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**Montalvo Arts Center presents: *O OAKS OH!*: Part 1 of 2 by Mierle Laderman Ukeles**

A daylong participatory artwork weaving together science, culture, nature, ritual, and spirituality to confront the ecological phenomenon of Sudden Oak Death with creativity

Artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles calls upon the public, scientists and experts in the field of Sudden Oak Death syndrome (SOD) to come together on Montalvo's grounds to become informed and envision a new ecological future for Montalvo Arts Center's forest.

SARATOGA, Calif. – On Thursday, Aug. 13, Montalvo Arts Center launches the first of a two-part artwork *O OAKS OH!*. This daylong participatory art event incorporates a *Day of Gathering/Public LEARN IN* focused on Sudden Oak Death (SOD), a disease that afflicts many oaks on Montalvo's grounds, the greater Bay Area and beyond. Created by public and performance artist, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *O OAKS OH!* convenes scholars, scientists and community stewards to share their knowledge of the perils of SOD and the spiritual majesty of the oaks. This is followed by the enactment of a ritual by all participants.

SOD is a virulent disease affecting forests in coastal California. According to Kelly Research and Outreach Lab at UC Berkeley, SOD has reached epidemic levels in several California forests, killing over 1 million trees in the past decade. Researchers have found a way to vaccinate individual trees from the disease, but are struggling to find a more accessible answer to the threat.

*O OAKS OH!* aims to inspire a commitment to maintain a healthy future for the 175-acre forest at Montalvo where many of these stricken oaks are located. Multiple elements unfold throughout the day and are enacted at different places around Montalvo. The day begins with presentations and a question/answer session with leading scientists and experts in the field of SOD and California's forest ecologies. Then, participants enjoy a working lunch with long-time local stewards. Afterwards, Ukeles and guest conductor/public artist Marcus Young lead everyone in a call and response rehearsal before entering the forest to enact the Ritual she has composed and choreographed to both mourn the oaks and celebrate the wild forest.

Ukeles states, "I aim to juxtapose two processes in one art event in order to open a new kind of airy space in people's minds, in their souls and in their hearts. First, we offer the highest quality of knowledge, then we join in a ritual that inspires a level of awe, reverence, love and passion for the oaks so that a spirit of emotional attachment to the oaks can emerge among all present. How else can we empower ourselves to work toward transforming a challenged forest into a healthy public space?"

This free, participatory artwork concludes with a reception, where guests begin to exchange ideas about creating a shared vision of community responsibility for this public land. *O OAKS OH!* is part of Montalvo's 2009 art initiative *AGENCY: The Work of Artists*, curated by Julie Lazar, which focuses on the theme of interdependence and the power that art has to change people's perceptions. Part 2 is scheduled for Dec. 2.

While in residence at Montalvo's Sally and Don Lucas Artists Residency Program to begin work on this commission, Ukeles walked the forest in search of the water source that sustains Montalvo's gardens and public park. She immediately realized that Montalvo's park is "a wild forest and a public treasure that holds promise for integrating nature and culture at Montalvo." As she walked the trails with Montalvo's grounds keeper, he pointed out a number of dead oaks, noting the cause to be SOD. Ukeles, a long-time New Yorker who had never heard of SOD, was struck by this devastating phenomenon taking place in such a beautiful landscape. To her, oaks had always represented "permanence, strength, endurance, dignity—something in nature that will always be there." After much thought and research, Ukeles decided to investigate this matter further, making it the focus of her project for *AGENCY*.

"Not only do the artwork activities shift from location to location, but the relationship between members of the audience and experts changes as well," Ukeles said. "If there can be a shift in people's ways of thinking and feeling about their relationship to the trees in this safe place for public gatherings, that's the first step in reclaiming its healthy future."

**Participants: Ecologists and Scientists (in alphabetical order):**

- **Janice Alexander:** SOD outreach coordinator for the University of California Cooperative Extension
- **Dr. Matteo Garbelotto:** Forest pathology and mycology extension specialist; adjunct professor in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management, Ecosystem Sciences Division, at UC Berkeley
- **Dr. Joe McBride:** Professor of forest ecology in the Forest Science Division of the Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management and professor of ecology in the Department of Landscape Architecture at UC Berkeley
- **Dr. David Rizzo:** Associate professor in the Department of Plant Pathology at UC Davis
- **Dr. Tedmund Swiecki:** Co-owner and plant pathologist, Phytosphere Research

**Participants: Local Stewards (in alphabetical order):**

- **Rosemary Cambra:** Tribal chairwoman, Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area
- **Betty Peck:** Retired Saratoga school teacher and community elder

Ukeles is "madly in love" with the public domain and public culture and as a result nearly all of her work takes place in the public sphere. Since 1977, when she became the official, unsalaried artist-in-residence at the New York City Department of Sanitation—a position she still holds—Ukeles has created art that deals with the endless maintenance and service work that "keeps the city alive," urban waste flows, recycling and ecology. Ukeles works in a variety of mediums, creating installations, performances, audio and video works. Her most recent teaching position was in Sculpture at Yale University and she is represented by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York.

