RoseLee Goldberg in Conversation With Justine Fisher

- Welcome back everybody. This Lockdown University really started off as a family affair, and then it grew into a worldwide participation. Today I am thrilled to welcome RoseLee Goldberg and my daughter Justine, who will be in conversation with her. So today is really, truly back to being a family affair. So RoseLee, I'm going to now introduce you. RoseLee, born and raised in Durban, South Africa. RoseLee Goldberg is a world renowned art historian, critic and curator, and the founding director and chief curator of Performa, whose book "Performance Art from Futurism to the Present," first published in 1979 and still in print, and in 15 languages, pioneered the study of performance art and changed the shape of art history.

She showed us how to understand contemporary art in all its forms across all disciplines. Throughout her career, RoseLee has looked to her childhood in South Africa as the foundation that turned her into a powerful activist and advocate for the arts as an essential, cultural force with the power to communicate and inspire humanist values in people around the world, across geographic borders and language barriers. In 2004, she founded Performa to create a highly visible and public platform for her ideas.

Beyond her publications and teaching, and in a few short years, Performa's innovative, citywide programming of live performance in all media has created a new model for cultural organisations, influencing major institutions in New York, London, and Johannesburg, who as a measure of course, now include new media and live art as part of their programming. RoseLee's many awards include Chevalier of the Order of Arts Letters from the French government, Yoko Ono's Courage Award for the Arts, The Agnes Gund Cultural Award, Cultural Institute of Art. Goldberg has taught at NYU Steinhardt since 1987 and is a mentor to many graduates and young arts and cultural professionals from South Africa. In 2017, she was named Curator at Large for the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art in Cape Town. RoseLee, it's my great pleasure to have you on today, and I'm now going to hand you over to Justine, thank you.

- Thank you, Wendy.

- Hi everyone, it's my great honour to be in conversation with RoseLee today. Many years ago, while I was still a student in high school in London, my mother's friend Lynn Shea, introduced me to RoseLee's book "Performance Art "from Futurism to the Present." It opened my mind and I was instantaneously hooked. You can imagine my excitement when two years later, while scrolling through the roster of professors and classes at NYU, I came across her name. Now, to be a student of RoseLee's was a unique and dynamic experience. I loved it so much that I fought for and won the revered spot of the very first intern of her nonprofit organisation, Performa, which we'll come to later.

And if that wasn't enough time with RoseLee I then wound up my senior year TAing for her for the very same class. Now, I must add here that it is a huge feather in my cap that as Wendy Fisher's daughter, I was able to introduce her to RoseLee Goldberg and not the other way

around. So now RoseLee, I'd like to discuss you. How did growing up in South Africa shape the art historian that you became and the person that you are today?

- Wow, thank you Justine, thank you, Wendy. It's great to be here talking to you both. I don't think we've done this before, the two or three of us together, and great to be here talking probably to a lot of South Africans who I know and I'll hear from you afterwards, I hope. It's interesting because, especially in the last couple of years, I've been bringing quite a few South African artists to New York for Performa, and we'll talk about that later.

But it made me realise just how, just about everything in my, the way I think and people asking how did you start being interested in performance and so on, really does go back to South Africa. For those of us who came of age during apartheid, I think there was a very early awareness of the politics of the country, a real sense that we all had to be very, very concerned and responsible towards a much larger culture and larger communities. And also, I think from a very early age, I was aware of the fact that you didn't really separate one discipline from the next. It was very much about thinking of media in relation to one another, and probably always in relation to politics as well.

I think that was one of the very early lessons learned growing up in South Africa, that politics informs absolutely everything. It shaped everything about our lives, our personal relationships, and our relationship to the larger pictures of history and education. So to me, that was really a key part of thinking about painting or dance or music, it's all been part of a kind of expression, a way of expressing response to the lives that we live and to the culture around us. So that's a kind of brief response to your question, Justine, But of course there are other things that I still feel that are so much a part of who I am and coming out of South Africa.

Waking up in the morning and turning on the radio and hearing Zulu songs or in Durban, certainly, the noise of the ladeda birds, hededa birds, as they were called, just screeching. The physical aspects of being in South Africa, going for drives and seeing into the Drakensberg and seeing ancient, ancient paintings from the sand people in the caves. Again, this was multiculturalism in the deepest sense for all of us before that word became such a currency in, let's say, really in the '80s, with a really a new blossoming of art and culture, looking at what we mean by multiculturalism.

So I, again, these are things that I am very aware of, that I feel is so deeply formed by being, having grown up in South Africa, by being a South African and having that really, in one's entire psyche and one's bones. And it's, in a sense, the further I am away from the country, the more I recognise how deeply that shaped me those first 20 years.

- From South Africa, you then moved to London to study at the Courtauld. Tell us a little bit about these formative days in London. This must have been a huge change from apartheid South Africa. How did this experience shape you?

- Well, again, I think for a lot of us growing up in Durban and then I went to Wits and did political science and art history there. I think going to London seemed like a natural next step. My sister was in London and she was actually at Oxford. My brother was there. So gradually there was the sense of that we would meet up there and we did. And my other sisters also eventually came over as well. So we were really very much in a London mode.

And again, I think, you know, a group, a family group, an extended family, very much concerned about what we had left behind and why we'd left that behind. London in the late '60s, as you can imagine, was a pretty amazing place. Very, there was still Carnaby Street, there was a lot of politics. There was a lot of exciting things we could talk about, the way the culture was shaping up. And I managed to get into the Courtauld, which, at the last minute, because coming from South Africa again, wasn't always such an easy transition.

