

Biography

In my opinion art is conceptual. The thing that moves us about art, the thing that touches us is always the idea.

— William Anastasi¹

William Anastasi (1933–2023, Philadelphia – New York) occupies a foundational place within the history of postwar American art. Across more than six decades, he developed one of the most rigorous and singular practices to emerge from the New York conceptual scene, working fluidly across drawing, sculpture, photography, installation, performance, sound, language, and moving image. Throughout this remarkably diverse body of work, Anastasi consistently investigated the relationship between perception and artistic production, transforming ordinary actions into procedures through which the world itself became an active participant in the making of the work. Long before phenomenology became a central reference for contemporary artistic discourse, he conceived art as an embodied mode of attention in which walking, listening, movement, gravity, and chance generate forms beyond the limits of conscious intention.

Born in Philadelphia to Sicilian immigrant parents, Anastasi was largely self-taught. Before devoting himself entirely to art, he worked as a bricklayer, masonry contractor, salesman, and restaurant manager, experiences that profoundly shaped his understanding of labor, process, and material reality. Drawing nevertheless remained a constant throughout these years, accompanying him long before he considered himself an artist.



Fig. 1 Portrait of William Anastasi. Courtesy of Thomas Rehbein Galerie.

¹ William Anastasi, *Interview*, interview by Stephan Römer, *Conceptual Paradise*, September 27, 2016, <https://conceptual-paradise.zkm.de/interview-anastasi/>

After settling in New York in 1962, in what would later become Alphabet City, he began incorporating drawing into the fabric of everyday life. Walking through the city with folded sheets of paper concealed inside his pocket, he allowed the movements of his body to inscribe marks directly onto their surfaces, transforming locomotion itself into a mode of artistic recording. Rather than composing images, Anastasi established procedures through which experience could register itself, inaugurating an investigation into embodied perception that would remain central throughout his career.

These early experiments rapidly expanded into a broader exploration of drawing as transcription. The *Pocket Drawings* were soon followed by the *Constellation Drawings*, executed while listening to Bach with closed eyes, and by a growing series of works generated through external forces rather than compositional decision-making. Sound, bodily movement, duration, and environmental conditions became collaborators in the production of form. These works extend the legacy of Surrealist automatism while fundamentally transforming its premises: drawing becomes neither the expression of the unconscious nor the assertion of artistic subjectivity, but the phenomenological registration of the body's continuous negotiation with the surrounding world. Echoing Maurice Merleau-Ponty's understanding of perception as lived experience, Anastasi conceived the body itself as a recording instrument whose unconscious adjustments to gravity, rhythm, vibration, and spatial conditions constitute the work's true authorship.



Fig. 2 William Anastasi, *Untitled (Pocket Drawings)*, 1969 Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

This investigation into transcription soon extended beyond drawing to encompass sound, recording technologies, and language itself. Beginning in 1964, Anastasi developed his seminal *Sound Objects*, integrating everyday objects such as radiators, fans, pneumatic drills, and tape recorders with field recordings of their own operation. Rather than functioning as documentary recordings, these works collapsed object, sound, memory, and duration into a single perceptual event, expanding the implications of Duchamp's readymade into the temporal domain. Throughout the following decades, recording technologies—including tape recorders, phonographs, stenography, and later video—became recurring tools through which Anastasi questioned how experience might be translated without passing through conventional forms of representation. Listening emerged as one of the central conditions of his artistic practice, understood not simply as the reception of sound but as an embodied mode of perceiving the world.

