



QUEENS MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Queens Museum presents *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art*
The first survey of the 50-year career of the pioneering performance and public artist features rarely seen works, new publication and slate of public events

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Queens, NY (August 17, 2016) — The Queens Museum is thrilled to announce *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art*, the first survey exhibition of the pioneering American artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles. On view September 18, 2016 through February 19, 2017, the exhibition features newly imagined historic performances, sculptural works, and current works-in-process as new site-specific installations, often using the unique features of the Queens Museum. These include a light path tracking her seminal performance 1979 *Touch Sanitation* across the surface of the *Panorama of the City of New York* and *Pulse II*, fourteen Sanitation truck “flashers” blinking and signaling along the Museum’s west façade. The exhibition also includes photo and text based works related to dozens of performances that ranged from hours to months in duration as well as proposals, planning documents, and models for major realized and unrealized temporary and permanent public projects.

“Over the course of her groundbreaking career, Ukeles has addressed some of the most complex societal issues of our times, including the role of women in society, environmental sustainability, freedom, and civic responsibility,” said Laura Raicovich, President and Executive Director of the Queens Museum. “Her work is a guidestar and inspiration to new generations of artists working to engage social issues, and the character, inclusiveness, reciprocity, and scalability of Ukeles’ work embodies the ‘openness’ that is part of the distinctive mission of the Queens Museum.”

Dedicating all of the Museum’s temporary exhibition spaces to one artist—a first for the Museum—*Maintenance Art* is the most significant presentation of Ukeles’ work ever assembled in one place. The exhibition

is organized by Queens Museum curator Larissa Harris and guest curator Patricia C. Phillips.

"As the New York Sanitation Department's Artist-in-Residence, Mierle Laderman Ukeles' art has brought wide public attention to the difficult work performed each and every day by the dedicated men and women of the DSNY," said Commissioner Kathryn Garcia. "From *Touch Sanitation*, in 1979 to her current project at Freshkills Park, the department's relationship with Ukeles has demonstrated how effective and thought provoking an artist residency can be and served as a model for current and future city agency artist residencies."

With works dating from 1962 to 2016, *Maintenance Art* traces Ukeles' career as a feminist performance artist, her almost forty-year tenure as the official, unsalaried Artist-in-Residence at New York City's Department of Sanitation, and as an artist whose Jewish faith has fueled a firm belief in the capacity of the human spirit.

"I became an artist to be free: free to use the gifts given to me by my artist heroes. In 1968, we were blessed to have a child and we fell madly in love with her. I became a maintenance worker, not only to do the work necessary to keep her alive but to do the work to help her thrive! I discovered that heroes Jackson [Pollock], Marcel [Duchamp] and Mark [Rothko] didn't change diapers; I fell out of their picture. I didn't want to be two separate people—the maintenance worker and the free artist—living in one body," said Ukeles. "In October, 1969, an epiphany! If I am the boss of my boundless freedom, I name Maintenance – Art. In a quiet rage, in one sitting, I wrote the *MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART, 1969!* At that time, there was no recognition, and very little honor for service work and service workers: those at home and those who work outside. And little care for the needs of the finite planet-as-home. So I set out to make this visible, i.e. to make a revolution with everyone in the picture. After making maintenance art myself and with one or two workers, then 300 maintenance workers in 1976, I got a call from the Sanitation Department: "How would you like to make art with 10,000 NYC sanitation workers?" "I'll be right over." I replied. I have been very lucky to have officials and workers and the art world willing to open all the doors, to take a risk and say 'Yes. Yes!' Welcome to the results."

Exhibition highlights include:

- *Early Work (Air Art)*

Engaged with the ecological and the urban since the early 60s, Ukeles proposed and fabricated inflatable sculptures and wearables in organic shapes for appending to existing architecture, engaging land, sea and air, and/or creating independent architecture for individuals and groups. After use, they were

supposed to be deflated, folded, and put away. But the facture, care and maintenance (they leaked!) of these symbols of freedom were so serious that they, along with the birth of her first child, helped trigger the insights in *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*. Drawings and plans for a selection of *Air Art* will be on view for the first time anywhere.

