

## Marty St.James NRLA

In 1979 I attended a Performance Platform session in Nottingham. This was to become the forerunner of the National Review of Live Art and it was here that I met for the first time Steve Rogers who was chairing a panel discussion. He later became our close friend and tour manager and indeed was the editor of Performance Magazine some time after. Having toured as a student/performance artist in the mid 1970's, encountering a whole array of performance art characters on the circuit, the Platform/NRLA gradually formed a sense of focus for the medium, not in all its forms but in many. Much of the debate featured around disagreement rather than a sense of one purpose or definition. I recall a heated encounter with Hesitate and Demonstrate at the Midland group when we argued over the theatrical or plastic arts nature of performance; I was on the visual arts side, believing the work came out of a history of visual artists encounters with material and conscious orientated philosophy. Differing views were exchanged, not necessarily watertight ones, but they were believed and held with conviction.

Having said that, my live work at the time was with partner Anne Wilson and we were performing in very public spaces such as Ferries, Buses, Shopping Centers, Festivals, Clubs etc. Venues and showcases like the NRLA and other spaces in Britain and abroad provided us with an auditorium environment, allowing a different type of form and control to come into play which later led to the development of the Video Portrait objects and much of the moving image work I make now. I have never seen things in one single strand or form and indeed have always adhered to a sense of process in all forms and media i.e. one thing enveloping into another. Painting can lead into performance (take away the canvas and you are left with the activity); performance leads to video, in the form of performance to camera; moving image leads to digital media as technology and networks change. But at the centre of my practice has always been action, movement and performance of a historical visual art nature. I recall a past advertisement for the NRLA Midland Group (quote)

*1986 is the festival's sixth and strongest year, reflecting a new confidence in Performance Art in Britain today.... Great banquet debate, films, Video Artists on Tour, contentious, inspiring, frustrating, anarchic and fun...*

I still strongly believe that Performance Art is the purest form of art, as it is direct and inputs through necessity into a person's memory and, of course, at best ignores the art market. My last public performance art work was the Civic Monument, an Artangel/Gulbenkian touring project in 1990. Last year I presented *Homage*, a 7-minute performance, my first public work for some 18 years at my *Invisible Man* video triptych installation exhibition in New York City (2007). You never know, I may even be encouraged to perform this work again in the UK!

Marty St.James is a practicing artist, based in London and Professor of Fine Art at the University of Hertfordshire.