

# Danspace Project

## Conversations Without Walls:

### Joan Jonas & Eiko Otake with Judy Hussie-Taylor

September 12, 2020

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Welcome to Danspace Project. I'm Judy Hussie-Taylor, Executive Director and Chief Curator. This is a reimagining of Danspace's Conversations Without Walls series, which we initiated in real time a decade ago. Now, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we have launched this program in digital space. Initially, with a conversation on Slowness and what it means to gather by artists and scholars Okwui Okpokwasili, Simone Leigh, Tina Campt, and Saidiya Hartman. We subsequently had a conversation between choreographer and Danspace curator Ishmael Houston-Jones and lighting designer Carol Mullins. Ish and Carol went into the Danspace archive, revisiting the late 1970s and early 1980s, the infamous St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery fire, Ishmael's groundbreaking *Parallels* series and his piece *Relatives*. These conversations, as well as other videos, essays, and poems are available on Danspace Project's Journal on our website. So please look for those. Today, we are talking with Eiko Otake and Joan Jonas. Welcome Eiko, welcome Joan. Eiko, your work spans nearly five decades. Your performance and installations with Koma Otake have been recognized with the MacArthur award. Gia Kourlas of the New York Times writes of Eiko's solo work, "The site of her deliberately moving frame can be both startling and hypnotic as she dances in those places, some of which have been sites of suffering or turmoil. Eiko, who imparts a sense of loneliness, whether in a train station or in Fukushima, can evoke oppression and hardship without being explicitly political." End quote. Joan Jonas' body of work spans five decades. Joan is a 2018 Kyoto Prize recipient. The late art historian Douglas Crimp had this to say about Joan when Danspace honored her at our gala in 2017. Quote, "Some facts and opinions about Joan Jonas. Along with a very few fellow artists, Joan Jonas invented performance art, and again, along with a few others, Joan Jonas invented video art. Joan Jonas alone invented the hybrid video performance art." End quote. I've known Eiko since 1991, when she and Koma performed *Land* at the Colorado Dance Festival. They've performed at Danspace many many times over the last few decades. In 2016, Eiko and I co-curated, with Lydia Bell, a multi-week Platform entitled *A Body in Places*, at Danspace, which included a 24 hour Fukushima memorial performance, and 21 solos, which occurred in various sites throughout the East Village for very small audiences. I first met Joan through artist Pat Steir and again later through Douglas Crimp, who was a loyal Danspace audience member. Douglas and Pat brought Joan back to Danspace. I'm grateful for that. Joan, you performed *The Juniper Tree* at Danspace in 1977. 40 years later in 2018, Danspace presented the US premiere of your *Moving Off the Land*. We can see an image of that. There are a couple more, this is actually not at Danspace. Both of you have been Danspace honorees, in 2016 and '17 respectively. And then after this, we have an image of Douglas introducing you, Joan. And you were sick that day with the flu, so you actually couldn't make it but his remarks were of course, beautiful and perfect. And my understanding is that you

two met in 2016, when he brought you to one of Eiko's performances at Danspace and maybe we have an image of one of these solos. This is Eiko in front of the Liquiteria on Second Avenue, which is now closed. And you see in the left is Sam Miller, and then Douglas Crimp, and then Geo Wyeth. But maybe you can talk about how you met, how you first encountered one another after that.

**Joan Jonas:** Well, I don't remember how we actually shook hands but, for me, I missed -- for some reason I never saw Eiko and Koma all those years that they were performing so often and I never saw any of their work. But I do remember my first sight of Eiko dancing the day that -- the night that Douglas and I went together to see that performance, and it struck me right away that I felt this affinity you know, coming together. I was completely taken. That's what I remember.

**Eiko Otake:** I remember and we have kind of similar stories. You know, of course, I've known Joan more like through the books. I have never been as a touring artist myself, I haven't really been around with many of her performances, but I was familiar with her work through the books. But when I saw her in Danspace, we greeted. And I was like, I remember thinking "That's Joan Jonas, right?" I think I asked Lydia. So I recognized, you know, she was there. And then quite a bit later, not until 2018, I wrote her an email and wanted to meet and that's how we -- the first time we met was over dinner.

**Joan Jonas:** The thing is that what was kind of interesting and wonderful is that Eiko sent me an email. I was also -- at the very same time I asked Judy for Eiko's address, and I wrote to Eiko and I think our emails crossed paths.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** It was within 24 hours for sure.

**Joan Jonas:** And so you know, it was like, certainly intuition and communication. We came together.

**Eiko Otake:** And [what was] unbelievable was, as we both said we would like to meet and I said "Would you like to come over for dinner to our place?" And she said, "Oh sure." We were discussing the date and she said I'm coming back from Japan such and such a day and I can come next day. Right Joan, you came like next day after you came back from Japan? Would I do that? Would I go to someone's house for dinner when you just came back from Japan? And she was you know, she was received with an award. She was giving presentations. It was remarkable. And I was just from the very -- just her showing up. And she was asking what she brings and we were just talking about wines and food and fish and she brought red wine. That's how -- it's a beginning of many red wines together.

**Joan Jonas:** Yes, we both enjoy red wine.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Hopefully, there's more to come together.

