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EYEBEAM ONE-ON-ONE:  
BARBARA LONDON AND JOAN JONAS IN CONVERSATION  
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>> Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us. (Off microphone) Over 43 public programs -- interactive workshops, and presentations. Barbara London, and Joan Jonas. This event is the beginning of a podcast series we're going with Barbara as part of a research project she's launching in tandem with her forthcoming book to be published in 2019. I first met Barbara a number of years ago. And I have to say I'm glad first impressions don't always stick in this case. I was running Eyebeam's residency program. We were demoing new works. And it was a couple minutes past closing time.

A number of people were still looking around and

talking within the space. But I didn't see that someone was still fully immersed inside one of the interactive installations. I hit the power switch to turn off the installation. To my chagrin, I saw a startled person walking out. And I immediately realized I had turned off the project someone was intensely engaged with. My colleague whispered, do you know who that is? You just killed the project that Barbara London was viewing. Suffice to say, not the first best impression.

But happily, her largess allowed for a new friendship to grow along with ongoing opportunities to work together. For four decades, London has paved the way for media artists at MoMA, founding the video collection and curating its first show on sound art. Throughout that same period, Jonas gained wide recognition as one of the most important artists of our time, whose experiments continue to be crucial to the development of art genres.

Tonight, the two will share insights and anecdotes from over 40 years of professional collaboration and friendship, followed by time for an audience Q&A. I was told to remind you all that our bar will be open after the Q&A for mingling. Please join us there. It's truly my pleasure to welcome Barbara London and Joan Jonas to the stage this evening. Thank you.

(Applause)

>> Thank you for that very beautiful introduction, and thank you and Sally, the wonderful tech who just set this up. And my wonderful friend, colleague, and maybe I could call you mentor, too.

>> What did you say?

>> I said I could call you a mentor, too. So, anyway. So, I was going to say just a couple of things about Joan that we've known each other for at least 40 years. We probably have done -- had many dinners, many studio visits. We crossed Checkpoint Charlie once to go into East Berlin together. We've had lots of fun experiences. So, Joan, maybe some of you know, she honed her technical skills -- she has a career in both literature, sculpture, and was when I met her an avid film maven.

It's from her I learned of many filmmakers. So, why don't we get the first slide up. So, we are going to be serious, but I wanted just to say that both of us are Cancers, born in the summer, and both of us are from New York, and freako about flea markets. So, New York is the center of the world, right? Anyway. So I thought maybe we could start with you just saying a few words, now that Anna is here, who worked on the Judson theater show that's up now. Joan drifted in and out in

that period.

>> JOAN JONAS: Yes I was in New York, of course, in the '60s. I saw a lot of these performances and happenings. It's one of the reasons that I switched from sculpture to performance. I was inspired by Goldenberg, and Childs and so on. And there's a wonderful show at MoMA now about the Judson, which was a particular place where the dancers and artists performed during the early '60s. So I came late to Judson. I saw things, and I saw works by those people, but I was never a part of Judson. But I was on the edge.

>> BARBARA LONDON: And I think over the years when we've talked, the Judson dance theater was downtown. And maybe the younger generations think oh, New York was one big ball of wax. And it wasn't. There were very distinct groups. But I think a lot of people really crossed and looked.

>> JOAN JONAS: Well, the audience we had was composed of people from all the disciplines that you could imagine, so that's what the situation was. It was mostly downtown, below 14th Street. It was a small community compared to now. One knew many people. There were many groups within that community, like different video groups, more political ones, the ones in the art

world. Once Lawrence and I had an argument with John. And he said you must have worked with plexus. We said we didn't, because he's from California.

I'm just saying that as an example of how these groups existed side by side, but didn't necessarily always cross over.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Next slide, please. Those of you who were not born yet, New York in the '60s, it was bankrupt here. And we all were mugged at different times. But you just lived with it. And this is just a picture of New York in the '60s. And this happens to be Tony Conrad, a wonderful film-maker and artist.

>> JOAN JONAS: Who did great work with Lamont Young, and an early period of his music.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Michael Snow encouraged you to go see Jack Smith.

>> JOAN JONAS: That's right.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Next one, please. So, down in -- even before it was called soho, Joan, you lived up-town but then you were living downtown. And one of your neighbors was Nam June.

>> JOAN JONAS: We looked into each other's windows. He came for dinner one night. I looked across and the next day they had curtains up.

