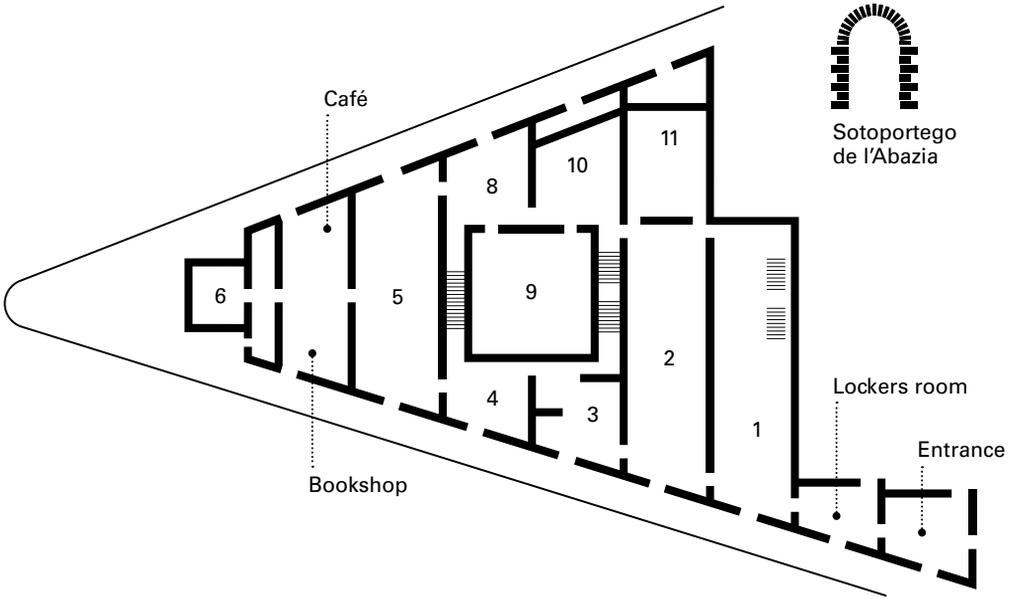
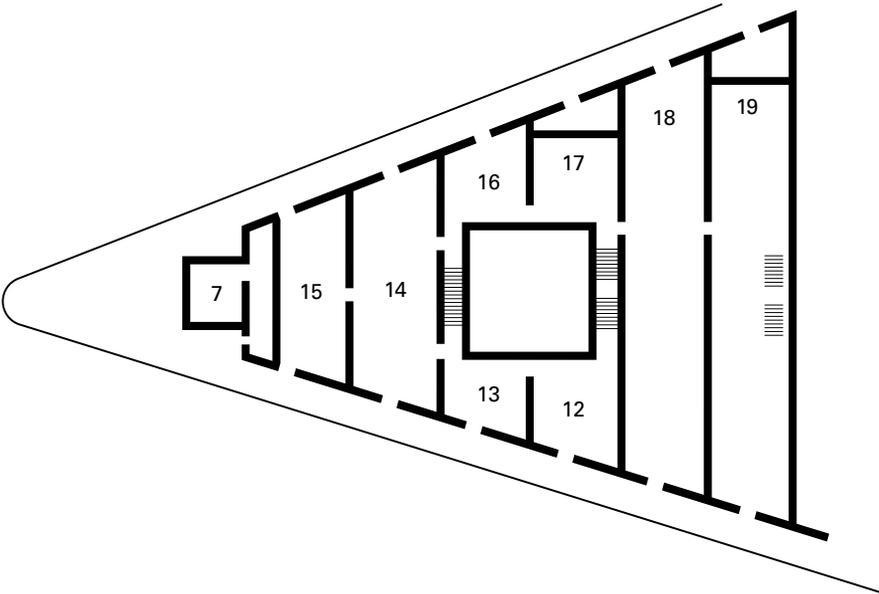




Ground level



First level



**BRUCE NAUMAN**  
**CONTRAPPOSTO STUDIES**  
**PUNTA DELLA DOGANA**  
**VENEZIA**  
**23.05.21–09.01.22**

CURATORS: CARLOS BASUALDO, CAROLINE BOURGEOIS

*“...I think that art begins with the faculty of communicating, not a mass of information, but an experience...”*

**Bruce Nauman**

For more than fifty years, the American artist Bruce Nauman has been one of the most powerful presences on the global art scene. His revolutionary works, using such diverse mediums as sound, video, film, neon, holograms and 3D, remain an important influence for generations of artists.

The exhibition at Punta della Dogana takes as its starting point a corpus of recent video installations—the *Contrapposto* series, according to the expression used by the curators, Carlos Basualdo and Caroline Bourgeois—which is contextualized through a selection of older works. The show focuses on three fundamental aspects of Nauman’s oeuvre which are indeed essential components of the *Contrapposto* series: the artist studio as a space where creation takes place, the use of the body in performance and the exploration of sound.

The impulse for this exhibition arose from the joint acquisition by the Pinault Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art of the major video ensemble *Contrapposto Studies, I through VII* (2015/2016) and the associated work *Walks In Walks Out* (2015).

*Contrapposto*, a key aspect of Western sculpture since its emergence in Greece in the 5th century BCE, became a major feature of Renaissance art. The term refers to the pose of a standing human body resting its weight on a single leg, and therefore causing a dynamic torsion that contrasted with the stiffness of the poses in Archaic Greek sculpture.

Working with a wide range of materials and methods, Nauman demonstrates the precariousness of some of our fundamental and, so we believe, most stable notions, such as time, space and language. He makes no secret of his desire to provoke a sense of unease in the viewer, to directly challenge us and to constantly stay alert:

*“I want [my art] to be vehement and aggressive because that forces people to pay attention.”*



Sebastiano Luciani (Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547), *Santi Vescovi: San Bartolomeo e San Sebastiano*, before 1511, oil on canvas, 292 × 137 cm, ownership of the patriarchal Curia of Venice, deposited at the Gallerie dell’Accademia of Venice

To disorient, destabilize and even shake up the viewer: such is the aim of this artist who never fails to get a strong response because his work touches on universal themes such as life and death, pleasure and pain, the body, identity, and the role of language. In this sense, he is an important representative of a major artistic tendency that developed in the second half of the 20th-century, as illustrated in other fields by Samuel Beckett, John Cage and Merce Cunningham.

