

# Use of Glass in Performance Art

## Camın Performans Sanatında Kullanımı

Ayla BİRİNCİ 

Department of Painting, Erzincan  
Binali Yıldırım University, Faculty of  
Fine Arts, Erzincan, Türkiye



### ABSTRACT

Performance art, which is one of the fields in which art is used effectively as a means of expression, contains many disciplines and presents the borderless aspect of this understanding of art to art audience with a supportive attitude. The idea of the inclusion of the audience, which is at the core of performance art, has periodically changed and developed within itself. Artists have periodically and stylistically changed the art material, and this situation has made performance art boundless within itself. In addition to removing the boundaries between art and artist with its pioneering initiatives of art, it has also tended to include audiences in this field. Artists have periodically changed the direction of expression and this has provided a style for each artist. Performance art has continued from the past to the present day in the national and international arena and has created a language of expression by dealing with social issues in general.

The aspect of performance art that allows the artist to use various mediums has allowed us to examine glass art in an integrated manner with performance art. Because the properties of glass such as being sensitive, fragile, sharp, transparent, softening, and suitable for shaping are used at points where it can express what is meant to be expressed in performance. In particular, the limitless attitude of performance art, with the transparent structure of the glass, strengthens the expression. In this study, the change and development of performance art from past to present, especially the use of glass as an art material, have been researched and it is aimed to contribute to the literature. In the use of glass as an art material, how the glass expresses the concept of infinity has been shown with examples in the studies. In the literature review for this study, according to which subjects the examples related to the use of glass in performance art can be determined and the forms of expression are examined.

Within the scope of the study, a literature review was made, and it has been tried to clarify issues such as common areas and distinctions in the areas where art practices are related to the collected data. As a result of the study, attention has been drawn to the place of glass in the story of performance art from the use of the body as an art object to the use of different materials. Emphasizing the effectiveness of glass as a material in performance art, the expressive power of glass is emphasized. This study aims to express the place of the artistic aspect of glass as a material in performance art.

**Keywords:** Art, glass, glass art, performance art, plastic art

### ÖZ

Sanatın bir ifade aracı olarak etkin kullanıldığı alanlardan bir tanesi olan performans sanatı, içinde birçok disiplini barındırarak bu sanat anlayışının sınır çizmeyen yönünü, destekleyici bir tavırla sanat izleyicisine sunmaktadır. Performans sanatının temelinde yer alan izleyiciyi dahil etme fikri dönemsel olarak değişmiş ve kendi içerisinde gelişmiştir. Sanatçılar dönemsel ve üslupsal olarak sanat malzemesini değiştirmiş, bu durum performans sanatının kendi içerisinde de sınırları olmayan bir hâl almasını sağlamıştır. 1900'lü yıllarda avangart oluşumlarla başlayan performans sanatı süreci, sanatsal pratiklerle izleyici ve sanat eseri arasındaki ilişkiyi gittikçe geliştirmiştir. Sanatın öncül girişimleriyle sanat ve sanatçı arasındaki sınırları kaldırmasının yanında izleyiciyi de bu alana dâhil etme eğiliminde olmuştur. Sanatçı dönemsel olarak ifade yönünü değiştirmiş ve bu da her sanatçı için bir üslup oluşmasını sağlamıştır. Ulusal ve uluslararası alanda performans sanatı geçmişten günümüze kadar devam etmiş ve genelinde sosyal konuları ele alarak bir anlatım dili oluşturmuştur.

Performans sanatının sanatçının çeşitli medyumlar kullabilmesine imkân veren yönü cam sanatını da performans sanatı ile bütünleşik olarak inceleyebilmemize imkân tanımıştır. Zira camın hassas, kırılğan, keskin, şeffaf, yumuşayan, şekillendirilmeye uygun olması gibi özellikleri, performansta anlatılmak istenen şeyi ifade edebileceği noktalarda kullanılmaktadır. Özellikle performans sanatının sınır tanımayan tavrı, camın şeffaf yapısı ile anlatımın güçlenmesini sağlamaktadır. Bu çalışma