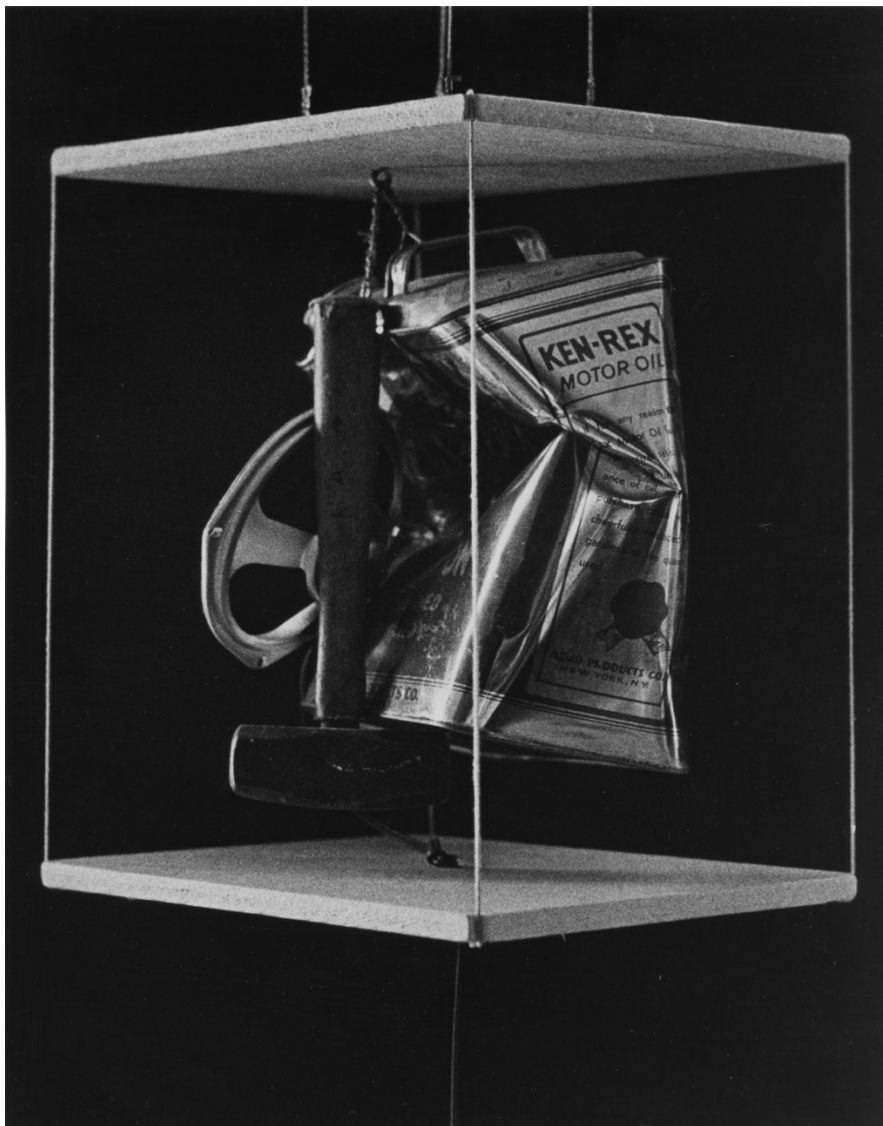


Fig. 3 William Anastasi, *Oil Can & Sledge Hammer*, 1964 (archival image, 1966)
© the estate of William Anastasi

At the same moment, Anastasi established himself as one of the leading figures of New York's emerging Conceptual art scene. Between 1966 and 1970 he presented four highly acclaimed solo exhibitions at Virginia Dwan Gallery, including the landmark *Six Sites* (1967), in which photographs of each gallery wall were installed upon their corresponding walls, producing a tautological dialogue between architecture, image, and perception. These exhibitions revealed the remarkable conceptual precision that would characterize his practice while anticipating subsequent developments in site-specific installation, institutional critique, and conceptual photography. Throughout these years, Anastasi cultivated an equally profound engagement with the writings of Marcel Duchamp, James Joyce, and Alfred Jarry, whose reflections on language, indeterminacy, and artistic thought became enduring intellectual companions. His essay *Duchamp on the Jarry Road* (1991) remains one of the most insightful readings of Duchamp's work by a fellow artist.