Bruce Nauman has reflected on the key question of what it is that an artist actually does alone in the studio:

*“My conclusion was that [if] I was an artist and I was in the studio, then whatever I was doing in the studio must be art. At this point art became more of an activity and less of a product.”*

His studio thus became the “field of experimentation” in which he was able to develop his own artistic languages by means of actions that in appearance were highly simple. In this regard, Nauman has been interested from the beginning in using his body as a material for his work.

The artist has acknowledged in particular the influence of bebop pianist Lennie Tristano, a musician who never played an introduction or finale:

*“From the beginning I was trying to see if I could make art that did that. Art that was just there all at once. Like getting hit in the face with a baseball bat. Or better, like getting hit in the back of the neck. You never see it coming, it just knocks you down. I like that idea very much: the kind of intensity that doesn’t give you any trace of whether you’re going to like it or not.”*

To be surprised and overwhelmed, physically and mentally, by the artist’s propositions; to enter into an intense, personal dialogue with the work: that is the experience visitors are invited to partake of in the show.

**FOR BEGINNERS  
(INSTRUCTED PIANO), 2010**

Audio installation (stereo sound), continuous play,  
two speakers

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater,  
New York

As soon as visitors arrive at the entrance, their attention is solicited by the sound piece *For Beginners (instructed piano)*, 2010. In this work we hear Terry Allen playing on the piano notes that correspond to instructions concerning the combinations of fingers, as articulated on a video piece titled *For Beginners (all the combinations of thumb and fingers)* exhibited further (room 9). In the latter, a notable discrepancy appears instantly between the indications given to the protagonist and the corporeal actions that respond to those instructions. Both works thus reflect on the conflict between the rule dictating a certain form of behavior, on one side, and the freedom of the performer on the other.

The sound installation was directly inspired by *Mikrokosmos* (composed between 1926 and 1939, published in 1940) by the Hungarian composer Béla Bartók, a collection of 153 short pieces for teaching the piano to beginners, or for amateur pianists.

From 20 May to 30 May and from 3 September to 12 September 2021, *For Beginners (instructed piano)* is installed as well in the Sotoportego de l'Abazia located only a few steps away from Punta della Dogana.



**CONTRAPPOSTO STUDIES,  
I THROUGH VII, 2015/2016**

HD video installation (color, stereo sound,  
continuous play).

Video element (Contrapposto Study I): 7min. 5sec.

Video element (Contrapposto Study II): 7min. 5sec.

Video element (Contrapposto Study III): 62min. 19sec.

Video element (Contrapposto Study IV): 7min. 5sec.

Video element (Contrapposto Study V): 63min. 21sec.

Video element (Contrapposto Study VI): 7min. 5sec.

Video element (Contrapposto Study VII): 62min. 19sec.

Jointly owned by Pinault Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Funding for the Philadelphia Museum of Art is made possible through the generosity of many donors

With *Contrapposto Studies, I through VII* (2015/2016) Bruce Nauman revisits an earlier work - an exception for the artist -, the video *Walk with Contrapposto*, 1968 (room 4). The work from 2015/2016 is presented through a more complex multichannel set-up using the latest image and sound technologies. The possibility of exploring state-of-the-art technological means to accomplish results that Nauman could not obtain in the 1960s indeed seems to have been the main motivation for this return to an early work.

Almost fifty years later, for *Contrapposto Studies, I through VII*, Bruce Nauman filmed himself again in his studio, dressed in a simple way, wearing t-shirt and jeans. As in *Walk with Contrapposto*, he is trying to walk in a straight line, his hands clutched at the back of his head, maintaining his body in a *contrapposto* pose. He then segmented and digitally cut the images, presenting the fragments

## ROOM 3

of the film in the form of seven large-scale projections. The soundtrack is generated by the transformations of the image and becomes thus more complex with the increasing fragmentation of the video. The essential difference between the early and the 2015/2016 work—made possible thanks to the use of recent technology—is an inversion of the relationship between the figure and the background: as opposed to the 1968 work, in *Contrapposto Studies, I through VII*, the body seems to remain always in the same place while the wall behind ascends and descends in a continuous movement.

The scale of the projection emphasizes the monumentality of the figure underlining the references to classical sculpture and to the notion of *contrapposto*. As a matter of fact, the number of projections chosen by Nauman is not trivial: it alludes to the classical concept of the ideally proportioned body in seven parts, a favourite trope of the artist.

Nevertheless, contrasting with the classical ideal, the projections show an aging body struggling with time (heavier torso, uncertain balance). Nauman is shown simultaneously frontally, from the side and from the back, in negative and positive, in order to present himself fully, with no artifice, while testing his sense of balance and his own physical condition. This work thus offers an unvarnished picture of the body's changes over time.

"It's the end that is the worst, no, it's the beginning that is the worst, then the middle, then the end, in the end it's the end that is the worst, this voice that, I don't know, it's every second that is the worst, it's a chronicle, the seconds pass, one after another, jerkily, no flow, they don't pass, they arrive, bang, bang, they bang into you, bounce off, fall and never move again, when you have nothing left to say you talk of time, seconds of time, there are some people who add them together to make a life, I can't, each one is the first, not the second or the third, I'm three seconds old, oh not every day of the week."

Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*

*"When I did the performances, a long time ago, I'd made like a list of possibilities to do certain types of movements: standing up, leaning, sitting, lying down..., I had drawn up a list of seemingly discontinuous movements. When I did the performances, I realized that some of the positions seemed to involve powerful emotional bonds, while others were simple changes of posture which meant nothing."*

Bruce Nauman

In this room visitors are confronted with the actions and movements of flesh-and-blood performers/dancers executing in the exhibition space the precise, detailed instructions for three performances conceived and written by Nauman at the end of the sixties. The artist's work centers on the figure of the human being and the body, which he takes as the starting point for interrogating our nature. This is the quest literally embodied by the performers here and which the visitors are invited to experience in turn.

In 1980, talking about the works' relation to the viewer, Nauman explained:

*"Well, I wasn't interested in a boring situation and I think what was important was that there was no — of course, there always was a beginning and an end, but it seemed to me that if it went on long enough, if*

*somebody could come in and watch it you could give them an hour or a half hour or two hours or whatever, but what I always wanted to be careful about was to have the structure include enough tensions in either random error or getting tired and making a mistake — whatever — that there always was some structure programmed into the event. And I really was interested in tensions."*

## UNTITLED OR EXTENDED TIME PIECE, 1969

Performance

60 min.

