

Book Review

Theatre, Exhibition, and Curation: Displayed and Performed
by Georgina Guy (New York: Routledge, 2016)

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Introducing the concept of live objecthood as a means to define the relationship between the object and the encounter with display and performance, Georgina Guy's fascinating *Theatre, Exhibition, and Curation* constitutes a significant contribution to the fields of theatre and performance studies by offering insight into the intersections between theatricality, performance and exhibition, and by engaging with the complexity of novel curatorial practices which not only powerfully place performance within the modern art museum, but also redefine the way we encounter performance as an object in a wide range of contexts.

Performance art made its way into the modern art museum from the 1960s, though it has only been fairly recently that its effects on modern art museums have started to be studied by researchers in disciplines spanning from art history and visual culture to performance studies and new media, as well as by museum professionals in curation and preservation. Arguably though, performance documents had been used in displays by modern art museums well before the 1960s. In fact, it was the use of these documents within the exhibition context that led to significant impacts on the organisational structures and day-to-day practices of a number of modern art museums including The Whitney, MoMA, SFMOMA, the Walker Art Center, Tate, and the Van Abbemuseum, among others. Exhibitions like MoMA's *Bauhaus: 1919–1928* (7 December 1938 to 30 January 1939) played a significant role in MoMA's subsequent development as a multi-departmental structure. Likewise, *Preview: Dance Archives* (6 March 1940 to 7 April 1940), which used a wide range of archival materials and artworks related to the history of dance, inspired the creation of a Department of Dance and Theatre Design that was, however, dissolved only eight years later. As these examples show, and there are many others, performance has been strategic in the evolution of the modern art museum almost since its inception. Guy's book constitutes a significant step forward in building a common language that allows us to understand the complex relationship between performance, theatricality and the museum, and the role of performance as an agent of change within museological practice.

The study, organised in four core chapters titled 'Performer & Exhibit': Theatrical Conditions', 'Theatre & Gallery: Turning Away from Performance', 'Visitor & Performer: The Return of the Relational' and 'Gesture & Object: Digital Display and Arrested Attention', interpret the move towards performance (and the performative), by looking at performance as a form of display, experience, documentation and preservation. Moving away from ontological analyses to do with documentation as well as practices of re-enactment to revalue theatricality and related discourses from theatre studies, *Theatre, Exhibition, and Curation* proposes a new paradigm by suggesting that the exhibition of performance has produced 'a dynamic context in which established traditions of display and performance interact' (2016, 1). Bringing together histories from museological practice, theatre and performance, Guy thus shows that a 'reconceptualised theory of exhibition' (1) has emerged within which performance operates as the 'organising principle' (18) of museum displays. By looking at performance not only as an artistic genre but as an organising principle Guy explains a number of radical changes in curatorial and exhibition practices. Focussing on the period 2007 to 2012, and looking at a number of case studies from Tate, MoMA and FRAC Lorraine, among others, Guy therefore advances knowledge in performance and theatre studies, as well as in art history, showing how each of these disciplines' understanding of the display of performance in the art museum was radically altered by the prevalence of performance in the late-20th and early-21st centuries.

In her first chapter, Guy analyses how performance affected exhibition practices by looking specifically at what happens when live performers are positioned as exhibits in the gallery before an audience. Examples discussed include documents, actions, re-enactments and objects with case studies such as Elmgreen & Dragset's *Drama Queens* (2008) performed at the Old Vic Theatre in London and *Marina Abramović Presents...* (2009) an exhibition held at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester which show the use of minimalist practice can disrupt boundaries 'of institutional and aesthetic traditions' (63).

Her second chapter focuses on the theatre-goer and draws attention to the relationship and even 'interchangeability' (27) of performer, object and audience. Focussing on programming, the chapter offers insight into how performance has challenged curatorial practices over the years. Case studies include Roman Ondák's *I'm Just Acting In It* (2007), part of the *The World as a Stage* exhibition at Tate Modern, and *Renoir at the Theatre: Looking at La Loge* (2008) at the Courtauld Gallery which entail a complex use of objects. Stipulating that in these cases performance cannot be reduced to a live encounter, but rather that performance here entails a number of 'object-centric formulations' (71), Guy shows how in this context performance is both a means of production and a set of specific ontological and epistemological conventions. The works looked at, she shows, in fact 'experiment with a new temporality for performance and transcend distinct theatrical and art historical models precisely in the duality of their operations, their functionality as both displayed and performed' (95).

In her third chapter, Guy draws on relational aesthetics to discuss the position of the visitor in Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled (Still)* (1992) and Gillick's *theanyspacewhatever Signage System* at the Guggenheim Museum (2009), looking at alternative frames through which

performance might appear. Finally, in the fourth chapter she explores curation in the digital context by looking at *Frank Auerbach: London Building Sites 1952–62* (2009–10) at the Courtauld Gallery. Here again digital objects are described as functioning ‘both as displayed and performed’ (163). The study concludes by reconceptualising canonical understandings of viewing, looking and participating in performative practices that take place within the modern art museum.

Embracing and building on scholarship by Peggy Phelan, Rebecca Schneider, Philip Auslander, but also by the Head of Collection Care Research at Tate Pip Laurenson and The Tate Curator for International Art (Performance) Catherine Wood, as well as Michael Fried, Amelia Jones, Claire Bishop, Nicholas Serota, Vivian van Saaze, among others, Guy opens our minds as to what the object may have become in the modern art museum’s turn to performance, revising the specific ontology that performance brings to the museum and, in turn, also throwing new light onto what performance becomes when it is displayed. This is a great read for anybody working at the intersection between performance, theatre and art history.

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