SMARTHISTORY OF ART XII: GLOBAL CULTURES 1980 – NOW



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

1: Beginner's guide

- 1.1: Contemporary Art, an introduction
- 1.2: Postmodernism
- 1.3: The Case for Copying
- 1.4: The Black Atlantic
  - 1.4.1: The Black Atlantic- What is the Black Atlantic?
  - 1.4.2: The Black Atlantic- Identity and Nationhood
  - 1.4.3: The Black Atlantic- Toppled Monuments and Hidden Histories
  - 1.4.4: The Black Atlantic- Afterlives of Slavery in Contemporary Art

2: Cold War Germany and after

- 2.1: Anselm Kiefer
  - 2.1.1: Shulamite
  - 2.1.2: Bohemia Lies by the Sea
  - 2.1.3: An interview with Anselm Kiefer
- 2.2: Sigmar Polke, Watchtower series
- 2.3: Gerhard Richter
  - 2.3.1: The Cage Paintings (1-6)
  - 2.3.2: Uncle Rudi
  - 2.3.3: Betty
  - 2.3.4: September

3: Art in the AIDS era

- 3.1: David Wojnarowicz, Untitled (One Day This Kid . . .)
- 3.2: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Untitled” (billboard of an empty bed)
- 3.3: Masami Teraoka, American Kabuki
- 3.4: Sue Coe, Aids won’t wait, the enemy is here not in Kuwait
- 3.5: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Horn Players
- 3.6: Keith Haring, Subway Drawings
- 3.7: Pepón Osorio
  - 3.7.1: En la barberia no se llora (No Crying Allowed in the Barbershop)
  - 3.7.2: Badge of Honor

4: Post-Cultural Revolution China

- 4.1: Luo Zhongli, Father
- 4.2: Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn
- 4.3: The Case for Ai Weiwei
- 4.4: Xu Bing, Book from the Sky
- 4.5: Xu Zhen – ‘Artists Change the Way People Think’

5: Apartheid-era South Africa

- 5.1: The story of Ernest Cole, a black photographer in South Africa during apartheid
- 5.2: Jane Alexander, Butcher Boys
- 5.3: William Kentridge, drawing from Tide Table (Soho in Deck Chair)
- 5.4: Sue Williamson, For Thirty Years Next to His Heart
- 5.5: Marlene Dumas, Models

6: Young British Artists and art as commodity

- 6.1: Jeff Koons, Pink Panther
- 6.2: The YBAs- The London-based Young British Artists
- 6.3: Tracey Emin, My Bed
- 6.4: Chris Ofili, The Holy Virgin Mary
- 6.5: Damien Hirst, The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living
- 6.6: Marc Quinn, Self
- 6.7: Hans Haacke, Seurat's "Les Poseuses" (small version), 1884-1975

7: Pictures generation and post-modern photography

- 7.1: Alfredo Jaar, A Logo for America
- 7.2: Barbara Kruger, Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)
- 7.3: Jeff Wall, A View from an Apartment
- 7.4: Sally Mann, Blowing Bubbles
- 7.5: The Pictures Generation
- 7.6: Cindy Sherman
  - 7.6.1: Untitled Film Still #21
  - 7.6.2: Untitled #228
- 7.7: Carrie Mae Weems, Untitled (Woman Feeding Bird), from The Kitchen Table Series
- 7.8: Joel Sternfeld, On This Site—The Stonewall Inn
- 7.9: Stan Douglas, Every Building on 100 West Hastings
- 7.10: Will Wilson interview about The Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange
- 7.11: Annie Leibovitz, Queen Elizabeth II
- 7.12: Trevor Paglen, The Black Sites—The Salt Pit, Northeast of Kabul, Afghanistan
- 7.13: Chris McCaw, Sunburned, GSP #166, Mohave/Winter Solstice

8: Revisiting histories

- 8.1: Betye Saar, Liberation of Aunt Jemima
- 8.2: Nari Ward, We the People (black version)
- 8.3: Kara Walker
  - 8.3.1: An interview with Kara Walker
  - 8.3.2: Darkytown Rebellion
  - 8.3.3: Kara Walker, A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Bab
  - 8.3.4: Kara Walker, Fons Americanus
- 8.4: Alison Saar, Topsy and the Golden Fleece
- 8.5: Kerry James Marshall
  - 8.5.1: An interview with Kerry James Marshall about his series Mementos
  - 8.5.2: Kerry James Marshall- Mastry
  - 8.5.3: Kerry James Marshall on his process
- 8.6: Clarissa Rizal, Resilience Robe

- 8.7: Tenzing Rigdol, Pin drop silence- Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara
- 8.8: Thornton Dial, Blood and Meat- Survival For The World
- 8.9: Titus Kaphar, The Cost of Removal
- 8.10: Omar Victor Diop- Black subjects in the frame
- 8.11: Wendy Red Star, 1880 Crow Peace Delegation
- 8.12: Yee I-Lann, Picturing Power #6…
- 8.13: Roger Shimomura, Diary- December 12, 1941
- 8.14: An interview with Fred Wilson about the conventions of museums and race
- 8.15: Ken Gonzales-Day, Erased Lynching Series
- 8.16: Kenseth Armstead, Surrender Yorktown 1781
- 8.17: Lam Tung Pang on “A day of two Suns”
- 8.18: Michael Rakowitz- Haunting the West

9: Mapping and migration

- 9.1: Julie Mehretu, Stadia II
- 9.2: Doris Salcedo, Shibboleth
- 9.3: Doris Salcedo- Third World Identity
- 9.4: Raúl de Nieves, Beginning and the end neither and the otherwise betwixt and between the end is the beginning and the end
- 9.5: Julie Mehretu, HOWL, eon (I, II)
- 9.6: Julie Mehretu, HOWL, eon (I, II) (Masterpiece Moment)
- 9.7: An interview with Alfredo Jaar
- 9.8: Jamie Wyeth, Kalounna in Frogtown
- 9.9: Zineb Sedira – ‘The Personal is Political’
- 9.10: Suchitra Mattai, Exodus

10: Borderlands

- 10.1: Tanya Aguiñiga, Metabolizing the Border
- 10.2: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Border Tuner
- 10.3: Postcommodity arts collective
- 10.4: Richard Misrach, Border Cantos
- 10.5: Minerva Cuevas, Crossing of the Rio Bravo
- 10.6: Jaime Carrejo, Border/Land
- 10.7: Guadalupe Maravilla, Requiem For My Border Crossing

11: Figuration, the body, and representation

- 11.1: How did Lucian Freud present queer and marginalized bodies?
- 11.2: Lucian Freud, Standing by the Rags
- 11.3: Identity Politics- From the Margins to the Mainstream
- 11.4: Louise Bourgeois, Maman
- 11.5: Stephanie Syjuco, The Visible Invisible
- 11.6: Renée Stout, interview about Fetish #2
- 11.7: Wangechi Mutu
  - 11.7.1: Wangechi Mutu, Preying Mantra
  - 11.7.2: Wangechi Mutu, The NewOnes, will free Us
- 11.8: Marina Abramović, The Artist is Present
- 11.9: Rineke Dijkstra, Odessa, Ukraine, August 4, 1993
- 11.10: An interview with Maryam Hoseini

- 11.11: Jordan Casteel paints her community
- 11.12: Luchita Hurtado's body of work
- 11.13: Shirin Neshat
  - 11.13.1: Rebellious Silence, Women of Allah series
  - 11.13.2: 'Dreams Are Where Our Fears Live'
- 11.14: Kehinde Wiley
  - 11.14.1: Rumors of War
  - 11.14.2: Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps
- 11.15: Yinka Shonibare, The Swing (After Fragonard)
- 11.16: Figures and Fictions- Santu Mofokeng
- 11.17: Kiki Smith, Lying with the Wolf
- 11.18: Catherine Opie
  - 11.18.1: Self-Portrait/Cutting
  - 11.18.2: Figure and Landscape series
- 11.19: Stefanie Jackson, Bluest Eye
- 11.20: Ellen Galagher, DeLuxe
- 11.21: Ah Xian artist interview
- 11.22: Takashi Murakami
- 11.23: Will Wilson, Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange
- 11.24: Lorna Simpson – 'Everything I Do Comes from the Same Desire'
- 11.25: Amy Sherald, Precious Jewels by the Sea
- 11.26: Michelle Browder, Mothers of Gynecology
- 11.27: Douglas Coupland, Terry Fox Memorial

12: Social practice

- 12.1: Guerrilla Girls, 'You Have to Question What You See' (interview)
- 12.2: Ai Wei Wei, Remembering and the Politics of Dissent
- 12.3: Ai Wei Wei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds)
- 12.4: Tania Bruguera, The Francis Effect
- 12.5: Tania Bruguera, Immigrant Movement International
- 12.6: Theaster Gates on collecting
- 12.7: Danh Vo Interview- Art Should Estrange
- 12.8: Lida Abdul – 'A Beautiful Encounter With Chance'

13: Public memory and the politics of place

- 13.1: An-My Lê, 29 Palms
- 13.2: Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii
- 13.3: Kerry James Marshall, Our Town
- 13.4: SAAM- Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii, 1995
- 13.5: Do Ho Suh, Rubbing/Loving
- 13.6: The National Memorial for Peace and Justice (Equal Justice Initiative)
- 13.7: Krzysztof Wodiczko, Monument
- 13.8: Daniel Libeskind, Imperial War Museum North, Manchester, UKNew Page
- 13.9: Birdhead – 'We Photograph Things That Are Meaningful To Us'
- 13.10: Contemporary politics and classical architecture
- 13.11: Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, Native Hosts (Arkansas)
- 13.12: What's in a map? Jaune Quick-To-See Smith's State Names (2000)
- 13.13: Graciela Iturbide, Photographing Mexico

- 13.14: Contemporary Native American Architecture
- 13.15: Mark Bradford's 150 Portrait Tone
- 13.16: Artist Richard Bell – 'My Art is an Act of Protest'
- 13.17: Yatika Starr Fields and mural painting
- 13.18: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)

14: Landscape and ecology

- 14.1: Stéphane Couturier, Fenetre, Eastlake Greens, San Diego
- 14.2: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Earth's Creation
- 14.3: Maya Lin, Silver Upper White River
- 14.4: Courtney Leonard, ARTIFICE Ellipse, 2016
- 14.5: Sebastião Salgado's Kuwait
- 14.6: Michel Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe (Corned Beef 2000)
- 14.7: James Turrell, Skyspace, the way of color
- 14.8: Roger Minick, Woman with Scarf at Inspiration Point, Yosemite National Park
- 14.9: Binh Danh, Bridalveil Fall, Yosemite CA, May 31, 2012
- 14.10: Thiebaud, Ponds and Streams
- 14.11: Noel Harding, The Elevated Wetlands
- 14.12: Artist Dale Harding – 'Environment is Part of Who You Are'
- 14.13: Mel Chin, Paydirt

15: Digital culture

- 15.1: An interview with Jamian Juliano-Villani
- 15.2: Meriem Bennani's Exploded Visions
- 15.3: Art, Race, and the Internet- Mendi + Keith Obadike's Black.Net.Art Actions
- 15.4: Cao Fei, Building "RMB City"
- 15.5: Shahzia Sikander, The Last Post

16: Assemblage and materiality

- 16.1: Assemblage
- 16.2: Magdalene Anyango N. Odundo, Symmetrical Reduced Black Narrow-Necked Tall Piece
- 16.3: Nick Cave's "Soundsuits"
- 16.4: Damián Ortega, Alias
- 16.5: Abraham Cruzvillegas, Autoconstrucción
- 16.6: Rebecca Belmore on Rising to the Occasion
- 16.7: El Anatsui
  - 16.7.1: El Anatsui, Untitled
  - 16.7.2: El Anatsui, Old Man's Cloth
- 16.8: Mickalene Thomas on her Materials and Artistic Influences
- 16.9: Fred Wilson- Beauty and Ugliness
- 16.10: Kohei Nawa, PixCell-Deer#24
- 16.11: Zheng Chongbin on "I Look for the Sky"
- 16.12: An interview with artist Ogawa Machiko
- 16.13: Lares Feliciano, Memory Mirror installation
- 16.14: Mona Hatoum – 'Nothing Is a Finished Project'
- 16.15: Jesús Rafael Soto, Houston Penetrable
- 16.16: Artist Profile- Sopheap Pich on Rattan, Sculpture, and Abstraction
- 16.17: Who is Rachel Whiteread?

- 16.18: Artist interview with Lee Bul about Willing To Be Vulnerable
- 16.19: Ellen Gallagher- Cutting
- 16.20: Thornton Dial, Sr., Crossing Waters
- 16.21: Shan Goshorn (Eastern Band Cherokee), Sealed Fate- Treaty of New Echota Protest Basket
- 16.22: Richard Zane Smith (Wyandotte Nation), Wyandotte Feast Pot
- 16.23: Marilyn Spoon, Bandolier Bag

17: Spirituality and transcendence

- 17.1: Jack Whitten on Mapping the Soul
- 17.2: Bill Viola, The Crossing
- 17.2: Lee Ufan
- 17.3: Richard Mayhew, Indigenous Spiritual Space
- 17.4: Mariko Mori, Pure Land
- 17.6: Bruce Nauman, The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths

Index

Glossary

Detailed Licensing

Detailed Licensing

Licensing

*A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in **Back Matter/Detailed Licensing**.*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Beginner's guide

1.1: Contemporary Art, an introduction

1.2: Postmodernism

1.3: The Case for Copying

1.4: The Black Atlantic

1.4.1: The Black Atlantic- What is the Black Atlantic?

1.4.2: The Black Atlantic- Identity and Nationhood

1.4.3: The Black Atlantic- Toppled Monuments and Hidden Histories

1.4.4: The Black Atlantic- Afterlives of Slavery in Contemporary Art

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1.1: Contemporary Art, an introduction

by DR. VIRGINIA B. SPIVEY

Page ID
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"Getting" Contemporary Art

It's ironic that many people say they don't "get" contemporary art because, unlike Egyptian tomb painting or Greek sculpture, art made since 1960 reflects our own recent past. It speaks to the dramatic social, political and technological changes of the last 50 years, and it questions many of society's values and assumptions—a tendency of postmodernism, a concept sometimes used to describe contemporary art. What makes today's art especially challenging is that, like the world around us, it has become more diverse and cannot be easily defined through a list of visual characteristics, artistic themes or cultural concerns.



Figure **1.1.1**: Girl Looking at: Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962, synthetic polymer on 32 canvases each 20 x 16″ (The Museum of Modern Art) (photo: Steven Zucker)

Minimalism and Pop Art, two major art movements of the early 1960s, offer clues to the different directions of art in the late 20th and 21st century. Both rejected established expectations about art's aesthetic qualities and need for originality. Minimalist objects are spare geometric forms, often made from industrial processes and materials, which lack surface details, expressive markings, and any discernible meaning. Pop Art took its subject matter from low-brow sources like comic books and advertising. Like Minimalism, its use of commercial techniques eliminated emotional content implied by the artist's individual approach, something that had been important to the previous generation of modern painters. The result was that both movements effectively blurred the line distinguishing fine art from more ordinary aspects of life, and forced us to reconsider art's place and purpose in the world.

Shifting Strategies

Minimalism and Pop Art paved the way for later artists to explore questions about the conceptual nature of art, its form, its production, and its ability to communicate in different ways. In the late 1960s and 1970s, these ideas led to a "dematerialization of art," when artists turned away from painting and sculpture to experiment with new formats including photography, film and video, performance art, large-scale installations and earth works. Although some critics of the time foretold "the death of painting," art today encompasses a broad range of traditional and experimental media, including works that rely on Internet technology and other scientific innovations.

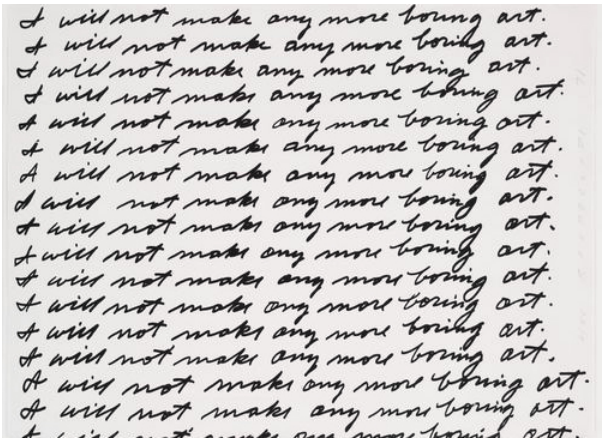


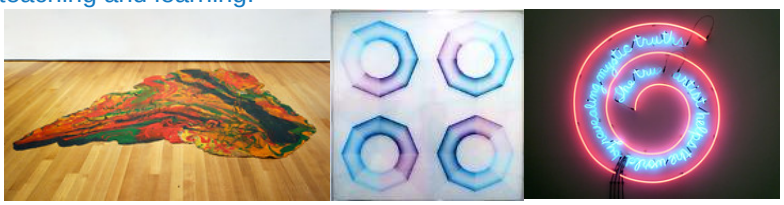
Figure **1.1.2**: John Baldessari, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, 1971, lithograph, 22-7/16 x 30-1/16″ (The Museum of Modern Art). Copyright John Baldessari, courtesy of the artist.

Contemporary artists continue to use a varied vocabulary of abstract and representational forms to convey their ideas. It is important to remember that the art of our time did not develop in a vacuum; rather, it reflects the social and political concerns of its cultural context. For example, artists like Judy Chicago, who were inspired by the feminist movement of the early 1970s, embraced imagery and art forms that had historical connections to women.

In the 1980s, artists appropriated the style and methods of mass media advertising to investigate issues of cultural authority and identity politics. More recently, artists like Maya Lin, who designed the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Wall in Washington D.C., and Richard Serra, who was loosely associated with Minimalism in the 1960s, have adapted characteristics of Minimalist art to create new abstract sculptures that encourage more personal interaction and emotional response among viewers.

These shifting strategies to engage the viewer show how contemporary art's significance exists beyond the object itself. Its meaning develops from cultural discourse, interpretation and a range of individual understandings, in addition to the formal and conceptual problems that first motivated the artist. In this way, the art of our times may serve as a catalyst for an on-going process of open discussion and intellectual inquiry about the world today.

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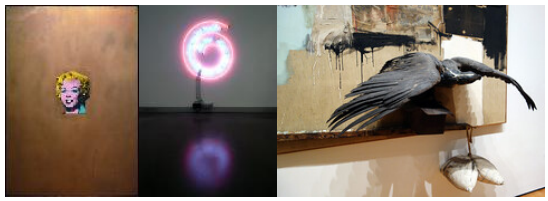
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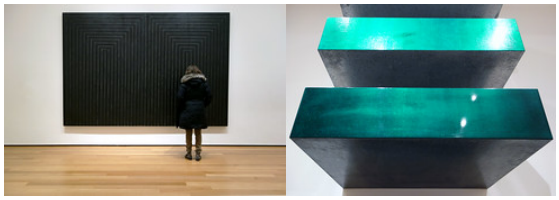
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1.2: Postmodernism

- by **VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON**

Page ID

182345



Video 1.2.1: This film features some of the most important living Postmodern practitioners, Charles Jencks, Robert A M Stern and Sir Terry Farrell among them, and asks them how and why Postmodernism came about, and what it means to be Postmodern. This film was originally made for the V&A exhibition ‘Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970 – 1990’

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1.3: The Case for Copying

- *by THE ART ASSIGNMENT*

Page ID

182346



Video **1.3.1**: Speaker: Sarah Urist Green

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SECTION OVERVIEW

1.4: The Black Atlantic

1.4.1: The Black Atlantic- What is the Black Atlantic?

1.4.2: The Black Atlantic- Identity and Nationhood

1.4.3: The Black Atlantic- Toppled Monuments and Hidden Histories

1.4.4: The Black Atlantic- Afterlives of Slavery in Contemporary Art

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1.4.1: The Black Atlantic- What is the Black Atlantic?

by TATE

Page ID

182348



Video **1.4.1.1**: In episode one of a four-part mini-series, culture writer and curator Ekow Eshun searches for a definition of the Black Atlantic, drawing on the works of JMW Turner, Ingrid Pollard, Isaac Julien and Yinka Shonibare. In 1993, Paul Gilroy published a ground-breaking book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity & Double Consciousness*, which has forever left its mark on historical and cultural studies. The idea that there exists a culture which is African, American, Caribbean, and British, all at once, has generated the rich and boundless space that is Black Atlantic thinking. This series explores Tate's collection and the impact of the Atlantic slave trade through the lens of the Black Atlantic. It gives an accessible introduction to the Black Atlantic, how it can help us to understand British identity and how we can acknowledge and learn from history to look towards the future.

Additional resources

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity & Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993)

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1.4.2: The Black Atlantic- Identity and Nationhood

by **KAYLA MCCARTHY**

Page ID

182349



Video **1.4.2.1**: In the second part of a mini-series on the Black Atlantic, culture writer and curator Ekow Eshun considers identity and nationhood through the work of Ellen Gallagher, Lubaina Himid, John Akomfrah, Chris Ofili and Fred Wilson. In 1993, Paul Gilroy published a ground-breaking book, The Black Atlantic: Modernity & Double Consciousness, which has forever left its mark on historical and cultural studies. The idea that there exists a culture which is African, American, Caribbean, and British, all at once, has generated the rich and boundless space that is Black Atlantic thinking. This series explores Tate's collection and the impact of the Atlantic slave trade through the lens of the Black Atlantic. It gives an accessible introduction to the Black Atlantic, how it can help us to understand British identity and how we can acknowledge and learn from history to look towards the future.

Additional resources

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity & Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993)

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1.4.3: The Black Atlantic- Toppled Monuments and Hidden Histories

- by **TATE**

Page ID

182350



Video **1.4.3.1**: In the third part of a mini-series about the Black Atlantic, culture writer and curator Ekow Eshun explores monuments and hidden histories through the work of Donald Locke and Hew Locke. In 1993, Paul Gilroy published a ground-breaking book, The Black Atlantic: Modernity & Double Consciousness, which has forever left its mark on historical and cultural studies. The idea that there exists a culture which is African, American, Caribbean, and British, all at once, has generated the rich and boundless space that is Black Atlantic thinking. This series explores Tate's collection and the impact of the Atlantic slave trade through the lens of the Black Atlantic. It gives an accessible introduction to the Black Atlantic, how it can help us to understand British identity and how we can acknowledge and learn from history to look towards the future.

Additional resources

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity & Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993)

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1.4.4: The Black Atlantic- Afterlives of Slavery in Contemporary Art

- by **TATE**

Page ID

182351



Video **1.4.4.1**: In the final part of our mini-series on the Black Atlantic, culture writer and curator Ekow Eshun looks at the afterlives of slavery in contemporary artistic practice through the work of Kara Walker, Alberta Whittle and Hew Locke. In 1993, Paul Gilroy published a ground-breaking book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity & Double Consciousness*, which has forever left its mark on historical and cultural studies. The idea that there exists a culture which is African, American, Caribbean, and British, all at once, has generated the rich and boundless space that is Black Atlantic thinking. This series explores Tate's collection and the impact of the Atlantic slave trade through the lens of the Black Atlantic. It gives an accessible introduction to the Black Atlantic, how it can help us to understand British identity and how we can acknowledge and learn from history to look towards the future.

Additional resources

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity & Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993)

This page titled 1.4.4: The Black Atlantic- Afterlives of Slavery in Contemporary Art is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Tate, "The Black Atlantic: Afterlives of Slavery in Contemporary Art," in Smarthistory, November 7, 2022, accessed December 21, 2022, https://smarthistory.org/the-black-atlantic-afterlives-of-slavery-in-contemporary-art/..

