

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS
1-2 WARNER YARD
LONDON EC1R 5EY
TEL: +44 (0)207 837 5991
WWW.HOLLYBUSHGARDENS.CO.UK

JOHANNA BILLING: EACH MOMENT PRESENTS WHAT HAPPENS

Preview: Thursday, 23 March, 18:00 - 20:00
Exhibition: 24 March - 6 May 2023

The genesis of Johanna Billing's film, *Each Moment Presents What Happens* (2021), departs from a collaborative premise and twofold dilemma: how to reimagine a historical event that exists most (in)coherently in the realm of memory, and to conceive a record of such an undocumented experience? Billing invited students, largely from Bristol Grammar School in England, to reimagine a seminal work by John Cage, *Untitled Event (Theater Piece No. 1)* (1952) – the first known happening or multimedia artwork held in Black Mountain College, USA. The film records the multifaceted outcome of such a collective response, with students engaging in an experimental, improvisational and multidisciplinary process open to exchange, imagination and failure. The film continues Billing's long-held examination of performance and its parameters, exploring the affinities between staging and contingency.

Each Moment was commissioned by Bristol Grammar School to commemorate the opening of the 1532 Performing Arts Centre. This new centre inaugurated interdepartmental connections across the arts as well as public-facing access within the local community. Testing the differences between educational models and what qualifies as knowledge, *Each Moment* creates a dialogue between the school, founded in 1532, now selective, independent and fee-paying and the defunct Black Mountain College, founded in 1933, specialising in liberal arts education. Cage's *Untitled Event* was originally held in the dining hall of Black Mountain College, involving simultaneous and multidisciplinary chance activities variously created by: John Cage, Nicolas Cernovtich, Merce Cunningham, Franz Kline, Charles Olsson, Robert Rauschenberg, M.C. Richards and David Tudor.

In lieu of photographic or video documentation, the happening lives on today through memory and testimony. These contradictory recollections and the intrinsic anonymity of Cage's work serve as a cue for the students, who were invited to imagine what could have taken place before, during and after the event, articulating responses through dance, music, theatre, poetry, painting, philosophy, photography, dj-ing and film production. Throughout *Each Moment*, Billing encourages a practical and poetic approach to learning that challenges the values of failure and success, process and outcome. In this way, the project also advocates a means of thinking the past through the personal, coincidental and relational. The work's title directly quotes Cage's *Lecture on Nothing* (1959), which becomes a poignant motif throughout the film. By revisiting Cage's historical texts, the performers consider the meaning of improvisation, success, authorship and artistic autonomy in relation to everyday experience.

Each Moment features a reconsideration of Cage's *Prepared Piano Pieces* (1938-54). Originally, the act of preparation was designed to contort the instrument's sound by inserting bolts, screws, erasers and other objects between the piano strings. In this, Cage sought "to place in the hands of a single pianist the equivalent of an entire percussion orchestra" with the prepared piano serving as a precursor to his later experiments with chance. In the film, students interpose the piano's internal structure with a myriad of objects such as toys, art utensils, cutlery, science equipment and office stationary. Notably, Cage's *Prepared Piano Pieces* had been removed from the A Level music syllabus as the work's ambivalent status undermined conventional academic assessment. By contrast, Billing's revival of this exercise sees the instrument function as a site of collective ownership and cross-disciplinary creation.

Formally, *Each Moment* is distinguished by its attentive negotiation of time. Taking place over a single day, the work's sensitivity to the passing and structuring of time is redoubled by a self-reflexive approach to the camera. Students are recorded preparing work, speaking publicly in the dining hall, and playing the piano – all are performances embedded within the reality of the school day. Parallel activities occur within the black box theatre, recorded by a camera installed upon a track in a 360 degree formation. The lens observes the students' action and the supporting film crew in a circular orbit. This structure of recording echoes Cage's original event where viewers were seated centrally and facing outward, each observing different activity. Here, the camera functions as both participant and structuring device, offering a viewpoint in the round which acknowledges simultaneous peripheral action. The students frequently interchange their handling of the camera, meaning the pace of recording is continually

recalibrated by the body. Permitting a new activity to enter after a number of rotations, the camera – reminiscent of a clock face or timepiece – becomes an imperfect device to organise time. By physically relating to the camera's movement in space, the students become conscious of "keeping time" only through a dynamic estimation and felt sense of its very passing.

Commissioned by Bristol Grammar School to commemorate the opening of the 1532 Performing Arts Centre. Produced by Josephine Lanyon in association with Bristol City Council. Supported by the University of the West of England.

With thanks to the Embassy of Sweden, London.

Solo exhibitions include *Each Moment Presents What Happens*, Jan Mot, Brussels, Belgium; *In Purple*, Kalmar Konstmuseum, Sweden (all 2022); *In Purple*, Riksidrottsmuseet, Stockholm, Sweden (2021); *In Purple*, Hollybush Gardens, London (2020); *In Purple*, Stadsbiblioteket, Jönköping, Sweden, (2019); *15 Years of You Don't Love Me Yet*, Teatro Garibaldi/Galeria Laveronica, Modica, Italy, (2018); *I'm Lost Without Your Rhythm*, Trondheim Kunst-museum, Norway, (2017); *Keeping Time*, Villa Croce, Genoa, Italy, (2016); *I'm Gonna Live Anyhow Until I Die*, the MAC, Belfast, (2012); *I'm Lost Without Your Rhythm*, Modern Art Oxford, (2010); *Moving In, Five Films*, Grazer Kunstverein, Austria, (2010); *Tiny Movements*, ACCA, Melbourne, Australia, (2009); *I'm Lost without Your Rhythm*, Camden Art Centre, London, (2009); *Taking Turns*, Kemper Museum, Kansas City, USA, (2008); *This Is How We Walk on the Moon*, Malmö Konsthall, Sweden, (2008); *Forever Changes*, Kunstmuseum Basel, (2007); *Keep on Doing*, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Scotland, (2007); and *Magical World*, PS. 1, New York, (2006). She has participated in significant group exhibitions internationally, including *Controra Ep. V*, curated by Like A Little Disaster, Palazzo San Giuseppe, Italy; Çanakkale Biennial, Turkey (all 2022); Seoul Mediacity Biennale, South Korea (2021); MOMENTUM 10, 10th Nordic Biennial of Contemporary Art, Moss, Norway, (2019); *It's Time To Dance Now*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, (2010); 4th Auckland Triennial, (2010); Documenta 12, Kassel, (2007); Singapore Biennale, (2006); 9th Istanbul Biennial, (2005); 1st Moscow Biennale, 2005; and 50th Venice Biennale, (2003). Forthcoming group exhibitions include *Centuries*, Zachęta - National Gallery of Art, Warsaw; *World Class Room, Contemporary Art through School Subjects*, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (all 2023).

Her work is held in numerous museum and public collections, including MOCA, Los Angeles; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, USA; Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Seville, Spain; Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden; Jönköpings Museum, Sweden; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; FRAC Bourgogne, France; SMAK, Ghent, Belgium; Sørlandets Kunstmuseum, Kristiansand, Norway; Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands; Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, USA; Museum Sztuki, Łódź, Poland; and Museum Współczesne, Wrocław, Poland.

For press enquiries and further information, please contact: info@hollybushgardens.co.uk

Gallery Hours: Wednesday - Saturday, 11am - 6pm; or by appointment.