- *Maintenance Art*

The original four page artwork, *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!* is presented alone on a wall as the artist considers it: "a sculpture that is a text." Drawing on the principles of her *Manifesto*, Ukeles, along with works that traveled with the exhibition, conceived more than a dozen Maintenance Art Performances for curator Lucy Lippard's traveling exhibition of feminist conceptual art, *c. 7500* (1973-1974). Along with washing its steps and gallery floors, Ukeles intervened in the Wadsworth Athenaeum's security and conservation systems; raked and tracked falling leaves on the campus of Vassar College; scrubbed a Soho sidewalk in front of the original A.i.R. Gallery and interviewed passersby about their maintenance habits. The exhibition includes the entire Maintenance Art Works series and newly discovered ephemera related to this extraordinary body of work.

An important leap came in 1976, when Ukeles invited 300 maintenance workers at a downtown office building to consider one hour of their eight hour work shift to be "maintenance art." She then took Polaroids of the employees at work and asked them whether, in their opinion, her camera had captured them during their hour of art, or their seven hours of work. The 704 original Polaroids, labeled with each workers' decision, that make up *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day* will be on view for the first time since the work was created in 1976.

When a review of the above exhibition suggested that the Sanitation Department (affected by NYC's fiscal crisis) might want to apply for funds for performance art, Ukeles contacted and was welcomed by the Commissioner of the Department of Sanitation into what was at first an undefined research role but would evolve into the unique position of official, unsalaried Artist-in-Residence. This provided Ukeles an opportunity to scale up her engagement with maintenance as a cultural idea in the "big leagues" of sanitation and continues to this day.

- *Touch Sanitation Performance (1979-1980) and Touch Sanitation Show (1984)*

Ukeles' first performance with DSNY was *Touch Sanitation*, in which she faced and shook the hand of all 8,500 Sanitation employees as they did their work on streets and Sanitation facilities and offices, saying to each, "Thank you for keeping New York City alive." Tiny, moving lights installed on the Museum's *Panorama of the City of New York* map the complex, spiraling route Ukeles took while executing this eleven-month performance, an unprecedented act of alliance across gender boundaries in an attempt to forge a grand coalition between ecofeminism and service work. A 20-minute sound piece created with Stephen Erickson from field recordings of the entire Sanitation system and Ukeles' conversations with "sanmen" will be reconfigured for the hall containing the *Panorama* surrounding the visitor with the sounds of the city and the voices of its workers. For this exhibition, Ukeles has also assembled new works relating to this performance from hundreds of photographs, telexes, annotated maps and related ephemera.

One Year's Worktime II, in which a full year of work shifts in the form of clock faces have been silk-screened over a gradient of colors representing the seasons, fully occupies the Queens Museum's 100-foot, 45-foot High Large Wall. *Pulse II* delicately animates its 200-foot west facade with fourteen three light blinkers salvaged from the backs of defunct Sanitation trucks. These works (and above mentioned sound piece, *Trax for Trux and Barges*) were originally seen in Ukeles' massive and complex two site *Touch Sanitation Show, 1984*, which is itself presented to the public for the first time in this exhibition, through architectural models, planning documents, and newly unearthed photo- and video-documentation.

- *Work Ballets (1983-2012) + Social Mirror (1983)*

Since 1983 Ukeles has staged seven *Work Ballets* in New York, Rotterdam, Pittsburgh, Givors, France, and Echigo Tsumari, Japan, working with the drivers of heavy duty vehicles to co-design delightful performances in which their work trucks and barges, often laden with hundreds of tons of recyclables, are the dancers. For the first time, video documentation of six of these ballets will be on display, along with selected choreography drawings used in planning sessions. *Social Mirror (1983)*, a garbage truck clad in mirror created as part of her first work ballet, and featured in exhibitions and parades ever since, will appear at the Museum's east entrance on Saturdays throughout the exhibition, and on

the Sundays when exhibition-related events are scheduled, for a total of 31 days on view.

- *Ceremonial Arch* (1988/1994/2016)

First created in 1988 for an exhibition at the World Financial Center and newly recreated for this exhibition, *Ceremonial Arch* is a celebration of the hands and enduring spirits that keep New York City functioning. The social process that defines this work is a “harvest” of thousands of work gloves being collected now from workers at a range of city agencies, ConEdison, and the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA). These gloves sprout in a leafy canopy that reaches more than 14 feet high and 9 feet long over six sturdy columns wrought from the tools of the trade at the FDNY, NYPD, DSNY, NYC DOT, MTA, and USPS.

