

SYLVIA
PALACIOS
WHITMAN:
TO DRAW
A LINE WITH
THE BODY

AMERICAS
SOCIETY

EXHIBITIONS

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Sylvia Palacios Whitman performing *Jump Up a Pyramid*, from performance event *Going* at Trisha Brown Studio, October 10–11, 1974



→2A →3 →3A KODAK TRI X PAN FILM →4 →4A →5 →5A →6 KODAK SAFETY FILM →6A →7

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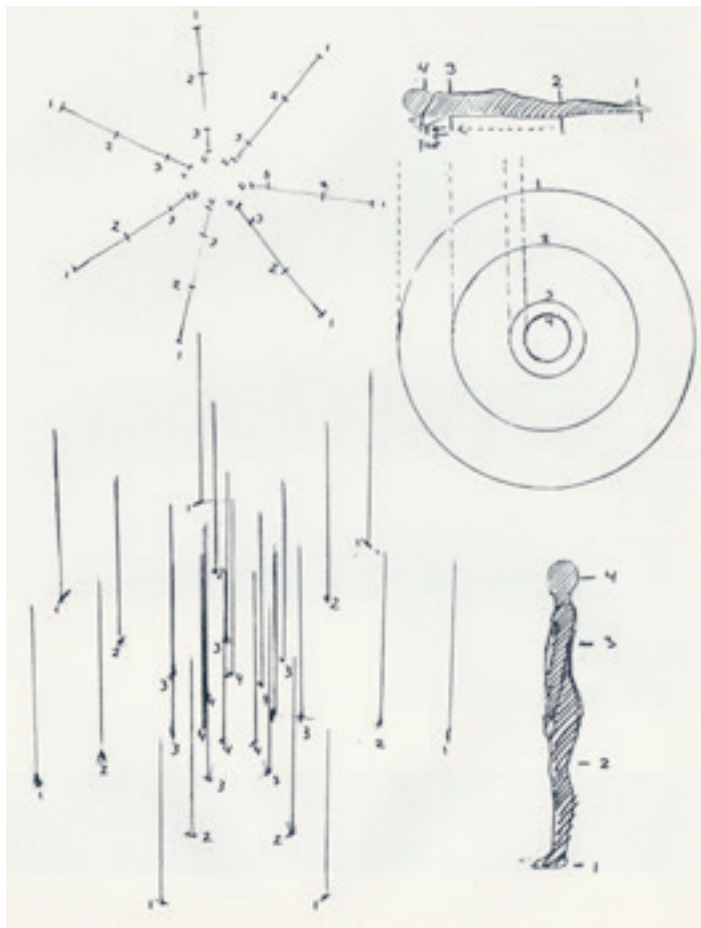
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Previous: Performance event *In Moving* at Trisha Brown Studio,
November 7–8, 1975

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FOREWORD

Americas Society is pleased to present *Sylvia Palacios Whitman: To Draw a Line with the Body*. Showcasing more than forty years of the artist's work, this is Palacios Whitman's first solo exhibition and career survey in the United States. Sylvia Palacios Whitman (b. Osorno, Chile, 1941) is a visual and performance artist who became an integral figure in the experimental downtown arts scene in 1970s New York, following her relocation to the United States in the 1960s. *Sylvia Palacios Whitman: To Draw a Line with the Body* will revisit her landmark performances with never-before-seen material from the artist's archives alongside sketches, video, and works on paper created throughout her career. It is the second exhibition in our new series highlighting the legacy of women and female-identifying artists of the Americas,

focusing on those artists previously understudied or overlooked.

I am grateful to Aimé Iglesias Lukin, Director and Chief Curator of Visual Arts, who brought this project to Americas Society and leads the gallery with exciting programming. Thank you also to the curatorial team, Rachel Remick with Sarah Lopez, who worked together with Iglesias Lukin on this presentation of Palacios Whitman's work; to Tie Jojima and Karen Marta for their editorial support of Americas Society's publications, Todd Bradway for his project management, and Garrick Gott for designing this series. Americas Society would also like to thank Julie Martin and Jennifer McColl Crozier for their support of the research for this publication.

The presentation of *Sylvia Palacios Whitman* is made possible by generous support from the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation, and by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and New York State Council on the Arts with the support of

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SUSAN SEGAL
PRESIDENT AND CEO, AS/COA

SYLVIA PALACIOS WHITMAN'S
STORIES

Aimé Iglesias Lukin

Since 1960, Sylvia Palacios Whitman has been registering memories of her youth in a series of seemingly simple and colorful pencil and watercolor works on paper. For decades, these small drawings were an intimate outlet parallel to a rich career in performance where the body and storytelling were the main tools through which she created her art, all of which has dealt with the always-nostalgic process of time passing, in her case one level more challenging as a migrant.

Born in 1941 in the small Chilean city of Osorno, at the southern tip of the continent, Palacios Whitman came to the United States in the early 1960s after a short stay in Mexico. What was originally planned as a short trip would turn into a six decades-and-counting adventure in which Palacios Whitman became a pioneering figure of the performance art scene of downtown Manhattan, making pieces that kept in their heart the values of drawing and storytelling while expanding the media through experiments that positioned the body as a main protagonist of artmaking.

In 2019, in a gesture that is informative of the relationship between drawing and body throughout her whole career, Sylvia decided to build a new piece—a performance work—out of her drawings. Presented for the first time at New York University’s Einstein Auditorium in October 2019, and quickly after at the Kunsthalle Wien in Austria, the performance *Visit to See the Monkey and Other Childhood Stories* (1960–2019) consisted of the simple but powerful gesture of Palacios Whitman standing on an empty stage before an audience, narrating the story behind each of the drawings in a series being projected on a screen, accompanied only by a small table with a few personal effects and a photo of her parents.

Deeply personal, the scenes from her childhood are told in a humorous, nostalgic tone. The opening drawing (p. 51, top right) shows Sylvia doing what might be her first performance: a home-made theater play she wrote and played for her family in their country house in 1940. The drawing centers on a

protagonist, her great-grandmother Rosa in a heart-shaped costume, escorted by a young Palacios Whitman—dressed as a devil—and another girl dressed as an angel. Entering from the left and running up the stairs is her father, arriving late and a bit rushed because (as she explains) he was a doctor and was always busy. While in the performance she does not go into detail about what the play was about, the slightly surrealist composition allows us to imagine a moral tale about good and evil, perhaps a fable created by young Sylvia for her family’s amusement.

Other scenes show her uncle Cato playing polo, next to her brother riding a horse called “Chanchito” (piggy) which he was not happy with. Another shows the effect of an earthquake in Southern Chile with cows comically mooing while hanging from trees, and one depicts the day which Palacios Whitman decided to jump out of a window with an umbrella in emulation of the parachuters she had seen in the movies. Palacios Whitman narrates all these stories with

a simple and tender tone, adding sparkle to the not-always-so-happy memories, and slipping into a bit of her native Spanish here and there. The result is a moving work in which we are immersed in her memories, recalling a past that is decades gone and thousands of kilometers away but feels close to all of us.

The drawing that titles the series, *Visit to See the Monkey* (p. 49), is also the earliest. It tells the story of when her father took the three children to a nearby farm to meet “Tuñito,” the first monkey the kids had encountered. Sylvia imagined he would look like King Kong, and caution was heightened by her father’s instruction to the children to observe while he taught them how to interact with this strange species. Surprise came when they saw a cute, small, fearful animal chained in a corner. Reiterating his expertise dealing with monkeys, her father made the kids watch from a distance while he approached the creature. The twist came when “Tuñito” jumped and bit her father’s finger, who—terrified—started shaking the animal

to free himself, desperately asking his children to rescue him. The scene ends with the embarrassed father having to be treated at the hospital where he was the director. Behind this slapstick anecdote lies a much bigger event: the children’s discovery of their father’s imperfect authority. *Visit to See the Monkey and Other Childhood Stories* becomes, then, a recollection which features specificities of Sylvia’s early life in distant Chile, but which addresses universal narratives about growing up.

The theme of childhood also appears in some of her performance work from the 1970s, as exemplified by pieces like *Cat’s Cradle* from 1975 (pp. 82–85) in which dancers move around, above, and below ropes, creating shapes similar to the those created with fingers in the ubiquitous children’s game; and by the many other kid plays that inform her choreographies. However, the drawings in *Visit to See the Monkey and Other Childhood Stories* are stylistically different from those found in the notebooks instructing her performances and in the many other works on

paper that she produced in parallel throughout her career (see Works section). These ones have the naïve and playful register of a children's book, because that is exactly what Palacios Whitman is doing: illustrating her own childhood. It is only through performative storytelling that she activated sixty years later, in 2019, that we understand also that the style of the drawings corresponds to the witty but deeply profound memories that they register.

Autobiography has historically been a distrusted genre in canonical art history, particularly when made by women artists. Works that discuss childhood and the artist's life are read as illustrative and anecdotal, unlike so-called "great art" that discusses the philosophical problems of mankind. But "femalekind" storytelling—if I am allowed the wordplay—has a power that is unique and persistent throughout the ages: a sincerity and a freshness that can only come from narrating your own history without the constraints of a social discourse from which women are outcast anyhow. Performance art

can have a similar effect: when putting oneself on the stage, the body language must be honest and transparent, or the result will be artificial.

Part of a series of exhibitions focused on female-identifying artists of the Americas that this institution started in 2021, this exhibition provides one more example of an artist who has not received the institutional attention that her expansive production deserves. Palacios Whitman's work allows us to think not only about what it means to discuss childhood and nostalgia in the work of women artists, but also in that of a migrant artist for whom "home" and the past have a particularly poignant meaning.

After more than half a century living away, Sylvia goes back to her youth in Chile through *Visit to See the Monkey and Other Childhood Stories*, sharing with her audience a sense of home rooted in childhood that we can all identify with. In the end, her art demonstrates how home is not necessarily a geographical space but a mental one, which we are allowed to build.

VISUAL PERFORMANCE
IN THE WORK OF
SYLVIA PALACIOS WHITMAN

Jennifer McColl Crozier

Sylvia Palacios Whitman's work has never been entirely framed within the disciplines of the performing or visual arts. Instead her work oscillates between these two spaces, so that contextualizing it is difficult, as it can be approached from the spaces of dance, theater, performance, poetry, or two-dimensional art. As Jennifer Dunning has written:

Palacios Whitman choreographs dreams. Neither theater, happening nor dance, her pieces are most like restless paintings, full of delicately conceived, sometimes wittily irrational objects that float across the stage as across the unconscious of the dreamer. They are, for the most part, lyrical dreams.¹

The non-use of narrative representations, the use of accessories or visual objects on stage, and the actions carried out by performers in order to achieve a specific objective—be it the creation of a two-dimensional image or the execution of a clear and defined operation—generates

uncertainty regarding the classification of Palacios Whitman's work. Her work is constructed as a series of moments—brief visual poems in motion. Of the elements that Palacios Whitman presents in her drawings and performances—fabrics, elephants, boats, polyhedrons, whales, leaves—each are turned into a new image, stripped of trivialized perception in order to reconstitute themselves into objective, creative, productive materiality. As it was written in *The New Yorker* in 1978:

In the dances of the painter Sylvia Whitman—or perhaps one should say in the paintings of the dancer Sylvia Whitman—human performers and décor merge on the same figurative plane. Her most recent concert—or exhibit... was filled with images that began as paintings of assemblages and extended themselves through manipulations in performance.²

The question of the visual in Palacios Whitman's work is a complex one. Over the years her

paintings, collages, and drawings have maintained a direct aesthetic relationship with her performative work, though they emphasize a more surreal sensibility stripped of their spatial setting. She uses Kraft paper, cardboard, and structures that lift from the walls and the floor. Some of her drawings are composed of graphite saturations that are interrupted by photographic fragments, press clippings, faces, people at varying scales, labels, clouds. Others propose blurred bodies, from which devices are displayed and sensations created. Even two-dimensional gestures allude to incipient movement but remain in the visual field.

Palacios Whitman derives the visual both from and for her performative pieces. She proposes a type of conceptualization that moves away from the performing arts to meet the territory of the plastic, especially through the design of objects and devices. She uses devices, which we could call visual objects, that are maneuvered on stage to build performative assemblages. Like children's exercises,

she diagrams these phantasmic imaginaries with total freedom, later designing the necessary parts for these reveries to appear. In this sense, her notebooks are the space in which she captures, in a literal way, the relationship between the performative action and the visual imaginary of each piece.

Since 1974—when she left Trisha Brown’s first dance company—Palacios Whitman has developed a large number of performative works that are presented in galleries and spaces such as the Idea Warehouse, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Kitchen, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, the Brooklyn Museum, and Centro Nacional de Arte Contemporáneo in Santiago, among others. Her works are generally organized as concerts where she proposes a series of short performance pieces, placing the body, actions and visuals on a central axis, creating unusual and absurd scenes. Objects, fabrics, texts, people, and accessories fill the scene,

crafting static and mobile images with a strong poetic sense.