And the Courtauld was, it's a fascinating place for art historians. I often say it's sort of God's gift to art historians. It's a very rarefied environment. But again, a profound way of entering British education in that fashion. So London was, in terms of contemporary art, it was actually fairly quiet. There was not a lot of interest in contemporary art in the late '60s in London and even into the '70s. And, the Courtauld, again, gave me a sense of reference, but again, in a London, in a English educational context, you're pretty much left to your own as to which directions one's going to move into. And so early on I started working on performance, which I discovered at an exhibition at the Royal Academy of Oskar Schlemmer and the Bauhaus. But we can talk about that, again, a little bit later.

- Is this why you moved to New York to find a more vibrant contemporary art scene?

- Well, let me just backtrack a little bit. So I was also, I should have mentioned earlier, I was also a dancer growing up in South Africa. So the combination of dance and doing a fine art degree at Wits was again part of that makeup of my references. And so I was actually constantly in question about which direction I was going to take. Was I going to be a dancer or a painter? Which way was I going to go? And at that point, it was really very committed to both sides. Then I discovered the work of Schlemmer and decided to do my dissertation on Schlemmer because he literally embodied this conflict between the two disciplines and his entire work at the Bauhaus, and his writings and his diaries, were all describing this, not so much a dilemma, but how he was using each side to inform the other.

That dance was his dionysian expressionistic side and painting and drawing and sculpture were, in a way, his more intellectual, mind-based way of examining art. So again, this became my dissertation and it didn't really shape what I did after that. I went to live in Paris for a year after graduating from Courtauld, I thought I had to do that. James Joyce had done, taught English at Berlitz. So I thought I'd follow in those great footsteps and do the same thing. And so I went to teach English in Paris and then applied for a job at the Royal College of Art, as director of exhibitions at the gallery.

And to my surprise, 'cause I was really just out of school, landed that job. And I really didn't know anything about curating or running a gallery or an exhibition space and very little about contemporary art, 'cause I was still really very much in the 1920s. But it was a moment in time when everybody was talking about interdepartmentmentalization, it's a big word, but it's was the word at the time. And unbeknownst to me, I didn't realise this was a big effort that the Royal College was concerned about.

And so in my conversation with the interview committee, I really talked about this need to connect different departments, different disciplines, how it would be exciting to have the design students create design the graphics for the exhibitions that we did, and I would have the art history students write the catalogues. So I laid out this plan without, very spontaneously during the meeting and I'm convinced that's what actually made everybody excited that we could move forward. So there was three years of that and really being a very exciting time moving, taking off to Venice Biennial, and New York and Los Angeles, and really looking into contemporary culture. And having access to this extraordinary environment where I had a gallery and a space that I could really invite different artists to and so on.

So it was very, very lively programme in London at that point. And again, always opening up this idea that you could be looking at a lot of different disciplines at the same time. That art wasn't just about painting, sculpture and drawing, which is sort of the classic definition that we were always being taught in classical art history. And the way museums were run then too, was very much defined by those three areas. And slowly you'd start to see video coming into the museum, but again, talking about the early '70s, that was not the case. And also in London, as I said in the '70s, it was pretty quiet as far as the contemporary world.

Tate still only had Tate Britain. There wasn't a museum of modern art the was there was in New York. So very different reference to art history that was based on, again, the past rather the immediate present. And so after several visits to New York, I have to say I was utterly seduced. But again, let's describe New York at the time, New York was actually famously bankrupt in the '70s, mid to late '70s. The streets were littered with trash that had been left there for weeks. But downtown was a magical place. That's where artists lived in lofts.

Lofts were taken over by the artists. And my first loft in Soho, which still shocks people now, but it was 2,000 square feet for $200 a month, which was pretty amazing, 1976 or so, '77. And again, this art community downtown was made up of people from all different disciplines. So we were painters or filmmakers, there were musicians, composers, choreographers, and so on. So again, it's this extraordinary place where we all met up at the very few local bars at the time, Soho, which anyone who's visited New York knows, it's really such a mega shopping area for some of the highest quality design stores, at that stage was really all still factories.

So the artists lived in the buildings above factories. And so quite a unique time to be in New York. And so I'd go back to London and had a very different experience each time I came back to New York, and decided I'd better go live there. I need a loft, have to be there. So moved to

New York.

- I remember you used to tell us stories of hanging out with artists such as Cindy Sherman, where she was a secretary in a gallery, and each week she used to come dressed in a different character and stories like this and just how cheap those lofts were. You made it sound incredibly exciting, so-

- It was, yeah.

- So I wanted to ask you, so it was around se 1979 or it was it in 1979 that you wrote your first book, which my mother alluded to, which has been translated in again into 15 languages and has not been out of print since. What inspired you to write this book? Why did you feel the need to write this book?

- Well, so coming straight out of my research at the Courtauld on Schlemmer and Bauhaus and this entire mode of investigating how artists treated the live performance and there's a huge, huge, very rich history there of course. And in a sense, realising, and it's something that I'm still hammering this point home, that the 20th century was always about multimedia. And I know that the Lockdown University, you've been talking about, I certainly know David Pine has been talking about how artists work with poets or writers or choreographers, as in ballet, the Russian Ballet and so on. with Diaghilev.

