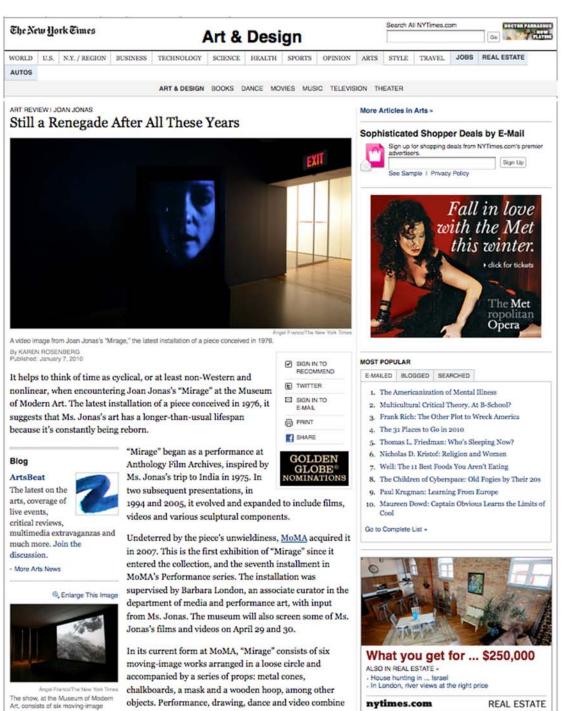


Joan Jonas NY Times January 2010



and recombine in arcane but thrilling ways.

All of this makes an argument for performance art as a continuing experience, rather than a one-time event — something that can be integrated with other mediums and updated constantly. It also suggests that Ms. Jonas, who is in her early 70s, is thinking

about her legacy.



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The moving-image works - projected 16-millimeter films and videos, as well as other videos displayed on monitors - mostly date from 1976. They include a side-by-side pairing, "Mirage 1" and "Mirage 2," that anchors the installation. Some of the surrounding works, like "Good Night Good Morning," are classics in their own right.

The space, MoMA's media gallery, isn't ideal. On the second floor, it funnels crowds between the atrium and the contemporary galleries. One benefit of this setup, however, is that tourists looking for the Tim Burton survey stumble on something at least as witchy and electric.

In "Mirage 1" (1976), Ms. Jonas draws, erases and redraws Gnostic symbols on a chalkboard. The action in "Mirage 2" (1973/2000) is harder to follow: Ms. Jonas blows into a large metal cone, interacts with a rabbit and does strange contortions on a rock formation. She also incorporates a newsreel of President Richard M. Nixon on a state visit abroad, with commentary from Dan Rather and Walter Cronkite - a gesture that grounds her mysterious rites in Watergate-era notions of secrecy.

The other films and videos in "Mirage" compete for attention, some more clamorously than others. "Volcano Film," a compilation of eruption footage projected on a giant screen, works as a kind of scenic backdrop - you can watch it out of the corner of your eye. But "Good Night Good Morning," in which Ms. Jonas repeatedly addresses the camera, demands more sustained viewing.

Myth, ritual and border crossing are the common denominators. Structural tics like the "roll," the lines that appear on a malfunctioning analog television screen, figure prominently. Also relevant is Ms. Jonas's habit of turning the monitors on their sides, a neat trick that forces you to think of them as sculpture.

In "Car Tape" she points her camera out the window of a moving vehicle, but the roll keeps interrupting; the landscape can't be apprehended for more than a few seconds at a time. That this hiccup proves deeply frustrating, on a physical and ontological level, suggests that the car governs our sense of duration more than we like to think.

The syncopated, jumpy quality of "Mirage" is to some extent typical of early video art, but it also feels remarkably current. It's easy to forget that Ms. Jonas was one of the first artists to use video -sometimes live feeds, sometimes recorded - in her performances. Younger artists like Robin Rhode, who films himself interacting with his own drawings, are hanging on her coattails.

You can see Ms. Jonas in action, at Anthology Film Archives and elsewhere, in a series of photographs. She plays hopscotch, slips through hoops, dons masks and strikes yogic

"Mirage" isn't as overtly multicultural as some of Ms. Jonas's later works. If you aren't familiar with the tribal rituals of New Guinea, for instance, you might not know that the chalk drawings in "Mirage 1" relate to the Melukean Book of the Dead.

Yet part of the beauty of this installation, and of Ms. Jonas's work in general, is that it's cryptic without being inaccessible. You don't need to have seen her 2003 retrospective at the Queens Museum, or her recent project on Dante for Performa 09, to find a way into "Mirage,"

To some extent, that's because you never really know what she's up to. So many contemporary artists seem intent on demystifying every part of the art experience, in written statements and telegraphed homages. Ms. Jonas, to her credit, keeps things unpredictable and open-ended.

"Performance 7: Mirage by Joan Jonas" continues through May 31 at the Museum of Modern Art; (212) 708-9400, moma.org.

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