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Cold War Germany and after

2.1: Anselm Kiefer

2.1.1: Shulamite

2.1.2: Bohemia Lies by the Sea

2.1.3: An interview with Anselm Kiefer

2.2: Sigmar Polke, Watchtower series

2.3: Gerhard Richter

2.3.1: The Cage Paintings (1-6)

2.3.2: Uncle Rudi

2.3.3: Betty

2.3.4: September

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.1: Anselm Kiefer

2.1.1: Shulamite

2.1.2: Bohemia Lies by the Sea

2.1.3: An interview with Anselm Kiefer

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2.1.1: Shulamite

by **REBECCA TAYLOR**

Page ID

182353



Figure **2.1.1.1**: Anselm Kiefer, *Shulamite*, 1983, oil, emulsion, woodcut, shellac, acrylic, and straw on canvas, 213 x 145″ / 541 x 368.3 cm (Doris and Donald Fisher Collection at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) © Anselm Kiefer, courtesy of the artist

> ***Black milk of morning we drink you at night***
> ***we drink you at noontime Death is a gang-boss aus Deutschland***
> ***we drink you at dusktime and dawntime***
> ***we drink and drink Death is a gang-boss aus Deutschland his eye is blue***
> ***he shoots you with leaden bullets his aim is true***
> ***there's a man in this house your golden hair Margareta***
> ***he sets his dogs on our trail he gives us a grave in the sky***
> ***he cultivates snakes and he dreams Death is a gang-boss aus Deutschland***
> ***your golden hair Margareta***
> ***your ashen hair Shulamite***

—the final lines of Paul Celan's poem, "Death Fugue," published 1947 (trans. Jerome Rothenberg)

Breaking postwar silence

Born in Germany just months shy of the end of World War II, Anselm Kiefer came of age in the late 1960s when the silence surrounding the crimes of the Nazi regime was ruptured by a vocal younger generation horrified by their collective German "past," struggling to reconcile such shame and redefine what it meant to be German in a post-Nazi world.

For Kiefer, who had studied with the artists Peter Dreher in Karlsruhe and Joseph Beuys in Dusseldorf, painting became the arena to vocalize and elucidate his contempt for the Nazis and their reprehensible legacy, instilling every brush stroke with palpable rage, grief, and shame. In the 1970s, Kiefer developed a signature style that was influenced in part by the Neo-expressionist style of Georg Baselitz, but also by his teacher Beuys, particularly Beuys's tendency to use commonplace materials, such as fat and felt within his artistic practice. Kiefer augmented his thick layers of impasto with lead, glass, straw, wood, dried flowers, and more, yielding highly textured, viscous surfaces. As his list of materials grew, so too did the scale of his canvases, which though large and formidable, felt ephemeral and fragile as a result of the materials he utilized.

A thick impasto

All of the canonical elements of Kiefer's work are present in *Shulamite*—a thick impasto resulting from a hardened mixture of oil, acrylic, emulsion, and shellac; a brittle, textured surface infused with commonplace materials (in this case, straw and ash); mythological or biblical references (Shulamite refers to the heroine in the Song of Solomon); a literary reference (Celan's "Death Fugue"); and a historical subject or location (a Nazi Memorial Hall in Berlin).

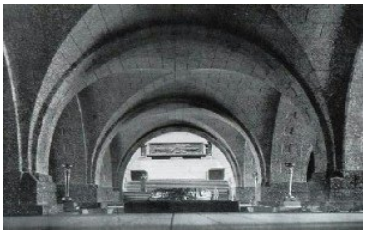


Figure **2.1.1.2**: Wilhelm Kreis, Funeral Hall for the Great German Soldier in the Hall of Soldiers, c. 1939 (Berlin)

Kiefer's hall is not a memorial to great men with patriotic flags waving boldly, but a gateway to damnation, a dark and foreboding road to hell, enclosed by low arches and paved with massive stones —the whole mise-en-scène (a stage set that tells a story) suggestive of an oven (immediately bringing to mind the hyperactivity of the crematoria at the Nazi death camps). Sulamith, is inscribed in the upper left hand corner, a graffiti-like testament in white paint upon the stone, to Celan's brave young Jewish girl consumed by this living hell, who came to her death in a chamber such as this because she had not the golden hair of Aryan Margarete but the dark "ashen hair" of Shulamite. Kiefer transformed architecture meant to honor Nazi heros into a memorial for their victims.

Emotional honesty

Comparisons to Jackson Pollock in terms of both scale and expressive, gestural style are understandable, but for me Kiefer's paint handling is even more reminiscent of Vincent van Gogh, in terms of raw beauty and emotional honesty. Just as van Gogh's paint can transport me into the Dutch or French countryside and fill my nose with the smell of fresh sunflowers or irises, so too can Kiefer transport me to another place in time and space—but rather than a hayfield in Holland it is the dark abyss of a concentration camp with the stomach-churning smell of burning flesh sullying the air.

Special thanks to Sandy Heller, The Heller Group, LLC

Additional Resources:



Surrounded by his paintings in SFMOMA's galleries, German artist Anselm Kiefer describes the challenges and significance of exploring the past in his work. He highlights the subjective, emotional nature of both history and art.



German painter and sculptor Anselm Kiefer discusses the meanings behind some of his favorite materials, including straw, cow manure, and lead. He describes how he strives for fluidity and malleability in his work, though conservation can be a challenge.

Paul Celan, Death Fugue, Copyright © 2005 by Paul Celan and Jerome Rothenberg. From Paul Celan: Selections. Reprinted with permission of the University of California Press. Poets.org

Nicolas Wroe, "Life in Art: Anselm Kiefer," essay in the Guardian Newspaper, March 18 2011

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2.1.2: Bohemia Lies by the Sea

by COREY D'AUGUSTINE and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID

182354



Video **2.1.2.1**: The conservator's eye: Anselm Kiefer, *Bohemia Lies by the Sea*, 1996, oil, emulsion, shellac, charcoal, and powdered paint on burlap, 75 1/4 in. × 18 ft. 5 inches / 191.1 × 561.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Speakers: Corey D'Augustine and Steven Zucker.

Additional resources



Video **2.1.2.2**: German painter and sculptor Anselm Kiefer discusses the meanings behind some of his favorite materials, including straw, cow manure, and lead. He describes how he strives for fluidity and malleability in his work, though conservation can be a challenge.

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2.1.3: An interview with Anselm Kiefer

- by **SFMOMA**

Page ID

182355



Video **2.1.3.1**: Surrounded by his paintings in SFMOMA's galleries, German artist Anselm Kiefer describes the challenges and significance of exploring the past in his work. He highlights the subjective, emotional nature of both history and art.



Video **2.1.3.2**: German painter and sculptor Anselm Kiefer discusses the meanings behind some of his favorite materials, including straw, cow manure, and lead. He describes how he strives for fluidity and malleability in his work, though conservation can be a challenge.

This page titled 2.1.3: An interview with Anselm Kiefer is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by SFMOMA, "An interview with Anselm Kiefer," in Smarthistory, December 21, 2020, accessed December 21, 2022, https://smarthistory.org/an-interview-with-anselm-kiefer-2/..

2.2: Sigmar Polke, Watchtower series

by KATRINA KLAASMEYER

Page ID
182356

In the early 1980s, Sigmar Polke returned to painting. The ever-evolving artist had spent the previous decade experimenting with photography, inspired perhaps by his extensive travels through Asia and Australia. His interest in photography centered on the chemical processes of the darkroom and their potential for unpredictable results. Like his earlier *rasterbilder* (works that exposed the raster-dot technique of printing, such as *Bunnies*), Polke continued to delight in exposing the artistic process. As he began to use unconventional materials and chemicals across various media, viewers could see the artwork literally developing and changing in front of their eyes. These experiments have earned him the designation of alchemist—the ancient practitioner of magic, altering substances at the most fundamental levels.

Alchemy in painting



Figure **2.2.2**: Sigmar Polke, *Watchtower,* 1984, synthetic polymer paints and dry pigment on patterned fabric, 9′ 10″ x 7′ 4 1/2″ (The Museum of Modern Art) © 2015 Estate of Sigmar Polke

We can see Polke's play with alchemy in the series of five works centered on the watchtower theme completed from 1984-1988. Taken as a whole, the watchtower series consistently presents a tenuous balance between imagery that evokes both the ominous and the everyday.

In *Watchtower* (1984), we see the watchtower clearly with its distinctive white outline against the darker background fabrics. Gestural swirls of yellow paint add to the dreamlike haziness of the image. Two styles of textile have been used: on the left, a repetitive geometric pattern similar to a basketweave; on the right, large stylized flowers of yellow, red, and purple. These fabrics are nothing special—in fact, their very banality is what appealed to the artist. Rather than use the sanctified canvas of high art, Polke has instead chosen "bargain-bin" consumer textiles. Polke's use of these textiles alludes to a subtle type of alchemy: the transformation of a simple material widely available into the foundation for the genius of artistic expression. Through his manipulation, the fabric previously worth only dollars upon the yard has now transmuted into an artwork worth millions.

Polke's alchemical practices are most apparent in *Watchtower II* (1984-85, Carnegie Museum of Art) where he used silver oxide to create a ghost-like, hazy outline, resulting in a muted image. From certain angles, the watchtower is barely visible. We see another variant on this theme in *Watchtower with Geese* (1987-88, Art Institute of Chicago). Polke has prominently placed a gaggle of geese atop a fabric printed with beach umbrellas and sunglasses. In this context, the function of the watchtower becomes ambiguous. The fabric alludes to the beach, thereby suggesting this symbol could be a lifeguard tower, whereas the geese allude to hunting, providing yet another possibility for the tower—a hunter's blind. Indeed, the original German title *Hochsitz* translates literally to "perch" (as in a high vantage point) and typically refers to the hunter's blind, an elevated seat used in the German countryside as a lookout for hunting fowl. Ambiguity, banality, alchemical transformations—with these recurrent themes present in this series, Polke is consistent in his inconsistency.

Art after Auschwitz

Without question, the central symbol in this series evokes the horrific realities of concentration camps, the Nazi past, and government surveillance in a divided nation. As Germany struggled with reunification in the 1980s, the military watchtowers continued to stand, near the wall separating the communist East from the democratic West. For some Germans, these towers were part of everyday reality. By layering the watchtower symbol within the banal imagery of the preprinted textiles, Polke is symbolizing a layering of consciousness, disparate realities within a divided nation. Many artists have confronted these themes of postwar reality and the healing of wide-spread cultural trauma, most notably Joseph Beuys in his shamanistic workings with felt and fat, and Anselm Kiefer's massive canvases exploring history and myth.

Polke addressed the issues of surveillance and slaughter in this watchtower series, as well as in his ominous painting *Camp* (1982, **Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**), where the viewer is placed within a black mist set between two inwardly curving fences of barbed wire against a dark yellow sky. In these paintings, Polke does not diminish or attempt to hide the horrific realities of these symbols, yet he enshrouds them in dark uncertainties. The ghost-like haziness and mysterious mist are unpredictable and unbounded, forcing a shifting of perspective. Polke does not wish to erase the past, but perhaps something so complex can only be approached through the magic of alchemy, with its transformative powers and limitless potential.

Additional Resources:

***Watchtower* at the Museum of Modern Art**

***Watchtower II* at the Carnegie Museum of Art**

***Watchtower with Geese* at the Art Institute Chicago**

Artist's biography at Tate

Polke on the the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.3: Gerhard Richter

2.3.1: The Cage Paintings (1-6)

2.3.2: Uncle Rudi

2.3.3: Betty

2.3.4: September

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2.3.1: The Cage Paintings (1-6)

- by **GERHARD RICHTER STUDIO**

Page ID

182358



Video **2.3.1.1**: Robert Storr talks about Gerhard Richter's Cage paintings.

This page titled 2.3.1: The Cage Paintings (1-6) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Gerhard Richter studio, "Gerhard Richter, The Cage Paintings (1-6)," in Smarthistory, September 7, 2018, accessed December 21, 2022, https://smarthistory.org/gerhard-richter-the-cage-paintings-1-6-2/..

2.3.2: Uncle Rudi

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
182359



Figure **2.3.2.1**: Gerhard Richter, *Uncle Rudi*, 1965, oil on canvas, 87 x 50 cm (Lidice Gallery, Lidice, Czech Republic) used with permission of the Gerhard Richter studio

“I can’t see it…is it me?” I watched a young woman step closer to the canvas titled, *Uncle Rudi*. She was now physically closer and she was looking hard, but the image kept its distance.

Refusing Style

Meaning in Gerhard Richter’s art can also keep its distance. The elusiveness of meaning is, in some ways, a central subject of Richter’s art. Since the early 1950s, Richter has painted a huge number of subjects in wildly conflicting styles. For most artists, one style emerges and evolves slowly, almost imperceptibly, over the course of their career. This is because artists often continue to work through problems that remain relevant and perhaps, because they achieve a degree of recognition and the market then demands that style. In other words, collectors often want what is known. Artists who abandon their signature style do so at some risk to future sales. Still, some artists do push in startlingly new directions. Willem de Kooning abandoned abstraction for the figure against the advice of his dealer, and Pablo Picasso famously pursued opposing styles simultaneously—think of his volumetric, even bloated Neoclassicism compared to the collages where he pressed flat every volume in sight.

The Impossibility of Meaning

During Richter’s long career, he has produced art in an unprecedented number of conflicting styles starting with the propagandistic Social Realist art he made as a student at the Dresden Art Academy in Communist East Germany. After his move in 1961 to Düsseldorf in the West (via Berlin—the wall was begun the same year), he co-founded a German variant of Pop art which he, somewhat jokingly, termed Capitalist Realism. Since then he has painted high-pitched realism (sometimes blurred just enough to soften the image, or sometimes wiped or scraped beyond all recognition) and produced representations of abstraction (as opposed to abstraction itself). He has explored many of the most pressing visual issues of our time, the relationship of photography to painting, memory and the image, art’s role in the representation of war and politics, and perhaps most importantly, the impossibility of fixed meaning.

Image and Ideology

Richter was born in Dresden, Germany on the eve of the Second World War. His two uncles were killed in the war and his father served, but survived. His schizophrenic aunt, Marianne, was murdered by the Nazis as part of their drive to euthanize the sick. Less than a week after his thirteenth birthday, Richter heard some 3,600 British and American planes drop more than half-a-million bombs on Dresden (he then lived just outside the city). 25,000 people were killed in these raids and the Soviets would quickly occupy Eastern Germany. Unlike the idealized, classicized nudes that Adolf Hitler had promulgated, the young Richter was taught

Social Realism at the Dresden academy, a celebration of the heroism of communist workers. Once in the West, Richter found that the relationship between image and ideology reversed yet again. Here, images in advertising and popular culture celebrated material wealth and the culture of capitalism. Under the Nazis, under the Soviets, and in the West, Richter saw art used to express political ideology. His art, while deeply concerned with politics and morality, rejects the very possibility of answers, even of the idea that we can know.

Uncle Rudi

Uncle Rudi, the painting the woman had stepped closer to see, is painted in the grays of a black and white photograph. It is small and has the intimacy of a family snapshot. We see a young man smiling proudly and awkwardly. He is clearly self-conscious as he poses in his new uniform. One has the sense that a moment before he was talking to the person behind the camera, likely a friend or family member. Rudi would die fighting soon after the photograph that is the basis for this painting was taken. This is the artist's uncle, the man his grandmother favored and the adult the young Richter was to model himself after. But nothing in this painting is clear. Not the relationship between the artist and his uncle, not the tension between Rudi's innocent awkwardness and his participation in Nazi violence, not even in the relationship between the photograph and Richter's painting. The artist has drawn a dry brush across the wet surface of the nearly finished painting, and by doing this, he obscures the clarity of the photograph, denying us the easy certainty we expect. Richter reminds us that *Uncle Rudi*, like all images, promise and then fail to bring us closer to the people, things or places represented.

Additional Resources:

***Uncle Rudi* in the artist's website**

***Uncle Rudi* at the Lidice Memorial Museum**

Video of Richter painting

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2.3.3: Betty

- by **SAL KHAN** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID

182360



Video **2.3.3.1**: Gerhard Richter, *Betty*, 1988, oil on canvas, 102 x 72cm (Saint Louis Art Museum)

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2.3.4: September

- by **GERHARD RICHTER STUDIO**

Page ID

182361



Video **2.3.4.1**: Robert Storr talks about Gerhard Richter's *September*, 2005, oil on canvas, 52 cm x 72 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Art in the AIDS era

3.1: David Wojnarowicz, Untitled (One Day This Kid . . .)
3.2: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Untitled” (billboard of an empty bed)
3.3: Masami Teraoka, American Kabuki
3.4: Sue Coe, Aids won’t wait, the enemy is here not in Kuwait
3.5: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Horn Players
3.6: Keith Haring, Subway Drawings
3.7: Pepón Osorio
3.7.1: En la barberia no se llora (No Crying Allowed in the Barbershop)
3.7.2: Badge of Honor

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3.1: David Wojnarowicz, Untitled (One Day This Kid . . .)

by JON DAVIES

Page ID

182362

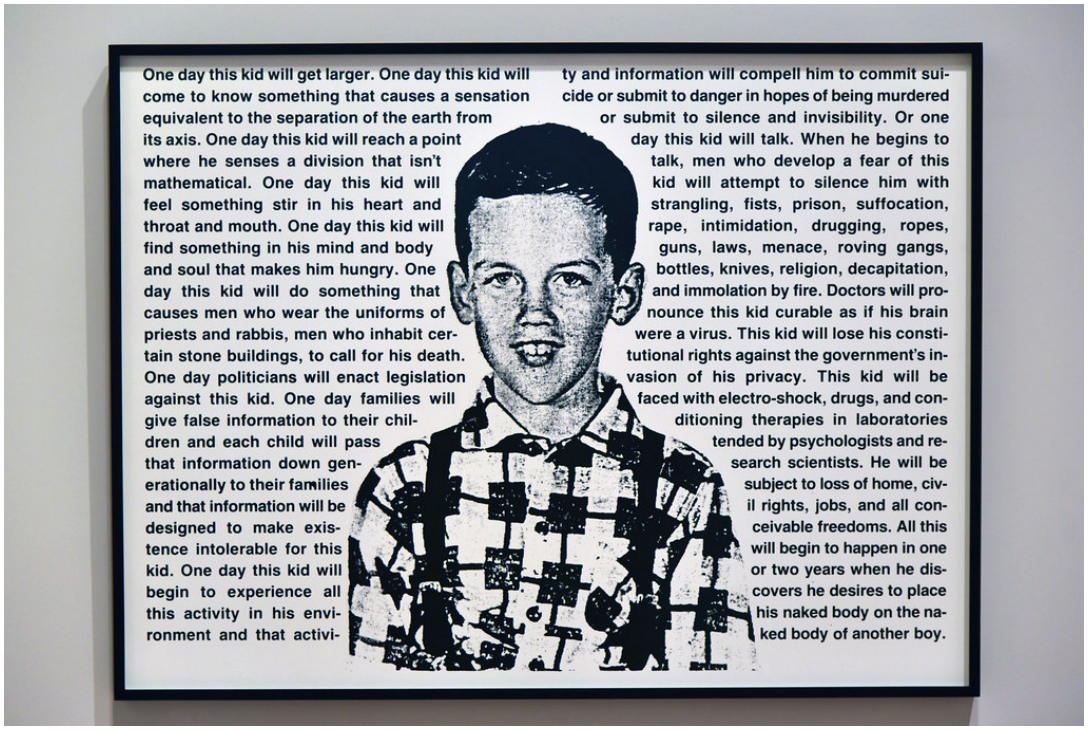


Figure 3.1.1: David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (One Day This Kid . . .)*, 1990, photostat, sheet: 75.7 x 101.9 x 0.5 cm (Whitney Museum of American Art) © The Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York

David Wojnarowicz's large Photostat print acts as a kind of time machine. Surrounded by text, a photograph of the artist as a young boy takes us back to a bygone, Cold War United States of the late 1950s and early 1960s when conformity was king. Boys of his generation would have been expected to work, pay taxes, marry, father children, worship, lay down his life on the battlefield if his country asked him to, and otherwise be a productive member of society. This is the future that awaits this seemingly typical white boy: skinny with long front teeth, big ears and a tidy haircut, dressed in a square-patterned shirt and frontally posed for a school photograph. In reality though, Wojnarowicz's family was often transient and he was severely abused at home. But on the streets of New York, he would soon create a new family with other discarded young men.

Photo + text

Untitled (One Day This Kid . . .) is exemplary because it brings Wojnarowicz's writing and image-making practices together with his political activism. His writing is celebrated for its visceral, first-person voice fueled by a sense of despair and rage at America, a country he felt was so wealthy and technologically advanced yet so vicious towards its most vulnerable inhabitants. He frequently worked with found photographs like the one included here in his many ambitious paintings. He also experimented with film, video, performance, and music. He was a member of the band, 3TK4 (3 Teens Kill 4).

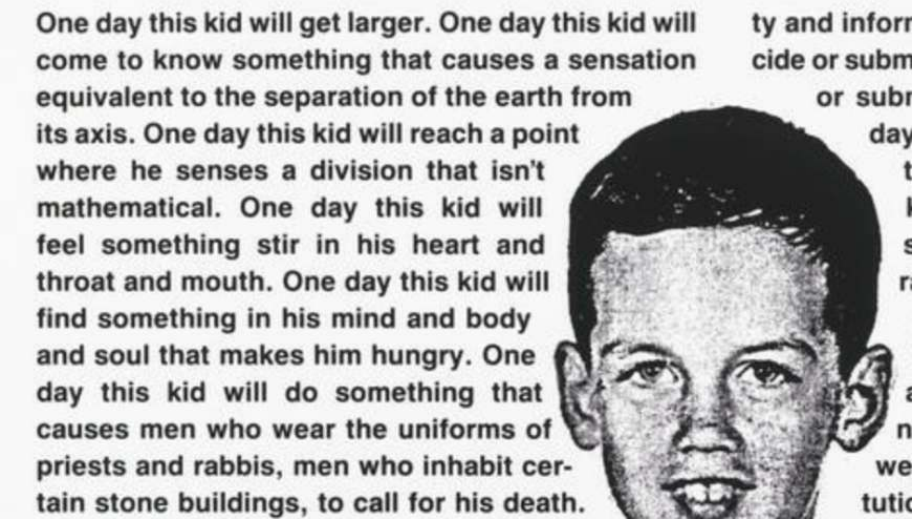


Figure **3.1.2**: David Wojnarowicz, detail of *Untitled (One Day This Kid . . .)*, 1990, photostat, sheet: 75.7 × 101.9 × 0.5 cm (Whitney Museum of American Art) © The Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York

A warning from the future

In the print, Young David is close to being visually overwhelmed by the explanatory text that captions him: he cannot escape the difficult future life that it describes, so different from the traditional norms society laid out for him. Wojnarowicz, writing thirty years later, confronts the kid in the old photo—who had no idea of the twists and turns his life would take—with his harsh fate. The text is in the future tense, and the repetition of "One day this kid . . ." or "one day . . ." creates a strong sense of inevitability. As the text builds over fifteen sentences arranged tightly in two flanking columns, we are kept in suspense as to what he has done to make him such a threat to the social order.

A litany of abuses

We first learn that as this kid grows up he will experience a "sensation equivalent to the separation of the earth from its axis," a deep hunger. If he acts on this desire, it will cause "men who wear the uniforms of priests and rabbis, men who inhabit certain stone buildings, to call for his death." If he is not killed, he will be driven to suicide or to "submit to silence and invisibility." If he resists silence and speaks out, the attacks on him will only escalate, and Wojnarowicz pulls no punches as he lists methods by which violence may be enacted on him: "strangling, fists, prison, suffocation, rape, intimidation, drugging, ropes, guns, laws, menace, roving gangs, bottles, knives, religion, decapitation, and immolation by fire." The treatment he faces from those who seek to "cure" him is just as violent, even if it claims to help: "electro-shock, drugs, and conditioning therapies in laboratories…" Finally, his civil rights will not be protected. It is only in the final punctuating sentence that Wojnarowicz clearly names the transgressive desire that doomed this kid: "All this will begin to happen in one or two years when he discovers he desires to place his naked body on the naked body of another boy."

