

PAULA COOPER GALLERY

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ROBERT WILSON

147 SPRING STREET BYRD LOFT

PAULA COOPER GALLERY
521 W 21st Street
October 1 - 29, 2011



NEW YORK – The Paula Cooper Gallery is pleased to present *147 SPRING STREET BYRD LOFT*, an exhibition focusing on early performance works by Robert Wilson. The exhibition occurs in conjunction with the premiere of this visionary artist’s celebrated theatrical production *The Threepenny Opera* at BAM and the release of two new monographs and a book on the Watermill Center. It also marks the occasion of Wilson’s 70th birthday on October 4.

In 1967 Wilson moved into his first loft on 147 Spring Street in Soho, which was becoming a hub for artistic experimentation, with artists such as Andy Warhol, Richard Foreman, Yvonne Rainer, Meredith Monk, Kenneth King and Jack Smith residing in the neighborhood. Named after Bird Hoffman, who helped Wilson as a child overcome his speech impediments through movement therapy, Byrd Loft was conceived as a performance and educational space with the intention “to find and to make situations where people of varied backgrounds, interests, and capabilities can come together to develop their own individuality and talents, and contribute their efforts in group situations.”¹

The exhibition explores the years 1967-1975, a fertile period during which Wilson created radically alternative performances inspired by new approaches to movement and theater. Emphasizing the visual instead of the verbal, insisting on stillness, silence and a stretched-out temporality, these early performances already contained the major elements of Wilson’s style.

¹ Byrd Hoffman Foundation Inc. prospectus, 1969, p. 7

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Included in the exhibition are video and archival records of *Baby Blood* (1967 - the first performance at the loft) and *Poles* ('68 – an outdoor commission created for children), as well as the performances *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud* ('69), *Deafman Glance* ('71), *KA MOUNTAIN* ('72), *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* ('73) and *A Letter for Queen Victoria* ('74). These early works established Wilson as a leader in Manhattan's burgeoning avant-garde and were to have a lasting influence on contemporary theater and performance art.

In the mid-seventies, Wilson turned his attention to large-scale opera and, with Philip Glass, created *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), which achieved worldwide acclaim and altered conventional notions of the opera form. Following *Einstein*, Wilson collaborated with internationally renowned writers and performers, and created landmark original works that were featured regularly at the Festival d'Automne, Paris; Der Berliner Ensemble; the Schaubühne, Berlin; the Thalia Theater, Hamburg; the Salzburg Festival; and the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival.

Extensive retrospectives of Wilson's work were presented at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. He has presented installations at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, London's Clink Street Vaults and the Guggenheim Museums in New York and Bilbao. His tribute to Isamu Noguchi was exhibited at the Seattle Art Museum and his *Voom Portraits* exhibition traveled to Hamburg, Milan, Miami, and Philadelphia.

Most recently, Wilson presented *The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic*, a biographical opera of the acclaimed performance artist, at the Manchester International Festival and Teatro Real, Madrid. Each summer Wilson retreats to the Watermill Center in Long Island, a laboratory for the arts and humanities which brings together students and professionals in a multi-disciplinary environment dedicated to creative collaboration.

For more information and images, please contact the gallery: (212) 255-1105;
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