



Graham performing *Performer/Audience/Mirror* (1977) at Riverside Studios, London, 1979, photo by Roland Fischer, courtesy of the artist

DAN GRAHAM: BEYOND

FEB 15–MAY 25, 2009 | MOCA GRAND AVENUE

250 South Grand Avenue Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dan Graham: Beyond, the first American retrospective of the work of Dan Graham, examines the artist's career through a focused selection of photographs, works for magazine pages, drawings and prints, films and videos, architectural models, pavilions, and writings. Graham's practice has been central to the development of art since the '60s—from the rise of minimal, conceptual, video, and performance art, to explorations of architecture and the public sphere, to collaborations with musicians and investigations of rock-and-roll culture. This exhibition traces the evolution of his work across each of its major stages while asserting the motifs and concerns that underlie his entire oeuvre: most notably, the changing relationship of the individual to society as filtered through American mass media and architecture at the end of the 20th century.

Graham was born in Urbana, Illinois, in 1942, the son of a chemist father and a psychologist mother. As a child, he moved with his family to suburban New Jersey, a landscape that would later serve as an essential subject for his art. An autodidact, Graham was influenced early on by the writings of Margaret Mead, Leslie Fiedler, and Marshall McLuhan. As a teenager, he was an avid reader of everything from *Esquire* magazine to the *Evergreen Review*, where he encountered the cutting-edge work of French New Novelists like Michel Butor and Alain Robbe-Grillet. Graham moved to New York City in the early '60s, where he cofounded and directed the short-lived John Daniels Gallery. Sidestepping the golden era of pop art, the gallery presented the first solo exhibition of Sol LeWitt and featured artists—including Jo Baer, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, and Robert Smithson—who would soon be recognized as catalytic figures of minimalism. In 1965, Graham closed John Daniels due to insolvency and began to formulate his own art projects.

Conceptual Art

In the immediate wake of pop and minimalism, which had introduced the content of mass culture and the materials of industry into the sanctified realm of high art, Graham sought to go further by critiquing the visual, ideological, and economic bases of art. As early as 1965, he was conceiving artworks intended for publication in the pages of mass-circulation magazines. As a former gallerist, Graham was keenly aware of the ways art accrues value through such photographic reproduction, and he was also critical of the aura bestowed on art objects by the gallery system. Appearing almost as mathematical diagrams, *March 31, 1966* (1966) and *Schema (March 1966)* (1966–67) depict rows of numbers that can be read according to simple reductive logics. These and related works, in their concern with the exploration of systems, serial repetition, and a democratic repositioning of art through “valueless” dematerialized representations, contributed to the rise of conceptual art.

Homes for America (1966–67) was initially presented as a slideshow derived from photographs Graham took with his point-and-shoot Kodak Instamatic camera on train rides home through the tract housing of suburban New Jersey. A later variation, a page layout for *Arts Magazine*, pairs those images with short texts. Highlighting the repetition, mass production, and reductive logic of the suburban landscape, Graham’s photographs echo many of the central concerns of minimalism. And, while the magazine layout is a deft parody of the lifestyle articles found in publications like *Esquire*, which touted the quasi-utopian housing developments then beginning to dot the American landscape, it may also be viewed as a critique of minimal sculpture—an attempt to locate the form and logic of work by Judd or LeWitt in the banal environs of the New Jersey suburbs.

Performance, Film, and Video

During the late ‘60s, Graham’s text works became increasingly concerned with tangible social processes and interactions between people. In the volatile cultural landscape of the time, artists such as Bruce Nauman and Yvonne Rainer were turning to performance, film, and video to resituate the individual body within the political terms of conceptual art. In 1969, Graham commenced a series of time-based works, first in film and performance, later in video, that were inspired by the perceptual conditions—feedback, looping, delay—accompanying these new modes of art experience.

The most culturally profound technology of the postwar era, television, had made an enormous impact on Graham’s generation, and at the heart of his new work was an investigation of the performer-audience relationship as it was filtered and distorted by the technology of the camera. In the dizzying counter-intuitive vantages of films like *Body Press* (1970–72), Graham second-guessed the supposed objectivity of the camera by giving the device to actors who performed simple reductive movements such as circling one another.

Extending his critique of mass-media technology even further, works like *Opposing Mirrors and Video Monitors on Time Delay* (1974) use closed-circuit video feeds to place viewers in room-scale media installations where they occupy the double role of performer and viewer. Mirrored walls allow visitors to see the reflections of their surroundings, themselves, and a television monitor showing the “just past”: the space recorded seconds earlier as seen from the opposite monitor. In *Performer/Audience/Mirror* (1977), Graham stands on a stage, between mirror and audience, and delivers a series of real-time verbal descriptions of his and the audience’s behavior, creating a kind of self-conscious awareness of present and just-past time.

Rock My Religion (1982–84) represents a departure from his earlier experiments with the medium. Throughout the ‘60s and ‘70s, Graham had been closely involved with underground music, writing a series of free-ranging yet historically rigorous speculations on bands like the Kinks, the Fall, and the Sex Pistols. Taking the form of an hour-long “video essay” (after the film essays of Jean-Luc

Godard), *Rock My Religion* traces a continuum between the Shakers, the early-American religious sect that sought spiritual transcendence through collective dance and song, and hardcore punk music. In the latter's cathartic noise and social rites, Graham locates an ongoing, if latent, spirit of separatism that has marked American culture from its origins.

