

ALLAN KAPROW / ARNAUD LABELLE-ROJOUX

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Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux: In 1961, Theodore Tucker wrote this about *An Apple Shrine* in *The Village Voice*¹: “Admittedly, Mr. Kaprow’s art poses problems.” Theodore Tucker was actually Allan Kaprow, reviewing his own work! The article goes on to say that the exhibition’s “life is a present one, and only memory can carry it into the future.... Far beyond the ‘*Apple Shrine*’s’ actual content stands Kaprow’s inadvertent quarrel with all the vapid glories, qualities and eternities which we think are History.” Kaprow on Kaprow – pretty amazing, isn’t it?

Jacques Donguy: Under a pseudonym...

A.L.-R.: That’s right, but that introduces the idea of fiction. Fiction or autofiction. As in *An Apple Shrine*, we encounter the real and the fake simultaneously. It is, in short, a construction.

J.D.: That’s what Duchamp did with the urinal. He wrote “The Richard Mutt Case,” published in the second issue of *The Blind Man*, under a pseudonym.

A.L.-R.: Of course, but I am especially interested in the example of Kaprow, because it is not necessarily what we would expect from him – invention and reinvention, yes, but not so much the real and fake from this angle. That’s how I want to approach the encounter of our work. From this point of view, it’s important to restate things historically: both the 1992 exhibition at your gallery and the first version in 1960². Allan Kaprow was one of the artists who convinced me to be an artist myself, and while my current work has taken me elsewhere, I still think his approach is pure and enriching. I would like to know how you handled the reinvention of 1992?

J.D.: Quite simply, I knew that Kaprow was doing something in Milan, at Gino di Maggio’s. So I went there, wondering how I was going to approach Kaprow. I decided to say that I wanted to do an interview with him for *artpress*. I had no agreement with the magazine, but of course *artpress* accepted the interview once it was done.

A.L.-R.: I read it at the time.

J.D.: That’s how I got in touch with Kaprow, and it’s interesting because we talked about what a happening was, the environment in relation to the installation or performance. He made a clear distinction between a performance and a happening, saying that the happening was “not theatrical” and was outside the context of art, museums and galleries. That’s how we made contact. Money was an issue, and the exhibition was shown in Paris thanks to help from [former French Culture Minister] Jack Lang.

A.L.-R.: When I saw it, I was surprised by how luminous and contemporary it was, with the cans and high-tech neon lights. It didn’t necessarily contradict the original piece, but was far removed from it formally, making it clear that it was a reinvention.

J.D.: And now that we are planning a reinvention in 2017, let’s look at what Allan wrote at the end of his text on the 1992 reinvention of *An Apple Shrine*, which sounds strangely relevant today: “Current tensions fed by global economic uncertainty, ecological danger, the collapse of ideologies, the resurgence of nationalism, ethnic and religious fundamentalism, etc., not to mention twenty years of reactionary tendencies in the arts, – must at least touch upon any meaning we can perceive in this work now.”

A.L.-R.: Absolutely. But that wasn’t apparent in 1960 in the rabbit-hole aspect of *An Apple Shrine*: a sort of ill-lit den with straw on the floor and an accumulation of rubbish and crumpled, torn-up newspapers. Its meaning was quite obscure.

J.D.: We couldn’t see it objectively because it was held during the early days of the consumer society, first in the United States, then in Europe. And that corresponds to what

he said about the reinvention of 1992: “The metaphors of urban waste dumps are now a mixture of industrial references and the harsh light of industrial settings.”

A.L.-R.: For the public, this exhibition, “Affinities,” will certainly raise two questions in particular: about what justifies it today, since the art I practice is far from the path taken by Kaprow, and concerning the idea of reinvention. What are we supposed to be reinventing when we play the game of reinventing *An Apple Shrine*, and from what elements? In this case, I am reinventing by association a historical installation that deals with the real and the fake, starting with the fake background of the 1991 Gulf War, which was present in the 1992 version. But I go head to head with Kaprow by reintroducing theatricality, which he despised! Barthes famously defined “theatricality” as “theater-minus-text,” but a word, especially when it is false, is a form of theatricality. And, when you think of war, you immediately think of the “theater of operations.” But, even though this contradicts Kaprow, I remember the wonderful thing he said to the participants in the Bon Marché happening, when he met them in front of the Récamier Theater: “We have come to the theater to leave it.” They ended up in the empty basement of the Bon Marché at night. What could be more theatrical than illegally visiting a department store by flashlight? I think Kaprow was aware of this inherent theatricality, which led him to later use lighter, anti-spectacular forms.

J.D.: The participants usually intervene in the happening and change things. You can see that in the photographs.