Collection of the artist

In 1969, Bruce Nauman, Judy Nauman and Meredith Monk made this variation on the exercise that Nauman had developed in his videos of *Bouncing in the Corner* (room 5). Each performer stood in a corner forming an angle of about 30 degrees, about 30 centimeters from the wall. Lasting roughly an hour, each of them let themselves fall against the wall, breaking the impact with their hands, then hit the wall. From time to time the performers' gestures or percussive blows seemed synchronized. As the artist Dan Graham noted, they were "playing the architecture" by creating a piece involving loud movements through their interaction with architectural elements<sup>1</sup>.

In accordance with Bruce Nauman and his studio, the performance length has been shortened to 30 minutes inside this exhibition.

<sup>1</sup> Joan Simon, ed., *Bruce Nauman: Exhibition Catalogue and Catalogue Raisonné* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1994), 238, cat. no. 162.

## UNTITLED, 1969

Performance

60 min.

Collection of the artist

Nauman may have written the instructions below describing this performance at the beginning of 1970:

“(A) Body as a Cylinder/Lie along the wall/floor junction of the room, face into the corner and hands at sides. Concentrate on straightening and lengthening the body along a line which passes through the center of the body parallel to the corner of the room in which you lie. At the same time attempt to draw the body in around the line. Then attempt to push that line into the corner of the room./ (B) Body as a Sphere/Curl your body into the corner of a room. Imagine a point at the center of your curled body and concentrate on pulling your body in around that point. Then attempt to press that point down into the corner of the room. It should be clear that these are not intended as static positions which are to be held for an hour a day, but mental and physical activities or processes to be carried out. At the start, the performer may need to repeat the exercise several times in order to fill the hour, but at the end of the ten days or so, he should be able to extend the execution to a full hour<sup>1</sup>.”

In accordance with Bruce Nauman and his studio, the performance length has been shortened to 30 minutes inside this exhibition.

<sup>1</sup> Joan Simon, ed., *Bruce Nauman: Exhibition Catalogue and Catalogue Raisonné* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1994), 238, cat. no. 164.

## UNTITLED, 1969

Proposal for performance

30 min.

Collection of the artist

Here again the performers follow Nauman's precise instructions:

“The dancer, eyes front, avoiding audience contact, hands clasped behind his neck, elbows forward, walks about the room in a slight crouch — as though he were in a room 12 inches lower than his normal height — placing one foot directly in front of the other — heel touching toe — very slowly and deliberately; my rate is about 1 step each 2 seconds./After 30 minutes the guards allow the people into the room and the dancer leaves. The dancer must be a person of some professional presence capable of maintaining a large degree of anonymity./I add this extra note of caution: I have worked on the exercise and it is difficult./Do not make the mistake of hiring someone not physically and mentally equipped to undertake this problem<sup>1</sup>.”

The original descriptive text for another similar performance from 1968, titled *Performance (Slightly Crouched)*, is presented in this room in order to accompany the performance from 1969 shown in the exhibition.

<sup>1</sup> Joan Simon, ed., *Bruce Nauman: Exhibition Catalogue and Catalogue Raisonné* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1994), 239, cat. no. 165.

## ROOM 4



### WALK WITH CONTRAPPOSTO, 1968

Videotape, black and white, sound  
60 min.  
Electronic Arts Intermix

This was one of the first works that the artist exhibited, and the reference point, almost fifty years later, of his *Contrapposto Studies, I through VII*, 2015/2016 (rooms 1 and 2). In *Walk with Contrapposto* (1968) the artist walks along a wooden corridor set up in his studio with his hands clasped behind his neck. Alternately facing and back to the camera, he moves with a pronounced sway of the hips.

In *Walk with Contrapposto*, Nauman's constant investigation of our relation to the world sees him confront us with a foundational, almost child-like experience: the simple fact of learning to walk as our first real way of constructing ourselves.

"Watch out for the right moment, then not another word, is that the only way to have being and habitat?"

Samuel Beckett, *Stories and Texts for Nothing*

## ROOM 5

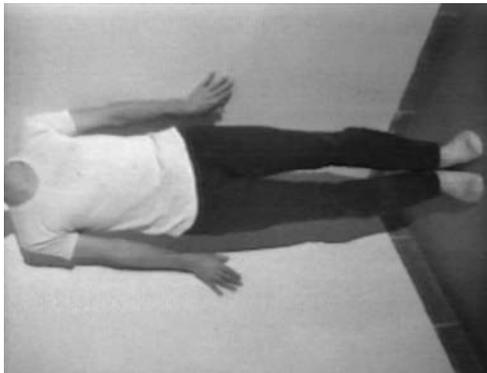
Bruce Nauman has made many conceptual video performances, based on simple, pre-established rules. The artist performs and transforms his own body into a malleable material, a sculptural entity subject to repetitive actions interacting with the surrounding space.

His performances are also inspired by the contemporary dance of the 1960s. For a long time Nauman has been interested in choreographers like Merce Cunningham and Meredith Monk who embody an experimental approach to dance and the desire to probe the spectator's perceptual capacities.

Because of where they took place — usually Nauman's studio — and the fact that they are seen only on screens, these filmed performances offer the viewer an indirect experience of the artist's space. Their duration is equal to the length of the tape: the artist continues his action until the tape runs out.