(Laughter)

>> BARBARA LONDON: The experimentation.

>> JOAN JONAS: He was a magical person.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Yeah. The sense of humor, the wit, the charm of his eyes. It was lovely. So, also, in the '60s, and you were mentioning before that you did indeed go to this, the experiments in technology. Billy Cluve passed away a couple years ago. But he and Bob founded something called Experiments in Art and Technology, which drew upon the engineers at Bell Labs, the telephone company's experimental studio. So did you go to all of them?

>> JOAN JONAS: No, as many as I could. I was just beginning. What were the years? I was just making that transition. And I was going to everything I possibly could go to. As a matter of fact, I had just come back -- I spent a year in Greece. I said I'll do anything, please employ me. And they didn't. But I became friends with all of them later. But it was a fantastic experience to see those performances, those events.

>> BARBARA LONDON: So there were situations -- I think this is John Cage, with all of his gear right in the middle of the armory, creating amazing sound program, Lucinda Childs using the Doppler effect with big swaying buckets full of sand. That was her

performance. And I think Rauschenberg had the artist Frank Stella do a tennis match with special sensors that were inside the handles so that the lights dimmed as Stella and a partner played tennis. So maybe we'll do the next.

And Carolee was present.

>> JOAN JONAS: She was living in London. But we're great friends. She was doing work radically different from what Yvonne, Debra, and Simone were doing. And it looked like that. That's Meat Joy.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Interesting anecdote is that Carolee -- I think she was with Anthony McCall at a point. And they were friends with Peter. So in this time, there were festivals, events, lots of communication. And maybe we think people didn't travel as much, but people had no money.

>> JOAN JONAS: A lot of people -- for artists like me and my friends, we were recognized in Europe a lot more first before being recognized here. So often, the first public things I did were in Rome. That was in 1972. So it was a little bit later. In New York you put on your own things. But you went to Europe and people sponsored you. So that was great. And then when you went to a place like Rome you met everybody, you know, all the art people when you went in Rome there. And

they all came to your performances, or your events.

>> BARBARA LONDON: And it gave you a little bit of money.

>> JOAN JONAS: A little bit. Not much. A little.

>> BARBARA LONDON: And this was across the windows, was Shigeko, who was also -- in the early '70s.

>> JOAN JONAS: And she was an artist, of course.

>> BARBARA LONDON: (Off microphone) And I often just find this amusing, just to make sure that everybody knows. It was a moment -- it was in a way instant everything, you know. Of course instant soup, instant orange juice, the Polaroid, so we were used to quick.

>> JOAN JONAS: Instant feedback.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Let's go on to the next one. So, you were one of the first in New York to get a video camera.

>> JOAN JONAS: There were other people. We went to Japan in 1970 and I bought one there. It's hard for you young people to imagine how radical it was, the first Portapak, for artists to have this camera and be able to see themselves simultaneously on the monitor and to be able to do everything in their studio to produce a video work.



>> BARBARA LONDON: And also, you mentioned feedback, but you had been already for a number of years working with the mirror and doing events, actions with several collaborators, or dance performers in the piece. So the mirror was something -- this mirroring was --

>> JOAN JONAS: I was inspired by Borges, the writer who mentions mirrors in his book Labyrinths. I thought my first prop will be the mirror. I adopted the mirror. And yeah. And then that turned out to be the video monitor, an ongoing mirror. The mirror performances kind of segued into video performance.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Kind of around the same time. What Joan got as a Portapak was not like what you have with your phone. The camera itself weighed 20 pounds.

>> JOAN JONAS: You see what the tape deck looked like. We used to walk around with it on our shoulder. That's probably why I'm crooked now.

(Laughter)

>> BARBARA LONDON: No museum would show the work because in the early days you had to thread the tape deck and come to the end. And who's going to rewind, right? So, anyway. So, in New York, often forgotten, based in some of the history books is Otto and Aldo's Black Gate Theater. Did you ever go to some of that?

>> JOAN JONAS: I didn't. I'm sorry. I missed it. But I met Otto later, because he was part of the media lab at MIT, towards the end of his life. It was nice to know him.

>> BARBARA LONDON: So maybe the next. So the other venue that was really important for technology in a way was Fillmore East. We think of it as yes, Janice Joplin, Jimi Hendrix performed there. But this was really razzmatazz, unbelievable.