So there's the history of 20th century art goes in and out of these relationships of artists making work for the stage or making their own stage works or writing poetry or creating books or, as like, making films, famous films by, like Dr. Caligari's Cabinet and many, many examples in art history areas. But somehow they never all came together. Art history was always, again, back to separate areas of painting and sculpture and so on. And so really quite, the answer is that, because of my background in dance and in painting and this fascination from very early on to always be peering over the borders, between the boundaries, between disciplines, I was developing more and more material that really examined this entire area, both in the current life in New York, which was very much driven by a downtown dance and performance scene, very avant-garde experimentation.

And I was meeting all the artists and talking with them and writing a lot for "Studio International" in London, and "Spare Rib," and reporting back to my contacts in London. So, and actually I met an editor, a terrific editor that some of you might know of, called Nico Stangos who was at Thames & Hudson then, and for many, many, for more than 30 years. And we started talking and he said, "This is a book." So we went from there. Again, the way these miracles happen and sometimes just a conversation. We literally talked about it that day and suddenly it was, let's go, let's do it. So then I started creating the book.

The book really is a, is in a way, a revisionist history of the 20th century. Putting back into all those places where it existed, how much it is really about the sociology of the art world. It's

much the sociology of the artists, how artists live, how they don't limit, many artists don't just think of themselves in one discipline. So it's less about separating, I'd like people not to think of it just, oh, there's this thing called performance art and then there's painting and sculpture. It's actually an art history of the 20th century. But putting back into those places where it's been left out, the important shifting times that performance was work, artists were working in performance and how that affected the way they made sculpture or the painting or other media that they were working in.

- When I first read your book, it certainly opened my mind and actually continued to do so as your student, what is art? I remember being in your class and you talked one time about a performance piece. It wasn't even a performance piece, it was just a bunch of artists talking about how how long it could possibly take to get from one side of the room to the other. That, is that art?

- What a great memory you have. It was wonderful, that was a work, actually it was an exercise that Robert Wilson, who some of you might have followed over the years, especially in the '70s, he was doing his early work in the late '70s, something called "Einstein on the Beach," which was a fantastic opera that's, again, very much represents New York City at that time because he pulled together a very extraordinary musician, called Philip Glass, who's a famous minimalist now is, considered this extraordinary minimalist composer, which of course in these early days in the '70s, they weren't really being recognised by mainstream disciplines at all. This was, again, a product of a very experimental downtown group.

So Wilson pulled together, Philip Glass, Lucinda Childs, a lot of the avant-garde downtown and in this piece called "Einstein on the Beach." And one of his exercises, his famous exercise, and I love that you remember that, was again, just really about this ability to move very slowly, to slow everything down. A kind of minimalism in the way there was minimalism in sculpture, the way there's minimalism in music. And this was a way to minimalize the idea of moving across the stage. So the experimentation of all of these people working together is a very exciting part of what we were all going through. We were all sort of running to each other's lofts or going to invitations to meet at a street corner or watch a performance on the street. But the reference is always back to what was going on in art at that moment in time. It's an incredibly rich period. And yes, those, again, has many other references.

We could talk about the interest in the '70s in Buddhism and John Cage's experiments in music, all about slowing down time and learning how to deal with time being just very long and quiet. Maybe something we're all doing right now with being at home with COVID, learning how to be very slow and focused and very concentrated. And that was that exercise that you remember so well.

- So moving along to the '80s, I believe it was in 1987 that you started teaching at NYU Steinhardt, which is where I took your class.

- [RoseLee] Yes.

- I believe you actually started teaching there at the RCA in London, correct? So would you consider yourself primarily an educator?

- You know, I am very much so. I think everything I do, I feel there's a way to reach a lot of people, to inspire people. You know, contemporary art is not easy and it's not a surprise that things are moving very quickly and it never is. I mean, at any point in time, you can go back for thousands of years, and let's go back, say to the Renaissances, any shift, any change often takes quite a while for people to understand how that material is being used or thought about or discovering perspective, as we all know from, the move to change from Fra Angelico to Masaccio, and the rounded figures. So we're always looking at these different stages in art history as shifts occur. And so, so what is my role?

I think as Wendy outlined, which is true, I really deeply believe that we learn so much as human beings through art. It's an entry throughout history to politics, to philosophy, to ethics, to ideas about science and colour and distance and perspective and architecture. So I think of all the elements that we're privileged enough being in this cultural milieu, to constantly be exposed to, and it needs, a lot of the time, it needs explaining. And sometimes there's that moment where you go, "Oh, of course I get it." Like you remembered walking slowly. What does that do? How does that shift the way you think during the day or in a moment in time for you?

So I think art does impact us and daily, and in the most ways, that you're not even realising it's occurring. And so, again, I'm always trying to think how I can find a platform to entice, seduce, change people's minds, get people feeling as excited, maybe going back to as I am when I see something, that I realise it's opened up my mind to an entirely new way of thinking about the world that I see, and the world that one sees visually and then all these other elements. So yes, education is something that, I've always taught. And again, I feel this sense of responsibility to download everything I know. I've watched, I've known, I do know so many artists, I've watched so many different decades move along. And again, my job as a contemporary historian is to watch the changes as they happen, right this moment, today. What was altered? I think it's fascinating to be living in such a present moment.

So with COVID, I think it's in a way even more active than ever to try to understand and analyse what is changing, how is it affecting the way we see the world, and how are the artists going to reflect on that? So yes, very much take great pleasure in passing those ideas on and really trying to animate students to also take a very strong sense of responsibility that that's their role as well, to inform people. And always going back to a deep sense of humanism and responsibility towards, let's call it the larger society.

