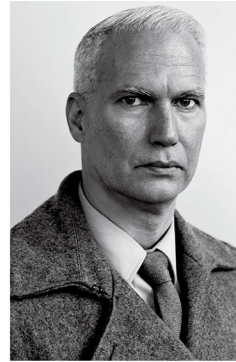


James Turrell, Meeting, 1996. Courtesy MoMA P/S



Dearest Lady Gaga,  
 I feel very honored by your letter inviting me to be the editor of the art section in this issue of V Magazine. I am so impressed by how you support other artists and also how you displayed your admiration for Tony Bennett, bringing his virtuosity to a completely new generation of loving audiences. You are supporting a mentor in making sure that the history of your art exists as an ongoing dialogue of one great artist to the next generation, to the next generation. I was very inspired by this and would like to do something similar for the profession of curator. Concerning curators, very often only male heroes, like Walter Hopps and Harald Szeemann, are mentioned as the inventors of what it means to be a contemporary curator. But actually, Alanna Heiss, who is now in her 70s, was an absolute pioneer of what it means to be a curator. She was instrumental in starting the Alternative Space movement; she was there very early to do site-specific exhibitions in the city, in the open urban space. She also founded P/S: 1 Contemporary Art Center (later MoMA P/S) in 1976, inviting artists into the abandoned old school building. She has curated everything from sections of the Venice Biennale to the Shanghai Biennale. She has discovered and rediscovered many emerging, re-emerging, and celebrated artists. My idea for V Magazine is to exemplify her work and her incredible character, and to explore the idea of discovering artists from 1976 into the future. I am looking through the most groundbreaking exhibitions she ever did, and at some of the most innovative artists she discovered and is still discovering.

Greetings, **KLAUS BIESENBACH**

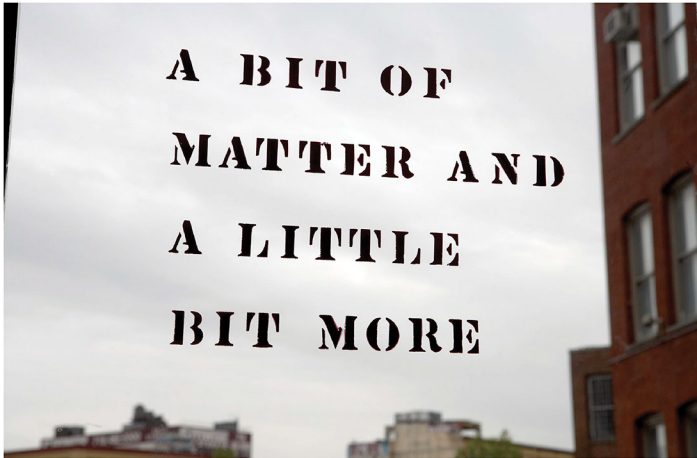
LEFT: KLAUS BIESENBACH WEARS CLOTHING HIS OWN  
 ABOVE: ALANNA HEISS WEARS SHIRT AND RINGS (HER RIGHT) HER OWN  
 RING (HER LEFT) AND WATCH TIFFANY & CO. BRACELETS CHROM HEARTS

# THE ART OF CURATION

WITHOUT ALANNA HEISS, DOZENS OF NEW YORK ARTISTS WORKING THROUGH IDEAS OF  
 PRETENSION AND PERCEPTION WOULD NOT HAVE FOUND THEIR ULTIMATE ARENA. HERE'S HOW THE  
 MOMA P/S1 FOUNDER CHANGED WHAT A MUSEUM PEDESTAL LOOKS LIKE

PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL AVERDON

PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL AVERDON



Lawrence Weiner. *A bit of matter and a little bit more*, 1976. Photo Matthew Septimus



Julian Schnabel, 1976.



Pipilotti Elst. *Salvatore in Loveland (Salvatore in the Bath of Loveland)*, 1994.

Alanna Heiss is a master of setting art in strange places. Museum sanctuaries and gallery walls can accommodate the artistic pursuit, yes. But how about a boiler room? Or a gritty spot beneath a bridge? Or the ticking, clicking hands of a giant municipal clock?

All of those and more have served as environs for new kinds of art that Heiss started championing in New York in the 1970s. Everything was wild then, after the heady brooding of Abstract Expressionism and the deliciously fizzy forays of Pop. So the settings should be wild too, or at least not constrained by conventions that worthwhile artists are always looking to break. Out of that impulse came the Alternative Space movement, which Heiss—as a visionary organizer with a keen artistic eye—helped pioneer.

Her first big move was a legendary event called "Under

the Brooklyn Bridge," which featured odd installations and performative happenings in 1971. Under Heiss's supervision, newly emerging and eventually epochal New York sculptors (including Carl Andre, Richard Nouas, and Dennis Oppenheim) made work involving rolled metal, discarded furniture, and dirt, among many other materials. The artist Gordon Matta-Clark roasted a pig. Philip Glass, a composer then making his name downtown, performed an outdoor concert, with power for his synthesizers pirated from a bootleg arrangement.