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Corresponding Author/Sorumlu Yazar:  
Ayla BİRİNCİ  
E-mail: ayla.birinci@erzincan.edu.tr

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ile performans sanatının geçmişten günümüze değin olan değişim ve gelişimi, özellikle camın bir sanat malzemesi olarak kullanımı araştırılmış ve literatüre katkı sağlaması amaçlanmıştır. Camın bir sanat malzemesi olarak kullanımında, çalışmalarda camın sınırsızlık olgusunu nasıl ifade ettiği örneklerle gösterilmiştir. Bu çalışma için yapılan literatür taramasında, performans sanatında camın kullanımı ile ilgili örneklerin hangi konular doğrultusunda belirlenebildiği ve ifade biçimleri incelenmiştir.

Araştırma kapsamında literatür taraması yapılmış, derlenen veriler ile sanat pratiklerinin ilişkili olduğu alanlardaki ortak alanlar, ayrımlar gibi konulara açıklık getirilmeye çalışılmıştır. Araştırmanın sonucunda performans sanatının vücudun bir sanat nesnesi olarak kullanımından, farklı materyal kullanıma değin uzanan hikayesinde camın yerine dikkat çekilmiştir. Performans sanatında malzeme olarak camın etkiselliğinin üzerinde durularak camın ifade gücünün üzerinde durulmuştur. Bu çalışma, bir malzeme olarak camın sanatsal yönünün performans sanatı içindeki yerini ifade etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sanat, cam, cam sanatı, performans sanatı, plastik sanatlar

## Introduction

Glass art, the earliest examples of which can be traced back to Egypt and Mesopotamia, is one of the important dynamics of contemporary art today. The classical self-isolation situation, in which glass art is produced by a wide variety of methods, has moved to a different dimension in the postmodern period when interdisciplinary artworks have increased. Although it is a branch of art in itself, it is known that glass is considered as an important concept and context in contemporary performative activities. In contrast to classical glass art, in contemporary art, there are works produced by adding elements such as sound, image and music, while new performative activities can be seen in which artists include their own bodies in the process. In this sense, how performance art and glass art communicate with each other should be examined.

Performance art, which has its origins in theatrical shows staged by 20th-century futurist, dadaist, and surrealist artists, benefits from the effect of these art movements to remove the boundary between artists and audience by creating mutual interaction. Since the words "performance" and "performative" come from the same root, the term performance can be expressed as follows: "A performative results in staging and manifests or realizes itself in the staging feature of performative acts; as a result, traditional art branches tend to perform themselves by staging and in the form of staging; new branches of art, such as performance art or action art, also terminologically refer to the performative dimension and staging qualities of the arts" (Carlson, 1996, p. 5). In the 1950s, performance art was used as a term for the interaction between audiences and artists, and in the 1960s, artists' bodies were used as an exhibition element. The fact that there are aspects associated with theater has put performance art into a field of comparison. "The arguments put forward to establish ritual studies and Theater Sciences departments were based on similar foundations. In both cases, the hierarchical positions were reversed. The transition from mythos to ritual and from literary text to theatrical staging was made" (Kipenberg, 1997, p. 98). In this understanding of art, which is also related to the Fluxus movement, which has shown elements such as music, dance and song, ideas for establishing a relationship between the audience and the work have been a priority. "Towards the end of the 19th century, the artistic quality of the theater was legitimized almost only by referring to dramatic works of art, namely literary texts" (Erika, 2016, p. 46). Here, strategies such as coincidence and improvisation are adopted. The basis of Fluxus is based on the idea of establishing a relationship between works and audiences. This is related to