With a Tree (1976), is a kind of duet between Palacios Whitman and a freshly cut tree branch where both seem to dance in unison (p. 97, bottom). In one of the drawings that she made while conceiving of this piece, she inserts an annotation addressed to the architect and artist Bernard Kirschenbaum, who fabricated most of the mobile structures used in her works: “I want you to do me a tree (that moves?).” In an “animistic and bewitching” choreography, the performers can be both objects and subjects—not to dehumanize them, but on the contrary, to humanize, and to animate inert objects.³

Another visual operation that constantly appears in Palacios Whitman’s work is an exaggeration of size and dimensions, altering proportions as a gesture of amplification. *Green Hands* (1977) is one of her iconic works in this sense, where the magnitude of the performer’s hands turns a simple choreography into a dreamlike and intriguing illusion (p. 106). As a

free exercise, she diagrams these phantasmic images on paper, designing the parts for these actions (or hallucinations).

In 1978, she presented *Around the Edge* at the Truck and Warehouse Theater, a concert that included ten performance pieces including *Bed* (pp. 114–115). In the middle of the dark stage, a human silhouette appears and moves through the space smoothly. As the structure progresses and the viewer's eye becomes accustomed to the darkness, it is revealed that the silhouette is a man dressed in white who is lying against a vertical bed, equally white: “again, fantastic details transfigure a commonplace sight.”⁴

One of Palacios Whitman's favorite operations is simply the unexpected: A kind of temporal and spatial dislocation that displaces any rational meaning or value. In *Whale*, which was part of her concert *South* (1979), a paper whale more than ten feet tall was propelled up the ramps of the Guggenheim Museum “like a jumbo jet, into a sky that's water (p. 119).”⁵ In a furtive act, the whale flew (or swam)

upward, dislocating the meaning of spatial coordinates—the sky becomes the sea—proposing a transcendent image, which simply disappears in the same gesture that constituted it. There is no illusion. The paper is still the paper, but at the same time a giant whale freely traverses the museum.

It is precisely this connection between bodies, objects and other kinds of expressive devices that are in tension in her work. Both the two-dimensional gestures on paper and the performances are loaded with plastic constructions, allowing Palacios Whitman's work to move freely from one medium to another, in an operation focused on the presentation of poetic and ephemeral sensations, thus generating an imagery that is performative and visual at the same time.

ENDNOTES

1. Jennifer Dunning, "Critics' Choices," *The New York Times*, November 16, 1980.
2. Arlene Croce, "Dancing, Arts and Sciences and David Gordon," *The New Yorker*, May 15, 1978.
3. Sally Banes, "Tradition in India and SoHo," *Dance Magazine*, February 1977.
4. Banes, "Engineering Images," *The SoHo Weekly News*, March 16, 1978.
5. Banes, "Sylvia Whitman. Playing with Live Images," *The SoHo Weekly News*, May 31, 1979.

TO DRAW A LINE WITH THE BODY

Rachel Remick

The artistic work of Sylvia Palacios Whitman (b. 1941, Osorno, Chile) blurs the boundaries between two and three dimensions, drawing on paper and in real life. Born and raised in a rural town in southern Chile, Palacios Whitman took an interest in performance and visual art from a young age and eventually moved to Santiago, the capital city, in the 1950s to study art. While there she met her first husband, with whom she relocated to New York City in the 1960s. Palacios Whitman arrived in Manhattan while it was in the midst of an artistic and cultural boom, and she quickly became involved with the city's burgeoning experimental art scene. In the early 1970s, the artist spent a few years performing with Trisha Brown before branching out to create her own performances and works on paper. Palacios Whitman's art from the 1970s onward borrowed elements from theater, dance, and visual art to create what the artist at times referred to as performance "images."¹

Sylvia Palacios Whitman: To Draw a Line with the Body illuminates Palacios Whitman's singular contributions to the experimental avant-garde scene in downtown New York and the fundamental connection between drawing and performance in her practice. Journalists and scholars have struggled to categorize Palacios Whitman's work as dance, performance, or installation given its interdisciplinary way of producing images across media. *Sylvia Palacios Whitman: To Draw a Line with the Body* embraces this interdisciplinarity by exhibiting works on paper from throughout the artist's career alongside her landmark performances. The works on view display how Palacios Whitman created a unique artistic style, often built on exaggerating and subverting routine movements and gestures. Her works staged everyday scenes as performance art, expanding the boundaries of what fine art could be. Often, Palacios Whitman would draw scenes from her childhood in southern Chile, whether on paper or on stage. This exhibition highlights the autobiographical

dimension of the artist's practice and how she explores the emotional registers of memory and personal history.

Drawing has been fundamental to Palacios Whitman's practice since her childhood and first formal art classes in Chile. This connection is clear in Palacios Whitman's numerous performance sketchbooks from the 1970s. In the sketch for *Jump Up a Pyramid* (1974), one of her first works performed at Trisha Brown's studio, the artist draws a central figure jumping while two other bent-over figures place the platforms (p. 61). Palacios Whitman includes handwritten notes and arrows, emphasizing the upward nature of the movement. Other sketches were places for Palacios Whitman to conceive ideas which were perhaps technically impossible, gesturing at the playful and ludic dimension of Palacios Whitman's work. One page of her sketchbook includes drawings for "Magnets" in which she draws two shadowy figures who have magnets attached to their costumes (p. 72). Their magnified bodies attract

and repel each other before moving to interact with a powerful magnet on the wall, where they walk, as Palacios Whitman handwrites in the sketch, “at the edge of attraction.” In the third scene, Palacios Whitman imagines their bodies are lifted four feet off the ground by a larger-than-life magnet suspended from the ceiling. Palacios Whitman’s creative work was often answering the simple question—“Why not?” It was, in many cases, experimentation for experimentation’s sake.

The performance *Slingshot* (1975) demonstrates the potency of Palacios Whitman’s three-dimensional images. On the same spread as “Magnets” in Palacios Whitman’s sketchbook, the artist sketched ideas for a “human slingshot” (p. 73). Divided into two panels like a comic strip, one shows a group of figures pulling back a central shaded figure in a large sling against an opposing wall. In the second panel, the figure has been released and the wall swallows them. The action of their body flying out of a sling and into the wall is left implied between

the static drawings. Unlike “Magnets,” which remained unrealized, *Slingshot* was performed at the Idea Warehouse in 1975. In *Slingshot*, while the performer pushes backwards, the sling becomes increasingly taut, in turn increasing the emotional tension of the audience. This tension is released when the performer is catapulted across the room and onto a mattress-covered wall. For that brief moment, their body seems more object-like as its material and fleshy substance is flung against the mattress. The audience is left awestruck watching the spectacle, before the cycle is repeated several times by additional performers.

Palacios Whitman does not think of herself as a dancer, and this is reflected in the aesthetic focus of her works.² In her pieces, performers—whether Palacios Whitman herself or other actors—are often engaged in routine movements like walking or jumping instead of technical or complex choreography. Their efforts are often focused more on the shapes which the movements create or lines extending

from the dancer's body to the prop. In *Human Paper Coil* (1975), Palacios Whitman walks onto a paper floor with a spiral design (pp. 88–89). She then picks up the center of the paper floor and winds it around her own body, as described by an alternate title for the piece, *Wearing a Spiral Floor*. The image created in this performance starts with one of a seemingly static floor and transforms into Palacios Whitman swallowed up by that paper surface. Or perhaps the paper spiral becomes an extension of the performer as they wind it around their body. In such works, Palacios Whitman highlights and transforms routine movements, giving them a sense of poetry or play.

Palacios Whitman further subverts quotidian movements and objects by staging everyday scenes as “performance art.” In doing so, the artist suggests the performance and choreography inherent to our social roles in everyday life. For example, *Introducing the Andrade Family* (1976) assembles a real family in front of an audience at The Kitchen (pp. 98–99). The family

members gather, sit formally in two rows, and pose for a portrait. After a short period, they get up and leave, and all that remains are the chairs and polaroid photographs of the family. Is this a real family, or are they actors? What do their actions tell us about them? We do not know, but through their formal dress and posture, we impose the narrative of a portrait session onto the scene. Palacios Whitman's staged performances of everyday life gain prescience in light of theories of identity-as-performance widely adopted in the 1990s.

Many of the everyday scenes and characters in Palacios Whitman's performances and works on paper are mined from her own life, specifically her childhood in southern Chile and relocation to the United States. In 1979, Palacios Whitman staged the performance evening *South* at the Guggenheim for two nights in June. *South* was, in Palacios Whitman's terms, “an event of a series of images presented through the medium of actors and props” inspired by a letter she received from her sister in Chile.³

That night, the artist and other performers used their bodies and movements to relate to and activate larger-than-life paper props, neon sculptures and carved words. The first section of the performance is described as “images from Palacios Whitman’s early years.”⁴ At one moment, a neon horse sculpture is paraded in front of a blue and green backdrop, allowing the viewer to imagine that wild horse in a natural landscape. In another image, Palacios Whitman stages the wedding of her brother in Chile. An actual photo of the bride and groom is flanked by semi-translucent fabric prints of shadowy figures, perhaps Palacios Whitman’s imagined wedding guests, as a paper bird sculpture is held aloft over the proceedings (p. 123). As in *Introducing the Andrade Family*, Palacios Whitman stages the wedding as a kind of performance. Her presentation of the wedding tableau is accompanied by giant paper sculptures of cursive words and phrases floating upwards on the museum’s spiral ramp—one of the few instances of text in her work. The phrase “a soft afternoon”

floats over the imagined wedding, giving the proceeding a poetic, nostalgic quality.

This nostalgia is further suggested in Palacios Whitman’s own reflections on the performance. “It was a funny and sad letter and reminded me of so much that it pushed me into ‘South’ more,” offered Palacios Whitman, describing the letter from her sister that inspired the performance. She continues, “You move from one place to another and all that stays.”⁵ In this light, Palacios Whitman’s recreation of her brother’s wedding, amongst other childhood scenes in Chile, seems instead an elegy to a life she left behind and of which she is no longer part. The second part of *South*, characterized as responses to those memory scenes, furthers these reflections. In one image, performers carry in a giant airmail envelope, an oversized paper sculpture version of the letter Palacios Whitman received from her sister. Perhaps the exaggerated scale physically demonstrates the letter’s emotional significance. A world away from Osorno, *South* restages Palacios Whitman’s

past and reinterprets her present, meditating on her experience of relocating to the United States.

In her artworks, Palacios Whitman understands that personal history is elusive. It is constructed by the narrator and seeks to illustrate and reframe a past that is ultimately unknowable. As part of another performance evening, *Lee Towey, N.Y.* (1980), Palacios Whitman casts a real woman to recount her memories of New York City on stage. One reviewer described witnessing this performance, writing “Could this be true? Perhaps it was, yet perhaps her tales were just tall tales. No matter. The important thing was that she made them sound true.”⁶ In staging personal history as performance, Palacios Whitman reveals its fugitive nature. Whether or not Lee Towey’s memories of New York City are factually true is insignificant in comparison to the way they made the audience feel and whether they carried a subjective sense of authenticity. By taking memories as source material, Palacios Whitman’s performance

images convey the subjective nature and affective registers of memory.

On paper or on the stage, Palacios Whitman creates sharp, layered images through a pen or a body. These images are at times playful, tense, melancholy or provocative. Aligned with the spirit of the art scene she contributed to in the 1970s, Palacios Whitman’s work is always at its heart experimental—blurring boundaries between disciplines, between movement and image, and between past and present. All of this is done with a light touch—for Palacios Whitman, art is simply a form of personal expression. In the artist’s words, “It shouldn’t be all that exclusive, the showing of art, the dancing. People should get used to it as something they experience daily, not as something special that you go to once in a while. We should get to a point where everybody can do it. But I just make dance anyhow, whether that happens or not, whatever the circumstances are.”⁷

ENDNOTES

1. For example, see brochure for *South*, Sylvia Palacios Whitman performance at Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, June 1 and 2, 1979, Sylvia Palacios Whitman Archive.
2. Interview with artist by author, January 27, 2023.
3. Handwritten note on verso of performance photograph by Nathaniel Tileston. Folder 12, Programs: 1E:1979: *Sylvia Whitman: South* Photographs, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archives, New York. Translation from Spanish by author: “un evento de una serie de imágenes presentados por medio de actores and accesorios.”
4. Jennifer Dunning, “Dances by Weaver of Dreams,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 1979. Sylvia Palacios Whitman Archive.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Jack Anderson, “Stage: ‘Lee Towey, N.Y.’ Has Strange Happenings,” *The New York Times*, November 29, 1980. Sylvia Palacios Whitman Archive.
7. Undated/unedited interview transcript with Sylvia Palacios Whitman, MoMA PS1 Archives Folder III.B.65, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

WORKS

VISIT TO SEE THE MONKEY AND OTHER CHILDHOOD STORIES (1960–2019)



In these drawings, Palacios Whitman recalls memories from her childhood in Chile. The artist uses vivid colors to depict figures in settings with a frontal perspective. Although the scenes are flat, the often-outstretched and dynamic body language of the figures imbue the drawings with a sense of movement. Many of the drawings refer to regular occurrences like her daily gym class in school, tricks she would play on her sister, and weekly trips to ride horses. In 2019, Palacios Whitman created a performance in which she stands before a projection of the drawings and activates them by recounting the events that inspired them to the audience.