The videos shown in this room (made in black-and-white with a Portapak video camera) were shot in the artist's studio in Southampton, New York State, during winter 1968–1969. They come across as a series of repetitive meditations that can trigger sensations of anxiety and unease in the viewer which are often linked to the compulsive nature and intensity of the action, but also to the state of isolation and confinement both experienced and staged by the artist. As he says:

*"My video always involves some idea of a human being in an unusual situation and what happens."*



## BOUNCING IN THE CORNER, NO. 1, 1968

Videotape, black and white, sound  
60 min.  
Pinault Collection

In this video, Nauman faces the camera but his position is such that his head is not visible and we see only his body from the neck to the feet. Standing with his back to the wall, he seems to be levitating. The artist films himself in his studio as he lets himself fall backwards and bounce back, again and again, despite the discomfort caused by the repetition. This artistic gesture reflects his material constraints at the time. Nauman has often explained that if he began working with his body it was because he did not have any other materials in hand:

*“My studio was almost empty because I couldn’t afford to buy material. I was therefore forced to examine myself and ask myself what I was doing there.”*



## SLOW ANGLE WALK (BECKETT WALK), 1968

Videotape, black and white, sound  
60 min.  
Electronic Arts Intermix

In front of a fixed camera, placed on its side — so that the filmed image is also on its side—the artist spent about an hour repeating a laborious sequence of bodily movements. Nauman’s singular approach in this video was to a large extent inspired by the existential theatre of the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett, and more particularly the extraordinary way his characters, such as Molloy<sup>1</sup> or Watt<sup>2</sup>, have of moving. Hands together behind his back, the artist starts out with one leg at a right angle, swings around 45 degrees and lets his foot come noisily down. Again, he stretches out his leg backwards at a right angle and starts again with the other leg, his body swinging forward like a pendulum.

As he advances towards the camera, and therefore the viewer, it becomes progressively harder to discern his actions. Nauman’s body is shown as fragmentary: the head is often cut off with only a feet or leg on view. At times he exits the screen completely with only the sound of his steps indicating his presence.

The viewer may experience a feeling of alienation seeing the artist doubly confined by the frame formed by the projected image and by the physical dimensions of his studio. Two detailed drawings from 1968–1969

rigorously describe these actions. Nauman rehearsed these exercises at great length before performing them in front of the camera. The recording was continuous and lasted an hour, with no break in either the filming or the action (an hour is the running time of the film). While the movement is methodically executed, the action does not exclude chance or a sense of tension, as when the artist loses his balance and falls.

The spectator's impression of witnessing an absurd situation is confirmed by the extreme concentration and conviction manifested by Nauman throughout his performance.



## STAMPING IN THE STUDIO, 1968

Videotape, black and white, sound  
60 min.

Electronic Arts Intermix

- 1 "I left the shelter of the doorway and began levering myself forward, swinging slowly through the sullen air. There is rapture, or there should be, in the motion crutches give. It is a series of little flights, skimming the ground. You take off, you land, through the thronging sound in wind and limb, who have to fasten one foot to the ground before they dare lift up the other. And even their most joyous hastening is less aerial than my hobble"; in Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), p.86.
- 2 "Watt's way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north [...] and so on, over and over again, many many times, until he reached his destination and could sit down"; in Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove Press, 1953), p.23.

Here the artist engages in a choreography in which the rhythm of his steps gradually grows more complex. He starts with a constant rhythm of one to two, then increases the combinations with accelerations, panting, pauses and *decrescendo*. He makes back-and-forth movements in the studio and moves diagonally, or in spirals. As the art critic and curator Stéphanie Moisdon observes, "the changes in the rhythm create a strange musicality. These different tempos, played by the body like a primitive instrument, put into motion an imaginary trajectory of infinite variations."

The camera is placed upside down, which is therefore how we see the action. There is a real sense of vertigo in the video in which space and time seem to be distended, while the viewer has the impression of losing ground.



## BOUNCING IN THE CORNER, NO. 2: UPSIDE DOWN, 1969

Videotape, black and white, sound  
60 min.

Electronic Arts Intermix

In this video the space where the action takes place is tilted, creating a feeling of dizziness. In a frontal and up-shot, the artist's body, seemingly riveted to the ground, swings between the two walls of a corner. His balance is thus imperiled. The fixed, unchanging framing of the image contrasts with the movement of the body, with its frequent knocks and starts. Once again, a sensation of oppression is inevitably induced by the disturbing presence of this silent, faceless body confined by walls.



## LIP SYNC, 1969

Videotape, black and white, sound  
57 min.

Pinault Collection

*Lip Sync* (1969) — an abbreviation referring to the synchronisation of sound with the movement of the lips — is a close-up of Nauman's mouth as he attempts to repeat in sync the words that he is hearing on his headphones. Although he goes painstakingly about his task, failures of coordination between his mouth and tongue become evident.

Nauman evokes both the power and fragility of the organ of speech in an approach that in many respects recalls the work of Samuel Beckett. *Lip Sync* in particular echoes Beckett's dramatic monologue *Not I* (1972), in which all that can be seen in the total dark of the theatre is the actress's mouth, lit by a single spotlight. From this mouth, all that remains of the human body, emerges an intense, emotional soliloquy. The mouth, moved by an urgent need to express itself, nevertheless does not really manage to do so and gets lost in an unbroken and incomprehensible flow of words.



## REVOLVING UPSIDE DOWN, 1969

Videotape, black and white, sound  
60 min.  
Electronic Arts Intermix

In this video, Bruce Nauman — his hands joined behind his back — performs a series of actions similar to the ones in *Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)*. The image, once again, is upside down: the actions seem to be taking place on the ceiling of the space that we observe. In a sequence of pirouettes and arabesques, Nauman reaches repeatedly for his centre of gravity, his balance almost lost. However, in its permanent circular movement the body of the artist keeps regaining stability, finding new points of anchorage, as he moves along an oblique line leading towards an exit that is out of frame.



## PACING UPSIDE DOWN, 1969

Videotape, black and white, sound  
60 min.  
Electronic Arts Intermix

In this work Nauman loudly walks, hands raised and joined above his head, around the perimeter of a tiny square in ever-widening circles, until he finally disappears from the frame. Since the camera is again upside down, the artist seems to be walking on the ceiling. The upside-down perspective challenges our perception, inducing a feeling of movement unconstrained.



## VIOLIN TUNED D E A D, 1969

Videotape, black and white, sound  
60 min.  
Electronic Arts Intermix

This video is closely related to two other works of Nauman: the film *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk around the Studio* (1967–1968), and the sculpture *Diamond Africa with Chair Tuned D E A D* (1981), in which Nauman “tunes” the legs of a chair to the same notes.

In *Violin Tuned D E A D*, the artist remains stationary as he plays on the four strings. The camera is static and placed on its side. Nauman has said of this work that

*“I thought it would just be a lot of noise, but it turned out to be musically very interesting. It is a very tense piece. The other idea I had was to play the two notes very close together so that you could hear the beats in the harmonics.”*

## ROOM 6



## MODEL FOR PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART (1”=1’), 2015/2016

Foam core, seven projectors, seven players, seven projector stands, three pedestals  
127 x 355,6 x 228,5 cm (50 x 140 x 89.9 in.)

Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York

*“To major things the surest road is on the minor pains bestowed, if you don’t happen to be in a hurry.”*

Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*

As indicated by the title of the work, Nauman conceived this model for the installation of the work *Contrapposto Studies* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2016. In Philadelphia, *Contrapposto Studies, I through VII* (here on display in rooms 1 and 2) had been presented simultaneously in the Modern and Contemporary Galleries. A larger space displayed the projections III to VII while another, smaller one, included the first two.

In the second half of the 1970s Nauman produced a group of works whose titles frequently included the word “model”. Built from materials such as wood, plaster and fiberglass, these models seemed incomplete, the point of their construction being simply to sketchily suggest the imaginary spaces that they represented. Acting on the viewer’s imaginative capacity they alter the sense of our spatial bearings.

## FOR CHILDREN /FOR BEGINNERS, 2009

Graphite on paper, two parts

76,8 × 55,9 cm (30.2 × 22 in.) each

83 × 62 × 5 cm (32.7 × 24.4 × 2 in.) each frame

This diptych is an element of the audio installation *For Children*, 2010, stereo sound, continuous play, four hidden speakers; dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York

Nauman is also the author of a body of graphic work that reflects his passionate interest in the body and its fragmentation, in signs and writing. This diptych of drawings titled *For Children/For Beginners* was the starting point for two sound pieces of the same name that feature in this show (respectively room 7 and entrance/lockers room/Sotoportego de l'Abazia). Each of the drawings consists of a list of notes jotted down in pencil, which are sometimes difficult to decipher, and were written spontaneously, capturing the ideas as they came in a light, quick hand. As in a poem, the repetitions and variations at work here allow us to perceive the subtlety of the correspondences and word play.

The list *For Children* (left) refers to teaching children, while *For Beginners* (right) is addressed to adult learners. The graphic nature of the artist's writing makes the words appear almost as objects:

FOR CHILDREN

SPOKEN WORDS – TWO VOICES

Increasing + decreasing intervals, not related

Children learning  
Teaching Children  
Children Teaching  
For teaching.

- Loud - shouting?

-(duet)

quartet

FOR BEGINNERS

DUET FOR VOICES

Random intervals not related

Beginner Beginning  
Learner Learning – Learning Learning  
Beginning Learning  
Beginning Beginning  
(duet)

quartet

However, these are not preparatory drawings for the corresponding sound pieces, like a score for a piece of music. Rather, these drawings are like sketches of ideas, establishing an emotional tone and rhythmic formulation that accompany and add complexity to the audio pieces.

## ROOM 7

### FOR CHILDREN, 2010

Audio installation (stereo sound),  
continuous play, four hidden speakers

Dimensions variable

An element of this audio installation is the diptych drawing *For Children/For Beginners*, 2009, graphite on paper, 83 x 62 x 5 cm (32.7 x 24.4 x 2 in.) each frame  
Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York

Upstairs, visitors come to a sound installation in which we hear Nauman's voice tirelessly repeating the words "for children". The work corresponds to the drawing *For Children/For Beginners* (room 6) forming one singular entity. Once again the artist draws inspiration from the composer Béla Bartók who composed *For Children* in 1908-1909, a collection of pieces for piano based on Hungarian and Slovak melodies and popular songs.

Behind the seeming formal simplicity, the work involves complex references to the notions of play, education and our ability to go beyond physical and mental barriers through learning processes.

## ROOM 8



### STEEL CHANNEL PIECE, 1968

Steel, audiotape player, audiotape, speaker  
17,8 x 17,8 x 304,8 cm (7 x 7 x 120 in.)  
The Sonnabend Collection Foundation

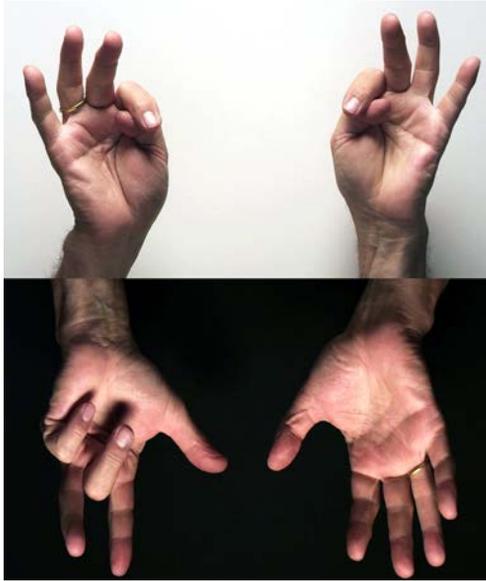
"Words fail. There are times when even they fail."

Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days*

This work consists of a steel beam placed on the floor with a speaker on top of it connected to a nearby tape recorder. From the speaker comes the voice of the artist repeating in a "loud whisper" anagrams of the words "lighted steel channel":

"leen lech Dante'l delight light leen  
snatches/light leen lech Dante'l delight leen  
snatches/leen lech'l delight Dantes light  
leen snatch/light leen snatch'l delight  
Dantes leen leech/light leen leech'l delight  
Dantes leen snatch/snatch leen leen leech'e'l  
delight light Dante"

By disconnecting words and taking them apart, Nauman literally exhausts spoken language and its signifying function, shifting it into the register of the absurd and nonsense, while playing on the double meaning of certain terms (the sexually loaded "snatch" for example, a slang word for the female genitals).



positions of the fingers change in response to the words suggests an abstruse exercise in coordination or the forms of an obscure sign language.

Through this visual alphabet, Nauman may be intent to evoke the way in which children first learn language. Furthermore, through the time lag between sound and image, the work stages the power struggle between words and physical actions: the mind dictates the instructions that the body seems not to be able to fully carry out.

In earlier works, Nauman used bronze cast hands in different positions to make sculptures; in this video installation, they become the actors.