- I think Performa, your organisation, manages to do this on an international scale. So before I even say that, let's rewind because as I said at the beginning, it's my claim to fame that I was the very first intern of your nonprofit organisation, Performa. So let's explain, please, can you

explain to the audience what Performa is, why you started it, and how exciting it is today?

- It's great and it's very, it's wonderful that you were there from day one. I think that's great because that class that I was teaching at the time, I think we, you really were exposed to the idea from day one. And it was actually interesting going back, since you had me talk about the beginning, the first book and how that happened. Because I had actually, this is just a real story, I had written to Nicolas and said, he kept saying, it's time for a new book. And I said, "I always get so involved in the history, "can't I just write about right now?" And he replied, "That's nonsense. "You can't just do a book that's about right now." And I thought, hmm.

And that's when I decided, there's a little bit of a preamble to this as well, but when I decided, I'm going to do this biennial, because I said, I said to him, "What about a book like a biennial? "It could come out every two years." And he said, "No, that doesn't work." And I said, "You know what, I'm going to do a biennial." So I had one student working with me at the time, and it was quite a story. And she came to work that day as my research assistant. I said, "We're going to do biennial." And she said, "Uh-huh, okay, how are you going to do that?"

And so from the start, it was an idea that I wanted to really take the story about the performance history. I was tired of people still saying, "Oh, what happened "to performance, what's going on?" And I said, "It's never gone away." This history is so rich. And so one of the reasons for starting Performa was really to put this history, not just in a public way, but also to show art historically, to show it to a much larger public, to create a platform that we could really talk about new work.

The other point, and there's a longer history, but we won't go into it now, was I had commissioned an earlier work by an extraordinary Iranian artist called Shirin Neshat in 2001, and without going into detail, it was a huge success and was taken at Lincoln Centre. It was the first work I'd ever commissioned and produced. And that became a sample for me too. Like, why don't I, why doesn't Performa as an idea, commission new work for the 21st century? I was, of course, my history was very, very aware of that history of what Diaghilev was doing in Paris in the '20s and what the Bauhaus was attempting to do and so on.

It was like, it's really time to work with artists, to help artists, to put this work in a very public way, to show another way of looking at art. And so it has, again, this very, very public component, like, how can I thrill people with what we produce and always to that sense of responsibility to the audience, to be very clear, to show work that they won't forget, that they'll always be dazzled by it. So, and that applies to everything. We'll talk a little bit about the galas that we have to do to raise funds in this country, the way it works. And everything that we do is in a sense about informing people about new ways to think about the world that we live through, and also working very, very closely with artists to allow their imaginations to just take off. And that's exciting.

- And I add here, for those who don't know who are listening, that every two years, so when she says a biennial, every two years in New York, literally the entire city of New York, for the month

of November, gets super excited for the Performa Biennial. And at different locations around the city, there are awesome, awesome events that you can just like stroll into and take part in. So my question to you is actually how many people get involved online and in person at these at-

- Yeah, it's quite hard to describe numbers because online it can be huge. I mean, we had some number once that I almost, I couldn't believe, but it came up as numbers of 5 million hits during the Biennial online. So there's a large population who has got to know it and who's followed it. And again, I'm concerned always to reach people who don't know this very detailed, and in a way, closed world of art history or contemporary art history. It's a very, that's quite a limited group, in a way, who follow it as closely as we do. But I think one of the nicest comments I ever got from someone who, I don't even know who she was, but she came up to me in New York somewhere at an event and she said, "I didn't, I've never liked contemporary art "and I don't understand performance, "but everything I see at Performa, I just love." And I was, "Great, that's all I want to hear."

That it's making an impression even if you don't come with your degrees in art history and if you're not following the history. There's something about being at a live performance that we produce that you can put your own imagination into what it's doing to you and visually, it's always very strong. And we're always, again, thinking about the experience for the viewer and what you're going to come away with. What is that going to feel like and how much you'll remember in many years to come.

- So when discussing what we were going to talk about today, I do believe you have a host of images to share with the audience so that they can get a real sense of exactly what it feels like and what goes on. Is it perhaps-

- Well this is great, I do have, you can imagine we've worked with over 700 artists in 15 years. We're just celebrating our 15th anniversary now. So this organisation is 15 years young. We're a small team who puts it all together. We're only six people, although during the biennial we expand. And then I do have a large, we do have an internship programme and you were the first to kick it off. But we have quite an extensive graduate internship programme, which is very exciting. And again, we're really producing the next curators of the future because all the curators of Performa are both deeply knowledgeable about history.

We're always looking into history of art and history of culture and many different cultures. But they've also learned to be producers, which a lot of curators are not informed about. How you create a budget, where you're going to put, raise money, how do you break down a production, who's line producer, where are we supporting all these different things? So in fact, we have quite a success story already with the curators who've been through Performa, who are now running a performance programme at the Whitney. There's some, and so on the people who come out of working with us.

- Sorry, sorry to jump in here, but I'm extremely excited for the audience to actually see these

images.

- Okay, this is great, thank you. I said we could talk for so long, Justine, and I wanted to thank you and Wendy, 'cause we did a little sort of brief conversation yesterday or two days ago about which pieces you remember the most. And so I wanted to try to satisfy Wendy with some of the things that she loves. So I just wanted to take you through, again, I'm going to go as fast as I can, I'm going to keep my eye on the clock. But to show you a range and really to dazzle your eyes more than anything else, with a range of material that we've produced over the last 15 years.

