

Rosenberg, Karen. "Commentary That's Both Visual and Vocal." *nytimes.com*, July 1st, 2010.
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/02/arts/design/02contemporary.html?_r=2

The New York Times

ART REVIEW

Commentary That's Both Visual and Vocal

By KAREN ROSENBERG

Published: July 1, 2010



Jennifer S. Altman for The New York Times

Geneva Clark, a 16-year-old from Texas, following Yoko Ono's instructions for "Voice Piece for Soprano": scream into the mike.

Marina Abramovic's survey has come and gone, but another longtime performance artist is at large in the Museum of Modern Art. You probably won't see this one, but you'll definitely hear visitors carrying out her instructions to step up to a microphone and scream.

That is Yoko Ono, who is reprising her "Voice Piece for Soprano," originally from 1961, and other pieces as part of MoMA's latest reinstallation of its contemporary galleries. Like previous exhibitions in the series, "Contemporary Art From the Collection" presents a loosely thematic take on art since the late '60s. But it's also a shock to the system, not unlike the screeches and shrieks that emanate from the atrium.

Its stated focus is "current events from the past 40 years," made literal in Robert Rauschenberg's 60-foot screenprint of press clippings from 1970, "Currents," but otherwise suspiciously broad-sounding. (What contemporary art isn't, in some way, about current events?) Really, though, it's about the different ways that art can convey urgency and immediacy.

Thus the organizers — the museum's associate director, Kathy Halbreich, and the curator Christophe Cherix, serve up plenty of performance and performance leftovers. Both are making their first big statements with the contemporary collection, though since arriving at the museum in 2008, they've worked on smaller shows, like Ms. Halbreich's "9 Screens" and Mr. Cherix's "In & Out of Amsterdam."

Ms. Halbreich, formerly the director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, deftly weaves film and video into the mix: short, saucy pieces by Kalup Linzy and Hannah Wilke, and longer, more intense ones by Glenn Ligon and Paul Sharits. Mr. Cherix's touch can be felt in the many works from his department: prints and illustrated books.

Each has made some inspired choices, in the selection and the installation. They pick uncharacteristic works by the artists we know well, and turn up major statements by the ones we don't. (And, yes, a healthy percentage of the art is by women; a set of posters by the Guerrilla Girls reminds you that this is a relatively new development.)

Among the gems the curators have unearthed is a bridge made of linked pads of steel wool, by the Arte Povera sculptor Pino Pascali; it shares a small gallery with a body-impression drawing by David Hammons, a photograph by Sigmar Polke and a puddle of white spray lacquer by Lawrence Weiner.

The curators also mine the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, a 2009 gift of some 3,000 works relating to the Fluxus movement. This explains Ms. Ono's prominence in the atrium ("Voice Piece for Soprano") and the sculpture garden ("Wish Tree," 1996/2010). And in "Whisper Piece" she's written brief invocations in tiny handwriting on walls throughout the exhibition.

Another Fluxus artist, Alison Knowles, will perform a version of a work from 1969 titled "The Identical Lunch." Beginning next January, she'll serve the same meal — a tuna fish sandwich — to one table of eight visitors to the second-floor cafe who have registered in advance. In the meantime you can see vintage photographs of her friends and colleagues eating their sandwiches.

And just below Ms. Knowles's photographs, a major installation by an underrated elder statesman of Fluxus, George Maciunas, incorporates emptied lemonade cans, sugar boxes and other containers: the remains of food and household products consumed by the artist over a period of one year.

Other bodycentric art is summarily acknowledged in a small gallery of ephemera. Here are the provocative posters and Artforum advertisements through which Robert Morris and Lynda Benglis waged gender war, as well as grainy 1972 Super 8 footage of Vito Acconci performing his autoerotic "Seedbed."

The show's most memorable performance, though, belongs to Ms. Wilke. In a video made in 1976 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the distractingly stylish artist struts and strips behind Duchamp's "Large Glass."

At this stage of the exhibition, the dearth of painting becomes hard to ignore. It's remedied soon enough, with dueling stripes by Daniel Buren and Agnes Martin and a mesmerizing multicolored abstraction by Simon Hantai. Let the others have their Minimalism and institutional critique; the only theory in Mr. Hantai's "Untitled (Suite 'Blancs')," made by painting exposed parts of a crumpled canvas, is string theory.

Even better is the gallery devoted to the 1980s, partly covered in General Idea's "AIDS (Wallpaper)." Modeled on Robert Indiana's "LOVE" letters, it makes a striking background for Warhol's immense gold Rorschach painting and Bruce Nauman's drawing "Punch and Judy II Birth & Life & Sex & Death." The elements of the installation are so carefully interwoven that the show starts to look like a Biennial, in a good way.

The final section, though, has some of the not-so-good hallmarks of Biennials: uninspired found-object tweaking, meaningless clustering and text that's full of curatorspeak ("willful mistranslation"). The sweet scent of Cildo Meireles's hay-bale cube, "Thread," helps a bit, as do strong drawings and prints by Huang Yong Ping and Huma Bhabha.

The intensity picks up again at the show's end, with an installation that documents Paul Chan's "Waiting for Godot in New Orleans." Mr. Chan's 2007 staging of that Beckett play in the Katrina-scarred Lower Ninth Ward was, by all accounts, a profound and cathartic event.

Some of those emotions get lost in Mr. Chan's exhaustive archive of audio, video, photographs, maps and props. But they return, suddenly, with a scream.

"Contemporary Art From the Collection" continues through Sept. 12, 2011, at the Museum of Modern Art; (212) 708-9400, moma.org.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: July 3, 2010

Schedule information on Friday with an art review of "Contemporary Art From the Collection," at the Museum of Modern Art, misstated the closing date. It is Sept. 12, 2011 — not Sept. 12 this year. The review referred incorrectly to the performance piece by Alison Knowles called "The Identical Lunch" that will be part of the exhibition. When it begins in January it will be during the run of the show, not after the exhibition has closed. In the piece, which will run twice a week

from Jan. 13 to Feb. 4, Ms. Knowles will serve the same meal to one table of eight visitors to the second-floor cafe who have registered in advance. She will not be serving it to all visitors to the cafe.



Jennifer S. Altman for The New York Times

Hannah Wilke's "Through the Large Glass," left, and part of Robert Rauschenberg's "Currents."