



Tohu Podcast: A Conversation with Mierle Laderman Ukeles

In this Tohu Podcast, David Duvshani meets performance and social practice art pioneer Mierle Laderman Ukeles in Jerusalem for a conversation following her move to Jerusalem and her latest retrospective exhibition at the Queens Museum in New York. They talk about manifestos, authenticity, collaboration, art education, women artists, labor organization, life in Jerusalem, and the state of the political Left in the US and in Israel/Palestine.

Conversation / David Duvshani July 31, 2019

Mierle Laderman Ukeles (b. 1939) is an American artist, a pioneer of performance, feminist, and environmental art. Ukeles, who is known mainly for her *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*, focuses her work on the tedious acts of maintenance, preservation, and cleaning, shining a spotlight on the connection between gender and labor. The world depends on these repetitive acts, performed mostly by women and poorly-paid laborers, but they remain invisible to society.

The *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!* comprises two parts. In the first one, "Ideas," Ukeles presents her world view and her thoughts regarding the imbalance between the time and resources consumed by maintenance and the negative way it is treated by society. The second part is structured as a proposal for an exhibition titled "Care." The manifest was written in 1969, after the birth of Ukeles's daughter. As she relates in this conversation, it has to do with a crisis she had undergone when she realized that daily chores and caring for her baby took up all of her time, leaving no room for art, unlike past artists, whom she idolized – men who never had to struggle with these issues.

The second part of the manifest is the proposal for "Care," originally intended to be mounted in a museum space (today's Met Breuer). The exhibition, which has never been produced, was supposed to extend over three floors, each dedicated to a different idea. The first part is the personal: an empty floor, in which the artist cleans and performs various daily chores related to maintenance. The second part is the "General": a space for conducting interviews with professional maintenance workers, and another for similar interviews with visitors to the exhibition. The third part is global maintenance: on this floor, containers of garbage and contaminated air and water would be brought in daily. These would undergo a cleansing and purification process, and then sent back.

From 1977 until today, Mierle has been Artist in Residence at the sanitation department in New York City. In another famous work, *Touch Sanitation*, from 1979, Ukeles personally met all 8500 workers of the maintenance and cleaning services of the New York municipality, saying to each of them: "Thank you for keeping the city alive." In 2013, she moved to Jerusalem and had been dividing her time between Israel and the United States.

Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!:

<https://queensmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Ukeles-Manifesto-for-Maintenance-Art-1969.pdf>

Mierle Laderman Ukeles's exhibition at the Queens Museum:

<https://queensmuseum.org/2016/04/mierle-laderman-ukeles-maintenance-art>

Ukeles--Washing, Tracks, Maintenance--Outside,



1973_KK18_1.jpg





[1]Mierle Laderman Ukeles

Washing / Tracks / Maintenance: Outside, 1973

Part of Maintenance Art performance series, 1973-1974

Performance at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT

© Mierle Laderman Ukeles

Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

[Ukeles--Transfer-The Maintenance of the Art Object, 1973 \(chart\)
small.jpg](#) **[2]**

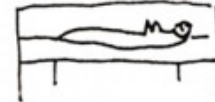


Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object © 1973

Museum Maintenance Rule: only the conservator is empowered to touch the art object, handle it, clean it.

1. Selection of the Art Object in the Museum:

Mummy (female figure) in glass case.



2. Activity: 3 people → same task → Museum → 3 powers

Activity	Person	Task	Result
	Maintenance Person	Clean the glass mummy case, (as usual).	A clean glass mummy case
	Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Maintenance Artist	Clean the glass mummy case: ("dust painting"). (Stamp glass case as Original Maintenance Art) (Maintenance Person can no longer touch it.)	A Maintenance Art Work
	Museum Conservator	(Perform conservation condition examination: Art Work is "Dusty. Requires superficial cleaning.") Clean the glass mummy case	A clean Maintenance Art Work

Mierle Laderman Ukeles

[3] Mierle Laderman Ukeles

Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object: Mummy Maintenance: With the Maintenance Man, the Maintenance Artist, and the Museum Conservator, July 20, 1973. (Detail)

Eleven 16 x 20 inch photographs, three 20 x 16 inch photographs, and three 11 x 8 1/2 inch handwritten texts.



© Mierle Laderman Ukeles

Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

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Links

[1] https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/Ukeles--Washing%2C%20Tracks%2C%20Maintenance--Outside%2C%201973_KK18_1.jpg

[2] <https://www.tohumagazine.com/file/ukeles-transfer-maintenance-art-object-1973-chart-small.jpg>

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