A.L.-R.: Yes, but the setting is there, even if it’s a found setting. To return to *An Apple Shrine*, I use the elements that Kaprow gives me. *An Apple Shrine* triggers thoughts that produce visual situations, objects, installations that are definitely not in the “Kaprow style.”

J.D.: Let’s just say that the final sentences of the 1992 text suggest what a reinvention of *An Apple Shrine* might be today. But what do you actually intend to do?

A.L.-R.: There will be two spaces. I thought it would be interesting to have a documentary space with videos and photos of the first *An Apple Shrine*, with letters, books and preparatory drawings, even personal ones. In the other space, in the gallery, I want to mix some of my own pieces with what remains of the 1992 exhibition. I started, of course, with the idea of the apple, or rather I surfed on associations born of the sudden appearance of apples. One was an India Adams record I own, which I took as a starting point. On the nicely kitschy record sleeve, she is relaxing in a kind of bowl filled with apples, which I immediately associated with the image of another woman, in a bathtub, during an Allan Kaprow happening³, which I had seen in his book *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings*. I realized that India Adams was a “ghost voice,” meaning the voice of movie stars. I made many other associations of this type. They come to me quite naturally. And I have become interested in a multitude of things relating to the apple, conscientiously forgetting about Cézanne: “apple heads,” for example, those dolls with shrunken-apple heads, which look like miniature mummies, made by American pioneers. This may add a somewhat morbid, bizarre feeling. In the end, it’s my own mental theater, inspired by Kaprow’s physical theater, suggested by the cans stacked like antique columns.

J.D.: Except that Kaprow gave after-death instructions for the reinvention in the Lyon Contemporary Art Museum, *Rearrangeable Panels 2*, saying that the cans must be presented differently. That could be the oil coming out, linked to the idea of pollution and CO₂; that’s why I wanted some of them to be rusty. Now we are in another phase. How should the cans be presented? It should look kind of wrecked. I don’t think we should show them in a triumphal way, in which all is well, with no awareness of global warming. We should respect what he said about his piece in the Lyon museum, that it should be based on the 1992 elements but different.

A.L.-R.: I introduce other elements, one of which is directly influenced by his “Panels.” It’s a slightly enigmatic piece with a row of small round mirrors. Along with Rauschenberg, Kaprow made me feel, when I entered the Beaux-Arts in Paris, that art could be something other than what is taught there.

J.D.: That's what it says on the cover of the Dortmund catalog: "Art Which Can't Be Art."

A.L.-R.: I can adhere theoretically to that formula, but it's not what I'm doing. I make art that looks like art. That's how it is. With "Activities," Kaprow tried to give the ordinariness of daily life, like cleaning a friend's kitchen, a special status.

J.D.: He did worse. When he was invited to documenta in Kassel, he dressed up as one of the workers and cleaned the rooms with them at five o'clock in the morning.

A.L.-R.: He only did that once. That was an experience, experience sharing. He certainly derived a personal benefit from it, but that wouldn't mean much to the workmen who have to get up at four o'clock every morning. Kaprow was an intellectual, who was driven by his inner life, in both this case and his other "activities." It's true that he could not help but think that "real life" was reduced to the literality of everyday life. I place my "affinity" with Kaprow precisely in the type of reflection I have just spelled out. I see him as a visionary thinker. When visitors take an apple in *An Apple Shrine*, they probably aren't thinking about ecology, especially if the apples look presentable, having been treated by 30 pesticides and other products. But the idea of ecology is present, of course. Is this apple real? More real than a fake apple?

J.D.: In reality, the real apple is an artificial real apple.

A.L.-R.: Exactly. It's a kind of double artifice. The fake apple is real, in the sense that it is a real object. With art, who knows?

1. See *The Village Voice* article of January 12, 1961, reprinted in *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*, Los Angeles, The Getty Research Institute, 2008, pp. 138-139.

2. Allan Kaprow, *An Apple Shrine*, December 1960

Originally, Kaprow had not intended to use real apples, planning instead to reuse the plastic ones that had fallen off *Rearrangeable Panels* or *Kiosk* (1957-59), now in the collection of the Centre Pompidou. As the environment took shape, however, the symbolic potential of the "temptation" to pick an apple, whether real or fake, became more important to him. This underground work – shown in the basement of the Judson Gallery, a New York-based cooperative gallery that Kaprow ran for a year – was a labyrinth built of junk picked up in the street. "Visitors squeezed their way through narrow lanes of loose chicken-wire stuffed with crumpled newspapers, straw and cardboard. ... Winding inward toward a central space ("the shrine"), one came to a three-tiered hanging framework of several dozen plastic and natural apples, tranquilly lit by colored lights." (Allan Kaprow).

