



Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963

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Off Limits is the first examination of the Rutgers group, artists who came together on the Rutgers University, New Brunswick campus during the 1950s and revolutionized art practices and pedagogy. Based on interviews with artists, critics, and dealers from the period, the book connects the initiation of major trends such as Happenings, Pop Art, and Fluxus to the faculty, students, art curriculum, and events at the university. It is the first book to look not only at the work of individual artists, but to consider how interactions between these artists influenced their groundbreaking work.

Rutgers was clearly the place to be for experimental artists during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Allan Kaprow's first Happening was presented at Rutgers. Roy Lichtenstein's first Pop paintings, George Segal's earliest figurative tableaux, Lucas Samaras's radical exploration of media, and proto-Fluxus events by Robert Watts and George Brecht all took place on and around the campus. The innovative group rejected Abstract Expressionism for art based on the immediate experience of urban and industrial life, creating startling new artforms which remain startling and provocative.

Led by the theoretical writings and art practice of Kaprow, the group created a New Art—art beyond the limits of the conventional and predictable, even beyond accepted notions of progressive trends. Lichtenstein recalls in an interview, “Kaprow showed us that art didn't have to look like art.” Along with Lichtenstein, Kaprow, Segal, and Watts taught at Rutgers and challenged one another to take art “Off Limits” — beyond the limits of the conventional, the predictable — even beyond the progressive, as defined by Abstract Expressionist gesturalism. Their art incorporated the gritty environs, the technological, the everyday, making art radical, outrageous, disturbing, and humorous.

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