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**Suzanne Lacy, a pioneer in socially engaged and public performance art,
heads to Sharjah Biennial 16**

**Three iconic works over three decades form a poignant retrospective and the first
presentation in the Region**

**Acclaimed works invite an exploration of social justice, collective memory,
and feminist resistance in an age of global change**



Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz, *In Mourning and In Rage*, Los Angeles (1977), photo by Maria Karras, courtesy Ariadne: A Social Art Network

Los Angeles, CA. — Renowned Los Angeles-based artist **Suzanne Lacy**, one of the most influential voices in socially engaged and public performance art will participate in the prestigious sixteenth edition of **Sharjah Biennial**, a global exhibition organized by the Sharjah Art Foundation. The Biennial, one of the most significant international art events, will take place from February 6–June 15, 2025 across several key venues in the United Arab Emirates, including Sharjah City, Al Hamriyah, Al Dhaid, Kalba, and Al Madam.

Themed “to carry,” Sharjah Biennial 16 is curated by a distinguished team including Alia Swastika, Megan Tamati-Quennell, Natasha Ginwala, Zeynep Öz, and Amal Khalaf, who ask “what does it entail to carry a home, ancestors and political formations with you?” Khalaf, who specifically collaborated with Lacy for this Biennial. draws on a rich conceptual framework inspired by a type of divination practiced in coastal communities: the ritual of throwing shells. This tradition—embracing storytelling, song, prophecy, and sensory awareness—serves as Khalaf’s guiding vision for Lacy’s contribution, emphasizing methodologies for learning, grieving, wayfinding, and resilience in the face of political violence and environmental crisis.

“Suzanne Lacy’s work challenges us to confront the weight of histories, identities, and social movements that shape our lives,” says Khalaf. “Lacy doesn’t merely document societal change, she catalyzes it, creating space for communities to engage with difficult truths and transformative possibilities. Through this Biennial, her practice demonstrates a powerful testament to the impact of collective action and the relevance of art in navigating today’s global crises.”

Three pivotal works by Lacy, presented in the Region for the first time, each explore cultural, and community-focused themes and delve into how personal and collective identities bear the weight of societal transformations and disconnections. Responding to the “ever-expanding” impacts of technological, spiritual, and moral shifts, she examines the deep social and political undercurrents of change. Lacy’s pieces reveal the persistent tensions within communities, across generations, and between marginalized and dominant identities, inviting audiences to reflect on the challenges faced by those often overlooked in society.

“Art has always been my way of grappling with the complexities of injustice and inequity,” says Lacy. “These works—born from listening deeply to people’s experiences—invite their participants and subsequent audiences to consider the invisible threads connecting us across time, culture, and identity. My hope is that this presentation at Sharjah Biennial 16 fosters meaningful exchanges about the possibilities of art to convene communities and present hidden realities within our ever-changing world.”

The earliest work to be presented, [*In Mourning and In Rage* \(1977\)](#) exemplifies the theme of carrying trauma and demonstrating resistance through the pain and anger surrounding violence against women, while critiquing the role of media sensationalism and public services. This work’s feminist protest challenged both the literal violence of Los Angeles’s “Hillside Strangler” murders in 1977 and the figurative violence inflicted by a voyeuristic media. It reflects key themes found in Lacy’s subsequent work: wide civic participation, engagement with structures of power, and a sophisticated exploration of intimate and mass communications as channels for rage and pleas for solidarity.

“to carry” here reflects the trauma that both individuals and communities shoulder. Today, when gender-based violence remains a global issue, Lacy and Labowitz’s piece prefigures feminist movements that fight systemic gender violence and amplify demands for women’s agency and safety. In a world still negotiating the complexities of feminist identity within a digital age, *In*

Mourning and In Rage underscores the importance of channeling memory, analysis and lived experience through art as a means of collective activism.

