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News from the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum
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Images available on request

Reflecting back: Joan Jonas returns to her alma mater

Revered for her innovations in performance, video and installation, Jonas will give a lecture and direct a performance at Mount Holyoke College, while MHCAM presents an exhibition of her mirror-themed works.

SOUTH HADLEY, Mass. — The [Mount Holyoke College Art Museum](#) (MHCAM) is pleased to announce the return of internationally-acclaimed artist and alumna Joan Jonas to Mount Holyoke. Jonas, who graduated in the class of 1958, is currently the subject of a focused [exhibition](#) at MHCAM, “Promise of the Infinite: Joan Jonas and the Mirror,” on view through June 16, 2019.

Jonas will serve as the College’s Leading Woman in the Arts for 2018-2019, presenting a [public lecture](#) on October 18, 2018 and directing a [live performance](#) on campus on January 31, 2019.

Over the last half-century, Jonas has experimented with new forms of artistic expression, blending video, sound, sculpture, drawing, and performance to create immersive viewer experiences that explore ways of seeing. Born in New York in 1936, she received her B.A. from Mount Holyoke before attending the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and



Columbia University, where she earned an M.F.A. in Sculpture in 1965. Jonas has performed and exhibited her work internationally since the late 1960s. Tireless in her creativity into her eighties, Jonas has received significant recognition in recent years with major traveling exhibitions in 2014 and 2018, organized by HangarBicocca, Milan and Tate Modern, London respectively. In

2015, she represented the United States at the Venice Biennale, and this year she was selected as a Kyoto Prize laureate, Japan’s highest private award for global achievement. A hero and mentor to a younger generation of artists, she is professor emerita at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Jonas, who splits her time between New York and Nova Scotia, last visited her alma mater in May 2016, when she received an honorary doctorate of fine arts from Mount Holyoke. "Promise of the Infinite" is her first exhibition at the College.

"We are truly thrilled and honored to host Jonas's solo exhibition here at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum," says Tricia Y. Paik, Florence Finch Abbott Director. "The opportunity to share her groundbreaking work with our students and community will no doubt foster inspiring dialogue about her lasting contribution to the arts."

Focusing on the recurring theme of the mirror in her oeuvre, the exhibition brings together four works that span Jonas's prolific career. "From her use of looking glasses and mirrored costumes in her earliest performances," notes Associate Curator Hannah W. Blunt, "Jonas has used the concept of the mirror to show that images are not facts, but reflections of our individual imaginations and assumptions."



The four works in the exhibition include one of Jonas's earliest films, "Wind" (1968), recently restored and digitized by the Anthology Film Archive, as well as a sculptural video theater from the late 1990s, "My New Theater II: Big Mirror," and a video projection, "Mirror Improvisation," excerpted from her multimedia performance "The Shape, The Scent, The Feel of Things," which debuted to critical acclaim at Dia:Beacon in 2004. "Mirror Pieces Installation II" (1969/2014), a recent acquisition by MHCAM in honor of longtime curator Wendy Watson, completes the exhibition and distills concepts and physical

components from several of Jonas's early Mirror Pieces into a video installation.

With their various mirrored elements—both tangible and metaphorical—the works in the exhibition distort visitors' notions of space, and also complicate their roles as viewers and spectators. Jonas prompts viewers to consider the difference between looking and seeing, and between reality and its representation.

Jonas to serve as Mount Holyoke's 2018-2019 Leading Woman in the Arts, the first alumna in the program's 12-year history

As Mount Holyoke's 2018-2019 Leading Woman in the Arts, Jonas will discuss her work in a free [public lecture](#) titled "60 Years Later" on Thursday, October 18, 2018 at 5:30 p.m. in Gamble Auditorium at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum. While on campus, she will also facilitate a leadership and careers luncheon with students, attend an advanced studio art class, and meet with the student participants in her January 2019 performance at the College.

The [Leading Women in the Arts](#) series was launched in 2006, and is organized collaboratively by Mount Holyoke's Weissman Center for Leadership and the InterArts Council, comprised of

creative and performing arts faculty. The program reflects the Center's support of short-term residencies by internationally acclaimed artists, writers, and practitioners whose influential careers provide inspiration for a new generation of students. Invited guest artists are featured in public discussions about the interconnections between creative expression of all forms and cultural transformations.