**Eiko Otake:** I remember she said, "Shall I bring wine?" And I said, "Well, you can. You don't have to. We're having fish. So if you want to drink white wine, you can bring white wine, but I drink red wine." And then she said, "I bring that." So very quickly, I found out oh, she can drink red wine over fish. In America, people going all the fish to the white wine. So this was already quite a nice way for me to learn a little detail about someone that you haven't really talked to. I appreciated that.

**Joan Jonas:** Yes. No, it was very, very -- coming together, like I'm very shy and sometimes I wouldn't know what to say to somebody that I revered like Eiko, but it was so fluid, our conversation, right away. Of course the red wine helped us. We had a wonderful time that first night and then continued to after that.

**Eiko Otake:** But you know, Joan, I'm also thinking back, you know, how I felt amazingly like really fortunate to have you around and then having just a conversation. And then I realized you just came from Japan. So you are kind of like, you are arriving from Japan. You are arriving my home which, you know, I grew up in Japan. So there's a kind of natural flow there.

**Joan Jonas:** Yeah, we have many things in relation to that to talk about and many things, I wouldn't say in common, because we're from different sources, but my love of Japanese culture and in particular the Noh Theater and my fascination with it, literature, and so on. Immediately, I saw that, in Eiko's work, I saw that spirit and so I was totally fascinated right away because of that.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Yolanda, would you go to the slide of Eiko in front of the -- Yep. This is a part of the East Village series. This is on Second Avenue.

**Eiko Otake:** That Judy Hussie-Taylor took.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** I took the photo. [laughs]. It's an amazing moment.

**Joan Jonas:** Yeah, it's beautiful.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** I was thinking about your--both of your early work actually, even though this is much later, but also having to do with place as you're just so specific about place Eiko, and you Joan with regard to space, which is a whole topic unto itself. But I was looking at your early works yesterday and pieces that were created a decade apart, both were performed outside, both were in downtown New York. And looking at those pieces yesterday was a really incredible reminder of prior New York moments, very specific, the 70s and the 1980s. But also was so resonant with our current moment, our current global crisis. And I've been thinking a lot about like, what will performances look like in our immediate future, um, and I realized that I basically reimagined versions of things that you both already manifested: extremely local, limited viewers, perhaps viewing from a great distance or in very small pods. Joan, your *Delay Delay* in 1972 was performed on an abandoned lot on the West Side Highway with the audience watching from a nearby loft rooftop and *Nova Scotia Beach Dance* (1971) was performed on a

beach with the audience watching from the cliffs above. And then Eiko, the solos, as we're looking at one of those here, were actually, well, they're solos but they're really duets between you and specific places, a boutique, a Senior Center, a restaurant kitchen. And they were limited to very small audiences of 10 or 20. So I see that your work has been speaking to this moment for many, many years from 70s, 80s, and through now in many respects. But I was looking at your 38 minute video, *38 Pieces* yesterday, and I was struck by the piece you and Koma performed at the Hudson River landfill in 1980. It's called *Event Fission*. So I was hoping we could look at an excerpt of one of those early pieces of yours, Joan, I think we have *Song Delay*, and then look at Eiko and Koma's *Event Fission* back to back and then talk about those pieces.

**Joan Jonas:** Well, I'll just say briefly, *Song Delay*, it was 1970/72. At that time, those empty lots. I mean, I liked cities with holes in them. We called them holes because they are places, empty places, that are just kind of abandoned and they didn't have a specific character but one could enter and take over -- the spirit would take over. For instance, this is on a dock, when we made the film. And this was one of the early influences. We went to Japan in 1970. I went with Richard Serra who had a show there and I went to see a lot of Noh and Kabuki. And one of the things that I was impressed by was the sound of wood block, wood against wood, wood clapping in Japanese theater. And so my idea for having blocks of wood clap together, like there is in this video -- you could just play the video --

[*Song Delay* video clip plays]

**Joan Jonas:** -- came, just one of the things that I was inspired by from the visit to Japan.

[*Song Delay* video clip ends]

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Can you repeat what you were saying, Joan? It was a little hard to hear.

**Joan Jonas:** I'm sorry.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** That's okay.

**Joan Jonas:** It was 1972 and it was when this area had just been been -- they tore down a lot of the buildings and there were just empty lots right above Chambers Street and the Hudson River, around that area. And we watched -- the audience was on top of the building as Judy said, but this is just after I'd come -- we went to Japan in 1970 and I saw a lot of -- well, Noh theater influenced me deeply. And one element of Noh theater and all Japanese theater is the sound of wood against wood. You know the stages are wood and they use wood blocks, actually clapping wood together, and so this clapping of the wood is directly influenced by my trip to Japan seeing the theater and the culture and becoming involved with it. And yeah, and these empty lots, I call them holes in the city, when the city had holes that you could enter and you know take over and the atmosphere is like this you know a ruin kind of thing. That interested me.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Eiko, you also use sound in very, very specific ways.

**Eiko Otake:** Yes. I hit the ground too.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Yeah. And I was looking at that first piece, I think it was *White Dance*, that you and Koma performed and it was the sound of the potatoes. And you shriek suddenly. So I think this disruption, this idea of sound as a sudden jolt to the current moment, right, brings you back somewhere.

