

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Mara Hoberman, "Reviews," *Artforum*, February 2016

ARTFORUM

FEBRUARY 2016

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GLADSTONE GALLERY

PARIS

“Ugo Rondinone: I ♥ John Giorno”

PALAIS DE TOKYO

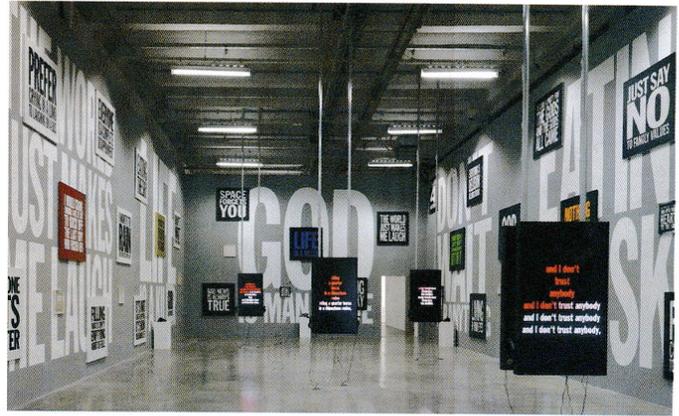
Living up to its impassioned title, “Ugo Rondinone: I ♥ John Giorno” was an adulation of the American counterculture icon as a poet, artist, friend, lover, activist, archivist, muse, and inspiration. Conceived by his longtime partner, Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone, and curated by Florence Ostende, Giorno’s first-ever retrospective was an exhaustive yet intimate showcase comprising more than three hundred artworks, six hundred audible poems, and fifteen thousand archival photos and documents. It was also a tribute show featuring works by Rondinone, Angela Bulloch, Anne Collier, Verne Dawson, Judith Eisler, Pierre Huyghe, Françoise Janicot, Elizabeth Peyton, Michael Stipe, Billy Sullivan, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Andy Warhol, among others. Across eight chapters, this nonchronological survey covered Giorno’s diverse affiliations and influences—from Buddhism and the Beats to AIDS activism and action poetry. In stark contrast to the Palais de Tokyo’s lobby, which was plastered with the show’s fire engine–red logo (Scott King’s riff on Milton Glaser’s iconic “I ♥ NY”), a black-and-white video installation by Rondinone set a reverent tone of adoration. In *Thanx 4 Nothing*, 2015, Giorno performs his 2007 poem of the same title in a vaudeville-era theater. Spotlit in a tuxedo and bare feet, the poet extends a peculiar variety of gratitude to his friends, lovers, and enemies: “May every drug I ever took / come back and get you high, / may every glass of vodka and wine I’ve drunk / come back and make you feel really good.”

Rondinone’s perfectly synchronized pastiche of close-ups and long shots, painstakingly edited from more than fifty performances, creates a rhythmic portrait across four large screens and sixteen boxy monitors. Technically virtuosic, this work—like many tributes to Giorno—is nonetheless upstaged by its subject.

Such is the case in Warhol’s five-plus-hour film of Giorno asleep (*Sleep*, 1963), which was screened alongside less well-known Warhol shorts in which Giorno appears nude in a sunny kitchen (*John Washing*, 1963) and swaying in a hammock (*Untitled [John in Hammock]*, 1963). Observed through Warhol’s homoerotic, voyeuristic gaze, Giorno’s mere presence is captivating no matter what he is (or isn’t) doing. Fast-forward several decades to Huyghe’s *Sleeptalking*, 1998, which gives Giorno’s silent sleeping beauty a voice and a backstory. The sound track to this sixty-four-minute black-and-white video, wherein a slumbering sixty-two-year-old Giorno slowly morphs into his twenty-seven-year-old self in *Sleep*, is a medley of Giorno’s lively accounts of New York in the 1960s and ’70s.

Giorno’s politics, humor, and passion were loud and clear in a room dedicated to his poem paintings and audio recordings. Plastering the walls, murals and silk screens (some dating back to the late 1980s) blasted acerbic slogans—BAD NEWS IS ALWAYS TRUE, NOTHING RECEDES LIKE SUCCESS, LIFE IS A KILLER—in block letters. In the center of the room, *Sound Poems*, 2015, a collaboration with Rondinone, paired audio of Giorno reading his poetry with karaoke-style read-along monitors. Six rotary phones on white pedestals provided direct lines to *Dial-A-Poem*, 1968–2012, a service originally hosted by the Architectural League of New York that connected callers to recordings by the likes of Jim Carroll, Diane di Prima, and Bobby Seale. The audio accessed in this exhibition (and, for its duration, via an 800 number) was updated to also include French voices like Antonin Artaud and Serge Gainsbourg.

The show’s final room housed a digital archive of Giorno’s record label, Giorno Poetry Systems (GPS), which released more than fifty albums between 1965 and 1997. Conceived by curator Matthew Higgs, the listening room was decorated with Bulloch’s “Happy Sack” bean-



bag chairs and Collier’s digital slide show of GPS LP covers. Listening to recordings of Laurie Anderson, Allen Ginsberg, Philip Glass, Patti Smith, and Frank Zappa while looking at album artwork by Robert Mapplethorpe, Peter Hujar, and Keith Haring, I realized this lavish tribute to Giorno was long overdue.

View of “Ugo Rondinone: I ♥ John Giorno,” 2015–16. Photo: André Morin.

—Mara Hoberman