

john giorno

I wanted to do more than write poems. I wanted to broaden the ways that poets could connect with audiences. — John Giorno

life is a killer

august 29— october 10,
2026

opening
august 29, 12 — 4 pm

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tue – thur, 11am – 6pm
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kurimanzutto presents *John Giorno: LIFE IS A KILLER*, the first major solo show in Mexico City by the legendary American artist, poet, and activist (1936–2019). The exhibition brings together works on canvas and paper, wall paintings, audio recordings, film, and live performances to examine Giorno's prolific creative practice through language. His iconic phrase reappears across paintings, recordings, performance, and publications in the exhibition, reflecting Giorno's conviction that a poem did not end on the page but took on a new life of its own and acquired new meaning each time it morphed into another medium.

Some of these wall paintings and works on canvas, or *Poem Paintings*, a series Giorno began in the late 1980s, appear in stark black and white or vivid rainbow colors, transforming words into bold visual compositions. They are inspired by the graphic language of Pop art and the exchange between poetry and the visual arts in New York at that time, which was also inspired by Giorno's association with Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Andy Warhol. His lifelong commitment to Tibetan Buddhism also shaped this understanding that language could continually be reimagined through repetition, scale, color, and context.

Across these monumental paintings and works on canvas, phrases such as *LIFE IS A KILLER*, *SPACE FORGETS YOU*, and *EVERYONE GETS LIGHTER* reveal how shifts in scale, color, and architecture can shape how we experience recurring words. By responding to the building, these wall paintings extend Giorno's poems beyond the canvas, allowing language to occupy the gallery space.

The show also includes a selection of silkscreen prints from the late 1960s and early 1970s based on newspaper headlines, magazine articles, and personal ads alongside Giorno's own writing. Two of these works feature the artist's signature double-column format, inviting viewers to read poems out loud, echoing the importance of voice, rhythm, repetition, and layered language.

As a reminder of Giorno's lifelong commitment to performance, there is a suspended microphone in the middle of the gallery hanging above a raised platform that serves as a

stage for live acts. It is surrounded by four turntables, developed with artist Rirkrit Tiravanija, who knew Giorno well. These turntables play vinyl records released by **Giorno Poetry Systems** (GPS), the nonprofit organization Giorno founded in 1965. Among the recordings are selections spanning the history of GPS, including *The Dial-A-Poem Poets: Totally Corrupt* (1973), *Big Ego* (1978), and *Life Is a Killer* (1982). Visitors are invited to select, handle, and play the LPs themselves, allowing up to four recordings to spin at a time. As visitors play the recordings, voices will fill the gallery, layering poems into an ever-changing soundscape. These recordings reflect Giorno's commitment to reimagining how poetry could exist beyond the page, and connect with new audiences in everyday life.

To shed more light on Giorno through performance, the gallery's project room upstairs presents **Rirkrit Tiravanija's** *untitled 2008 (john giorno reads)* (2008). The ten-hour film, which was captured over the course of several days at Giorno's home at 222 Bowery in New York, follows the artist performing poems, memoirs, and music spanning five decades of his career. It reflects Tiravanija's desire to preserve Giorno's energy, as well as a long friendship and artistic dialogue between the two artists. It is also an invitation for visitors to experience the intimate setting where Giorno lived, worked, and performed.

In the spirit of GPS's longstanding peer-to-peer model—in which artists are invited to present the work of an artist they admire—the nonprofit has also invited **Abraham Cruzvillegas**, who in turn has invited **La Bruja de Texcoco** to perform on September 9 at 222 Bowery. As an extension of Giorno's commitment to amplifying voices beyond his own, the event extends GPS's commitment to fostering creative exchange among new artists and audiences.