### FOR BEGINNERS (ALL THE COMBINATIONS OF THUMB AND FINGERS), 2010

HD video installation (color, stereo sound), continuous play  
Channel A: 26 min. 19 sec.  
Channel B: 25 min. 59 sec.  
Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Pinault Collection

Nauman's discovery of *Mikrokosmos*, a collection of piano pieces for beginners by Béla Bartók, led to his interest in piano pieces written specially for children. This is how *For Beginners (all the combinations of thumb and fingers)* came about. These two big video projections show Nauman working through all the 31 possible combinations of fingers and thumb. The two videos are identical except for their background color. They are not synchronized, which means that sounds overlap.

The mysterious choreography that is acted out twice, with one projection above the other, follows verbal instructions that Nauman recorded separately—again, without synchronizing sound and image. The volume and the size of the images immerse the viewer in a hypnotic virtual dance. The way in which the



### CONTRAPPOSTO SPLIT, 2017

4K 120 fps 3D projection (color, stereo sound)  
289,6 cm × 515,6 cm projection size (114 × 203 in.)  
Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland

“It will be the silence, where I am? I don’t know, I’ll never know: in the silence you don’t know.”

Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*

This 3D work filmed in Nauman’s studio in Galisteo, New Mexico sees him coming back to the major concerns that have shaped his artistic research: the studio, the human body, and the exploration of the sense of vision and visuality.

In this recent reprise of *Walk with Contrapposto*, 1968 (room 4), Nauman makes full use of the latest developments in 3D which enable him to transmit much more visual information than a traditional film or video. The astonishingly clear images show the smallest details, and the effect is that the exhibition space seems to become an extension of Nauman’s studio, with the viewers situated inside. We find ourselves observing the elements laid out around the artist as he enacts his “Walk with *Contrapposto*”. The screen is divided into two parts, creating the illusion that the top and bottom halves of the body are moving independently of each other. These visual dislocations and discrepancies add to a matter of fact approach that reveals a painful awareness of the ways in which his body has changed over the years.

Nauman surprises us once again here with his bold use of a new medium, reflecting

an experimental openness that enables him to constantly keep renewing himself. Today, moreover, his emphasis on the space of the studio as a place of isolation acquires a new relevance with the heightened awareness of our role and presence in the world caused by the COVID-19 health crisis.



## WALKING A LINE, 2019

4K 120fps 3D projection (color, stereo sound), continuous play  
289,6 x 515,6 cm (114 x 203 in.), 15 min. 46 sec.  
Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York

In *Walking a Line*, a work in 3D, Nauman spreads out his arms horizontally while walking in a straight line. We watch the artist put precariously one foot in front of the other. Like a tightrope walker, he tries to keep his balance and it is not always easy.

The projection is divided in two, with the upper and lower parts of the body on separate screens. As in *Contrapposto Studies, I through VII* from 2015/2016 (rooms 1 and 2), the two halves are not exactly synchronized, which heightens the sense of precariousness. *Walking a Line* therefore evokes the difficult search for stability and balance, both internal and in relation to the outside world. In his essay for the exhibition catalogue, Carlos Basualdo sees in the artist's position (bare feet, his arms stretched on both sides of his body) a clear reference to the numerous crucifixion scenes in Italian paintings.



## TEST TAPE FAT CHANCE JOHN CAGE, 2001

Video, DVD  
12 min., continuous play  
Pinault Collection

As a traditional space for making art but also for learning and perpetuating the classical disciplines, the notion of the studio was contested by many artists in the 1960s as they sought to break with certain practices and throw off the yoke of artistic institutions.

In contrast, Nauman made of the studio the privileged space for his research and experimentation. In 2001, a series of videos placed it at the center of his work. In *Test Tape Fat Chance John Cage*, several infrared cameras were set up to register the activity in his studio at night time (moths fly in the weak light, from time to time a mouse scurries across the screen, or a cat prowls around). Nauman used basic digital editing software to colorize and reverse the direction of the images. These effects give us the impression that we are entering an underwater world where we completely lose our faculties of orientation. A train passing in the distance, the buzzing of an insect, barking dogs and howling coyotes constituted the aural scene that the artist himself discovered. He wrote:

*"You begin to (notice) smaller and smaller incidents. At first I was looking for the cat and the mouse, and then I started to listen to the flies buzzing round or to see the beautiful patterns that the moths make as they fly*

*around in front of the camera. There was a lot more going on than I was anticipating."*

## ROOM 13

The very place of origin of artistic creation thus appears as densely inhabited with various unexpected presences which the absence of the artist paradoxically underlines.



### SOUNDTRACK FROM FIRST VIOLIN FILM, 1969

Vinyl LP, paper insert, cardboard sleeve, Perspex slipcase

Side A: 13 min. 36 sec.

Side B: 19 min. 29 sec.

Private collection

*Soundtrack from First Violin Film* (1969) brings together in a single audio piece the aural traces of various actions previously filmed by the artist.

In contrast to the composer John Cage or the proponents of *Musique Concrète*, who drew from non-instrumental sources to create music, Nauman here uses instrumental sounds to create non-musical works.



## FOOTSTEPS, 1968

Audiotape, card stock  
6,5 x 27,5 cm (2.6 x 10.8 in.)  
Private collection

This is one of the few actual objects presented in this exhibition: a length of recorded magnetic tape rolled around a folded card with typed instructions on it.

*Footsteps* is Nauman's first work consisting predominantly of sound. Here, the magnetic tape contains the recordings of steps, probably from a video or film. The accompanying instructions tell the user to "Play the tape quite loudly for as long as you want or can stand." Once again, Nauman tries to push the visitor's experiences to the limit.

*Footsteps* was published in the fifth issue of the *S.M.S. (Shit Must Stop)* artists' portfolios edited by the artist Bill Copley in October 1968, alongside works by fellow artists such as Yoko Ono, Lawrence Weiner and Neil Jenney. The cover of this issue was painted by a chimpanzee, Congo, who had demonstrated remarkably developed aptitudes in a study of the creative potential of apes.