the analysis process and personal desires of audiences in order to understand the work of art. Artists who want to achieve the balance between modern art and daily life as individuals have shown themselves in a political art approach. Performance art, which has a more adopted understanding of art after 1960, has increased the audience rate. In the 1970s, artists used performance art to draw attention to problems of body representation. In the 1980s, videos were used as material. In performance art, the means of expression consists of materials such as bodies and goods, and glass material can be included in this diversity. Performance art, which strengthens its identity as a means of expression with its variety of materials, creates a space that can be used with many art movements. While creating a space for itself in art movements such as video art, conceptual art and installation art, it takes place in an avant-garde representation. "Performance art, which has traces of art movements and approaches of the period but emerged and developed without being connected to any of them, has also had a very important impact on today's understanding of art" (Martinez & Demiral, 2014, p. 182). Pollock, one of the pioneers of the movement, used his body together with materials such as paint and canvas brush in his works. His expressive studies combined with the performance he created with body movements formed a theoretical framework. The USA has had pioneering representatives in many countries such as Germany, Austria, Japan, Great Britain, and Serbia. These names are Allan Kaprow, Otto Muehl, Chris Burden, Marina Abramović, and Jiro Yoshihara. In the 2000s, performance art shows its development with the more effective use of technology. "Performance Art is among the art movements that have been able to show a truly international character" (Antmen, 2009, p. 219).

## Performance Art and Representatives

Artists have expressed themselves in different ways with performance art since the 1950s. In the following years, the way of expressing oneself gradually changed. "Its roots gained popularity in the 1960s and the origins of performance art go back to the Surrealist, Futurist and Dada Movement. The ideas formed by artists before performances to be made, places to be selected are all examined and initiated, developed and performances are finished" (Kirazcı, 2010, p. 16). Artists have used their bodies as material and performed sociological demonstrations. Jackson Pollock, one of the artists who realized the first examples of performance art, paints on canvas cloth that has been laid on the ground with his experimental works in his own workshop. In the application of paint with techniques such as splashing on canvas and sprinkling flow, he also applies performance art because he uses his bodily



**Image 1.**  
An Image From Jackson Pollock's *Work and His Working*, 1950 (Paftal, 2019)

movements. The movements made by the artist in the process of creating his works constitute the work itself (Image 1).

Performance art is an art that does not draw boundaries and can bring together many disciplines. It is able to remove an audience from its original position and actively involve it in a work. In this position, the aim is to remove the boundary between life and art. Over time, the way it reveals itself has changed and the concept dimension has become clear. Thoughts and concepts are mainly processed in artists' performances. Performances have been made based on political, sociological, and psychological issues. There are samples of performance art at national and international levels. With the development of technology, the possibility of expression in this understanding of art has increased. "In today's society of the 21st century, with the contribution of rapid developments in the technology category, art, which develops with individual and social perceptions from all parts of daily life, shows changes and creates a new language" (Uğur, 2021, p. 1). The Happening movement, which has an important place in performance art, is also known as Formation. Happening is artistic work formed by the ideas that develop at that moment. Some formations can be experienced emotionally or sensorily. "The branches of art known and expressed as Happening or Formation include a process that does not produce any results, that occurs with the ideas that develop at the moment, and that is done at that moment. Popular artists such as Allan Kaprow, John Cage, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Whitman, Carolee Schneemann, and Red Grooms are known for their Happenings. The famous American artist Kaprow studied the art of painting but is also known as the realizer of visual spaces, which are also known as happening today" (Yılmaz, 2006, p. 258). In addition to Pollock's use of the canvas, Allen Kaprow's urge to create awareness in works created by the body art and that of the artists reflecting the same style have carried this understanding of art to different points. At this point, the expressive differences of existence are reflected by artists. "By drawing attention to the existence at the moment of the event by important artists such as Allan Kaprow and Joseph Beuys, it has continued to be seen as a form of expression by artists such as Yves Klein, Hermann Nitsch, Marina Abramović, Dennis Oppenheim, Bruce Nauman, Carolee Schneemann, Chris Burden, Stelarc and Orlan, and realized by making changes on bodies through events" (Yılmaz, 2006, p. 285). By focusing on many issues such as gender, race and equality in narrative issues, it has positioned the act of thinking

