

JOAN JONAS

Inferno Paradise / The Juniper Tree

Main Galleries: 05 April – 18 May 2008

Wilkinson Gallery is pleased to present a solo show by the acclaimed performance, video and installation artist, Joan Jonas.

The exhibition premieres a new installation, entitled *Inferno Paradise*, alongside *The Juniper Tree* (1976). Whilst taking inspiration from Dante, *Inferno Paradise* is not merely a visually seductive retelling of the story. It instead uses the classic's themes to transform the gallery space into an immersive presentation of filmed footage taken from a performance and Jonas' own travels. Five screens and a monitor display subtly intercut film scenes- which include a shadow performance piece, a Mexican Modernist stone circle, a toy museum and an archive Jonas performance- which, though ambiguous in their meaning individually, assume an energetic aesthetic language when taken as whole.

Mirroring Dante's orbiting Circles of Hell the viewer is invited to allow the screens to act as orbiting windows to alternate realities and cultures. Juxtaposed against the European narrative base the footage is simultaneously otherworldly and familiar. A car journey around Mexico City is interspersed with a female interacting with a glass hand mirror amongst a modernist stone circle; the toys in the toy museum have their inbuilt sense of nostalgia knocked by their high concentration, becoming both cozy and unsettling; an archive film of a street improvisation performance by Jonas from 1976 gives a historical insight into the artist's career yet retains its original, ethereal, and perhaps disturbing impact. Within the films, ongoing motifs, that have remained a constant in the artist's visual language, reappear: the mirror, the mask, the cone, the dog, the hoop; each containing their own history in the wider narrative of Jonas's oeuvre. Choreographed together the films present an all-encompassing alternate world, taking from Dante, from the familiar and from the artist's previous body of work.

Mirroring the journey made by Dante, *Inferno Paradise* marks the latest stage in the artist's journey in which each piece has both consciously and subconsciously informed each new work and series. *The Juniper Tree* was the first work in which Jonas took up a narrative structure, incorporating fairy tales and folklore, formalizing her highly complex, nonlinear method of presentation.

It was the first performance she undertook in the UK and highlighted Jonas's continued and ongoing interest in the anthropological and fantastical. Originally conceived and performed for children at the ICA in Philadelphia (1976), the work retells the eponymous Brothers Grimm fairytale in which a stepmother kills a boy, only for the boy to seek his revenge in the shape of a bird. The installation, which evolved from the solo version of the performance and includes all the props used and all the paintings completed during the action, takes a new hybrid presence within the gallery setting, allowing the viewer to contemplate the physical matter independently of the ephemeral events taken to produce the installation. The solo version was performed at various venues including Joan Jonas' Loft, Mercer Street, New York 1978, Osterreichischer Kunstverein, Vienna, Austria 1978, The San Francisco Arts Institute, 1979, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1979 and Stedelijk Van Abbenmuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, 1979.

An active artist for over three decades Jonas continues to build on an impressive body of work that is often highly theorized yet remains visually dynamic; integrating with innovation disparate elements from across mediums.

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