

Robert Whitman was born in New York City in 1935. He studied literature at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, from 1953 to 1957, and art history at Columbia University in 1958. In the late fifties he began to present performances, including the pioneering works *American Moon* (1960) and *Prune Flat* (1965), as well as to exhibit his multimedia work in some of New York's more influential experimental venues, such as the Hansa, Reuben, and Martha Jackson galleries. With scientists Billy Klüver and Fred Waldhauer and artist Robert Rauschenberg, Whitman cofounded, in 1966, Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), a loose-knit association that organized collaborations between artists and scientists. His one-person exhibitions were held at such venues as the Jewish Museum, New York (1968), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1968), and the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1973). Dia organized a retrospective of his theater works in 1976. Several theater projects have also toured to various European venues, including the Moderna Museet, Stockholm (1987 and 1989), and the Centre Pompidou, Paris (2001 and 2002).

selected bibliography

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Front cover:
above: *Prune Flat*, 1965, photo: Babette Mangolte, 1976
below: *Light Touch*, 1976, photo: Babette Mangolte

Robert Whitman
Prune Flat (1965)
Light Touch (1976)



Dia:Beacon 3 Beekman Street Beacon New York
Friday–Sunday, September 5–7, 2003, 4pm

Dia:Chelsea 545 West 22nd Street New York City
Wednesday–Friday, September 10–12, 2003, 7:30pm

Robert Whitman

Prune Flat (1965)

In traditional theater, the audience projects itself onto the stage. I don't want the audience mindlessly to be part of the piece and be swept along by it. I want objective rational distance, as well as emotional participation. Let them come up to the stage, remembering that the work is an image to be perceived.

—Robert Whitman

Prune Flat was produced specially for a program of expanded cinema at Jonas Mekas's Film-Maker's Cinematheque on West 42nd Street, December 1965, when it shared the bill with works by Claes Oldenburg and Robert Rauschenberg. From May 20 to August 21, 1966, it ran on consecutive weekends with *Untitled* (1966) at the Martinique Theater and Circle in the Square, once again on a narrow proscenium stage.

In *Prune Flat*, Whitman has created "a classic work in the exploration of flat projected images and three-dimensionality," Mekas argued. Barbara Rose called the piece "a tour-de-force of the juxtaposition of reality and illusion, revealing the basically illusionary nature of art." Don McDonagh claimed, "For Whitman, the intent of any piece is to explore an image. In *Prune Flat* he has a dual idea: reality and the representation of it. He busily feeds the eye with actions of live performers and filmed sequences of the performers in identical costumes romping through the countryside or through city streets. At other moments the performers themselves pass back and forth in front of the screens, their white costumes awash with projected images."

Light Touch (1976)

Most of my pieces are reactions to specific times and spaces. They get off the ground when I see the space and work in the space. They are a response to the physical activity involved in making that piece. They function in a social reality in a time in my life. They are not abstract.

—Robert Whitman

Light Touch was originally commissioned by Dia Art Foundation in 1976, on the occasion of a retrospective series of Whitman's performance works. It had its debut in a truck depot at 589 Washington Street, New York City.

Exceptionally in his oeuvre, this work, like *Prune Flat*, was initially made for a specific space, which became integral to the work itself. Attributes of the depot, such as the large open space, roll-up doors opening onto the street, and the loading platform, are deployed so that the performers, props, films, and things that happen in the space function as the intermediary or medium between the audience and the street.

Produced by Jim Bauerlein

Cast

Prune Flat

Sylvie Chartrano

Katiushka Melo

Vickie Arndt

Light Touch

Gustavius Smith

Leonel Estevez

Projectionists

Patrick Heilman

Jennifer Fieber

Brian Dooda

Production Staff

Head of crew: Vickie Arndt

Construction chief: Mark Walker

Production Crew

Kim Lowe, Sarah Wood, Marcel Walker, Jason Kendall, Meredyth Sparks, Julio Cortez, Curtis Harvey