

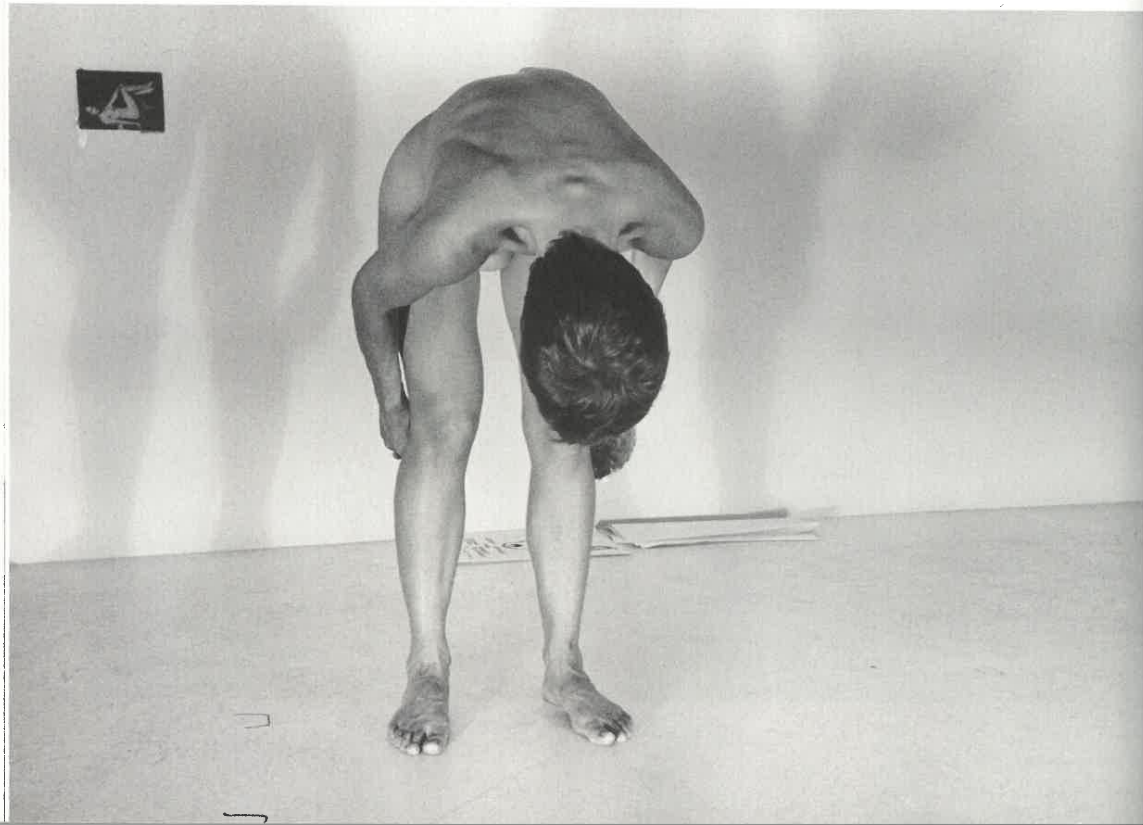
GLADSTONE GALLERY

Anna Daneri, "Joan Jonas: Invisible Miracles," *L'Officiel Art*, Spring, 2019

**L'OFFICIELART**

# Joan Jonas Invisible Miracles

by Anna Daneri



# GLADSTONE GALLERY



For Ocean Space, a new cross-disciplinary platform initiated by TBA21-Academy and located in the Venetian Church of San Lorenzo, pioneering performance and video artist Joan Jonas (b. 1936, New York) has produced a new performance and multimedia installation, titled *Moving Off the Land II*. Beginning with this latest project to then go back to earlier works, such as the US Pavilion for the 2015 Venice Biennale, Anna Daneri delves into the inspiring and multi-faceted practice of the American artist.

**"JOAN JONAS: MOVING  
OFF THE LAND II,"  
OCEAN SPACE, CHURCH OF  
SAN LORENZO, VENICE.  
THROUGH SEPTEMBER 29.**

Joan Jonas, *Mirror Check*, 1970;  
performed as part of *Organic Honey's  
Vertical Roll*, 1972, Ace Gallery, Venice,  
California, 1972. Photo: Roberta  
Neiman. Courtesy: the artist.