to reach the maximum level. "The body itself, which is the center point in body art, has been positioned as a subject in many different ways by artists, such as the movement of painted bodies by Yves Klein in 1960, the singing busts and sculptures of Gilbert & George in 1969, and Joseph Beuys expressing his images of a dead rabbit" (Lucie, 1996, p. 287). Performance art is a practical act for artists in terms of content. It is an original and non-repetitive experience for artists and audiences. This art expression, which has a theatrical attitude, does not aim to describe. It is used to communicate between artists and audiences. This form of communication is ensured by the active participation of audiences. "The term 'Happening' used by Allan Kaprow for events or actions in the early 60s is performances with the active participation of an audience. In the Happenings, in which mostly the effects of Dada are seen, each performance is different from the others. Performances in which improvisation is used intensively can be defined as structures arranged in sections" (Lynton, 1982, p. 329). Performance art has developed over the years as a language of expression and has formed an understanding of art by covering various disciplines. "In the 1970s, it was an understanding of art that was accepted as a form of artistic expression in itself. This understanding has developed in various geographies and completely different ways until today and has created a field that covers many fields such as dance, music, theater, poetry, and video. This understanding of art, which also uses a plastic language, has appealed to large and small masses" (Karabaş & İşleyen, 2016, p. 340). This artistic approach, which appeals to the masses, has increased its activities in regions of art and has turned into an accepted approach in terms of audiences. In this way, it has turned into a philosophically based form of inquiry that maintains its actuality and independence. The situation aiming to create awareness by criticizing sexist attitudes has taken its place in the art world with the feminist movement. American art historian Linda Nochlin, in her article published in *ARTnews* magazine in 1971, created the beginning of a feminist movement by saying "Why Are There No Great Female Artists?" (Antmen, 2008, p. 119).

### Use of Glass in Performance Art

Disciplines such as theater, dance, and music, which exist at the basis of performance art, have taken their place in art history with the inclusion of the art of painting. "Man has become a human being by means of tools. By making and creating tools, he made and created himself" (Fischer, 1982, p. 30). It has taken different stages in development as the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, and it serves as a mirror to conceptual art with its anti-form and questioning materiality. In a period when all art practices were questioned, art was exhibited outside the museum and gallery environments. Its boundaries have changed over time, and instead of a brush, bodies have been used as a material element. It is seen that sociological determinations play a role in the selection of materials. In many periods in art history, the "female body" rather than the expression "body" has been a means of expression and has been processed by artists to emphasize topics such as love, passion, sexuality, and greatness. Over time, the way of use in art has changed and the use of real bodies has been started. Materials often have not remained in one dimension, auxiliary materials have been also used. In some studies, the expression is strengthened with only a single material. When it comes to materials, every living or inanimate material that can come to mind and support its theoretical dimension can be used. Glass has been one of these materials. Glass, which can be used





**Image 2.**  
Elaine Miles, "Reflections," Glass Percussion Project, 2019, 300 × 300 × 150 cm (Miles, 2019)

to create a narrative language in performance art, is especially seen in international performances. An example of this is Elaine Miles' Glass Percussion performance using approximately 1000 shaped glass objects, sound and light. With this study, it is aimed to contribute to music with an experimental and contemporary approach. An Australian contemporary artist working in the fields of installation, sculpture, and performance, Miles uses glass predominantly in her performances (Image 2).

Another artist who performs performance art with glass is Yann Marussich. The artist, who uses his own body in his performances, completes his performances in a long-term way by ignoring the pain and the damage that results from them. An example of this is his performance in St Petersburg, where he used a bathtub and broken glass materials, undressed before entering the tub, entered the bathtub full of broken glass, and had himself covered so that his one arm remained out. The artist, whose performance is called "Cutting Edge," risked being castrated due to the glass shards and gently lifted the shards with classical music with his only arm remaining out. In this performance, which lasted about 1 hour, the artist aimed to express in his performance the existence of man as a prisoner in a painful world and his attempt to escape from this situation (Image 3).

Antony Gormley included the audience in his performance "Blind Light," allowing them to spend time in a glass container full of steam. The artist, who performed the installation, drew reactions to the security weakness of architectural structures. He argues



**Image 4.**  
Blind Light, Antony Gormley, London, 2007 (Levene, 2007)

that architecture should protect living things from the weather, darkness, and uncertainty. He sees the ostentation offered by architectural designs as modern penal slavery and wants to explain that it is possible to get away from this situation with the installation order that has been established. Glass has established a limiting order in this study (Image 4).