**Eiko Otake:** Yeah. You know, Joan talks a lot about this disruption and the way and I resonate with that, you know, without knowing that language before. But from this homework, this time. I was really picking up those wording from her.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Let's look at *Event Fission*. There we go.

[*Event Fission* video clip plays]

**Eiko Otake:** So Joan, you just said that's 1970 Chambers Street ...

**Joan Jonas:** I can't hear you, but wait until this is finished.

[*Event Fission* video clip ends]

**Eiko Otake:** Yeah, I was just saying it is coincidence, maybe already Judy knew this, so the two videos, Joan's and mine, 10 years apart, same place. Chambers Street and the Hudson River. Right?

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Yeah, I discovered that yesterday actually. And I actually looked up to try to get specific addresses to figure out how close you actually were.

**Eiko Otake:** This is around the pier and it was out in the beach of cities. So in the same cities that summer, Bill T. Jones was performing, Meredith was performing and you know, I was attacking Lower Manhattan with my white flag, which is no violence. But I remember very strongly saying with Koma, why do they build something like this, the Trade Center. It's so high. It's like creating a target and a memorial. We remember talking about that. I mean, the first thing you know, you're taking this from my *38 Piece 38 Minutes*, so it's very short. But in the first scene after I attack Lower Manhattan, Wall Street, then I attack Koma, and then just 20 seconds later an airplane passes towards the top. So when I saw that, you know, after 9/11 we didn't see this footage for a long the time and then when 9/11 happened I remembered we performed there. And sure enough, the plane pass. So that became extremely -- and also because we had a studio in the Trade Center throughout the year 2000 on 91st floor, from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. So between both having a home there in 1980, looking at the tower and then

working in the tower for a whole year before the, right before the 9/11, a year before the 9/11. But my relationship. It is a very important part of my relationship to New York.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Yeah. I was thinking that Joan, you were talking about -- or those holes as you call them were buildings that were, you know, demolished, right, so the whole was a former factory and then it was demolished and then Eiko, you and Koma were there as the towers were going up. So it was just very striking that what happened in that 10 year period and the beginning of the 80s, the crazy Wall Street years and--

**Joan Jonas:** Berlin, in the beginning of the 80s. I had a scholarship there, just quickly, and Berlin was a city with a lot of holes in it. It was a very great place to work in Berlin.

**Eiko Otake:** And Tokyo, the Tokyo I grew up in was very much a big city with a lot of holes because Tokyo was totally--

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Yeah. And then I was thinking like in 1970, you could just go out and sort of occupy a site, take it over, no permits, no, you know, just go do it. But Eiko, *Event Fission* was commissioned by Creative Time. So in those 10 years things really changed and became more formal and you know, you had to be presented and get licenses probably to be where you were.

**Eiko Otake:** Well, you didn't have to be presented, but you still have to be real. You had to -- you can present yourself, which I did a lot of. You know, it takes some time before you can be presented so, and even then, Koma and I produced many things ourselves.

**Joan Jonas:** Well, yeah, I produced everything myself and I'll just say quickly, we made our own posters. We printed them. We put them up around.

**Eiko Otake:** Yeah, so did !

**Joan Jonas:** Yeah, we didn't -- there was nobody helping us and that was the way it was.

**Eiko Otake:** Yeah. I made my own costume. I never asked anyone else to make a costume. I made many, most of our sound, except when I worked with music people. And in that you and I are quite similar in a way. You do everything that it takes. It's not no boundaries. And yeah, and we did the same. And in the year 2000 on the Trade Center, we were actually making a piece, which is a very big environment piece. You were actually showing that picture, right before, and that took us a year. We created each piece of little cheesecloth, painted it, ironed it, pasted it, and created the whole thing and so, there's that part of me that is not part of us, that is not video choreographer dancer. We did everything. We got more involved in making the environment and the visual of that.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** I just want to return to Noh for a minute and maybe we can look at *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* and *Organic Honey*. I think we only have *Vertical Roll*, but the piece is -- You want to say the same? And then after that, I would love you to talk about that one when we see this and then we'll look at another excerpt.

[*Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* video clip plays]

[Reggae music plays]

[*Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* video clip ends]

**Joan Jonas :** All right. Yeah, that was a piece called *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy Vertical Roll*. And it was my -- the original version. That's the second year of working on that, was a video, my first video piece. Um, it was really again influenced by my trip to Japan, in that I started using masks and that's a mask I got it an erotic store in Times Square. It's an ordinary plastic mask and costumes that I picked up at the Rose Bowl in California. The music is a reggae song. And that song, I can play it over and over again. It just makes me feel happy. You know, of course, he's saying you look so beautiful, but I have a mask on, so it's not me. But anyway, I was working with my -- making, creating an alter ego or a persona that was organic--I named her Organic Honey. And so I had this parallel identity. I didn't ever want to be Joan Jonas in my work. I wanted to be someone else. And then the masks helped me to hide my face. I was not -- I was a little bit self conscious in front of an audience, so I really felt comfortable with the mask. And I'll just say quickly. Yeah, I never wanted to imitate the Noh. But what I liked about -- what I was drawn to was the simplicity, it was the music, as opposed to western theater. It was a music dance form that was visual and used incredibly simple props that you could make very easily. Those are all the things that attracted me to the fact that it was a dance music form. I don't know if that says enough. I'll just say quickly the idea of the video. So I started working with video and there was a camera person who was operating the camera, which you didn't see. But the idea of the piece, the early videos, was that the camera would pick up a live detail of the performance, which would be passed to the monitor or the projector. So the audience would see simultaneously the video and the live performance together. And that was all very carefully choreographed and worked out to the absolute nth degree. I could look at myself and a small monitor and constantly work with the framing at the same time that cameraman was working with the framing. So it had to be done the same way every time.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** And the mirrors appear, which I think, I was reading that you were reading Borges at the time, and I just wonder if you want to talk about your use of mirrors and reflection and disruption.