And to just give you a taste of what this means and to try again to make this as accessible, both at a kind of art historical level, but also at a sheer pleasure of the experience level. So I just trying to see how we get, so I just thought I'd throw in a slide here that really talks about the books and as you talked about how the fact that this early book, which is the one, the first one in 1979 was the first cover. And I'm just showing a range of covers as it comes out and different scales of books. And you could ask the question, don't you ever get tired of writing about performance, because of course, I've also written a lot of other books Before "Performance." But the fact is, each time I turn around, we can go more into the dance world, we can go more into the new media, is always asking the next question, the new technologies of the time.

So it's fascinating to always keep up to date. And of course looking around the world, this is not just about New York City, this is about, literally what's happening in all different parts of the world. And I just wonder to, without going too far, but to just give you a few key moments to think about regarding the history. And so I just wanted a couple of flag, a couple of parts. Some of you again might have already done, gone through 20th century art history and know about the futurist, but it is a good place to start and that's where I began the book, officially, in 1909, which was a big year in so many areas, so much happened in that moment in time, in the first part of the 20th century.

Stravinsky, you know, in contemporary music, Arnold Schoenberg, somehow 1909, becomes this date that a lot of different things happen. And it's a year that the futurist took off. Another good reason for this image. I like to tell my students to be an artist, you should always be well dressed. I think that's a kind of reminder. But also, and it's also of course, an all-male group, there were women, but that history's also been rewritten. But the main point of the futurist was bringing together a group of artists from different disciplines.

So there's one poet, one musician, one architect, one stage maker, one composer, a painter, and sculptor and so on. And so this group were again, seriously looking across discipline, which could be called the sort of, the main drive of this idea of looking at a history of art that is always inclusive of these different disciplines. And just again, to try to show you the kinds of experimentation that was so exciting at the time. This is a work by Luigi Russolo, from 1913, again, making instruments like you've never seen such instruments before. And these were actually made in concert, sometimes presented alongside a classical orchestra.

And the sounds were all about the new industrial world that the 20th century represented. So that's again fascinating. An artist who makes sound, who writes music, and of course each of these representatives of futurism wrote manifestos to go with their work. Writing manifestos was a strong way for artists in the early '20s to get work across and was very typical to, if were going to coalesce as a group, we're going to write these manifestos. So again, for those of you interested in following any of these directions, looking at manifestos from the futurists, the Russian constructivist, the Dadas, the surrealists, the whole idea of the manifesto as stating the intentions of the artist is a really strong one.

And again, I'm presenting this just so that again, it's understood that this is a really vast history. This is a work, it shows you the set in Russia in the '20s, early '20s, with Russian constructivism, Meyerhold, who was a theatre director and inventor, working with wonderful Russian constructivist artist, called Liubov Popova, where they literally, in order to reach, after the revolution, the illiterate, most of the population were illiterate. And in order to talk about the new, the new economy, the new politics, the new social criteria, the new values, they were trying to create a new kind of theatre that would talk to this entirely new society that was being developed. And that included new ways to move, included new ways to articulate ideas, a whole different idea of theatre.

And this again, was done really closely interconnected artists, writers, playwrights, poets, again and on and on and on. I always keep reminding you that this is about those meshing of different disciplines. Again, a costume, so the artists were also creating costumes, and this is a wonderful image from the time with Meyerhold called Biomechanics. Because in order to work these cranes and pulleys and all this moving parts of the theatre stage, and also to be able to talk to a public, there was this whole new kind of way that he was developing for the actors to actually move. So, and that's a picture of Popova, as well, constructing one of the sets.

And again, just to show you the level of this excitement, the visual excitement, the using the new styles. This is a piece going back now to Paris. We're just jumping around Europe at the moment, in the early '20s, just showing how much performance was going on. This is actually a fantastic work called Relâche, that was presented in Paris in 1924. What you're looking at is all those globes would come on, the actors actually are undressing there. They start out in the audience wearing suits and underneath they got these little bunny outfits on and they jump on the stage. And it included all the, many of the artists, Picabia was involved, these are names I'm sure you're all familiar with. Erik Satie did the music score.

There was a movie shown in the middle of it. Legere was in it, Duchamp was in the audience the night it appeared. And again, a time to sashay quickly into one of my big obsessions with Performa, is to take earlier periods and show all of those who come to our events in New York, what that history then looks like now. So this is a gala that we did, and it's also around 2013, which was a gala celebrating surrealism. We celebrated by showing, by sort of mocking up, our own version of that set. And the food was done in this wonderful surrealist way.

It was actually served in, oh, here we go, surrealist food. It came in bird cages and the little Cornish hens were all wrapped in pastry. And so you had to reach into the bird cage to get your piece of little chicken. So we really think about every aspect. As I said, galas are a part of the reality of how we get through, how we raise funds to put on these amazing extravaganzas that we do. And most of you who've been to galas know how very dreary they can be. And so Performa, because what we do is about being very inventive about live events, we make a point of all our galas being absolutely, just blow people away with the excitement of the way we present it.

And I like to say with every bite a bit of history because we're also, the menus you'll see are, would come with a lot of art history attached to them. Like, why you're eating what you're eating, what you're looking at, where the reference is, how it all works. And just again, some images for you to keep close to you of Oskar Schlemmer, Bauhaus, I talked earlier about how, for him, the image on the left is him in a way, representing his ideas of being the intellect, the mind. He's holding up the two cymbals. One in a way is of mathematics, of the order of the universe, the other, the sort of the, the mask, the idea of theatre. And that's him on the right in his early, one of his dance costumes that he created. And just, again, just flashing images at you to understand why this is such an incredibly rich history.

