

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Peace Table*, 1997. Suspended cobalt glass table. Installation view LAMoCA. Photo by Robert Wedemeyer. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Snow Workers' Ballet* 2003, July 21, 2003. Performance for the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, Tokamachi, Niigata Prefecture, Japan. Thirteen snow vehicles. Photo by Shigeo Anzai. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, rendering for *Landing*: *Cantilevered Overlook*, 2008–ongoing. Design for a permanent, three-part, environmental, public artwork for Freshkills Park, Staten Island, NY. Created as part of Ukeles's Percent for Art commission for Freshkills Park. Renderings by W X Y Architecture and Urban Design; Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

The works in what Ukeles has named [07] *Repair Room*, made across three decades, together suggest the possibility of repair and transformation of a radically torn social fabric. *Radiance Relay*, 1987, proposed to suffuse the monumental statues of different races on Philadelphia's City Hall and eleven other sites around the city with healing light. For LAMoCA's *Unburning Freedom Hall*, 1997, workers, students and museum visitors produced "Unburnings," glass jars containing unique artworks, in an effort undo the civic trauma of the 1992 Los Angeles riots which were sparked by the acquittal of LAPD officers videotaped beating Rodney King. *Birthing Tikkun Olam*, 2008, created for San Francisco's Contemporary Jewish Museum, is based on the artist's interpretation of the Kabbalistic creation story. Within a symbolic assembly of objects, visitors are asked to commit themselves to acts of *tikkun olam*, translated from Hebrew as "world repair," in exchange for a hand mirror. The grouping of these works crystallizes Ukeles' deep engagement with, as she says, "our freedom to create acts of transfer and exchange that can begin to repair the world."

[13] *Peace Table*, 1997, conceived for *Unburning Freedom Hall* was originally installed at LAMoCA among shattered glass mounds and served as the site for convenings on peace, from the personal to citywide. The clear blue glass table has been brought to the Queens Museum where it is suspended under the central skylight. Ukeles and the Museum have conceived a series of public programs meant to engage and contemporize some of the exhibition's important themes. The series includes three round-table conversations at the *Peace Table* with activists, artists, city workers, and other experts; a day of readings on peace in memory of Martin Luther King, Jr., and a tour of Freshkills Park led by Ukeles including the future site of her major public artwork *Landing*. The Museum will also use the *Peace Table* for additional educational opportunities. See Public Programs listings on back cover.

### About the Artist

Mierle Laderman Ukeles has exhibited internationally, including at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; Whitney Museum; MoMA PS1; Queens Museum; LAMoCA; Tel Aviv Museum; Sharjah Biennial 8; Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco; Smack Mellon, Brooklyn; Wellcome Trust, London; Creative Time, New York; Brooklyn Museum; Haus der Kunst, Munich; the 13th Istanbul Biennial; Manifesta 10, St. Petersburg; and Manifesta 11, Zurich. Her early work was the subject of a touring exhibition organized by Graz Kunstverein, Graz, 2013–2015. The keynote speaker at the International Open Engagement Conference in 2014, Ukeles was a Guggenheim Fellow and recipient of many grants and fellowships from the NEA, NYSCA, Joan Mitchell, Andy Warhol, and Anonymous Was a Woman Foundations, among others. Currently, she is completing *Landing*, the first permanent Percent for Art public artwork for Freshkills Park, Staten Island. She is represented by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

### Publication

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Queens Museum and Prestel have published the first comprehensive book on Ukeles' work, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art*.

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### Public Programs

**Sep 25, 2016 Artist in/of the City**  
With Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl on artist residencies.

**Nov 13, 2016 Garbage: The Future**  
With DSNY Commissioner Kathryn Garcia on "What does Zero Waste by 2030 look like?"

**Nov 20, 2016 Fresh Kills: From Landfill to Park**  
Ukeles leads a tour of the site's ongoing transformation including her work-in-progress.

**Jan 15, 2017 Readings on Peace**  
An MLK Day gathering around the *Peace Table*.

**Feb 5, 2017 Human Agency: A Day of Transfer and Exchange**  
Participatory performance with Ukeles on healing the world.

**Feb 12, 2017 Care as Culture**  
This convening brings service work, ecofeminist art, and experts on climate change together.

