



la Biennale di Venezia

56. Esposizione  
Internazionale  
d'Arte

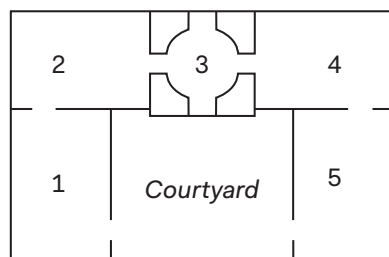
Partecipazioni Nazionali

# They Come to Us without a Word

Joan Jonas

UNITED STATES PAVILION





- |           |            |
|-----------|------------|
| 1         | Bees       |
| 2         | Fish       |
| 3         | Mirrors    |
| 4         | Wind       |
| 5         | Homeroom   |
| Courtyard | Nine Trees |

#### THE VIDEO AND PERFORMANCE ART PIONEER JOAN JONAS

has created a new video installation, *They Come to Us without a Word*, for the United States Pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia. The installation, which also includes drawings and sculptural elements, evokes the fragility of nature in a rapidly changing situation. Each room of the pavilion represents a particular creature (bees, fish), object (mirror), force (wind), or place (the homeroom). Fragments of ghost stories sourced from the oral tradition of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, are part of a continuous narrative linking one room to the next. These spoken fragments function partly as a reference to what remains. Jonas states, “We are haunted, the rooms are haunted.”

Four of the rooms feature two videos each, one representing the main motif of the room and the other the ghost narrative. Jonas developed the videos in New York in 2015 during a series of workshops with children, ranging in age from five to sixteen. The children performed in front of video backdrops that contain excerpts from Jonas’s earlier works as well as landscapes the artist shot in Nova Scotia, Canada, and Brooklyn, New York.

Freestanding rippled mirrors, conceived by Jonas and handcrafted in Murano, are placed in each room alongside Jonas’s distinctive drawings, kites made in Japan, and some of the objects used as props in the videos. Mirrors also cover the paneled walls of the pavilion’s rotunda, where Jonas has suspended a crystal-beaded chandelier-like structure from the ceiling.

In the pavilion’s courtyard, tree trunks from La Certosa, an island in the Venetian lagoon, are wrapped together by copper wire, echoing the themes of the exhibition. Jonas’s soundtrack for *They Come to Us without a Word* includes music by Jason Moran and songs by the Norwegian Sami singer Ánde Somby. The customized lighting was conceived by the lighting designer Jan Kroeze.

*They Come to Us without a Word* evolved out of Jonas’s earlier work *Reanimation*, which was partly inspired by the writings of the Icelandic author Halldór Laxness and his poetic portrayal of the natural world. Jonas first performed *Reanimation* at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2010, then presented the work in its entirety at dOCUMENTA(13) in 2012.

“Although the idea of my work involves the question of how the world is so rapidly and radically changing, I do not address the subject directly or didactically,” says Jonas. “Rather, the ideas are implied poetically through sound, lighting, and the juxtaposition of images of children, animals, and landscape.”

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*They Come to Us without a Word*

Joan Jonas

May 9–November 22, 2015

United States Pavilion, 56th International Art Exhibition –  
la Biennale di Venezia

Commissioning Institution: MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge,  
Massachusetts, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of State

Paul C. Ha, Commissioner and Co-Curator

Ute Meta Bauer, Co-Curator

56th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia

Giardini della Biennale, Venice, Italy

Hours: 10:00–18:00, closed Mondays

*They Come to Us without a Word II*

Performance by Joan Jonas with Jason Moran

July 20, July 21, July 22, 2015, at 21:00

Teatro Piccolo Arsenal, Campo della Tana, Castello, Venice

For more information, visit [joanjonasvenice2015.com](http://joanjonasvenice2015.com)

### **About Joan Jonas**

Joan Jonas (b. 1936, New York, New York) received a BA in art history from Mount Holyoke College in 1958, studied sculpture at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and received an MFA in sculpture from Columbia University in 1965. Jonas's work developed out of her art-historical studies and sculptural practice and expanded to performance and film in the 1960s through her involvement with the New York avant-garde. She is the recipient of numerous awards and honors. Her most recent solo exhibitions include those held at HangarBicocca, Milan (2014); CCA Kitakyushu Project Gallery, Kitakyushu, Japan (2014); Kulturhuset Stadsteatern Stockholm (2013); Proyecto Paralelo, Mexico City (2013); Contemporary Art Museum Houston (2013); Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, Norway (2011); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2010); and Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) (2007–8). She has been represented at Documenta in Kassel, Germany, six times since 1972 and has had major retrospectives at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart; and the Queens Museum of Art, New York. Jonas taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 1998 to 2014 and is currently Professor Emerita in MIT's Program in Art, Culture and Technology (ACT). Joan Jonas, a New York native, continues to live and work in New York City.