Another Schlemmer work called the "Slat Dance," costume made out of glass, which is pretty extraordinary. Another costume made out of metal. And again, leading from here into one of the parties that they did at the Bauhaus, taking the same idea that everything had to be really creative and you actually would sit on that little pulley at the back, a little cart, and get pushed into the party. And again, we decided to interpret that with one of our galas. And this was called the Metal Party, in honour of Schlemmer and the Bauhaus.

And we had, we invented our own little trolley. So the woman on the right is squealing because she was pushed into the scene on a trolley. and another dinner that everybody remembers, this was in 2009, and it's actually three floors, the dinner was on three floors. This is one of our galas. It's designed by terrific artist called Jennifer Rubell. And as you know, typically when you come to cocktails, you get peanuts. So this is a pile of peanuts. Everybody would help themselves to glasses. There were 3,000 glasses. Dinner was served in these pots, and so it forced a really fun engagement of the whole, everybody who was there, 'cause they all had to open the pots up and find utensils in some pots and rice in another pot.

And dessert was famously, some of you might recognise the bunny, it's a Jeff Koons' bunny, which I'm told that the original, that those made out of steel sell for $90 million or something. So, and in total irony, she had a chocolatier in New York, create the bunny, with permission from Jeff Koons, and out of chocolate, and people had to take a hammer and smash the bunny for their dessert. And this is another lovely moment in time where we also even thought through how we might do the wine and water in a very different way.

And onto, again, just images to show you the extent of the work we do. This was an absolutely terrific piece by Mike Kelley, an artist based in LA that has a fantastic following. Everybody absolutely loved it. But again, you just see the artists at work,

- [Artist] Alright.

- So that's a fabulous piece that we, so everything we do at Performa, just to clarify, is commissioned, and everything is from scratch. So in many ways, I should clarify, we're not presenters per se, we rather commission and produce everything ourselves because this idea is what can we do that's absolutely new? A wonderful piece here by an artist called Eddie Peake, an English artist. You can see how he moves from, the gold and the blacks start to move together and intertwine. Another artist here, young painter in New York, who called Iona Brown, who's obsessed with Kabuki and hip-hop.

She's African American and she wanted to do her first live performance. We decided we'd, how could we help her translate her personal obsessions into a live performance? So these are the costumes she produced, and she did her version of Kabuki and hip-hop. And again, all of this is on film. All of this is archived. It's really pretty fabulous. And I could take your whole day showing you all the films which we have. This was another startling piece, it's called "Bliss." It was a 12-hour opera of one song. It's the last aria of Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro." And the artist is the fellow in the middle. And he began at noon singing the same aria and ended at midnight. And people could not leave.

Talk about a marathon, they were there and the crowds by the end were just screaming and applauding as they got to the very end. It was a fantastic piece. This is another very unusual work by an artist called Rashid Johnson, some of you might know. I want to point out that the only performers are the African American guy and the White woman with her hands in the air. All the rest are the audience. In other words, you. It's a production of a play, a very famous civil rights era play in New York, America, called "Dutchman" by Amiri Baraka.

And the story is of a Black, two strangers on a train, on a subway train in the middle of New York City heat. And subways were barely air conditioned in the '60s, and which turns violent. And so Rashid Johnson, who'd never made live performance before, said he wanted to do this play in the bars, the last remaining Turkish bars in the city. So that's how we all got to the bars. So as you see, we really use the city, we move around, this was a work by Shilpa Gupta, a fantastic Indian artist. I've always been watching who I met in Delhi when I was there.

And he wanted to make a very special dinner, which he made for 60 people every night for two weeks. And he created also, you can't see it so well at the back, but this stunning chandelier that was part of all the way he, all the kinds of sculptures he makes and people could come and be literally served and sit amongst his work in this way as his live performance that he wanted to do for Performa. This is a beautiful work by Mika Rottenberg, a terrific artist based in the U.S. now. She grew up in Argentina and Israel, and she wanted to do something in South Africa.

And I was on the phone that day to the gentleman who runs NIROX and I said, "I have an artist here "who would really like to come to South Africa." And anyway, we made it happen and this is part of the larger work, but I wanted to show you that she actually filmed this in Botswana. It is a material that we helped make create for her. Back to history, I've explained that Performa's always going through history. This was the Renaissance. I wanted to really show people that indeed, performance goes back all the way.

So my team, we did lots and lots of research on the Renaissance and how performance was really part of the culture and how it was used in the courts and so on. And this was a big piece that "Vogue" magazine ran on this production that we created by Italian artist called Francesco Vezzoli. The gentleman on the right is a very famous American ballet star, part of American Ballet Theatre called David Hallberg, he's also the first American to go to the Bolshoi in in Moscow. And the ways that we worked, we created a special set, which was for, resembling a Renaissance set. We put this up in about three hours of the entire thing in a big church on Park Avenue in New York. And so that people would have a sense of a kind of old, wasn't quite Renaissance style, but certainly an older style, kind of pretty very high, soaring ceilings, gothic-like church.

And then Hallberg costumes designed by Prada was actually, who has a huge following, performing and actually reenacting based on old texts and books about nature, perform ballet and dance in 15th century Italy. So we had this really going as close as possible as we could get to history, but of course doing it in a very lively contemporary way and people were absolutely intrigued. We also have worked with Yoko Ono. We've, this was an evening, where we were actually honouring Yoko and Wendy, terrific host today.