More information at [queensmuseum.org](http://queensmuseum.org)

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QUEENS MUSEUM

# Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art

Sep 18  
2016  
Feb 19  
2017





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Mierle Laderman Ukeles: *Maintenance Art* is organized by the Queens Museum and curated by Queens Museum Curator Larissa Harris with guest curator Patricia C. Phillips.

Cover: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Touch Sanitation Performance*, July 24, 1979–June 26, 1980. Citywide performance with 8,500 Sanitation workers across all 59 New York City Sanitation districts. Photo by Robin Holland. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Air Art: On Land, in the Air, and in the Water with Growth*, 1969. Ink and marker on paper mounted on board, 18 x 24 in. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

Art is freedom expressed. I became an artist to be free: free to use the gifts given to me by my artist-heroes. Uncle Jackson Pollock gave me the gift of the body active within the art-making process; Grandfather Marcel Duchamp, the gift of naming anew; Uncle Mark Rothko, the gift of moving from one dimension into another. I worked for years to become a free artist. Then in 1968, we were blessed to have a child. We fell madly in love with her. I became a maintenance worker, not only to do the work necessary to keep her alive but to do the work to help her thrive! I learned that Jackson, Marcel and Mark didn’t change diapers; I fell out of their picture. Also, my Air Art inflatable works that were to be free-flying symbols of freedom, leaked! I fell into a crisis. I didn’t want to be two separate people—the maintenance worker and the free artist—living in one body. In October, 1969, an epiphany! If I am the boss of my boundless freedom, then I call necessity art. I name Maintenance – Art. In a quiet rage, in one sitting, I wrote the Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969! From the beginning, I name three levels of Maintenance as Art: Personal; Society/the City; the Planet. With limited resources from our finite planet, how do we do this? How do we survive? I got new eyes. I looked out in this new world and saw that most people were working to get along, to survive. They had to. At that time, there was no language, no culture, no recognition, and very little honor for service work and service workers: those at home and those who work outside. So I set out to make this visible, i.e. to make a revolution with everyone in the picture. After making maintenance art myself and with one or two workers, then 300 maintenance workers, I got a call from the Sanitation Department: ‘How would you like to make art with 10,000 NYC sanitation workers?’ ‘I’ll be right over,’ I said. I entered maintenance heaven at the time of the maintenance hell of the NYC fiscal crisis of the 1970’s: the housekeepers of the city-as-home. I have been very lucky to have officials and workers and the art world willing to open all the doors, to take a risk and say ‘Yes. Yes!’ Welcome to the results.

—Mierle Laderman Ukeles, 2016

Mierle Laderman Ukeles: *Maintenance Art* is the first survey of the work of pioneering American artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles (b. Denver, CO, 1939). Including works made between 1962 and 2016, this exhibition traces Ukeles’ career as a feminist performance artist, her almost 40-year tenure as the official, unsalaried Artist-in-Residence at the New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY), engaging in public art internationally, and as an artist whose Jewish faith has fueled a firm belief in the capacity of the human spirit. Ukeles sees meaning and power in the repetitive, essential daily activities of cleaning, caring for, and keeping a family, city, and planet going. Her *Manifesto* calls for the full-scale reorganization of society towards the revaluation of maintenance work of all kinds. Decades of performances, sculptural work, and realized and unrealized public art have flowed from these core insights, still profoundly relevant today.

Engaged with ecology and the city since the 1960s, Ukeles fabricated inflatable sculptures and wearables in organic shapes in [01] *Air Art*, 1967-69. These were meant to be attached to existing buildings or serve as independent architecture for individuals and groups. After use, they were supposed to be deflated, folded, and put away. With their ease of function, they were to be symbols of freedom. But their manufacture, care, and maintenance was so complex that they, along with the birth of her first child, ended up triggering *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance Outside*, July 23, 1973. Performance at the Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, CT. Black and white photograph, 20 x 16 in. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York