### **About the MIT List Visual Arts Center**

Located on the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the MIT List Visual Arts Center (established as the Hayden Gallery in 1950) is dedicated to exploring intellectually challenging and investigative contemporary art making across all media. Renamed the List Visual Arts Center in 1985 in recognition of a gift from Vera and Albert List, the List Center presents a dynamic program of special exhibitions and a broad range of educational programs, events, and scholarly publications, and it manages MIT's permanent collection and highly regarded Percent-for-Art program. The List Center also has organized exhibitions for the U.S. Pavilion at two previous Biennales, *Fred Wilson: Speak of Me as I Am* (2003) and *Ann Hamilton: Myein* (1999).

For more information, visit [listart.mit.edu](http://listart.mit.edu)

### **About the United States Pavilion**

The United States Pavilion at the Venice Biennale is a Palladian-style structure built in 1930 by the American architects William Adams Delano and Chester Holmes Aldrich. Since 1986, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection has worked with the United States Information Agency (USIA), the U.S. Department of State, and the Fund for Artists at International Festivals and Exhibitions in the organization of the visual arts exhibitions held at the U.S. Pavilion.

### **About the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs**

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) promotes international mutual understanding through a wide range of academic, cultural, professional, and sports exchange programs. ECA exchanges engage youth, students, educators, artists, athletes, and emerging leaders in many fields in the United States and in more than 160 countries. Alumni of ECA exchanges comprise more than one million people around the world, including more than forty Nobel laureates and more than three hundred current or former heads of state and government around the world. For more information, visit [exchanges.state.gov/us](http://exchanges.state.gov/us)

### **About the Accompanying Publication**

The MIT List Visual Arts Center, Gregory R. Miller & Co., and Hatje Cantz Verlag will publish a catalogue for *They Come to Us without a Word* in June 2015. Designed by Miko McGinty in close collaboration with Joan Jonas, the core of the publication features an extensive series of images selected by Jonas, including stills from the videos projected in the U.S. Pavilion installation, production stills, drawings, and related photographs, as well as images of the installation itself. Jonas views these images not only as documents of an ambitious and important new work but as an integral part of the presentation and experience of *They Come to Us without a Word*. The book, edited by Jane Farver, includes Jonas's poetic notes on her process and major new essays by Ann Reynolds and Marina Warner as well as an interview with Jonas conducted by Ingrid Schaffner and is available at the Biennale bookstore and through the MIT List Visual Arts Center.

In June 2015, Gregory R. Miller & Co. will publish *In the Shadow a Shadow: The Work of Joan Jonas*, the first comprehensive monograph of Jonas's work, edited by Joan Simon.

## ***They Come to Us without a Word***

Conceived and directed by Joan Jonas

Paul C. Ha, Commissioner and Co-Curator

Ute Meta Bauer, Co-Curator

PRODUCTION MANAGER Anna Daneri

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT Elena Mazzi

INSTALLING TEAM Attitudine Forma: Roberto Dipasquale, Director; Francesco Boerio,

Mattia Dipasquale, Roberto Cannata, Elisa Strinna

SOUND CONSULTANT Mattia Biadene

LIGHTING DESIGNER Jan Kroeze

VIDEO/SOUND INSTALLING Eidotech: Bela Letto, Mathias Taupitz

LOGISTICS COORDINATOR Jill Weinreich

U.S. PAVILION PROJECT MANAGER AT THE PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION

Chiara Barbieri

ARCHITECTURAL CONSULTANT Th&Ma architettura

PHOTOGRAPHY Moira Ricci

MIRRORS Ongaro & Fuga, Murano, Venice; Salviati, Murano, Venice; Alexander Rosenberg

KITES Center for Contemporary Art, CCA Kitakyushu, Japan

CURTAIN The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia

EXHIBITION COPIES OF DRAWINGS Ediprima: Michele Lombardelli

TREES Legambiente; Parco della Certosa, Isola della Certosa, Venice

### **Video Production Team**

VIDEO BACKDROPS Joan Jonas

WESTBETH STUDIO CAMERA Greenhouse Media: Aaron Iglar

VIDEO ASSISTANTS, PREPRODUCTION, NEW YORK David Dempewolf, David Sherman

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS Jin Jung, SketchUp files, plans, and costumes;