**Joan Jonas:** Yeah, I'll just say that in 1968-69, I started reading Borges and short stories, the Labyrinths. And in the short stories of Borges, he often mentions a mirror. And he describes mirrors in many different ways. They're not just there. They can be abominable because they multiply, and so on. So he used different words to describe mirrors. And I was inspired to have a mirror as my first physical prop. I had had props before, but the mirror was my first. I began with a mirror and the mirror reflected me, reflected the room. It fragmented space and it was also a

metaphor. And so video, I called it an ongoing mirror. So the mirror is a very important element in my work and the idea of the mirror.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Right. Eiko, do you want to add anything before we look at the next video, which is a mirror piece?

**Eiko Otake:** Oh, is this a good time to talk about Noh or shall we do that later?

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** No, now is great.

**Eiko Otake:** Because it did reminds me. So Koma and I left Japan in 1972. And it occurred to us Oh, we haven't really seen much traditional performing arts. I had seen quite a bit of a Kabuki because my family was doing lots of traditional dancing. My grandma too, but Noh is usually pretty expensive crowd, you know it's a little more aristocratic in a way of the crowd. But we thought we should see it and we also see a bit Japanese traditional --. I was very, very taken by it and about Noh, one thing it continues for me to think about is in Noh character, as Joan said, there's a story there. And very often, it is a guy who was killed unjust and his spirit is very upset that he was not treated right and often very much betrayed. So he comes back to tell his story. So he's the main character, right? And all the audience knows this story and they will have this book because everybody studies this singing storytelling who was in the crowd, a particular crowd. So I've always thought about, and again me having grown up in Japan post war, when massively killed or unjust killed, the spirit are upset. So by that, the dead come back and give us a story and we learn the story and we sympathize to that story and that ritual, repeated ritual, because he comes back whenever this is being performed. That's supposed to calm down that upset victim who killed and that function of storytelling, so it's not a story to entertain or dramatic for the sake of just melodramatic. It is about audience joining for the dead who come back to talk, which was kind of important for me. And if I may, I also realized when Koma and I left Japan, we sold all the books because we had to leave by ship through USSR to Europe. I only brought three books. One was Zeami, the Noh's starter person, *The Book of Flower*, *Kadensho*, and then Nijinsky's diary, and then thirdly van Gogh's letters to his brother Theo. So I wasn't thinking very deeply why I picked those three books, but recalling my own youth, there was something there. And as I was reading that book in a ship going to the USSR one way ticket to Europe, cheapest way possible, it really occurred to me that people or persons studied so called traditional art, but very much an avant garde artist of that time. So for me, oh, that's revolutionary art. But Kabuki was studied by Okuni, the Noh, Zeami, the second person of the family. They were the survivors. They had to get the support. They couldn't get it enough. They struggled with it and they come up with the strategies and skills and ideas. And also in Noh, the main person is going to perform until he could die on stage. So there is a second person who is assigned if performer dies, or collapses on stage. Second person is ready to take on. It's a very different sense of time and a role a performer plays, which I just wanted to add to that.

**Joan Jonas:** I'll just say one more thing, and maybe it's not totally accurate, but I think that the Noh and all theater comes from ritual originally, you know, a long time ago. So that's what -- I was always interested in ritual and when I was making this transition into performance, I really

read a lot and did a lot of research about the ritual of other cultures and how that functions. And I thought of my work, although I didn't say it publicly, as ritual, but a ritual in the present time. I'll just say that, but that's one of the things that attracted me to the Noh was this idea of the ritual.

**Eiko Otake:** Yeah

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Yeah, I think that is, although you both have incredibly different sensibilities in the work you make, but I think that is something you share as a reimagined ritual. Absolutely, both you and Eiko.

**Eiko Otake:** And you know, in those traditional performing arts, the performers are not at all need to be young. In fact, you know, Zeami said it very clearly. There are different flowers blooming depending on the age and he really specified that, right? And I think it's no coincidence you know Joan and I are not that young people anymore. We very much continue to perform, right? And we believe in that: our facility within the ritual of the performance.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** I'm just going to say that say that Zeami is Z-E-A-M-I and Motokiyo M-O-T-O-K-I-Y-O. I just learned, thanks to both of you yesterday, a 14th century playwright and philosopher who really helped codify the Noh theatre that is somewhat passed down to today. Do I have that correct?

**Joan Jonas:** Yeah, he wrote many plays.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** I just thought if anyone wanted to research that they could look him up. Yeah. It's a lot, a lot to learn. Do you want to look at *Mirror Piece*, Joan?

