

# MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

**June 28, 2017**

**Exhibition Review:**

**UGO RONDINONE: I ♥ JOHN GIORNO**

by Katie Heiserman



Like a gift that keeps giving, the retrospective of poet, artist, and activist John Giorno is dispersed across thirteen Manhattan venues including the New Museum, the Rubin Museum, the Kitchen, and others. This Pop Art treasure hunt, which was curated and orchestrated by Giorno's husband Ugo Rondinone, features not only works from Giorno's archives, but also iconic pieces by a number of artists who comprised the heart of the 1960s downtown art scene. Pieces on view include Andy Warhol's 1963 film "Sleep" starring Giorno, Pierre Huyghe's "Sleep Talking," and a series of portraits by Elizabeth Peyton.

It seems only right that the multi-installation show take such a surprising and unprecedented form. Giorno's career has been defined by his desire to and success at pushing boundaries. Entering the Pop Art scene as early innovators such as Andy Warhol, John Cage, and Roy Lichtenstein were reaching success, Giorno noticed a gap in the movement and in the art world generally – a lack of progress in the genre of poetry.

In the next decades, Giorno became committed to expanding the audience for poetry and revolutionizing the ways that poems could be accessed and consumed, while still drawing on Pop Art practices he learned from his close friendships with Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns.

The creation of artist collective and record-label Giorno Poetry Systems in 1965 marked a turning point for the poetic form by introducing performance poetry (spoken word) to the art world and growing the traditionally written art into a multimedia practice. Previously confined to print publications and records, poems were made available in unconventional audio forms by Giorno and his collaborators who were recording readings of their work and distributing them using telecommunication technologies. In 1968 Giorno and poet William Burroughs conceived of the groundbreaking “Dial-A-Poem” project, a public phone service that connected callers to answering machines with recorded poems by established authors. The project expanded over time, eventually including readings and speeches (no longer than a few minutes long) by over two hundred artists, as well as political voices including Black Panther Bobby Seale. “Dial-A-Poem” has been reactivated for the current show.

Giorno also fused his poetry with visual arts and design by creating t-shirts and paintings printed with his clause-length poems. Curt and open-ended, pieces like “DON’T WAIT FOR ANYTHING,” “THANX 4 NOTHING,” and “SPACE FORGETS YOU” exhibit Giorno’s signature irreverence and defiant attitude.