## VIOLINS+SILENCE=VIOLENCE, 1981

Pencil, charcoal and pastel on paper  
134 x 154,3 cm (52.7 x 60.7 in.)  
142 x 162 x 4 cm (55.9 x 63.8 x 1.6 in.) framed  
Pinault Collection

*"When language begins to break down a little bit, it becomes exciting and communicates in nearly the simplest way that it can function: you are forced to be aware of the sounds and the poetic parts of words. If you deal only with what is known, you'll have redundancy; on the other hand, if you deal only with the unknown, you cannot communicate at all. There is always some combination of the two, and it is how they touch each other that makes communication interesting."*

This is the drawing associated to the neon sculpture *Violins, Silence, Violence* conceived in 1981–1982. Following his characteristic penchant for working through all the possibilities of the materials and subjects that are important to him, Nauman produced two versions of this neon: an indoor one in the form of a triangle, and a rectilinear outdoor one that is installed as a frieze in the new wing of the Baltimore Museum of Art. In the outdoor version each word appears the right way up with another, upside-down word superimposed over it. On one side of the museum façade, the word "Violins" appears over "Silence" and "Violence"

over “Violence”, while on the adjacent wall, “Silence” is placed over “Violins”.

In the drawing shown here, the three words form a triangle in which some words are superimposed and others face each other. The word “violence” contains the first four letters of “violins” and the last five of “silence.” The word play and aural overlapping of these terms, coupled with their positioning, forms a visual poem that describes the paradoxical connections between music and silence, creativity and violence. The repetition and superposition of words disorients visitors and prompts them to think twice about their meaning and associations. The double occurrence of the word “silence”, while paradoxically making it almost illegible, corroborates and gives concrete form to its meaning: by the visual disappearance of the word, silence silences itself.

This work exemplifies Nauman’s relation to language: playing with words in order to underscore certain meanings, to bring out hidden significance or simply to render them incomprehensible.

## ROOM 14



### DIAGONAL SOUND WALL (ACOUSTIC WALL), 1970

Acoustic material on armature

Dimensions variable

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,

Panza Collection, Gift, 1992

*Diagonal Sound Wall (Acoustic Wall)* consists of a “mattress wall” made of acoustic sound-absorbing material. When originally installed at the Konrad Fischer gallery, Düsseldorf, in February 1970, the work diagonally divided the space in two. Nauman spoke of an

*“odd sense of pressure — pressure in your ears as you walk into the space, into the wedge.”*

At the Punta della Dogana, this work takes the form of a wall diagonally bisecting a long, narrow room, leaving only a few centimetres at the back to let visitors pass to the other side. This diagonal pushes us back physically against the wall, provoking an acute sense of discomfort due to the shrinking of the space.

The installation is an excellent example of those physically or mentally disconcerting installations conceived by Nauman in which the body is constrained by a constructed space.



## ACOUSTIC WEDGE (MIRRORED), 2020

Wallboard and acoustic material  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater,  
 New York

*Acoustic Wedge (Mirrored)*, 2020 is a new installation especially produced for the exhibition at Punta della Dogana. In the work, the artist revisits a series of architectural spaces realized in the early 1970s such as *Acoustic Wedge (Sound Wedge - Double Wedge)* from 1969 - 1970 or *Acoustic Pressure Piece* from 1971. Nauman uses sound-absorbing materials as well as special architectural forms that affect visitors when they move around and inside the structure. The installation prompts a feeling of dislocation by taking away the acoustic reflection. As in many of his works, balance is lost again and needs to be restored by the visitor.



## ELKE ALLOWING THE FLOOR TO RISE UP OVER HER, FACE UP, 1973

Videotape, color, sound  
 40 min.  
 Electronic Arts Intermix

In the video *Elke Allowing the Floor to Rise Up over Her, Face Up* we see a young woman lying on the floor. Following the instructions given by the artist, she imagines the floor gradually swallowing her up, welcoming her body into its thick, compact mass. After this experience, Elke told the artist that she had become frightened that she would never be able to get free of the floor and would be deprived of air. Conceived as a mental exercise within a given space, this experiment harnesses the power of the imagination and sets up a tension between the concepts of "awareness" and "attention."

*"We used two cameras and changed locations from time to time. [...] What I was investigating at that time was how to examine a purely mental activity as opposed to a purely physical situation which might incur some mental activity;"*

Nauman explained in an interview in 1979. Once again, the visitor is free to experience the work by her(him)self.



their own mental state rather than to reflect on a question that concerns them. It is a *reflexive act* of thought and not simply an act of *reflexive thought*."

## TONY SINKING INTO THE FLOOR, FACE UP AND FACE DOWN, 1973

Videotape, color, sound  
60 min.  
Electronic Arts Intermix

In *Tony Sinking into the Floor, Face Up and Face Down*, the pendant to *Elke Allowing the Floor to Rise Up Over Her, Face Up*, the performer's task was to imagine himself sinking into the surface of the floor. The image shows him lying on the ground, at times facing up and others facing down. Nauman has described the intense atmosphere of the shoot:

*"[Tony] was lying on his back and after about fifteen minutes he started choking and coughing. He sat up and said, 'I did it too fast and scared myself.' He didn't want to do it again but did it anyway. At another time we were watching his hand through the camera and it was behaving very strangely. We asked him about it later and he said that he was afraid to move his hand because he thought he might lose his molecules."*

With these two videos, as Noé Soulier points out in his essay in the exhibition catalogue, "the performer accomplishes an action, but it is a mental action rather than a physical one, acting on the flux of their thoughts, not on their bodies. This performance also involves the reflexivity of the action: the performer seeks to act directly on

## ROOM 17



### SOUND BREAKING WALL, 1969

Room with two-channel audio, continuous loop  
Dimensions variable  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,  
Panza Collection, Gift, 1992

This is how Bruce Nauman described the original installation of this work shown at Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris, in 1969:

*“It was a large L-shaped wall covering two walls of the Parisian gallery. It was flush with the wall with very thin speakers in it. For that, there were two different tapes: one was of exhaling sounds, and the other of pounding and laughing alternatively. You couldn’t locate the sound. That was quite a threatening piece, especially the exhaling sounds.”*

The visitor’s difficulty in detecting and anticipating the sources of sound induces the threatening feeling of uncertainty, which is such a frequent feature of Nauman’s work. Indeed, the artist’s intention to create uncomfortable spaces and forms is a manifest constant, a recurrent strategy that enables him to trigger specific cognitive experiences. According to Nauman’s words, this state is an effective reminder that art is only secondarily concerned with *“how to provide or make beautiful things,”* but primarily with *“how to go about thinking about things.”*

## ROOM 18



### NATURE MORTE, 2020

Three 4K video projections and three servers controlled by three iPad Pro 11”, 3D scans of studio  
Dimensions variable (in consultation with the Bruce Nauman studio)  
Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York

*Nature Morte* comprises three 4K video projections of the artist’s studio in New Mexico. Each projection is linked wirelessly to an iPad which the viewer can manipulate to move around “virtually” in the artist’s studio and discover all its contents: artworks, notes, sketches pinned to the wall, a cup of coffee<sup>1</sup>, the underside of a table or a chair, tools and other objects scattered over the floor. Using a handheld scanner, Nauman recorded hundreds of 3D images thus creating an interactive mapping of his studio, with the result that the viewer is able to choose close-ups of every object in the studio, moving around in the image to view them from above or below, and sometimes upside down. As we explore the space from ceiling to floor, zooming in on tiny details left here and there by the artist, we become aware that the work *Nature Morte* is as physical as it is digital. In the absence of the artist, the spectator becomes the free, privileged actor of his own investigations throughout Nauman’s studio.