**Joan Jonas:** For just two seconds. It's silent, so I can talk while it's playing. Shall I?

[*Mirror Piece* video clip plays]

-- So my early *Mirror Piece* in '68-'69 or whatever, '69. This is a reproduction. But anyway, in the original ones the performers carried mirrors and I choreographed it in very strict formal choreographed patterns. And I was interested in the visual aspects of how the mirrors reflected the space, reflected the performance, and broke up the space in a kind of Cubist way and the fragility of the mirrors and the fact that the audience saw themselves, so the audience is brought into the performance and the performance is about like half an hour long or 40 minutes long, and so on. And so it was different configurations of the mirrors moving in space.

[*Mirror Piece* video clip ends]

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** I love seeing the little girl wave. It's also a nice way of like -- it's another kind of mask too, right?

**Joan Jonas:** Well, what was interesting to me was how uneasy the audience is when they see that, I mean many people in the audience. It's like when you're sitting at a dinner table and there's a mirror opposite you and you don't want other people to see you looking at yourself in the mirror. The same way, they were very uneasy. They looked away, they look to the side, or they looked at themselves, you know. It was -- that interested me.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** I had someone recently say that the reason Zoom is so strange is that you don't often sit in a panel discussion or in a discussion and look at yourself in the mirror while you're also in conversation with someone else. So we're sort of in a bit of a mirror moment, right?

**Eiko Otake:** Can I say? So when I went to Nova Scotia, you know Joan very kindly invited me, and they have a summer house. There are many mirrors and I think that the last thing you know, the last thing she and I did there was I was working with mirrors. It was very clear Joan's history of working with mirrors. She's very -- she knows how those things work. So I was very comfortable and I have rarely been directed by another person. And she didn't as much as direct to me as just to give suggestions, which is a kind of direction. And I remembered I saw this piece in the video, and I have a feeling I probably have seen it a long time ago, either live or a video screening. So I was very familiar with her work with mirrors, but then being in there in her house and having that mirror also reflecting her shooting me in a mirror was a very layered experience of me appreciating I am in Joan Jonas' place and I am on a day, in a day, in the life, of my life, and her life being there together.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** I can't wait to look at the video we have. And based on your time there, I just thought we could actually talk about your meetings. And I know that we have a recent photo of you both in Tokyo in December at MoMA Tokyo. And maybe you can both talk to us about where you are and how you got in front of this painting.

**Eiko Otake:** So this is actually not the last time, but third or last time we saw together. Since then, we went to two different benefits together. Joan invited me. But this was memorable to me because -- no, I have to say first, Joan had given me an access. And in a way, you know, it's hard for us to even find a time to get together. You know, I mean, she's all over the place. Every continent wants her. So she's like writing to me from Spain or from God knows where. And I'm also -- I travel a lot, not as much as she has been doing. So to find that time, pitch day of where we can be together, and then she was going to be in Japan. I very much wanted to meet in Japan. And I wanted to call to see her show, which was in Kyoto, and I just couldn't make it because of my work. So in that regret, I went to MoMA, for other reasons I had to be there. And it just occurred to me oh, I haven't been MoMA for long time. And I was just thinking how much I'm missing to appear and surprise Joan in Kyoto. And I went upstairs and here's Joan's show in MoMA, this is New York. And this was right before I was leaving for Japan. So that's one, page one, and there were many some page. And then now I'm in Japan, I missed her show in Kyoto, but I felt good because I saw unexpectedly her show in New York MoMA. And I found out my grandfather's painting, which is behind us here as a background, and it was on. It was, you know, it's in their collection and it is often shown, but not always. So I was just told by MoMA

curator, his painting is on and I said to Joan, we only have like 90 minutes together because she was very busy, of course, she's a guest of honor. And you want to go to Tokyo MoMA because my grandfather's painting is on? And she immediately said Well, let's go. So very limited time we were there and not only we saw his work, which was a big pleasure to me, and then we also saw some of the post war Japanese exhibitions and to which I owe my youth. As I grew up, I see those you know, the 2, 1, 2, 3 generations before us, right. So seeing all those shows together with her was -- and again, this is because she does put an effort, so do I, and that way we can be together and experience something together.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Can you share your grandfather's name Eiko?

**Eiko Otake:** His name is Chikuha C-H-I-K-U-H-A. Chikuha is his first name and last name is my last name, Otake. O-T-A-K-E. Anyway, he was dead long before I was born. So I don't really have much nostalgia or anything. But he's interesting because his writing is very strangely similar to mine, but of course he lived long before me. So my writing style is strangely similar to his, which was a little shock to me at this age to find out. What? Did I not bring myself up? Is it something before me that was creeping up on manifestation of who I am? And I was like talking that to Joan about that I think that day.

**Joan Jonas:** Yeah, well, also the other paintings -- I mean, he's a wonderful painter and this is a more traditional image.

**Eiko Otake:** He was only 30-years-old when painted this.

**Joan Jonas:** And then he painted others that are more strange and modern. And I was thinking, Eiko, there are nude figures in these paintings. You know, they look like a--Not this one, this is more traditional one.

