

The New York Public Library

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Works and Creative Process of Revolutionary Choreographer Merce Cunningham and Collaborators on Display in Exhibition Opening June 19 at the Library for the Performing Arts

World Premiere of Cunningham Solo to be Given

The works and the methods of the great choreographer and dancer Merce Cunningham and the renowned artists with whom he has worked are the focus of *Invention: Merce Cunningham & Collaborators*, the exhibition opening Tuesday, June 19 at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. The exhibition illustrates the innovations that Cunningham has pursued over sixty years, drawing on a wide range of manuscripts, designs, computer-generated choreography, and other materials from the Library's collections. The exhibition also includes artifacts from the Merce Cunningham Archives and the John Cage Trust. In addition to the John Cage artifacts, the exhibition features materials related to Cunningham's many collaborators, including such composers as Morton Feldman and David Tudor, artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, and video artists Nam June Paik and Charles Atlas. As an added highlight, Cunningham is creating a dance solo that will be performed at scheduled times during the run of the exhibition. The exhibition will be on view in the Donald and Mary Oenslager Gallery at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, 40 Lincoln Center Plaza, through Saturday, October 13, 2007. Admission is free. For further information, telephone 212.870.1630 or visit the Library's website at www.nypl.org/



Merce Cunningham in *Antic Meet*, 1958. Photograph by Richard Rutledge. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

Invention: Merce Cunningham & Collaborators illustrates the four key discoveries that Cunningham has pursued throughout his career, often in collaboration with John Cage:

- the separation of music and dance
- the use of chance operations and indeterminacy in composition and choreography
- the possibilities of film and video
- experimentation with computer technology.

Invention: Merce Cunningham & Collaborators features photographs, multimedia materials, designs, and interactives that document performances from the 1940s to the present. Cunningham's

choreographic artifacts range from drawings, charts, and diverse materials generated by the computer software DanceForms®. Visitors can retrace the artists' investigations through such primary sources as Cage's manuscript scores, and more unusual equipment, such as charts, instructions and tools of chance operations. Sets, costumes, and video by many of the most innovative artists of contemporary times will be on display.

The exhibition, which will have entrances at both ends of the gallery, is designed to be experienced like a performance with no beginning and no end. Entering through the Lincoln Center Plaza entrance, the gallery viewer will encounter a scenic element from *Way Station* (2001), one of 5 sculptural tripods by Charles Long through which the dancers moved and through which the viewer will be able to move. The original painted backdrop (17' x 42') by Robert Rauschenberg for *Summerspace* will be mounted on the back (west) wall and a film of the dance will be projected on a scrim in front of it. Other Rauschenberg designs on display will be the fanciful costume pieces that Rauschenberg designed for *Travelogue* (1977) including the large colorful swaths of material attached at the dancers' waists that open up like fans and swinging tin cans tied together and attached to the legs. *Antic Meet* (1958) will be exemplified by Rauschenberg's parachute costumes and the 4-armed sweater, which was designed and knitted by Cunningham, himself, with assistance from Valda Setterfield. Andy Warhol's silver mylar pillows will invoke *RainForest* (1968). *Second Hand* (1970) will be embodied by Cunningham's sketch of hand positions for dancer Valda Setterfield and by Jasper Johns' unitards designed in the colors of the spectrum. There will be a computer technology area with the DanceForms® computer software and a keyboard with headphones. Several cases of John Cage scores and other artifacts include scores that demonstrate performer-determination, scores that demonstrate the use of I ching, scores that demonstrate found-object percussion, and scores for Cunningham dances.

"With pride that the Library for the Performing Arts is the repository of the Merce Cunningham Dance Foundation Collection and the John Cage Music Manuscript Collection, comes the responsibility to not only make these collections available to the public, but to present the material in a way that makes apparent to all its uniqueness and importance. Because of the depth and range of its holdings, the Library is also able to make clear the interactions among Merce Cunningham, John Cage, and their collaborators," said Jacqueline Z. Davis, the Barbara G. and Lawrence A. Fleischman Executive Director of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Trevor Carlson, Executive Director of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company stated, "Our significant relationship with The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts began with the John Cage Trust, and the determination that the library was the most appropriate home for Cage's work. It then became obvious that this was the right place for the archives of Merce Cunningham also; and the happy culmination is this grand celebration of Merce and his collaborators."