My Father and the Monkey from *Visit to See the Monkey and Other Childhood Stories*, 1960. Mixed media, 9 × 12 inches (22.9 × 30.5 cm)



Visit to See the Monkey and Other Childhood Stories, 1960–2019.
Mixed media, 9 × 12 inches (22.9 × 30.5 cm) each



Visit to See the Monkey and Other Childhood Stories, 1960–2019.
Mixed media, 9 × 12 inches (22.9 × 30.5 cm) each

**PAMPLONA STONES (1974)
WITH TRISHA BROWN**

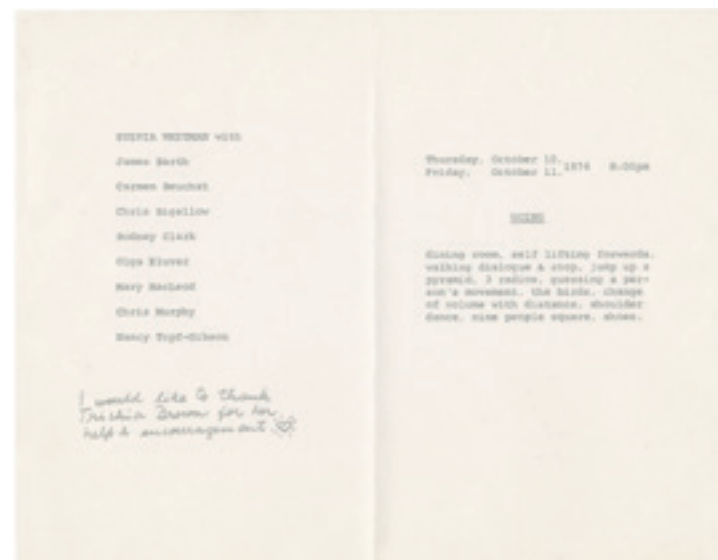
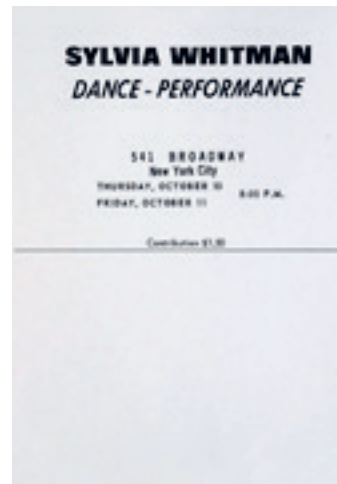


Palacios Whitman danced with Trisha Brown in the early 1970s, when she performed in several of Brown's works, including *Walking on the Wall* (1971), *Roof Piece* (1971–73), and *Raft Piece* (1973). In 1974, they co-created the performance *Pamplona Stones* (1974). As Palacios Whitman began creating her own work, she staged several performances in Brown's studio.

Sylvia Palacios Whitman and Trisha Brown performing *Pamplona Stones*, June 11–12, 1974

GOING (1974)
TRISHA BROWN STUDIO, NEW YORK, NY

Held at Trisha Brown's studio, *Going* (1974) was a performance that Palacios Whitman subtitled a "Dance-Performance," which included ten works: *Dining Room* (formerly *Chair and Table*), *Self Lifting Forwards*, *Walking Dialogue & Stop*, *Jump Up a Pyramid*, *3 Radios*, *Guessing a Person's Movement*, *The Birds*, *Change of Volume with Distance*, *Shoulder Dance*, *Nine People Square*, and *Shoes* (formerly *Cinderella Dance*). Palacios Whitman continued to structure her performance work in this way, wherein titled events would include numerous short pieces. Palacios Whitman often created sketches of her performances before bringing them to life, as evidenced in her notebooks. For instance, in *Walking Dialogue & Stop*, the artist sketched two shaded figures meeting each other on a diagonal plane. The performance itself begins with two performers on separate ends of the space, and then talking and walking until meeting in the middle where their bodies push on one another.



Front and back of invitation (top) and program (bottom) for performance event *Going* at Trisha Brown Studio, October 10–11, 1974



AVALANCHE, December 1974

Sylvia Whitman's dance performance *Going* was presented on October 10 and 11 at Trisha Brown's new loft at 541 Broadway with performers (shown here in *The Body*) Carmen Bouchar, Mary MacLeod, Nancy Trupf, Sylvia Whitman, Olga Klaver, Chris Bigelow, Rosilyn Clark, Chris Murphy and James Barth. Other pieces in Whitman's program included the following: dining room, will lifting forwards, walking dialogue & stop, jump up a pyramid, 5 ratios, gaining a person's movement, change of distance with distance, shoulder dance, nine people square, and three.

In these activities Whitman investigated the physical relationships between the performer, in terms of height, volume, bodily mass and configuration and thrust, but without didactic emphasis. The juxtapositions in themselves were humorous, and so was in particular a sequence in which one performer closed his/her eyes in turn and attempted to guess from the sound and timing of his movements which of the others was performing and to re-enact the specifics of his motions. LB

GOING



Images and review of performance event *Going* at Trisha Brown Studio, October 10–11, 1974, included in a 1975 brochure on Palacios Whitman's work



Sketch for (top) and performance (bottom) of *Walking Dialogue & Stop*, from performance event *Going* at Trisha Brown Studio, October 10–11, 1974



Sketch for (top) and performance (bottom) of *Jump Up a Pyramid*, from performance event *Going* at Trisha Brown Studio, October 10–11, 1974



Performance event *Going* at Trisha Brown Studio, October 10–11, 1974

RED CONE (1974)
ARTISTS' SPACE, NEW YORK, NY

Red Cone (1974) is a film-performance which was included in a group exhibition at the recently-founded Artists Space. In the recorded performance by Palacios Whitman, performers slide down a pole one by one, forming a pile on top of one another which is then covered by a large cloth, creating the shape of a cone. The sketch of the work indicates that the performers would then lift the cloth to create a hole large enough for each to crawl out and move around to the back of the cone.



Film stills from *Red Cone*, December 2, 1974



RED CONE / A FILM-PERFORMANCE



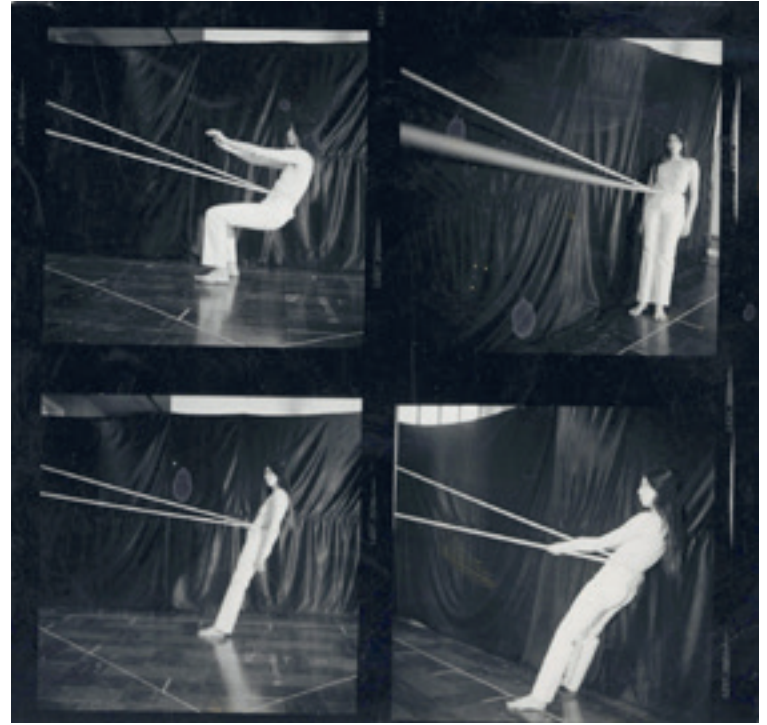
Brochure from *Red Cone*, December 2, 1974

**PERFORMANCE EVENING (1975)
IDEA WAREHOUSE, NEW YORK, NY**

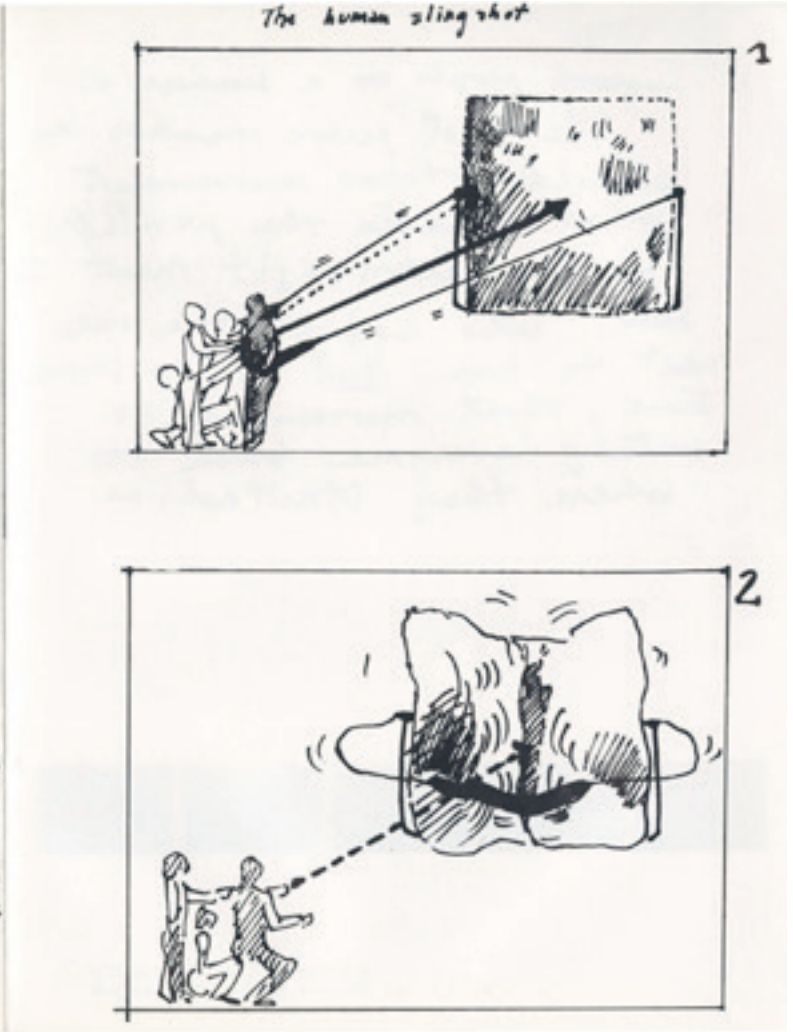
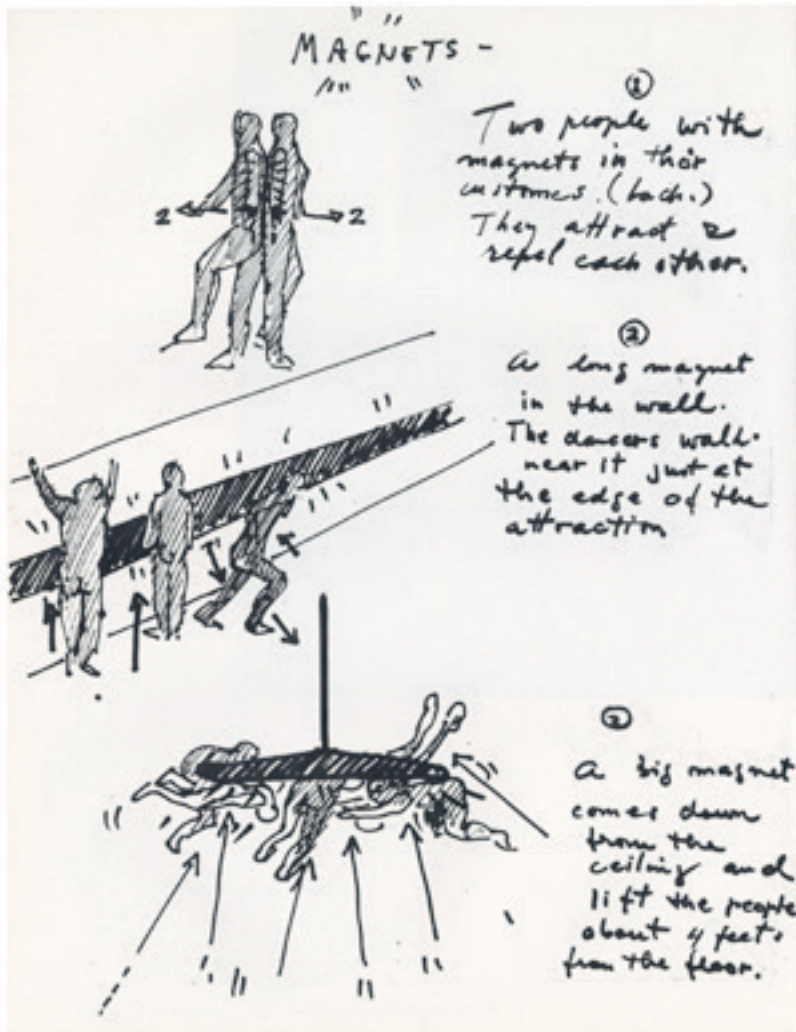
In *Performance Evening* at the Idea Warehouse in Lower Manhattan, Palacios Whitman presented five new performances including *Green Bag*, *4 Walking Pieces*, *3 Talking Pieces*, *1 Ribbon*, and *Slingshot*. The entire event is sometimes referred to as *Slingshot*. In the performance *Green Bag*, Palacios Whitman and several other performers are strapped to a crane apparatus and collectively lifted to the ceiling, creating a suspended mass of people. Palacios Whitman collaborated with the artist Bernard Kirschenbaum to conceive the appropriate mechanical apparatus for her performances. The group was moved from one side of the space to another, where they were lowered into a large green bag and the bag enclosed around them. The action exemplifies the playful nature of Palacios Whitman's work, echoing a toy prize crane and reconfiguring the performer's bodies as small objects.