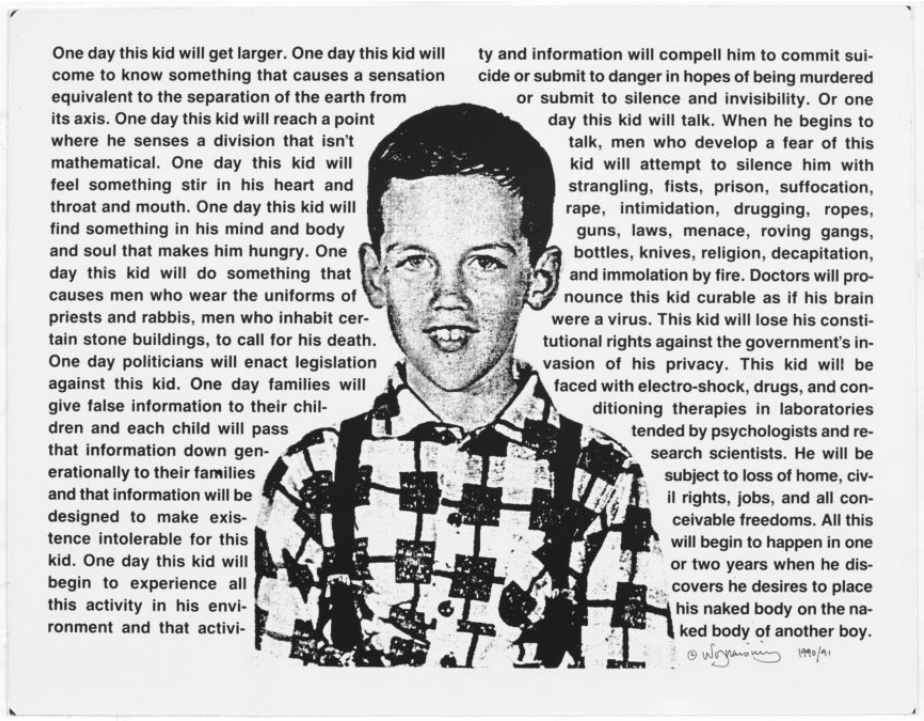


Figure \(\PageIndex{3}\): David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (One Day This Kid . . .)*, 1990, photostat, sheet: 75.7 x 101.9 x 0.5 cm (Whitney Museum of American Art) © The Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York

A time machine

With this work—this time machine—Wojnarowicz catches his innocent past self before his "fall," warning him of what is to come as punishment simply for loving people of the same sex. It deploys sentiment to illustrate how homophobia destroys children because many of us are aware of our difference in our early years and quickly understand that we may be hated for it.

As the text suggests, Wojnarowicz knew he was gay from a young age and it came to epitomize his feeling of being an outsider to American society; this feeling was further intensified when Wojnarowicz found out that he was HIV positive in 1988. This discovery galvanized his art practice and sparked his political activism, particularly as the AIDS pandemic greatly intensified societal homophobia.

When this print was created in 1990 vast numbers of gay men—including numerous gay artists in Wojnarowicz's downtown New York circle such as his lover and mentor the photographer Peter Hujar, who passed away in 1987—were dying of AIDS, which was largely ignored by an American government that did not want to be seen as funding health initiatives intended to save the lives of homosexuals or IV drug users. Politicians and religious leaders joined forces to demonize and refuse aid to the dying. Wojnarowicz's depiction of himself as an "every kid" is an impactful reminder of the essential humanity of People with AIDS.

A political broadside

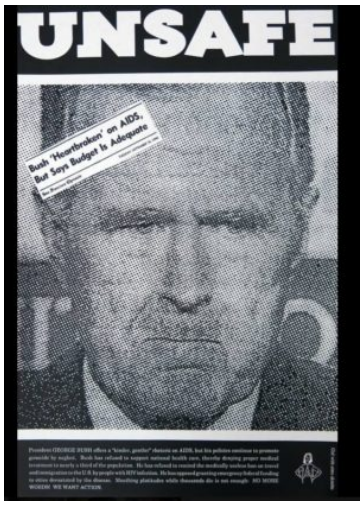


Figure **3.1.4**: Boy/Girl With Arms Akimbo, an anonymous San Francisco-based cultural activist collective, from the "Safe/Unsafe" campaign, 1992

Wojnarowicz's avoidance of color in favor of stark black-and-white text and image prioritizes raw, urgent communication, and indeed the print is easily reproduced and has circulated widely—and been translated—as a postcard, poster, and placard that persuades readers to fight against homophobia and AIDSphobia. AIDS activists in this period often reproduced the faces of figures like President George H.W. Bush, Senator Jesse Helms, or Cardinal O'Connor on walls or placards to shame them for their negligent response to the AIDS crisis.

Having the young Wojnarowicz's face disseminated as a visible queer child was a potent political symbol. (It also perhaps recalled the face of Ryan White, a young Indiana boy with hemophilia who was prevented from attending school after his AIDS diagnosis by phobic parents and officials.) Transforming a school photo into a political broadside, Wojnarowicz created a kind of manifesto for queer childhood.

A call to action

The print acts as a retrospective warning to Wojnarowicz's younger self of the injustices that await him, but the story does not end there. Salvation and love are possible and come from the community that is created by the work itself in its circulation and reception: people who identify with or empathize with the boy and the fate that awaits him. People who, after looking at the work, might commit themselves to ensuring that kids like him survive and thrive rather than suffer. In doing so it seeks to break the generational cycle of homophobia described in the text itself: "One day families will give false information to their children and each child will pass that information down generationally to their families and that information will be designed to make existence intolerable for this kid."

Wojnarowicz understood not only his artwork but his body as a weapon, and he became increasingly involved in AIDS activism before his own death from AIDS in 1992, only two years after creating this enduring work. Some of his ashes were scattered in protest on the White House lawn during one AIDS demonstration, a powerful final act for the kid who looks out at us—his whole life ahead of him—from this print.

Additional resources

David Wojnarowicz, ***Untitled (One Day This Kid…)***, 1990, Whitney Museum of American Art

Barry Blinderman, ed., *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame* (Illinois State University, 1990).

David Breslin and David Kiehl, *David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 2018).

Cynthia Carr, *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* (Bloomsbury, 2012).

David Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (Vintage, 1991).

This page titled 3.1: David Wojnarowicz, Untitled (One Day This Kid . . .) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Jon Davies, "David Wojnarowicz, Untitled (One Day This Kid . . .)," in Smarthistory, May 12, 2022, accessed December 21, 2022, https://smarthistory.org/david-wojnarowicz-untitled-one-day-this-kid/..

3.2: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Untitled” (billboard of an empty bed)

by **DR. THOMAS FOLLAND**

Page ID
182363



Figure **3.2.1**: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *“Untitled” (billboard of an empty bed)* 1991, printed billboard, dimensions variable © The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation

Untitled (billboard of an empty bed) is a stark, black-and-white image of the rumpled sheets and pillows of an unmade bed. The depression in the center of each pillow, suggesting a recent presence, conveys a profound sense of intimacy. But this scenario is in jarring contrast to its public location—on a billboard. First exhibited on the streets of Manhattan, this evocation of absent bodies soon came to define all of Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ work up until his death in 1996 from AIDS-related causes. The artist is most known for ephemeral installations: a pile of candy in a corner (below), a stack of posters on the floor, or strings of lights dangling from a ceiling—all of which recall the reduced visual and formal language of Conceptual and Minimalist art from the 1960s and 1970s.

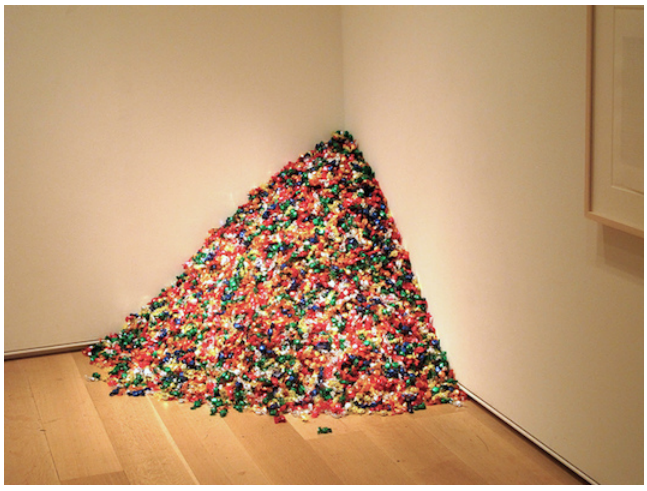


Figure **3.2.2**: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *“Untitled” (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, 1991, multicolored candies, ideal weight 175 lbs., dimensions variable © The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation (photo: henskechristine, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)



Figure **3.2.3**: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (for Stockholm)*, 1992, light bulbs, porcelain light sockets and extension cords, dimensions variable © The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation (photo: Andrew Russeth, CC CC BY-SA 2.0)

Yet Gonzalez-Torres didn’t merely reference the work of earlier Minimalist artists like Donald Judd and Dan Flavin—he introduced a specifically contemporary note into his work. In the late 1980s and early 1990s artists were asking new questions

around the construction of identity—including gay identity. For instance, the lights in his work were redolent of the environment of a dance club (left), and the candy on the floor was a perverse reference to the drug AZT used to combat HIV. And the bed? Much like the paired wall clocks he created the same year entitled *Perfect Lovers* that marched slightly out of step with one another (one is a few seconds off), the censored image of same-sex love slowly makes its imprint.

Bed's sexual politics

By 1987, a new era of gay activism had begun. The Aids Coalition to Unleash Power (ACTUP) formed and suddenly old questions around the relationship between art and politics took on new significance for gay artists. Artist-collectives like Gran Fury used appropriated image and text to convey overt political messages around the politics of AIDS. But Gonzalez-Torres did not follow this route. His disappearing but perpetually replenished works (viewers were allowed to remove a poster or take a piece of candy) took a more elegiac path: it was one in which any direct representation of homosexuality was seldom apparent. Thus his art became an abstract memorialization of loss. Gonzalez-Torres' memorialization resonated especially during a time when Ronald Reagan (U.S. President from 1981 until 1989) notoriously never uttered the word "AIDS" because of its predominant association with homosexuality. Heads pressed onto pillows in the *Untitled* billboard thus becomes a simultaneous declaration and disavowal of same-sex love—writ large within an urban landscape.

As an artist, Gonzalez-Torres came of age during the 1980s (he was born in 1957 in Cuba). At that time, Postmodern artists often worked with existing imagery and text, appropriating and examining an increasingly media-saturated world. His earliest work was in that vein. In the manner of Jenny Holzer, who reproduced found slogans or random sentiments on wheat-pasted posters throughout the streets of lower Manhattan in the late 1970s, one of Gonzalez-Torres' earliest works is a framed photostat (an early version of a photocopy) from 1988 of a sentence. It's really a jumble of words—white letters on a black background that read "supreme 1986 court crash stock market crash 1929 sodomy stock market crash supreme 1987." In this way, he offered a poetic commentary on the erasure of gay history by sandwiching a reference to the 1986 Supreme Court ruling that upheld the state of Georgia's sodomy laws (which effectively criminalized homosexuality) between significant dates in economic history.[1]

Back to the future

Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (billboard of an empty bed)* marked an important threshold in contemporary art history. In the late 1980s the art world underwent significant changes. It seemed to many critics at the time that postmodern art existed only to illustrate complex philosophical concepts, while the felt aspects of experience, important for the renewed surge of identity politics (political alliances based on identity, like the women's movement), were ignored. Foregrounding the bodily dimension of experience, artists like Robert Gober, Kiki Smith and Jane Alexander created sculptural works with visceral impact. Artists began to return to discarded artistic strategies like narrative, constructed (rather than appropriated) forms—anything that would invoke a sense of the contemporary, lived aspect of everyday experience without mediation. Bodies were often splayed upon the gallery floor or its parts protruded from a wall.

Gonzalez-Torres' art had, in a sense, a foot in both camps: *Untitled (billboard of an empty bed)* bore resemblance to the billboards Barbara Kruger had done as early as 1985. Her *Surveillance is Your Busy Work* is one that was unveiled in Minneapolis that year and featured her trademark use of advertising imagery reconfigured with text to correspond to discussions around public space, gender and corporate culture. But Gonzalez-Torres's image of a disheveled bed was shorn of any textual or even didactic directive. Significantly, the image is of his own bed. *Untitled (billboard of an empty bed)* suggested—even if it did not portray—a tangible if disappearing presence.

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1. This ruling was eventually overturned.

Additional resources:

Print/Out: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, on Inside/Out, MoMA's blog (April 4, 2012)

Biography of the artist from Oxford University Press on MoMA.org

The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation

Art and Photography: the 1980s on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

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3.3: Masami Teraoka, American Kabuki

by EMMA ACKER AT THE FINE ARTS MUSEUMS OF SAN FRANCISCO and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
182364



Video **3.3.1**: Masami Teraoka, *American Kabuki (Oishiiwa)*, 1986, watercolor and sumi ink on paper mounted on a four-panel screen, 196.9 x 393.7 x 3 cm (de Young Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco), © Masami Teraoka Seeing America video Speakers: Emma Acker, Associate Curator of American Art, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and Steven Zucker

Additional resources:

This painted screen at the de Young Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

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3.4: Sue Coe, Aids won’t wait, the enemy is here not in Kuwait

by MONICA ZIMMERMAN, PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS and DR. BETH HARRIS



Video: **3.4.1**: Sue Coe, *Aids won’t wait, the enemy is here not in Kuwait*, 1990, photo-etching on paper, 23.8 x 32.5 cm (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, © Sue Coe)

Additional resources:

This work at PAFA

Andrew Sullivan, “Gay Life, Gay Death: The Siege of a Subculture,” *The New Republic* (December 17, 1990) (reposting on June 26, 2013)

This page titled 3.4: Sue Coe, Aids won’t wait, the enemy is here not in Kuwait is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Monica Zimmerman, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and Dr. Beth Harris, in Smarthistory, February 3, 2020, accessed December 4, 2020, https://smarthistory.org/sue-coe-aids-wont-wait-the-enemy-is-here-not-in-kuwait/..

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3.5: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Horn Players

by DR. JORDANA MOORE SAGGESE

Page ID
182366



Figure **3.5.1**: Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Horn Players*, 1983, acrylic and oilstick on three canvas panels mounted on wood supports, 243.8 x 190.5 cm (The Broad Art Foundation) © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat **(zoomable image here)**

Jean-Michel Basquiat's 1983 painting *Horn Players* shows us all the main stylistic features we have come to expect from this renowned American artist. In addition to half-length portraits on the left and right panels of this triptych (a painting consisting of three joined panels), the artist has included several drawings and words—many of which Basquiat drew and then crossed out. On each panel we also notice large swaths of white paint, which seem to simultaneously highlight the black background and obscure the drawings and/or words beneath. Most notable perhaps is the preponderance of repeated words like "DIZZY," "ORNITHOLOGY," "PREE" and "TEETH" that the artist has scattered across all three panels of this work.

Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie

Despite the seeming disorder of the composition, however, it is clear that the main subjects of *Horn Players* are two famous jazz musicians—the saxophonist Charlie Parker and the trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, who Basquiat has depicted in both linguistic and visual portraits. On the left of the canvas, the artist has drawn the figure of Parker, holding his saxophone which emits several hot pink musical notes and distorted waves of sound. We see Dizzy Gillespie in the right panel, who holds a silent instrument alongside his torso. The words "DOH SHOO DE OBEE" that float to the left of the figure's head call to mind the scat (wordless improvisational) singing Gillespie often performed onstage.

Many of the words Basquiat has written on the canvas relate specifically to Charlie Parker, but they make sense only for those viewers with some knowledge of the musician's life. For example, the literal meaning of "ORNITHOLOGY" is "the study of birds," but this is also the title of a famous composition by Parker, who named the tune (first recorded in 1946) in reference to his own nickname "Bird." The words "PREE" and "CHAN" that we see written above and below the saxophonist's portrait refer to Parker's infant daughter and common-law wife, respectively.



Figure **3.5.2**: Jean-Michel Basquiat posing next to SAMO graffiti

This kind of wordplay is a characteristic that extends across most of Jean-Michel Basquiat's work. One of the most recognizable features of the artist's more than 2000 paintings and drawings is the overwhelming abundance of written words on the canvas. The art historian Robert Farris Thompson once declared: "It's as if he were dripping letters." Before his success as a painter, Basquiat was famous for writing on the walls of lower Manhattan as a teenager when he and a high school friend, Al Diaz, left cryptic messages in spray paint under the name "SAMO" (an acronym for "Same Old Shit") from 1977 until 1979.

As SAMO, Basquiat and Diaz wrote maxims, jokes, and prophecies in marker and spray paint on subway trains throughout New York City (particularly the "D" train, which ran between downtown Manhattan and Basquiat's home in Brooklyn), as well as on the walls and sidewalks in the SoHo and Tribeca neighborhoods. Many of the locations where SAMO writings were to be found were in close proximity to prominent art galleries. Combined with these strategic positions, phrases like "SAMO AS AN END TO PLAYING ART" or "SAMO FOR THE SO-CALLED AVANT-GARDE" presented the "SAMO" persona as outside the commercial art world and critical of it. In fact, even after relinquishing the SAMO persona and emerging to the art world as Jean-Michel Basquiat, the artist remained an outsider to the mainstream art world, despite his meteoric rise on the art auction block.

"The Black Picasso"

Basquiat went from SAMO"to commercial success at warp speed in the early 1980s. He first exhibited (still under the name SAMO) at the Times Square Show—an exhibition in June 1980 that marked the genesis of the eighties art movement. He was later invited to exhibit in **New York/New Wave**, a group show of sixteen hundred works by 119 artists that opened at P.S. 1 on Valentine's Day. The show was affectionately called "The Armory Show" of the 1980s (the original Armory Show in 1913 was the first large exhibition of international modern art in America).

Almost immediately afterward, the young Basquiat (at this point just 20 years old) was invited to exhibit in his first solo show in Modena, Italy. The gallerist Annina Nosei, who showed more established artists like David Salle and Richard Prince, agreed to represent Basquiat, who had a one-man show at her gallery the next year. That same year, Basquiat had exhibitions in Los Angeles, Zurich, Rome, and Rotterdam and became the youngest artist invited to participate in Documenta 7 (an international contemporary art exhibition that takes place every five years). By 1983 the average sale price of Basquiat's work had increased by 600 percent, and his popularity (both in the auction house and in popular culture) persists even today. You can buy his images on shirts and hats from popular retail outlets and his large paintings sell at auction for more than $20 million.

Based on his meteoric success, critics referred to Jean-Michel Basquiat as "the black Picasso." The nickname was complicated for Basquiat, who never embraced it, but was nevertheless concerned with his own place within art history. He often relied on textbooks and other sources for his visual material; most biographies of the artist note his reliance on the medical textbook *Gray's Anatomy* (a gift from the artist's mother when Basquiat was hospitalized as a child) for the anatomical drawings and references we see on many of his surfaces. Basquiat also appropriated the work of Leonardo, Edouard Manet, and Pablo Picasso into his own compositions. These appropriations were in part an homage to the great painters Basquiat admired, but they also were a way for Basquiat to rewrite art history and insert himself into the canon.



Figure 3.5.3: Pablo Picasso, *Three Musicians*, 1921, oil on canvas, 200.7 x 222.9 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

Looking again at *Horn Players*, for example, reveals several connections to Picasso's *Three Musicians*. Basquiat's use of the triptych format—a popular device for the artist in this period—echoes the triple subjects of the Picasso image. The figure of Parker in Basquiat's composition is also reproduced in the same position as the standing figure (playing the clarinet) in Picasso's work.



Figure 3.5.4: Right: Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Horn Players* (detail), 1983, acrylic and oilstick on three canvas panels mounted on wood supports, 243.8 x 190.5 cm (The Broad Art Foundation) © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat; left: Pablo Picasso, *Three Musicians* (detail), 1921, oil on canvas, 200.7 x 222.9 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

The central panel of Basquiat's canvas, which does not show a portrait of an identifiable musician like the other two panels, but instead a distorted head with roughly outlined features, suddenly comes into focus via its comparison with *Three Musicians*. Here Picasso references in paint, his earlier experiments with paper collage especially in rendering the face and head of his central figure, whose jawline dramatically extends beyond what is anatomically possible to create an abstract, bulbous shape. Basquiat's central figure bears a similar protrusion—this time from the top of the head—which he fills in with hatch marks that are suggestive of the patterning of Picasso's "collaged" paper. Once again, Basquiat seems to be speaking in code. This time, we are being asked not only to draw upon our knowledge of music history but of modern painting to fully understand his work.

Basquiat's musicians

Musicians were a popular subject for Basquiat, who himself played briefly in a noise band called Gray—likely a reference to the *Gray's Anatomy* textbook. Jazz musicians began to appear in the artist's paintings around 1982; references to jazz musicians or recordings appear in more than thirty large-format paintings and twenty works on paper. Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie are the two musicians who appear most frequently, both as figures in the paintings and through linguistic references to their work. The artist painted canvases with figures playing the trumpet, the saxophone, and the drums. He also devoted several canvases to replicating the labels of jazz records or the discographies of musicians.

Many scholars have connected Basquiat's interest in jazz to a larger investment in African American popular culture (for example, he also painted famous African American athletes) but an alternative explanation is that the young Basquiat looked to jazz music for inspiration and for instruction, much in the same way that he looked to the modern masters of painting. Parker, Gillespie, and the other musicians of the bebop era infamously appropriated both the harmonic structures of jazz standards, using them as a structure for their own songs, and repeated similar note patterns across several improvisations. Basquiat used similar techniques of appropriation throughout his career as a painter.

Additional resources:

Basquiat from The Art Story

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3.6: Keith Haring, Subway Drawings

by *DR. AMY RAFFEL*

Page ID
182367



Figure **3.6.1**: Keith Haring, *Untitled*, 1984, chalk on paper, 88 1 /2 x 46 inches, photographer: Ivan Dalla Rana © Keith Haring Foundation

An international art star, Keith Haring and his work have often been characterized as quintessentially of the eighties—an embodiment of the decade's street art, hip hop, and urban energy in New York. While his career involved a diverse range of art making—painting, drawing, performance, video, murals, and art merchandising—his subway drawings stand among his most well-known and celebrated work.

Haring drew over 5,000 chalk drawings over a five-year period, from 1980 to 1985, in New York City subway stations (visit the **Keith Haring Foundation website** to see his work year by year). Since the beginning of his career, Haring was determined to create art that could be for everyone, both through an accessible style and by locating his work in easily reachable, public locations. Creating art on the street meant that a bigger audience could see his work, outside of the more insular space of an art gallery.

Previous Street Art

Haring's subway drawings were not his first intervention into public, urban space. In New York City, early in 1980, he began to subtly alter street advertisements, such as one for Chardón Jeans, in which he blocked out letters, so the ad read "hard on Jeans." He also posted small collages on street lamps made up of images appropriated from print media and bits of painted paper. In the summer of 1980, Haring made more overtly political collages by cutting and rearranging headlines from the *New York Post*, to say things like "**REAGAN SLAIN BY HERO COP**" and "POPE KILLED FOR FREED HOSTAGE." He xeroxed these works by the hundreds and posted them all over the city in an effort to undermine the political conservatism of the period. These early experiments helped set the stage for Haring's subway drawings.

Subway Drawings



Figure **3.6.2**: **Keith Haring working in the subway. Photographer, Chantal Regnault 1983**

In late 1980, Haring noticed that New York City subway's blank advertising spaces were covered with black matte paper when advertising subscriptions expired. He immediately purchased some chalk, and started drawing. Over the next five years, this became a daily, repetitive obsession: he would ride the subway, look for these empty spaces of black paper, and draw quickly—without any preparation—and then leave on the next train. Through incessant repetition,Haring's subway drawings allowed him to perfect his highly recognizable reduced linear vocabulary, and to create an inventory of images. Simplification was practical: he needed to complete his drawings as fast as possible to avoid being arrested. He created characters, such as the barking dog and the radiating baby, which he drew on flat planes with no spatial depth, often with only a horizon line or a staircase to suggest space. Drawn close to the surface like cartoons, his images had immediacy and impact, and could carry multiple meanings through various combinations.

