

## ***this is the time and this is the record of the time***

As a young artist on the '70s New York downtown scene, I was pretty sure that we were doing everything for the very first time, that we were inventing a new art form. It even had a clumsy new-sounding name "Performance Art," and critics and audiences struggled to define this "new" hybrid that combined so many media and broke so many rules about what art was supposed to be. So when RoseLee Goldberg's book *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present* was first published in 1979, I was completely amazed to find that what we were doing had a rich and complex history. Marinetti, Tzara, Ball, and Schlemmer sprang from the pages. Dada and Futurist manifestos, diagrams, posters, sets, events, happenings, and concerts came alive in all their chaotic and fertile inventiveness. I especially appreciated details like an account of an event by "The Incomparables Club" in 1911 which featured The Earthworm Zither Player—a trained earthworm who slid along the strings exuding drops of "mercury-like sweat" that made the instrument resonate. In her new book, Goldberg continues the story, following the thematic threads and presenting, along with the photographic artifacts, a cogent analysis of styles, ideas, and socio-political background.

Live art is especially ephemeral. Once performed, it tends to become myth and a few photos and tapes. Many of the artists in this book only occasionally reconstruct their performances, mainly because much of the work—performed by the artists themselves—was designed on the most basic levels for that particular artist's voice or body. Also, there are no performance companies to re-present the work. So representing this work as text and images becomes an act of imagination.

Because I've seen much of the work illustrated in this book, the images are especially rich. I can hear the voices of Vito Acconci, Christopher Knowles, picture the breakneck speed of Molissa Fenley, re-experience the grinding gears, sparks, and shopping carts careening around in the dark of a La Fura dels Baus event. But even if you've never seen any of this work, the images speak. The sets, stills and performance shots are vivid snapshots of an art form that resists documentation.

I myself used to be very proud that I didn't document my work. I felt that, since much of it was about time and memory, that was the way it should be recorded—in the memories of the viewers—with all the inevitable distortions, associations and elaborations. Gradually



I changed my mind about making records of events because people would say things like, “I really loved that orange dog you had in that show!” And I’ve never had an orange dog ever. I started to keep track of things after that. I just didn’t want it to disappear.

When live art is documented through film or audio recordings it immediately becomes another art form—a film or a record—another rectangle or disk. It’s in the can. But live art is continually elusive. This book covers an immense amount of work in many media and extremely diverse styles. Tracing the trends and links, RoseLee Goldberg has let the work resonate through its images.

Many of the artists in this book are friends—some have been collaborators—some acquaintances. Most of them are still making art and reinventing their vocabularies and styles. Some of them are just beginning. This is literally living art that continues to evolve and expand. As it continues to change, I’ve come to feel that it’s crucial to preserve this work. It is the anarchic and experimental arm of our culture. It isn’t supported by the mass media and is not recorded by it. We live in a time in which everything gets captured and processed and made to fit into boxes and categories. This is a difficult task with live art. In this book, the images and text are presented in the spirit of the work itself: ever evolving and reinventing.



**LAURIE ANDERSON**

***Stories from the Nerve Bible, 1992***

First performed at Expo '92 in Seville, *Stories from the Nerve Bible* used computerized imagery and holograms to create a spectacular setting for Anderson's apocalyptic songs.