Invention: Merce Cunningham & Collaborators is a collaborative exhibition of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, the Cunningham Dance Foundation, and the John Cage Trust. It is curated by Barbara Cohen-Stratyner, Judy R. and Alfred A. Rosenberg Curator of Exhibitions at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Michelle Potter, Curator of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; and David Vaughan, Archivist of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. Material for the exhibition comes from the Merce Cunningham Dance Foundation Collection and the John Cage Music Manuscript Collection, which are housed in The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. In addition, there are artifacts from the Merce Cunningham Archives, the John Cage Trust, and other collections in the Library's Jerome Robbins Dance Division, Music Division, and Rodgers & Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound.

A related program series is being presented in the Library's Bruno Walter Auditorium. The first program, screenings of works choreographed by Merce Cunningham will be held Saturday, June 23 at 3:00 p.m. For information, telephone 212.642.0142 or go to the Library's website at www.nypl.org/lpaprograms.

About Merce Cunningham

Merce Cunningham's earliest dance training was in tap and ballroom dance, with a local teacher, Mrs. Barrett, in his hometown of Centralia, Washington: before he was a modern dancer, Merce was a hooper. What he also learned from Mrs. Barrett was that "dance is most deeply concerned with each single instant as it comes along."

After five years as a soloist in the company of Martha Graham, he began choreographing independently, first in solo concerts, then in 1953 he formed his own company, whose fiftieth anniversary was celebrated in 2003. In his many works for the company, he has been noted for his collaborations with contemporary visual artists and musicians, especially with John Cage, his life partner from the 1940s until Cage's death in 1992. In the course of their work together, they proposed a number of radical innovations. The most famous and controversial of these concerned the relationship of dance and music, both of which are time arts. Therefore, they came to the conclusion that the two should exist independently, occurring in the same time and space but without supporting or being connected to one another in the usual way.

Both Cunningham and Cage made extensive use of chance procedures, which meant that not only musical forms but narrative and other conventional elements of dance composition, such as cause and effect, climax and anticlimax, were also abandoned. Cunningham is not interested in telling stories or exploring psychological relationships: the subject matter of his dances is the dance itself.

His pioneering work in video and film, collaborating with filmmakers Charles Atlas and later Elliot Caplan, enlarged the possibilities of choreography for the camera. Cunningham himself is an imaginative visual artist, whose drawings of animals, birds, and insects have been collected in a book, *Other Animals* (2002).

Cunningham's dances have often been described as having much in common with Dada (collage structures) and Zen (multiplicity of centers). This does not mean that the dances are formless, but their structure is organic, like something in nature, not preconceived and imposed on the material. But there is no improvisation: the dancers know precisely what they are going to do before they go on stage.

About The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts houses the world's most extensive combination of circulating, reference, and rare archival collections in its field. Its divisions are the Circulating Collections, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, Music Division, Billy Rose Theatre Division, and the Rodgers & Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound. The materials in its collections are available free of charge, along with a wide range of special programs, including exhibitions, seminars, and performances. An essential resource for everyone with an interest in the arts - whether professional or amateur - the Library is known particularly for its prodigious collections of non-book materials such as historic recordings, videotapes, autograph manuscripts, correspondence, sheet music, stage designs, press clippings, programs, posters, and photographs.

About The New York Public Library

The New York Public Library was created in 1895 with the consolidation of the private libraries of John Jacob Astor and James Lenox with the Samuel Jones Tilden Trust. The Library provides free and open access to its physical and electronic collections and information, as well as to its services. It comprises four research centers - The Humanities and Social Sciences Library; The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; and the Science, Industry and Business Library - and 86 Branch Libraries in Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx. Research and circulating collections combined total more than 50 million items, including materials for the visually impaired. In addition, each year the Library presents thousands of exhibitions and public programs, which include classes in technology, literacy, and English as a second language. The New York Public Library serves over 15 million patrons who come through its doors annually and another 21 million users internationally, who access collections and services through the NYPL website, www.nypl.org

Invention: Merce Cunningham & Collaborators is on view from June 19 through October 13,

2007 at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, 40 Lincoln Center Plaza. Exhibition hours are: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from noon to 6:00 p.m.; Thursday from noon to 8:00 p.m.; closed Sundays, Mondays, and holidays. Admission is free. For exhibition information, telephone 212.870.1630 or visit the Library's website at www.nypl.org.

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Note : There will be a press briefing with Merce Cunningham at the Library for the Performing Arts on Monday, June 18 at 5:00 p.m., to be followed by a reception.