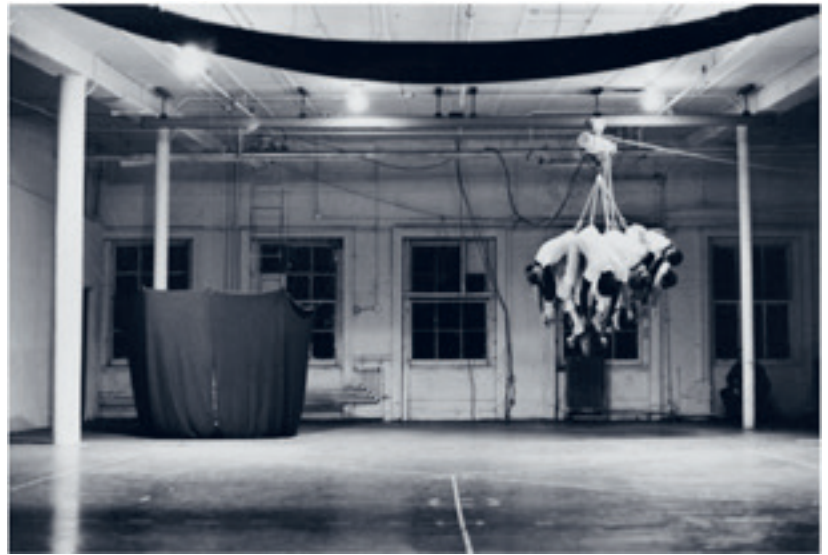
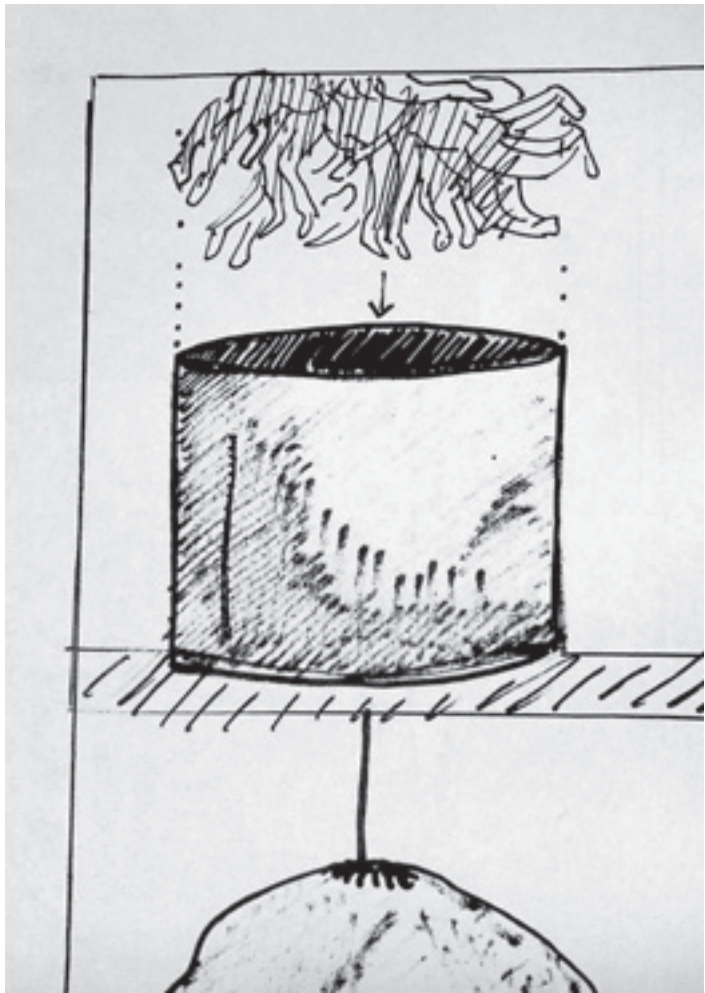
Poster for performance event *Performance Evening* at the Idea Warehouse, May 2-3, 1975



Slingshot from performance event *Performance Evening* at the Idea Warehouse, May 2-3, 1975

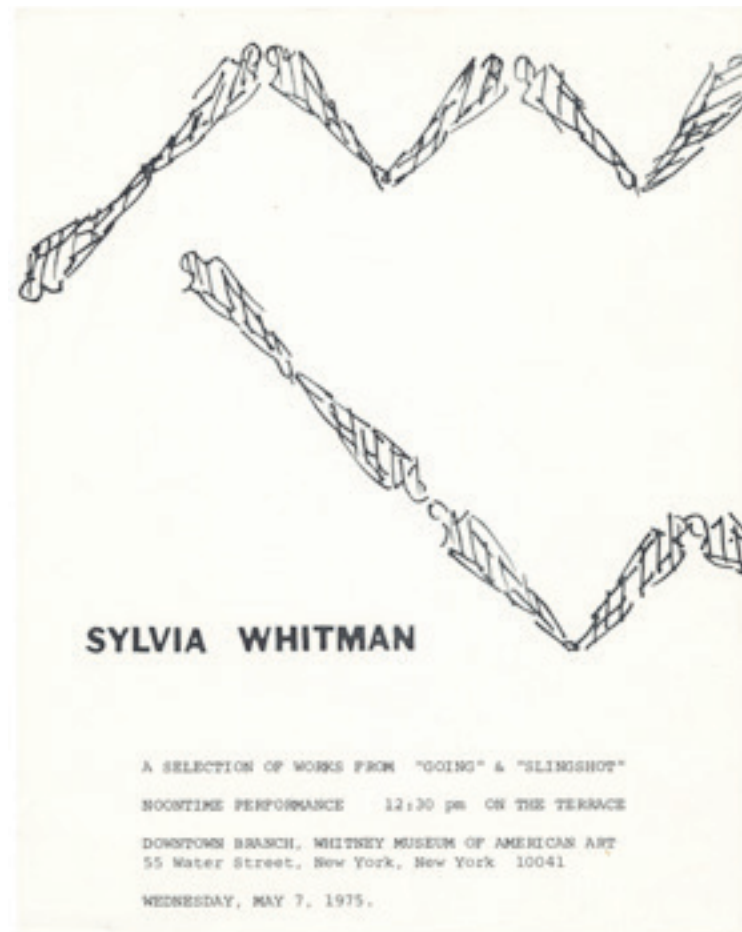


Sketches for performance *Magnets*, 1975 (not realized, left) and *Slingshot*, 1975 (right)



Sketch for (left) and performance (right) of *Green Bag*, from performance event *Performance Evening* at the Idea Warehouse, May 2–3, 1975

**SELECTION OF WORKS (1975)
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART,
DOWNTOWN BRANCH, NEW YORK, NY**

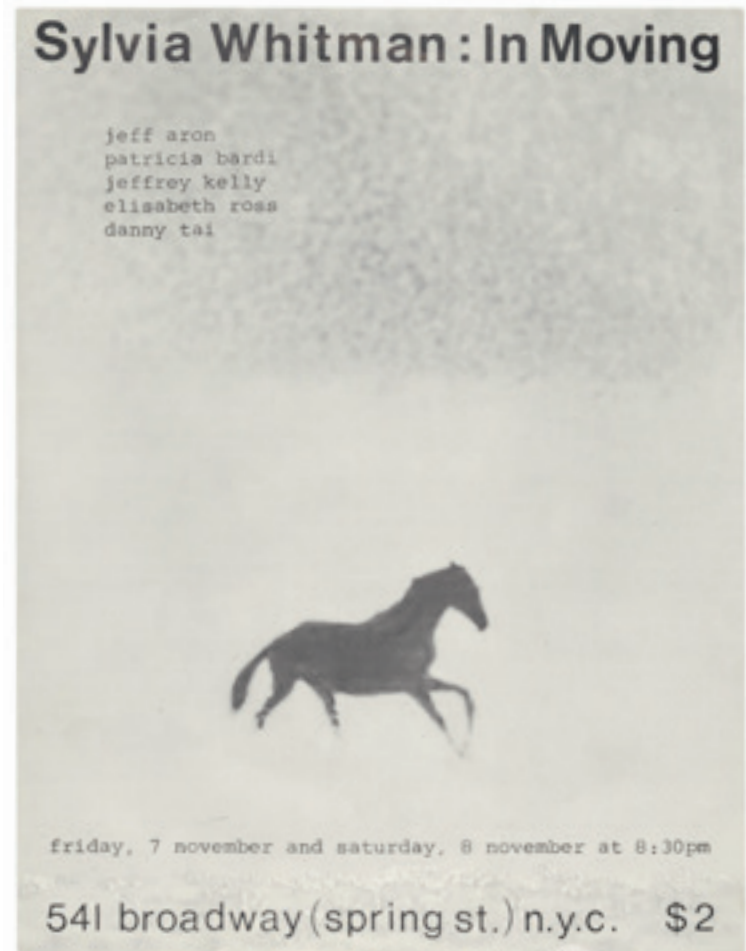


A Selection of Works took place at the Whitney's Downtown Branch at 55 Water Street and included performances from the events *Going* and *Slingshot*. Palacios Whitman had previously performed at the Whitney's Downtown Branch as a dancer in a piece by Trisha Brown. The venue was one of several emergent spaces for experimental and performance art at which Palacios Whitman staged her work.

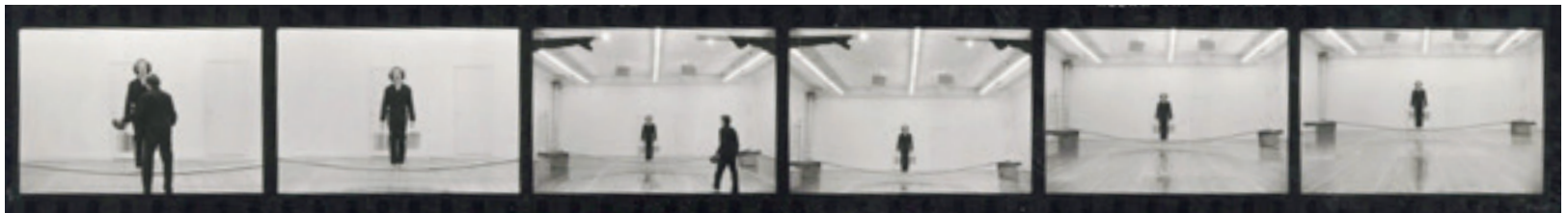
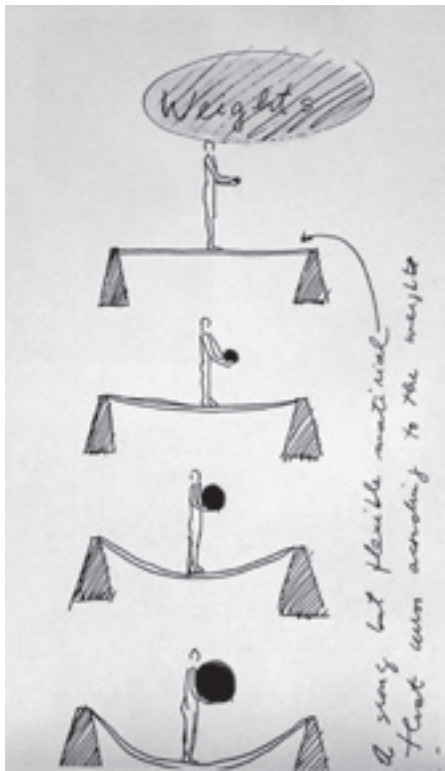
Poster for performance event *A Selection of Two Works* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown Branch, May 7, 1975

IN MOVING (1975)
TRISHA BROWN STUDIO, NEW YORK, NY

Another performance event at Trisha Brown's studio, *In Moving* (1975), includes one of Palacios Whitman's better-known pieces, *Cat's Cradle*. Inspired by the children's game, *Cat's Cradle* is performed with six people whose bodies take the place of fingers. Using a loop and rope, the performers enlarge the game to life-size proportions and create various geometric designs. Other performances included in this event are *Human Paper Coil* (formerly known as *Wearing a Spiral Floor*), *Elephant Trunk*, *Black Rectangle Passing*, *Curve and Weight*, *Legs*, *Red Cone*, and *Horses*.