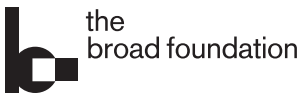
Architecture

A concern with architecture has marked Graham's work from the beginning—the suburban developments of *Homes for America*, the conceptual and economic space of the works for magazine pages—but during the late '70s his explorations of physical space became both more literal and more sophisticated. Created for the 1976 Venice Biennale, *Public Space/Two Audiences* (1976) is a room separated by a glass wall in which viewers are able to stand on one side while observing those on the other. Participants in the work are not only conscious that they are being observed by those opposite, but they are also aware of their own reflections in the dividing pane of glass and in the mirror that lines one wall.

Graham did not train as an architect, but his early interest in the rise of suburbia was bolstered by postmodernists like Robert Venturi and Bernard Tschumi, who viewed the built landscape as a realm of signs, references, and cultural and perceptual "reading." Realized as an architectural model, *Alteration to a Suburban House* (1978) "alters" a generic suburban home so that viewers may look into the house through its façade of transparent glass, and in turn the house reflects the outside world by mirrors set on its inside walls. In this way, the house both receives and emits visions of idealized bourgeois domesticity.

The major focus of Graham's art since the late '70s has consisted of public architectural installations, called pavilions, derived from geometric forms and rendered in plate glass, two-way mirrors, and steel armature. Graham intends his pavilions to function like punctuation, pausing or altering the experience of physical space, providing momentary diversion or places to delve into other activities like reading or viewing videos. The notion that architecture might heighten or restructure experience—especially in a pleasurable or utopian way—was already embedded in the ideology of suburban "garden cities," with their parks, follies, and meandering public spaces. It is also a function of urban architecture, where the atriums of corporate skyscrapers provide workers with hanging ferns, reflecting pools, and other respites. These deceptively simple structures recall many of the artist's earlier experiments with perception, reflection, and refraction, but depart from them in their non-gallery setting as long-term additions to the landscape.

Presented by



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RELATED EVENTS

ART TALKS

These informal discussions of current exhibitions feature artists, curators, critics, writers, and other arts professionals.

INFO 213/621-1745 or education@moca.org

SUNDAY, FEB 15, 3pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE, AHMANSON AUDITORIUM

Moderated by exhibition co-curator and MOCA Associate Curator **Bennett Simpson**, this discussion features **Dan Graham** in conversation with musicians **Kim Gordon** and **Thurston Moore** of Sonic Youth. TICKETS TO THIS EVENT ARE SOLD OUT. A limited number of unclaimed tickets may become available shortly before the start of the event; these tickets will be released to the public on a first-come, first-served basis.

SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 3pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE

Mark von Schlegell, science-fiction writer and exhibition catalogue essayist
FREE with museum admission

THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 6:30pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE

Bennett Simpson, MOCA associate curator and exhibition co-curator
FREE

THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 6:30pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE

Christine Robinson, MOCA curatorial assistant and exhibition research assistant
FREE

Art Talks are made possible by The Times Mirror Foundation Endowment, Good Works Foundation, and The Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Los Angeles.

COURSE OFFERING

SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 12:30pm–3:30pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE

SATURDAYS, APRIL 4, 11, 18, 25, and MAY 2, 10am–1pm

1010 WESTWOOD CENTER

Exploring the Work of Dan Graham

Offered in conjunction with *Dan Graham: Beyond*, this six-session course will explore Graham's work through lectures, discussions, and creative projects. The course will begin with a tour of the exhibition, followed by a class discussion of the artist's work; students will then conceive their own projects using Graham's ideas as a point of departure. Participants may choose to work in a diversity of media (as Graham himself does), including but not limited to photography, video, painting, sculpture, drawings, and architectural models. Completed projects will be presented and critiqued during the final class meeting.

Prerequisite: Students must have web access to retrieve course materials.

Instructor: **Richard Langendorf**, B.Arch., Ph.D., Urban and Regional Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Advance registration required; no refunds

REGISTER 310/825-9971 or uclaextension.org

\$290 MOCA members, reg. # U8685B; \$300 general, reg. # U8683B

FIRST SUNDAYS ARE FOR FAMILIES WORKSHOPS

These hands-on, artist-led workshops are **FREE** for families with children ages five and up. No reservations required.

INFO 213/621-1765 or fflores@moca.org

SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 1–3:30pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE

Take a guided tour of *Dan Graham: Beyond*, then participate in a hands-on activity with your family. Using elements of movement, action, performance, and architecture, your family will create a temporary large-scale installation on the Sculpture Plaza. This family learning experience is designed and led by conceptual artist **Ismael de Anda**.

SUNDAY, MAY 3, 1–4pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE

Big Family Day

MOCA's biggest family celebration of the year features gallery tours by expert kids, hands-on activities, entertainment, and more! Explore *Dan Graham: Beyond* and MOCA's permanent collection, then create art with your family on the Sculpture Plaza. Live music will be performed by local students.

First Sundays are For Families is presented by Bank of America. Generous support is provided by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Arts Commission.

TEEN NIGHT 2009

SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 7–10pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE

For one night a year, teens take over the museum for an extravaganza of art, music, and more. **SIN FACTORY: Generating Critique, Challenging Norms, and Provoking Society**—whose name is inspired by footage from the Dan Graham film *Rock My Religion*—invites teens to see the museum as a place for critique and provocation. Bring your friends and join teens from all over Southern California for live performances by local bands and DJs, a student art exhibition, art-making activities, and refreshments.

INFO 213/621-1745 or education@moca.org

FREE; waivers required for guests 17 and under (available at moca.org)

Teens of Contemporary Art is made possible by UBS.

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