

SEP 18-20



CHICAGO PERFORMS 2026



MUSEUM OF
CONTEMPORARY ART
CHICAGO

A NOTE FROM THE CURATOR

What defines performance art in Chicago?

Over the last five years, the MCA's *Chicago Performs* festival has provided a space for more than a dozen local artists and collectives to reflect on Chicago's performance ecosystem (you can explore all of these reflections online: mcachicago.org/whats-on/series/chicago-performs). Each response is as unique as the respondent.

Critics have also sought to pinpoint the remarkable influence and impact of performance made in our city. In her 1982 article, "Chicago Performance: An Annotated Guide," renowned Chicago-born video and performance artist Christine Tamblyn surveyed the scene between 1975–80, a period she described as "the heyday of the medium in the Windy City."¹ She highlights two key factors at work in Chicago: the emergence of classes dedicated to performance at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) in the late 1960s, and the inspiration of visiting artists who came to perform, often at the MCA. More recently, visiting MCA scholar Jenny Harris astutely tied the history of the museum to the history of performance itself. MCA exhibitions like *Bodyworks* (1975) brought the work of Adrian Piper, Chris Burden, Bruce Nauman, Laurie Anderson, Eleanor Antin, and others to Chicago, providing exchange between the microcosm of the city and the macrocosm of the international performance world.²

Both Tamblyn and Harris site the Midwest as a pioneering frontier for performance. Alongside the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the Wexner Art Center in Columbus, Ohio, the MCA has historically been more willing than its coastal peers to take risks on little-known artists and provide a critical testing ground for emerging artists.

For instance, Tamblyn highlights several strategies and methods that differentiated the Chicago art

scene from other areas of the country, including the theatricality of performance art in Chicago and its ties to Dada and Futurist traditions, the use of sculptural or multimedia elements, inspiration from Chicago's longstanding comedy scene, and collaboration as a mode of discovery.

Though Tamblyn wrote this more than forty years ago, the strategies she identified are imprinted on the artists featured in this year's series. Ginger Krebs, a sculptor by training, uses wry wit, athleticism, technology, and geometry in her choreography to explore the limits of human physicality despite our ambitions. Her project *Protected by Invisible Fence* asks who controls whom given the constant prodding of our algorithmically driven devices.

Maria Gaspar's interdisciplinary practice incorporates installation, sculpture, and sound in performance to explore the politics of location and issues of spatial justice. Her work *We Lit the Fire and Trusted the Heat (After Angela Davis)* wields musical performances by Damon Locks, Ben LaMar Gay, and Mauricio López F. to dismantle borders and turn the remnants of a former prison building—located in her neighborhood of Little Village—into art objects that inspire possibility.

The Poor Farm Experiment is an artist collective and residency based in Manawa, Wisconsin, that explores the fleeting nature of gathering. Their project *Leopold Benches: A P(o)or(t)ch Theater* is a thoughtful investigation into two spaces of temporary togetherness: benches and porches. Over the course of a two-hour score, the group investigates how slight differences in perception influence our connections to each other and our shared reality.

This year's festival culminates in a discussion on the history of performance art in Chicago led by Leon J. Hilton, Associate Curator at the Performance Art Museum in Los Angeles, which houses the *High Performance* archive, a quarterly

Chicago Performs is organized by Laura Paige Kyber, Assistant Curator of Performance.



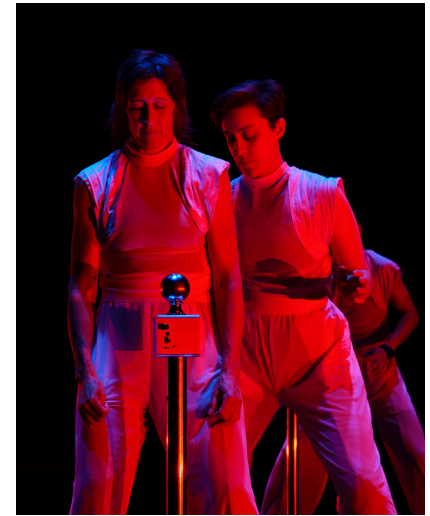
Scan the QR code to access full program notes, including artist bios, billing, and short video documentaries.

arts magazine published from 1978–97. I hope this program, alongside the broader *Chicago Performs* series, is just the beginning of a dialogue that picks up where Tamblyn left off and continues the reciprocal and generative spirit of exchange between Chicago performance artists and their peers beyond our city.