**Eiko Otake:** Yeah, this is an older one.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Could you go back to the other painting?

**Joan Jonas:** But there was a third one, anyway. So you see a figure sitting there. I was thinking of you and Koma you know when I saw that, you know what I mean?

**Eiko Otake:** Yolanda, could you find out the other one that is like this shape. Not this one, the next one. Yes. Right, Joan?

**Joan Jonas:** There's a man and a woman, a female and a male.

**Eiko Otake:** Oh yeah there's another third one. I may not have sent it. But Joan knows this. So Joan, interestingly enough, you know Japanese peoples' body, right? We are usually shorter. Somebody pointed out that the people he draws, paints is very much elongated.

**Joan Jonas:** Yes.

**Eiko Otake:** Kind of like my body, you know, because I'm very tall in Japanese culture.

**Joan Jonas:** That's true.

**Eiko Otake:** It's very strange. Yeah. But he gets in lots of trouble because he then kept changing his style to be different and people didn't appreciate that.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Maybe we can move on to seeing the research videos. We have four short excerpts that -- if you want to play this one. And maybe -- I don't think any of them have sound so you can both talk over these, I believe.

**Joan Jonas:** I'll just introduce each one a little bit. So this is an octopus that I shot. It's a major part of my installation *Moving Off the Land*. And it's an amazing creature, the octopus, as we all know. And so when Eiko first came to my studio when we first met, she came to my studio, and we were going to start working together. We just jumped right into it and I asked Eiko to perform in front of these different projections. And so this is the first one of the octopus that Eiko is performing in. And I believe that Eiko loves the octopus.

**Eiko Otake:** Yes!

[Video clip of *Eiko and the Octopus* plays]

**Joan Jonas:** I also perform in it, but not like this, but not here. In the performance I do. The way we work together, you know, I have materials at my studio, paper, and Eiko brought her own costumes. And it was really pure improvisation. And certainly I never would have dared to give Eiko directions in the beginning and I didn't have to because her spirit and my spirit they come together in a very natural way. So I was thinking of her. She was going to be in this big performance I was going to do and I felt very much at ease that we wouldn't have too much time to rehearse because I would trust Eiko totally. I have to say that. To enter into my work. I've never done that before. I'm totally a control freak, so I don't do that usually. But maybe I'm loosening up now in my old age. So it's a perfect time for us to meet. You know, I think that's part of it.

**Eiko Otake:** Yes.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Or maybe you just needed to meet a control freak that you trusted. Another one.

[Video clip of *Eiko and the Octopus* ends]

**Joan Jonas:** Yeah.

**Eiko Otake:** Can I just -- before you do the next video. Like, you know, we just met, right? I mean we met before, but we really -- that dinner at my house was the time we really talked, right? And then we had a little production kind of a thing that we used. She had asked to do some -- I could have potentially have been part of her -- So we really -- octopus was the first video and she was showing it to me. And I said, can I use that piece of paper? And she said, well fine, you can do whatever. And I began to dance with it. And I was kind of surprised to myself. I was fully in my performance mode. I wasn't just like, trying to see what would happen. I just went into it. And I think it was because I sort of fell in love with Joan. So it was more like -- and then I was with Iris, my friend and my collaborator, so Iris was there and as we get out of Joan's studio and I was like, what do you think? And they said, wow, audition was good. And I was kind of in shock to this word audition, because I never go to the audition. So of course Iris was joking. But it's almost like I really, I never did this. If Joan just said she doesn't do this, I never did this either to jump into somebody else's work.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Let's look at this next video.

[Video clip of *Eiko with Convex Mirror* plays]

**Joan Jonas:** I have to just -- I'll say in this part. I mean, we do both work with similar materials--

[Video clip of *Eiko with Convex Mirror* stops]

--and you know that long pole you had in the piece on the beach, I've used long poles a lot and I started using them because I use material that's there and so when we did the beach piece there were these long logs on the beach. And then in the lower West Side pipes were lying around. And so I used poles and logs and pipes. And I saw you do that. You also, you and Koma, did one with several logs and poles. So there's all -- you know, we have crossovers with each other. We have--our aesthetic is very related. Don't you think?

**Eiko Otake:** Yes, I agree. Totally.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Can we see the next video, Yolanda?

[Video clip of *Eiko with Convex Mirror* continues]

**Joan Jonas:** Well, I made this two years ago and then with Eiko the next summer. And so my performance is a year apart from hers, but I mean, I think it's great to have this conversation now because I think it will encourage us to go on and we have to come together again. That's what I think. Right, Eiko?

**Eiko Otake:** Yes. Oh, absolutely--

[Video clip of *Eiko with Convex Mirror* ends]

--and, you know, quite a bit after, I actually have the date (I can look it up), but you know, I went to your house, home, and looked at everything, right, and I was really afraid to go soft and I look something what I did and I'm disappointed. But somehow it's not right or beautiful. It's more like I liked, because I remember the mood that I walked in. And it was a very straightforward from my memory. So I basically told Joan, you can do whatever you want with it. Because I was originally afraid "Oh, Joan, don't use this part, don't use that part." I didn't feel that way at all, which is very surprising to me.