"It is an absolute privilege to have Joan Jonas '58 return to Mount Holyoke to be our 'Leading Woman in the Arts' this year," says Amy Martin, Director of the Weissman Center. "She is a model for our students and for our entire community, demonstrating to us how being visionary and innovative makes one a transformative leader in one's field."

Past Leading Women in the Arts have included choreographer Trisha Brown, composers Meredith Monk and Kaija Saariaho, visual artists Ann Hamilton and Carrie Mae Weems, architect Billie Tsien, and writer and poet Claudia Rankine, among others.

Jonas is the first alumna in the program's 12-year history.

Early mirror performance by Jonas to be restaged at Mount Holyoke

In an historic, one-night only [event](#) on January 31, 2019, Jonas will direct a reconfigured version of her groundbreaking 1969 and 1970 performances, *Mirror Piece I* and *Mirror Piece II*. Fifteen Mount Holyoke students will perform the piece at 7:30 p.m. in the Dance Studio Theater in Kendall Hall.

Mirror Piece I and *II* were the first in a series of time-based works that established Jonas as a leading figure in the field of performance art. Motivated by feminist ideas, these pieces explored gender hierarchies, the power of the gaze, and notions of perception and representation.

In the original staging of *Mirror Piece I* at New York University's Loeb Student Center, a group of mostly women performers moved in slow, choreographed patterns while holding oblong mirrors in front of their bodies. Two men walked among the women, periodically interrupting their movements to lift, carry, and deposit them in different positions. Facing out, the moving mirrors continuously revealed the reflections of the audience, complicating the relationship between spectator and spectacle. In *Mirror Piece II*, which was staged at New York's Emanuel-El YMHA, the performers carried heavier mirrors and pieces of glass, slowing the pace of their movements and creating a sense of risk and vulnerability to their bodies. For later stagings of these performances at the Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010), the Kulturhuset Stadsteatern, Stockholm (2013), and the Tate Modern, London (2018), Jonas incorporated reworked choreography and musical components.



Nefeli Skarmea, a London-based dancer and curator, will collaborate with Jonas on the performance at Mount Holyoke. The title of the new performance will be *Mirror Piece I & II: Reconfigured (1969/2018-2019)*.

About the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum

The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum (MHCAM) aims to spark intellectual curiosity and creativity through direct engagement with works of art and material culture. Founded in 1876, the Museum's collection comprises more than 24,000 objects, including exemplary Greek, Roman and Egyptian antiquities; art and artifacts from the indigenous Americas; paintings, sculpture and decorative art from Europe and the United States; photography, prints, ceramics and numismatics; and works by women artists. In recent years, the Museum has made significant acquisitions of global contemporary art, including works by Afruz Amighi, Ambreen Butt, Zanele Muholi, Kiki Smith, Alec Soth, Lin Tianmiao, Kara Walker, Carrie Mae Weems and others. Through thought-provoking exhibitions and educational programs, MHCAM serves as a nexus for experiential learning across academic disciplines and as a resource for the broader community.

MHCAM is free, open to the public and fully accessible. Hours are Tuesday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m. For additional information, please visit artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu.

About the Weissman Center for Leadership

The Weissman Center for Leadership, established in 1999, supports students, faculty, and staff in the development of leadership skills inside and outside the classroom. The Center's work is guided by four over-arching themes: inspiration sparked by public events with renowned guest speakers; capacity-building to develop skills and confidence through leadership courses, experiential learning, conferences, and trainings; mentoring and networking on campus and across nonprofit, public service, and business realms to promote opportunities for professional success; and reflection and discovery, the foundation for perpetual leadership growth.

Images: Joan Jonas in mirror costume, ca. 1968, Photo: Peter Campus, courtesy of Gavin Brown's enterprise; Installation view of *Promise of the Infinite: Joan Jonas and the Mirror* at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, Photo: Laura Shea; Performance view of *Mirror Piece I* (1969), Loeb Student Center, New York University, New York, 1969, Photo: Wayne A. Hollingworth, courtesy of Gavin Brown's enterprise, © 2018 Joan Jonas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Performance view of *Mirror Piece I* (Reconfigured) (1969/2010), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2010, Photo: Enid Alvarez © SRGF, NY, courtesy of Gavin Brown's enterprise, © 2018 Joan Jonas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.