In her writing, Harris cites an early MCA press release: "In our contemporary world the traditional boundaries separating painting, sculpture, theater, dance, poetry, literature and music no longer exist." Performance remains a vital part of what it means to be a contemporary art institution, and it is my pleasure to include these artists in the MCA's live arts canon.

—Laura Paige Kyber
Assistant Curator of Performance

1. Christine Tamblyn, "Chicago Performance: An Annotated Guide," *High Performance* #17/18, vol. 5, no. 1 (1982): 24–30.
2. Jenny Harris, "A New Kind of Art Object: Tracing a History of Performance at MCA Chicago in the Museum's First Decade," accessed July 30, 2026, <https://mcachicago.org/stories/editorial/a-new-kind-of-art-object-tracing-a-history-of-performance-at-the-mca-chicago-in-the-museum's-first-decade/>.



COVER, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Samora and Elena Pinderhughes performing *We Lit the Fire and Trusted the Heat (After Angela Davis)* at the Institute for the Arts and Sciences, UC Santa Cruz, 2023. Photo: Maria Gaspar; Ginger Krebs & Artists, in residence at John Michael Kohler Art Center, June 2026. Photo: Riley Wadzinski; *Leopold Benches*: Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam. Costume: Kristin Mariani. Performers: Judd Morrissey and Mark Jeffery. Photo: Kelly Kaczynski.

INTERIOR, TOP TO BOTTOM: Ginger Krebs & Artists, in residence at John Michael Kohler Art Center, June 2026. Photo: Riley Wadzinski; *Leopold Benches*: Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam. Costume: Kristin Mariani. Performers: Judd Morrissey and Mark Jeffery. Photo: Kelly Kaczynski; Maria Gaspar in her studio with *We Lit the Fire and Trusted the Heat (After Angela Davis)*. Photo: Noah Sheldon.

SCHEDULE

THE POOR FARM EXPERIMENT

*Leopold Benches:
A P(o)or(t)ch Theater
(MIDWEST REDUX)*

Front Plaza
Fri, Sep 18, 10 am–12 pm
Sat, Sep 19, 12–2 pm
Sun, Sep 20, 3–5 pm

GINGER KREBS & ARTISTS

Protected by Invisible Fence

Edlis Neeson Theater
Fri & Sat, Sep 18–19,
7:30–8:45 pm
Sun, Sep 20, 2–3:15 pm

MARIA GASPAR AND MUSICAL GUESTS

*We Lit the Fire and Trusted the
Heat (After Angela Davis)*

Kovler Atrium, 2nd Floor
Sat, Sep 19, 11–11:45 am
Sun, Sep 20, 4–4:45 pm

MCA TALK: PERFORMANCE ART IN CHICAGO

The Commons, 2nd Floor
Sun, Sep 20, 11 am–12:30 pm

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES AT THE MCA

JLIN + THIRD COAST
PERCUSSION, VERNACULAR
Oct 15, 7:30–9:30 pm
Copresented with Chicago
Humanities Festival

GRAMMY® Award-winning percussion ensemble Third Coast Percussion and Pulitzer Prize-finalist composer/performer/electronic musician Jlin join together in a program that explores the evolution of their decades-long partnership. In a collaboration that could have only originated in Chicago, this special evening delivers a fresh sound, as TCP's contemporary classical training meets Jlin's visceral and innovative electronic practice.

SLOW/ DANCE

Sep 12, 2026–Mar 14, 2027

Presenting six artists who use performance to reclaim slowness and resist the contemporary demand to constantly perform, this exhibition features live in-gallery performances throughout the run of the show.

For more information on upcoming performances and programming, visit:
mcachicago.org/whats-on/performances.

THANK YOU

Lead support for the 2026–27 season of MCA Performance is provided by Elizabeth A. Liebman.

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