Meredith Walker, props and object construction; Amos Turner, archivist

EDITOR AND PROJECT ADVISOR Sekeena Gavagan

EDITORS, VIDEO ELEMENTS David Sherman, Joan Jonas

PERFORMERS

Westbeth Studio, New York, 2015: Zora Casebere, Noah Delorme, Lila Gavagan,

Jonas Moran, Malcolm Moran, Willa Schwabsky

Cape Breton, 1990 to present: Sadie Bills, Moira Cody, Ragani Haas, Katie Kehoe,

Eva Jean Mustard, Margaret Mustard, Joan Jonas

Dog hoop, 1998: Eric Moskowitz and Zina

Shadows, 2007: Artists in residence at the Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Como, Italy

SOUNDTRACK David Sherman, Joan Jonas

MUSICAL FRAGMENTS Jason Moran, Ánde Somby

MUSIC FOR GRASS Mattia Biadene

READINGS Joan Jonas, Adam Pendleton, Charles Ruas

SOUND MIX Waterland Studio, Venice: Cristiano Verardo

## **Supporters**

Lead support of the U.S. Pavilion has been provided by Cynthia and John Reed, the U.S. Department of State, and the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.

Additional funding has come from generous members of the 56th Venice Biennale Matron and Patron Committee: Council for the Arts at MIT, Toby Devan Lewis, clé de peau BEAUTÉ – SHISEIDO, VIA Art Fund, Artnet, Agnes Gund, Lambent Foundation, Karen and Gregory Arenson, Fundación Botín, Barbara and Julian Cherubini, Alison and John Ferring, Charlotte Feng Ford, Carolyn Fine Friedman and Jerry Friedman, Pamela and Richard Kramlich, Barbara Lee Family Foundation, Lore Harp McGovern, Gregory R. Miller and Michael Wiener, MIT Office of the President, MIT Office of the Provost, MIT Office of the Associate Provost, MIT Office of the Dean of the School of Architecture + Planning, Jane and Neil Pappalardo, Elizabeth A. Sackler, Francis H. Williams, and an anonymous individual.

The U.S. Pavilion is also made possible with the support of Karen and Brian Conway, Steven Corkin and Dan Maddalena, Brit d'Arbeloff, Valeria and Jean Jacques DeGroof, Bridgitt and Bruce Evans, Audrey and James Foster, John Frishkopf, Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Gavin Brown's enterprise, Alberta Gerschel and Peter Wasserman, Abigail Ross Goodman, Jodi and Hal Hess, Patricia LaValley and Geoff Hargadon, Tristin and Martin Mannion, Max Mara, MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology, Lucy Moon-Lim and Richard Lim, Helen and William Pounds, Idee and Pierre Schoenheimer, Jeanne and Don Stanton, Terry and Rick Stone, Illya Szilak and Christopher Vroom, Maria C. Taft, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, UNTIL THEN PARIS, Wilkinson Gallery, and several anonymous individuals.

*They Come to Us without a Word* is organized by the MIT List Visual Arts Center and is presented by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. The exhibition is produced with the collaboration of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice (Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York).

### **MIT List Visual Arts Center Advisory Committee**

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Susanne Ghez	Andrea Miller-Keller	* <i>ex officio</i>

## Performance

### *They Come to Us without a Word II*

A video performance by Joan Jonas with music by Jason Moran

July 20, July 21, July 22, 2015, at 21:00

Teatro Piccolo Arsenale, Campo della Tana, Castello, Venice

A new performance conceived and directed by the artist with newly composed music by Jonas's longtime sound collaborator, the American jazz pianist and composer Jason Moran, will take place on three evenings in July at the Teatro Piccolo Arsenale. Moran will play live, accompanying Jonas for the performance. An aspect of *They Come to Us without a Word II* will be reedited video footage from the installation in the U.S. Pavilion.

For more information, visit [joanjonasvenice2015.com](http://joanjonasvenice2015.com)

## MIT List Visual Arts Center Staff

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#JoanJonasVenice

Cover: Joan Jonas, detail of video still from *They Come to Us without a Word*, 2015

Photograph © Joan Jonas



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