

THING VALLEY





Thing Valley is an exhibition that engages with the prop as a surreal, uncanny form situated between action and conclusion. These objects, which once accompanied performances from across time, are now placed in an alternate temporal space—the exhibition space. Bearing the memories of performances, either through their appearances in photographic documentation or through their continued existence as sculptural forms, these objects enter a state of “middlelife.” The performances they enabled may have ended, but, in the museum context, the objects open up new conversations. Here, their material presence comes alive in dialogue between the past, present, and future.

The exhibited works appear frozen in time. Franz Erhard Walther’s *Untitled* (1969), a canvas book, embodies a static form that resonates with Gillian Wearing’s *Trauma #3* (2001), a photographic still from a video performance. In their stillness, these works serve both as records of past performances and as autonomous art objects within the gallery space. Sculptures and photographs, such as Matthew Barney’s *Cremaster 1: Red Lounge Manual* (1995) and Krzysztof Wodiczko’s *Alien Staff* (1993), function as physical relics of performances. Meanwhile, works by Paul Chan, John Bock, and Jamie Isenstein—though not records of performances—become performative through their presentation in the gallery, embodying a perpetual intermission when stored away from the exhibition setting.

Thing Valley prompts visitors to understand these artworks as they share their “middlelives” together. This surreal environment creates a space where the real and the imaginary become conflated.

This exhibition features works by Laurie Anderson, Matthew Barney, John Bock, Paul Chan, Robert Gober, Mona Hatoum, Jamie Isenstein, Paul McCarthy, Franz Erhard Walther, Gillian Wearing, and Krzysztof Wodiczko.

Curated by Christopher Gianunzio, Grace Harmer, Gladys Lou and Amy Qian.

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Checklist:

Laurie Anderson
(b. 1947, Chicago, Illinois)

Hearing (for Parkett No.49)
1997

Earring with playable sound message (20 seconds), brass, copper, circuit board, lithium battery, wire, plexiglass
Edition: 72/150
Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Gift of Melissa Schiff Soros and Robert Soros

Laurie Anderson is an American avant-garde artist, musician, and filmmaker who also works with multimedia and performance. Created for the art magazine *Parkett*, *Hearing* is a small-scale sculptural sound work designed to be worn like a decorative earring. It delivers a short, twenty-second message of the artist playing the violin and whispering in the listener's ear to inform them that she is behind them, creating an eerie atmosphere and haunting psychological effect. Blending fashion with technology, this work shares a private message between the artist and the audience in the form of a repeating flow of sound.

Matthew Barney
(b. 1967, San Francisco, California)

Cremaster 1: Red Lounge Manual (from the series The Cremaster Cycle)
1995

Silver gelatin prints on self-lubricating plastic frames
Edition: 3/3
Marieluisse Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Matthew Barney's work melds sculptural installations with performance art, video, and photography to explore physical endurance, eroticism, and the body. *The Cremaster Cycle* is a series of five films by Barney. Depicting a surreal universe, the cycle includes sculptures, drawings, and photographs, created alongside the films, to convey a narrative built around the cremaster—a muscle that regulates the movement of the testes. *Cremaster 1: Red Lounge Manual*, when viewed independently, not only recalls the themes running through Barney's suite of films but also invites viewers to see interpretive potential in its role as a stand-alone artwork.

John Bock
(b. 1965, Gribbohm, Germany)

Untitled (hair curler)
2006

Mixed media
Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Gift of Rebecca and Martin Eisenberg

John Bock makes sculptures crafted from household objects, detritus, furniture, wood, and other found objects. In *Untitled*, he reassembles these materials to construct a new shape—a hair curler.

Bock's practice prominently features performance, which he sometimes refers to as "lectures." Drawing from spontaneous encounters that emerge from the experiential, reciprocal relationship he builds with his audience, Bock often creates what he calls an "a-logical" atmosphere. Items or props used during a lecture are often destroyed or discarded, while the improvised, collaged stage that are often constructed from tables, cupboards, or tiered wooden structures remains on view, sometimes alongside video documentation. All of this becomes a permanent work to be exhibited following Bock's lectures.

Paul Chan
(b. 1973, Hong Kong)

Sparta (from the series Arguments)
2013

Electrical outlets, wire, painted wooden door
Marieluisse Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Paul Chan is known for his interdisciplinary practice, which includes animated video projections, charcoal drawings, public performances, and haunting pneumatic sculptures. Chan's work often requires intricate installation instructions, imitating the choreography of a performance.

