

*Performance Documents*, created by Los Angeles-based artist **Robert Fontenot**, is an on-going series of paintings and ephemera that examine the lives and works of a group of fictional performance artists active in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s.

Over the past quarter century **Robert Fontenot** has been fascinated with fictional artists and the history of performance art. In the late Nineties he conceived the Victorian-era photographer Nikolai Vance. The artist made tin type photographs of marginalized individuals who would not have otherwise received sympathetic portraiture in the late 1800's—from cross-dressing men to a three-legged child to a woman with wings—and created scientific dioramas relating to various physical and societal abnormalities not accepted during that time. A decade later Fontenot began an intense research project on the legacy of performance art, and recreated hundreds of iconic performances in a book—*An Introduction to Performance Art*—illustrated with sculpted bread dough.

In *Performance Documents (Part I)*, opening November 10 at Praz-Delavallade Projects, Fontenot merges these two interests by creating a series of performances by the fictional Sylvia Hansen (born August 30th, 1946), a Los Angeles-based, feminist artist active throughout the 1970s whose work draws on technology and mysticism to explore themes such as marriage, trust and the role feminism plays in both the personal and public spheres.

Early works such as *Ovum* (1972), *Spring Cleaning* (1974), and *Sweeping Action* (1974) often echo the political and activist works of such artists as Suzanne Lacy and Mierle Laderman Ukeles, while at the same time turning those actions inward, removing them from the public sphere and focusing on the personal, physical, and metaphysical meanings the works could achieve.

Toward the middle of the 1970s, Hansen's works were increasingly performed privately or for a very small audience. The focus was on the actions or reactions of her own body. In *Quantification of a Consciousness Raised* (1977) the artist mapped her brainwaves while reading *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. The essence of the performance was narrowed down to the electrical activity of her neurons and was witnessed by a sole technician.

Many of Hansen's later performances were made in collaboration with, or in reaction to, her husband. In perhaps her best-known piece, *In Defiance of the Laws of Nature, I Shall Trust my Husband* (1978), the artist echoes the casual marital violence Chris Burden brought to his *Match Piece* (1972), in

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which the artist flicked burning match rockets at his naked wife. Hansen's piece ups the ante by enlisting her husband to throw dozens of darts at her, trying to come as close as possible without hitting her. By framing the act as a trust exercise in which the object is for her husband to miss, it upends the misogynistic connotations of Burden's piece and paves the way for the mutual trust needed for Marina Abramovic and ULAY's potentially fatal *Rest Energy* (1980).

It is telling that Hansen did not end the latter performance until after her husband had accidentally hit her with five separate darts. The piece is as much about the damage a marriage can do as about the trust needed to make it successful.

"Performance art is so bound into the mythology of the art world and a lot of performances have mostly been passed down through oral tradition," says Fontenot, noting only a few people witnessed seminal early works by Paul McCarthy and Vito Acconci. "Painting allows the performances to enter an even more mythical sphere."

#### **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Robert Fontenot is a Los Angeles-based artist who earned his BFA at the Rhode Island School of Design. His work has been the subject of solo shows at R.D.F.A., Weingart Gallery at Occidental College, the Salt Lake City Arts Center, and the Photographic Resource Center in Boston and included in group shows at Elizabeth Dee Gallery, the Armory Center for the Arts, Human Resources and Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions.

#### **ABOUT THE GALLERY**

Praz-Delavallade has a longstanding relationship with both American and European artists whose practices span a variety of mediums. The gallery was founded 1995 in Paris with an inaugural exhibition that included work by Paul McCarthy, Mike Kelley, Richard Petitbon, Jim Shaw, and Benjamin Weisman. In 1997, Praz-Delavallade was part of a burgeoning art scene in the 13th arrondissement on the eastern side of Paris, along with Air de Paris, Almine Rech, Art: Concept, Jennifer Flay, and Emmanuel Perrotin. Due to its strong connections with artists in Los Angeles, the gallery was known for bringing an international program to the growing Paris art scene, by featuring artists such as Sam Durant, Jim Isermann, John Miller, Analia Saban, and Marnie Weber, among others. In 2010, the Paris gallery moved to its current location at 5 rue des Haudriettes in the Marais and has continued its support of Los Angeles based artists by exhibiting a new generation that includes Matthew Brandt, Heather Cook, Nathan Mabry, Joe Reihsen, Ry Rocklen, Amanda Ross-Ho, and Brian Wills alongside European artists such as Soufiane Ababri, Philippe Decrauzat, Pierre Ardouvin, Thomas Fougérol, and Fabien Méréelle. In the fall of 2016, Praz-Delavallade opened a new outpost at 6150 Wilshire Boulevard—on the renowned thoroughfare in Miracle Mile right across from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art—in an effort to create a bridge between the two cities it calls home.