The title of the work refers to the traditional pictorial genre of the still life, usually a composition of inanimate objects such as fruits, flowers, foods and game. As in his

work on *contrapposto*, Nauman appropriates and re-signifies key notions from the history of Western Art.

## ROOM 19

- 1 One of the many cups of coffee that moves, falls and slides in Nauman's work, from the first ceramics made at the University of California at Davis, in 1965, up to the videos of 1993. Since his early days, the artist has always stated, not perhaps without humor, that a large part of his working day is spent pacing around the studio and drinking coffee.



### WALKS IN WALKS OUT, 2015

HD video installation (color, stereo sound, continuous play)  
3 min.

Jointly owned by Pinault Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Funding for the Philadelphia Museum of Art is made possible through the generosity of many donors.

In this video, Nauman poses in front of his own multiple image, projected on the wall, then exits the frame. Behind the artist we see two rows of seven figures, showing Nauman walking in *contrapposto*. These projected figures appear separated from the actual ground, so that their pacing against a moving background does not seem to be leading anywhere.

Filmed on a mobile phone, initially with the aim of using his own body size to assess the dimensions of the projected image in real space, Nauman reflectively redoubles his own presence. Here, a simple, behind-the-scenes action is transformed into an artwork. The studio appears not only as the place for making art but also as a possible artwork.

In addition, by walking while in *contrapposto*, an extraneous physical activity that he performs despite his age, Nauman seems intent in subverting the traditional image of this canonical pose that, ever since Antiquity, has been associated with youth and corporeal vigor, charging the work with an unexpected emotional quality.



*Born in 1941 in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Bruce Nauman was awarded in 1964 a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Wisconsin, where he studied mathematics, physics, music and visual arts. After obtaining his Master of Arts with an emphasis on sculpture from the University of California at Davis in 1966, he was given his first solo exhibition at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles. That year also saw him take an interest in what were then the unconventional mediums of photography and video. He was interested in sculptural practices and in experiments with performance and sound that at that time were relatively marginal in the visual arts. He also taught, notably at the Art Institute of San Francisco in 1966, and at the University of California in 1970. In 1968, the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, and the Galerie Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf, exhibited his work, in what would ultimately constitute a long series of solo shows by the artist. The same year Nauman was invited*

*for the first time to participate in Documenta in Kassel. In 1972, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York organized his first solo museum exhibition, which traveled to several venues in Europe and the United States. In 1979 Nauman moved to New Mexico where he has been living and working since then. In 1999 he received the Golden Lion as the Best Artist at the Venice Biennale, and in 2009 he represented the United States in an exhibition organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art that won the prize for Best National Participation. Since the 1980s, major solo exhibitions have been taking place all around the globe among which, most recently, the exhibition "Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts" organized by the Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager Basel and the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2018-2019) and a solo show at Tate Modern, London (2020-2021).*

## PHOTO CREDITS

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*San Bartolomeo e San Sebastiano*, before 1511 © G.A.VE Archivio fotografico

*Contrapposto Studies, I through VII*, 2015/2016, Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art

*Walk with Contrapposto*, 1968, Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

*Bouncing in the Corner, No. 1*, 1968, Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

*Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)*, 1968, Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

*Stamping in the Studio*, 1968, Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

*Bouncing in the Corner, No. 2: Upside Down*, 1969, Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

*Lip Sync*, 1969, Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

*Revolving Upside Down*, 1969, Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

*Pacing Upside Down*, 1969, Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

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*Acoustic Wedge (Mirrored)*,

2020, Installation view, *Bruce*

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*Elke Allowing the Floor to Rise*

*Up over Her, Face Up*, 1973,

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic

Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

*Tony Sinking into the Floor, Face*

*Up and Face Down*, 1973, Courtesy

of the artist and Electronic Arts

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*Sound Breaking Wall*, 1969,

Installation view *Bruce Nauman:*

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Janet Kraynak, ed., *Please Pay Attention Please: Bruce Nauman's Words, Writings and Interviews* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003).

Joan Simon, ed., *Bruce Nauman: Exhibition Catalogue and Catalogue Raisonné* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1994).

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Preface of François Pinault  
Preface of Bruno Racine  
Preface of Caroline Bourgeois  
and Carlos Basualdo  
Carlos Basualdo, *Volver sobre  
sus pasos*  
Damon Krukowski, *Following  
the Sounds*  
Noé Soulier, *Action as Work*  
Michael R. Taylor, *Bruce Nauman:  
Mapping the Studio, Changing the  
Field*  
Jean-Pierre Criqui, *Unlearning  
from Bruce Nauman*  
Erica F. Battle, *Bruce Nauman:  
Bodies at Work*  
Caroline Bourgeois, *Walks In  
Walks Out: An Appreciation*  
Carlos Basualdo, *Interview with  
Bruce Nauman*

In the context of this exhibition,  
the curators Carlos Basualdo and  
Caroline Bourgeois have led  
a series of online conversations  
entitled "Bruce Nauman Archive for  
the Future" with **Nairy Baghramian,**  
**Elisabetta Benassi, Boris Charmatz,**  
**Teodor Currentzis, Anne Imhof,**  
**Lenio Kaklea, Élisabeth Lebovici,**  
**Ralph Lemon, Paul Maheke,**  
**Philippe Parreno and Tatiana Trouvé**  
which will be presented online, **on  
the YouTube channel and the web-  
site of Palazzo Grassi.**

