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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ ART

Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974-2007

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Suzanne Lacy
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Suzanne Lacy's three decades of performance and writing about her art and process have encompassed some of the most dynamic years of American political history and have deepened public awareness of issues of violence, rape, race, ethnicity, aging, and women's experiences of marginalization and economic disparity.

Performance art, unlike other genres, leaves nothing behind. In it, the artist's actions, or those of a group, are the art, and the work is composed of four basic elements: time, space, the body of the performer, and the interaction of performer and audience. In seeking ways in which artists could play an active role in the politics of social change, performance art broke down cultural stereotypes about what constitutes "art." Its frequent inclusion of audience members in the actual work bridged the traditional separation between artist and public in a way that invited reflection and provoked, often through a shocking of audience sensibilities, a greater openness to the experience of the "other" and the need for change.

As performance art cannot be commodified, it has no value to collectors and investors, but in its ability to combine elements of art, theatre, and political or personal commentary in powerful ways that bypass traditional intermediaries, i.e., galleries, agents, and the like, it brings the artist's message directly to the public. An artist who uses the power of images primarily to communicate information, emotion, and/or ideology and to criticize popular culture, or inspire her audience to action, is using art, in Lacy' terms, as a work of service to the greater good.

The author documents how, since the 1970s, engaged visual artists have collaborated with scientists, planners, politicians, and others to facilitate and create change, often transgressing "traditional artistic formats in the process of creating an art that is formally and ideologically related to the service practices of engaged Buddhism." While the actual performances may have left nothing physical behind, Suzanne Lacy's detailed and compelling writings leave general readers, artists, and historians a record of a powerful and stimulating art form that, like its spiritual counterpart, is a response to the presence of suffering in the world and an anti-materialist and anti-hierarchical way of creating meaning.

Suzanne Lacy is an internationally recognized artist whose works include installations, video, and large-scale performances on social themes and urban issues. She is chair of the Master in Fine Arts in Public Practice program at Otis College of Art and Design, and has published more than seventy articles on public and performance art. She was editor of the collection *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*.
KRISTINE MORRIS (August 16, 2010)

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