

HOST Fusebox

Apr 11 – Jul 21,
2024

The Contemporary Austin

LAGUNA GLORIA

3809 West 35th Street

Austin, Texas 78703

512 458 8191

Art School: 512 323 6380

JONES CENTER

700 Congress Avenue

Austin, Texas 78701

512 453 5312

HOST

HOST is an exhibition space and program series that amplifies The Contemporary Austin's commitment to centering artists and welcoming publics. With each exhibition cycle, an artist will create a newly commissioned environment in the HOST gallery space at the Jones Center. Programming will accompany each work. Throughout the run of each exhibition, artists will invite visitors into their worlds.

All images courtesy of Fusebox.

Text © The Contemporary Austin 2024.

HOST display type by Simon Walker at Beasts of England.

Graphic design by Phillip Niemeyer.



Performance view, *Watch Me Fall* by Action Hero. Fusebox Festival 2013. Image courtesy of Fusebox.

Fusebox

This exhibition celebrates the twentieth anniversary of **Fusebox**. The brainchild of a group of young artist-friends living in Austin, Fusebox began in 2005 as a local festival for adventurous performance, staged in various venues and alternative spaces around town. Since then—having presented a wildly eclectic array of programs showcasing hundreds of local, national, and international artists—the organization has evolved to become both a cornerstone of the arts in Austin and a noted presenter of live and interdisciplinary art worldwide.

HOST: Fusebox presents an interactive gallery experience featuring a sampling of works by Fusebox artists. To contend with the problem of how audiences may tangibly engage with a history of ephemeral, performance-based artworks, especially when the actual record, or documentation, is limited, the exhibition, conceived as a playful Fusebox “record store,” invites visitors to browse through shelves of “records” displaying imagery and providing information about selected performances from Fusebox’s history. In addition, visitors may view screened excerpts of performances contributed by twenty Fusebox alumni, and listen to many of these artists speaking about their artistic practices via the listening stations. With an invitation to viewers to come in and browse, as one might at one’s favorite record store, the exhibition seeks to evoke not only the history but also the spirit of Fusebox—welcoming, adventurous, and always up for some fun.

— **Robin K. Williams**, outgoing Curator, The Contemporary Austin

This exhibition features video and audio content contributed by:

Action Hero (Bristol, United Kingdom)
Kenyon Adams (Austin, Texas)
Dickie Beau (London, United Kingdom)
Tania El Khoury (Annandale-on-Hudson, New York)
Michelle Ellsworth (Boulder, Colorado)
Jim Findlay (New York City)
Robin Frohardt (Brooklyn, New York)
Manuela Infante (Santiago, Chile)
Lagartijas Tiradas al Sol (Mexico City)
Jiabao Li (Austin, Texas)
Gesel Mason (Austin, Texas)
Jaamil Olawale Kosoko (Detroit, Michigan)
Poncili Creación (Santurce, Puerto Rico)
Rubber Repertory Theater (Los Angeles and Austin, Texas)
Rude Mechs (Austin, Texas)
Shaboom/Paul Soileau (New York City)
Justin Talplacido Shoulder (Sydney, Australia)
Tetsuya Umeda (Osaka, Japan)
Verdensteatret (Oslo, Norway)
Samson Young (Hong Kong)

Rubber Repertory Theater (Josh Meyer + Matt Hislope) will be in residence on the Jones Center rooftop during museum hours in the month of April. Inquire with visitor services for details.



Performance View, *Beyond the Stardust* by The Illustrious Blacks. Fusebox Festival 2022. Image courtesy of Fusebox. Photograph by Ismael Quintanilla III.



Performance view, *Bodies in Urban Spaces* by Willi Dorner. Fusebox Festival 2012. Image courtesy of Fusebox.



Robin K. Williams, The Contemporary: *Ron, take us back in time to Austin, Texas, in 2005. Tell us about how Fusebox began. How did the idea come about, and what were the goals for the festival in that moment?*

Ron Berry, Fusebox: Fusebox was founded by a group of artists. We were operating a performance space and gallery behind what is now Canopy in East Austin (at the time Canopy was a Goodwill distribution center, and there was a sex toy warehouse across the parking lot). Blue Genie Art was our neighbor. We were especially interested in creating a more robust exchange of ideas across artistic disciplines and geography. We loved living in Austin and, as artists living here, we were hungry to engage with artists living around the world. The festival became a platform for this exchange.

We had no idea we would do the festival more than once, much less 20 times. We had a budget of \$5,000. We didn't really have a long-term goal or plan. We just had a desire to create a moment in the year for sharing ideas across different art forms and across geography, with live performance at the center of it.