And it was a great dinner that we did with actually William Kentridge introduced Wendy. We had all kinds of wonderful things happening then and Performa, some of you might recognise the lettering. This is, Barbara Kruger's a well-known American artist who uses this text for everything she does. And she agreed to design our sort of visual campaign. And again, just further point that there's nothing we do that isn't thought out. So that our graphics are about how an artist might create graphics for us. Everything we do is filtered through how inventive can we be?

Like, we can't simply just get any designer to make us our Performa 17 poster, it's got to be something that is an artwork in itself that's thought through in this incredibly adventurous way. So we're very excited to have Barbara work with us on the graphics, but then she also did this remarkable piece, where she wanted to go very public. She's, again, and to tell you, just to use this as an entre to explain how Performa works, we don't always work with performance art artists who've made performance before. Barbara's never made performance before, but she's highly regarded, a much, much-followed figure in the art world who uses lettering as a way to talk about the society we are living in.

And she responded to this idea of what would you do? And maybe that's my question very often to a lot of artists, will you do a live performance, how should we do this together? And what would you like to do? And she's wanted to reach as many people as possible, be as popular as possible. So this idea to create a skate park, to create a skateboard, to this having a lot to do with New York City. So we actually took over the skate park downtown, which was up for three weeks. And you could actually, we also, this was just after the election in '16, so this was before Performa 17, and she was responding to the election and we actually made thousands of subway cards.

So these were subway cards to get into the subway, carrying Barbara Kruger's very, it's almost her poetry, her very clever thinking about the cultural moment. And people of course were lining up around the block to be able to buy these tickets. And we also created a school bus because she wanted to talk about, again, young people, reaching school children, reaching high school children. And again, if you look through all the text on the bus, again, it's very much a cultural and social critique that she's presenting. But we wanted to do it in this lived way to make it live.

So, and indeed, you could go on the bus from our hub that we create every year down to the skate park. And so again, we're thinking through this idea, how do you reach a lot of people? Also, again, you would have to really know New York culture to understand that there's something called the drop, which if your kids or somebody you know is interested in sneakers, there's a Supreme store in New York where people line up for an entire Saturday, like, for hours and hours to buy the Supreme, their special sneakers. So we faked a drop and everybody showed up and stood in line to buy Barbara Kruger's hoodies and beanies and skateboards and so on. A work by Wangechi Mutu, an artist out of Kenya.

Again, just throwing visual images at you. Couldn't possibly stop to explain everything, but interestingly we did this at the Metropolitan Museum uptown. So we work with institutions, with major cultural institutions, from all over the city. We really try to use the city as our stage, as our backdrop and reach all kinds of different audiences. And we also have huge programmes that I call "Pavilions Without Walls," that we bring in people from different countries. This was our South African pavilion. You'll see Wendy Fisher's A4, you'll see Zeitz MOCAA.

And this was after several trips we were lucky enough to also take a couple of our curators to South Africa. So it was was an extraordinary time to be able to bring so many artists from South Africa and introduce this work. Again, we don't fool around, here. Very ambitious project that by Robin Rhode, South African artist, that we put into Times Square. It's actually an Arnold Schoenberg opera from 1909, called "Erwartung." It's one of the few, I believe it's might be the only, I have to check my notes again, opera written for a single per single soprano. We have a full orchestra at the back there and in no less than Times Square.

And it was absolutely fantastic to see that. I remember coming out of the subway, just as it was starting, and just seeing regular people, not just the art crowd, but people stop and actually watching an opera in the middle of Times Square, it was quite fantastic and you'll recognise the

fabrics. And Robin Rhode really wanted to take this 1909 opera, which is about a woman sort of lost in the forest, looking for connections. And he wanted to interpret it as it related to women in South Africa, mourning the men who'd go off to the mines. So many, many references for him, a beautifully rendered project. And you'll also notice the stage is made up of 500 posters that audiences could pick up and take home with them, which was very, very clever way to make an impression on Times Square because it's a very busy crossroads and quite hard to imagine how you could put an opera and have people recognise that there's a real work of theatre and art taking place. So these are just some of the scenes from the opera.

I'm sure you're all very aware of Zanele Muholi's work by now in South Africa. Again, an artist that typically you wouldn't relate to performance in any way whatsoever. But I was so obsessed with her work that I said, "Zanele, we have to do something." I said, "What do you think you want to do?" She said, "I have no idea RoseLee, "but I want to have my face, my African face, "my LGBT values sort of all over New York City." I said, "Done."

And so we actually managed to put her into Times Square. Again, central crossroads of New York and such a important place in the States, a symbolic place in the city. And we put her everywhere and including the subways underground and the digital posters. We had her everywhere. Another fabulous South African artist Kemang Wa Lehulere, also managed to create a magical piece that we, just was startling. But again, I'm just giving you images to let them sit on your retina. And fantastic piece very much about life, his life, in South Africa and bringing all the elements from South Africa that he uses in his sculptures. Really, yes?

- Sorry to interrupt you. Just in lieu of time, I'm conscious that we are starting to run out of time and you're discussing all these very interesting South African artists and I know there are a lot of South Africans in the audience. Would it be possible before we wrapped up to talk a little bit about William Kentridge, as I know that he credits you with putting him in his own performances, which is pretty big.

- Fantastic, thank you. Yes, so we've got a very few more slides and just to thank him, we do end with William, so there you go, right? I must have been reading your mind. So Nicholas Hlobo, beautiful, beautiful piece. Again, just to show you the different spaces we find in New York. We really discover places that no one's been. Very few people, unless they get taken there. So this is an old decommissioned church in Harlem. A work by Nicholas Hlobo, really stunning piece. A work by Mohau Modisakeng, also another South African that started up in Central Park and ends in Times Square, that's very much about forced removals in South Africa.