**Joan Jonas:** Well, what was interesting, it happened while you were there in the few days you were there. There's another video.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Yeah. Can you show the next, Yolanda, the next two?

**Joan Jonas:** Yeah. So Eiko says, at one point, Eiko said to me, "I don't want to do my work." It was sort of like her movements. "I'd like to enter into your space a little more." And so you'll see in this particular one, it's only a few seconds, Eiko began to play a character. In my view, maybe I'm wrong, maybe Eiko doesn't agree, but she began to play sort of a character. And now I feel, I suppose, I could direct her. I mean we feel friendly enough with each other now and she didn't tell me I don't want to be directed. But I think that we could work in a different way now, right?

**Eiko Otake:** Yes, yes.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Okay, let's play this.

[Video clip of *Eiko the Fortune Teller* plays]

[Video clip of *Eiko the Fortune Teller* ends]

**Joan Jonas:** Yeah, because I see Eiko as having a presence of not acting, but behaving.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Mm mm. You call this the fortune teller, Joan?

**Joan Jonas:** Yeah, I call it the fortune teller. Yeah.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** And is there one more we can look at?

**Joan Jonas:** I don't think so

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** No? Okay.

**Joan Jonas:** I mean, there is more but we couldn't find it. Yeah.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** We only have about 10 minutes left, so I think I'm going to jump to the section where you had questions for each other and I know you both have many, many, many, many questions that have been flying back and forth all week. But I'm just going to go to something that you brought up, Joan, in one of the emails to Eiko. And that brings up another genius, Kazuo Ohno. You say "I loved Ohno's view that is not technique, but spirit, dance that is. I always notice the technique in dance, except when the spirit takes precedent, like Simone Forti, like you, Eiko."

**Joan Jonas:** Now, I relate to Eiko and Simone because I'm not a trained dancer. And so that's why I say that. I mean, both Eiko and Simone have bodies that are trained in a different way than mine that are used to -- I mean, whether or not you call it that. But I really liked what Ohno said. He was also a person that I followed as much as possible whenever he came. His work was so strange and mysterious. But yeah, maybe you could talk about that view of dance that Ohno had, of spirit.

**Eiko Otake:** Yeah, I mean, you know, Ohno is usually said to be a Butoh dancer, but I don't see him that way. I really see him as a contemporary artist of his own time. He really created his own vocabularies and the work, right? He's not so much a choreographer or at least the way I see it. He's a performer. He's a dancer. And for him being a dancer is very spiritual work. He's a Catholic, he's a Christian, very devoted one. But also the kind of Christian he said oh to me the Buddha and Christ is the same thing, right? And he is for that grotesque, not for the grotesque's sake, but understanding life itself because it essentially is grotesque, right? And it's not nudity, it is that what it is. And I left to him very early because I just don't have a temperament to be with somebody so big to me. So I kind of look at him, take as much as -- a little, and then we left. But then we have a very long time of -- he is the only person I actually call -- in Japan, too many people become sensei, which is teacher, so everybody is so many sensei. I only use that word to him. But that really doesn't mean I present myself as his disciple. In fact, I tried very hard to not look like him. And it's only recently when I'm improvising and if I see the photograph or a video later, I kind of shocked myself after decades of trying not to look like him. If I let me go, and all of a sudden, you know, it's like, oh, wow, that's and then I realize it's, yes. I went to his studio. He didn't choose me. I went to his studio, right? So I was attracted to him. So no wonder that it's in me and you know I spend, I know, I've seen so many of his performances, if not studied the technique. It's more of his spirit. He was extraordinary. I mean truly extraordinary. At the same time, one of the ways how I think I became so, feel so close to Joan is when she come from Japan, come to my house, and we are having a dinner and the first thing we talk about is Ohno. And as somebody, I'm like so familiar and have a complicated relationship with both familiarity and distance, right? So we can talk right away, right? I knew Simone, right? So Simone and Joan are very close friends, which I didn't quite know. So Joan talks about that. So there are so many ways we can get into this place. We didn't really have to take this polite way to get into this, and that was helpful. And you know, I feel the most important thing is, and I have so many questions which you don't have to go in. So Joan, you said, you just said, oh, maybe you can direct to me. And I think you can because, you know, when I do my own project with my younger choreographers or collaborators, of course, even though as a collaborator, we are trying to hear both each other, but at certain point some decision has to be made, or some

suggestion could be given by me or vice versa. So when I'm working with you in your house, I was actually for the first time thinking, and with Octopus too, I am interested in what you can do with me.

**Joan Jonas:** Great!

**Eiko Otake:** Yeah, I do. I am. I really am.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** I am interested in that too, so I encourage it, and I hope it's sooner than later. And just in closing, I'm just going to ask the question of our time, which is, where are you riding out the pandemic? And then then we'll say goodbye for today.

**Joan Jonas:** All right, well, shall I start? I'm very lucky to be with some friends Barry Schwabsky and Carol Szymanski in East Hampton, in their house. I've been here for two months. And I've been reading *The Tale of Genji* actually. It's a, you know, very long, 1,200 pages, and we were going to talk about it a little bit, but that's really held me over, *The Tale of Genji*, to read one book the whole time and to be making little drawings. I'm not doing very much work, but I feel very lucky. I'm coming back to New York in a week, and then I'll be in New York, but that's where I am. And then in touch like this with people, it's very different to be in touch like this.