The **radiant baby**, for example, could represent birth or purity, but could also be read as a symbol of nuclear energy or bodily corruption depending on what he drew around it. Haring intentionally sanitized the subject matter of his subway drawings, leaving out any explicit sexual and political imagery. He wanted his audience, which included children, to enjoy his works. This made his drawings more ambiguous to an extent, but also more outwardly positive and universal in theme. This work, though, while seemingly straightforward, did incorporate some darker references, including generalized themes of oppression and the abuse of power (image below left), but these were often simplified to such an extent that they remained open to multiple interpretations.



Figure **3.6.3**: **Keith Haring, *Untitled* (Subway Drawing), 1982, chalk on paper @ Keith Haring Foundation**

Graffiti scene

Haring's arrival in New York coincided with graffiti's peak in 1978-79, when artists covered subway cars, walls, and storefront gates throughout the city. Haring's well-defined style benefited from graffiti, which offered lessons in how to make graphic images visible in a cluttered urban environment and stressed the importance of motion, speed, and improvisation. Haring never considered himself to be a graffiti artist however. His subway drawings significantly differed from graffiti in location, timing, and medium. Haring often used white chalk and worked during the day so that he could interact with his audience. In contrast, graffiti artists usually used spray paint or markers, working at night. Graffiti encompassed a subculture at the social margins of New York City that excluded artists like Haring both racially and socio-economically.

Downtown Arts Scene

Other artists of Haring's generation worked within the public spaces of New York City to create and display art including **Jean-Michel Basquiat**, Kenny Scharf, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, and Richard Hambleton. In addition the artist collectives Colab, Fashion Moda, Gran Fury, and Group Material used the street as canvas. Like Haring, these artists experimented with alternate distribution systems to expand their reach outside of the commercial art world. Through posters, billboards, or small sculptures, or by engaging the community through artist-run events, pop-up exhibition spaces, or activist demonstrations, these downtown artists (like Haring) regularly put their art and ideas on the street to be enjoyed, and to inform and involve the public. Their intention was inclusion, rather than to alienate or confuse.

Burgeoning Celebrity

Haring drew several works of art every day, over many years in the New York City subway, a system used by millions of people. While he made his subway drawings for free, they proved to be a promotional tool that catapulted him into the public spotlight and helped launch his gallery career. In effect, he co-opted spots meant for advertising and campaigned for himself. His drawing was also performative—often attracting an audience captivated by his quick actions and improvisation. He promoted his subway work in other media, including one instance in which a friend taped one of his arrests by the MTA police, which was then featured on CBS News on a nationwide special. He also designed buttons illustrating his characters and gave away thousands to subway riders. Attached to shirts and bags, these buttons enhanced the visibility of his work.

In 1982, Haring joined the Tony Shafrazi gallery, but continued to work in the subway. This was a strategy he used throughout his career: operating in both the contemporary art world and in public spaces. His gallery career helped to fund his time making street art for free, and they both reinforced his public presence. Eventually, Haring's popularity meant that his work in the subways became so valuable that people began to steal panels as soon as he drew them, ending this phase of his work. He continued to create art for all through posters and prints, merchandising, and large scale public murals in cities around the world. Before Haring became a worldwide celebrity, however, he was a local celebrity—generating his first fame through his subway drawings.

Additional resources:

The Keith Haring Foundation

Henry Geldzhaler, Introduction to *Art in Transit*

Michael Auping, *Urban Theater: New York Art in the 1980s* (New York: Rizzoli, 2014).

Peter Belsito, *Notes from the Pop Underground* (Berkeley, CA: Last Gasp of San Francisco, 1985).

Jeffrey Deitch and Carlo McCormick. *Keith Haring: 31 Subway Drawings* (New York: Art Issue Editions, 2012).

John Gruen, *Keith Haring: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991).

Keith Haring and Robert Harris Thompson, *Keith Haring Journals* (New York: Viking, 1996).

Tseng Kwong Chi and Henry Geldzahler, Keith Haring, *Art in Transit: Subway Drawings* (New York: Harmony Books, 1984).

Keith Haring: Journey of the Radiant Baby (Piermont, N.H.: Bunker Hill Pub., 2006).

Cedar Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* (New York: Abrams, 2008).

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.7: Pepón Osorio

3.7.1: En la barberia no se llora (No Crying Allowed in the Barbershop)

3.7.2: Badge of Honor

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3.7.1: En la barberia no se llora (No Crying Allowed in the Barbershop)

by DR. MAYA JIMÉNEZ

The Puerto Rico born artist Pepón Osorio trained as a sociologist and became a social worker in the South Bronx. His work is inspired by each of these experiences and is rooted in the spaces, experiences, and people of American Latino culture, particularly Nuyorican communities (Nuyorican refers to the Puerto Rican diaspora living in New York, especially New York City). Osorio's large-scale installations are meant for a local audience, yet they have also been exhibited in mainstream cultural institutions (though after the 1993 Whitney Biennial, Osorio vowed to show his work first within the community, and then elsewhere).



Figure **3.7.1.1**: Pepón Osorio, *En la barbaria no se llora (No Crying Allowed in the Barbershop)*, 1994 Installation at Real Art Ways, Hartford, Connecticut, mixed media installation with barbers' chairs, photographs, objects and videos (Collection of the Museum de Arte de Puerto Rico) (photo by Pepón Osorio)

Nuyorican

Puerto Rico is a United States territory. Its residents are United States citizens and carry an American passport, yet they cannot vote in presidential elections or have representatives voting for their interests in Washington. This sense of marginality is further complicated when one considers that Nuyoricans often retain a distinct sense of cultural pride that is informed by their dual American and Puerto Rican identities.

Having lived both experiences—that of a Puerto Rican and Nuyorican—Osorio is best known for large-scale installations that address street life, cultural clashes, and the rites of passage experienced by Puerto Ricans in the United States. Outside the traditional museum setting, and commissioned by Real Art Ways (RAW) from Hartford, Connecticut, *En la barberia no se llora* (*No Crying Allowed in the Babershop*) is a mixed-media installation located in the Puerto Rican community of Park Street in Hartford. Created in collaboration with local residents, Osorio engaged the public through conversation, workshops, and artistic collaborations. The art itself is visually lavish—his installations have often been dubbed "Nuyorican Baroque" (a reference to the seventeenth-century style characterized by theatricality and opulence and found in both Europe and Latin America).

Masculinity

Inspired from his first haircut in Santurce, Puerto Rico, Osorio recreates the space of the barbershop as one that is intensely packed with "masculine" symbols like barber chairs, car seats, sports paraphernalia, depictions of sperm and a boy's circumcision, phallic symbols, and male action figurines. Osorio boldly challenges the idea of masculinity, and particularly of machismo (a strong sense of masculine pride), in Latino communities.

Chucherías



Figure **3.7.1.2**: Detail of Pepón Osorio, *The Scene of the Crime (Whose Crime?)* installation at The New Museum, 1993 (photo: **Hrag Vartanian**, CC BY-ND 2.0)

Spanish for trinkets or knick-knacks, and known to art historians as kitsch (mass produced objects characterized by—or ironically admired for—their bad taste), *chucherías* overpopulate Osorio's work. These include Puerto Rican flags, religious ornaments, plastic toys, dolls, ribbons, beads, etc., all of which function—to quote art historian Anna Indych-Lopez—as a "gesture of cultural resistance," presented as something universal yet personal.[1] The *chucherías* included in the installation *En la barberia no se llora*, (a flag, fake foliage, baseballs, framed portraits of famous Latin American and Latino men), serve to localize the work, yet these objects also raise issues of social class expressed here through taste, and the distinction between high and low art—effectively straddling a fine line between cultural celebration and social critique.

Video

One prominent aspect of *En la barberia no se llora* are the video installations featuring Latino men from Park Street in stereotypically "masculine" poses. The men vary in age. Osorio included older men from the retirement home, Casa del Elderly, presenting the issue of machismo as multi-generational and deeply ingrained in Nuyorican culture. As a foil to this construction, the artist also included videos of men crying, with the public reacting both in sympathy and disgust.

These same men then participated in workshops, in which they discussed how notions of masculinity had shaped their personal relationships as brothers, husbands, and fathers. Despite this participation of men, most of the visitors to the barbershop installation were, in fact, women.[2]

While *En la barberia no se llora (No Crying Allowed in the Babershop)* challenges definitions of masculinity, it also brings up—in a more subtle way—the relationship between machismo and homophobia, violence, and infidelity, and the ways in which popular culture, religion, and politics help craft these identities and issues.

1. "Nuyorican Baroque: Pepón Osorio's Chucherías," *Art Journal*, vol.60, issue 1, 2001, p. 75.

2. Erika Suderburg, Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 323.

Additional resources:

Pepón Osorio from art21 (video)

Pepón Osorio from the Ronald Feldman Gallery

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- **12.3: Identity and the body** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

3.7.2: Badge of Honor

- by **THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

Page ID

182370



Beverly Adams, Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art, looks at Pepón Osorio's 1995 installation "*Badge of Honor*"—which explores the effects of incarceration on a family in Newark, New Jersey—and notes that it has lost none of its relevance in the more than 25 years since its creation.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Post-Cultural Revolution China

4.1: Luo Zhongli, Father

4.2: Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn

4.3: The Case for Ai Weiwei

4.4: Xu Bing, Book from the Sky

4.5: Xu Zhen – ‘Artists Change the Way People Think’

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4.1: Luo Zhongli, Father

by DR. MADELINE ESCHENBURG

Page ID
182371



Figure **4.1.1**: Luo Zhongli, *Father*, oil on canvas, 1980, 215 x 150 cm (National Art Museum, Beijing, China)

When Luo Zhongli's oil painting, *Father*, was first exhibited at the Second National Youth Exhibition in 1981 in China's capital, Beijing, visitors were astonished by what they saw. It was not necessarily the subject matter, composition, or colors that drew them in. Rather, it was the raw truthfulness with which Luo depicted his subject. Originally titled "My Father," this painting is based on sketches he made of a man whose job was to guard a local manure pit in the remote Daba Mountains. This artwork elicited strong reactions among the Chinese public and remains one of the most revered paintings from this period in China's history.

A rural inhabitant

The subject matter of a rural inhabitant would not have been new or shocking to a Chinese audience at the time. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the "peasant" was upheld as one of the three "heroes" of Communist leader Mao Zedong's socialist revolution, alongside soldiers and workers. In fact, it was only through the support of China's vast peasantry that the communists were able to consolidate power in 1949 after many years of civil war.

Lasting from 1966–1976, China's Cultural Revolution was Communist leader Mao's last push to maintain his power over the nation. Marked by anti-intellectualism, cultural and economic isolation, and totalitarianism, it was one of the most oppressive and violent periods in China's modern history. In 1968, in an attempt to diffuse the violent uprisings of the student militants known as the Red Guard, Mao declared that the youth of China's cities should move to the countryside to be re-educated by the rural peasantry. Luo Zhongli, after graduating from the Sichuan Academy preparatory middle school in Chongqing in 1968, was one of millions impacted by this policy. He lived for ten years in the rural Daba mountain region on the border between Sichuan and Shaanxi provinces, where he encountered the man who would later become the subject of his most celebrated painting.



Figure **4.1.2**: Examples of propaganda posters of the 20th century featuring idealized peasants: left: Zhang Yuqing, "The Future of the Rural Village," October 1958, 53.5 x 76.5 cm (private collection); right: Revolutionary Group of the Second Liaison office of the Fifth Battalion of the Shanghai Cultural System, "Prepare for Struggle, Prepare for Famine, For the People," 1970, 53 x 77 cm (IISH collection)

Depicted as happy, strong, and healthy, the idealized image of the peasant came to represent the success of the Communist Party in the propaganda paintings, posters, and murals of the time. Most of the prints and posters that were widely disseminated were originally based on oil paintings. In Zhang Yuqing's poster "The Future of the Rural Village," for example, the well-dressed and hearty peasants work happily together in a village containing state of the art agricultural machinery, a streetlight, and a telephone, all symbols of a wealthy, technologically advanced country. Unfortunately, the artworks did not reflect the harsh reality that many rural inhabitants endured as a result of poverty, famine, and poor infrastructural planning under Mao's leadership. The Cultural Revolution came to an end after Mao's death in 1976. After the implementation of new policies which opened China's economy to the rest of the world in 1978, Chinese people began to reflect upon the reality and legacy of Mao's revolution. Luo's large-scale oil painting *Father* (made in 1980) is representative of this larger trend of historical reassessment.

Still, as Luo once said "The image of this old peasant actually is the summary of the images of so many peasants in my mind." In fact, he never knew the man's name that he painted. There is an interesting tension in the specificity of the photorealist style and the fact that this figure still stands as a symbol for "peasants" in general. It demonstrates how at this time in Chinese history, the "peasant" still held a strong symbolic meaning that was directly related to China's process of modernization. The jury of the exhibition actually changed the name from "My Father" to "Father," which pushes the symbolic function of the painting even further.



Figure **4.1.3**: Luo Zhongli, Father, oil on canvas, 1980, 215 x 150 cm (National Art Museum, Beijing, China)



Figure **4.1.4**: Chuck Close, *Mark*, 1978–79, acrylic on gessoed canvas, 274.3 x 213.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

After 1978, as part of China's opening its doors to the rest of the world, Chinese publishing houses released translations of foreign literature and philosophy, and art journals began to print reproductions of foreign artworks, initiating a period often referred to as "Cultural Fever." Although Luo had never seen an actual reproduction of any of Chuck Close's work, he was inspired to take a similar approach when painting *Father* as the American artist after reading a vivid description of his photorealistic style by a Japanese author. [1]

For a Chinese viewer in 1980 accustomed to the propaganda of the Mao period, the lack of triumphant heroism in *Father* — that had previously been required in representing a peasant — would have been shocking. Instead, he focuses in the most direct way on the painful labor this man, and those he represents, has endured. The composition is almost entirely filled by the man's face, which is friendly, but at the same time confronts the viewer directly, returning our gaze, implicating us. Both face and hands are covered in fine and deep wrinkles, a single tooth pokes jaggedly out of the right side of his mouth, his fingernails are filthy, sweat drips from his forehead, brow, and nose, one finger is wrapped with a thin bandage, and the bowl of tea he holds is cracked. He stares straight out at the viewer, squinting in the harsh sunlight that is reflected on his forehead, nose, and lower lip.

Unlike the Revolutionary Realism of Maoist propaganda, a style which Luo mastered during the Cultural Revolution, this painting highlights the harmful effects of years of working in the hot sun, revealing a truth that had been unspoken during the previous decades. This, combined with the man's guileless gaze, inspires compassion and reverence for the millions like him that gave so much of their lives and health attempting to fulfill Mao's utopian dreams.



Figure **4.1.5**: Wang Guodong, *Portrait of Mao* above Tiananmen Gate, 1964, 20 x 15 feet (6.1 x 4.6 m)(photo: Nicor, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Monumental in size



Figure **4.1.6**: Viewers in front of Luo Zhongli, *Father*, oil on canvas, 1980, 215 x 150 cm (National Art Museum, Beijing, China)

One reason this painting was so moving to viewers was its monumental size, measuring about 215 x 150 cm. Such a large scale had previously been reserved for portraits of powerful politicians, and before that, emperors, ancestors, and literati officials. In fact, *Father*'s large scale and composition is reminiscent of the most famous Chinese portrait at the time: the portrait of Mao Zedong by artist Wang Guodong, a version of which continues to hang above Tiananmen Gate watching over Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Some were so moved by the painting that they even suggested that *Father* should replace Mao's portrait.

Although the audience was urban-based, many had had experiences similar to Luo's in which they were sent to the countryside to learn from the rural peasantry. Others still traveled from the countryside and smaller towns and villages to see the exhibition. This connection with the rural countryside held by so many undoubtedly enhanced the feeling of identification with the portrait. Luo has said:

> ***Our country is a country of peasants. But those who speak for them are few and those who speak the truth are even fewer. They are our father and mother who provide us with clothing and food, they are the veritable masters of our country. [2]***



Figure **4.1.7**: Left: location of the pen in Luo Zhongli, *Father*, oil on canvas, 1980, 215 x 150 cm (National Art Museum, Beijing, China); right: a draft by Luo Zhongli for *Father* in which the pen is not there

What's with that pen?

One detail that strikes many viewers as out of place within the composition is the ball point pen resting behind the man's left ear. It is important to note that the exhibition where this work was first displayed was officially sponsored by the central government and therefore had a political agenda to promote the positive elements of Chinese society. It was within this context that the chairman of the Sichuan Artists Association, Li Shaoyan, insisted that Luo add the ballpoint pen to the composition for fear it would not be accepted into the exhibition without it. The pen was pivotal in expressing that this peasant was modern and educated, representative of China's hopeful future, rather than being seen as a direct attack on the policies of the Chinese Communist Party, who continued to hold power after Mao's death and remain in power today.

Ongoing relevance

Throughout the 1990s, Chinese economic and political policies began to favor urban development over rural stability. In the last 30 years, millions of rural inhabitants, unable to make a living in their hometowns and villages, have been forced to work as migrant laborers in Chinese cities along the East coast, often lacking economic and legal stability. While in recent years the government has attempted to improve China's rural economy, the rural inhabitant remains one of the most marginalized within the current system of global capitalism. It is perhaps for this reason that Luo Zhongli's painting continues to resonate both in China and around the world, decades after it was first painted.

Notes:

[1] 2011 interview with Luo by Eugene Wang as cited in Wang's article "Film and Contemporary Chinese Art: Mediums and Remediation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas*, ed. Carlos Rojas and Eileen Chow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 571.

[2] As quoted in Xia Hang, "Sichuan qingnian huajia tan chuangzuo," *Meishu* (1981.1): 44. Translation from Martina Köppel-Yang, *Semiotic Warfare: A Semiotic Analysis, The Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979–1989* (Hong Kong: timezone 8), p. 96.

Additional resources

Luo Zhongli's *Father* is currently held in the collection of the **National Art Museum of China**

Martina Köppel Yang, "Luo Zhongli: Father" in *Semiotic Warfare: A Semiotic Analysis, the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2003), pp. 92–103.

Minglu Gao, "Academicism and the Amateur Avant-Garde in the Post-Cultural Revolution Period (1979–1984)," in *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), pp. 65–97.

Michael Sullivan, "The 1980s: New Directions," in *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 225–239.

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4.2: Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn

by TIFFANY WAI-YING BERES

Page ID 182372

How can the destruction of an artifact also be an act of preservation? *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995) by **Ai Weiwei** is a highly provocative work of art. This series of three black and white photographs portray the artist holding a 2,000-year-old Han dynasty urn that, frame by frame, he drops, it falls, and shatters. As much a work of photography as a work of **performance art**, in each still an unaffected Ai looks directly at the camera aware of his destructiveness. In fact, to capture the action on film (rather than digital photography, which lets you review the image immediately), the artist actually broke two ceramic vessels, just in case. This kind of blatant destruction of artifacts may seem highly irreverent, yet it also forces viewers to consider issues of transformation and destruction of the past.



Figure **4.2.1**: Ai Weiwei, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, 1995 (printed 2017), Three gelatin silver prints, 148 x 121 cm each (photo: © Ai Weiwei)

Ai Weiwei

Born in Beijing, China, in 1957, Ai Weiwei is an activist, filmmaker, curator and one of the world's most famous artists. Ai began his artistic career in New York City, where he lived from 1981 to 1993. When he returned to China in the mid-90s, a time of rapid modernization for his home country, he was shocked to discover that certain objects of **cultural patrimony** were not highly valued. Ai explains that when he came across these Han dynasty ceramic objects, they were just a dime a dozen: "I still have a photo of when I was in Xi'an. There was a farmer sleeping on top of these two urns waiting for someone to pay him a few hundred yuan. For him that was a few months' salary, but even then nobody wanted them." [1] Ai realized that during that period, most of his fellow countrymen were not nearly as interested in their country's historic art objects as he was. For this reason, Ai began collecting antiquities, particularly ancient vessels and furniture, and eventually began converting these objects into contemporary artworks. Whether he reworks a discarded four-hundred-year-old wooden stool into a standing sculpture or creates an installation from hundreds of salvaged blue and white ceramic shards, Ai is interested in giving these historical found objects a second life as contemporary art.



Figure **4.2.2**: Shang Dynasty jade from the tomb of Fu Hao, 1300-1046 B.C.E., Anyang, China (photo: © National Museum of China, Beijing)

Historical legacy

This kind of repurposing of the past also relates to Chinese aesthetics and culture. In China, there is a long and rarified tradition of collecting ancient material remains and transforming them into new art. For millennia before the advent of modern scientific archeology, rulers and elites collected ancient materials and acted to preserve them or emulate them in new works, whether it was preserving important documents by recording them on durable surfaces like stone steles or incorporating ancient designs into bronze or ceramics. For example, Fu Hao's tomb in Anyang, a Shang dynasty (1600-1046 B.C.E.) royal burial tomb excavated in the 1980s, enabled scholars to push the history of antique collecting in China back to the thirteenth century B.C.E. The 775 **jade** carvings found in this tomb of a powerful Shang queen included both a collection of prehistoric jades as well a collection made in her era but modeled on earlier **Neolithic** prototypes. [2] This is an important revelation because it suggests that more than three thousand years ago, antique collections were already providing references and inspirations for making new works of art. This tradition of collecting and revitalizing antiquity has encouraged generations of Chinese artists and craftsmen to look to the past in making contemporary art.



Figure **4.2.3**: Tomb of Fu Hao, late 13th century B.C.E., Shang dynasty, Anyang, China (photo: **Gary Todd**, CC0 1.0)



Figure 4.2.4: Ai Weiwei, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (second image), 1995 (photo: © Ai Weiwei)

Act of revitalization?

Ai Weiwei has chosen an unusual way of continuing this legacy of transforming the material past while at the same time expressing dissent against a country that sometimes obliterates its own cultural heritage: through direct confrontation. On the one hand we can view his work as a destruction of another artist's work; on the other, Ai's act can also be thought of as a kind of collaboration with an ancient artist over thousands of years—a revitalization. Once an ancient receptacle, the urn in *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* takes on new meaning as contemporary art. In Ai's work, the object is less a vessel than an emblem of Chinese history. For this performance, it seems that the object selection is almost immaterial—it might as well have been any ancient object. However, in recognition of Ai's own celebrity, the artist has transformed this urn into something of great significance just by selecting it to become the subject of his art, by including its name in the title, and, of course, by destroying it. The sensationalism of breaking something so old and rare is what modern audiences find so compelling. Here the nostalgia for what once was serves as a mirror, reminding us that China's past remains important and relevant today.

Destruction as preservation

The event that Ai Weiwei created and captured in these photographs is one of violence. Many feel that it is unethical to destroy an artifact under any circumstances—that such an act indicates a lack of value and respect. Indeed, law professor Joseph Sax calls such destruction a kind of "unqualified ownership" because it enables "the indulgence of private vice to obliterate public benefits." [3] Certainly, the destruction of art for ideological or egoistic reasons reflects badly on a collector of ancient objects. Yet was *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* a true obliteration? The Han dynasty urn still exists for the public but it has been transformed into the form of captured film stills. The loss of one object gives the new artwork its potency.



Figure 4.2.5: Ai Weiwei "According to What" exhibition, Art Gallery of Ontario, (photo: Joseph Morris, CC BY-ND 2.0)

Ai himself says that he considers the act of dropping the urn one of creation rather than destruction: “People always ask me: how could you drop it? I say it’s a kind of love. At least there is a kind of attention to that piece [because of the photograph].” [4] From the artist’s point of view, his act was one of preservation through transformation. Indeed, this triptych (set of three photographs) and the shadow of the vessel captured within it now receive unprecedented attention. These photographs are displayed in museums and public institutions around the world. The work is widely available online, and even the focus of academic essays like this one. Given Ai’s own celebrity status and the significance of this artwork, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* is also now far more valuable than the original ceramic object. In 2016, this limited edition work **sold for nearly 1 million dollars** at Sotheby’s Auctions in London. [5]

Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn is one of many works by Ai Weiwei that focuses on heritage loss and the importance of the past. According to the artist, “the power [of my artwork] comes not from the act but from the audience’s attention, the challenge to their values. The act is easy—every day we can drop something, but it is when we are forced to come face to face with this action and make a judgment … that is the interesting part.” [6] Ultimately the work demands a judgment: was the provocation and the global attention Ai garnered for the urn worth the destruction of the urn itself? This set of photographs encourages its viewers to question value of antiquity in our modern world and whether it is worth preserving.