>> JOAN JONAS: It was beautiful. I saw Jefferson Airplane in San Francisco, which was amazing. And then to see this, also. I don't know why it didn't go on, actually.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Yeah.

>> JOAN JONAS: Maybe it'll come back.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Next slide, please. So I just put this up because it's the time David Bowie, Space Odyssey, and the U.S. got a man to walk on the moon. So you could say Space Oddity was also a druggie time. You could think it was a trip, a trip to the moon or a drug trip, which people forget. So next one, please. And then this is not so often reproduced, the artist Ray Johnson, his History of Video. With Ray Johnson who also sadly died, it's very tongue in cheek. He's got the history of video, he's got James Joyce, Douglas

Davis who was a writer for Newsweek.

He's got all kinds of people, Jonas.

>> JOAN JONAS: I'd like a copy of that.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Joan is up there, too. And Bruce is right next to her.

>> JOAN JONAS: You have to see it close-up, I think. It's amazing.

>> BARBARA LONDON: I'll send it to anybody who wants. Next slide. So next to Joan was Bruce Nauman, who actually was briefly around New York. He was invited by the galleryist Leo to come. I think it was Leo who helped him get his first video camera. But Bruce did not like New York City. He lived in Long Island and was making a number of these works. Steve and Bruce were friends. But Steve really lived in Soho.

>> JOAN JONAS: Yeah. We all knew each other. It's no big thing. And it was such an interesting, wonderful group of people. So we all went to hear Steve's music.

>> BARBARA LONDON: And then this is -- just to talk about institutions, having to figure out -- artists were living in lofts. You had a very big -- a decent-sized space. And if you were making work that was installation, you needed a kitchen or the Leo gallery or someplace to carry it out.

>> JOAN JONAS: Just to mention the lofts, maybe

you know of it. One of the people was George who helped artist -- I hate to say, almost nothing.

>> BARBARA LONDON: \$8,000.

>> JOAN JONAS: No, two.

>> BARBARA LONDON: 2,000.

>> JOAN JONAS: Artists bought lofts at that time aided by George, who bought them and then sold them to artists. He was really trying to help artists. He was a member of Plexus. A friend of Jonas Mekas.

>> BARBARA LONDON: And helped Jonas get one of the early film spaces, which was around the corner from you. So these two shows at MoMA, in a way, were a way to figure out how to deal with all of this technology. You've got one, as seen at the end of the mechanical age. And it's really a transition from the mechanical to then something right around the corner. And it included the video work of Nam June and some of the Bell Lab work. But then there was the information show where cybernetics were in the air, and a wonderful curator was figuring out ways to put them up. I'm sure you went to that.

>> JOAN JONAS: Yeah. Everybody did.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Next one, please. And this, Gene young blood, whose book -- the fields were separated, film and video.

>> JOAN JONAS: Filmmakers hated the quality of the Portapak. But video artists loved it. And I liked this -- the phrase expanded cinema. That's very important also to think about expanded media, going out -- going over the boundaries out and becoming another form. I mean, I was -- we all went. I went to see all the filmmakers' work and was influenced by it.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Did they come to your work?

>> JOAN JONAS: Some of them did.

>> BARBARA LONDON: I'm sure Michael did.

>> JOAN JONAS: And so did Paul.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Next one, please.

>> JOAN JONAS: Our old friends. They started the kitchen.

>> BARBARA LONDON: And people would come to their loft and show their new work. And it became so crowded they figured out they had to find someplace else. So there was a hotel on Mercer Street, not the one you know now. It was a really run-down hotel. In the basement was The Kitchen, and that's where the Kitchen started.

>> JOAN JONAS: They took machines apart. If you went to their studios, you'd see the machine in pieces. Then they'd put it back together again. They developed their own technology. The first time I saw Steina's

work was not until the mid-70s. She's Icelandic. I never saw a landscape filmed on video the way she did. It's very hard to shoot landscape in black and white because there's no depth, but she made beautiful work and did.

>> BARBARA LONDON: We'll go another one, please. The so, this was kind of the milieu of Soho. That's The Kitchen on Mercer Street in the old hotel. That's artist space in 1973. And that's Cindy Sherman as the receptionist, the artist. And there's Gordon at a space called 112 Green Street. It was an important space.

>> JOAN JONAS: Where people could make work and have an audience. It was very loose in those days.

