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A Mail-Art Performance and Other Treats at Performa 15

By Joshua Barone | November 12, 2015



Brian Fuata Credit Paula Court/Performa

The Miser has an ambivalent relationship with performance art. Some pieces can come off as esoteric or nonsensical; others can be profound, even moving. (Just ask the teary-eyed spectators who attended Marina Abramovic’s Museum of Modern Art retrospective five years ago.) At Performa 15, a three-week biennial devoted to the art form, not everything will stick. But with about 30 artists taking part, it shouldn’t be difficult to find something to love.

plunging this weekend’s offerings (a calendar is on the Performa website) won’t cost anything more than your time. With a few exceptions, everything is free.

Starting on Friday afternoon, the artist Brian Fuata, based in Sydney, Australia, will don a white bedsheet like a procrastinator putting together a cheap Halloween costume in “A preparatory/predictive performance for a circuit of email and the living.” He moves around the room like a ghostly persona, interacting with items from the archive of the artist Ray Johnson (1927-95).

In the 1960s, Johnson pioneered an art form based on mailed correspondence. Mr. Fuata, who began playing with text messages and emails as performance art about five years ago, eventually learned about Johnson’s work and began to incorporate pieces from that artist’s archive into his own work. “In that sort of ephemeral way,” he said, “we had a lot of similarities.”

Now, Johnson’s archive is the heart of Mr. Fuata’s improvised performance about the art of correspondence and long-distance relationships — even ones with long-dead artists.

(Friday and Saturday at 4 and 7 p.m.; Printed Matter, 231 11th Avenue, at 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-680-0569; 15.performa-arts.org; free. A related exhibition at Printed Matter, “Ray Johnson Books, Posters, Mail Art and Ephemera,” is on view through Nov. 28.)