The Crystal Quilt (1985-1987) was a project culminating in a large-scale performance on Mother's Day in the center of a Philip Johnson-designed complex in Minnesota with a crystalline roof. Four hundred and thirty women over the age of 60 were seated at tables on an 82-square-foot rug designed to resemble a quilt. Created over two years with a leadership program for older women, a series of events and classes and a mass media campaign in collaboration with almost two dozen artists and scores of volunteers, the work encapsulates the notion of “carrying” through its powerful examination of age, gender, and visibility. As the women shift their hand placements to form a quilt-like pattern, Lacy reveals, through her choreography, the labor of identity that these women have carried throughout their lives —the pressures of societal expectations, ageism and invisibility. The work reveals the often unacknowledged capacity and vitality of aging women, challenging societal narratives that devalue the elderly. *The Crystal Quilt* acts as a reminder of how contemporary discourse must grapple with inherited biases and the need for intersectional and inclusive feminist identities. In today's political climate, as generational divides and media narratives attempt to reshape identity in sometimes polarizing ways, Lacy's work proposes, through an aesthetic lens, a space where stories of resilience are both seen, heard, and valued.



Suzanne Lacy, *The Crystal Quilt* (1985–1987), with Nancy Dennis, Sharon Anderson, Phyllis Jane Rose, Phyllis Salzberg and Judy Kepes; quilt design by Miriam Shapiro; scarves by Julie A; soundtrack by Susan Stone; choreography by Sage Cowles; and PBS live broadcast produced by Emily Goldberg, courtesy Suzanne Lacy Studio

The Circle and the Square (2015-2018), produced with the people of Pendle, UK, provides an aural and visual metaphor for the interconnected yet often fractured layers of identity formed by race, labor, and tradition. In this piece, the voice of the community—spanning Shape Note singing to Sufi chanting—signifies both a carrying forward of traditions and a reckoning with the loss of economic and social cohesion through the forces of global capitalism. Through shared sonic lessons, interviews and communal performance, Lacy reveals the cultural divides left by the decline of the textile industry in the North of England and the ways in which South Asian and white communities have drifted apart in the wake of economic changes. Her work suggests that, as global movements of labor and migration reshape communities, individuals must navigate disconnection, loss, and renewed belonging. This project captures and orchestrates the struggle to sustain cultural identity while grappling with the ramifications of globalization and economic flux.



Suzanne Lacy, *The Circle and the Square*, 2015–18, performance in Pendle, Lancashire, UK, produced by collaborators including anthropologist Massimiliano Mollona of Goldsmith's College, London, musicologist Ron Pen of the University of Kentucky, USA, Rauf Bashir, of the Free Spiritual Centre and Building Bridges Pendle, filmmaker Mark Thomas of Soup Co., and community organizer Paul Hartley of In-Situ. The project was commissioned by Super Slow Ways, curated by Laurie Peake. Photo by Graham Kay, courtesy Suzanne Lacy Studio, the Whitworth Art Gallery, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

In each work, Lacy's commitment to social activism and justice underscores the tensions and transformations inherent in carrying forward identities that are continually shaped by and reacting to economic and social currents. As we confront challenges in today's political landscape, from divisive media to systemic inequities, Lacy's pieces invite us to reckon with our shared burdens, to find empowerment within the collective, and to engage in dialogues that

prioritize the value of lived experiences across generations and cultures. In doing so, they reveal a quiet endurance and bold defiance.

Lacy's pioneering career has centered on issues of social justice and community engagement, bringing critical topics of sexual violence, poverty, incarceration, labor, and racial and generational discriminations into the public discourse. With a career spanning over five decades, Lacy's work has pushed the boundaries of art as activism, blending performance, video, and large-scale installations and media interventions to address pressing social issues across global contexts, including the United States, Europe, and South America.

In addition to her groundbreaking art practice, Lacy has held significant roles in academia, including as the founding chair of the MFA Public Practice program at Otis College of Art and Design and currently as a professor at the University of Southern California's Roski School of Art and Design. Her academic contributions, combined with her publications such as *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* and *Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics*, underscore her commitment to expanding the scope and understanding of public art. Lacy's work has been featured in major exhibitions worldwide and recognized by numerous awards, highlighting her as a transformative figure in both art and social practice.

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