In honor of Giorno's legacy, there will also be an ongoing program of readings, performances, workshops, and public events in collaboration with artists, poets, and performers working in Mexico City, treating poetry as a shared act of performance and translation. **La Americana**, an independent bookstore specializing in books from the American continent, will lead a poetry translation workshop in which poets, editors, and writers will read works by Giorno and his contemporaries while producing new Spanish versions that embrace translation as a creative and interpretive act,

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one that shapes meaning across language and culture. These translations will be performed in the gallery, broadcast live via Montez Press Radio, and published in a zine by La Americana and kurimanzutto libros. Additional readings and performances will take place throughout the exhibition.

In addition, the gallery's bookstore will present an archive of photographs, publications, documents, recordings, and ephemera spanning Giorno's life and practice. This archive, which draws from materials related to Dial-A-Poem, GPS, Buddhism, the artist's political activism, as well as his collaborations, reveals how, throughout his career, poetry, performance, and community became inseparable from one another.

about the artist

John Giorno Estate (b. 1936—2019, New York, United States of America) At the crossroads of poetry, visual arts, music, and performance, John Giorno's work targets a broad audience, redefining the capabilities of poetry and linguistic form. The New York-born poet and performance artist is recognized as a leading figure of the Beat Generation, a group of American post-World War II writers who rose to prominence in the 1950s through the cultural phenomena they documented and inspired. Giorno's work encompasses two disciplines: poetry and art, which both fascinated and inspired the artist. His relationships and kinship with Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg profoundly influenced his work. Giorno's words also incorporate images in his Poem Paintings, which feature short excerpts from his writings, phrases that have continually haunted him.

In his first poetry anthology, *The American Book of the Dead* (1964), Giorno employed Pop Art techniques, such as the appropriation of found imagery in his poetry. That same year, he began applying cut-up and montage techniques to found texts. His first audio poem piece debuted at the Paris Museum of Modern Art Biennale in 1965. He is also credited with inventing Performance Poetry and Dial-A-Poem—a free telephone line connecting listeners to recordings of original works of poetry. Under his not-for-profit production compaNew York, Giorno Poetry Systems, he organized a number of multimedia poetry experiments and events. In 1970, his Dial-A-Poem installation at the Museum of Modern Art, New

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York, merged words and images to confront audiences with poetry in different contexts.

In 2008, the first career-spanning collection of Giorno's poems, *Subduing Demons in America: Selected Poems 1962–2007*, was published. His first solo show, *Black Paintings and Drawings*, took place at Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery in New York in 2012. In 2021, Giorno posthumously received the American Book Award from The Before Columbus Foundation for his book *Great Demon Kings: A Memoir of Poetry, Sex, Art, Death, and Enlightenment*.

Selected solo exhibitions include: *Dial-A-Poem Switzerland*, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MAMCO), Geneva, Switzerland (2026); *John Giorno: The Performative Word*, Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (MAMbo), Bologna, Italy (2026); *Dial-A-Poem Hong Kong*, M+, Hong Kong, China (2026); *John Giorno: No Nostalgia*, Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles (2025); *John Giorno: a labor of LOVE*, Milano Triennale, Milan (2025); *Welcoming the Flowers*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2025); *SIT IN MY HEART AND SMILE*, Moraes-Barbosa Collection, São Paulo, Brazil (2025); *John Giorno: Jasmine Burn*, kurimanzutto, New York (2024); *John Giorno Dial-A-Poem*, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York (2023); *John Giorno*, Almine Rech, London (2021); *John Giorno: DO THE UNDONE*, Sperone Westwater, New York (2019); *Ugo Rondinone: I ♥ John Giorno*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2015); traveled to 13 venues throughout Manhattan, New York (2017); *I love John Giorno - an exhibition by Ugo Rondinone*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2015); *Star 69: Dial-A-Poem Relics*, The Bauer Hotel, Campo San Moise, Venice (2011); *Diagonales*, Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Puteaux, France (2010); *LIFE IS A KILLER*, Galerie Almine Rech, Paris (2009); *LA SAGEZZA DELLE STREGHE/ WISDOM OF THE WITCHES / LA SAGESSE DES SORCIÈRES*, Kaplan Project n°3, Naples, Italy (2005).

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John Giorno passed away in New York in 2019.