Notes:

1. Tiffany Wai-Ying Beres, “A Battlefield of Judgments: Ai Weiwei as Collector,” *Orientations* 46, no. 7 (2015), pp. 87–92.
2. Wu Hung, ed., *Reinventing the Past: Archaism and Antiquarianism in Chinese Art and Visual Culture* (Chicago: Art Media Resources, 2010), pp. 16–39.
3. Joseph L Sax, “Collectors: Private Vices, Public Benefits,” in *Playing Darts with a Rembrandt: Public and Private Rights in Cultural Treasures* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 63.
4. Beres, p. 92.
5. Sotheby’s Auction: www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.42.html/2016/contemporary-art-evening-auction-l16020
6. Beres, p. 92.

Additional resources:

Ai Weiwei’s website

The Art Assignment, “The Case for Ai Weiwei”

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4.3: The Case for Ai Weiwei

- *by THE ART ASSIGNMENT*

Page ID

182373



Video **4.3.2**: Speaker: Sarah Urist Green

Additional resources:

Ai WeiWei's website

Ai WeiWei on Art21

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4.4: Xu Bing, Book from the Sky

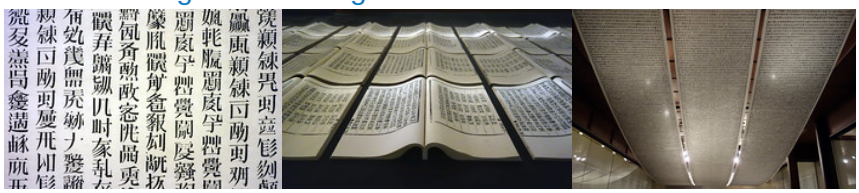
by DR. ALLISON YOUNG and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
182374

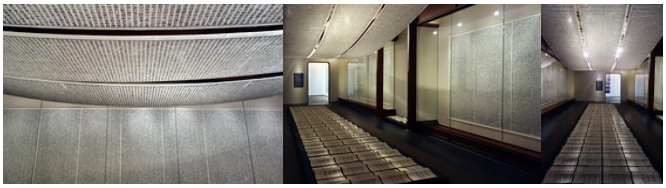


Video **4.4.1**: Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, c. 1987-91, hand-printed books and ceiling and wall scrolls printed from wood letterpress type, ink on paper; each book, open: 18 1/8″ × 20″ / 46 × 51 cm; each of three ceiling scrolls: 38″ × c. 114′ 9-7/8″ / 96.5 × 3500 cm; each wall scroll: 9′ 2-1/4″ × 39 3/8″ / 280 × 100 cm (installation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014, collection of the artist) © Xu Bing

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- **12.5: Ritual, spirituality, and transcendence** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

4.5: Xu Zhen – ‘Artists Change the Way People Think’

- by **TATE**

Page ID

182375



Conceptual artist, curator and entrepreneur Xu Zhen is a leading figure among the younger generation of Chinese contemporary artists. His extensive body of work across multiple platforms and media is intended to push boundaries, satirise cultural assumptions and confront a range of socio-political taboos. Xu’s pseudo-documentary 8848 – 1.86 (2005) recounts his team scaling the world’s highest mountain and cutting off its top. The multi-media installation comprises a refrigerated vitrine displaying a snowy peak, video of the expedition, oxygen masks and equipment allegedly used to make the trek. The artist’s claim to have taken part of the mountain to China is a witty and provocative play on foreign perceptions of China’s insensitivity to surrounding nations. Find out more about Xu Zhen: **https://goo.gl/YoHcbV**

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Apartheid-era South Africa

5.1: The story of Ernest Cole, a black photographer in South Africa during apartheid

5.2: Jane Alexander, Butcher Boys

5.3: William Kentridge, drawing from Tide Table (Soho in Deck Chair)

5.4: Sue Williamson, For Thirty Years Next to His Heart

5.5: Marlene Dumas, Models

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5.1: The story of Ernest Cole, a black photographer in South Africa during apartheid

- by **SFMOMA**

Page ID

182377



Video **5.1.1**: Under apartheid, the system of racial segregation that shaped South African society from 1928 until 1994, photographer Ernest Cole was able to change his classification from “black” to “colored.”

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5.2: Jane Alexander, Butcher Boys

by DR. AMY NYGAARD MICKELSON

Page ID
182378



Figure **5.2.1**: Jane Alexander, *Butcher Boys*, 1985/86, mixed media (Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, photo: **Goggins World**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Men or beasts?

Inside the Iziko South African National Gallery there are three monstrous figures that sit casually on a wooden bench thoroughly indifferent to their environment. Their indifference confounds gallery-goers who struggle to answer questions such as: Are these figures men or beasts? What do these figures represent? South African artist Jane Alexander created the life-sized sculpture, titled *Butcher Boys*, in 1985/86 while a graduate student at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. The figures are composed of reinforced plaster, animal bones, horns, oil paint, and the wooden bench on which they sit.

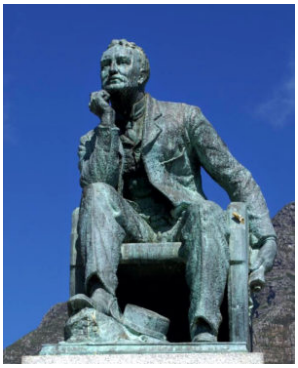


Figure **5.2.2**: Marion Walgate, *Cecil John Rhodes*, 1934 (University of Capetown, photo: Danie van der Merwe, CC BY 2.0)

Uncanny resemblance

The forceful impact of the *Butcher Boys* resides in the figures' uncanny resemblance to us. Their figures are not all together unfamiliar within the history of art. There are flashes of resemblances to the familiar and celebrated figurative sculptures of the Greco-Roman tradition. The scale, definition in form, and physical proportions seen in Alexander's *Butcher Boys* echo those of the

Hellenistic *Boxer at Rest* by Apollonius. Other stylistic associations to seated and contemplative figures, such as the now notorious monument to Cecil John Rhodes, can also be made.



Figure **5.2.3**: Jane Alexander, *Butcher Boys*, 1985/86, mixed media (Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, photo: Ctac, CC BY-SA 3.0)

However, Alexander's figures are not, of course, continuations of these figurative traditions. Rather, hers are a critique in which she transforms the symbolic body of heroic/stately strength into a grotesque mockery of classicism. Their scarred flesh, exposed spinal bones, horned crania, and vacant black eyes undermine any sense of beauty to be found in their carefully modeled bodies. The *Butcher Boys* discomforts us because their form comes too close to that of humans, yet their anatomy is riddled with nonhuman elements and mutations. Alexander has eliminated, or grossly mutated, each figure's sense of sound, sight, smell, and taste. Each figure has irregular concavities where, perhaps, ears once protruded, but have otherwise been removed. They have the slightest suggestion of nasal cavities, which makes their lack of any oral cavity all the more prominent and perplexing. Additionally, deep scars traverse the larynx, past the heart and end just above the navel. Their limbs and torsos are decidedly human. Their arms and legs are without mutation, however, deep wounds down their spinal columns expose fragments of bones.

Viewers of the *Butcher Boys* confront an uncanny image of brutalization. The figures are not sympathetic victims or overtly threatening monsters. They are intimidating; yet, the violence against their bodies elicits a certain amount of empathy. They are unnamable beings without classification. They are neither man nor beast but rather both.



Figure **5.2.4**: Jane Alexander, *Butcher Boys*, detail, 1985/86, mixed media (Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, photo: **Goggins World**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Crime against humanity

The National Party in South Africa came to power in 1948 and was founded on white-supremacy and driven by an ideological platform of extreme segregation known as apartheid, or in Afrikaans, “apartness” or “apart-hood.” In 1985, the same year Alexander created *Butcher Boys*, South Africa was consumed by violent and non-violent resistance to apartheid. This was followed by a state of emergency (the second) issued by the National Party and state-sanctioned violence.

The earliest apartheid laws were distinctly concerned with the control and management of South Africans to assert and maintain white supremacy. The first two laws passed by the apartheid government were anti-miscegenation laws that criminalized marriage and sexual relations between “a European and a non-European.” The third, the “Population Registration Act” of 1950, forced citizens to register with the government according to its racial caste system. By 1973 the General Assembly of the United Nations recognized South African apartheid as a “crime against humanity.” This reality, of course, had long been recognized by those who fought against the regime. Despite growing international condemnation and internal resistance, the National Party continued to violently oppress any challenge to their power throughout the later decades of the 20th century. Given this context of brutality, Alexander’s *Butcher Boys* are commonly linked to the violence of apartheid and particularly the second state emergency. Art critic Ivor Powell wrote that “the *Butcher Boys* . . . [is] probably the most enduringly iconic image of the sinister and apocalyptic brutalisations of apartheid.”[1]

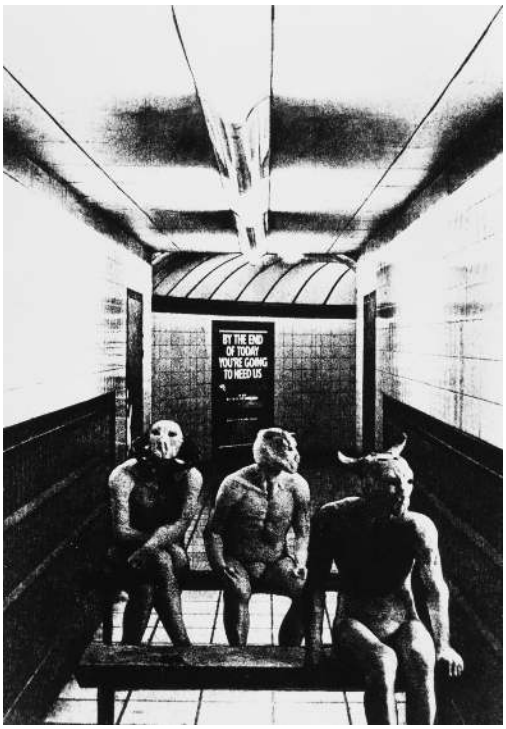


Figure **5.2.5**: Jane Alexander, *BY THE END OF TODAY YOU'RE GOING TO NEED US*, 1986, fibre-based silver print, 29 x 20 cm (**Stevenson**)



Figure **5.2.6**: Jane Alexander, *Ford, 1986*, 32 x 24 cm

Art, trauma, and political violence

Alexander, featured the *Butcher Boys* in photomontages, such as *BY THE END OF TODAY YOU'RE GOING TO NEED US* (1986), *Ford* (1986), and *Transmitter* (2007) among others. Since they are so commonly associated with apartheid violence and trauma, their presence becomes a potent symbol of that violence and trauma. Through the repetition of their image in photomontages, outside of the white-walled gallery space, Alexander appears to provide evidence of the *Butcher Boys'* existence within our world. In these photomontages, Alexander blurs and obscures the visual field just enough to give a candid or accidental aura to each image. It's as if the *Butcher Boys* are unwitting subjects within the series of photographs taken from everyday life.

By placing the *Butcher Boys* in a variety of scenes—on the outskirts of Cape Town, within a salvage yard, and waiting for a subway train—Alexander moves the audience beyond the physical components of the *Butcher Boys* and into a deeper consideration of their existence. This is the key to the work's iconic status. It is not just the shock of the physical, but even more so, the chilling recognition of the environment as the source of their trauma.



Figure 5.2.7: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, 349 cm × 776 cm. (Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid)

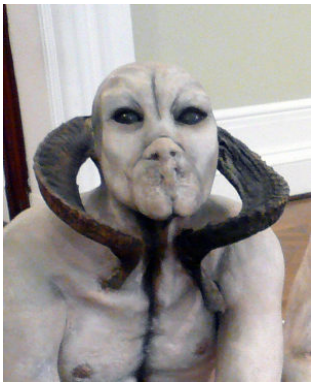


Figure 5.2.8: Jane Alexander, *Butcher Boys*, detail, 1985/86, mixed media (Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, photo: Ctac, CC BY-SA 3.0)

What Alexander achieved with *Butcher Boys* can be likened to Picasso's ***Guernica***. Both were created in the context of atrocities, which the governments (Franco's Spain and the National Party's South Africa respectively), inflicted on their own people. *Guernica* is so named because it depicts the bombing of a civilian target, the Basque city of Guernica in Spain. Its subject is local and specific; however, its reception propelled it into a totalizing indictment of fascism, much in the same way that Goya's ***Third of May, 1808*** depicts the events of a singular day of Napoleonic violence in Spain, but has come to represent the horrors of war more generally.



Figure 5.2.9: Francisco de Goya, *Third of May, 1808*, 1814, oil on canvas, 266 x 345.1 cm (Museo del Prado. Madrid)

Both Picasso's and Goya's paintings highlight an unsettling normalization of political violence. They give their viewers a chilling assessment of the unaffected banality of the environments from which these atrocities sprang. In so doing, these paintings resonate beyond their record of time and artistic movements as they reflect our seemingly endless slippage into enacting and accepting brutal violence. What sets Alexander's *Butcher Boys* apart from Picasso's and Goya's iconic paintings is that her work does not point to a singular event. Rather it is the totality of the apartheid's regime of violence that is called into question.

The *Butcher Boys* may be part man and part beast. Their identity as such, however, is less important than what they represent—violence and trauma. The *Butcher Boys* can be seen as a response to the public's willingness to depersonalize violence by ascribing such behavior to the monstrous. To acknowledge the truly violent nature of humankind is to implicate one's self in a relationship to such atrocities. These bodies visualize violence in a way that emphasizes how we dehumanize each other. It is easier to dehumanize violence than it is to see humanity in violence, and this transitional state of being between man and monster is where the *Butcher Boys* reside.

Notes:

1. Ivor Powell, "Inside and Outside of History," *Art South Africa* vol. 5, no. 4 (Winter 2007), pp. 32-38.

Additional resources:

Iziko South African National Gallery

Tate Modern, "Who is Jane Alexander?"

South African History Online, "Jane Alexander"

Pep Subirós, ed., *Jane Alexander: Surveys from the Cape of Good Hope* (New York: Museum of African Art, 2011).

Sophie Perryer, ed., *Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art* (New York: Museum of African Art, 2004).

Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa* (Southern Africa: David Philip, Publisher, 1989).

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5.3: William Kentridge, drawing from Tide Table (Soho in Deck Chair)

by JOSH R. ROSE

Page ID
182379



Figure 5.3.1: William Kentridge, Drawing from *Tide Table (Soho in Deck Chair)*, 2003, charcoal on paper, 81.28 x 121.92 cm (courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, NYC, © William Kentridge)

On the beach, but in a suit

It is a humorously discordant image: a man in a pinstriped suit sits on a deck chair at the beach, ignoring the overcast vista by reading a newspaper. The figure's balding head and newspaper are the brightest highlights against the smooth, rippling surf. South African artist William Kentridge has said the inspiration for this scene was a photograph of his grandfather similarly dressed at a beach near Capetown. The contrast of formal dress and beach setting—while whimsical—also suggests class distinctions and the disconnect between experiencing one's environment and codification as control: rather than watch the tide, the figure (as we come to find out) reads the newspaper's tide table (a chart that shows water heights over time for a particular location). The gulf separating understanding and experience in this drawing resonates in much of Kentridge's imagery and process.

"Successful Failures"

Kentridge was raised by two progressive lawyers in Johannesburg who actively helped disenfranchised South Africans navigate the legal system during the systemic inequalities of apartheid. The harsh racial and socioeconomic conditions in South Africa marked the earliest work Kentridge produced after studying visual art at the Johannesburg Art Foundation and theater at the L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris.

Kentridge's earliest passions were theater and opera (and he has continued working in these areas throughout his career), yet after realizing he was not cut out as an actor, he was "reduced to being an artist." As he has described it, "Every clear decision I have made was wrong. And the only thing that saved me was what I hadn't decided." This deceptively self-deprecating remark adequately describes the intentional openness and mutability of meaning Kentridge has built into his approach.

Process as Performance

The drawing above is the result of a film, *Tide Table*, the ninth film in the series "Drawings For Projection" begun in 1989. These films utilize a unique stop-motion technique: using a 16mm camera, Kentridge photographs each stage of a drawing on one sheet of paper as he continually modifies it through additions and erasures, often leaving ghostly remnants of previous marks on the page. He even periodically appears within the frame, such as by placing a new sheet in front of the camera when the previous drawing/scene is finished.



Figure 5.3.2: William Kentridge, Drawing from *Tide Table*, 2003 © William Kentridge

The resulting work of art is generally comprised of two elements: an animated film and a series of drawings. Unlike traditional animation, which is painstakingly planned and comprised of thousands of single images each denoting a fraction of a second, Kentridge's films develop organically without any preparatory planning like storyboards, relying more on a stream-of-consciousness approach that strives for something between random chance and conscious premeditation. Kentridge associates this with the concept of "fortuna," in which his imagery and narrative are influenced by objects in his environment or ideas and motions that seem intrinsically related to—but independent of—the themes and narrative being tackled at the time. The relationship might be comparable to that of authors noting how their characters do something unexpected in the course of writing a novel. There is a performative quality to Kentridge's process, predicated by the spontaneity he fosters, his own appearances in the frame, and the film itself as a time-based record of his drawing process.

The Traces Always Remain

Kentridge's drawings for his films are often regarded as palimpsests. A palimpset is the word for a manuscript where the original text has been erased and overwritten (a practice common before paper was available and when parchment was expensive). In Kentridge's work, the sheet of paper becomes the locus for layer upon layer of images that evolve and shift, where the earlier states of the drawing exist only through traces intentionally left on the paper. In the film, these traces help intensify the movement of his figures, but also visually remark upon the process as a physical interaction of charcoal and eraser on paper.

The palimpsest quality to Kentridge's approach is one that many critics and historians have associated with his reaction to growing up during a turbulent and shifting period in South African history. Apartheid, legalized racial discrimination, dominated South African governance and society from 1948 until 1994. One way Kentridge has made overt reference to the atrocities of apartheid in his "Drawings for Projection" series is through the one pre-determined facet of these narratives: an established "cast" featuring the wealthy white real-estate developer and industrialist Soho Eckstein. Eckstein represents the authoritative oppressors ruling over black South Africans.



Figure 5.3.3: William Kentridge, Drawing for the film *Monument*, 1990 © William Kentridge

In the 1990 film *Monument*, for example, Eckstein unveils a heroic monument showing a black worker struggling to carry a load of pristine marble objects. An ostensibly commemorative sculpture to the efforts of South Africans is revealed later to be an actual living person, not a sculpture. Racial discrimination is starkly reduced to the contrast between the "sculpted" worker's body and the white classically-styled load he bears.

In the 1991 film, *Mine*, a similar contrast is presented between Eckstein's white bed coverings and tray as he enjoys coffee, and the grueling, dank conditions of the mines that Eckstein owns. The two are linked visually by the downward action of the French-press coffee maker that becomes the elevator within the mines. Such contrasts seem intentionally provocative, both formally and thematically. Yet Kentridge admits that the decision to have the coffee plunger become the elevator shaft was another example of fortuna, inspired simply from the fact he had that type of coffee maker in his studio that day.



Figure **5.3.4**: William Kentridge, Drawing for the film *Mine*, 1991 © William Kentridge

A critical event linked to the legal dissolution of apartheid in the 1990s was the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Commission was a five year investigation into the crimes and human rights abuses committed under apartheid from 1960 until May 10, 1994. The results of the investigation, broadcast on South African television, were intended to bring to light crimes committed and the breadth of the structure of racism and disenfranchisement.

Although Kentridge's process was established several years before the Commission, scholars like Jessica Dubow and Ruth Rosengarten have linked the palimpsest quality of Kentridge's "Drawings for Projection" with the contradictory nature of the Commission: although the broadcasts intended to reveal atrocities, they also established that the harrowing acts revealed were firmly "in the past" and therefore not reflective of the dawn of a post-apartheid South Africa. Dubow and Rosengarten suggest that Kentridge's palimpsest technique is reminiscent of the Commission's attempts to show—but also remove—traces of apartheid and that Kentridge's "finished" drawings similarly do not fully reveal everything that went into making them. The documentation of every stage of the drawing is only seen in the animated film, hence the reason the drawings and the films are intrinsically related and should not be separated.

Tide Table

The disconnect between documentation and direct experience seen in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is also central to the drawing of Soho Eckstein sitting at the beach in a business suit. In the films he created after 1994, Kentridge presents Soho as a man whose life has fallen apart: between inexplicable health issues, violent nightmares, and the loss of his fortune, Kentridge portrays Eckstein's struggles in post-apartheid South Africa. Throughout Tide Table the artist provides a subtext that reflects upon youth, as a choir on the beach sings and a young boy dances and leaps in the surf. Often this occurs around Eckstein, as he sits in the deck chair, seeming to prefer the analytical table of tide flows in the newspaper and, in a later scene, pointedly placing the newspaper over his head to sleep (see above).

These images reinforce Eckstein's character as one who is more comfortable at a remove from human connection and the natural world, a portrayal that is common to many of the films in the series.

Eckstein's actions in *Tide Table* evoke a sense of loss for the comforts and advantages the character had during apartheid. Still, there is a glimmer of hope. Ultimately Eckstein observes those around him; he gets up, and playfully throws a rock into the water.

Additional Resources:

The artist discussing his 2003 film, *Tide Table* (SFMOMA)

The artist discusses his process (SFMOMA)

This film at SFMOMA

Interview with the artist

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5.4: Sue Williamson, For Thirty Years Next to His Heart

- by **THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

Page ID

182380

Art and apartheid. We should not forget history's difficult moments



Video **5.4.1**: Sue Williamson, *For Thirty Years Next to His Heart*, 1990, Forty-nine photocopies in artist-designed frames, overall (approx.): 72 x 103″ (182.9 x 261.6 cm) (**The Museum of Modern Art**)

Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, the Steven and Lisa Tananbaum Curator of Painting and Sculpture, looks at Sue Williamson's "For Thirty Years Next to His Heart," in which the 30-year life of one man's official government passbook "captures the experience of Black South Africans under apartheid"—and serves as a reminder that we must not forget the most difficult chapters of our history.

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5.5: Marlene Dumas, Models

by DR. TOM FOLLAND

Page ID
182376



Figure **5.5.1**: Models, 1994, 100 drawings, watercolor and ink-wash on paper, each 24 7/16 x 19 11/16 inches / 62 x 50 cm (Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven), installation view of the solo exhibition "Measuring your Own Grave," 2008, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, copyright Marlene Dumas © 2016

Painting Photography

The work of South African artist Marlene Dumas exists on a continuum between painting and photography. Simply put, she paints from photographic images. Or as she herself puts it: "I don't paint people, I paint images." Her sources range from the personal to the pornographic; from the medical to the political. Consisting of eerily rendered bodies and heads in thin washes of paint, ink or chalk, Dumas's paintings approximate the genre of portraiture but her figures are stripped of any kind of individualizing features. Dumas's portraits are, instead, rendered with a kind of dispassionate morbidity that is redolent of violence. A body or head in often sickly or garish colors and in broadly contoured outlines appears against a faint or blank backdrop. That her paintings seem bent on obliterating their photographic origins and reducing the figure to a lifeless prop, suggests that there is a profoundly social resonance to her work.



Figure **5.5.2**: Single sheet from Marlene Dumas, *Models*, 1994, watercolor and ink wash on paper, 62 x 50 cm (Van Abbemuseum)

Models, 1994, is a case in point: it conjures up a catalogue of the dead and/or missing—an all too frequent reference point that underlines the global contemporary. Arranged in the form of a grid, *Models* presents 100 female faces as if they were the carefully

laid out heads of a morgue. Positioned on blank surfaces and retaining only a minimum of individualized features, each "model" stares frontally or is rotated to profile or three-quarter pose. Faces vary from light skinned to dark and some have pastel colored eyes, but these are not the warms blues, greens and browns one might expect: lavender or lime-green instead serves to only heightens the disconcerting appearance of these disembodied figures. Who are these so-called "models?" As Dumas describes it: "There are pictures of the insane, pictures of fashion models, you have pictures of my friends…" In her description, as in her painting, Dumas gives them equal treatment: one becomes virtually indistinguishable from the other.

