ALMINE RECH

John Giorno
NO NOSTALGIA

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"I loved art before I loved poetry," said poet, activist, and painter John Giorno (1936–2019). A fixture of the New York art and literary scenes of the 1960s, Giorno is widely noted for his encounters—intellectual, social, and sexual—with figures like poet Allen Ginsberg, writer William S. Burroughs, and painters Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, detailed in his posthumous memoir *Great Demon Kings: A Memoir of Poetry, Sex, Art, Death, and Enlightenment* (2020). His particular bond with Andy Warhol cemented his early notoriety; Giorno was the sleeping subject of *Sleep* (1964), Warhol's six-hour underground film classic, making him one of Warhol's first superstars. Giorno's poetry, fusing spoken word, performance, and sound installation, aimed to democratize art in the mid-twentieth century. He captured the humor and horror of daily life in lines at once erotic, tender, and sly. His landmark Dial-A-Poem project (1968–) transformed the telephone into a public portal for poetry: Anyone could dial a number and hear a poem anytime, anywhere.

Less known is Giorno's painting practice, born from the same impulse to reach people within and beyond the museum. With language as his medium, he brought his ear for a sharp phrase into the art world, infusing it with a mix of gravity and levity. The works gathered here—text paintings, early prints, and rainbow canvases—form their own collective poem. They distill Giorno's worldview: the delights of New York street life, Buddhist thought, and the raw immediacy of language. Like koans, they invite viewers to finish the thought, to carry the fragments into their own lives. As Giorno wrote in one of his final poems, "Thanx 4 Nothing" (2007): *"Thanks for allowing me to be a poet / a noble effort, doomed, but the only choice."*

This exhibition also highlights Giorno's archive, revealing his collaborative methods and the friendships that sustained him. Dial-A-Poem returns here, offering 24-hour access to recordings by 132 poets, artists, musicians, and activists from across the Anglosphere. And beyond art, the show reflects Giorno's character, his moral courage. His Buddhist practice, rooted in compassion and clarity, shaped his response to the AIDS crisis: through his AIDS Treatment Project, he provided rent, food, and medicine for those abandoned by the US government.

Determined, as he said, "to make poetry a razor blade cutting through the ego of America's karma," Giorno fused life and art into one unceasing continuity, an experiment constantly being made and remade. *John Giorno: No Nostalgia* extends an open invitation for us to do the same.

JOHN GIORNO: NO NOSTALGIA is curated by Marciano Art Foundation (MAF) Director Hanneke Skerath and writer and critic Carlos Valladares for MAF in collaboration with Giorno Poetry Systems.