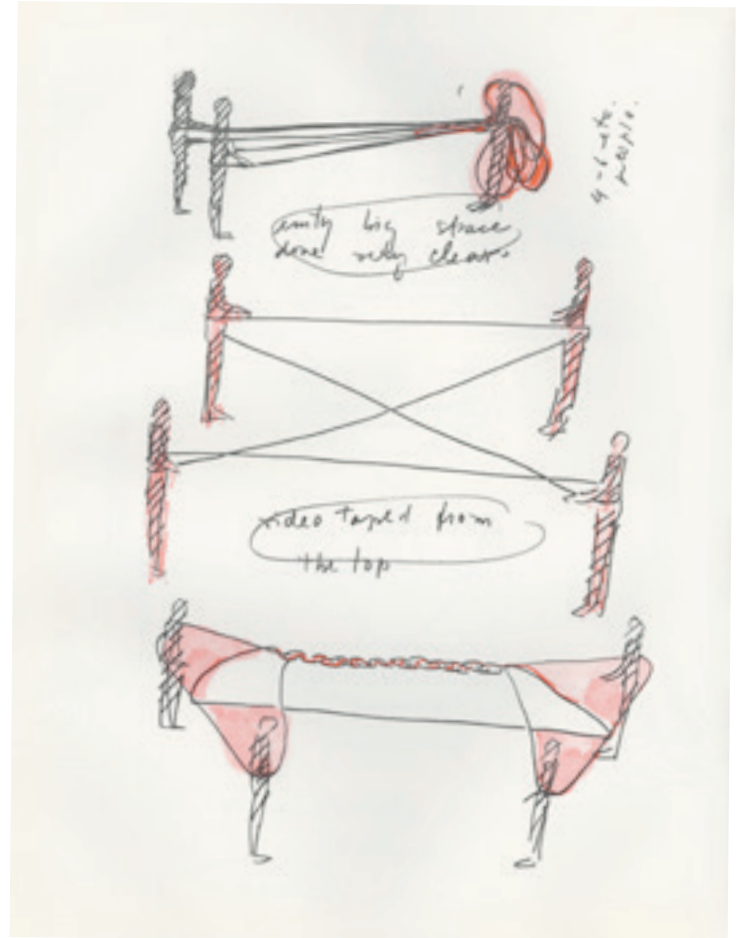
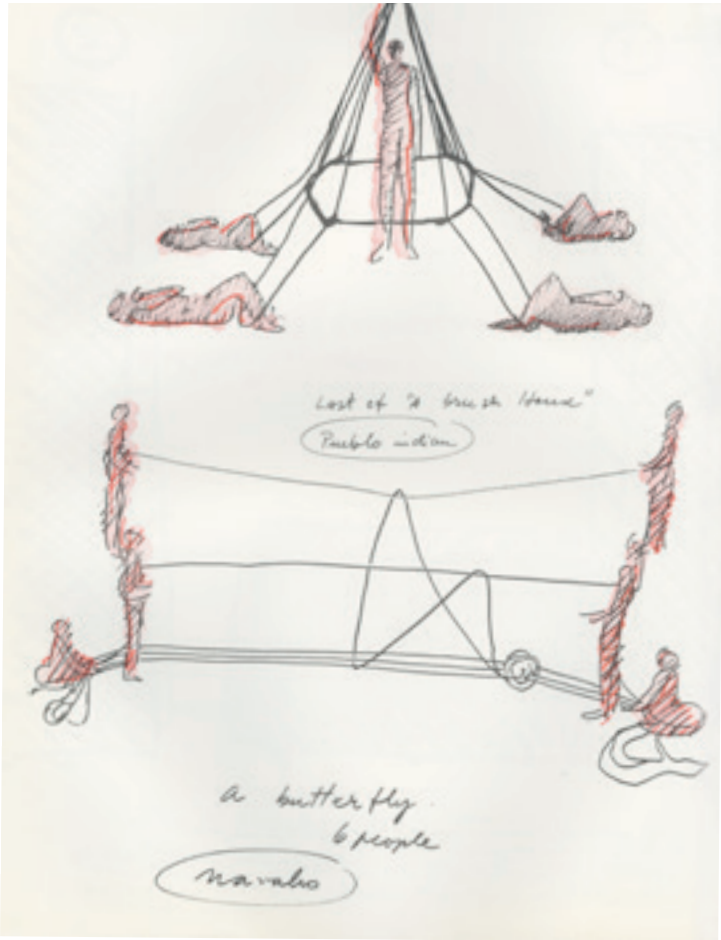


Poster for performance event *In Moving* at Trisha Brown Studio, November 7–8, 1975



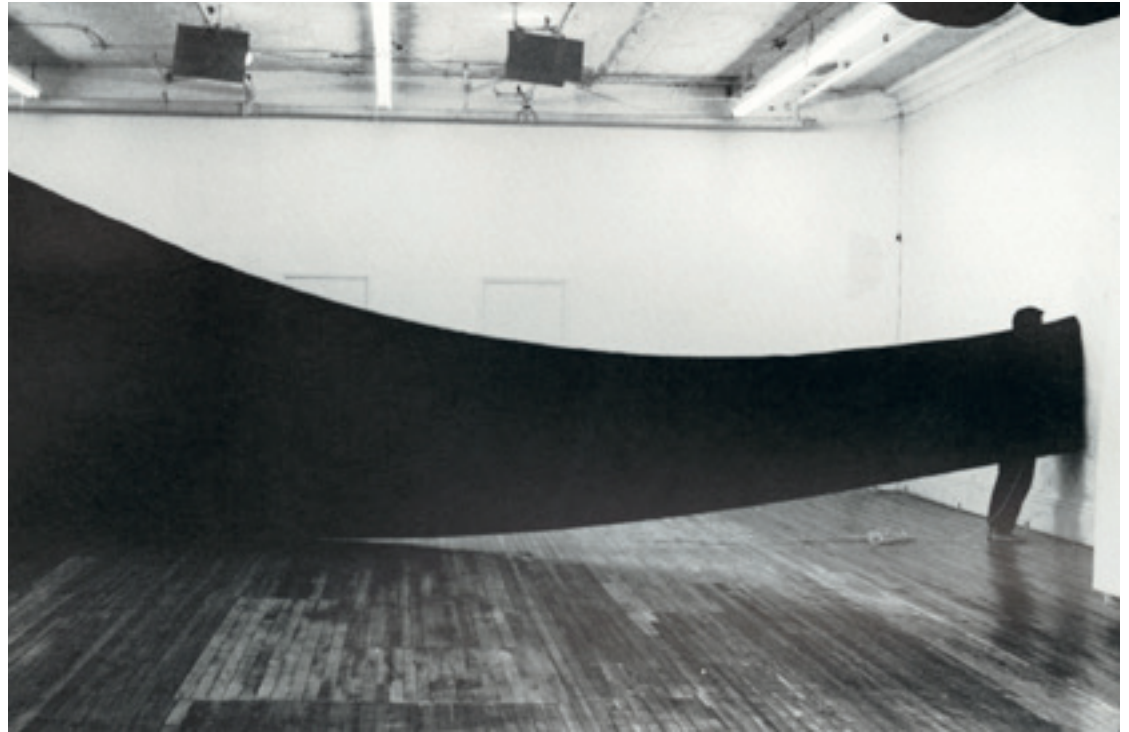
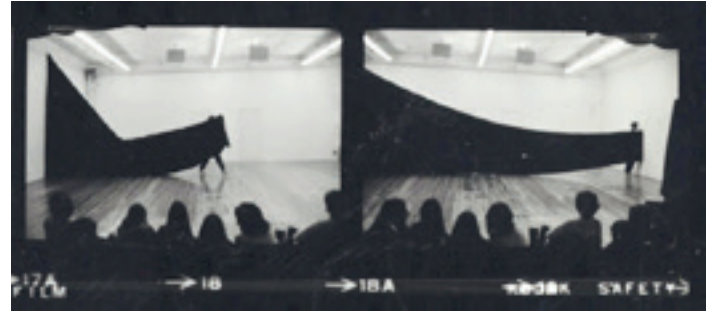
Sketch for and performance of *Curve and Weight*, from performance event *In Moving* at Trisha Brown Studio, November 7–8, 1975

Following spread: Sketches for and performance of *Cat's Cradle*, from performance event *In Moving* at Trisha Brown Studio, November 7–8, 1975





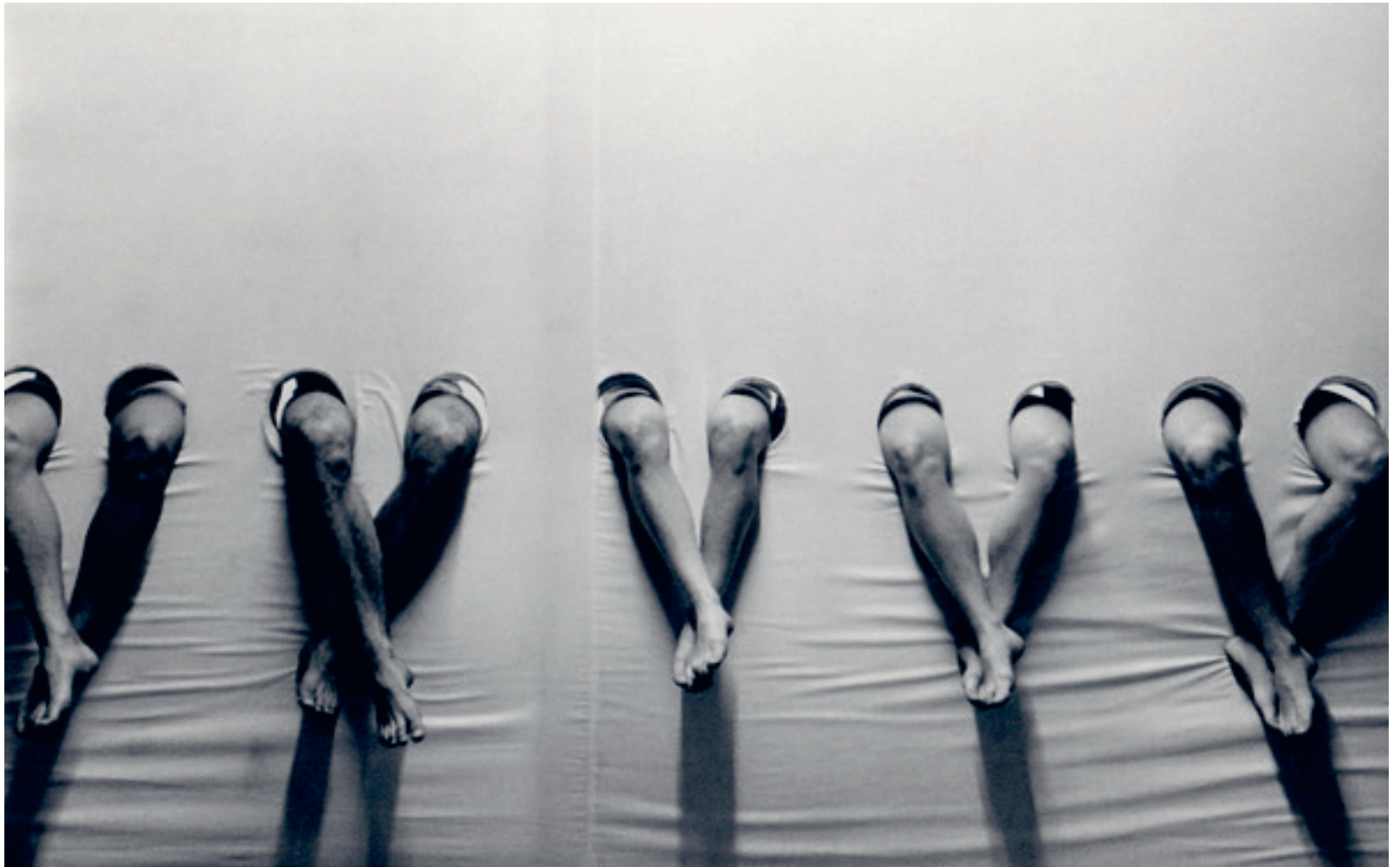
Performance of *Cat's Cradle*, from performance event *In Moving* at Trisha Brown Studio, November 7–8, 1975