Against Beauty

To unravel the meaning of this work, we might start with the title. What are we to make of it? Surely it is ironic. "Model" has a number of meanings—prominent among them is the life model, a venerable tradition in studio art. But Dumas dispenses with this approach; her models are not sourced from life. They are taken from polaroids (the friends she mentions), book illustrations (the "insane") and other sundry sources where clippings are readily available. The grim visages on display, casually acquired but so carefully reworked, suggest that Dumas is also not interested in idealized forms of beauty, as "model" might also suggest. Fashion models are the unobtainable standard of idealized female bodies in contemporary culture and have long been a site of intervention for feminist art. The term "model" in both popular culture and art history functions as an indicator of the "beautiful"—it means the female body perpetually displayed for the presumed male viewer.

One of the faces in *Models* is taken from an image of the feminist author Simone de Beauvoir and although it should not be taken as an overt symbol, it is clear that Dumas's critical interrogation of the "beautiful" is part of a feminist lineage in art that includes, to take only but a few examples, the photo-documented performance ***Carving—A Traditional Sculpture* (1971) by Eleanor Antin**, the photo-text work of **Lorna Simpson ("Twenty Questions (A Sampler) (1986)**, the self-portraits of **Cindy Sherman** or even the 1990s performances by **Vanessa Beecroft** where standing live models (actual models) were posed clad in heels with little else and faced an often awkward audience. But unlike her feminist counterparts who abandoned or rejected painting, Dumas compels us to consider the specific social force painting might have in contemporary culture. "I wanted to give more attention to what the painting does to the image, not only to what the image does to the painting" (as quoted in "**Who is Marlene Dumas**?" from Tate).

There is a deconstructive impulse in Dumas's work: she de-eroticizes the pornographic imagery she appropriates; she de-personalizes portraits of friends; she turns the image of a celebrity icon like Naomi Campbell into something strange and unrecognizable. Even her portraits of children tack towards the monstrous.

Troubling and compelling

Comparisons are often made to the German painter Gerhard Richter (**his notable series on the imprisoned Bader-Meinhof terrorist group** for example) as well as to Dumas's contemporary **Lucs Tuyman** whose faded paintings (indeed they look as if they are drained of color) seem to speak to a contemporary painting's inability to fully invoke scenes of political life. But Dumas's works provoke strong reactions. Is it because they speak so forcefully of violence done to persons? Persuasive arguments have been made that tie her work to the culture of apartheid she witnessed growing up as an Afrikaans-speaking Dutch descendant whose only access to the world was through print imagery (television did not come to South Africa until 1976). This certainly is a factor that underlines her work. But images of the dispossessed, the missing, and tortured are fairly routine fare in contemporary life.

Dumas's troubling images are compelling not because of the haunting figures they construct but because of her transformation of once discrete categories of portraiture into something almost unrecognizable. For example, we expect "model" as a term to not stray too far from a conventional meaning, and as an image we expect the subject to hew to certain conventions. In the interplay between photography and painting that exists in Dumas's work, the traditional function of portraiture is negated. It once served, in the history of oil painting, to commemorate the social status of an individual, to provide visual evidence of a marriage, or document the social bonds of family. In the nineteenth century photography usurped that job. The modern photographic portrait was supposed to capture something of the inner truth of the subject—one's psychological being. The poetic reveries of **Juliet Margaret Cameron** or the individualized studio portraits of **Felix Nadar** became the standard bearer for a newly emergent bourgeois identity where self trumped community. Photography's ability to capture likeness was soon harnessed by emerging ethnographic, psychological and jurisprudential discourses—criminals, and the insane all came under the powerful scientific gaze of the camera's lens.

The artist and critic Allan Sekula once described, in an influential essay, two exemplary modes of photographic representation, regimes of visibility one might say that determined, rather than represented, identity. One is honorific: the respectable bourgeois portrait. The other is repressive: the cold mug shot of the criminal. In Dumas's painted portraits the subject that emerges is at once both and neither of these. In an increasingly uncertain global culture, Dumas paints the indeterminacies and terrors of social identity.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Young British Artists and art as commodity

6.1: Jeff Koons, Pink Panther

6.2: The YBAs- The London-based Young British Artists

6.3: Tracey Emin, My Bed

6.4: Chris Ofili, The Holy Virgin Mary

6.5: Damien Hirst, The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living

6.6: Marc Quinn, Self

6.7: Hans Haacke, Seurat's "Les Poseuses" (small version), 1884-1975

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6.1: Jeff Koons, Pink Panther

by DR. TOM FOLLAND

Page ID
182381



Figure **6.1.1**: Jeff Koons, *Pink Panther*, 1988, glazed porcelain, 104.1 x 52 x 48.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) (photo: **LP**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

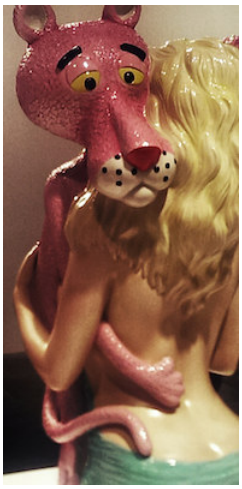


Figure **6.1.2**: Jeff Koons, *Pink Panther*, 1988, glazed porcelain, 104.1 x 52 x 48.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) (photo: **Jack Zalium**, CC BY-ND 2.0)

Banality

Imagine walking into an art gallery and seeing overgrown toys, or cartoon characters presented as sculpture. If, in 1988, you had wandered into the Sonnabend Gallery on West Broadway in New York City, this is indeed what you would have witnessed: it was an exhibition entitled “Banality” by New York artist Jeff Koons presenting some twenty sculptures in porcelain and polychromed wood. The work certainly strikes as an affront to taste: the sculptures are highly polished and gleaming. The colors—muted pale blue, pink, lavender, green and yellowish gold—seem to belong to the 1950s and 60s. The glossy textures look garish and factory-made, surfaces one associates with inexpensive commercial art. One would almost want to call these sculptures “figurines” were it not for their size. To add to this catalogue of horrors, the artist had farmed out the actual production to German and Italian artisans who made each work in triplicate! “Banality” thus debuted simultaneously in New York, Chicago, and Cologne.

A glazed porcelain statue entitled *Pink Panther* belongs to that body of work. It depicts a smiling, bare-breasted, blond woman scantily clad in a mint-green dress, head tilted back and to the left as if addressing a crowd of onlookers. The figure is based on the 1960s B-list Hollywood star Jayne Mansfield—here she clutches a limp pink panther in her left hand, while her right hand covers an exposed breast. From behind one sees that the pink panther has its head thrown over her shoulder and wears an expression of hapless weariness. It too is a product of Hollywood fantasy—the movie of the same name debuted the cartoon character in 1963.

The colors are almost antiquated; do they harken back to the popular culture of a pre-civil rights era as a politically regressive statement of nostalgia? And what about the female figure—posed in a state of deshabille (carelessly and partially undressed)? At a time of increased feminist presence in the still male-dominated art world this could only be perceived as a rearguard move. Or was Koons—a postmodern provocateur like no other—simply parodying male authority as he had done in some of his other work?

Postmodernism: the artist as critic of mass culture

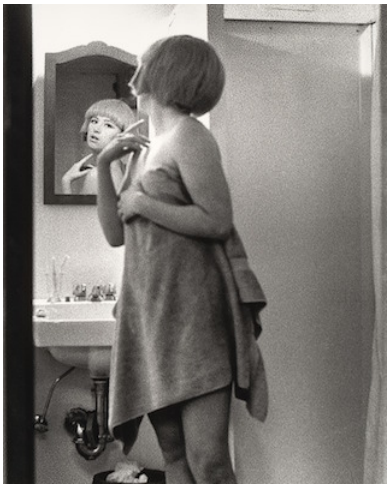


Figure **6.1.3**: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #2*, 1977, gelatin silver print, 24.1 x 19.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Provocation is a mainstay of the modernist avant-gardes reaching at least as back as far as when Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* of 1917, an ordinary urinal, was proposed as an artwork ("avant-garde" refers to artists whose work challenges established ideas). But whereas Duchamp eventually accrued near-mythical status, that same critical reception for Koons was not forthcoming—in fact, he would become one of the first artists of this period to achieve a level of success that depended more on the art market than on art criticism. He is still reviled. Only recently a review described Koons as "Duchamp with lots of ostentatious trimmings."[1] It's easy to see why he has continued to provoke: the postmodern 1980s inaugurated the contemporary sense of the artist as a critical and serious interrogator of mass culture and mass media. Cindy Sherman, one of the most prominent artists of that period, made photographs of herself that paraded the clichés of femininity before an audience that consumed critical theory about the constructed nature of reality and the oppressive manipulations of mass media. Her work was understood as a deconstruction (shorthand for the examination and analysis of the elements) of gender stereotypes. Another prominent postmodern artist of the period, Krzysztof Wodcizko, used high-powered projectors to cast politically charged imagery onto corporate façades after dark—imagery that often pointed to economic and social contradictions and prompted public discourse within an ephemeral and often provocative, public space.

Artists—postmodern artists—were supposed to counter the banality of evil that lurked behind public and popular culture, not giddily revel in it as Koons seemed to do. There appeared to be nothing serious about any of the works in the "Banality" exhibition: a life-sized bust of pop icon Michael Jackson and his pet monkey Bubbles; a ribbon-necked pig—especially egregious—in polychromed wood escorted by cherubic youths, two of which are winged. And of course *Pink Panther*, a work that seemed destined to insult rather than inform. It all seemed like kitsch posing as high art.



Figure **6.1.4**: Jeff Koons, *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*, 1988, ceramic, glaze and paint, on view at Versailles, 2014 (photo: **Jean-Pierre Dalbéra**, CC BY 2.0)

Kitsch

What is kitsch? The American art critic Clement Greenberg once defined it as the opposite of what a truly progressive, avant-garde modernism embodied. Greenberg advocated for a modern art that was true to its materials, such as the gestural abstractions of New York School artists like Jackson Pollock, who splattered and spilled paint in abstract fashion on unprimed canvas—declaring a direct creative confrontation that was raw and honest. Kitsch, a word of German origin, refers to mass-produced imagery designed to please the broadest possible audience with objects of questionable taste (think of objects and images with popular, sentimental subject matter and style). Postmodern art attacked Greenberg's influential theory of modern art, creating images in direct opposition to modernism. While modernism championed painting, form and originality, postmodernism foregrounded photography, subject matter, and the reproduction, and responded to modernism's search for the profound by presenting the quotidian and banal aspects of experience. Postmodernism grounded the rarified atmosphere of genius that was prevalent in modernism in the politics of everyday life.



Figure **6.1.5**: "A Little Boo Boo," Hummel figurine, porcelain

But postmodernism stopped short of fully embracing kitsch by insisting on a degree of self-aware critical distance. This is where Koons found a fault line that he fully exploited with works like *Pink Panther*. Hummel figurines and other popular collector's items are the basis for the art in "Banality." Koons rendered these saccharine and sentimental little figural groupings—cartoonish emblems of childhood innocence—at a life-size scale as an assault upon sincerity but also as an assault upon taste, and it is here that even the most daring of postmodern advocates drew a line in the sand. Like the modernist distinction between art and an everyday object drawn by Greenberg, *Pink Panther* challenged the distinction between an ironic appropriation of a mass-culture

object and the object itself (seemingly without critical distance) thereby challenging the whole critical enterprise of postmodernism itself.

1. Jed Perl, "**The Cult of Jeff Koons**," *The New York Review of Books*, September 25, 2014

Additional resources:

New York Times topic page: Jeff Koons

Jeff Koons (from art21)

"The Cult of Jeff Koons" from the NY Review of Books (2014)

Krzysztof Wodiczko: Projections (documentary video)

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6.2: The YBAs- The London-based Young British Artists

by ROSE AIDIN

Page ID
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Figure **6.2.1**: Rachel Whiteread, Holocaust Memorial, Judenplatz, Vienna, steel and concrete, 2000

"Young British Artists" (or YBAs as they swiftly became known) is now something of a misnomer. For this group of artists can no longer be described as young—they are mostly now in their fifties—and they are very international, and barely share a common style. Yet this small group of London-based artists, who came to prominence in the nineties, changed the international art world. The YBA phenomenon directly contributed to the climate of acceptance of modern and contemporary art in the U.K. which enabled the success of Tate Modern when it opened in 2000. The YBA remain a powerful force in the international art world today.

I first encountered the Young British Artists as a freelance journalist covering the arts for the mainstream press in the late nineties. By then art was no longer confined to single column reviews in remote arts pages, as it had been for decades. Instead, contemporary art was splashed over front and features pages. The Tate's annual **Turner Prize** for contemporary art had become headline news, with the award ceremony broadcast live on television, and for an intoxicating time, London was the center of the international creative world—all thanks largely to the YBAs.

So who and what are the YBAs?

The YBAs were a loose and disparate group, very much associated with London in the 1990s and the period of increased pride in popular British culture dubbed "Cool Britannia." YBA artists included Jake and Dinos Chapman, Tracey Emin, **Damien Hirst**, Gary Hume, Sarah Lucas, **Chris Ofili**, Marc Quinn, Sam Taylor-Johnson, Mark Wallinger, and Rachel Whiteread. Many of the artists had studied together at Goldsmiths College of Art in London, which had abolished the traditional separation between art forms (painting, sculpture, photography, printmaking) and focused on **conceptual art**, however there is no one single YBA style or approach. The work can be shocking, conceptual, or even traditional in its formal features: the principal link between the YBAs was social and attitudinal.

The majority of the artists came from non-establishment backgrounds, had grown up with Margaret Thatcher as prime minister and, perhaps as a result, had acquired an entrepreneurial, "can-do" approach to art and life. Then in their twenties and thirties, these artists were often glamorous and generally loved to party, and the nineties art world—and "Cool Britannia"—was happy to give them free rein.

Damien Hirst, *Freeze,* and Charles Saatchi

So how did the YBAs come into being? Damien Hirst was de facto ringleader of the YBAs. In 1988, while studying at Goldsmiths College, Hirst curated and promoted a "pop up" exhibition in an empty warehouse of work by him and his peers, entitled *Freeze.* Charles Saatchi, an advertising titan and art collector, bought work from Hirst's *Freeze* show and from the fledging artists' representatives. In 1992, the phrase "Young British Artists" was first used by *Art Forum* magazine to describe the group, and when Saatchi exhibited their work at his 30,000 square foot space in a converted paint factory in North London that same year, he entitled the show *Young British Artists*. And so a new movement was born. The work was new, fresh, and exciting: immediately accessible to the public, yet also with high art resonances and references.

The most expensive fish without chips



Figure **6.2.2**: Damien Hirst, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, 1991, glass, painted steel, silicone, monofilament, shark and formaldehyde solution (private collection) at *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*, the Brooklyn Museum, October 2nd, 1999–January 9th, 2000



Figure **6.2.3**: Damien Hirst, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* at the Saatchi Gallery, 1991

Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* of 1991, a shark suspended and preserved in a tank of formaldehyde, looked sensational in the Saatchi Gallery's warehouse-style setting in the 1992 *Young British Artists* exhibition. *The Sun* tabloid newspaper ran a story about the piece entitled "£50,000 for fish without chips?" and "the shark" became an icon of nineties art and culture. As a result, Hirst was shortlisted for that year's Turner Prize, and in 1995 was awarded the prize, which was presented to him by Charles Saatchi. The YBA star was firmly in the ascendant.

Hirst's Turner Prize exhibition included ***Mother and Child Divided*** (1993), a cow and calf cut in half and preserved in a vitrine of formaldehyde. The work caused outrage among the animal-loving British public. Hirst commented, "I remember what Warhol said: you don't read your reviews, you weigh them." He might well have added another of Warhol's aphorisms: "Making money is art. And working is art. And good business is the best art."

YBAs at the heart of the establishment



Figure **6.2.4**: ***Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Gallery*** at the Royal Academy, London

It was Charles Saatchi again, master of both presentation and media coverage, who positioned the YBAs firmly in the mainstream of popular culture with the 1997 exhibition *Sensation*, which filled the Royal Academy in London with 110 works by 42 artists from Saatchi's personal collection. It was the year that Princess Diana died and Tony Blair became Prime Minister. The country was ripe for a change. The YBA's column inches became column miles: the exhibition was visited by 285,000 people, almost half of them aged under thirty. A new audience and climate had been created for modern art. Contemporary art was now at the fore of public consciousness.

The path to Tate Modern

Until Tate Modern opened in 2000, London was the only major European city without a public art gallery for modern and contemporary art. Britain was resolutely philistine about the visual as epitomized by a controversy in 1976 triggered by the display of Carl Andre's ***Equivalent VIII*** (1966) as a recent acquisition at the Tate Gallery in Millbank (now Tate Britain). *The Evening Standard* referred to the sculpture as a "pile of bricks." Public outrage and protest focused on the expenditure of "tax payers' money" on this **Minimalist** work made of manufactured bricks. Evidently, much needed to change before a museum of modern art would be welcome in London. Private funds would be required in order for public collections to acquire modern and contemporary art, and ultimately to support a London museum dedicated to its display.

In 1984 the Tate's annual Turner Prize for new art was founded with the long-term goal of creating an open and understanding climate for modern and contemporary art. By the mid-nineties, thanks to the nominated Young British Artists' high profile and pulling power, the Turner Prize had become a major annual event, with record-breaking numbers of visitors to the Tate's exhibition of short-listed artists, and its gala dinners and prize-giving ceremonies avidly attended and covered, with the likes of Madonna presenting the prize. The purpose of the Turner Prize was accomplished, thanks in great part to the YBAs, and the public made ready for the opening of Tate Modern.

“Art is power”



Figure **6.2.5**: Tate Modern from the Millennium Bridge, photo: **Michael Day** (CC BY-NC 2.0)

When Tate Modern (a museum dedicated to modern and contemporary art) opened in London in May 2000, its launch party for 4,000 people was the hottest ticket in town, and broadcast live on the BBC. Invitations were said to be changing hands for up to £1,000 and some left town rather than admit they were not on the list. “Everyone” was there, yet it was the Young British Artists who had done so much with their talent, energy and glamour to bring the art world’s focus to London for the first time in centuries (and to create a climate of acceptance for contemporary art), who provided the stardust. The YBAs ensured that Tate Modern’s opening party was the place to be and the museum was an instant success, with visitor numbers vastly higher than anticipated.

As the artistic duo **Gilbert & George** said as they opened the building earlier that day in front of the Queen of England, “Art is power.” The YBAs ruled the establishment: the artists were celebrities and everyone wanted to know more about them. And that, for a while, was how I made my living. Then it all suddenly came to an end, with 9/11 as a marker. Shortly after the twin tower attacks, Charles Saatchi closed the private gallery that had done so much to incubate the YBA movement, and there was a sense of moving on. I went into teaching and now teach the work of many of the artists I interviewed. The young adults I teach are consistently fascinated by the YBAs’ work, which speaks very strongly to them, and convinces me that even now—long after the parties and the scene have faded—the work itself will endure and stand the test of time.

Additional resources:

Tate on the Young British Artists

Damien Hirst: Art and Life (video)

The Saatchi Gallery on *Sensation* at the Royal Academy

Tate on The Turner Prize

Tate archive on Carl Andre’s *Equivalent VIII* and the “Bricks controversy”

Tate archive on the opening of Tate Modern

Rose Aidin, “The Comeback King,” *The Saturday Telegraph Magazine* (October 2, 2001)

Rose Aidin, “Brit Art’s square dealer moves on,” *The Guardian* (September 22, 2002)

“Tate Gallery Buys Pile of Bricks—Or Is It Art?,” The New York Times (February 20, 1976)

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6.3: Tracey Emin, My Bed

by DR. TOM FOLLAND

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A Young British Artist



Figure **6.3.1**: Tracey Emin, *My Bed*, 1998 (**Tate Britain**)

In 1998 the British artist Tracey Emin spent several days languishing in bed as the result of depression. When she emerged, she decided to turn the experience into art and the result was *My Bed*, an installation that consisted of her unmade bed and an assortment of sundry personal items associated with her time spent there. This was not the first time Emin made art about things that many would consider excruciatingly personal. She once exhibited, as art, a package of cigarettes belonging to an uncle killed in a car crash. In 1997, she created an installation entitled *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995*, which was a tent appliquéd with the requisite names. Parts of *My Bed* were so shocking—it included soiled underwear for example—that she became a tabloid sensation.



Figure **6.3.2**: Tracey Emin, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963 – 1995*, 1995, appliquéd tent, mattress and light, 122 x 245 x 214 cm (**Saatchi Gallery**)

Emin was part of a group of artists who had studied at Goldsmith College and Royal College of Art in London and were dubbed the **YBAs** (Young British Artists). Members of this ad hoc group, including **Damien Hirst**, Sarah Lucas, Liam Gillick, and Gary Hume among others, very quickly coalesced into a movement, and began exhibiting together in warehouses and other informal spaces during the late 1980s. Hirst had organized the exhibition *Freeze*, widely acknowledged to have been the movement's origin, at an abandoned space in the London Docklands in 1988.



Figure **6.3.3**: Damien Hirst, *Mother and Child (Divided)*, exhibition copy 2007 (original 1993), glass, stainless steel, Perspex, acrylic paint, cow, calf and formaldehyde solution, 2 parts: 208.6 × 322.5 × 109.2 cm, 208.6 × 322.5 × 109.2 cm (**Tate Britain**)



Figure 6.3.4: Sarah Lucas, *Self Portrait with Fried Eggs*, 1996, digital print on paper, 74.5 x 51.4 cm (Tate Britain)

YBA works quickly became associated with sensationalism and shock value, the impact of which was only heightened by the prevailing decade of **postmodern art** which, to a younger generation of artists, had increasingly become depersonalized and too reliant upon a dense theoretical framework. I remember an art school at the time in Canada issuing a call for work for a student exhibition with a list of caveats including "No hand wringing over the relationship between signifier and signified" (a reference to semiotic theory popular at the time). Everywhere it seemed a reaction to slick postmodernism was to be found in a return to a less technologically-mediated reality. The more visceral the better. Well-known YBA artworks include a calf suspended in formaldehyde (Damien Hirst), a sculpture of two fried eggs and a kebab arranged in the shape of a female body (Sarah Lucas) and of course Emin's *My Bed*, which scandalized a British public with its frank portrayal of the detritus of four days of depression spent in bed.

Shock value

Shock is of course not new in art; the art-going public have been routinely scandalized at least as far back as the nineteenth century, when artists first **went against accepted norms** for what constitutes art. The significance of Emin's installation, however, lies beyond its shock value. After all, shock is generally a short-lived phenomenon. Emin went on to become a nominee in 1999 for the Turner Prize, a prestigious visual arts award given annually in Britain. So what makes *My Bed* important as an artwork? Emin subjects to scrutiny one of the most abiding beliefs of art in Western modernism—the notion that art is always autobiographical, a reflection of the artist's inner being.



Figure 6.3.5: Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*,1514, engraving, 24 x 18.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

As Western art increasingly became governed by more individualistic approaches to style and as religious and royal patronage gave way to the marketplace in the nineteenth century, the association of art with individual identity became an accepted norm. "Every painter paints himself" is a phrase known since the renaissance and it is a metaphor of this very idea that art is always an expression of the self at its core. But what does it actually mean? What aspect of self is expressed? When pressed, one is hard put to offer

anything other than the most generic response: it represents emotions or feelings and perhaps a sensibility. What Emin does is take the meaning of self at its most literal sense and in the most provocative way possible. She does however present a portrait of the melancholic artist that references a tradition stretching as far back as the German renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer's 1514 engraving ***Melencolia I,*** an allegorical winged female figure in a state of pensive gloom considered to be a portrait of the artist himself. But Emin's is an unvarnished and unidealized version of depression in which glorified myths of the artist are shed in favor of a frankly visceral portrait of an artist who has spent her days in bed drinking and having sex. Emin perverts that tradition and therein lies its challenge to conventional taste.