>> BARBARA LONDON: So, next one, please. And then how you worked with the equipment, it was relatively new. So the Videofreex, a guide to the use, repair, and maintenance. It was all kind of a sharing of -- if you learned something about the tool, then you shared it. We'll go on one more. Then we come to -- this was one of the first videos we acquired at MoMA, I'm happy to say. And maybe I'll let you talk a little bit about it, how you arrived at it.

>> JOAN JONAS: Well, I don't have the same relationship to technology now that I had then, because then it was all hands-on. So you could turn a little

knob as you probably know on the monitor and you'd have the vertical roll. You can't do that anymore. So I made a video using the structure of the vertical roll. And I'll just describe -- we shot it out in California in Robert Irwin's studio he had just moved out of. It was beautiful light because he had put a scrim over the skylight so it had a very filtered light.

We practiced it for two weeks. It's all one shot, no edits, made by shooting off the video monitor, the camera recording. So the signal -- the performance is sent from the camera to the monitor. And then another camera records off the monitor because you can't record -- you have to record it -- the vertical roll, it doesn't show up. In other words, you have to record it with another camera. And so that's what the story of that piece is. And so it was part of a big -- my first big video project called Organic Honeys Vertical Roll.

>> BARBARA LONDON: We're going to show a quick clip at the very beginning, I think one minute. So do you want to do the clip?

>> JOAN JONAS: If you look at it for 20 minutes, the room rises. It really affects your perception of space.

>> BARBARA LONDON: You made that before we had

flat screens.

>> JOAN JONAS: It was for a monitor.

>> BARBARA LONDON: So that monitor was a box, like a piece of furniture. And it was head-sized. So there's a kind of intimacy with the relationship to it.

>> JOAN JONAS: You couldn't have a big room full of people looking at it until later projections. But I remember the first time I saw it projected, it was hard for me. A woman reviewed it in some newspaper at the Columbia Circle. She said it was the worst thing she ever saw.

(Laughter)

>> BARBARA LONDON: So it's complicated, making a work that was intended for one scale.

>> JOAN JONAS: I think we've all relaxed. At the beginning we didn't want these things to be projected, right? But then we relaxed because it's the only way you can show it to people. But it's different. It's meant for the glass box.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Almost like a terrarium or something, yeah. Okay. Next one, please. This is just to show you -- I don't know if anybody saw the show of Gordon Clark at the Bronx Museum. He was a very important artist. A very wonderful, wonderful human being, smart, did important work, and was a cofounder



of food restaurant, which lasted from 1971 until he was involved in '74, I think. Did you hang out there?

>> JOAN JONAS: A little bit. I knew Gordon pretty well. He was a wonderful person. He was working on the docks, making these big structures, cut-outs in the docks. He made one there.

>> BARBARA LONDON: He would take a very derelict building. Those were the buildings on the docks on the west side and cut holes, and it was illegal what he was doing.

>> JOAN JONAS: That's interesting to bring that up. In New York at that time, you could do things in different empty lots. I did something at night down on Wall Street, Pat and I and a camera man, with my cones. We went down there and spent two hours improvising and running around. And police don't come. And now you can't do that. But then you could. Like Gordon could work on the docks. I mean, some people worked on the docks at that time. And so on.

>> BARBARA LONDON: We'll do the next one, because then it's a work in which he performed in your work, Song Delay.

>> JOAN JONAS: That was in the lower west side in empty lots. They had just torn down all those buildings so the audience sat on the roof of the building and saw

the piece.

>> BARBARA LONDON: It was a lot about scale.

>> JOAN JONAS: And distance.

>> BARBARA LONDON: And sound.

>> JOAN JONAS: I always describe these cities like New York as cities that have holes in them. Now they're filling all the holes up, which is one of the problems.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Next one, please. So I just bring this in just because Jonas Mekas, he was very supportive of you and your work.

>> JOAN JONAS: He was so important for so many people because he had the anthology, which I went to as often as possible and many people did, and it was such an important place for artists. And it's still here, of course.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Yeah, yeah. Next slide, please. Because he allowed or invited you or offered -- actually, in 1975, you did the first version of Mirage.