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

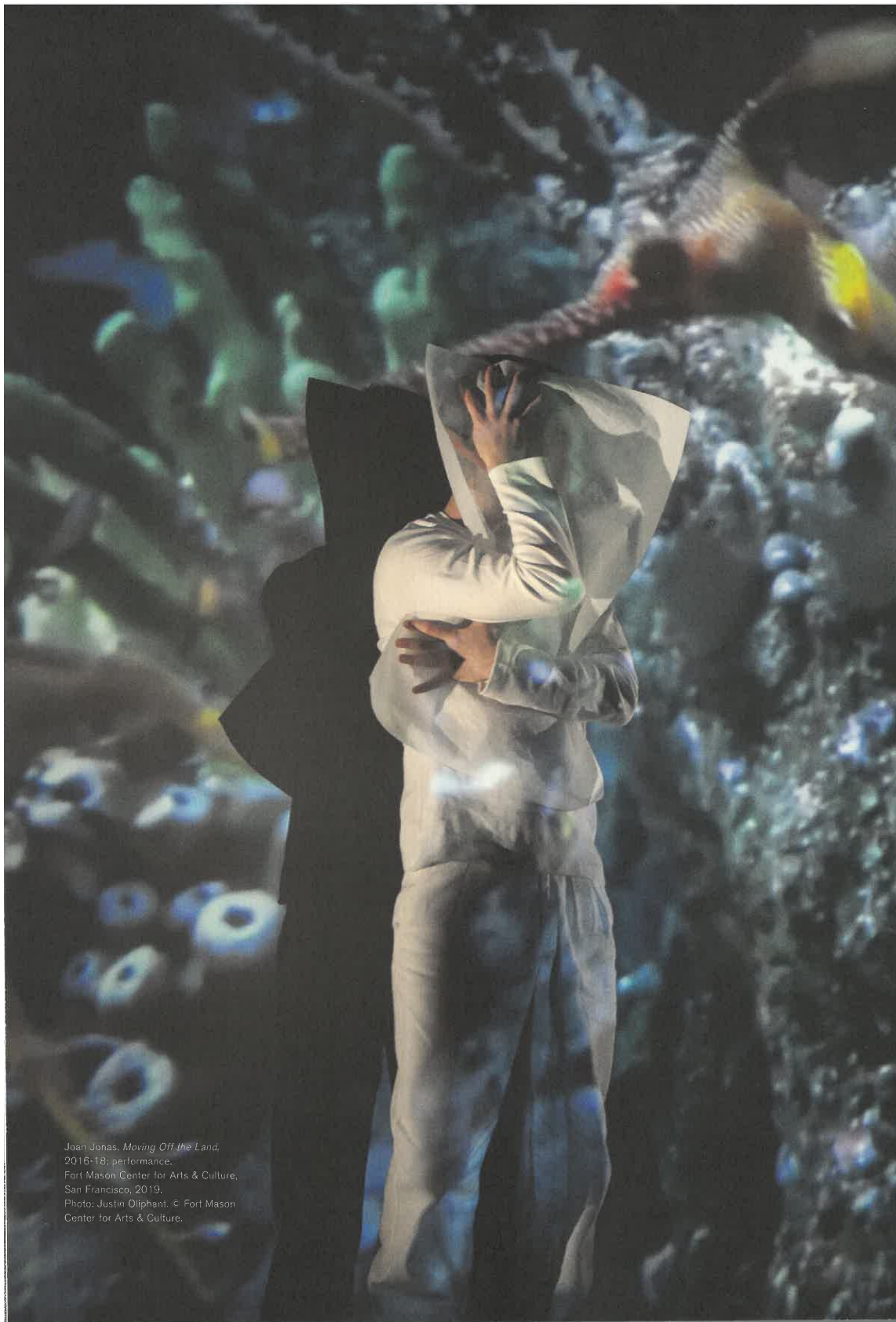


Joan Jonas, *Mirror Piece I*, 1968; Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, 1969. Photo: Joan Jonas. Courtesy: the artist.





# GLADSTONE GALLERY

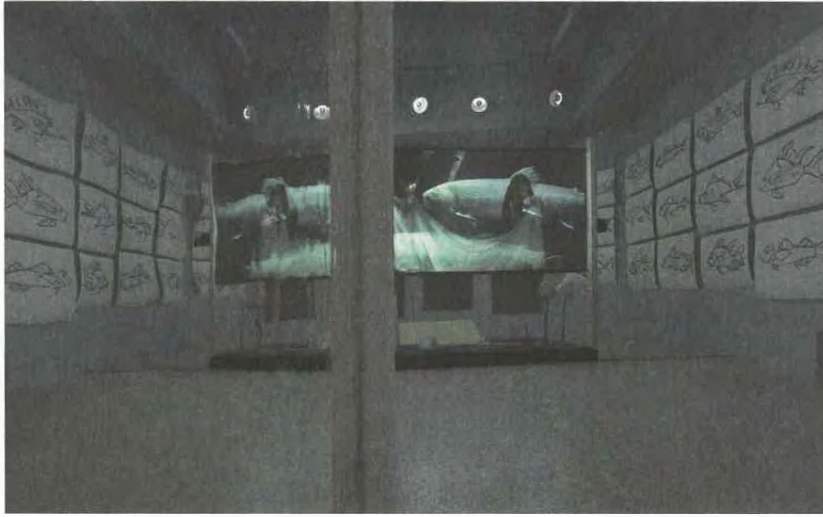


Joan Jonas, *Moving Off the Land*,  
2016-18; performance.  
Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture,  
San Francisco, 2019.  
Photo: Justin Oliphant. © Fort Mason  
Center for Arts & Culture.



