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Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Present *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here*

The First Major Retrospective of the Social Practice Pioneer

Conceived as One Exhibition over Two Venues



AT YBCA: Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby, and Chris Johnson, *The Roof Is on Fire* (1993–94), from *The Oakland Projects* (1991–2001); performance, June 4, 1994, City Center West Garage, Oakland; © Suzanne Lacy; photo: Nathan Bennett, courtesy Suzanne Lacy



At SFMOMA: Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz, *In Mourning and in Rage*, 1977; performance, December 13, 1977, Los Angeles City Hall; © Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz; photo: Maria Karras, courtesy the artists

Exhibition on view April 20–August 4, 2019
at YBCA: First Floor Galleries
and at SFMOMA: Floor 7 and Haas Jr. Atrium

SAN FRANCISCO (November 15, 2018)—Throughout her prolific career, Los Angeles–based artist Suzanne Lacy has used community organizing strategies and media interventions to create dialogue-based performances about pressing social issues, including feminism, violence against women, racism, and labor rights. A pioneer of social practice—a field that she has helped define through her performances and art installations, writings, and teachings—she organizes public encounters that combine intensive dialogue and collaborative choreography.

Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here, co-organized by [Yerba Buena Center for the Arts \(YBCA\)](#) and the [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art \(SFMOMA\)](#), is the first full retrospective of the artist’s career. It is conceived as one exhibition at two venues.

At SFMOMA, *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here* explores nearly five decades of the artist’s work, from her earliest performances, objects, and photographs in the 1970s to her latest immersive video installations. YBCA’s presentation updates Lacy’s key collaborative projects from the 1990s, including an in-depth revisiting of *The Oakland Projects* (1991–2001), a series on youth representation, media education, and policy; the show includes new works by Bay Area youth-centered organizations and artists.

Jointly curated by SFMOMA Curator of Media Arts **Rudolf Frieling**, YBCA Curator at Large **Lucía Sanromán**, and Director of the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University and former Curator of Education and Public Practice at SFMOMA **Dominic Willsdon**, *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here* will be on view at YBCA and SFMOMA **April 20 through August 4, 2019**.

“Fittingly co-organized by a renowned museum and civically focused arts center, this retrospective of Lacy’s work aims to continue YBCA’s commitment to public life, complemented by the rigorous review of a fifty-year career that the partnership with SFMOMA makes possible,” remarks **Sanromán**. “We are also exploring the social and political legacy of Lacy’s work, particularly as it relates to the current context of youth, feminist, and labor issues in the Bay Area.”

“Reflecting three years of research and close work with the artist, the exhibition addresses participation and the relationship between socially engaged practice and public life from a variety of perspectives and approaches,” says **Frieling**. “Acknowledging the importance of social practice for the history of contemporary art is overdue.”

YBCA Presentation

For its presentation, YBCA departs from the traditional retrospective format, proposing instead an experimental approach to authorship and participation inspired by Lacy’s own commitment to collaborative creation. *The Oakland Projects* (1991–2001) and *La piel de la memoria / Skin of Memory* (1999) are presented at YBCA as a point of entry into youth culture and activism in the Bay Area from the 1990s to today. Both are long-term projects and performances where Lacy and her many collaborators worked with government, education, and social service agencies to engage with youth and address the structural stresses inherent in urban spaces. *The Oakland Projects* was a series of educational programs and performances that gave young people of color tools to create their own media images that countered the negative representations of youth prevalent in the media in the 1990s. *La piel de la memoria* took place in Medellín, Colombia, and contributed to the creation of a civic process to address systems of violence and trauma.

For *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here*, the artist has invited former participants in *The Oakland Projects* to reflect on their processes and relationships and consider how to represent their work more than eighteen years after the project’s conclusion. Central to the YBCA presentation is the inclusion of three local youth arts and activist organizations: San Francisco–based **Youth Speaks**, Berkeley-founded **Youth Radio**, and Oakland-based **Center for Media Justice**. Alongside contemporary Bay Area artists currently working

with youth, these collaborators will create new works that reflect on the urgent issues affecting young people today, including the influence of social media, restorative justice, and the consequences of the Bay Area's accelerated gentrification.