>> JOAN JONAS: Yeah. I just have a little anecdote. He and P. Adam Sidney, I used the screen. And I made it go up and down. It was one of those film screens, you could open it and close it, up and down by pulling buttons. I was doing -- I used it as a structuring device. I was doing that during the rehearsals, and P. Adams said she's going to break that

screen. And Jonas said no, let her do it, it's okay. So that was his attitude.

>> BARBARA LONDON: But it was very magical to actually be there, because Joan is working with the screen. She's got monitors, film projection, very beautiful live use of the space. So you would have performed that probably what, five, ten times?

>> JOAN JONAS: Ten times each year. I did another version. It was wonderful. It's unusual for an artist to be given the space to work in. They were very generous in that space.

>> BARBARA LONDON: At a certain point you locked it down. Next slide, please. So then it becomes Mirage an installation. And it's got three years because it began in '76. And did you do it in '94?

>> JOAN JONAS: Yeah.

>> BARBARA LONDON: And then when you showed it in New York, the MoMA acquired it.

>> JOAN JONAS: Yes. I still show it. Every time it has to be slightly rearranged for the space, but not radically. But it became more layered with one more projection, so I add things to it. It's a piece I go back to. It inspires me. You have unfinished ideas and ideas that can be developed, so that was one of them.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Next, please. We're going to

take a little bit of a jump cut because we're not doing all of Joan's career. We're then going to go and this is a work that was acquired by MoMA around 2013 and was just up for over a year, I think.

>> JOAN JONAS: Yeah, it's incredible for me.

That's great.

>> BARBARA LONDON: So it's got many magical parts.

Do you want to talk a little bit?

>> JOAN JONAS: It started out as a small lecture performance at MIT, which is now part of it, in which I was working for the camera overhead and the audience saw -- in the projection -- what I was doing for the camera. And that became the beginning. It was based on an Icelandic writer, a piece called Under the Glacier. And then maybe a year later I was asked -- I can't remember exactly. But I was asked -- yeah, I knew that I had to go on working on it. So a friend of my invited me to go to the islands, and Under the Glacier Is about a glacier.

I had to shoot in the snow and ice. I went to the mountains and developed it. It was in a little house in a field, a special place that the curator wanted artists to experiment with these little houses. And then I changed it because I felt like you couldn't really perceive the sound and image looking through the

windows of a house. I had it inside the house. So then I worked with the shoji screens. I had spent some time in Japan working with shoji screens. And made a different structure. It's still up at MoMA if you want to go see it.

It went through different stages. This is it. It's not going to change again. But it's really when I began to think about what's happening in the environment, because it's called Under the Glacier. Beginning to work on that I thought, glaciers are melting and so I had to -- I don't take it to the period. I bring it into the present.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Nice. Maybe the next slide . . . Yep. And there's another view of it. And then we'll go next. And then we come to your work that I think I first saw up at Gavin Brown.

>> JOAN JONAS: Do you want me to . . . What do you think?

>> BARBARA LONDON: What?

>> JOAN JONAS: Were you going to say something?

>> BARBARA LONDON: No, I would love you to talk about it because it's very complicated.

>> JOAN JONAS: It's called Stream or River Flight or Pattern. That was the title I came up with when I was working on it. It stuck with it. It's composed of

three different video pieces and drawings of birds on panels on the walls, because birds are a major subject. After I finished reanimation, sometimes you feel like you have nothing else. So I began -- I was traveling a lot. I took my camera with me. I went to Singapore, to Genoa, just for the three pieces to Spain and then finally to Vietnam.

I took my camera with me and recorded what I was interested in in the first place, the first video of birds and trees, and in Genoa, I performed in front of projections in my loft. The second one was done in Santander. We don't have an image. The third piece -- I'll talk about them, we're going to show them at once. The third piece was inspired by my trip to Vietnam, although there are other shots in that. So each of the video works is composed of -- I call it journeys as another way to describe this piece. Also, I went to India and we went on these boats in these rivers.

Did you ever go on those? Yeah, beautiful. Anyway, so going to Vietnam was a big thing for me because I was a mentor for a young Vietnamese artist. We'll see her later. And, you know, for an American to go to Vietnam is very . . . It's special. It's not that I went there and did something about my feelings about the Vietnam War, but in order to go there I had to

really prepare myself to go there. But when I went there, it was simply to see my mentee's work and her friends and meet young artists. And then we went around, we visited various place where is I was interested in -- they have villages in which they make one thing, for instance, kites, paper animals, and so on.

