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| Halprin, Anna (Schuman) (1920--) |
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| A dancer, choreographer, community leader and educator, Anna Halprin helped to pioneer what she called ‘experimental dance’ in the 1960s. After training with the modern dance performer and choreographer Doris Humphrey, she turned to dance education, fusing these dual tracks of performance and pedagogy into a practice where dance changed the dancer. Her experimental dance theatre events helped prefigure happenings, performance art and experimental theatre works. Located at the boundaries between art and life, healing, ritual and performance, Halprin created participatory site-specific dances, art events situated in the midst of urban life. Breaking down the boundaries between spectator and performer, her dance events deliberately reconfigured socially marginalized individuals as the subject and medium of performance, including people with HIV/AIDS and the aged. Beginning in the early 1960s, Halprin started offering dance workshops on the ‘dance deck’, the dramatic outdoor wooden dance studio designed in 1953 by Arch Lauterer, the theatre designer, and Lawrence Halprin, Halprin’s husband and a renowned urban designer. Halprin’s students in these early years included several who would become founders of dance minimalism, including Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, and Meredith Monk – artists who were inspired by her precedent for framing pedestrian actions as dance, relinquishing control and embracing difficult personal history as legitimate subject matter for dance. |
| Summary  A dancer, choreographer, community leader and educator, Anna Halprin helped to pioneer what she called ‘experimental dance’ in the 1960s. After training with the modern dance performer and choreographer Doris Humphrey, she turned to dance education, fusing these dual tracks of performance and pedagogy into a practice where dance changed the dancer. Her experimental dance theatre events helped prefigure happenings, performance art and experimental theatre works. Located at the boundaries between art and life, healing, ritual and performance, Halprin created participatory site-specific dances, art events situated in the midst of urban life. Breaking down the boundaries between spectator and performer, her dance events deliberately reconfigured socially marginalized individuals as the subject and medium of performance, including people with HIV/AIDS and the aged. Beginning in the early 1960s, Halprin started offering dance workshops on the ‘dance deck’, the dramatic outdoor wooden dance studio designed in 1953 by Arch Lauterer, the theatre designer, and Lawrence Halprin, Halprin’s husband and a renowned urban designer. Halprin’s students in these early years included several who would become founders of dance minimalism, including Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, and Meredith Monk – artists who were inspired by her precedent for framing pedestrian actions as dance, relinquishing control and embracing difficult personal history as legitimate subject matter for dance. Training and Background Born Ann Schuman, Halprin was raised in the Chicago suburbs where she studied interpretive dance with Francis Allis and Josephine Schwartz, a Doris Humphrey dancer. Halprin attended the arts rich Winnetka elementary, middle and high schools. At the University of Wisconsin at Madison, Halprin became the protégé of dance educator, Margaret H’Doubler, receiving her B.A. in dance in 1941. It was at U.W. that Halprin met her future husband, landscape architect, Lawrence Halprin, who would become her frequent collaborator. After graduating, Halprin joined her husband in Boston where he was in Harvard’s architecture program studying with Bauhaus artists Walter Gropius and Mololy Nagy. Influenced by the economy and functionalism of Bauhaus design, Anna Halprin began working toward a dance parallel after the Halprins moved to San Francisco in 1945. Founding her own company, The San Francisco Dancers’ Workshop, Halprin shaped choreography as movement investigations based on the functional actions of the body in response to basic tasks and emotional states. Contributions to the Field and to Modernism Halprin was a pioneer in what she referred to as ‘experimental dance’, creating dance that existed at the boundaries of happenings, new music, theatre and performance art. Beginning in 1961 she taught a series of path breaking summer workshops whose students included leading dancers who would carry her investigations into task performance forward to Judson Church in New York. In the West, Halprin was one of the few women associated with the Beat artists and along with them she helped to establish San Francisco as a center of collaborative artistic experimentation. She erased the divide between participants and observers in her dances, making dances like *Circle the Earth* (1986), where everyone present became, de facto, a performer. This interest in how experience becomes performance let her to her late career work of the 1980s-2000s where she guided movement investigations that led into performances where people with cancer or HIV/AIDS or the aged, were both subject and performer in dance theatre works about illness, aging and death. Legacy Halprin de-centered contemporary dance in the U.S., helping to make the West Coast a site of counterculture and new group performance pedagogies. Connecting her work to the landscape, Halprin modelled how dance can change the dancer. She expanded the category of performer to include the untrained, the ill and the aged and she redefined the role of the choreographer as a broker of experiences for both the spectator as well as dancer. Halprin began with the basic kinesthetic logic of the body, a legacy of her training with H’Doubler, and developed this into a practice, which she called Movement Ritual. She separated narrative from action, stripping movement down to its fundamental functional actions through tasks she gave her dancers to investigate, such as pouring water or removing and then putting back on ones clothes. In the process she called attention to the aesthetic dimension of simple actions, manipulating these through placement within the frame of a performance back into art. She developed a pedagogy of scoring, or planning dances, which she called the Life Art Practice and which included a feedback loop her husband evolved called the RSVP Cycle. This allowed her students to evaluate and respond to the connections between movement events and their consequences. Over time this led into psychological territory as well for her performers, resulting in dance works that blended play, ritual, healing, and art to show how dance can be both personally expressive yet socially aware. Selected List of Works: *The Prophetess* (1947)  *Branch Dance* (1957)  *Hangar* (1957)  *Birds of America or Gardens Without Walls* (1960)  *The Four-legged Stool* (1961)  *Parades and Changes* (1965-67)  *Apartment 6* (1965)  *Ceremony of Us* (1969)  *Circle the Earth* (1986-ongoing)  *Planetary Dance* (1987) Moving Image Material *Returning Home* (2003) Director and Producer, Andy Abrahams Wilson. DVD.  A documentary about Halprin, in her eighties, performing outdoors in dramatic outdoor settings nude wearing artist Eeo Stubblefield’s body paint and plant matter covering as she describes her approach to dance in the environment in a voice over and interviews.  email [admin@annahalprin.org](mailto:admin@annahalprin.org).  *Breath Made Visible* (2009) Director and Producer, Ruedi Gerber. DVD  A documentary of Halprin told through rare historic footage mixed with contemporary material, interviews and exchanges with her husband, Lawrence Halprin. Manuscript Sources and Online Resources San Francisco Museum of Performance and Design – Anna Halprin Archives |
| Further reading:  (Halprin)  (Halprin, Returning To Health With Dance Movement And Imagery)  (Ross)  (Worth and H. Paynor) |