And he found a similar story in Central Park as that's part of African American history in New York. So and then to William. So William, of course, for all of us, is perhaps the ultimate example of an artist who cannot be stopped or contained within one discipline. Probably, and does it in the most magical way. There's nothing he doesn't seem to relish and know about, from opera to literature, to across all kinds of historical borders. And he performed in this himself. This is also in 2017. It's a work some of you might know by Kurt Schwitters, called the

"Ursonate," which is just really a lot of sounds but he managed to make it sound like it was every dictator who'd ever who'd ever dictated. And a magical piece.

And this is a second work he's done with us. He did a work in 2009 for us that he told me as you reminded me, Justine, that it was because I asked him to do a live performance that he performed in his work for the first time. And now he indeed does that regularly. So that was a nice touch to seeing how forceful William is as a presence on stage, and then in each case, to see him respond and come up with entirely new ways of constructing a theatre work.

And for those of you who've looked at his drawings and his films and listened to the music that he puts together, and then the operas and the way he stages operas, he is the ultimate. And again, I don't use that word, performance artist. He's an ultimate artist who works across all these incredible disciplines. So there we are. I think we are on time. And Justine, you're fantastic in guiding me through this.

- [Justine] Thank you. I want to thank you and Wendy, and if you do want to ask questions, please let me know. And, and again, I'm happy to get emails or texts from anyone who wants to know more. And, oh, I would just, yes?

- I think people who would like to ask you questions perhaps can send you emails, just in the consideration of time. I would like to add to the audience that having been to many, many Performa events, they really are all extremely different and mind opening in very different ways. So thank you RoseLee. I'm so glad the audience has had a small, tiny taste of everything that you are doing and who you are. And I very much-

- Well, thank you, thank you so much. It's a great opportunity to look at this material again. I'm always rethinking it and in wonder myself by what artists produce. It's really amazing.

- [Justine] Yes. And just to tell you about, Wendy mentioned, don't forget, and she's right, we have this telethon coming up next Wednesday, the 18th. And let me just explain what it is. So I've talked quite a lot about the different galas that we do and we really always, they're so exciting, the things we come up with. But of course with COVID, no one can do galas. We're all at home and there's no live galas. So this is actually, sorry, it's an early mock-up of the invitation. There's a much more current one that we'll get to. Anyone who wants to be sent more information, please, let us know, we'll send it to you.

So Wednesday is going to be a live telethon. It starts at two o'clock, New York time, it goes on till 10 o'clock. And we're commissioning new work for a live TV show that will go around the world. It'll be global. We have people calling in from Hong Kong, Shanghai, you name it, with some South African works as well. And just very small commissioned works, some of them just three minutes long, we'll be showing lots of work from the archives. And it's our way of being very inventive and positive and upbeat about a very strange and distressing time where we're all separated. This will be an amazing way to connect the world culturally and artistically.

And we are also paying homage to Nam June Paik, who was really one of the earliest major pioneers of working with video and broadcast. And so we're, again, as you've heard by now, I'm always trying to push an understanding of history as well. So those of you who are curious, please look up Nam June Paik. He did a wonderful early global cultural event in 1984. And so we're picking up the baton where he left it and turning our, the sadness of no galas, no social life, into the joy of what technology, at its best, can do. So thank you again.

- So thank you to Justine and to RoseLee for that wonderful presentation. RoseLee, what an exciting life you are living and have lived. And I just wanted to reiterate, as we have heard, Performa's innovative citywide programming of live performance in all media has created a new model for cultural organisations, influencing major institutions, not only in New York, London, in Joburg, but in Shanghai, Tel Aviv, and Moscow, all around the world. So, it now includes new media and live art as part of their programme, which is absolutely incredible.

Performa's about rethinking and re-imagining art history and bringing it to life in the present, in the most public way. And there's no better way to understand art history than to be deeply immersed in contemporary art. RoseLee has showed us how to understand contemporary art in all its disciplines. And to quote you, RoseLee, "Art is a way to change people's hearts and minds "and make us better human beings. "It's the only totally free space, a radical space. "It cannot be contained. "Art historians have a responsibility to be radical, too. "As radical as the artists about whom they write."

Well, you certainly have fulfilled this mission, and I'm proud of what you have achieved. I'm so happy to have you as a close and valued friend, and I'm honoured to sit on the Board of Performa. And RoseLee, I'd like to publicly say I want to thank you for being so wonderful to Justine when she was a student in New York, and for opening up your home and taking her in when she was so homesick, and being like a mom to her. I deeply, deeply appreciate that and I will never forget that.

- Wendy, thank you so much.

- [Wendy] Thank you.

- And Justine.

- Thank you.

- Fantastic, and thank you for all your vision along with ours, thank you.

- And to you and Dakota as well. I'd just like to thank you, your lovely husband and your family for really acting as a family for my daughter. And before, sorry, sorry, RoseLee.

- I was just saying wonderful, thank you very much.

- Yeah, thank you. And I'd also like to just offer our audience the opportunity to join us on the 18th, after David Miliband's presentation, to participate in Performa's 2020 Marathon. And we'll be sending you a link, for those of you who would like to join and just to see what Performa's all about. And so once again, I'd like to thank Justine, you were an excellent interviewer. And to RoseLee, thank you very, very much.

- [Justine] Thank you.

- To all of you, enjoy the rest of your evening and for those of you in the states, enjoy the rest of your day, thank you.