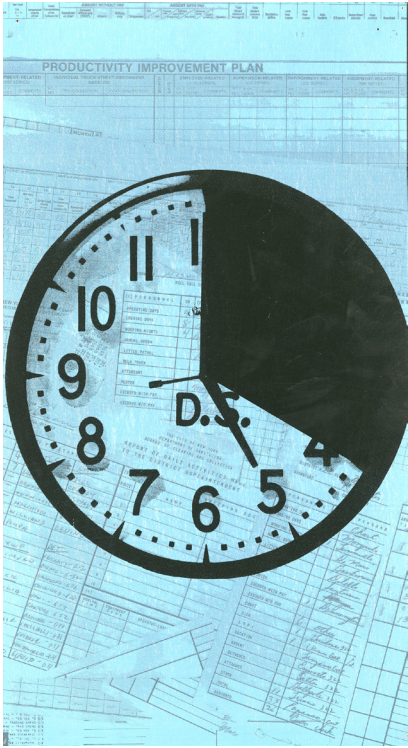
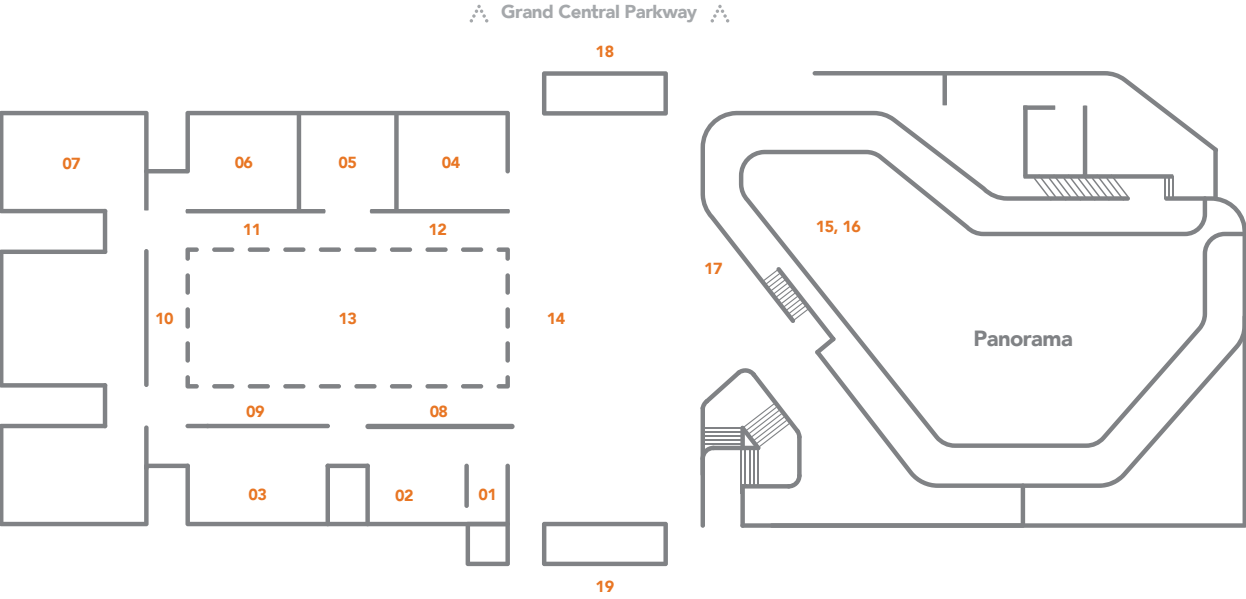
Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part I: The Social Mirror*, 1983. Garbage collection truck, tempered glass mirror, and acrylic mirror, 28 x 8 x 10 1/2 ft. Created in collaboration with DSNY. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

In Ukeles’ [01] *Manifesto for Maintenance Art*, 1969!, 1969, the artist, after having her first child, was driven to state: “I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also (up to now separately) I ‘do’ Art. Now, I will simply do these maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art.” Ukeles’ contribution to curator Lucy Lippard’s 1973 exhibition of feminist conceptual art, c. 7500, included the picture album [01] *Maintenance Art Tasks*, 1973, and recorded interviews with people about their maintenance habits. c. 7500’s traveling venues provided Ukeles an opportunity to test more than a dozen [01-02] *Maintenance Art Performances*, based on the principles of her *Manifesto*. Along with washing its steps, Ukeles intervened in the Wadsworth Athenaeum’s security and conservation systems, raked and tracked falling leaves on the campus of Vassar College, scrubbed a Soho sidewalk, and more. These performances illuminated fundamental structures of institution and society, and the hidden power of those who maintain it.