"Montalvo is honored to have an artist of Mierle Laderman Ukeles' caliber to research, develop and orchestrate a project that holds such great significance for the immediate Montalvo community—one which also has value for a global audience," curator Lazar said. "It is our hope that by experiencing an ephemeral, topical artwork—one that compassionately addresses a challenging local environmental issue—a critical mass of talented people will become engaged enough to act on behalf of a treasured forest."

*AGENCY* is a focused, thematic series of newly commissioned and existing art projects that explore the subject of interdependence—life's dynamic, reciprocal interplay—from a variety of

approaches including family, immigration, the environment, faith, cultural memory and economic globalism. More than 60 artists were invited to participate in *AGENCY* because of their sensitive, compassionate investigations into relationships among people, places and systems as well as their skillful production of engaging public art, film, sculpture, photography, literature, performance and architecture.

*AGENCY: The Work of Artists* is funded in part by grants from The Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, Nimoy Foundation, and gifts from Mickie and Gibson Anderson, Jo and Barry Ariko, L.J. Cella, Wanda Kownacki and John Holton, Sally and Don Lucas, Judy and George Marcus, Kathie and Robert Maxfield, and Joan and Frederick M. Nicholas.

For more information visit [www.montalvoarts.org/agency](http://www.montalvoarts.org/agency). To reserve a space for this event, call the Box Office: 408.961.5858. Tickets are also available the day of the event at the registration table in the historic Villa.

#### **The Daylong Event Unfolds:**

**9:30 am:** Registration (historic Villa); Exhibits by participants and local organizations are on view for the day.

**10:00–12:35 pm:** *LEARN IN:* Presentations by ecologists and scientists who discovered and continue to study SOD followed by Q&A from audience. An art workshop for children ages 5-12 will be held simultaneously.

**12:35–1:30 pm:** Working lunch with a very local conversation with community stewards. Discussion continues with county officials. Presentations of the Ritual and description of "next steps for the forest" by artist Ukeles. (Lunch must be reserved in advance through the Box Office, 408.961.5858, or guests can bring their own).

**1:40–2:10 pm:** Rehearsal for the Ritual with a chance to practice sounds of mourning and celebration (Garden Theatre), led by Ukeles. Children from the morning workshop are invited to join the adults and to participate in the rest of the event.

**2:10–3:50 pm:** Move to the threshold of Montalvo's wild forest. Enter woods and perform the Ritual of mourning for the stricken oaks; leave the forest together and conclude the Ritual on the Great Lawn to celebrate the future of the forest as a healthy public place with the offering of a proposal for creating covenants of responsibility from the artist and participants.

**3:50 to 4:15 pm:** Reception on the Villa's veranda. Conclusion, announcements, reservations for Part 2 of *O OAKS OH!* on December 2 to be held in Montalvo's Carriage House Theatre.

#### **About Montalvo Arts Center**

Montalvo Arts Center is a nonprofit organization that fosters community engagement through the creation and presentation of multidisciplinary art. By uniting the broadest possible audiences with a global community of artists, Montalvo expands the role of arts and culture as an essential community resource. Montalvo's programming includes: an annual theme-based arts program; music and performance; education and public programs; new media and visual arts; and the Sally and Don Lucas Artists Residency. Located in the Saratoga foothills in the midst of Silicon Valley, Montalvo Arts Center occupies a Mediterranean-style villa on 175 stunning acres, which Senator James Phelan left to the people of California for the encouragement of promising students in the areas of art, music, literature and architecture. In January 2005, the organization changed its name from "Villa Montalvo" to "Montalvo Arts Center" to better communicate its mission to increasing local, national and international audiences. Montalvo celebrates its centennial in 2012. For more information about Montalvo Arts Center, call 408.961.5800 or visit [www.montalvoarts.org](http://www.montalvoarts.org).

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