

## CRITICS' PICKS

## Brisbane

**Mierle Laderman Ukeles**

INSTITUTE OF MODERN ART

420 Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley

October 11–November 29

Mierle Laderman Ukeles's first solo exhibition in Australia restages a 1998 exhibition held at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York. This iteration, curated by Krist Gruijthuisen, features documentation of twenty-one works, installed across two large museum galleries, which showcase the artist's performance-based practice through photographs, announcements, and typed instruction pieces typical of early Conceptual art. One work, comprising twelve photographs and two sheets of text, depicts the artist scrubbing the exterior steps of the Wadsworth Atheneum in the performance *Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside*, 1973. These iconic, feminist images draw parallels between the servile tasks often expected of women and those assigned to maintenance workers. Consisting of five black-and-white photographs, *The Sorting of the Socks: Hommage to Mu Ch'i*, 1973, banally records a method for sock sorting, while the videos *Sanman Speaks Video* and *Waste Flow Video*, both 1977–84, highlight the material conditions of waste management—a daily movement of rubbish from people's houses to landfills—through interviews with underappreciated workers as part of her ongoing residency with the New York City Department of Sanitation.

In *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973, Ukeles takes on the role of a museum janitor. She cleans a mummy in a glass case and then hands over certification of this work as a performance to the museum's conservator, revealing how the same activity can be understood in radically different ways depending on the systems of value that are applied to it. A preoccupation with documentation makes Ukeles's practice particularly well-suited to our viewing it within a larger historical context, while her blurring of the boundary between labor and performance is emblematic of her intelligent yet playful take on institutional critique, unveiling then-latent connections between feminism, workers' rights, and ecological awareness.

Hill, Wes. "Brisbane: Mierle Laderman Ukeles." *Artforum*, November 1, 2014.  
<http://www.artforum.com/picks/id=48868>



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside* (detail), 1973, twelve black-and-white photographs, two text panels, dimensions variable. From a performance at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, 1973.

— Wes Hill