The reinvention of 1991-92 (Milan/Paris, Galerie J & J Donguy)

This is what Kaprow said at the time: "The present version replaces nearly everything except the apples Rags and paper on the floor are now sawdust. Colored bulbs are now vertically suspended fluorescent tubes. Metaphors of urban throwaways ... are now a mix of industrial references and the clean light of corporate décor." The Gulf War was happening at the time and everything ran on oil with no awareness of the consequences of global warming being caused by CO2. The situation is different in 2017, 25 years later.

The reinvention of 2017 at the Galerie Loevenbruck reuses the 1992 materials, but in a different way, with the participation of the artist Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux. One room is devoted to documentation, with an excerpt from a video by Jacques Donguy in which Kaprow comments on slides of the 1960 version of *An Apple Shrine* at a conference at ENSBA in Paris.

3. Girl in a bikini in a bathtub, *Orange* happening, Florida, March 1964.

ALLAN KAPROW

Allan Kaprow was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1927, and died in California in 2006. He studied painting with Hans Hofmann, then philosophy, then art history with Meyer Shapiro at Columbia University – where he wrote a thesis on Mondrian – and music with John Cage at the New School for Social Research in New York. He invented the “happening” in 1959 with “18 Happenings in 6 Parts” at the Reuben Gallery in New York. While he was creating happenings, he was also working on “environments” following a period of making collages and assemblages. The word “happening” had appeared in his 1958 article in Art News, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock.” His best-known book, *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*, was published in 1966 by Abrams (New York). The *An Apple Shrine* environment dates back to 1960. From the 1970s on, Kaprow disappeared from the art scene and discreetly developed his “Activities” with a few friends in the United States and Europe. In the 1990s, he reinvented his famous “Environments” from the 1960s, including *Beauty Parlor*, *An Apple Shrine* and *Stockroom*. He taught at Rutgers University in New Jersey, at the New York State University, and, beginning in 1969, at CalArts and the University of San Diego in California. In the 1970s, he began to develop the idea of an Un-Artist, an artist who is “unloaded” by the history of art while having a perfect knowledge of it. As he said in 1992, “As I saw it, ART, as an idea and a practice, might usefully be put aside (not necessarily rejected).”

Jacques Donguy

On Kaprow, see his article in the *Encyclopædia Universalis* and, on the “Érudit” site, the one published in the magazine *Inter*, no. 95, winter 2007. See also my translation of his “writings” under the title *L’Art et la Vie Confondus*, compiled by Jeff Kelley, Paris, Éditions du Centre Pompidou, “Supplémentaires,” 1996.

ARNAUD LABELLE-ROJOUX

Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux was born in 1950 in Paris. He first became known in the late 1970s in the performance-art world, the subject of his book *L’Acte pour l’Art*, published in 1988, the first work in French dealing with action art.

He has produced many performances and composite pieces in France and abroad while continuing to exhibit, notably at the Galerie Loevenbruck, which has represented him since 2003. He has also participated in, among others, the exhibitions “Notre Histoire” (Paris, Palais de Tokyo, 2006); “La Force de l’Art” (Paris, Grand Palais, 2009); “Une Forme pour Toute Action” (Toulouse, Le Printemps de Septembre, 2010); “Les Maîtres du Désordre” (Musée du Quai Branly, 2012); and “Le Surréalisme et l’Objet” (Centre Pompidou, 2013-14).

Since *L’Acte pour l’Art* came out, he has published 10 essays and occasionally collaborates in the writing of shows for the Compagnie du Zerep. He also organizes events requiring the participation of other artists, while others have involved collaborations with Xavier Boussiron, for “Passion Triste” (which led to exhibitions and publications), and Gauthier Tassart, based on the “Culte des Bannis,” presented in the form of conference/performances.



Official program FIAC Hors les murs, Gallery Night.

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EXHIBITION PROGRAM 2017–18 « AFFINITIES »

- #1. MARCEL DUCHAMP / JEAN DUPUY (28 APRIL – 27 MAY)
- #2. TETSUMI KUDO / KEY HIRAGA (2 JUNE – 29 JULY)
- #3. PHILIPPE MAYAUX / PIERRE MOLINIER (22 SEPTEMBER – 14 OCTOBER)
- #4. ALLAN KAPROW / ARNAUD LABELLE-ROJOUX (20 OCTOBER – 25 NOVEMBER)
- #5. JOHN ARMLEDER / MORGANE TSCHIEMBER (1st DECEMBER – 19 JANUARY 2018).

A catalogue will be published for each of the exhibitions in this programme, by Éditions Loevenbruck, Paris.

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Gallery open Tuesday–Saturday, 11am–7pm or by appointment.