

Performance: do you buy it?

The public is warming to the medium, but collectors remain cool

By Julia Halperin. From [Art Basel daily edition](#)

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While some visitors spent the first public day of Art Basel admiring multi-million-dollar paintings, others strayed from the main fair to watch a nude woman examine her body with a hand mirror and a war veteran stand silently in a corner. These performance works, by the artists Joan Jonas and Santiago Sierra respectively, are part of "14 Rooms", a show of live installations at Messe Basel (until 22 June). The project is part of a wider effort to raise the public's awareness of performance art.

"Performance is reaching a broader public now," says Hans Ulrich Obrist, the co-director of the Serpentine Galleries in London, who co-organised "14 Rooms" with Klaus Biesenbach, the director of MoMA PS1 in Queens, New York. "The internet age has made the need for live experiences more urgent."

In New York, the Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson has hired musicians to play in the New Museum for the duration of his show (until 29 June). In London, visitors are queuing for hours to catch a glimpse of Marina Abramovic, who is holding court at the Serpentine for her exhibition "512 Hours" (until 25 August). In October, Frieze Art Fair is due to launch a new section devoted to interactive works.

Although the public may be warming to performance art, collectors remain cool. Only a few private individuals and major institutions, such as the Tate in London, the Centre Pompidou in Paris and New York's Museum of Modern Art are buying live performance. The works are typically sold as a set of instructions that are logistically and conceptually demanding to stage and nearly impossible to resell. "It almost becomes a form of patronage, more than a purchase," says Catherine Wood, a curator of performance art at the Tate.

At the fair, a private collector bought *Justified Beliefs*, 2014, an interactive work by Christian Falsnaes, from Berlin's PSM gallery (2.1/S5) for €18,000. The five-channel audio installation invites visitors to put on headphones and join two performers in following the artist's instructions, which include cheering and stripping naked. But this type of acquisition remains rare. "It is hard to work out how to make performance collectible," says Laura Chiari, a director at Rome's Galleria Lorcan O'Neill (2.1/R7), which has devoted its stand to the Italian performance artist Luigi Ontani.

Some galleries have found success in presenting videos and photographs of performances. New York's Sean Kelly gallery (2.1/N2) sold several editions of *Places of Power, Waterfall*, 2013, a photograph by Marina Abramovic, for €80,000 each, while Madrid's Helga de Alvear (2.1/M8) sold two photographs of performances by Santiago Sierra for \$6,000 each. But not everyone believes that performance art should be commodified. "I feel as if the 'value' of performance art is in the 'you had to be there' factor," says the art adviser Liz Parks. "The documentation of



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a performance presents a somewhat diffused version of the original, in-the-moment electricity.”

Some collectors say they do not distinguish between performance and other media, despite its unique challenges. “If it’s a great piece, it’s a great piece,” says the Greek collector Dakis Joannou. To stage Tino Sehgal’s *This is Propaganda*, 2002, Joannou must hire an actor to sing every time someone enters the room. “If you are buying a five-ton Richard Serra sculpture, you need to hire movers to install it. What’s the difference?” he asks.

For now, collecting performance art remains driven by passion rather than a practical desire for investment. “You’re buying a relationship with the artist,” says RoseLee Goldberg, the founder of the performance art biennial Performa. But some suspect that the market will eventually catch up. As the artist Christian Falsnaes said in a recent interview: “In post-industrial capitalism, there is a market for everything.”

Parcours Night performance

The Dutch artist, composer, film-maker and triathlete Guido van der Werve’s first solo museum show in the US is due to open at Nashville’s Frist Center for the Visual Arts in 2015. Werve tells The Art Newspaper that he has started a new piece, which will be a “counterpoint” to *home*, a *requiem*, 2011-12, performed in Basel this week.

The athletic performance artist warmed up for the Parcours Night concert on Thursday by swimming in the Rhine and jogging to the Clarakirche. A classically trained musician, he played the piano, still wearing a wetsuit, accompanied by a 20-piece string orchestra and 28-strong choir.

Nummer veertien, *home*, 2012, another romantic absurdist work, is presented by Luhring Augustine (2.0/E13) and Marc Foxx Gallery (2.1/R9) in Unlimited (U77). For the 54-minute film, Van der Werve swam, cycled and ran from the Warsaw church where Chopin’s heart is interred to the composer’s grave in Paris. J.P.