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MOMA features a performance art bamboozle (Photos)

PERFORMANCE ART | APRIL 11, 2013 | BY: LINDA COVELLO |

20 photos

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It is difficult to trace the roots of an idea to its source, and, as the pundits say, everything has been done before. Therefore, it is with an equivocal eye that one might gaze upon the sleeping actress, [Tilda Swinton](http://www.examiner.com/topic/tilda-swinton), in a glass box at the [Museum of Modern Art](http://www.moma.org). The idea of chancing upon the actress in repose, amidst Monet's "Water Lilies", or Munch's "The Scream", has driven many to the midtown museum to plunk down the \$25.00 entry fee. The museum has not posted a schedule for the artist's appearances, and Swinton is free to stealth

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her way into the [MOMA \(http://www.moma.org\)](http://www.moma.org) at whim, so many leave in disappointment upon discovering it was not one of the mercurial star's chosen days of public repose. The actress' performance piece, titled "The Maybe" (Maybe she is going to be here today?) was first unveiled in 1995, in collaboration with the artist Cornelia Parker, at London's [Serpentine Gallery \(http://www.serpentinegallery.org\)](http://www.serpentinegallery.org). Over 20,000 visitors watched her sleep over seven consecutive days. The [MOMA \(http://www.moma.org\)](http://www.moma.org) has not advertised how many visitors have watched Swinton count sheep since her first appearance, but the bean counters must be rubbing their hands with glee at the prospect of all the hopeful star gazers.

The artist Colette Lumiere slept in a glass case on public display for her "Liberte to Olympia" exhibition, at the Rempire Gallery in Soho, in September, 1991. As this performance piece predates Swinton's by four years, it might be speculated that the androgynous actress was inspired for her own work by this exhibit. Or, maybe not. What does not remain in doubt is that the original idea for the work cannot be attributed to Swinton. Lumiere is a multimedia artist known for her pioneering work in [performance art \(http://www.examiner.com/topic/performance-art\)](http://www.examiner.com/topic/performance-art), street art, and the constructed photograph. Born in Tunisia, she grew up in Nice before coming to New York City. By the early '70's, she had already established herself as a prolific artist and tireless innovator of multimedia statements. Lumiere was painting the streets incognito in the mid-'70's, well before the anonymous [Banksy \(http://www.banksy.co.uk\)](http://www.banksy.co.uk) gained fame and fortune for the enterprise. Lumiere slept in store windows, decorated as her boudoir, long before the curators of [Barney's \(http://www.barneys.com\)](http://www.barneys.com) window displays executed "Gaga's Boudoir" for the Lady Gaga's Workshop event the store hosted for the 2011 holiday season. [Fiorucci \(http://www.fiorucci.it\)](http://www.fiorucci.it), the hottest retail store of the disco age, commissioned Lumiere to stage one of her "Sleeping Environment" pieces in the store's East 59th Street

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windows in 1978, which she followed with a performance with her band “Justine and the Victorian Punks”.

View slideshow: MOMA features a performance art bamboozle (<http://www.examiner.com/slideshow/moma-features-a-performance-art-bamboozle>)

The worlds of art and commerce are rife with stories of plagiarism, and the impoverished of genius often resort to ripping off the ideas of actual artists who endure in creative anonymity and fiscal penury. The Italian composer Antonio Salieri comes to mind, when considering the roadblocks the establishment can throw in the way of an artist’s recognition. Salieri, with his year’s long lucrative position as director of the Italian opera at the Hapsburg court, was thought by Mozart to be the main impediment to his opportunities in obtaining posts and staging his operas. This creative rivalry was famously depicted by the playwright Peter Shaffer, in his highly acclaimed 1979 play, “Amadeus”. With its fictionalized account of Salieri’s two faced dealings with Mozart, and his behind the scenes machinations to thwart the brilliant composer’s success, Salieri has become an emblem of a soulless establishment that profits at the expense of authentic genius.

Nothing says “Establishment” like the commercial success of Lady Gaga. To her Little Monsters she may seem like the Joan of Arc of the unique and the individual of the world, as is the mission statement of her **“Born This Way” Foundation** (<http://www.bornthiswayfoundation.org>). But there is something inherently inconsistent about a “champion” who speechifies on Oprah that she supports the “creative brave”, only to turn a deaf ear when it is brought to her attention, as Lumiere and her supporters have repeatedly attempted to do, that she might publicly acknowledge her debt to her creative forbear. In a blatant act of unattributed cribbing, Gaga staged an event at the end of the September 2012 Fashion Week to hawk her new perfume, “Fame” at the **Guggenheim Museum** (<http://www.guggenheim.org>). She slept in a bubble in

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front of an assembly of invited friends for a masquerade ball that culminated with her receiving a scalp tattoo as onlookers gaped at her bloody neck.

Lumiere is sanguine when asked her feelings about all the borrowing of her art that takes place in the public domain by entities that trade on their gifts of incomparable style and supposed avant garde status. “I am like David fighting Goliath. I am dealing with these big corporations, and my sling shot is my vision and my history, which no one can take away from me. I am still here and I am still creating.” This is true, as evidenced by her recent installation at a Tribeca gallery in February, “A Colette/Sandy Collaboration”, that celebrated the artist’s ability to “turn

the nightmare of Sandy into something wonderful”. On view were pieces of Lumiere’s vast archive that survived the storm with minimal damage, and found objects excavated from downtown ruins. Lumiere’s “In The Bedroom” installation was featured on the entire fourth floor of Tokyo’s [HPGRP Gallery](http://www.hpgrpgallery.com/tokyo) from 2003 to 2005, and she takes commissions for installation work here in NYC as well as in Europe. Lumiere teaches art at the School of Visual Arts, and continues her commitment to her living environment as a work of art. In her words “it’s not the medium that I use that is important, as the fact that I turn it into incredible artworks”.



(http://cdn2-b.examiner.com/sites/default/files/styles/large_lightbox/hash/f3/cc/1365716386_7565_1.jpg?itok=vGbAxxLk)

Colette Lumiere sleeps in a glass case at a Soho Gallery in 1991

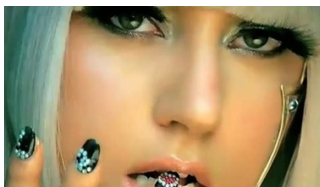
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Lumiere

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