- *Inner City Outer Space: Landfills and Transformation* (1978-Present)

Since the start of her tenure at the Department of Sanitation, Ukeles has envisioned landfills as new public spaces—earthworks that we ourselves have made and own. A range of proposals and artworks from nearly forty years of work will be displayed together for the first time on five walls surrounding Queens Museum’s central skylit atrium, both focusing on Fresh Kills—one of the world’s largest landfills—and sites in other cities and countries. *Landing*, estimated to be constructed in 2018, is a three part work: an overlook and two earthworks sited at the heart of what was formerly the Fresh Kills Landfill and what is becoming Freshkills Park. A life size photo of the two-mile-long view across the transforming site allows viewers to envision what it will be like to experience the completed work.

- *Repair Room* including *Light Up Philadelphia* (1987), *Unburning Freedom Hall* (1997) and *Birthing Tikkun Olam* (2008/2009/2016)

Repair Room presents new iterations of an unrealized citywide public project and two large site specific installations. Taken together, the works suggest the possibility of repair and transformation of a radically torn social fabric. *Light Up Philadelphia* (1987) proposed to suffuse the monumental statues of different races on Philadelphia’s City Hall and eleven other sites around the city with healing light. Research for this proposal uncovered the story of Pennsylvania “Freedom” Hall, a “Temple of Free Speech” built by women and free African Americans in 1838 then burned to the ground by rioters three days later.

Originally installed at MoCA, Los Angeles in 1997, *Unburning Freedom Hall* used the same story as a response to the riots sparked by the 1992 Rodney King police abuse trial, the worst civil disturbance in the history of the US. Repair Room contains photo-documentation of the installation—a central blue glass table amidst mountains made of shattered glass—and video documentation of the collaborative process in which a range of municipal workers, students and museum visitors produced “Unburnings,” 1,700 glass jars containing unique artworks in an effort to “unburn” or undo civic trauma. The *Peace Table* (1997) was also a site for *Peace Talks* convenings on different kinds of peace from personal to citywide.

Birthing Tikkun Olam, first installed at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, is based on the artist’s interpretation of the Kabbalistic creation story. In a symbolic assembly of objects including a broken crystal goblet, a curtain or “veil” and many hand mirrors with taped blank covenants on the back, visitors are asked to answer Ukeles’ call to look in the mirror then to create a covenant with her and the artwork by committing themselves to acts of “tikkun olam” or repairing the world. Embodying the call and response relationship between Ukeles and members of communities she has engaged, the grouping of these works crystallizes her deep engagement with human agency and transformation, secular and spiritual.

- Talks at the *Peace Table* and an artist’s tour of Fresh Kills

Ukeles and the museum have co-conceived a series of public programs during the course of the exhibition to engage and contemporize some of its important ideas and themes. Four three-hour roundtable conversations with activists, artists, city workers and other experts at the *Peace Table* (1997) (see above) which hangs from the 50-foot vaulted ceiling in the center of the Museum, will be rounded out by a guided tour of Freshkills Park including the future site of Ukeles’ major public artwork *Landing*. The Queens Museum Education Department will also hold its classes and workshops around the *Peace Table*.

Events and Public Programming Schedule:

September 25th 2016: *Artist in/of the City*, an exploration of embedded artist residencies in city agencies, anchored by Tom Finkelpearl, Commissioner of New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and featuring artists and city representatives from around the country.

November 13, 2016: *Garbage: The Future*, anchored by Kathryn Garcia, Commissioner of the Sanitation Department, and featuring innovators in recycling, reduction and reuse.

November 20, 2016: Tour of Fresh Kills, with the artist and city officials to learn about the 3,000-acre Fresh Kills transformation and the process behind remediation and its relationship to Ukeles' land art Percent for Art commission *Landing*, the first permanent work of art to be built in the future Freshkills Park.