Central to his sculptural works are electrical cords that plug into a range of objects and surfaces, from walls and doors to shoes. Connecting pairs of seemingly unassociated materials, *Sparta* presents ways to break from established norms, and challenges us to imagine new exits suggested by art making.

Mona Hatoum
(b. 1952, Beirut, Lebanon)

Performance Still

1985/1995

Silver gelatin print mounted on aluminum

Edition: 7/15

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Performance Still is photographic documentation of Mona Hatoum walking out of the Brixton Art Gallery in South London with bare feet. She wears black work overalls, dragging a pair of black Dr. Martens boots, which are tied to her ankles. This style of boot was historically worn by both British police and skinheads—two groups in direct opposition during the racially tense atmosphere of early 1980s London. In 1985, a wrongful police shooting in the city's Brixton neighborhood exposed institutional racism. Hatoum's bare feet evoke the vulnerability of racialized groups confronting violence and discrimination from a public authority meant to protect the community.

Jamie Isenstein
(b. 1975, Portland, Oregon)

Clap Magic

2007

Monitor, Clapper, DVD, custom-made lamp and shade

Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Gift of Rebecca and Martin Eisenberg

Jamie Isenstein's work combines theatricality and everyday phenomena. *Clap Magic* features a television on the floor that plays a video of hands clapping. The sound triggers a Clapper, which turns a lamp on and off. The installation takes the form of a performance that lasts indefinitely in the absence of the artist's body, where the lamp stands in for a performer who responds to applause. The work questions the nature of an artist's relationship to work that moves beyond physical existence into an afterlife of its own.

Paul McCarthy
(b. 1945, Salt Lake City, Utah)

Baby Lotion

1993

Cibachrome print

Edition: 1/3

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Orange Lion

1993

Cibachrome print

Edition: 1/3

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Paul McCarthy's work explores themes of excess, overload, duration, and the body. His now-infamous performances often produced interconnected drawings, sculptures, photographs, videos, and installations, conveying a fascination with material culture and trauma. In 1991, McCarthy photographed a collection of props that were initially used during his early performances, from 1972 to 1983. The artist printed the resulting 120 images in PROPO at an uncomfortably large scale, emphasizing the viewer's relationship to each object and their own body in space. The props themselves bear marks of McCarthy's performances, often covered in substances such as paint, ketchup, mayonnaise, dirt, and time.

Franz Erhard Walther
(b. 1939, Fulda, Germany)

Untitled

1969

Canvas

Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Gift of the Marieluise Hessel Foundation

In the late 1960s, Franz Erhard Walther began to create objects that required the viewer's interaction to fully complete, arguably making his audience the most crucial aspect of his work. *Untitled* is one example: an oversized book made entirely of raw cotton. Each page takes on a different form meant to be investigated by the viewer. Walther's works are resoundingly playful, encouraging viewers to consider form as a flexible container for ideas. As the artist once asked: "What does it mean, formless without form, beyond form?"



Gillian Wearing
(b. 1963, Birmingham, England)

Trauma #3

Executed in 2001

C-print

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Vital to Gillian Wearing's work is the use of masks, which blur boundaries between public and private identities and give subjects anonymity to confess private truths and traumas.

This still is drawn from Wearing's video installation *Trauma*, 2000 in which participants share painful memories while wearing masks that reflect their age at the time of the experience. The masks become vessels of time that brings the subjects back to before their scars were formed. Wearing explains: "I wanted the masks to transport you back to this defining moment in the wearers' lives, to a time when you wouldn't have been able to see the signs yet on their faces."

(Image 3)

Krzysztof Wodiczko
(b. 1943, Warsaw, Poland)

Alien Staff (Steel)

1993

Steel, wood, rubber, plastic, speaker, videocassette recorder, video monitor
Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

In 1986, Krzysztof Wodiczko received resident-alien status in the United States, prompting the creation of *Alien Staff*. In past performances, the artist invited immigrants he encountered to hold the instrument in public spaces, with the monitor at the level of their heads, empowering participants to share their stories.

Here, the performance is documented in the form of a video of one participant's head on a small screen, as a recording of her story plays through the loudspeaker. The transparent cylinder at the bottom of the staff contains sample documents and images of the participant's life journey, including letters, visas, and work permits.

(Image 4)



A List of Things:

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