And so anyway, the three works came together as one installation.

>> BARBARA LONDON: So I guess we go right to the videos? Okay. They're just a couple minutes, each one.

¶

>> JOAN JONAS: So I was interested in trees, too. So in Santander, and found chestnut trees. And then this is in Genoa. I did a number of things with this shot. You won't see it now. But I really liked this. That's a mirror. Up in Canada I have a big mirror, and I've done several performances for the mirror, making drawings. But this is an example of putting a work together with no idea what it is to begin with. It doesn't have a literary story. So I go back and forth working that way and working with more of a structured reference to literature.

So this is the one inspired by Vietnam. The birds . . .

>> Coyote on the shelf, looking out window.

>> Lying by the window. Wood, colors, covered with writing.

>> Books nailed to table, surveillance, flashback, movement from mad to bird.

>> Animal trail, flight patterns, shadows.

>> Large fox head, paper mache.

>> Tiger mask, orange with black markings.

>> Squat bird, green, purple, yellow, ceramic with interior bell.

>> Bird on branch, shot, stuffed, brown.

>> Perched owl on green base, wood is split, heart-shaped face.

>> Gray oversized elephant, painted wood, exaggerated trunk.

>> Behind, white wooden carved rabbit. Gentle.

>> JOAN JONAS: That's my collection of folk art that I'm talking about. I don't think -- there may not be any shots of Vietnam in this, but there are in the piece. Well, this is Vietnam. And this is India. Remember? I'm talking about it like it's a travel log.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Did you want to add anything?

>> JOAN JONAS: It's hard, because it's so much work. But the one part of the Vietnamese footage that's not shown is one interesting thing for me was the paper



village where they make paper animals, very elaborate, beautiful. They're big, all kinds of animals. Horses, and other things. And with colored paper. And then we were lucky. We went to the paper village to a little -- there are many different little houses that make different paper objects. And then they're used in the ceremonies. We're very lucky, we went to a place nearby, not a monastery exactly, where this ceremony was taking place.

But the mother god in Vietnam, not connected to any religion, but the goddess of nature. And there were maybe 30 people watching this woman do a ceremony for hours. She was putting on different kimonos and taking them off. She didn't mind. They didn't mind. I had my camera. I was recording. They didn't mind. At some point they bring in these incredible paper animals and the woman does something. And then they take the paper animals and they burn them. They take them out to a place where they're all burned. So for me that's an incredible metaphor.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Very beautiful.

>> JOAN JONAS: I didn't use very much because I had to be very careful not to have it -- to tip in the wrong direction.

>> BARBARA LONDON: We'll go one more. Oh. You

talked about your collection. So this was, I thought, very beautiful, at Gavin Brown gallery on the ground floor when you walked in. This was in a way Joan's life. (Chuckling) Something your grandfather or your great uncle had carved?

>> JOAN JONAS: There was something my great uncle had carved, but they were all things I had collected over the years, up in Canada and also in various -- Barbara loves second-hand places, flea markets, everywhere. And yeah, I use them in my work a lot. I have a whole collection of houses like a miniature village that I've used a lot in my work. The things go in and out of my work.

>> BARBARA LONDON: And the dog or coyote?

>> JOAN JONAS: From a piece, yeah.

>> BARBARA LONDON: And the drawings. You felt you were getting a very intimate look at you. We'll do one more. So, Joan has been a teacher in Europe, at the Rex academy, at MIT where you're a professor emeritus, I think. But you already mentioned -- I'm not going to pronounce her name right, Thao, she just won this award. It was very beautiful. We'll go one more. This is a still from her piece.

>> JOAN JONAS: Actually, she was a mentee. I was a mentor through the Rolex Foundation. And when I saw her

work, she was a painter. She had just begun to do a little bit of video. She's a beautiful painter. I knew she was a really good artist. Then she developed this piece. And her work is beautiful. I'm so glad. It's such a nice connection, Barbara, that you were one of the people who gave her. I'm very happy. It was very important to have somebody from a place like Vietnam, and to be a woman, because it is harder for women to be recognized everywhere, so. But she deserves it. It's not just because she's a woman.

>> BARBARA LONDON: When I was on the jury and saw the work I thought this is the eye of someone very special, so, yeah. So think that's kind of it. We'll take questions if you want, Sally? If you don't, that's okay. We'll have a glass of wine. There's one. Oh.