The late 1970s marked another decisive moment in Anastasi's practice through his long friendship with John Cage. Their daily chess games became the occasion for the celebrated *Subway Drawings*, produced during Anastasi's journeys across Manhattan with his eyes closed as the movements of the subway translated themselves directly into graphic form. Their collaborations culminated in performances such as *You Are* (1977), in which Cage described visitors entering the gallery while a professional stenographer and court typist successively transcribed and translated his words. Across these works, perception became a collective and mediated process, unfolding through successive acts of listening, recording, translation, and transcription. The artwork no longer resided in an autonomous object but in the dynamic relationships established between body, language, technology, and environment.

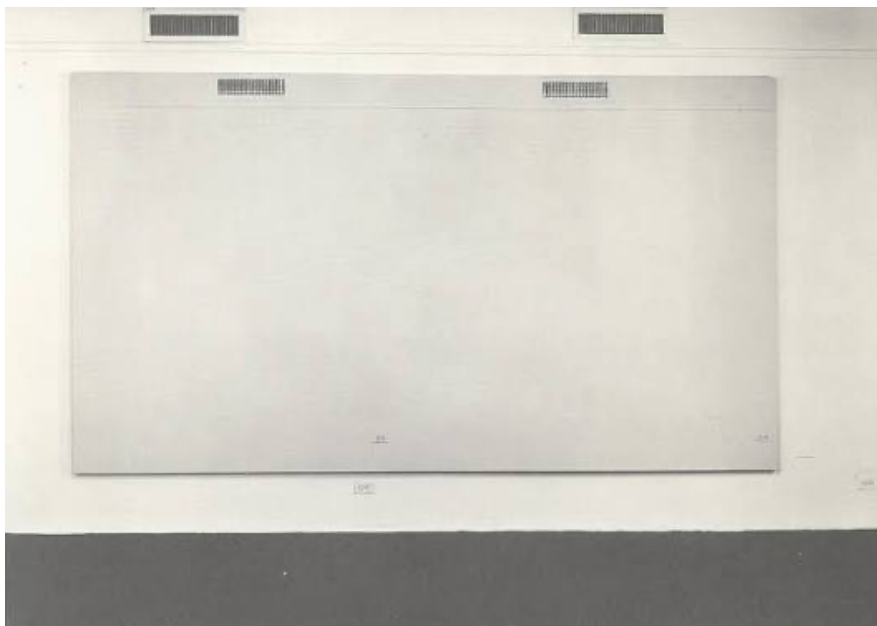


Fig. 4 William Anastasi, *Untitled (Six sites)*, 1966 Image courtesy Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

Throughout his career, Anastasi maintained an exceptional independence from stylistic categorization while profoundly influencing subsequent generations of conceptual, performance, and sound artists. His work has been presented internationally in numerous solo exhibitions, including at The Drawing Center, Hunter College, Peter Blum Gallery, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, and the Esbjerg Museum of Modern Art, among many others. It has also been featured in major institutional exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art, MoMA PS1, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the New Museum, and the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. In 2010 he received the prestigious John Cage Award from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, and from 1984 served, together with Dove Bradshaw, as Artistic Advisor to the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, designing décors and costumes for both stage and film. His work is represented in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Walker Art Center, the National Gallery of Art, and numerous international museums.