When glass is used as a means of display, it can also show performative effects. This theory, which can be applied to many disciplines, is used in the field of fashion. Fashion designer Alexander McQueen is a designer who uses glass performatively. She used the writer Michelle Olley as part of her fashion show in 2001. Olley, lying naked in a closed glass box with flying moths, depicts lumpy female figures from the Paleolithic period with her body. With the processes involved in the performance, the lid of the glass box in which Olley was located was opened and the glass on the front and back sides was divided into small pieces and scattered around (Image 5).

Performance art, which is present in many disciplines of art, has existed with common connection points. Film actress Tilda Swinton slept in a glass box placed in a museum as part of her one-woman show "The Maybe." A large number of people flocked to the museum to watch Swinton. She spent seven hours with a jug full of water and a cup to meet some of her vital requirements as she entered the glass box, which was covered with white sheets. After the closure of the museum, she left the museum and performed this show six times in many countries. She performed this performance in order to experience the claustrophobic tendency of art (Image 6).



**Image 3.**  
Yann Marussich, "Cutting Edge," 2017 (Marussich, 2017)

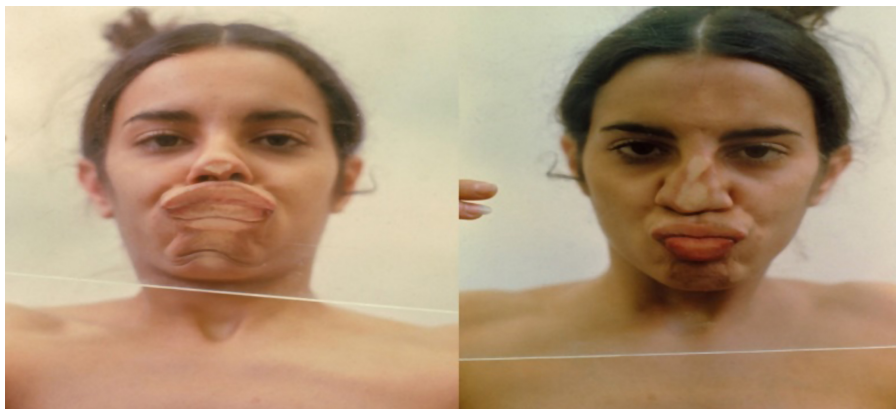


**Figure 5.**  
*Michelle Oley, 2001 (Oley, 2001)*



**Image 6.**  
*Actress Tilda Swinton Sleeps in a Glass Box at the Serpentine Gallery in London As Part of Cornelia Parker's Film The Maybe, 1995 (Swinton, 1995)*

Another artist using the female body as a performance material is Ana Mendieta. The Cuban artist is famous for her subtle but powerful interventions against nature. However, she has performed many performances questioning the concepts of female beauty by addressing feminine issues such as violence and oppression against women. In 1972, in response to the murder of a young girl who was raped, she performed "Glass on Body Imprints" by soaking her body in animal blood against a glass partition in her performance with her body. She recreated the victim's poses in front of the audience (Image 7).



**Image 7.**  
*Ana Mendieta Glass on Body Imprints, 1972 (Mendieta, 1972)*

Another artist who, like Ana Mendieta, has performed feministically is Hannah Wilke. Wilke has been a controversial figure among feminists of her time. In her works, she has been accused of maintaining the objectification of women by displaying her naked and traditionally, beautiful body. Refuting to be supervised by both men and women in the way she uses her body, she sang "Hannah Wilke Through the Large Glass." In 1976, she performed a striptease show at the Philadelphia Museum of Art behind Marcel Duchamp's sculpture "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors," wearing a white satin men's suit representing both the bride and the bachelor through the glass that served as a window for the audience. Wilke posed a few fashion magazine-like poses and then completed her performance by slowly taking her clothes off (Image 8).

