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| Kaprow, Allan (1927-2006) |
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| Allan Kaprow was an American artist whose oeuvre included painting, assemblage and ‘environments’. He is best known as the originator of ‘happenings,’ a term he coined in the late 1950s. A ‘happening’ refers to one-off (often scripted) performances intended to break down the barrier between art and life through eliminating the distinction between artist and audience and taking place across differing locales. Happenings played an important role in the transition from modernist painting to performance art in the mid-twentieth century. The debt that this new type of practice owes to modernist painting is made explicit in Kaprow’s seminal essay, ‘The Legacy of Jackson Pollock’, published in *Art News*, October 1958. In the essay, Kaprow proposes an alternate legacy to the formalist one established by American art critic Clement Greenberg. Kaprow boldly claimed that Pollock destroyed painting in that in his ‘action paintings’ , ‘artist, spectator and the outside world are interchangeably involved’. Kaprow thus believed that happenings belonged to the legacy of Pollock’s painting in that both produce works of art through common-place actions. Pollock’s painting achieves this through a deskilled use of gesture; Kaprow’s happenings do so in their bringing together non-art participants and performance through commonplace acts (such as shouting, eating lunch, brushing teeth).  Kaprow represented a new generation of New York artists who, unlike their forefathers, were not directly affected by the Great Depression of the 1930s. In contrast to the majority of first generation New York School artists, Kaprow was university-educated; while undertaking a BA in Philosophy and Art History at New York University (1945-49), Kaprow studied painting at the Hans Hoffman School of Fine Arts, New York (1947-48). After completing graduate coursework in Philosophy, he undertook a MA in Art History at Columbia University, New York, under Meyer Shapiro, from 1950-52 and founded the Hansa gallery in 1952. In the same year, Kaprow witnessed an early Carnegie Hall performance of John Cage’s *4’33* (in which four minutes and thirty three seconds of silence are ‘performed’); it was a pivotal moment in his artistic career. Five years later, Kaprow returned to study musical composition under Cage at the New School for Social Research, New York. The influence of Cage is evident in the script for *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959) [see Kaprow (1966b)]. Prior to the Reuben Gallery performance of this piece, Kaprow had experimented with happenings among friends. One such occasion - *Pastorale*, held at George Segal’s farm in 1958 – reportedly ended in chaos due to inebriated participants not knowing what to do. As a result, subsequent happenings were scripted and meticulously rehearsed. Kaprow continued to blur the line between art and life through these directed acts until his death in 2006.  [File: Kaprow.jpg]  Figure Kaprow Prepares For '18 Happenings In 6 Parts'By: Fred W. McDarrah  [http://www.gettyimages.ca/detail/news-photo/american-performance-artist-allan-kaprow-speaks-with-news-photo/87895040?Language=en-GBGetty Images](http://www.gettyimages.ca/detail/news-photo/american-performance-artist-allan-kaprow-speaks-with-news-photo/87895040?Language=en-GBGetty%20Images) |
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| Further reading:  Kaprow, A. (1966) *Environments, Assemblage and Happenings*, New York: Harry N. Abrams.  ------ (1966b) *Some Recent Happenings*, New York: Great Bear (available online via Ubuweb <http://www.ubu.com/historical/gb/kaprow_recent.pdf>)  ----- (1968) *How to Make a Happening* (lecture)*,* sound recording, <http://www.ubu.com/sound/kaprow.html>  ----- (2003) *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. by Jeff Kelley, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.  Kaizen, W. (2003) ‘Allan Kaprow and the Spread of Painting’, *Grey Room* 13: 80-107.  Kirby, M. (1965) *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, New York: Duttom and Co.  Ubuweb ‘Kaprow’ archive: http://www.ubu.com/historical/kaprow/index.html |