Robin: *In the years since, Fusebox has evolved to become not only a cornerstone for the arts in Austin, but also a preeminent festival for live and interdisciplinary art worldwide. What were some of the key moments in that transformation?*

Ron: One of the first key moments occurred when a few supporters helped create essential staff positions. In the first three years of Fusebox, we were all volunteers. It was not sustainable, and these supporters had the vision to see what this thing could potentially become and the understanding that it would require support on a staff level.

It would be impossible to talk about the transformation of Fusebox and not talk about collaboration. We built our festival through partnerships. At first this was a way to do some things that we couldn't do ourselves with our \$5,000 budget. But this quickly became a central value. It was also fun/joyful. We loved sitting across the table from our community partners and dreaming up projects to do together. The act of producing a festival became an act of community building.

Finally, when we started, I really didn't know what was happening outside of Austin. I started researching and attending festivals, engaging with other curators and artistic directors around the world, and slowly building a global network of other festivals, cultural ministries, art centers, and artists. It's hard to fully engage with much of this work unless you're experiencing it in person. This was transformative.

Robin: *Over the last 20 years, Fusebox has worked with hundreds of artists drawn from an incredibly diverse array of practices. What is most important to you in terms of the artists and projects you bring to Fusebox?*



Ron: I think we're always trying to hold a couple of different conversations simultaneously. There's an ongoing conversation locally: What's happening in Austin? What's not happening in Austin? What would be interesting to see in Austin? What local projects would be interesting to highlight and support through the festival? And then, what's happening nationally/internationally? And what would be interesting to bring into conversation with Austin audiences?

Those conversations are ongoing and serve as a baseline. Out of that research there are often one or two projects that just stop you in your tracks. Projects that make you say, "Holy shit!" We like to start with those and then build out a grouping of projects around them, asking what would be interesting in proximity to these initial projects.

We have also been interested in creating a multipronged, shared curatorial structure. Each year we engage with a cohort of guest curators, as well as a pool of partner organizations. This results in constellations of projects that spark each other.

In this way, the festival offers clusters of curated threads and ideas, but there's also always an act of discovery and learning that takes place as we assemble each edition.

Robin: *Looking back at all that you've accomplished through Fusebox in the last twenty years, what do you feel most proud of?*

Ron: I'm proud that we've been able to support so many artists (locally, nationally, globally) over the past twenty years. I'm also proud that we've been able to share so many projects with so many people in Austin. For thousands of people living in Central Texas, Fusebox represents their only opportunity to experience so many of these artists.

I'm also very proud of our Live in America project, led by Co-Artistic Director Carra Martinez. The first edition of the Live in America Festival, which we produced in conjunction with The Momentary at Crystal Bridges at in northwest Arkansas in June 2022, was unlike any festival I've ever experienced.

And finally, I'm proud that we've been able to create an entity that centers relationships, as opposed to transactions. We've tried to make Fusebox a very human endeavor, and that feels good.

Robin: *What are your hopes for Fusebox in the future?*

Ron: I hope that Fusebox keeps unfolding, keeps transforming. This is a living, breathing endeavor. I wouldn't want it to become fixed. We do have some concrete plans for the future, though.

Beginning this past year, we are undergoing a major transformation as we transition from Fusebox Festival (an annual festival) to Fusebox (an organization that presents year-round events and projects, as well as festivals). We're also looking to create a permanent physical home for Fusebox and several other

arts organizations. We're interested in creating a site that is truly interdisciplinary, that invites the different components of the artistic ecosystem together, and that also connects Austin with a larger, global community of artists and projects. The site will give artists and arts organizations long-term control over their own situations, and will also offer truly affordable rents.

We continue to believe in the act of gathering, and in what can only happen when people come together to experience things in a room or space together.



Performance view, *100 Keyboards* by ASUNA. Fusebox Festival 2022. Image courtesy of Fusebox. Photograph by Ismael Quintanilla III.

Ron Berry is the Co-founder and Co-Artistic Director of Fusebox, a non-profit arts organization working in Austin, TX and NW Arkansas. Ron has helped guide the organization through twenty years of critically acclaimed programming across a multitude of art forms. His particular focus has been on stewarding the annual Fusebox Festival in Austin, which features local, national, and international artists at sites across the city for each April. Today, Fusebox collaborates with artists and organizations all over the world ranging from small grassroots organizations to major art centers and festivals in service to artists and their work.

Robin K. Williams is outgoing Curator at The Contemporary Austin. She is Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of Michigan Museum of Art.



Performance view, *The Plastic Bag Store* by Robin Frohardt. Fusebox Festival 2022. Image courtesy of Fusebox. Photograph by Ismael Quintanilla III.