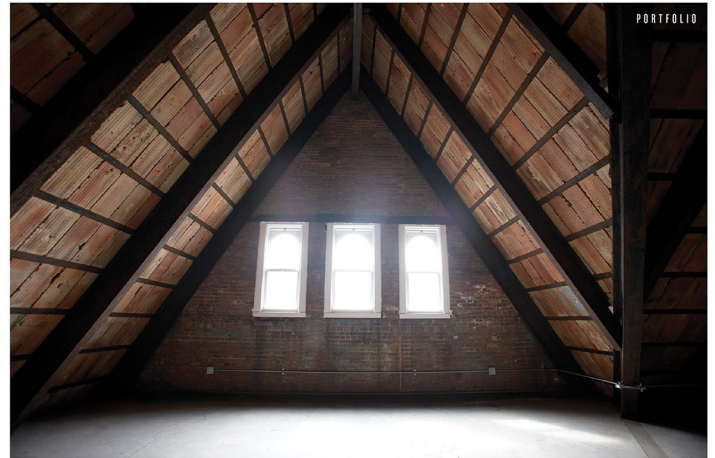
"I tried to organize it through the city, but it didn't work out," Heiss recalls now. "The way we did it was by plugging into a light post. I remember climbing up ladders on the back of a pickup truck. It was a terrifying thing to do, but that was the way people organized things."

Protection from gangs who haunted the waterfront then

was provided by a nearby cement company whose intimidating services Heiss secured. "You can fill in the blanks on who the cement people were," she says.

After that came the Clocktower Gallery, which Heiss founded in 1972 at the top of a landmark building in Lower Manhattan, near the Financial District but worlds away in terms of the creativity on display. The strategically strange gallery played a crucial role in setting up SoHo as a locus for artists and art, which in the years to come would creep and crawl into all kinds of different circumstances and surroundings. (Among the different forms then coming into their own: performance art, installation art, conceptual art that swore off objects in favor of "ideas" instead, etc.)

From Clocktower, Heiss made her biggest and most lasting play in the conception and creation of PS. 1, a rogue art



Richard Serra. *Untitled*, 1976. Photo Matthew Septimus



Keith Sonnier. *Tunnel of Tears*, 1997.



Richard Serra. *Untitled*, 1976. Photo Matthew Septimus

USA: MONTY BRONCO FOR NYMAG.COM/ALANNA HEISS

space situated in a massive old public school building in Queens. It's still there—now known as MoMA PS1, after its acquisition by the Museum of Modern Art in 2000—but its beginnings track back to 1976 and an inaugural exhibition with 78 artists titled *Rooms*. Richard Serra made a sculpture for the attic. Vito Acconci installed a sound piece with stools, a light bulb, and sound on magnetic tape in the boiler room. Marjorie Strider slashed the outside of the building with urethane foam, and the enigmatic Walter De Maria covered a wall with black-and-white photographs of pornography and a woman sitting by a swordfish.

PS. 1 proved huge in its effects on museum culture and art-making too, inviting projects that would consider action and space as part of an equation that has continued expanding ever since. "The number of people who were interested

in contemporary art in any significant way," Heiss says of her formative time, "was almost the same as the number of people who had an interest in higher chemistry. It was a small and neighborly world where you could have fights and they really mattered."

As the art world has billowed and ballooned into the present, she has continued her fight for art as something separate and distinct from the kind of market talk and glamour gazing that often attends it. "Part of it is an unexplainable, nearly psychotic aversion to the sale of artistic objects," Heiss says of her sensibility. "I have the greatest difficulty even talking about money and art. It's sort of like how some people feel about rats. I'm not equating dealers and rats, though there would be some justification..."

However the art world might change, her passion remains.

At the age of 72, Heiss holds court over numerous projects working under the aegis of Clocktower Productions, which continues as a roaming, nomadic enterprise after the original building her gallery inhabited was sold for more numbing commercial use in 2013. She continues putting up shows in alternative spaces, such as Pioneer Works in Brooklyn and the Knockdown Center in Queens. Her *Clocktower Radio* project recently broadcast signals from a station at the Ghetto Biennale in Haiti.

"I was and am to this minute only very excited and optimistic, overly so probably, perhaps without foundation," Heiss says. "In high school I was a cheerleader. Does that tell you anything? This sense of enthusiasm was part of what I could do for art. I find a sense of elation in watching artists come together in spaces I have been able to snare." **ANDY BATTAGLIA**



Ajay Kurian. *Collar House Rules*. 2015. Neon, dirt, chromed ostrich eggs, silver enamel, yams.

## AJAY KURIAN

"I was speaking to a curator once and he was recounting a myth to me. He couldn't remember the details or the names, but he was fervently speaking of this astronomer whose heart was set on the stars, who had no other hopes and dreams but to focus his every waking minute on what was above, to the detriment of what he was amidst. He had forsaken his polis, his city, as he believed his purpose to be higher. The curator suddenly stopped and looked at me and said, 'But you're different. You are the astronomer in the polis.' Of course it's a ridiculous thing to pronounce, but it's still what I hope the work can do: to peer into those places beyond what we know for certain, while committed to the common realities we must certainly face. The art is in getting the viewer to follow me down that path."

AJAY KURIAN WEARS T-SHIRT LOUIS VUITTON



Clockwise from top left: Curating the artist, courtesy the artist; Casey Kodan, New York, and private collection; photo: Sean Yong; courtesy of Canal; image courtesy Bonhousse Project; courtesy the artist