

Performance and Body Art

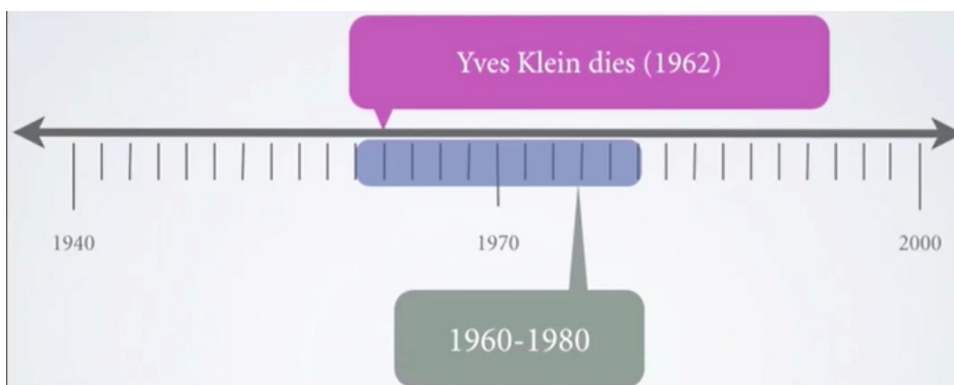
by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson is about performance and body art. Dada performances, action painting, and the work of Yves Klein were precursors to performance art. By the end of the lesson today, you should be able to identify and define today's key terms, describe the precursors to the development of performance art, and identify examples of performance art. You will cover:

You'll be looking at art from between 1960 and 1980 today.



1. "Leap into the Void"

Performance art draws from the influences of Dada performances, like the poetry readings at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, Switzerland, the action painting of artists like Jackson Pollock, as well as the work of Yves Klein.

In his short career and life, Yves Klein managed to become one of the most influential post-war artists. In many ways, he was ahead of his time. Aside from being a pioneer in performance art, he experimented with painting and photography and is seen as an important influence on the minimalist and pop art movements that follow.

Although he died young, this performance wasn't the reason. This work, called *Leap Into the Void*, is a very convincing photomontage in which the tarp that he's jumping into has been cropped out:



Leap into the Void by Yves Klein

1960

Performance (photography)



BIG IDEA

Dada performances, action painting, and the work of Yves Klein were precursors to performance art. The association with dance or acting often overshadows other types of performance art. Performance art is defined as an artistic form in which there are elements of action, temporality, and use of the body. In the above example, you have all three. Klein was trying to evoke a sense of freedom and abandon in this work, albeit through a tightly controlled and rehearsed performance.



TERM TO KNOW

Performance Art

An artistic form that has elements of action, temporality, and use of the body.

2. "Seedbed" and "Yard"

The idea of having the viewer or audience as an active and essential component of a work of art is a modern, 20th-century idea. You may have seen it in other works of art such as Latin American *Penetrables*. A number of artists of the 20th century took this idea of audience or viewer participation or interactivity in unique and strange new directions.

IN CONTEXT

Case in point: the performance piece *Seedbed*, first opened in 1971, by the artist Vito Acconci. It was a room, with a wooden ramp that ran the length of the room, which Vito sat under. He had a microphone connected to a PA system so that people could hear him but not see him. What was Vito doing under the ramp? He would listen to the movements of the people above him. In response, he vocalized his fantasies to the people as they moved about the room.



Vito Acconci

How is this art? Take a step back and consider the sponsoring idea for this performance. It was Vito's take on creating a work of art that was completely unique, dynamic, and an example of interactivity. The performance was really fueled by the presence and participation of the audience.

The work of Allan Kaprow is another example of performance art. His series of performance pieces called *Happenings* was created in this spirit. **A happening** is a form of artistic practice that creates an event for organic audience participation. These involved scripted performances with room for improvisation that could occur anywhere and involve anyone. An example might be 20 college students spontaneously piling into a Volkswagen Beetle. A modern example that you've probably seen before would be that of a flash mob.

His installation artwork *Yard* is a collection of old rubber tires that the audience is encouraged to climb on and through and jump on:



Yard by Allan Kaprow

1961

Performance

It's in works like this that you can appreciate the temporality component of performance art. Every performance, even scripted, is unique.



TERM TO KNOW

Happening

A form of artistic practice that creates an event for organic audience participation.

3. "Trans-Fixed"

Body art is a type of art in which the human body is the medium and focus of the work. It can crossover with performance art, but doesn't need to. An example of non-performance body art is tattoos. Body-based performance art can result in some rather interesting displays with the artist literally putting themselves in harm's way.

Chris Burden was one such artist who can pushed the envelope with personal safety. One of his most famous examples of body-based performance art is "Shoot," in which his assistant literally shot him in the left arm from a distance of about 15 feet. "Trans-Fixed," pictured below, is another one of his most famous pieces in which he is crucified upon the body of a Volkswagen Beetle. It supposedly was run during the performance, revving its engine for several minutes before shutting off. Chris Burden died in 2015, but from melanoma, not his performance art.



Trans-Fixed by Chris Burden

1974

Performance



TERM TO KNOW

Body Art

An unconventional form of art where the body is used as a medium and can include forms of self-abuse.

4. "S.O.S" and "Silueta Series"

Hannah Wilke, Ana Mendieta, and Carolee Schneemann are female artists known for their work in body-based performance art. Take a look at two of them:



S.O.S--Starification Object Series by Hannah Wilke

1974

Performance

In this piece, Wilke addresses feminine identity, partially masked while posing in different stereotypical female roles, such as the housewife or the model. Audience members were given chewing gum, which was later collected and formed into tiny little vagina sculptures. These were attached to her body, a starification and form of glamorizing that is simultaneously self-mutilating.



Silueta Series by Ana Mendieta

1973-1980

Performance

Ana Mendieta had a fiery personality and passion. She was married for a short time to the minimalist artist Karl Andre until her untimely and suspicious death in 1985. She fell to her death from her apartment window. Her "Silueta Series" is the first known combination of multiple emerging forms of art, land and body art. She combined these into a form of art she called earth-body art.

She traveled from the United States to Mexico. She would photograph her naked body's silhouette or the impression it made on the earth, and then color it with various materials, including her own blood.



SUMMARY

Now that you've seen the lesson, are you able to identify and define today's key terms? Can you describe the precursors to the development of performance art? Can you identify examples of performance art? You saw a piece called **"Leap into the Void"** to look at elements of performance art. **"Seedbed"** and **"Yard"** were examples of performance art where audience participation is critical to the piece. **"Trans-Fixed"** highlighted how the body can be a powerful medium in performance art. **"S.O.S"** and **"Silueta Series"** are examples of work from important female artists in body-based performance art.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell



TERMS TO KNOW

Body Art

An unconventional form of art where the body is used as a medium and can include forms of self-abuse.

Happening

A form of artistic practice that creates an event for organic audience participation.

Performance Art

An artistic form that has elements of action, temporality, and use of the body.