Sketches for and performance of *Elephant Trunk*, from performance event *In Moving* at Trisha Brown Studio, November 7–8, 1975



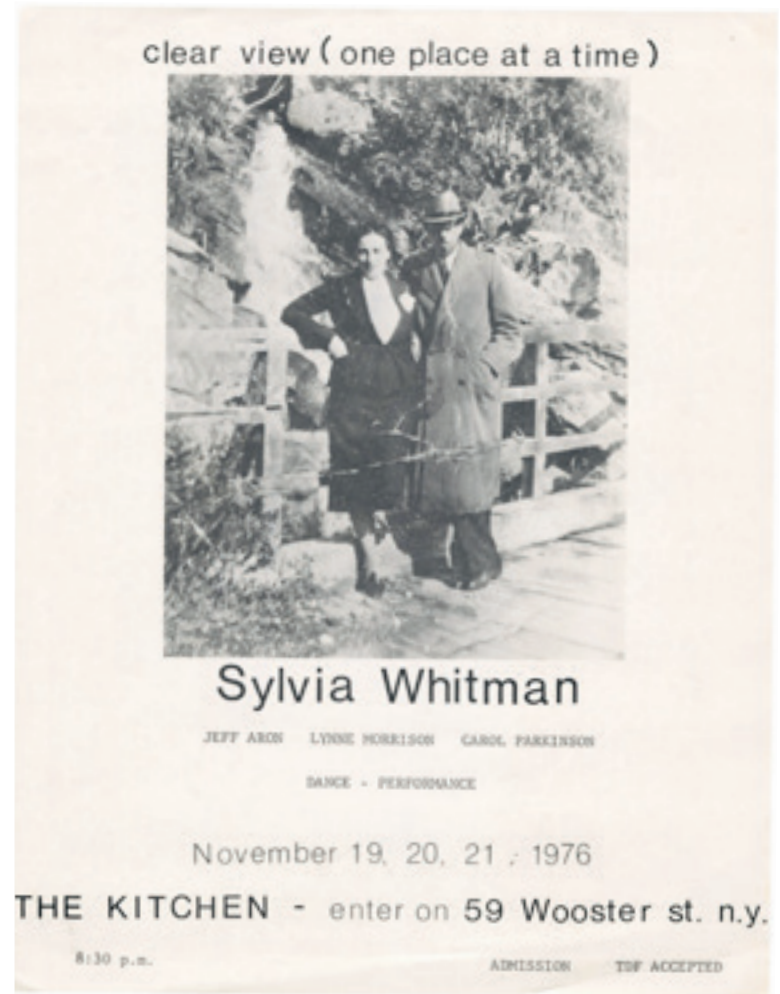
Performance of *Human Paper Coil*, from performance event *In Moving* at Trisha Brown Studio, November 7–8, 1975



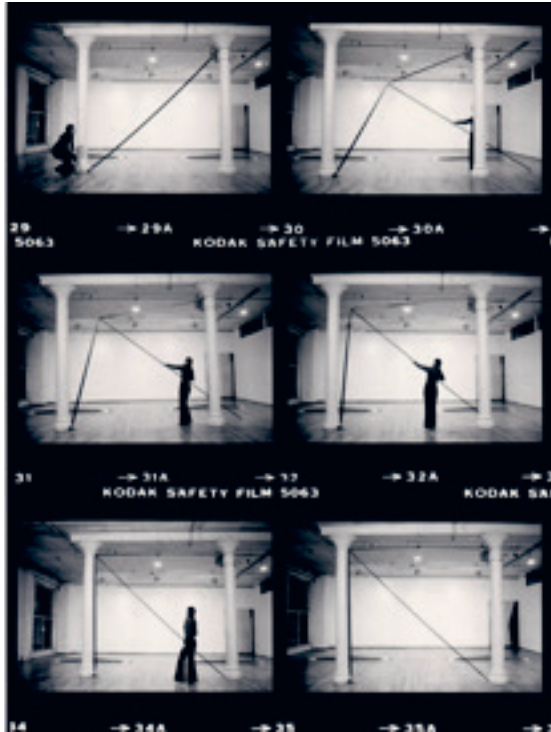
Performance of *Legs*, from performance event *In Moving*
at Trisha Brown Studio November 7–8, 1975

**CLEAR VIEW (ONE PLACE AT A TIME) (1976)
THE KITCHEN, NEW YORK, NY**

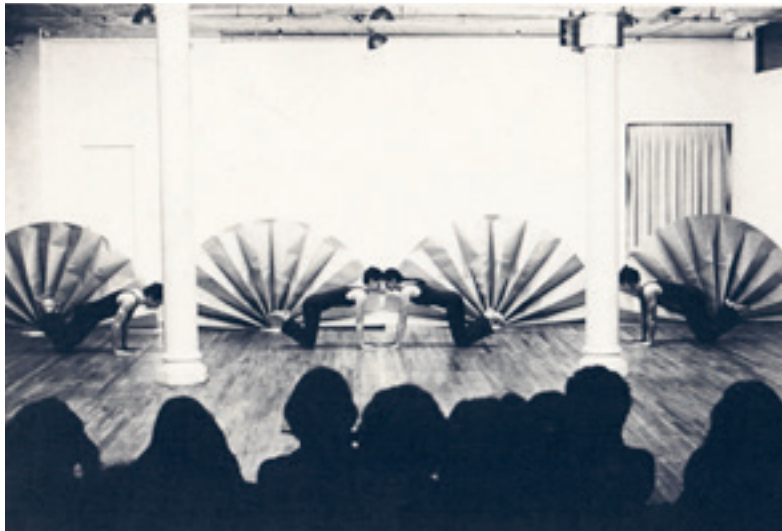
Clear View (one place at a time) (1976) was a performance event at The Kitchen, another avant-garde art space founded in the early 1970s. For the invitation, Palacios Whitman utilized a photograph of her parents, an image that she would return to in her practice in the years to come. Other personal connections can be found in performances like *My Brother Rehearsing for the Funeral of Father Mayer in 1951*, which was based on a memory from her own childhood. In other pieces, such as *Change of Line*, Palacios Whitman continues her investigations of movement and drawing in space. In the work, a performer changes the position of a cord diagonally traversing the gallery space with a long stick. Other performances from this evening included *Top of Heart*, *Introducing the Andrade Family*, *Fans and Horses*, *Cigar*, *Ironing*, and *With a Tree*.



Poster for performance event *Clear View (one place at a time)* at The Kitchen, November 19–21, 1976



Performance event *Clear View (one place at a time)*
at The Kitchen, November 19–21, 1976



Performance event *Clear View (one place at a time)*
at The Kitchen, November 19–21, 1976

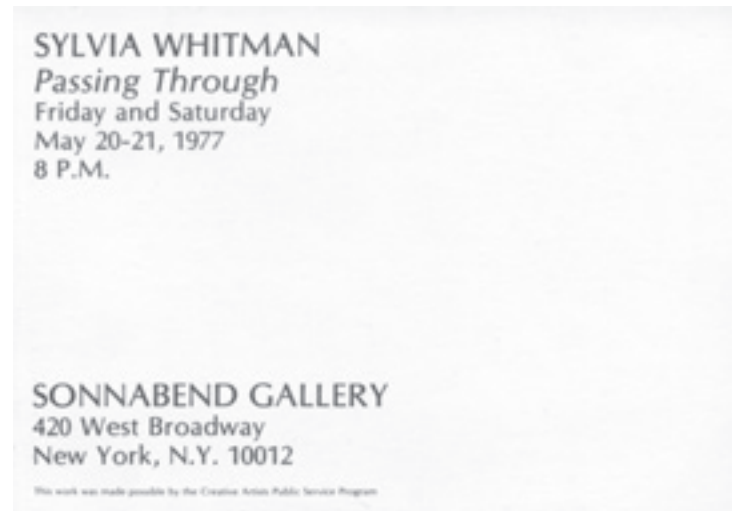


Performance of *Introducing the Andrade Family* from performance event *Clear View (one place at a time)* at The Kitchen, November 19–21, 1976

PASSING THROUGH (1977)
SONNABEND GALLERY, NEW YORK, NY



Passing Through (1977) was a performance event that took place at Sonnabend Gallery. This event included Palacios Whitman's best-known work from the 1970s, *Green Hands*, which stemmed from the idea of extending the body into space. In the performance, Palacios Whitman wore two large, flat, green gloves resembling hands with elongated fingers. The artist progressively moved the position of her body and arms to create different visual configurations. The difference of scale between the artist's body and the prosthetic hand lent the piece a humorous tone. The evening also included the performances *Cone*, *Cloud & Airplane* (also known together as *Passing Through Plane*), *Floating Stairs*, *Music Bag*, *Box*, *Volcano*, *Mummies*, *Paper Stairs*, and *Cup & Tail*.



Front (top) and back (bottom) of invitation postcard for performance event *Passing Through* at Sonnabend Gallery, May 20–21, 1977



Performance of *Music Bag* (left) and various pieces (right) from performance event *Passing Through* at Sonnabend Gallery, May 20–21, 1977



Performance of *Green Hands* (top) and *Floating Stairs* (bottom) from performance event *Passing Through* at Sonnabend Gallery, May 20–21, 1977



Performance of *Green Hands* (left) and *Floating Stairs* (right) from performance event *Passing Through* at Sonnabend Gallery, May 20–21, 1977

**TWO NOTEBOOKS (1977)
PROJECT STUDIOS ONE, QUEENS, NY**



This exhibition took place at Project Studios One, part of the experimental programming at P.S. 1, which would later become part of MoMA. *Two Notebooks* included work from a publication of the same name that Palacios Whitman released with painter Susan Weil the year prior. The exhibition represents each artists' exploration of ideas through their distinct mediums of performance (Palacios Whitman) and painting (Weil). Palacios Whitman displayed the props for her 1976 performance *Fans* (presented at The Kitchen) in the gallery space. Videotapes documentation of two past performances were shown on two Sundays during the run of the exhibition.

Front (top) and back (bottom) of invitation postcard for *Two Notebooks* exhibition at Project Studios One, 1977

**AROUND THE EDGE (1978)
TRUCK AND WAREHOUSE THEATER,
NEW YORK, NY**

Performed at Truck and Warehouse Theater, *Around the Edge* (1978) took place on a large theatre stage. Several of the performances in this event utilized Palacios Whitman's paper sculptures and oversized paper props. In *The House that Follows*, the artist attached a cardboard house to the performer with clear plastic so that it followed them as they move around the stage. In *Leaf*, a performer gradually dragged a large drawing of a leaf from one side of the stage to the other. The performances presented in this event include *Yellow Tube*, *Soft Frame for a Small Black Telephone*, *Right Time*, *Negatives*, *With Five Cups*, *Bed*, *Going In* (also known as *Pulling into Square*), *Leaf*, *The House that Follows*, *Man with Own Shadow*, *Half Shapes and Shadows* (also known as *Floating People*). David Tudor created music for this event.

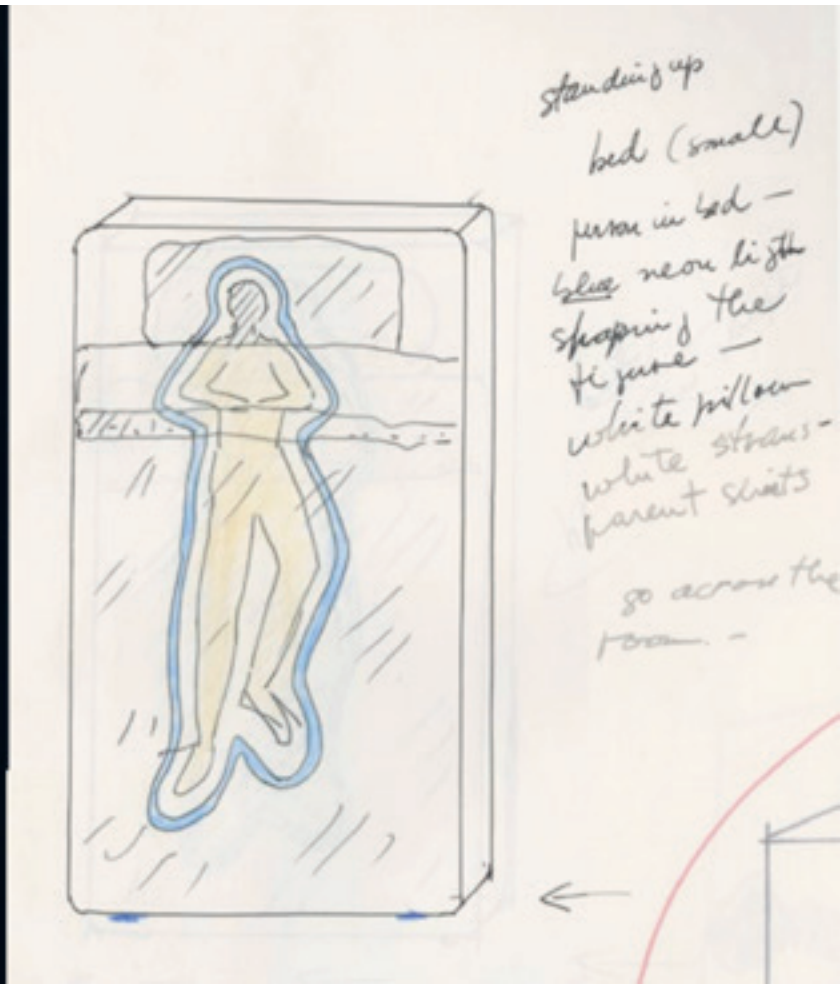


Performance event *Around the Edge* at Truck and Warehouse Theater, 1978





Previous: Performance event *Around the Edge* at Truck and Warehouse Theater, 1978



Sketch of and performance of *Bed*, from *Around the Edge* at Truck and Warehouse Theater, 1978



Performance of *Negatives*, from performance event *Around the Edge*
at Truck and Warehouse Theater, 1978

SOUTH (1979)
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, NEW YORK, NY

South (1979) was a performance event in which Palacios Whitman presented scenes informed by personal memories and reflections on her childhood in Chile and move to the United States. For example, in the performance *Wedding* the artist recreates the scene of her brother's wedding in Chile, while in *Airmail Envelope* she recreates a letter from her sister as an oversized paper prop manipulated by the performers. Palacios Whitman organized *South* into two acts or parts of what she called "images." Part 1 of the evening included *Horse*, *Wedding*, *Statue*, *Family Portrait*, *Shell*, *Ocean (swimming)*, and *Whale*. Part 2 included *Karate Jump*, *Airmail Envelope*, *Street Scene*, *No Arm People*, and *And Those of Stone*.