An important leap came in 1976, when Ukeles invited 300 maintenance workers at a downtown office building to consider one hour of their eight-hour work shift to be Maintenance Art. She then took Polaroids of them and asked whether, in their opinion, her camera had captured them during their hour of art, or their seven hours of work. [03] *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day*, 1976, includes 704 original Polaroids labeled with each workers’ decision. When a *Village Voice* review of the piece suggested, tongue-in-cheek, that the Sanitation Department—suffering like the rest of New York City from a fiscal crisis—call its work performance art and apply for funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, Ukeles enclosed the clipping in a letter to the Commissioner of Sanitation, and a career-changing partnership was born.

Ukeles’ first performance with DSNY was *Touch Sanitation Performance*, 1979-1980, in which she faced and shook the hand of all 8,500 Sanitation employees as they did their work, saying to each, “Thank you for keeping New York City alive.” For [15] *Ten Sweeps Light Path*, 2016, tiny, moving lights on a network of wires installed on the Museum’s *Panorama of the City of New York* map the complex route of this 11-month performance. For this exhibition, Ukeles has also assembled new works relating to [04] *Touch Sanitation Performance* from hundreds of related photographs, telexes, and Sanitation district maps found in her extensive archive.

Ukeles asked “sanmen” where a [05] *Touch Sanitation Show*, 1984, should be. Some said in a cultural space, and some said a Sanitation site. Ukeles did both, creating an installation that opened on the same day at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in Soho and at a decommissioned Marine Transfer Station, where garbage went from truck to Hudson River barge. Three works originally conceived for *Touch Sanitation Show* have been reimagined for the Queens Museum: [16] *Trax for Trucks and Barges II*, 1984/2016, a sound piece created with Stephen Erickson from field recordings of the entire Sanitation system and Ukeles’ conversations with “sanmen” which fills the the *Panorama*; [17] *One Year’s Worktime II*, 1984/2016, a full year of work shifts in the form of clock faces has been silkscreened over a gradient of colors representing the seasons and is installed on the Museum’s Large Wall; and [18] *Pulse II*, 1984/2016, delicately animates the Museum’s 200-foot west façade with a series of fourteen three-light blinkers salvaged from defunct Sanitation trucks.



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *One Year’s Worktime*, 1984. Component of *Touch Sanitation Show: Maintenance City/Sanman’s Place* at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts. Silkscreen, 12 x 21 in. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

Since 1983, Ukeles has staged seven [06] *Work Ballets*, 1983-2012, in five cities around the world, working with the drivers of heavy-duty municipal vehicles to co-design delightful performances in which their work trucks and barges are the dancers. [19] *Social Mirror*, 1983, a garbage truck clad in mirror created as part of *Sanitation Celebrations*, her first work ballet, visits the Museum’s east entrance on Saturdays and Sundays during the run of the exhibition (See queensmuseum.org for full details).

[14] *Ceremonial Arch IV*, 1988/1993/1994/2016, was first created in 1988 for an exhibition at the World Financial Center titled *Ceremonial Arch for Service Workers in a New Service Economy*. Restored for this exhibition, *Ceremonial Arch* is a celebration of the hands and enduring spirits that keep New York City functioning. A “harvest” of 5,000 of used, signed work gloves from workers at New York’s Fire, Police, Sanitation, Environmental Protection, Parks, Cultural Affairs, and Transportation Departments; the Metropolitan Transit Authority; and ConEdison sprout in a leafy canopy over six sturdy columns wrought out of the tools of the trade of some of the same municipal agencies and the United States Postal Service.

Since the start of her tenure at DSNY, Ukeles has envisioned landfills as new public spaces—earthworks that we ourselves have made and own. In [08-12] *Inner City Outer Space: Landfills and Transformation*, 1977-ongoing, a range of proposals and artworks from nearly 40 years of work are displayed together for the first time on five walls surrounding Queens Museum’s central sky-lit atrium, both focusing on Fresh Kills—one of the world’s largest landfills—and sites in other cities and countries. *Landing*, estimated to be constructed in 2018, is a three part work: an overlook and two earthworks sited at the heart of what was formerly the Fresh Kills Landfill and what is becoming Freshkills Park. A lifesize photo of the two-mile-long view across the transforming site allows viewers to envision what it will be like to experience the completed work.