January 15, 2017: *A Day of Peace Readings*, on the occasion of Martin Luther King Day, texts on the topic of peace will be gathered from many sources, cultures, and languages. Volunteers will read them out loud all day long so that "a momentum of energy toward the possibility of peace will fill up the soaring skylit space of the museum." (Ukeles)

February 5, 2017: *Human Agency: A Day of Transfer and Exchange*, in a performance with the artist, as a part of *REPAIRING THE WORLD / TIKKUN OLAM*, visitors are invited to commit to "repair the world" in exchange for a hand-mirror, and will also be introduced to a Fresh Kills-related proposal for one million people to participate in a public artwork for *Fresh Kills: Public Offerings Made By All, Redeemed by All*. The performance will conclude with a convening about real-world strategies and constraints of human agency toward repairing the world.

February 12, 2017: *Care As Culture*, anchored by writer and activist Rebecca Solnit, this Peacetable convening brings service work, ecofeminist art and experts on climate change together.

Publication

Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art, a 256 page publication with 280 color illustrations, accompanies the exhibition. Published by Delmonico Press/Prestel Publishing and the Queens Museum, this first comprehensive book on the influential artist explores her work from the early "Air Art" experiments, the creation of the *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*, through the ensuing Maintenance Art Works and her legendary tenure as Artist-in-Residence at New York City's Department of Sanitation. With a major essay by critic Patricia C. Phillips, the volume also includes interviews with four Sanitation Commissioners who enabled Ukeles to create massive works with DSNY Norman Steisel, Brendan Sexton, John Doherty, and Kathryn Garcia, an essay by curator and critic Lucy Lippard, and a range of striking photos, all offering important perspectives on an artist who has transformed our ideas about feminism, the city, and ecology today.

About Mierle Laderman Ukeles

Since 1977, Mierle Laderman Ukeles has been the official, unsalaried Artist-In-Residence of the NYC Department of Sanitation. Her multimedia

work, launched by her iconic *MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART 1969!*, blurs the boundaries between labor and performance, system and spirit, and unveils connections between feminism, workers' rights, and the environment. Currently, she is completing *LANDING*, the first permanent Percent for Art public artwork for Freshkills Park in Staten Island. Her first monograph, *SEVEN WORK BALLETS*, edited by Kari Conte, was just published by Sternberg Press. Recently, her work from 1969 to 1984 was the subject of an exhibition curated by Krist Gruithuijsen for the Graz Kunstverein, Graz, and traveled to Arnolfini Centre for Contemporary Arts, Bristol; Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; and Marabouparken Art Gallery and Konsthall C, Stockholm. Ukeles has exhibited internationally, including at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; Whitney Museum; MoMA/ PS1; Queens Museum; Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art; Tel Aviv Museum; Armory Art Show, NY; Sharjah Biennial 8, United Arab Emirates; Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco; Smack Mellon, Brooklyn; Wellcome Trust, London; Creative Time, New York; Brooklyn Museum; Haus der Kunst, Munich; the 13th Istanbul Biennial; and Manifesta 10, St. Petersburg; and Manifesta 11, Zurich. She was the keynote speaker at the International Open Engagement Conference in 2014. A Guggenheim Fellow and recipient of many grants and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, NY State Council on the Arts, Joan Mitchell, Andy Warhol, and Anonymous Was a Woman Foundations among others, she has received honorary doctorates from the Rhode Island School of Design and the Maine College of Art. She received a BA in international relations and history from Barnard College in 1961, and an MA in interrelated arts from New York University in 1974. She is represented by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in NYC.

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About the Queens Museum

The Queens Museum in Flushing Meadows Corona Park features contemporary art, events of hyperlocal and international impact, and educational programs reflecting the diversity of Queens and New York City. Changing exhibitions present the work of emerging and established artists, both local and global, that often explore contemporary social issues, as well as the rich history of its site. In November 2013, the Museum reopened with an expanded footprint of 105,000 square feet, a soaring skylit atrium, a suite of daylight galleries, 9 artist studios, and flexible event space. The Museum works outside its walls through engagement initiatives ranging from multilingual outreach and educational opportunities for adult immigrants, to a plethora of community led art and activism projects. The Museum's educational programming connects with schoolchildren, teens, families, seniors as well as those individuals with physical and mental disabilities. The Queens Museum is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.