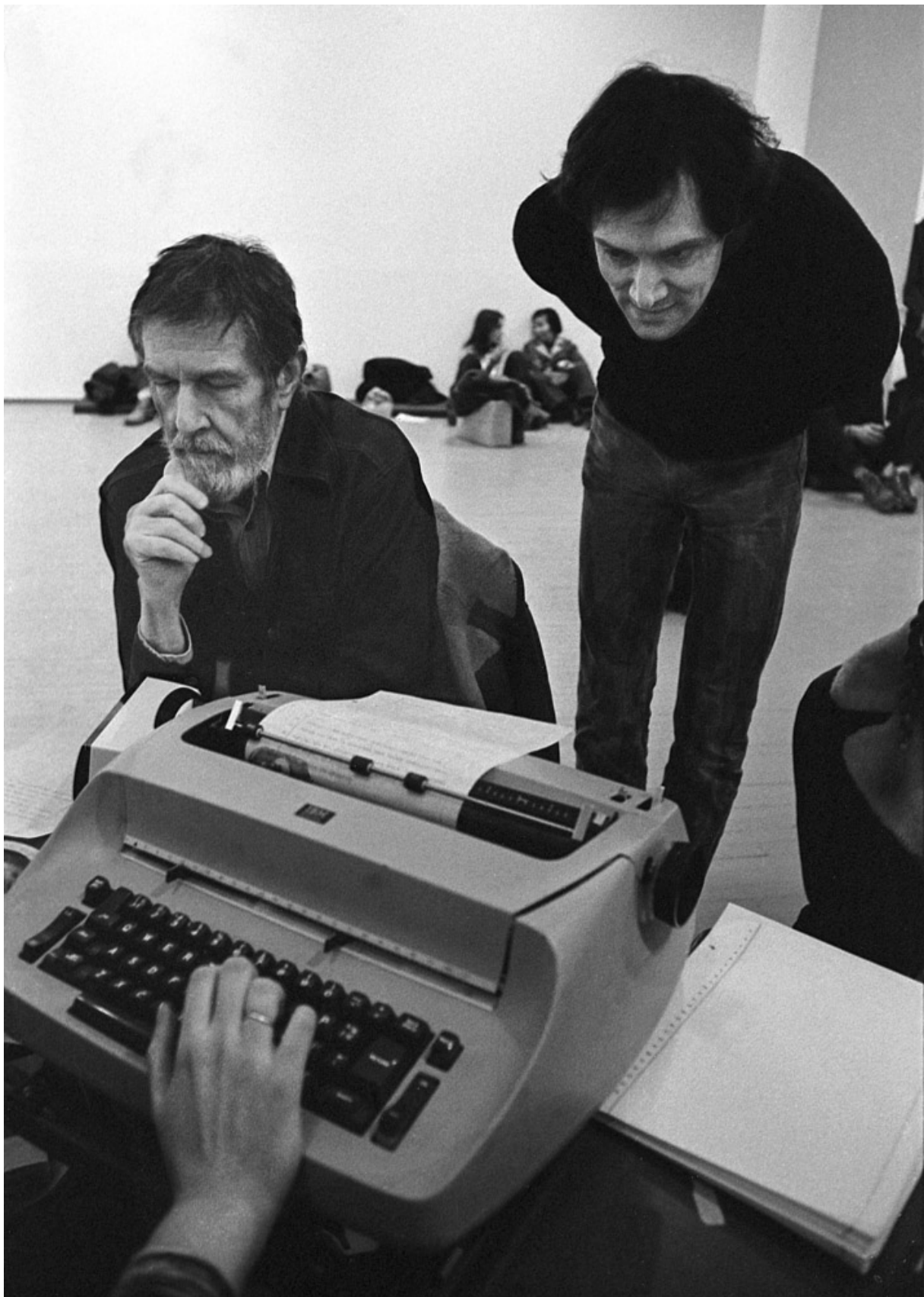


Fig 5. William Anastasi, *You Are*, 1979. Performance with John Cage, a stenographer, and a court typist. Clocktower Gallery, inside the McKim, Mead and White Building, Lower Manhattan

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2026

William Anastasi, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris

2024

William Anastasi (1933-2023). This Is Not My Signature, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Romainville, France

2022

Sound Objects, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Romainville, France

2021

Reading Line on a Wall, Galeria Mascota, Mexico City, Mexico

William Anastasi, Thomas Rehbein Galerie, Cologne

2019-2020

Blind Drawings: 1963-2018, Malborough Gallery, London, UK. Catalogue with interview with Maurizio Cattelan and essays by Dove Bradshaw and Charles Stuckey