GLADSTONE GALLERY





Above: Joan Jonas, *They Come to Us without a Word*, 2015; installation view, US Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale, 2015. Photo: Moira Ricci. Courtesy: the artist. Right page: Joan Jonas, *Reanimation*, 2010/2012/2013; mixed-media installation; dimensions variable; installation view, Tate Modern, 2018. Photo: Seraphina Neville. © Tate photography and the artist.

of forms, also with very marked undulations, which were finished as mirrors and placed on view in the "Home Room." For the "Mirror Room" the choice went instead to industrially produced glass with a slightly undulated surface, again mirror-finished by hand, which covered the surface of the room, producing an infinite play of reflections augmented by the presence of a chandelier of salvaged crystal drops at the center, in a wide range of forms, hanging from an iron structure designed by the artist and crossed in turn by a video projection. Discussing the role of mirrors in her practice, Jonas states:

*One of the underlying concerns of my work is the perception of space, and I work with various devices, such as the mirror, to alter the audience's experience of a space. My "Mirror Pieces" (1968-71) were performed in large indoor rooms – such as gyms, auditoriums, and lofts – and once outdoors. [...] Today I use different mirrors – concave and convex – because they reflect and distort the image and change the space. Often instead of using special effects in video, I use the mirrors to create magical worlds, one step more removed. My camera, pointing at the mirror, records my gaze as I look indirectly into the lens reflected in the mirror.<sup>5</sup>*

The mirror finishing is itself an alchemical process, and I believe that for Joan Jonas being present during the operation constituted an important moment. The procedure is similar to that of photographic printing: the surface of the glass is immersed in vats with a mixture

of chemicals, and the glass is transformed, gradually revealing the image, like the image that emerges through the passage in developing trays.

It is magical – the mirror is like a camera that records the data of the visible and restores them to the gaze with the variations caused by its surface. A game of rebounds of gazes (and images) that has been the basis of artistic representation since its origins, and whose history continues to nurture the work of Jonas. "As I developed a piece, the important thing was to sit and stare at a space as if I were looking at a painting. In studying art history I traced the history of painting for instance, which fascinated me, in relation to representation of space."<sup>6</sup>

A new production of mirrors is also central to the large installation *Moving Off the Land II* (2019), created for the spaces in Venice of TBA21, curated by Stefanie Hessler. Their surface suggests the ripples on the lagoon, and reflects the interiors of the church of San Lorenzo, one of the few churches in Italy with a bifrontal altar, built at the end of the 16th century by Simone Sorella and previously closed for many years. All the elements of the installation are thus implicated in the game of reflections: large suspended canvases that reproduce some of the red drawings made during the performances; rows of drawings on paper of fish that make reference to the undersea creatures in the videos by Gruber; and, of course, the videos, projected in specially designed spaces that remind us of the "My New Theater" series of cinema-sculptures for domestic viewing, which take on an environ-

mental scale, in this case. In the exhibition, as in the performance, Joan Jonas constructs reflections in images and texts on the state of the oceans and our possible relationship with the beings that live inside them, another part – as we have seen – of a research project spanning many years, in search of invisible miracles.

Anna Daneri is an independent curator based in Genoa.

1 - Anna Daneri and Caterina Riva (ed.), *Invisible Miracles. XIII Advanced Course in Visual Arts of the Fondazione Ratti*, Mousse, 2008, p.1.

2 - Frances Richard and Anthony Huberman (ed.), *Joan Jonas is on our mind*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2017.

3 - Joan Jonas, "Notes on Process" in: Jane Farver (ed.), *Joan Jonas. They Come to Us Without a Word*, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Gregory R. Miller & Co. & Hatje Cantz, 2015, p.15 and 17. After Venice, the piece has been shown in 2016 at NTU Center for Contemporary Art Singapore and DHC/ART Montreal. In 2019 Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture presented the installation with the support of the Kramlich Collection.

4 - Ingrid Schaffner, "Conversation with Joan Jonas," in: *ibidem*, p.116 and 131.

5 - Joan Jonas, "Mirrors" in: Joan Simon (ed.), *In the Shadow of the Shadow: The Work of Joan Jonas*, HangarBicocca and Malmö Konsthall, Gregory R. Miller & Co. & Hatje Cantz, 2015, p.40.

6 - Joan Jonas, "Space, Movement, Time" in: Anna Daneri and Cristina Natalicchio (ed.), *Joan Jonas*, Fondazione Antonio Ratti and Galleria Civica di Arte Contemporanea di Trento, Charta, 2007, p.48.

GLADSTONE GALLERY