Poster for performance event *South* at the Guggenheim Museum, June 1–2, 1979



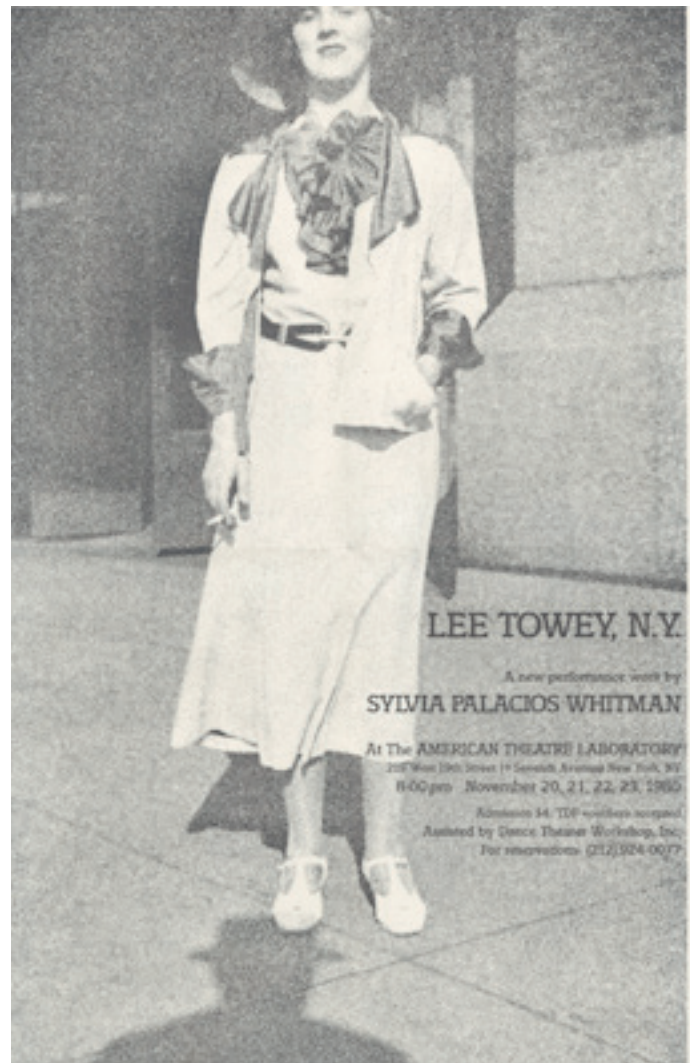
Performance of *Street Scene*, from performance event *South* at the Guggenheim Museum, June 1-2, 1979



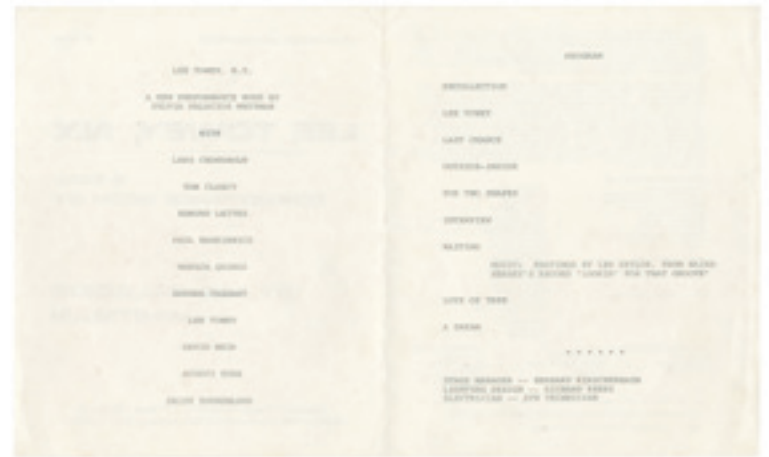
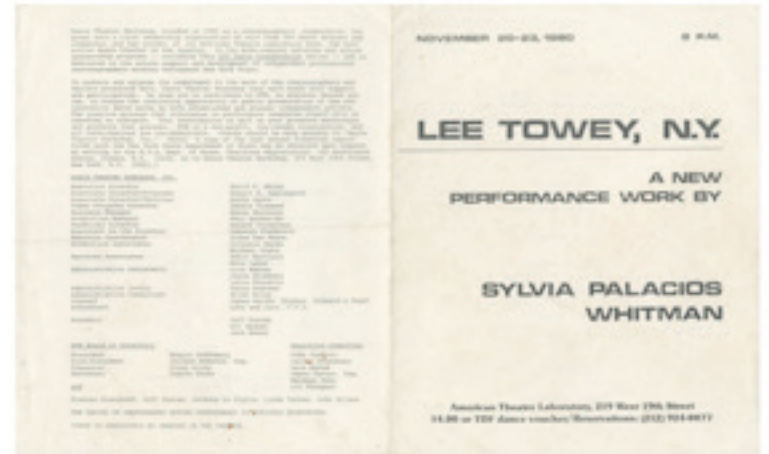
Performances of *Airmail Envelope* (top left), *Whale* (bottom left), and *Wedding* (right) from performance event *South* at the Guggenheim Museum, June 1–2, 1979

LEE TOWEY, N.Y. (1980)
AMERICAN THEATRE LABORATORY,
NEW YORK, NY

Lee Towey, N.Y. (1980) was a performance event at the American Theatre Laboratory. Palacios Whitman presented nine performances in this series, part of which were inspired by an encounter with an older woman who had shared lively accounts of her life with the artist. Collaborative performances like *Recollection* and *Interview*, in which the older woman reflects on her life and memories of New York City, are unique in Palacios Whitman's oeuvre; typically, the artist draws from autobiographical material. *Lee Towey, N.Y.* included *Recollection*, *Lee Towey*, *Last Chance*, *Outside-Inside*, *For Two Shapes*, *Interview*, *Waiting*, *Love of Tree*, and *A Dream*.

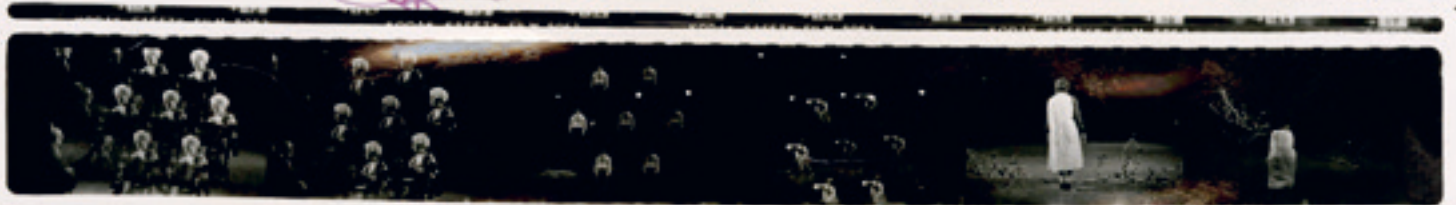


Poster for performance event *Lee Towey, N.Y.* at American Theatre Laboratory, November 20–23, 1980



Performances (left) and program (right) for performance event Lee Towey, N.Y. at American Theatre Laboratory, November 20–23, 1980

DATE



61-80-1

TECHNICAL DATA



Previous: Performance event *Lee Towey, N.Y.* at American Theatre Laboratory, November 20–23, 1980

Performance of *Love of Tree*, from performance event *Lee Towey, N.Y.* at American Theatre Laboratory, November 20–23, 1980

**PERSONAL IMAGES (1981)
MODERNA MUSEET, STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN**

Personal Images took place at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden. Palacios Whitman performed *Negatives*, originally presented in the 1978 performance event *Around the Edge* at Truck and Warehouse Theater (see pp. 116-117). In this piece, three performers walk in choreographed steps around the room, holding transparent banners with drawn images of anonymous men in trench coats and fedoras. As the performers move, they drop pieces of colored fabric around the floor and the banners billow, animating the unknown figures.



Poster for performance event *Personal Images* at Moderna Museet, April 22-24, 1981

SIREN (2017)
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
WARSAW, POLAND



Part of the group exhibition *The Beguiling Siren is thy Crest*, the video-performance *Siren* (2017) was displayed on the façade of the main pavilion of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Poland. This work incorporates mixed media works on paper (drawings with collage) Palacios Whitman created depicting hybrid figures made of contemporary and mythological imagery. The artist then juxtaposed the projections of these works on paper against backdrops that allude to oceanic themes (such as the ocean and whale tails). Such juxtaposition speaks to the artist's interest in how myths are created.

Video performance and installation *Siren* on the façade of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw during the opening of the exhibition *The Beguiling Siren is thy Crest*, March 25, 2017



Drawings for video performance *Siren*, 2017. Mixed media, 10½ × 14 inches (26.6 × 35.5 cm) each

LIVING ROOM (2017–2022)



In recent years, Palacios Whitman has utilized Kraft paper as a medium to create sculptures and works on paper. In *Living Room*, the artist uses Kraft paper, cardboard, and plastic to simulate a domestic environment. The plastic sheeting in the background is meant to recall a mountainside using lights to cast shadows. In Palacios Whitman's simulated living room, a paper chair invites the viewer to sit and relax and is sometimes staged with paper cups and bottles. Stacked cardboard shipping boxes are also "worn" by the artist like a suit covering her entire body as she moves around the living room.

Living Room, 2017–2022. Kraft paper, plastic, and cardboard, dimensions variable

FIRST NAMES OF PEOPLE I KNOW
(2020–2022)



First Names of People I Know is a Kraft paper sculpture which records the names of people that Palacios Whitman has encountered. Its form echoes a performance prop from the 1970s for the piece *Cone* (1977), in which the artist moves across the stage with a paper cone, using it to obscure her face as a large hat extends from her head. While not connected to a performance, the object speaks to Palacios Whitman's practice of crafting oversized props from paper.