2018

THREE CONIC SECTIONS, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris, France

William Anastasi. Incidents and coincidents: 60s and 70's Photographs in Which the Camera is the Subject, Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna (with Dove Bradshaw)

Backstage- die Rückseite, the rear site, Thomas Rehbein Gallery, Cologne, Germany

2015

Continuum, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris, France

2013

William Anastasi: The Sound Works, 1963-2013, Leubsdorf Art Gallery at Hunter College, New York, USA

2012

Jarry/Joyce/Duchamp, Blind Drawings, Walking, Subway, Drop, Vetruvian Man, Still, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris, France

2010

Drawings, Gering & López Gallery, New York, USA

Drawings, Isabelle Du Moulin und Nils Borch Jensen Galerie, Berlin, Germany

William Anastasi, John Cage Award (Biennial Award), New York, USA

2009

William Anastasi, Emilio Mazzoli Gallery, Modena, Italy

William Anastasi Retrospective, Curator: Inge Merete Kjeldgaard, The Esberg Museum of Modern Art, Esbjerg, Denmark

2008

Opposites Are Identical, Peter Blum Gallery (Chelsea), New York, USA

New works, Stalke Galleri / Stalke Up North / Stalke Out Of Space, Kirke Saaby, Denmark

2007

William Anastasi, Raw [Seven works from 1963 to 1966], The Drawing Center, New York, USA

William Anastasi, Paintings and drawings, Michael Benevento, The Orange Group, Los Angeles, USA

2006

William Anastasi, Bjorn Ressle Fine Art, New York, USA

William Anastasi, Baumgartner Gallery, New York, USA

2005

Drawings 1970-2005, Stalke Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark

Blind, art agents, Hamburg, Germany

William Anastasi, Rehbein Gallery, Cologne, Germany

2004

William Anastasi, SolwayJones, Los Angeles, USA

2003

Blind, The Annex, New York, USA

2001

William Anastasi: 1961-2000: A Retrospective, Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center, Copenhagen, Denmark

2000

William Anastasi, art agents, Hamburg, Germany

1999

...vor mehr als einem halben Jahrhundert, Landes Museum, Linz, Germany

Drawings, Gary Tatintsian Gallery, New York, USA

1998

I Am A Jew, The Philadelphia Museum of Judaica, Philadelphia, PA, USA

1997

The Painting of the Word Jew, Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, USA

William Anastasi, Hubert Winter Gallery, Vienna, Austria

1996

William Anastasi, Stalke Kunsthandel, Copenhagen, Denmark

1995

William Anastasi: A Retrospective (1960-95), Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia, PA, USA

William Anastasi, The Pier Gallery, Orkney, Scotland

Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia, PA, USA. Ten manuscript pages from *me innerman* monophone: *Jarry in Joyce*, shown alternating with the first ten manuscript pages of James Joyce's *Ulysses*

William Anastasi, Anders Tornberg, Lund, Sweden

Abandoned Paintings, Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, USA

1994

Kristal Fahl Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden

Me innerman monophone, oeuvre conceptuelle, Exhibition of original manuscript and paper given on "Jarry in Joyce" at the Sorbonne, Paris, France

1993

Du Jarry, Exhibition of original manuscript, Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, USA

Drawing Sounds: An Installation in Honor of John Cage, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA

1992

Works 1963-1992, Anders Tornberg Gallery, Lund, Sweden

1991

Sink, Trespass, Issue, Incision, Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, USA

1990

Incidents and Coincidents A Retrospective, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, USA

1989

A Selection of Works form 1960 to 1989, The Scott Hanson Gallery, NY, accompanied by catalogue

The Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, USA

1988

Bess Cutler Gallery, New York, USA
Stalke Galleri, Copenhagen, Denmark

1987

Bess Cutler Gallery, New York, USA

1982

Diary Paintings, Ericson Gallery

1981

Coincidents, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA
Collapse, Sculpture for a Public Space, Commissioned by the museum, exhibited at the Lincoln Center Complex, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA

