

**Judson Fragments** by Elaine Summers,  
and its inclusion in the exhibition *Un dancing per ballare*, Lecce Italy, 2019

by Thomas Körtvélyessy

Elaine Summers has many possible links to the focus of this exhibition: like Anna Halprin and like many of her colleagues at the now famous collective Judson Dance Theater, she was interested in daily movements as a source for dance. Her intermedia work brought multiple film projections, live dancing and the environment where the performance happened into one experience. Towards the end of her life, she embraced the internet and created telematic internet-performances, all as part of her work [www.skytime.org](http://www.skytime.org)

As a child of the US-American Depression, Elaine Summers was acutely aware of daily life and the social and political questions of her time. Her dance-company was always multi-racial and remained so from the early 1960s to the very end. She created one of the first not-for-profit corporations, the Experimental Intermedia Foundation, now still maintained by Phill Nibblock, to help fund art-projects in a shared environment with other artists. She professionally supported women artists, made an Anti-Vietnam film *Another Pilgrim*, and was open to talk with everyone who she met about facts of life. Her somatic movement technique Kinetic Awareness® is one of the earliest post-war examples of a sensory-based approach to the individual human body and its own needs and ways to move, centering personal discovery and exploration above external rules and cultural norms. All of her work can be understood from this central interest in what an individual dancer can and wants to do in the moment of performance, no matter what medium. Works like *Invitation to Secret Dancers*, *White Wind Dance*, *Walking Dance for Any Number*, or *One & One & One & One & ...* all invite the dancers, professional or amateur, to explore their interests and possibilities with a certain element, structure or idea. Many of these dances were presented in Italy, at the Festival Santarcangelo in 1981, with composer Pauline Oliveros and the Elaine Summers Dance & Film Company. The same playful, body-based exploration can be witnessed in her film-dances, such as *Walking Dance for Any Number*, *Iowa Blizzard*, or *Absence & Presence*.

She always retained an interest in everyday people around her, brought up her son by sharing the responsibilities of child-care with other professional women taking turns for each other, and as late as 2012, at age 87, she started a blog about SoHo in 2012, two years before her passing away in 2014, about the area where she lived for much of her life. <https://livelovelearnlocally.blogspot.com/2012/04/>

Elaine Summers created the film *Judson Fragments* as an improvisation, right after her epochal intermedia-concert *Fantastic Gardens* at Judson Memorial Church in 1964. It shows parts of films that she made and also includes films by colleague-friends. The footage, of which much was also used during the concert, shows the now famous recordings of Yvonne Rainer's *Room Service* at Judson Dance Theater Concert No. 13, a collaboration with visual artist Charles Ross. Steve Paxton and Deborah Hay can be seen moving an inflatable transparent structure on a golf-course. But there are also parts showing cars seen from Elaine Summers' loft-studio at the time, her son wearing a cowboy hat, children playing with film-scraps in an exhibition space. Just like with the human body, she played with the possibilities of film, like negatives, hi-speed, sudden cuts, stills, etc. creating dancing movements of light, mostly in Black & White.

For this exhibition, I suggested to Laura Perrone that, following the artists' interests, the presentation of *Judson Fragments* should not remain confined to the literal box of a single monitor, but also be projected directly on the wall, or even the windows of the exhibition space, to create a merging of the movements of the film with the actual walls of the building, and even the presence of the visitors. I am curious and look forward to see what she and Luca Coclite will have made of this invitation.

Thomas Körtvélyessy is a choreographer, artistic director of his own enterprise Reäl Dance Company, and executor at the Artistic Estate of Elaine Summers, facilitated by Kinetic Awareness® Center, with thanks to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York City Public Library for the Performing Arts. Special thanks to Phill Nibblock, Linda Murray, and Tanisha Jones.

[www.realdancecompany.org](http://www.realdancecompany.org)  
[www.elainesummersdance.com](http://www.elainesummersdance.com)  
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