“*The Oakland Projects* was specifically focused on youth, education, government, and health practices and policies in relation to communities of color,” explains **Sanromán**. “We want to feature today’s youth work and make present the projects of these organizations that are concerned with equity.”

SFMOMA Presentation

At SFMOMA, the retrospective encompasses the diverse range of mediums that Lacy has explored throughout her career, including performance, photography, film, sculpture, video installation, drawing, artist’s books, and ephemera. It features approximately seventy solo and collaborative works, from Lacy’s earliest projects in the 1970s to her latest video installations, including the world premiere of *De tu puño y letra* (By Your Own Hand, 2015/2019), which draws from letters written by Ecuadorian women about their experiences of violence, and the US debut of *The Circle and the Square* (2017), which explores the racial consequences of globalized capitalism in England.

“It’s striking how the topics that Lacy has been working on for decades—immigration, race and policing, working-class culture, gender—are still very front of mind for many artists working today,” remarks **Frieling**.

“This exhibition highlights some of the ways in which Lacy has made projects—particularly since around 2000—that rethink past ideas, either for aesthetic or political reasons, which has become an important part of her practice in the last couple of decades,” adds **Willsdon**.

Lacy’s ethically committed, participatory performances and large-scale projects have blurred the line between life and art. Several works on view at SFMOMA honor the voices and contributions of women to public life, and embody Lacy’s role as a pioneer of feminist art practice since the early 1970s. Her best-known performances convening groups of women, such as *Three Weeks in May* (1977), *In Mourning and in Rage* (1977, with Leslie Labowitz), and *The Crystal Quilt* (1987), are represented through videos, photographs, and sculptural elements. Attesting to the artist’s lasting relationship with the Bay Area, several coauthored works on view were originally staged in San Francisco, including *Alterations* (1994), *Freeze Frame: Room for Living Room* (1982), and *International Dinner Party* (1979). The installation *Alterations* and the performance *Cleaning Conditions* (2013) address issues of labor and will be activated at SFMOMA with new local participants, in addition to public programs with a focus on feminism and youth.

PUBLICATION

Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here is accompanied by a 288-page catalogue featuring approximately four hundred illustrations; curatorial essays by Rudolf Frieling, Lucía Sanromán, and Dominic Willsdon; contributions by Jessica D. Brier, Christa Cesario, Lucia Fabio, Taylor Shoolery, and Tanya Zimbaro; and new and archival commentary on Lacy’s work by peers and collaborators. The catalogue is coedited by Frieling, Sanromán, and Willsdon, and published by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in association with DelMonico Books • Prestel.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Based in Los Angeles, **Suzanne Lacy** has created artworks ranging from intimate body explorations to large-scale public performances, often involving hundreds of performers. Born in 1945 in Wasco,

California, Lacy became a key participant in the feminist movement and performance art scene in Southern California in the 1970s. She has exhibited in the Tanks at Tate Modern, London; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the New Museum, New York; MoMA PS1, New York; and the Biennale of Sydney, among many other venues. She has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Henry Moore Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. She lectures widely and has published more than seventy texts of critical commentary, several of which are featured in her book *Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974–2007* (2010). Her influential book *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (1995) is now in its third printing. She was dean of Fine Arts at California College of the Arts from 1987 to 1997. Lacy was founding chair of the MFA program in public practice at the Otis College of Art and Design. She holds an MFA from California Institute of the Arts and a PhD from Gray's School of Art at Robert Gordon University in Scotland, and currently teaches at the University of Southern California Roski School of Art and Design.