1979

Re-visions: Perspectives and Proposals in Film and Video, Whitney Museum of American Art, NY
Coincidents, Kunstmuseum, Dusseldorf, Germany

1978

Terminus, Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY, USA
Max Hetzler, Stuttgart, Germany

1977

P.S. 1 Museum, the Institute of Art and Urban Resources, New York, USA

1973

O.K. Harris Gallery, New York, USA

1970

Continuum, Dwan Gallery, New York, USA
Three Conic Sections, Dwan Gallery, New York, USA

1967

Six Sites, Dwan Gallery, New York, USA

1966

Sound Objects, Dwan Gallery, New York, USA

1965

Witherspoon Gallery, University of North Carolina, USA

1964

Washington Square Gallery, New York, USA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS**2025**

Dessins sans limite. Chefs-d'œuvre de la collection du Centre Pompidou, Grand Palais, Paris, France
« *Life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans* » *Aesthetics of contingencies #2*,
Curated by Sébastien Pluot, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Romainville
Looking Through the Other Eye - Left is Right and Right is Left: Drawings by Sculptors, Curated by Wyatt Kahn, Galeria Mascota, Mexico City

2024

Renverser la tâche, Galerie Zlotowski, Paris

Renverser la tâche, Galerie Catherine Issert, Saint-Paul-de-Vence

It Never Entered My Mind, Galeria Mascota, Mexico City

2023

Planes, Trains & Automobile, Galeria Mascota, Mexico City, Mexico

WORLD FRAMED. Contemporary Drawing Art of the Schering Stiftung Collection, Kupferstichkabinett (Museum of Prints and Drawings), Berlin

2022

Material Impression: Artists & Paper, Larsen Warner, Stockholm, Sweden

2021/2022

L'âme Primitive, Musée Zadkine, Paris, France (September–February)

2021

Sound and Silence, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany

... Line as Thought, Lines as Universe ..., Salzburger Kunstverein, Munich, Germany

2017

Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery, 1959–1971, LACMA Resnick Pavilion, Los Angeles, USA

Intuition, Palazzo Fortuny, Venice, Italy

The transported man, Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, East Lansing, USA

Stalke Pop Up, Curator: Sam Jedig; Copenhagen

2016

Through the listening glass..., Total Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, South Korea

Drawing Dialogues: selections from the Sol LeWitt Collection, The Drawing Center, New York, USA

CAMÉRA(AUTO)CONTRÔLE, Centre de la photographie Genève, Switzerland

La Boîte de Pandore: une autre photographie par Jan Dibbets, Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris - MAM, Paris, France

Mirror Images in Art and Medicine, Museum of Medical History, Charité & Schering Foundation Project Space, Berlin, Germany

Portrait de l'artiste en Alter, FRAC Haute Normandie, Sotteville-lès-Rouen, France

2015/16

The Bottom Line, SMAK Gent, Belgium

Alfred Jarry Archipelago, la valse des pantins, acte III, Centre d'art contemporain de la Ferme du Buisson, Noisiel, France

2015

Tout le monde, Centre d'art contemporain d'Ivry - le Crédac, Ivry-sur-Seine, France

What is a line, Curator: Jennifer Farrell, The Fralin Museum of Art, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA

Grey Is The Color, If I Had A Heart, Curator: Tim Hawkinson, Marc Straus Gallery, New York

2014

Anastasi, Bradshaw, Cage, Marioni, Rauschenberg, 1990/2014, Strategies of Non-Intention, Sandra Gering Gallery Inc., New York, USA

Dans ma cellule, une silhouette, Curator: Lore Gablier, La Ferme du Buisson, France

For Each Gesture Another Character, Art Stations Gallery, Stary Browar, Poznań, Poland