>> AUDIENCE: I would love to hear you respond to -- or expand on your argument that you had with John where he then suggested that you might be influenced by Plexus work. I won't ask you that unless you want to respond. I then started thinking about your relationship with Plexus, because I think you come from a very different place.

>> JOAN JONAS: I do. I never felt part of Flexus, but there's a lot of common -- all these groups have little bits in common. But I don't know, it's just that

John insisted that must be true.

(Laughter)

>> JOAN JONAS: And, yeah.

>> BARBARA LONDON: I'm going to take that back. I also remember being at a conference at MoMA in '73, '74. I think you were there as well, where all kinds of people came to talk about video. And it was, again, like everybody jumping on the bandwagon, briefly for some people. But John made a cogent point. He saw everybody talking as if it were the bee's knees and he said, it's just another pencil.

>> JOAN JONAS: That's true. I remember that. We were all sitting in a room, remember? Yeah.

>> BARBARA LONDON: There's a question in the back. You call them out.

>> AUDIENCE: Hi, Joan, Barbara, thank you so much for the inspirational talk. It's really amazing to see your work. So, my question, do you have any general advice for young emerging artists working with video and performance?

>> JOAN JONAS: Well, I mean I have advice in general for artists, which I say over and over again. One thing is to form a peer group, because it's very difficult. I know it is. It's very difficult to have your work shown in a space you might want to show it

in. So I think you should form your own peer groups. And what artists have been doing for years is opening their own spaces. That's one way to get your work out. I don't have any particular advice for video per se because I think you're working with different technologies. And I'd have to know more about what you particularly do.

But also, then I always say you have to work hard and love what you do because you may not get recognized, and you may not get recognized for a while. But, yeah. I think that to look at the technology, I think it's perfect to mention John saying it's just a tool. It's a pencil. It's a tool. I've always tried to balance it with . . . Without getting too dependent on the technology, to have it dominate. Anyway. But I do think -- I would feel better answering if I knew more about your work or what you're trying to do, because it would -- I'd say something different to each person. It depends on what you want, you know. That's the most important thing.

>> AUDIENCE: Thank you Barbara, and thank you Joan. I'm here. I stood up so you can see me. I wanted to ask you, Joan, I know that Douglas said once that with other artists you invented video, and others invented performance, but you alone invented the hybrid

of video performance. And it's true that video and performance are very much connected in your work. Also the video and the installation often has documentation with your work without being documentation. There's always this blurring. As you said, your previous work are always an inspiration for the future work.

So I wondered if you could elaborate a little bit more about the performative part of your work, the moments when you were performing.

>> JOAN JONAS: Yeah, I was just saying tonight please don't call me a performance artist. I just say that because it's just -- many artists don't want to be tied down to one discipline. And so words like that -- you know, somebody else invents those phrases, but on the other hand I'll say that performance and moving with my body is really one of the basic structures of my work, and one of the ways in which I find movement, I find narrative, all the things that you see, through moving my body in relation to, say, a video projection. But I don't like to be called a performance artist because what does that mean, a performance artist? To me I don't think people can understand what that means.

So I'd rather just be called an artist. That's not really what your question is.

>> AUDIENCE: Video performance artist.

>> JOAN JONAS: It happened because I was performing with someone, I bought a Portapak and brought it back. I was fascinated with sitting in front of the monitor with the camera, the closed circuit situation, inventing -- it was the influence of film because I had been looking at film, studying it by going to film at the Anthology and all over New York there were film theaters showing Fassbender and so on. I was really interested in film. When I got the Portapak, I thought now I can make my own films. I called them films to begin with.

All of my early video explores the relationship of video to film. So my first question was how is video different from film, what is peculiar to video, what is the vertical roll. So it was just a natural thing to step into the space of video. And then to the first performance I did using video, Saul bought his class to my loft to see it. It involved a camera, a monitor, a table, and a lot of props. And I performed so the audience saw on the monitor what I was doing, manipulating the prop. That fascinated me because I could make a complex statement by layering these different -- the audience saw the live performance simultaneously with the video projection.

And, you know, I performed with my body. And I work with objects. And in the beginning, not with any kind of language. And so that's how I began. And then I said in the very beginning I want to develop my own language, because I was in the middle of a minimalist -- my good friends were all minimalists -- many of them, minimalist artists. And I really wanted to break out of that tradition. And, of course, Jack Smith was there, so he was definitely not a minimalist. And so it just became a way that I could develop my own language, to put these things together.