A new conceptual art



Figure **6.3.6**: Chris Burden, *Through the Night Softly*, 1973, performance (**Gagosian**)

In the 1990s, as artists searched for new alternatives, many considered **conceptual art** of the 1970s an unfinished project. While rooted in conceptual art, postmodernism's focus on media spectacle and consumer objects had become too tied to a market-oriented idea of the art world. Artists began revisiting the strategies of earlier artists, particularly the more visceral bodily experience that was an important aspect of conceptual art. The unflinching realness of Emin's bed would not have been possible in the postmodern '80s but it certainly existed in the 1970s when artists like Chris Burden crawled through broken glass (*Through the Night Softly*, 1973), or had himself nailed to the front of a car (*Trans-fixed*, 1974).



Figure **6.3.7**: Vito Acconci, *Claim Performance*, 1971, graphite, pastel and black & white photograph collage mounted on board, 58 x 71 cm

From 1968 to 1971 **Valie Export** toured European cities with a structure made of styrofoam that allowed people to reach inside it and touch her breasts. The artist **Vito Acconci** had himself blindfolded in the basement of a gallery, and armed with metal pipes and a crowbar, would threaten to swing at anyone who came near (*Claim*, 1971). Challenging conventional ideas around artistic creativity, as these artists did, is, in fact, a venerable tradition in modern and contemporary art. Artists continually renew the conditions and parameters of what constitutes art or artistic authorship.

Much like conceptual artists who rejected the medium of painting as too conventional in favor of newer and more experimental forms and ideas, Emin had abandoned painting and even went so far as to destroy many of them. In a famous argument with artist and boyfriend Billy Childish, she referred to his paintings as "stuck" in time. In response, Childish formed a movement called "Stuckism" which promoted painting and creative expression while denouncing Emin's brand of conceptual art. "Stuckism" would prove to be short-lived, but Emin's *My Bed* would become one of the most resonant works of the 1990s.

Additional resources:

Read more about the YBAs at Smarthistory

Tracey Emin's works at Tate Britain

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6.4: Chris Ofili, The Holy Virgin Mary

by DR. ALLISON YOUNG

Page ID
182384



Figure **6.4.1**: Chris Ofili, *The Holy Virgin Mary*, 1996, paper collage, oil paint, glitter, polyester resin, map pins & elephant dung on linen, 243.8 x 182.9 cm © Chris Ofili

Sensation

When the personal collection of British advertising executive and art collector Charles Saatchi went on tour in an exhibition called *Sensation* in 1997, viewers should have known to brace themselves for controversy. The show presented a cross-section of shocking work by a brash new generation of "Young British Artists," including, for example, Marcus Harvey's portrait of convicted child-murderer Myra Handley, and pornographic sculptural tableaux by Jake and Dinos Chapman. In London, the museum was picketed from day one, but the media attention eventually ushered in record turnouts.

In October of 1999, *Sensation* opened at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, where it was Chris Ofili's iconic painting, *The Holy Virgin Mary* that incited the most heated debate. Mayor Rudy Giuliani threatened to close the city-funded institution on the grounds that this artwork was offensive to religious viewers. Two months later, the painting, which rests upon two large balls of elephant dung, was desecrated by an elderly visitor who smeared white paint over its surface, claiming that the image was "blasphemous."

At first glance it seems easy to discern why the painting raised a few eyebrows: the inclusion of real shit and collaged pornography might be enough to offend conservative viewers. However, Ofili's work is more nuanced than it appeared to his detractors; the piece reflects on art historical precedents while addressing identity politics, religion and pop culture. To grasp its complexity, one must look beneath the surface—as dazzling and shocking as it may be.

Iconic or iconoclastic?

Set against a shimmering gold background comprised of carefully placed dots of paint and glitter, the central figure in Ofili's painting stares directly at her beholder, with wide eyes and parted lips. Her blue gown flows from the top of her head down to the amorphous base of her body, falling open to reveal a lacquered ball of elephant dung where her breast would be. Collaged images of women's buttocks surround the Virgin; cut from pornographic magazines, they become abstract, almost decorative forms that refuse to signify until confronted up-close. The two balls of dung beneath the canvas are adorned with glittering letters spelling out the work's title.

Formally, the use of gold and the front-facing Virgin link the work to Medieval icons, making the vulgarity of the pornographic images all the more stark. Yet, the artist claims that the sacred and the profane are not always opposed, even in traditional religious art:

> ***As an altar boy, I was confused by the idea of a holy Virgin Mary giving birth to a young boy. Now when I go to the National Gallery and see paintings of the Virgin Mary, I see how sexually charged they are. Mine is simply a hip hop version.***

Race, religion, and representation

It is perhaps Ofili's final statement above that indicates the source of his critics' anxieties. As Carol Becker has explained, Ofili is "transforming the Holy Virgin into an exuberant, folkloric image. (…) probably most controversial of all, he made his own representation of the Virgin, defiant of tradition."[2] The "parody-like African mouth" and exaggerated facial features call attention to racial stereotypes, as well as to the assumed whiteness of biblical figures in Western representations. Ofili's icon asks us to confront the possibility of a black Virgin Mary. Other works express Ofili's interest in black culture more explicitly: paintings like the *Afrodizzia* series and *No Woman No Cry* make references not only to hip-hop and reggae but also to contemporary racial politics.

The triumph of painting

While his works pay homage to iconic black celebrities such as James Brown, Miles Davis, and Muhammad Ali, they are also just as much about the act of painting. With their psychedelic patterning, bright colors and textured surfaces, the images express Ofili's desire to "get as deeply lost as possible in both the process of painting and the painting itself."[3]

From his beginnings, the artist was passionate about the medium, even as painting grew out of favor in the wake of postmodernism. He enrolled at the Chelsea School of Art where he developed an expressionistic style, but his work really started to mature after an oft-mythologized trip to Africa.

Ofili was born in Manchester, England to Nigerian parents. When he was awarded a British Council grant in 1992, however, he ventured not to their home country but to Zimbabwe, in southern Africa. There, he was inspired by the abstract motifs found in San rock painting; these graphic marks found their way into the swirling backgrounds of his later compositions.

In Zimbabwe he also discovered elephant dung, and experimented with using it as an aesthetic medium, sticking it onto the surfaces of his canvases. As he later recalled, "it was a crass way of bringing the landscape into the painting," as well as a nod to modernist art history through the dung's status as a found object.[4]

The following year, back in Europe, Ofili was already at work with his new material. He staged a performance in Berlin and London entitled *Shit Sale*, a nod to the American artist David Hammons' *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* of 1983, and later produced a work on canvas simply titled *Painting with Shit on It*, from which his mature style eventually emerged.

Combining visual pleasure with a conceptual practice

Ofili's work is as formally-motivated as it is political. The artist did not only return to painting, he returned to decoration and visual pleasure, at a time when art was expected to comply with the more cerebral aesthetics of postmodernism. Perhaps his attraction to gaudy bright colors, earthy materials and glittering surfaces, paired with the highly conceptual stakes of his project, reflects another blending of sacred and profane, regarding the conservatism of the art world. By incorporating high and low art forms, historical narratives, religion and pop culture, *The Holy Virgin Mary* represents a deeper inquiry than the spectacle of Sensation would imply.

1. Quoted in Jonathan Jones, "Paradise Reclaimed," *Guardian*, magazine section, 15 June 2002.

2. Carol Becker, "Brooklyn Museum: Messing with the Sacred" in *Chris Ofili*, Rizzoli, 2009, p. 84.

3. Chris Ofili, quoted in Judith Nesbitt "Beginnings" in *Chris Ofili*, London: Tate Publishing, 2010, p. 15.

4. Chris Ofili, "Decorative Beauty was a Taboo Thing", interview with Mario Spinello, *Brilliant! New Art from London*, exh. cat., Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1995, p. 67.

Additional resources:

Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection (Brooklyn Museum)

Ofili at the Saatchi Gallery

Biography of the artist from Grove Art/Tate Modern

San rock art

No Woman, No Cry on the Google Art Project

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6.5: Damien Hirst, The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living

by SAL KHAN, DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video **6.5.1**: Damien Hirst, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, 1991

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6.6: Marc Quinn, Self

by MATTHEW WILSON

Page ID
182386



Figure **6.6.1**: Marc Quinn, *Self*, 1991, blood (artist's), stainless steel, Perspex and refrigeration equipment, 208 x 63 x 63 cm (originally collection of Charles Saatchi, now collection of Steve Cohen, New York)

The shock of the new

Shock value has been an important aspect of art since the nineteenth century. But is provocation always merely a case of superficial attention-grabbing, or can it ever have depth? Marc Quinn's *Self*, a sculpture depicting the artist's head made from his own frozen blood, is a perfect artwork for mulling over such questions. Shock is the probably the foremost element in its success and lasting impact on viewers: once seen, *Self* is not easily forgotten. The sight of blood often has this effect. For some it is an extremely distressing spectacle in its own right, and even for those of us used to transgressive artistic acts, the public display of real bodily fluids still retains its sense of taboo. But once the shock wears off, what are we left with? Does its meaningfulness erode over time, like a joke whose amusement diminishes on each rehearing?

Process and meaning



Figure **6.6.2**: Making *Self* (1991): collecting blood

It is probably wise to first acknowledge the extraordinary amount of preparation and the lengthy ordeal Quinn put himself through to create *Self*. First, he took blood from his body – as you would do during a blood donation – over five separate sessions to stockpile a total of ten pints (5.7 liters). He then made a cast of his head by covering it with an all-over mask of plaster of Paris (leaving breathing holes for his nose). This perfect impression of the artist's facial features was then removed, filled with the blood and frozen. When it was solid, the blood head was mounted within a Perspex box filled with silicone oil at a subzero temperature.



Figure **6.6.3**: Making *Self* (1991): making the cast

This careful, quasi-medical process indicates the seriousness and meticulous planning that lie behind Quinn's shock tactics. Ten pints is the average amount of blood in a human body, so among the other effects of *Self* is to make the spectator aware of the modest volume of this vital substance required to sustain a life. The freezing process is also one that might trigger thoughts of other modern medical practises such as cryopreservation (the technique of storing biological samples — and sometimes whole bodies — by keeping them at low temperatures for future regeneration). Quinn's sculpture is, among other things, a life support system. It therefore suggests wider issues of life and healthcare in the modern world: *Self* is as dependent on science as our own lives are, and it leaves us space to contemplate the magical promises of medical technology, as well as its limits.



Figure **6.6.4**: Marc Quinn, *Self*, 1991, blood (artist's), stainless steel, Perspex and refrigeration equipment, 208 x 63 x 63 cm (originally collection of Charles Saatchi, now collection of Steve Cohen, New York)

Quinn's education as a student of History and History of Art at the University of Cambridge can be seen as a vital component of his work as a whole, and here his engagement appears to be with ancient tomb sculptures. Much of what we study as art from early civilizations (such as from **Egypt** and **China**) is from burial chambers, where the intention was to preserve bodies and spiritually conquer death. Also, one of the chief purposes of all portraits has been to conserve an individual's legacy. Quinn's engagement with cryopreservation in a gallery setting reminds us of art's ancient role in ensuring posterity.

Blood simple



Figure **6.6.5**: Left: Marc Quinn, *Self*, 1991, blood (artist's), stainless steel, Perspex and refrigeration equipment, 208 x 63 x 63 cm (originally collection of Charles Saatchi, now collection of Steve Cohen, New York); Right: *Head of a Roman Patrician* from Otricoli, c. 75-50 BCE, marble (Palazzo Torlonia, Rome)

Disregarding the startling choice of sculptural material, there is little in the appearance of *Self* to cause alarm. In some respects, its presentation is rather archaic. It is a portrait bust, a format which originates in Europe with the **Romans**, and it sits on a plinth behind a glass case, much like an exhibit in a museum of antiquities. The head is subtly upturned with its lips pursed and eyes closed, giving it a sense of peacefulness and serenity — as if asleep or gracefully deceased. The casting process that Quinn used has picked up many tender textures from the surface of Quinn's face such as the eye lashes, creases on lips and the folds of flesh on the ears. A sense of the macabre is thus conveyed only through its bruised, red and blue coloration, and arguably also the surface texture which bears marks left behind from the mold used in the process of casting and makes the head look scarred or decayed. Casting is a very old sculpting technique, but it looks as though Quinn is making reference specifically to the tradition of death masks, which were used by the Romans to record the physiognomy of deceased family members.

A literal p6ortrait

Unlike more traditional materials of western sculpture such as marble, blood is not durable and will decay if not frozen. Similarly, the process of casting is traditional, but usually it is done with bronze or other precious metals, and not a bodily fluid. Value therefore becomes a significant theme, as blood — unlike marble and bronze — lacks monetary worth and yet is essential to life. The use of bodily fluids increases the sculpture's status as a 'true' self-portrait in which the artwork serves not only to depict the artist but is also composed of a part of the artist's own body, his DNA. As mentioned before, the presence of a refrigeration unit underscores the sculpture's dependence on a source of power, arguably increasing its sense of vulnerability. Quinn has commented on the autobiographical dimension of *Self* saying that it reflects his alcoholism, as it is entirely dependent on electricity, just as he was reliant on alcohol. This self-expressive aim is also attested by Quinn's aim to pay homage to **Rembrandt, who repeatedly created self-portraits** in the latter stages of his career, by making a new 10-pint blood *Self* every 5 years.



Figure **6.6.6**: Rembrandt, *Self-portrait with Shaded Eyes*, 1634, oil on panel, 71.1 x 56 cm (The Leiden Collection)

Sacrifice

Historically, blood is associated with sacrifice and ritual, such as in the **Aztec Empire** and Mithraism (an ancient Roman mystery religion centered on the god Mithras), and in some religions had been applied to sculptures in order to "animate" them. In Christianity the blood of Christ is also sacred and celebrated at the **Eucharist**. In other contexts, blood is symbolic of truth and family lineage — one speaks of a "bloodline" and agreements have sometimes been sealed by mingling blood. Quinn's self-portrait can be identified in the crossroads of these various associations, indicating the potent, generative powers of blood, the veracity and individuality of the artist's personal identity, as well as his self-sacrifice in the name of art.

The trope of the artist as a suffering, outcast martyr has been with us since at least the **Romantic** period. And it is not unrelated to the trope that this essay began with: that of the artist as provocateur, intent on shock tactics to turn heads. According to this stereotype, **artists should behave like outsiders** who position themselves beyond society, only in order to castigate and shock it with their piercing commentary. This tradition was given its most forceful early voice with Manet and his provocative works of the 1860s with such works as ***Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe***. In the fierce competition of the art world every young artist needs to court notoriety if they want to be noticed — quiet conservatism seldom makes for front-page news. Causing shock is relatively easy, but the outrage quick wears off if the work lacks dimension, and there will be many forgotten names in the history of twentieth-century art, music and cinema who resorted to the kind of superficial shock whose impact petered out all too quickly.



Figure **6.6.7**: Édouard Manet, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe (Luncheon on the Grass)*, oil on canvas, 1863 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

Does *Self* fall into this category? A defense of its merits would point to the breadth of themes addressed in this essay: its painstaking process, its appropriation of medical technology, its art-historical reference points and its aim to act as a vehicle of the artist's self-expression. *Self*, such an argument would run, serves as an example of provocation with a purpose, where medium, technique and message coalesce, and the art achieves both a memorable aesthetic and a satisfying quantity of conceptual ballast.

Additional resources:

The work of art at the artist's website

Making the work of art at the artist's website

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6.7: Hans Haacke, Seurat's "Les Poseuses" (small version), 1884-1975

- *by SAL KHAN, DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

Page ID
182387



Video **6.7.4**: Hans Haacke, *Seurat's "Les Poseuses" (small version), 1884-1975*, 1975

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Pictures generation and post-modern photography

7.1: Alfredo Jaar, A Logo for America

7.2: Barbara Kruger, Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)

7.3: Jeff Wall, A View from an Apartment

7.4: Sally Mann, Blowing Bubbles

7.5: The Pictures Generation

7.6: Cindy Sherman

7.6.1: Untitled Film Still #21

7.6.2: Untitled #228

7.7: Carrie Mae Weems, Untitled (Woman Feeding Bird), from The Kitchen Table Series

7.8: Joel Sternfeld, On This Site—The Stonewall Inn

7.9: Stan Douglas, Every Building on 100 West Hastings

7.10: Will Wilson interview about The Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange

7.11: Annie Leibovitz, Queen Elizabeth II

7.12: Trevor Paglen, The Black Sites—The Salt Pit, Northeast of Kabul, Afghanistan

7.13: Chris McCaw, Sunburned, GSP #166, Mohave/Winter Solstice

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7.1: Alfredo Jaar, A Logo for America

by DR. DORIS MARIA-REINA BRAVO

Page ID
182388



Figure 7.1.1: Alfredo Jaar, *A Logo for America*, 1987, Spectacolor animation, Times Square, New York City, 42 seconds (photos: Jane Dickson/Public Art Fund)

In the spring of 1987, visitors to Times Square were confronted by a puzzling 45-second animation among the glittering billboards characteristic of this part of Manhattan. The animation consisted of three digital renderings that each combined images (maps and a flag) with simple lines of text. What mystified some viewers were not the images themselves, but the text that accompanied them: in the first frame, "This is Not America" was superimposed on a map of the United States; in the second frame, "This is Not America's Flag" was superimposed on the image of the United States flag; and in the last frame, the single word "AMERICA" was superimposed on the image of the North and South American continents together.

In less than a minute, artist Alfredo Jaar succeeded in provoking patriotic inhabitants of the United States by asserting that they are not the only "Americans." Jaar's message gave credence to a long-standing belief among Latin Americans in other countries that they, too, have the right to call themselves by that term. Nearly thirty years later, Jaar's *A Logo for America* remains a powerful example of art that uses the language of commercial advertising to convey a pointed political message.

Messages in Spectacolor



Figure 7.1.2: Catalina Parra, *USA, Where Liberty is a Statue*, 1987, Spectacolor animation, Times Square, New York City (photo: Jane Dickson, Public Art Fund)

In 1982, New York City's Public Art Fund launched the *Messages to the Public* program with the goal of exposing viewers to media-based artworks through Times Square's Spectacolor board. For nearly a decade, dozens of artists created short animations that would appear within loops of commercial advertising. A new "Message" would appear every month, providing the viewing public with a fresh animation. According to the project's originator, the painter Jane Dickson (who was working as a designer for Spectacolor at the time), the purpose was to inject a political message into daily life. "I picked that title," she said of *Messages to the Public*, "because I thought the propaganda potential from this project was terrific." [1] Other Latin American artists involved in the *Messages* project also used this opportunity to highlight their critical perspectives on U.S. culture. For example, Catalina Parra's *USA, Where Liberty is a Statue* (see image) critiques the promise of the modern immigrant experience using the country's most iconic symbol of liberty.

Jaar's message

Jaar illustrates two iconic symbols of the United States of America—the map of the country and the flag—and embeds them with messages that subvert their traditional meanings. The contrast is meant to pose the question, What exactly *is* America? As a potential answer, Jaar ends his animation with a rendering suggesting that the entire hemisphere is, in fact, "America." For those living in Mexico, Central, and South America, this is an argument that has often fallen on deaf ears. For example, it is common for someone from Chile—Jaar's country of birth—to simultaneously consider themselves a Chilean and an American. The distinction is simply the difference between national and continental affiliations. When Jaar was commissioned to create this work of art, he

had only been living in the United States for a few years, and it would likely have struck him as odd to hear the term “America” being used to define only citizens of the United States.

Defining “America”



Figure **7.1.3**: Alfredo Jaar, *A Logo for America*, 1987, Spectacolor animation, Times Square, New York City (Photos: Jane Dickson/Public Art Fund)

However, for many people living within the United States, this question is likely rarely, if ever considered: for them, “America” implies one country, one flag, and one nationality. According to Jaar, “Some of [the viewers] said live on national radio, ‘This is illegal. How could they let him do this?’ It is so embedded in their education that the U.S. is America, whereas the rest of the continent is erased.” [2] Jaar elicited this reaction by appropriating a national symbol to critique mainstream ideas about Americanness—not only about the definition of the term itself, but the ways that the term’s use in the United States implies superiority over other American countries and cultures. The final frame of his animation, which shows the outline of North, Central, and South America along with the word “AMERICA,” is the new “logo” referenced in Jaar’s title. It is a literal re-rendering—a “rebranding,” to use the language of advertising—of the American continents that **Europeans encountered** in the late fifteenth century. Afterall, the lands of the Western hemisphere which came to be called America after the explorer and mapmaker Amerigo Vespucci, were perceived as one geographic entity, despite political subdivisions.



Figure **7.1.4**: The first map to name America (after the explorer and cartographer, Amerigo Vespucci) and to show America and Asia as separate continents. Martin Waldseemüller, *Universalis Cosmographia*, 1507, composite map, 128 x 233 cm (**Library of Congress, Washington D.C.**)

Pop and propaganda

What does it mean to make this logo for America, a type of symbol normally used to represent products or corporations? A useful example can be seen in the earlier movement, **Pop Art**, and its use of consumer culture as a source of inspiration. Artists like Richard Hamilton, Roy Lichtenstein, and Andy Warhol appropriated the slick, graphic sensibility of mid-century advertising as well as the means and materials of industrial production. Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*, for instance, perfectly mimicked factory-made boxes, simultaneously drawing attention to the aesthetic appeal of what might otherwise be passed over as an unremarkable, mass-produced package, while critiquing high-minded notions of art that fetishized unique, handmade objects.



Figure 7.1.5: Andy Warhol, *Brillo Boxes*, c. 1964, house paint and silkscreen on plywood (Whitney Museum of American Art, photo: Dr. Steven Zucker)

However, unlike Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* which are exhibited within galleries and museums, *Messages to the Public* existed within a stream of actual advertising, emphasizing its critical opposition. Like the Pop artists before him, Jaar not only made use of the formal language of advertising, but in taking it out of the object-centric realm of the gallery and into the virtual space of the advertising screen, he also questioned the very definition of art-making, which he described as primarily a process of thinking:

> ***I think that artists are thinkers, they're intellectuals. And art is about thinking. For me, art is about 99% thinking and 1% making. So I spend most of my time, and I ask my students to spend 99% of their time, thinking. […] Only at the end of a very long thinking process [do] we make something […] And in my case I do not work with a specific medium. The medium I use is the one that I feel speaks the better for the ideas I'm working with. [3]***

Just as Jaar asserted the importance of thinking in creating his art, the viewer is also rewarded for investing time considering it—something one might not normally do in the face of advertising.

A Logo for America is still considered a seminal work of Latin American Art. It was acquired by the Guggenheim Museum as part of the Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative and was featured in the museum's 2014 exhibition, *Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today*. Concurrent with this show, Jaar's video returned to Times Square for a month-long reenactment, playing every night on dozens of screens. Despite its simplicity, Jaar's message continues to stir emotions and serve as a daring intellectual exercise.

[1] Alfredo Jaar—Messages to the Public: A Logo for America," **Public Art Fund**.

[2] "In Conversation: Alfredo Jaar," **The Brooklyn Rail, April 6, 2009**.

[3] "Focus on: Alfredo Jaar," **Vogue Italia**.