On View V, Stalke Galleri, Denmark

Art=Text=Art: Works by Contemporary Artists, Works from the Sally and Wynn Kramarsky Collection, UB Anderson Gallery, University at Buffalo, New York, USA

2013/14

Something More Than a Succession of Notes, Justina Barnicke Gallery, Toronto, Canada

2013

A Trip from Here to There, Drawings Galleries, MoMA, New York, USA
Sol LeWitt collectionneur. Un artiste et ses artistes, Centre Pompidou Metz, France
Something More Than a Succession of Notes, Bétonsalon, Paris, France
L'instinct oublié, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff at gallery LAbor, Mexico City, Mexico
A Stone Left Unturned, Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris, France
Too Big and Not Too Big, Thomas Brambilla Gallery, Bergamo, Italy

2012

Humor, seriously, Esbjerg Museum of Modern Art, Esbjerg, Denmark
Notations: The Cage Effect today, Hunter College
John Cage: A Centennial Celebration (with Friends), Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati

2011

Plot, Plan, Process: Works on Paper from the 1960s to Now, Leslie Tonkonow ARTWORKS + PROJECTS, New York, NY, USA
Drawn / Taped / Burned: Abstraction on Paper, Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, NY, USA
Dance/Draw, Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, Boston, MA
Aldrich Undercover, Aldrich Museum Exhibition and Benefit, Ridgefield, CT, USA

2010

Intolerance, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, USA
Early Conceptualists, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris, France
Connexions, Esbjerg Museum of Modern Art, Esbjerg, Denmark
Performance Drawings, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, USA
Drawn / Taped / Burned: Abstraction on Paper, Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, NY, USA
Reunion 2010: The Night of Future Past, William Anastasi & Dove Bradshaw play chess; Ryerson Theatre, Toronto, Canada
At 21: Gifts and Promised Gifts in Honor of The Contemporary Museum's 20th Anniversary, The Contemporary Museum of Honolulu, Hawaii
On Paper, Stalke Gallery, Denmark
Biennial Winter Salon, Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York, USA
Performance Art Benefit, Lehman Maupin Gallery, New York, USA

2009

The Third Mind, American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA
East/West, Anastasi, Bradshaw, Flavin, Kuwayama; Bjorn Ressle Gallery, New York, USA
Space As Medium, Miami Art Museum, Miami, USA
ONE Copenhagen, Six Americans / Six Danes, Stalke Up North, Copenhagen
ONE More, Dedicated to Sol LeWitt, Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, St Louis, MO, USA
Passion, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris, France
Théâtre des opérations, Théâtre de l'usine, Geneva, Switzerland

2008

The Title of This Show, Jan Mot Gallery, Brussels, Belgium
Subversive Spaces: Surrealism and Contemporary Art, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK
No Regrets, Stalke Up North, Copenhagen, Denmark
New York New Drawings 1946-2007, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, Segovia, Spain
Five Americans, Borup Artcenter, Copenhagen, Denmark
Choosing, Andrée Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg, Germany
Winter Salon—Works on Paper, Björn Ressle Gallery, New York, USA
Brooklyn Rail Benefit, Pace Gallery, New York, USA

Aldrich Museum Benefit, Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, CT, USA

ONE More: Dedicated to Sol LeWitt, Esbjerg Museum of Modern Art, Esbjerg, Denmark

2007

One, In memoriam: Sol LeWitt, Bjorn Ressel Gallery, New York

Blind, The Annex, New York, USA

Anastasi, Bradshaw, Cage, Cunningham, University of California at San Diego and University of Virginia Art Museum

LeWitt x 2, Kirke Sonnerup, Denmark; Miami Art Museum, Miami, USA

Invention, Merce Cunningham & Collaborators, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center, New York, USA

Winter Salon, Bjorn Ressel Fine Art, New York, USA

White Box Annex, New York, USA

2006

Twice Drawn, Tang Teaching Museum, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, USA