And, yeah, to explore something that was relatively unknown at that time. Does that answer your question?

>> AUDIENCE: Yes. Thank you.

>> AUDIENCE: Hi. Thank you both for speaking. I'm a big fan of your work, Joan. I wondered if there's anything that you would be willing to share about your experience of staying emotionally present with a transforming environment and planet. Staying emotionally present within a natural environment, a planet that is rapidly changing.

>> JOAN JONAS: I focus on my work. I mean, I find -- we all know how depressing it is to read the newspaper every day. And it's a dire situation we're



in, I know. I focus on my work. And I'm working right now on a working involving oceans. And you know what's happening to the ocean. But I focus on the -- it's about fish and about creatures partly. And I'm working with children. So I focus on the -- what are the miraculous aspects and qualities of these creatures.

And so that's what I focus on. My piece is not about the tragedy that's happening. But of course you see it. I mean, because the audience comes and they know. And I imply. I make -- but I'm not making a didactic piece, I'm making a piece about creatures. I can't really -- I won't go into it, but that's basically -- I think all of us -- I have friends who for various reasons, the work is what keeps you alive and going and being positive, because the work is positive. It's the only thing -- I think that art is one of the few positive areas that we have, you know. And I think that's why so many people go to museums and we share our work with each other.

>> BARBARA LONDON: So maybe we'll go one more.

Okay.

>> AUDIENCE: A friend of mine passed away, Hans, he taught at the University of Iowa. He was an intermedia artist.

>> BARBARA LONDON: I knew Hans from the '70s.

>> AUDIENCE: He had a wonderful story about how --  
(Off microphone) He had a CD that needed to be  
projected. And -- what to do with it, so they installed  
the CD on a pedestal. They couldn't find a monitor to  
play it on. Which I thought was very telling. I wonder,  
Joan, you mentioned the educators that were using the  
video, the Portapaks. I grew up amongst educators in  
Philadelphia who experimented with it. And I'm curious  
about the strange connection between people in the arts  
and people in education, whether the boundaries were  
crossed and enough dialogue occurred.

>> JOAN JONAS: I don't know what you mean by  
people in education.

>> AUDIENCE: Radical educators who were like  
yourself using technology in interesting new ways. The  
question is, you know, in the '70s, were the artists  
that you hung out with in New York, were they in a  
dialogue with these educators?

>> JOAN JONAS: I wouldn't separate what you call  
these educators from these artists, because many  
artists were teaching. Why don't you speak to --

>> BARBARA LONDON: I don't understand either.  
Everybody I knew was teaching, even in the '70s. Nobody  
had money. Teaching was one way.

>> JOAN JONAS: There wasn't a separation like

you're implying.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Everybody was in dialogue.

>> AUDIENCE: I guess what I'm arriving at is that if there had been enough momentum where this new culture of feedback systems, which is what the camera and the Portapak and the monitor provides, feedback can be with society, students and teachers, students and their environment, artists and their environment. We would have had a culture that could have stood up against the crushing of, say, net neutrality. Like we're in a place where there's huge change going on and we need a strong answer to how we're not addressing Google, and Apple, and all these large corporate frameworks that are not fostering art and a good, positive relationship with nature.

>> BARBARA LONDON: I think it's out there. You've got all kinds of pockets of people interacting through social media. And they form networks. And yes you've got those big cats, or those big people who have a lot of control. But there are communities online, communities in the cities, communities around the libraries or around -- I mean, they form everywhere. So it's not like we and they -- yes, there is a we and they, but there's a lot of wes. I don't know.

>> JOAN JONAS: That's true. Also, there's also

been those big bad guys.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Museums were big bad guys in the '70s. Everybody with power, television stations, museums.

>> JOAN JONAS: I mean, I think -- I mean, I for instance don't want to battle -- I have no desire to battle these big corporations myself, you know? It's something -- I don't know, we can't really address it.

>> BARBARA LONDON: Let's do it over a glass of wine. So, Joan, thank you for opening up.

>> JOAN JONAS: Thank you. We've known each other for 45 years, actually. So it's really great. Thank you so much. It's great to be here with you, Barbara. Thank you.

(Applause)

(Session concluded at 6:38 p.m. CT)

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