Anna Mlasowsky, a glass artist, founded a gallery where performance art is applied based on glass art. Mlasowsky incorporates both performance and experimental glass techniques into her art practice. *4 Feet Apart* (2020) is a 20-minute film she cocreated with Lilia Ossiek and Alba Maria Thomas Alvarez. Mlasowsky describes the way she uses glass in her performances by saying, "Sometimes we have to break the things that bind us together in order to find them together." The performance creates narratives that take on the roles of characters among dancers and its glass objects. Separated by numerous seemingly elongated glass rods attached to their backs, when they tried to interact, the glass moved and broke until the dancers were free to embrace (Image 9).

The dialog that objects establish with artists has created the provocative forms seen in performance works. The artist has





**Image 8.**  
Hannah Wilke, *Through the Great Glass*, 1976 (Wilke, 1976)

incorporated bulletproof features into the glasses she uses in her performances. The artist's research on new techniques and new ways of using glass materials have formed the art attitude of today. As a performance and glass artist, she consistently crosses boundaries in her narratives of interaction between objects and actors. An example is the recurring cloak seen in *Chorus of One* (2016–2018) and *Noon* (2016–2019). The cloak is made of Rhino glass, a special glass developed for the army to be bulletproof and unbreakable (Image 10).



**Image 9.**  
Lilia Ossiek and Alba Maria Thomas Alvarez, *4 Feet Apart* (video still available), 2020 (Mlasowsky, 2020)

The artist Julianne Swartz, who associates glass with sound, discovered and exhibited new sounds by using the air pressure of the sound and the environment in her glass and ceramic container work with the hot glass blowing technique in her performance in New York (Image 11). In her performance of how sound shapes spatial and interpersonal relationships, the artist implanted a microphone that collected tonality within the encapsulated air mass. This air mass was amplified through electronic feedback to a pure tone or sound. The artist realized her performance by



**Image 10.**  
Anna Mlasowsky, *Rhino Glass-Ceramics, fabric, body. Chorus of One*. 2016–2018 (Mlasowsky, 2016)



**Image 11.**  
Julianne Swartz. "Sine Body," *Glass, Porcelain*. Photograph: Chris Kendall, 2018 (Kendall, 2018)

blending artistic elements with technology in her works. Glass has a smooth, reflective surface, which means clarity in the sound. The artist thinks that the surface and intensity of the glass reflect and hold the sound waves. Similarly, porcelain makes sense as the equivalent of glass because it has a very refined, densely glazed nonporous clay body. Therefore, it also has clarity and resonance with sound. The two materials were joined together by wrapping the baked ceramic pieces in wet paper and using them as press molds to form cavities in hot glass bubbles.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Performance art has been an attitude toward the classical understanding of art as a form of making art. The aim of the performances made from the past to the present is to create the freedom of art, and this situation emerges before the art audience in the form of removing the limits and eliminating the rules in art. With the beginning of performance art, there were periodic developments from the 1950s to the 2000s, and studies were carried out on the actions against war, violence, abuse, oppression, and many other topics. As a result of the studies, performance artists have been considered as protesters and activists. Performance art has continued the opposite of the classical understanding of art and has given a different vision with the use of materials. In addition to the difference in the understanding of materials, performance art has also carried the perception of space in the art to a different point. Without the need for galleries and indoor spaces, the use of the living body as an art material aims to make the message more meaningful and questionable. Performance art, in line with sociological determinations, has enabled the body to be shown in its most real form from many aspects. The body is positioned not only as itself but also imaginatively, and its phases are periodically seen in performance art samples from past to present. Materials have been among the determining factors of these transition phases, moving away from the limitations of space perception. At this point, glass has taken its place as a material in many periods and has become a preferred material in performances due to its physical properties. The properties of glass such as being delicate, fragile, sharp, transparent, soft, and suitable for shaping are used at points where it can express what is wanted to be explained in performances. In particular, the limitless attitude of performance art strengthens the expression with the transparent structure of glass. With this study, the change and development of performance art from past to present, especially the use of glass as an art material, was investigated and it was aimed to contribute to the literature. In the use of glass as an art material, examples are shown in the works of how glass expresses the phenomenon of limitlessness. In the literature review conducted for this study, the topics on which examples of the use of glass in performance art could be determined and their forms of expression were examined.

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