**Eiko Otake:** Joan?

**Joan Jonas:** Yeah?

**Eiko Otake:** Sorry, Joan, could you really concentrate, knowing this pandemic is going on outside your own home? Really, could you get into the reading?

**Joan Jonas:** I got into the reading.

**Eiko Otake:** Because that's a humongous undertaking.

**Joan Jonas:** I read the -- I've almost finished the whole book. Yeah. I could not have done it in any other circumstances.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** I carried it around for two decades and I never got through it.

**Eiko Otake:** Do you think I should try too? Would you recommend it personally, to me?

**Joan Jonas:** I mean, you can try it. It's up to you, you know.

**Eiko Otake:** Well not now, but sometime that will be --

**Joan Jonas:** But do I have time to say -- because I'm also very interested Japanese culture, so I've been reading modernist fiction, mostly by men in the early 20th century. And so I know there

were female writers and I'm going to find more. This *Tale of Genji* was written in, I don't know, the 10th century by a woman. And I think that's amazing. One of the first novels, thousand pages long, and I wanted to read it because the women are treated in a certain way and spoken of in a certain way in contemporary and modernist Japanese films and Mizoguchi, and in the writer Akutagawa. The women have a certain role, and I wanted to really see how the women -- what the roles were for the women in earlier literature, particularly one written by a woman, which is very unusual. And so I'm gradually finding out how women were seen. They had to be behind a screen, you know, there's all kinds of ways the women had to behave in certain part of the culture. I mean, not, you know, at certain levels of the culture. But I found gradually that there are many women calligraphers and painters through the centuries in Japan. That to me is one of the reasons that I'm reading *The Tale of Genji*.

**Eiko Otake:** Great, great, great, great. And can I just say one more thing?

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** If you tell us where you are? Will you reveal your --

**Eiko Otake:** Yes, I am in Japan actually. So this is now at 12:30 after midnight in my time. I left New York end of March, as the situation was getting bad. And I've been with this Corona, running away from it, from January because I was in China for months, and then I was in New York February to March, and then I'm here now in Japan. Not Corona-free, but certainly much less tense situation right now. I just wanted to say really, thank you very much for this occasion. Because one thing that was important for me to get to know Joan is you know, Joan is not my age. Joan is certainly quite a bit older, but I don't particularly feel any -- yes we live with it from the different time. Also, I mean to say was around how to look forward to be myself or older, if somehow by wishing I can become like her, in terms of being her characteristics, smart, and bright, and not pretentious. She's extremely matter of factly and I really appreciate that.

**Joan Jonas:** Well, thank you.

**Eiko Otake:** Yes, I adore that.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** I want to thank you -- Oh, go ahead Joan.

**Joan Jonas:** No, we appreciate each other definitely.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** I appreciate both of you and also am so appreciative that you are sharing your conversations, your research, your thoughts with us on --

**Joan Jonas:** Can I say one thing, Judy?

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Yeah.

**Joan Jonas:** I just want to say that this process of making this talk, you know, I think Eiko was the same as I was, I had to, you know, prepare for it. And I wanted to -- we were exchanging

emails madly. We've got so many questions we haven't answered. But I think this was part of our getting to know each other. So thank you.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Well, what I would like to do is extend an invitation to part two of this conversation because I have your emails and I have the wonderful questions you're asking each other. And we haven't even scraped the surface of some of those beautiful research questions. So I hope you'll say yes to returning to our strange Zoom conversations. Because I want to know, I want to eavesdrop on your conversations. I've also spent the last few days looking at videos, and reading, and reading writings, your own writing, which has been incredible and I'm really grateful. Thank you both and I also want to thank our Danspace staff team, Yolanda Royster and Ben Akio Kimitch, who are behind the scenes and have worked very hard to make this happen. And so before I sign off, I'd like to say that we'll be hearing from our Assistant Curator, Public Engagement, Seta Morton, and she'll tell us more about Danspace's website and our online Journal. I encourage everyone to go to [danspaceproject.org](http://danspaceproject.org). And there's a Journal and we have writing from the past five or six years, archives, video. Eiko, the Platform you, and I, and Lydia worked on together. There are videos of your solos. So please look at that. And I guess goodbye for now.

**Joan Jonas:** Bye. Goodbye, Eiko.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor:** Good night.

**Joan Jonas:** Good night.

[Outro]

### **Seta Morton**

Thank you for joining us for this Conversations Without Walls. The Conversations Without Walls 2020 digital series will be broadcasted on YouTube Live for one time only viewing parties. Don't worry if you don't catch us there. The conversations are all pre-recorded and will be posted ultimately in the Danspace Project website in our online Journal in Issue 11: *trembling archive*. Our Journal issues accumulate over time with new material added regularly. Apart from this series, you will find video, audio, and written work by Danspace Project artists, curators, and writers. Please also check out Issues 1 through 10 to find work that centers the Danspace Project past Platforms, seasons, experiments. The online Journal is really a place to get more insight into some of the internal conversations, research, and work that goes behind our more mainstage public facing programs. So check out the online Journal, and we look forward to having you at the next Conversation Without Walls.