LeWitt x 2, Inaugurating the new building

From Time to Time

Word to Word

10th year anniversary group show

Charles Carpenter Collection, Whitney Museum

2005

Edge Level Ground, Stephanie Hering Gallery, Berlin, Germany

Anastasi Bradshaw Cage Cunningham, University Art Museum, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA

William Anastasi / Dove Bradshaw, Les Yeux du Monde, Charlottesville, VA, USA

Poles Apart, Poles Together, 51st Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy

Reality, Kirke Sonnerup, Denmark

2004

Work Ethic, Baltimore Museum of Art; traveled to Des Moines Art Center and Wexner Center for the Arts

Selections from the Sol LeWitt Collection, New Britain Museum of Art, New Britain, CT, USA

View Point: Works from the Museum Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art, Roskilde, Denmark

Opening Celebration of the Rubin Museum of Art, New York, USA

Infinite Possibilities: Serial Imagery in Twentieth Century Drawings, Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA, USA

2003

The Invisible Thread: Buddhist Spirit in Contemporary Art, Snug Harbor, New York, USA

Group show, Davidson Art Gallery, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, USA

Unexpected Dimensions: Works from the LeWitt Collection, New Britain Museum of American Art and Davidson Art Center, Wesleyan University

LeWitt's LeWitts, New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, USA

White Box Benefit Auction, Cohan Gallery, New York, USA

2002

Memorial Concert For John Cage, 1912-1992, Garry Tatinsian Gallery, New York, USA

Charles Carpenter Collection, The Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, CT, USA

Blobs, wiggles and dots, webs and crustillations, The Work Space, New York, USA

Mattress Factory 25th Anniversary Auction, Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, USA

Whitebox Benefit, Whitebox Gallery, New York, USA

Collaborations, Dieu Donné, New York, USA

Benefit for the Drawing Center, The Drawing Center, New York, USA

ARTISTIC ADVISOR TO MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY

Appointed along with Dove Bradshaw

1984 Phrases — World première, Théâtre Municipal d'Angers, Angers, France. Music: David Vaughn; design: William Anastasi and Dove Bradshaw.

1985 Native Green — World première, City Center. Music: John King; design: William Anastasi and Dove Bradshaw; lighting for stage.

1985 Grange Eve — World premiere, City Center Theater, New York. Music: Takehisa Kosugi; décor, costumes and lighting: William Anastasi.

1986 Points In Space — World premiere, BBC Television. Music: John Cage; décor: William Anastasi; costumes: Dove Bradshaw.

1990 Points In Space — Commissioned by Rudolf Nureyev, Opéra de Paris Garnier, Paris. Music: John Cage; décor: William Anastasi; costumes: Dove Bradshaw.

1986 Fielding Sixes — World Premiere, City Center Theater, New York. Music: John Cage; décor, costumes and lighting: William Anastasi.

1987 Shards — World Premiere, City Center Theater, New York. Music: David Tudor; décor and lighting: William Anastasi.

1988 Eleven — World Premiere, Joyce Theater, New York. Music: Robert Ashley; décor, costumes and lighting: William Anastasi.

1989 Events — World Premiere, Grand Central Station, New York. Music: David Tudor; costumes: William Anastasi and Dove Bradshaw.

1990 Polarity — World Premiere, City Center Theater, New York. Music: David Tudor; décor from drawings by Merce Cunningham; costumes and lighting: William Anastasi.

RADIO

1993

WBAI, August 19, 2:00–3:30 a.m., commemorating John Cage with Peter Schmidig.

1992

WBAI, August 16, 11:00 p.m., panel of close associates of John Cage, Peter Schmidig.

TELEVISION

1993

Endings and Beginnings, September 26, 12:30 a.m., ABC, discussing painting of the word “Jew”, Jewish Museum, New York.

SPECIAL EDITIONS

1975

The Anastasi Puzzle, special edition for MoMA (3000).

1976

The Anastasi Puzzle, second edition (1000).

1979

Puzzle Puzzle, special edition for MoMA (5000).