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Lucía Sanromán joined YBCA as director of visual arts in October 2015, and became YBCA curator at large in September 2018. She received The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts program grant in 2016 for her work at YBCA, and has curated and organized The City Initiative program, a series of exhibitions by architects, designers, planners, and artists creating provocative work in the urban environment, including *Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman, Visualizing Citizenship: Seeking a New Public Imagination* (2017), *Damon Rich and Jae Shin: Space Brainz—Yerba Buena 3000* (2018), and *The Open Workshop: New Investigations in Collective Form* (2018, co-organized with Martin Strickland). Under the program title Changing the Ratio: Female Artists at YBCA she has organized survey exhibitions of key women artists, including *Tania Bruguera: Talking to Power / Hablándole al Poder* (2017, co-curated with Susie Kantor), *Futurefarmers: Out of Place, in Place* (2018), and *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here* (2019). In her independent practice, she was awarded the 2012 Warhol Foundation Curatorial Fellowship and a 2013 Warhol Exhibition Grant for *Citizen Culture: Art and Architecture Shape Policy*, at the Santa Monica Museum of Art (2014). Sanromán co-curated with Candice Hopkins, Janet Dees, and Irene Hofmann SITE Santa Fe's signature biennial *SITELines.2014: Unsettled Landscapes* (2014). Sanromán was an associate curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, from 2006 to 2011.

Rudolf Frieling has been SFMOMA's curator of media arts since 2006. At the museum, he recently co-curated *Soundtracks* (2017–18) and *Bruce Conner: It's All True* (2016) and he has organized more than twenty exhibitions, including *Sublime Seas: John Akomfrah and J. M. W. Turner* (2018), *William Kentridge: The Refusal of Time* (2017), *Film as Place* (2016), *Christian Marclay: The Clock* (2013), *Lynn Hershman Leeson: The Agent Ruby Files* (2013), *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: Frequency and Volume* (2012–13), *Stage Presence: Theatricality in Art and Media* (2012), *Descriptive Acts* (2012), *Sharon Lockhart: Lunch Break* (2011), and the influential survey exhibition *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now* (2008). Spearheading the notion of the museum as producer, Frieling has commissioned numerous works for SFMOMA's public spaces, including Jim Campbell's *Exploded Views* (2011–12) and Bill Fontana's *Sonic Shadows* (2010). Frieling is an adjunct faculty member at California College of the Arts and lectures internationally on media history and theory. He was a curator and researcher at ZKM, Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany, from 1994 to 2006. He holds a master's degree from Free University of Berlin and a PhD from the University of Hildesheim.

Dominic Willsdon is the newly appointed executive director of the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University. From 2006 to 2018, he was the Leanne and George Roberts Curator of Education and Public Practice at SFMOMA, where he directed programming in public dialogue, school initiatives, performance, and film. He was a co-curator of the art and humanities project Public

Knowledge, and coeditor of *Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of the Common Good* (2016) and *Visual Activism* (2016). Willson co-curated *Public Intimacy: Art and Other Ordinary Acts in South Africa* (2014) at YBCA as part of SFMOMA On the Go. He was a co-curator of the 2016 Liverpool Biennial and a pedagogical curator of the 2013 Mercosul Biennial in Porto Alegre. Before joining SFMOMA, he was the curator of public programs at Tate Modern in London (2000–2005). He holds a master's degree and a PhD in philosophy from the University of Essex, and a master's degree in fine arts from Edinburgh University. He was a lecturer in critical theory at the Royal College of Art, London (1999–2005), and a lecturer in the history of modern art at England's Open University and Birkbeck College at the University of London (1995–99).

CREDITS

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ABOUT YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

701 Mission Street

San Francisco, CA 94103

Open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday 11 AM–6 PM and Thursday 11 AM–8 PM. Closed Monday.

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) is one of the nation's most innovative contemporary arts centers. Founded in 1993, YBCA's mission is to generate culture that moves people. Through powerful art experiences, thoughtful and provocative content, and deep opportunities for participation, YBCA is committed to creating an inclusive culture that awakens personal and societal transformation. YBCA presents a wide variety of programming year-round, including performing arts, visual arts, and civic engagement. For tickets and information, call 415.978.ARTS (2787). For more information, visit ybca.org.

ABOUT THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

151 Third Street

San Francisco, CA 94103

Open Friday–Tuesday 10 AM–5 PM and Thursday 10 AM–9 PM. Closed Wednesday.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) is dedicated to making the art for our time a vital and meaningful part of public life. Founded in 1935 as the first West Coast museum devoted to modern and contemporary art, a thoroughly transformed SFMOMA, with triple the gallery space, an enhanced education center, and new free public galleries, opened to the public on May 14, 2016. Since then, the expanded museum has welcomed more than one million visitors annually. Visit sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

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