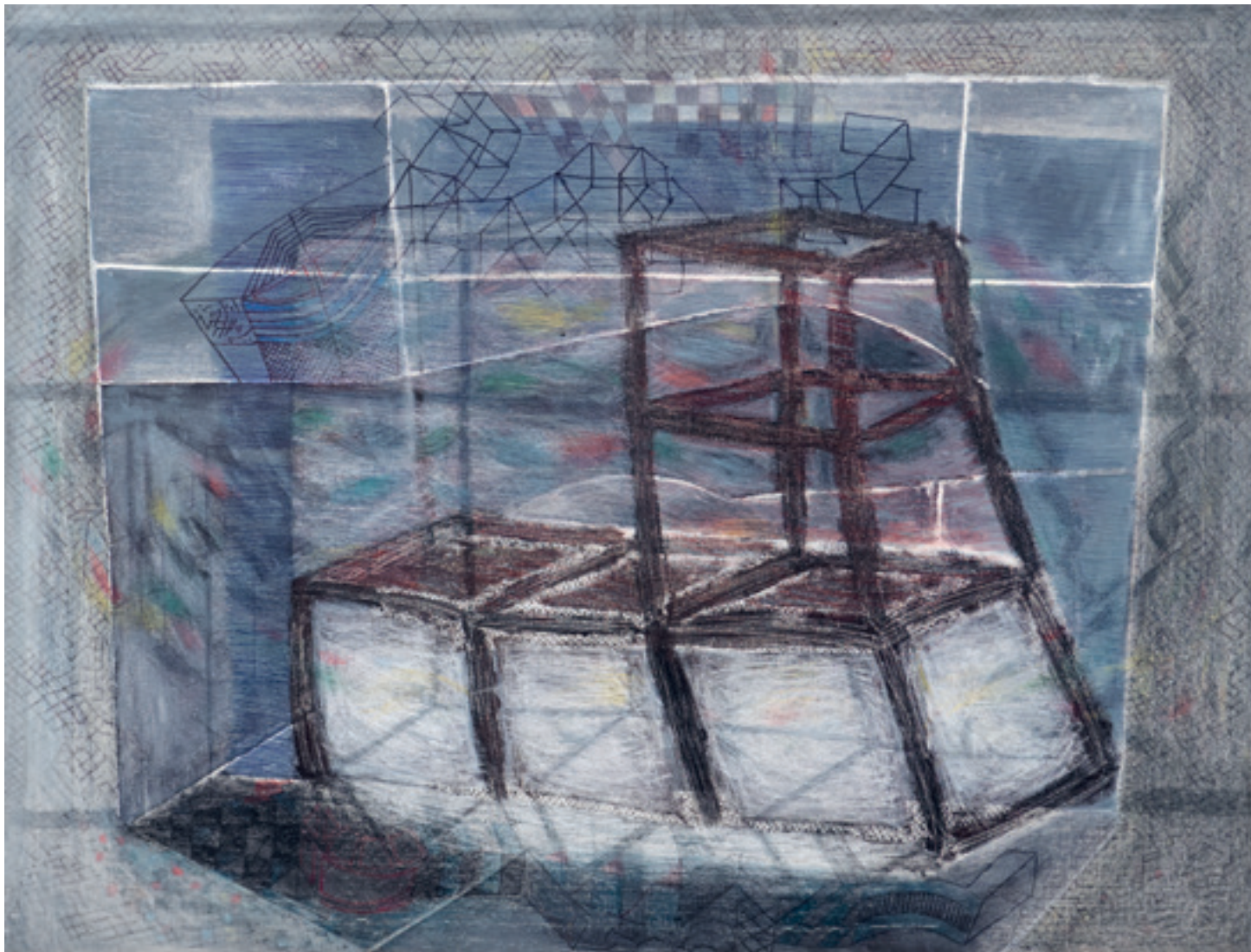
First Names of People I Know, 2020–2022. Kraft paper, 72 × 20 in. diameter
(182.8 × 50.8 cm)

WORKS ON PAPER AND PAINTINGS

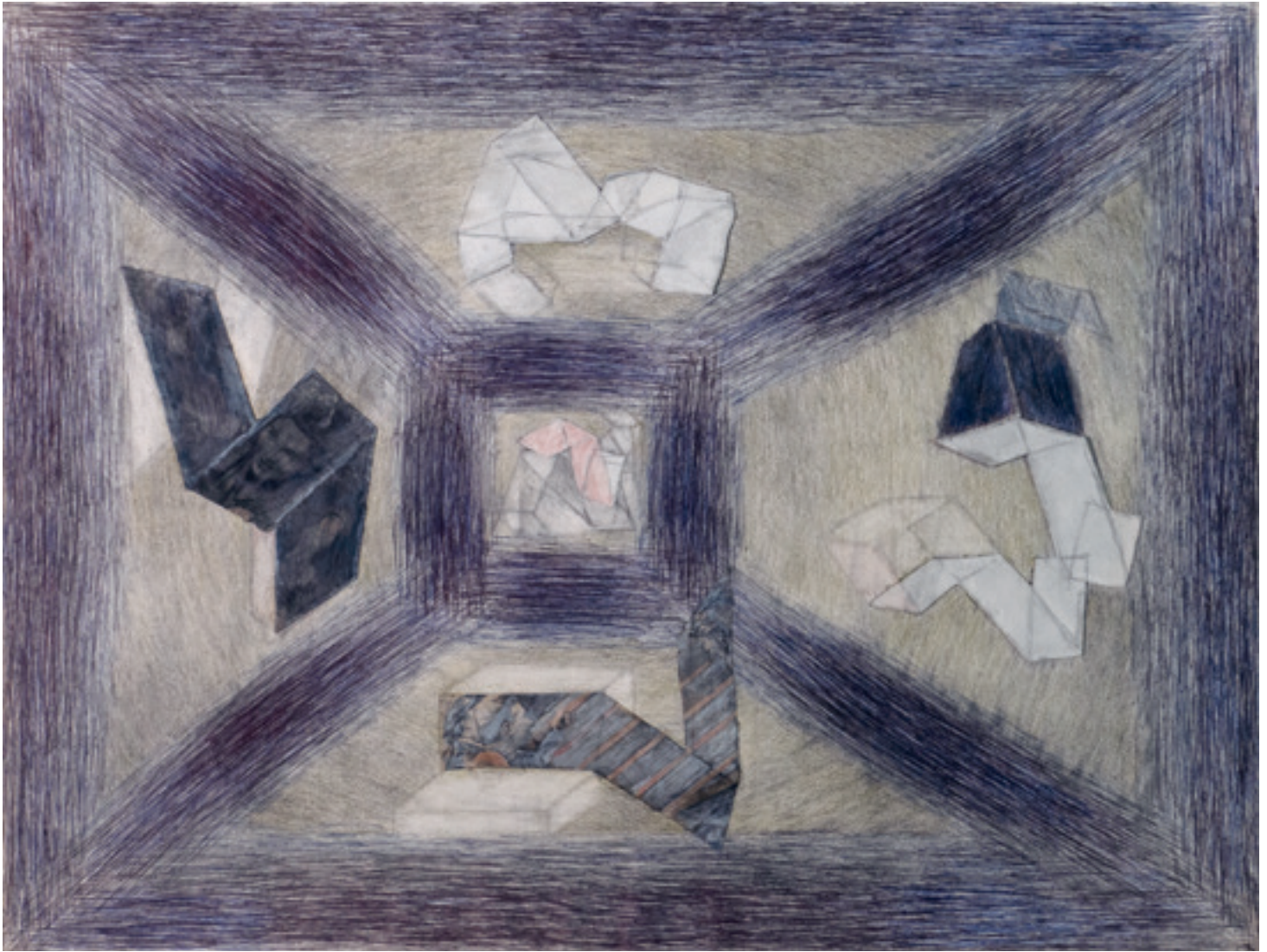
In the 1980s, Palacios Whitman began focusing on the creation of mixed media works on paper, including drawings, collages, and paintings. Mixed media works produced during the 1980s are filled with dense geometric designs and make use of dark colors and heavy shading. These works on paper establish the artist's interest in dense and layered compositions that incorporate found imagery. In the 2010s, Palacios Whitman emphasized lighter colors and softer shading to create collage-like arrangements of hands, faces, and bodily forms, among other figures. By the early 2020s, Palacios Whitman began making large-scale works on brown Kraft paper that are meant to be displayed on the floor and referred to as *Floor Drawings*. These works often play with perspective and present figures within surreal and geometric landscapes. In the *Floor Drawings*, Palacios Whitman returns to characters and scenes from earlier works such as the suited man in a fedora.



Untitled, 1986. Mixed media on paper, 24 1/8 × 18 inches (61.3 × 45.7 cm)



Untitled, 1978. Mixed media, 48 × 36 inches (121.9 × 91.4 cm)



Untitled, 1986. Mixed media on paper, 24 $\frac{1}{8}$ \times 18 inches (61.3 \times 45.7 cm)



Untitled, 1984. Mixed media, 40 × 36 inches (101.6 × 91.4 cm)



Untitled, 1985. Mixed media on paper, 13 ½ × 11 ¾ inches (34.3 × 29.8 cm)



Untitled, 1986. Mixed media, 27 ½ × 23 inches (69.9 × 58.4 cm)



Self Portrait, 2015. Mixed media on paper, 30 × 22 inches (76.2 × 55.9 cm)



Untitled, 2013. Mixed media on paper, 12 × 9 inches (30.5 × 22.9 cm)

Opposite: *Untitled*, 2012. Mixed media on paper, 12 × 9 inches (30.5 × 22.9 cm) (top); *Untitled*, 2013. Mixed media on paper, 12 × 9 inches (30.5 × 22.9 cm) (bottom)





Untitled, 2023. Mixed media, 33 $\frac{3}{4}$ \times 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (85.7 \times 41.9 cm)



Banana, 2020. Mixed media, 24 × 46 inches overall (61 × 116.8 cm)



Tragedy, 2013–2014. Mixed media on paper, 40 × 35 inches (101.6 × 88.9 cm)



Untitled, 2022. Mixed media on paper, 36 × 24 inches (91.4 × 61 cm)



One Finger, Two Finger, Three Finger, Four, 2019. Mixed media on paper
24 $\frac{1}{8}$ \times 18 inches (61.3 \times 45.7 cm)



Great American Legs, 2019. Mixed media, 24 × 18 inches (61 × 45.7 cm)



Floor Drawing, 2020–2022. Mixed media on Kraft paper, 40 × 60 inches
(101.6 × 152.4 cm)



Floor Drawing, 2020–2022. Mixed media on Kraft paper, 34 × 60 inches
(86.4 × 152.4 cm)



*Floor Drawing, 2020–2022. Mixed media on Kraft paper,
67 × 60 × 2 ½ inches (170.2 × 152.4 × 6.4 cm)*



*Floor Drawing, 2020–2022. Mixed media on Kraft paper,
36 × 60 inches (91.4 × 152.4 cm)*



Floor Drawing, 2020–2022. Mixed media on Kraft paper,
76 × 36 inches (193 × 91.4 cm)

EXHIBITION HISTORY

- 1974 *Pamplona Stones*, with Trisha Brown. Performance, June 11–12, 383 West Broadway, New York, NY
Going. Performance event, October 10–11, Trisha Brown Studio, New York, NY
Artists as Filmmakers. Group exhibition, December 2, Artists Space, New York, NY
Soup & Tart. Series of performance sessions organized by Jean Dupuy, The Kitchen, New York, NY
- 1975 *Metroline*. Group exhibition, University of Colorado, Denver
Performance Evening. Performance event, May 2–3, the Idea Warehouse, New York, NY
A Selection of Works. Performance event, May 7, Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown Branch, New York, NY
In Moving. Performance event, November 7–8, Trisha Brown Studio, New York, NY
- 1976 *Clear View (one place at a time)*. Performance event, November 19–21, The Kitchen, New York, NY
- 1977 *Passing Through*. Performance event, May 20–21, Sonnabend Gallery, New York, NY
Two Notebooks. Group exhibition, March 10–20, Project Studios One, Queens, NY
- 1978 *Around the Edge*. Performance event, Truck and Warehouse Theater, New York, NY
- 1979 *Eighth Season 1978–79*. Group exhibition, Buecker & Harpsichords, New York, NY
South. Performance event, June 1–2, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY
- 1980 *Lee Towey, N.Y.* Performance event, November 20–23, American Theatre Laboratory, New York, NY
- 1981 *Personal Images*. Performance event, April 22–24, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2013 *Evening of Performance*. Performance event, December 13–14, Broadway 1602, New York, NY
Rituals of a Rented Island: Object Theatre, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama Manhattan, 1970–1980. Group exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
- 2014 *Human Paper Coil, Negatives, Mummies, Cat's Cradle, Elephant Trunk, Green Hands, Cup & Tail*. Performance, January 18, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- 2017 *The Beguiling Siren is thy Crest*. Group exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, Poland
Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985. Group exhibition, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Brooklyn Museum, NY; Pinacoteca, São Paulo, Brasil
- 2018 *Around the Edge*. Performance event, March 23, Tate Modern, London, UK
- 2019 *Visit to the Monkey and other Childhood Stories*. Performance, October 26–27, New York University, NY
- 2021 *This Must Be the Place: Latin American Artists in New York, 1965–1975*. Group exhibition, Art at Americas Society, New York, NY
Alrededor del Borde / Around the Edge. Solo exhibition, Centro Nacional de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago, Chile

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Aimé Iglesias Lukin is Director and Chief Curator of Art at Americas Society. Born in Buenos Aires, she received her PhD in art history from Rutgers University with a dissertation titled "This Must Be the Place: Latin American Artists in New York 1965–1975." Her research received grants from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Terra and Andrew W. Mellon Foundations, and the ICAA Peter C. Marzio Award from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. She completed her M.A. at The Institute of Fine Arts at New York University and her undergraduate studies in art history at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. She curated exhibitions independently in museums and cultural centers and previously worked in the Modern and Contemporary Art Department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art, and Fundación PROA in Buenos Aires.

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CREDITS

All artworks and archival and documentary images are courtesy the artist unless otherwise noted.

Archival photographs and documents are sourced from the Sylvia Palacios Whitman Archive unless otherwise noted.

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Sylvia Palacios Whitman: To Draw a Line with the Body

Curated by Aimé Iglesias Lukin and Rachel Remick

June 7–July 22, 2023

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