Additional Resources:

This work at the Guggenheim

This work on the Public Art Fund website

Messages to the Public on the Public Art Fund website

Catalina Parra's *USA, Where Liberty is a Statue* on the Public Art Fund website

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7.2: Barbara Kruger, Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)

by DR. TOM FOLLAND

Page ID
182389

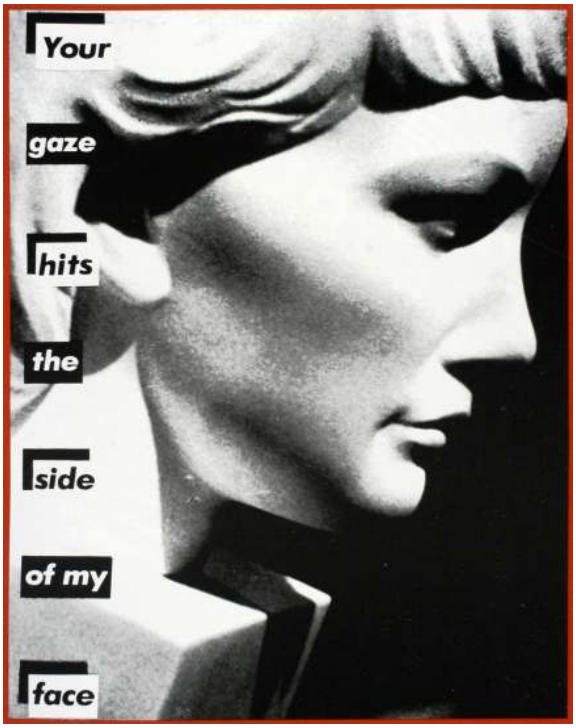


Figure **7.2.1**: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)*, 1981

Has an artwork ever been more direct in acknowledging that the simple act of looking is a gendered (and gendering) act? “Your gaze hits the side of my face,” admonishes Barbara Kruger in *Untitled* (1981). The phrase is made stark and impersonal by arranging the words in a vertical stack, like those of a ransom note, to the left of a photograph of a female portrait bust in profile. Notice how the head is equally depersonalized; a stylized version in the classical tradition whose neck disappears into a block of stone, the suggestion here is that women are rendered inert in the act of being looked at. With an assumed male viewer — the subject of the possessive phrase “your gaze” — the subject of the portrait bust readily conforms to patriarchal fantasies of the passive female object.

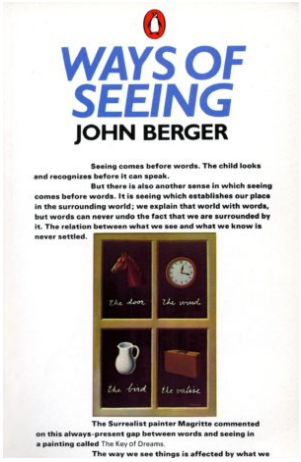


Figure **7.2.2**: John Berger, cover of *Ways of Seeing*, 1972

In 1981 the concept of the male gaze spelled out a crucial problematic of feminist theory. Could women truly be liberated from the objectification implied in this act of being looked at? John Berger in his 1972 book *Ways of Seeing* described the history of Western oil painting as a catalogue of submissive nude women arranged for the pleasure of male viewers. Kruger confronts this tradition

head on. The phrase “male gaze” referenced in Kruger’s title is taken from Laura Mulvey, who coined the phrase in her 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” a landmark text of feminist theory.

Kruger’s art is characterized by a visual wit sharpened in the trenches of the advertising world where the savvy combination of graphic imagery and pithy phrasing targeted a growing population of consumers in the post-World War II years. The portrait bust she uses for *Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)* is a found picture, one of any number the artist would have encountered in her early career in graphic design. This included a stint at *Mademoiselle* magazine, whose glossy pages were a virtual catalogue of stereotypical images of femininity. In the late 1970s, Kruger began to choose for her photomontages images of women that were often heightened examples of such stereotypes to which her addition of text would, often humorously, expose and thereby deconstruct the supposed realism of such imagery.



Figure 7.2.3: Barbara Kruger, *Unititled (We have received orders not to move)*, 1982

A 1982 work, for example, shows a silhouette of a woman’s body partially outlined by dressmaker’s pins and leaning forward in a chair marked with the words “We have received orders not to move.” The text here is laid across the body’s midsection, adding another layer of the idea of being pinned in place. The sense that women were trapped or immobilized in the act of being seen runs throughout her body of work from this period and underlines how common this kind of depiction of women was in advertising, particularly during the mid-twentieth century, the period from which many of Kruger’s images were culled.

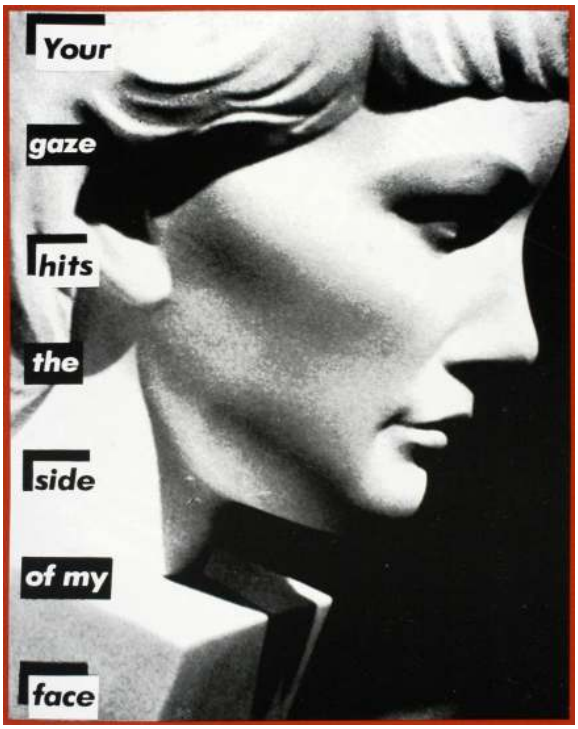


Figure **7.2.4**: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)*, 1981

Kruger offers some resistance to the objectifying gaze of the titular male viewer. Only hitting the side in *Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)*, one imagines it bouncing off as if merely ricocheting. But it nevertheless makes strategically visible the tacit assumption of Western visual traditions: women are looked at; men do the looking. In feminist terms, this means that women are negatively defined as lacking subjectivity or agency. Kruger staged an intervention, one could say, and it is in this way that her work is considered part of the feminist art canon.

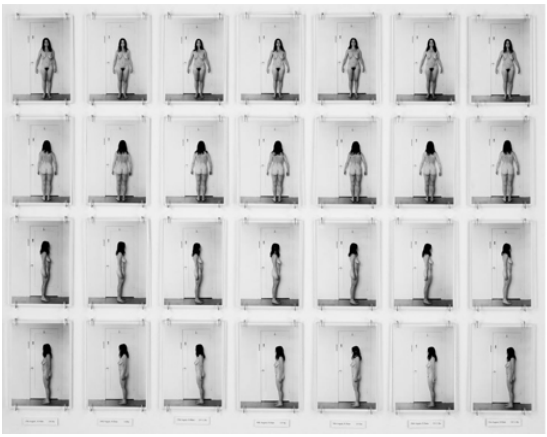



Figure **7.2.5**: Left: Eleanor Antin, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (detail), 1972 (**Henry Moore Foundation**); right: Sylvia Sleigh, *The Turkish Bath*, 1973 (**Smart Museum of Art**, The University of Chicago, Purchase, Paul and Miriam Kirkley Fund for Acquisitions, 2000.104)

During the second wave of feminism in the 1970s, women artists sought, in different ways, to confront the problem of women's representation in art. Sylvia Sleigh's painting *The Turkish Bath* (1973), for example, renders a group of nude men in a traditional portrait genre usually reserved for women typified by the Neoclassical painter **Jean-Dominque Ingres**. Other artists, like **Eleanor Antin** (who also riffs off the classical sculptural tradition in *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, an important antecedent for Kruger) sought to subvert the usual depiction of women through unidealized and un-sexualized representations of the artist's own body.

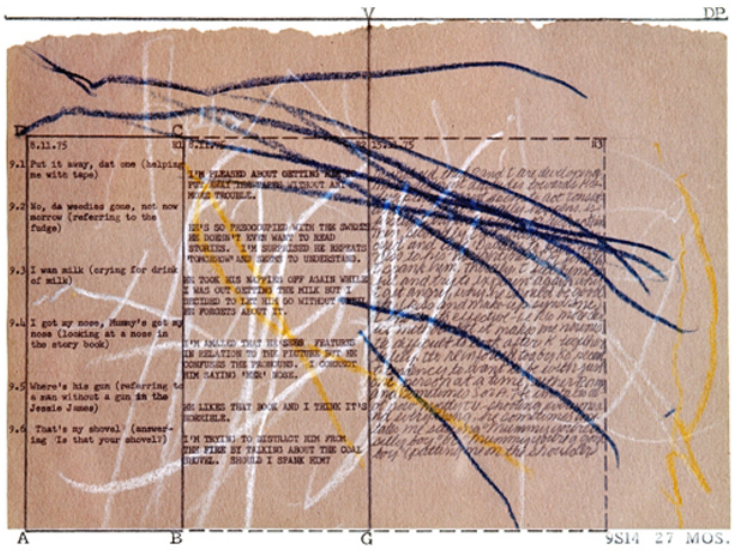


Figure **7.2.6**: Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, 1973-79, perspex units, white card, sugar paper, crayon, 1 of the 13 units, 35.5 x 28 cm each

A different tactic was to refuse representation of women's bodies altogether. **Mary Kelly**'s monumental *Post-Partum Document* (1975), while an extensive portrayal of female subjectivity in relation to the mother-child relationship in psychoanalytic terms, makes no visual reference to herself or her body. Yet another approach was to develop a separate aesthetic predicated entirely upon women's experiences: ***Womanhouse*** was created by Miriam Schapiro and **Judy Chicago** in the early 1970s as a space to showcase feminist performances about rape or installations about menstruation. Finally, there is the use of craft traditions typically associated with the domestic labor of women. Elevating "craft" to a fine art became a symbol of the elevation of women themselves as they strove for inclusion and representation. Kruger's first artworks, in fact, were wall hangings that reframed craft in feminist terms. Despite the variances in approaches, at issue in feminist art practice was the place of imagery of women and artwork by women within patriarchy and in dialogue with political issues around gender and sexuality.

Kruger's work differs from her predecessors whose work I have just briefly outlined. She came of age as an artist at a time when many were taking existing imagery and then re-staging it in slightly altered form. The term for this was "appropriation," and it defined the strategy of a new generation of artists who wanted to refute modernism through invalidating ideas of originality, uniqueness, and even authorship. They became known, as did Kruger, as postmodern artists. Interestingly, many of these artists were women. Already critical of modernism because of its male-centered ideology, they filled the ranks of postmodernism to such extent that the critic Craig Owens described this congruence as a "crossing of the feminist critique of patriarchy and the postmodernist critique of representation." **Sherrie Levine** re-photographed a suite of images by the photographer Walker Evans in order to void his authorship. **Cindy Sherman** appropriated the cinematic tropes of Hollywood whose stock and trade was the vulnerable female in trouble and re-staged them using herself as model. While feminist art (and postmodern art) was largely a white movement, later artists such as Lorna Simpson, **Carrie Mae Weems** or **Kara Walker** would expand upon these earlier artistic strategies to address the intersection of race and gender.



Figure 7.2.7: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)*, 1989

The art of the "**Pictures Generation**" as these postmodern artists came to be called, was glossier, slicker, and more enamored of media culture than what had come before, to such an extent that the cultural critic Fredric Jameson worried that art and advertising had become one. Of course the aim was to critically analyze such imagery; Kruger redeployed its seductive techniques, usually pressed into the service of enticing consumers (and historically much of it was aimed at women consumers), to expose the subtle and pervasive ways in which stereotypes of gender roles were reinforced through advertising and cinema (later works by Kruger would target consumerism directly).

Deconstructing the supposed naturalism or ordinariness of these cultural fictions of femininity took on, within the larger political context of the feminist movement, an often agitprop or activist gloss. *"Your body is a battleground"* was produced for a 1989 women's march on Washington. Confining her imagery to black and white with the eventual addition of red was clearly a nod to the **photomontages** of Russian avant-garde artists in the early twentieth century. In the first years after the Russian Revolution, artists sought to harness the power of technology using photography and film to reach mass audiences and unmask false ideologies.



Figure 7.2.8: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Questions)*, 1990/2018 (**Geffen Contemporary**; photo: **rocor**, CC BY-NC 2.0)



Figure 7.2.9: Logo for the clothing brand Supreme

Much like the factory murals and posters of Russian avant-garde art, Kruger sought a broader audience outside the gallery. Her work would appear on billboards, train station platforms, bus stops, public parks, and even matchbook covers. In the early 2000s

the street clothing brand Supreme acknowledged that Barbara Kruger was an inspiration for their logo, a white Futura font within a red box. Despite its critical stance toward the advertising industry, Kruger's unique graphic style couldn't help but ultimately become influential in packaging and product design. Had Jameson been right about the collapse of art and advertising? Did the promotional and publicity structures of a consumer society eventually absorb postmodernism and thereby render its critique neutral?

Additional resources:

1. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, Volume 16, Issue 3, (Autumn 1975): 6–18.
2. Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press 1983): 78.

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7.3: Jeff Wall, A View from an Apartment

by DR. VIRGINIA B. SPIVEY

Page ID
182390



Figure **7.3.1**: Jeff Wall, *A View from an Apartment*, 2004-05, transparency on lightbox, 1670 x 2440 mm © Jeff Wall, used by permission of the artist, special thanks to Sandy Heller, The Heller Group, LLC (Tate, London)

Jeff Wall's *A View from an Apartment* is a large photographic transparency displayed on an electric light-box. Characteristic of Wall's work, this format offers sharp figures in rich saturated colors, made even more intense by the lights that illuminate the image from behind. At almost 5 ½' x 8', the photograph approaches human scale. It's as though the viewer could simply walk into the scene—or that the women in the image might walk out.

At first glance, this appears to be an ordinary genre scene. The large scale and striking detail draw the viewer closer to examine the image—the modern decor, the half-finished laundry, a cluttered coffee table. One woman walks forward while folding a cloth napkin; another pauses at a magazine page that's momentarily caught her eye. And, in the background, framed by the large picture window, is a panoramic view of Vancouver's harbor just outside.

Photography as Painting

Wall was trained as a painter and art historian and became known in the 1970s alongside artists like Cindy Sherman and Sherrie Levine. Influenced by conceptual art practices, as well as the pervasiveness of film and the mass media, this generation of artists turned to photography as a way to challenge our expectations about images and their meaning, and our assumption that the camera never lies.

A View from an Apartment initially evokes the larger-than-life feel of a film or an advertising billboard; but, in many ways, Wall's photograph has more in common with painting. Its monumental presentation and implicit narrative recall the academic tradition of history painting, where artists idealized their imagery in order to glorify individuals and important events of the past. Moreover, like a painter, Wall carefully composed the photograph to direct our gaze and frame key elements in the scene. The repeated diagonal lines of the television, the shelves above, and the basket below pull our eye to the standing woman. Her forward motion leads us to the sitting area, which, in turn, draws our attention up to the window and the view outside.



Figure **7.3.2**: Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, oil on canvas, 1882, 96 x 130 cm (Courtauld Gallery, London)

Wall's work might also be compared to Realism of the 19th century. Like Édouard Manet, Wall depicts common scenes of modern life, thus elevating contemporary experience to the fine art status of the classical past. Realists like Manet challenged established artistic values by rejecting illusionistic painting techniques of the past. Wall issues a similar critique through his practice to deliberately stage his photographs. In *A View from an Apartment*, the artist gave his model a budget to furnish and live in the apartment, which he then photographed over several months. He used digital editing to combine multiple shots to achieve the final image. This creative process forces us to question the photograph's value as an accurate record of the scene, and effectively demonstrates the artifice inherent to established traditions of art.

The Transparent Window

For all of Wall's careful planning of the interior, the titular view of the harbor most distinguishes *A View from an Apartment*. Framed by the window, the harbor scene contrasts dramatically to the mundanity of life inside. This picture within a picture forces us to examine fundamental questions about art, its ability to represent the world around us, and our own relationship to those surroundings.

Illusionism in traditional art teaches that a painting is like a window on the world. The picture plane dissolves to reveal a distant expanse before us. But, in Wall's work, the photographic image denies such illusionism by presenting an actual landscape, mechanically captured by the artist's camera. It also heightens spatial ambiguity in the work. Here the photograph's planar surface does not dissolve; rather the window is clearly real, evidenced by light reflected from lamps inside the apartment. The transparent window paradoxically calls attention to the solid apartment wall that separates the figures from the outside world, a barrier underscored by the women's obliviousness to the vista the viewer enjoys while standing before the photograph.



Figure **7.3.16**: Richard Estes, *Telephone Booths*, 1967, acrylic on masonite, 122 x 175.3 cm (Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid)

Wall's use of the apartment view to create a discourse on art's illusionism finds a place within this important recurring theme in art history. Painters, from Diego Velasquez in the 17th century and Henri Matisse in the 20th century raised similar questions by revealing the distance between reality and their representations of the real. In the 1970s, photorealists like Richard Estes drew on photographic images to highlight the ambiguity and formal play found in representational painting. Wall contributes to this on-going tradition through his references to modern cinema, mass advertising, and the role of photography in popular culture. His work reminds us to think twice about the images we see everyday. In the age of Photoshop, Instagram, and digital proliferation, what is real, and what is not, seems always to be in play.

Additional Resources:

This photograph at the Tate

Photographer Jeff Wall's best shot, the Guardian Newspaper

Roberta Smith review of "Jeff Wall: In His Own Words" exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, The New York Times

Site for "Jeff Wall: In His Own Words" exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art

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- **12.4: Banality and Kitsch** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

7.4: Sally Mann, Blowing Bubbles

- by **HIGH MUSEUM**

Page ID

182391



The High Museum’s Donald and Marilyn Keough Family Curator of Photography, Sarah Kennel, details the intricacies of “Blowing Bubbles” by Sally Mann.

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7.5: The Pictures Generation

by **DR. JORDANA MOORE SAGGESE**

Page ID
182392

Appropriation—the strategy of selective borrowing—is a common theme in the history of modern art. Since the late nineteenth century artists have both copied and imitated the work of other artists. Consider, for example, the work of Vincent Van Gogh, who copied the format and the compositions of Japanese color woodcuts (*ukiyo-e*). In the twentieth century, Pablo Picasso imitated the form of African masks for the faces of several female figures in his well-known painting, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* of 1907. The appropriation of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* by Marcel Duchamp in 1919 was a radical gesture, where Duchamp drew a handlebar mustache and goatee onto a postcard-size reproduction of Leonardo's famous painting.



Figure **7.5.1**: Invitation to the 1977 Artists Space exhibition, "Pictures"

The Pictures Generation

In the late 1970s appropriation took on new significance. Artists later identified as belonging to the "Pictures Generation" moved beyond the use of appropriation as a formal strategy, and instead made appropriation the content of the works as well. Repositioning the forms and ideas from previous works of art, these artists were invested in creating new meanings in new contexts. Through the manipulation of media like film and photography in particular, these artists questioned both the possibility and the significance of "originality."

Many of the artists now known as the "Pictures Generation" were so named mainly because of their inclusion in the 1977 exhibition "Pictures" at Artists Space in New York City. The five artists included in this exhibition—Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith—explored the boundaries between reality and images, originals and reproductions. This concern with "pictures" expanded beyond those five original artists to include many others working in this period as well. In a retrospective exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2009 the work of artists Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Richard Prince, David Salle, Cindy Sherman, and Michael Zwack was included under the broad category of Pictures Generation art. Despite the diversity in the subjects and approaches of these artists, most did work in photography and film—two media particularly suited to the blurring of boundaries between originals and reproductions, and between the real world and the world of images. From the moment of its invention, photography inspired debates around the question of originality; with one negative image capable of producing an unknown number of positive prints, can we consider any of those as original?



Figure 7.5.2: Left: Walker Evans, *Alabama Tenant Farmer Wife*, 1936, gelatin silver print, 20.9 x 14.4 cm, (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); right: Sherrie Levine, *After Walker Evans*, gelatin silver print, 12.8 x 9.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

The work of Sherrie Levine, one of the artists included in the 1977 "Pictures" exhibition engages with these questions of originality via her use of photography. For Levine's *After Walker Evans*, 1981, for example, the artist rephotographed a 1936 black-and-white portrait by Walker Evans of the wife of an Alabama sharecropper. Although it may be difficult to distinguish the 1936 and 1981 photographs, it is important to note that Levine did not produce her image from Evans's negative or even his gelatin silver print; rather, Levine's *After Walker Evans* was taken from of a catalog reproduction of Evans's 1936 image. Levine's specific appropriation of Evans's reproduced image confronts the contradiction between photography (an infinitely reproducible medium) and fine art (which favors the unique object). In other words, Levine's reproductions of photographic reproductions intervene directly in the debates surrounding the medium of photography—as a document or a work of art, as a unique image or an endlessly reproducible copy. When we look at Levine's *After Walker Evans* we are reminded of the words of the historian and critic Douglas Crimp, who curated the 1977 "Pictures" exhibition. "Underneath each picture," Crimp wrote, "there is always another picture."

Postmodernism

Artists directly engaged with appropriation in the 1970s were doing so under the influence of postmodernism. In previous generations, artists were praised for their ability to create new ideas and objects. Originality was the hallmark of modernism, and artists were presumed to be independent creators of objects and their meaning. However, by the late 1960s such ideas were beginning to break down. New theories about the impossibility of originality developed in the field of literary theory began to permeate the art world. A key text of this period was a 1968 essay by French philosopher Roland Barthes entitled "Death of the Author." Barthes realigned the focus of literary theory from the creation of language to its enunciation. This meant that the act of interpretation was more important than the act of creation. Artists were suddenly freed from the burden and the expectations of complete originality; what mattered now was how artists could interpret, reconfigure, and reposition already extant works and ideas to create other meanings. Levine's *After Walker Evans* expresses these postmodern ideas. It can be difficult to locate the "original" in Levine's image. Instead, the focus here is on how the artist uses the medium of photography to disrupt modernist lineages, which frequently put white, heterosexual males at the "origin" of these trajectories. The "After" in her title refers to the existence of a prior model but underscores Levine's break with it.



Figure **7.5.3**: Carrie Mae Weems, *A Negroid Type / You Became a Scientific Profile / An Anthropological Debate / & A Photographic Subject*, 1995-96, color photographs in four parts © Carrie Mae Weems

Artists have continued to explore strategies of appropriation. For example, in the early 1990s the photographer Carrie Mae Weems appropriated daguerreotype photographs of slaves taken in 1850 by J.T. Zealy in her *Sea Island Series*.

Like in the work of Levine, Weems's use of these photographs was more than an appropriation of the image itself; the focus here is on reworking the meaning of these original photographs. The nineteenth-century daguerreotypes objectify the bodies of South Carolina slaves, reducing them to specimens in order to prove a theory about the innate inferiority of people of African descent. In her re-presentation of these nineteenth-century images, however, Weems transforms the sitters of the photographs from objects to people. Her tinting of the photographs and their installation alongside a narrative gives the subjects of these images a new voice of their own, acknowledging the history of oppression from which they came.

Additional Resources:

"Pictures" Artists Space

"The Pictures Generation" on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Holland Cotter NY Times review: 'The Pictures Generation'

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SECTION OVERVIEW

7.6: Cindy Sherman

7.6.1: Untitled Film Still #21

7.6.2: Untitled #228

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7.6.1: Untitled Film Still #21

by DR. SHANA GALLAGHER-LINDSAY and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
182394



Video **7.6.1.1**: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #21*, 1978, gelatin silver print, 7.5 x 9.5 inches or 19.1 x 24.1 cm (MoMA)

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- **12.2: Appropriation and ideological critique** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

7.6.2: Untitled #228

by MARY BETH LOONEY

Page ID

182395



Figure **7.6.2.1**: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #228*, from the History portraits series, 1990, chromogenic color print, 6′ 10 1/16″ x 48″ (208.4 x 122 cm) (The Museum of Modern Art)

This photograph is from Sherman's History Portraits series—where she draws inspiration from the history of art.

Description

The artist depicts herself in costume, standing in front of printed textiles parted slightly to reveal darkness beyond. She wears a red satin, full length dress, which is cinched by a dark blue sash across the shoulders, just under the bust line, and also well below a seemingly swollen abdomen. A gold sash wraps around her head and neck and drapes over each shoulder. In one hand she holds the head or mask of an old person, with a wrinkled, receding hairline, a large nose and bloodshot eyes. In the other hand, which is bloody, she holds a knife.

The figure tilts her head slightly to one side as she gazes at the viewer with a blank expression. The face is artificially made up with thin, arching brows and lips stained red in the center to suggest that they are puckered, as if about to kiss. Bare feet point outward, and appear enlarged in proportion to the rest of the figure.

Judith

In *Untitled #228*, Sherman cites the story of Judith and Holofernes—a popular subject during the Renaissance and Baroque periods (especially the 16th-17th century).

The Book of Judith (included In some versions of the Bible), recounts the story of Judith, who, to save her people (the Israelites in the town of Bethulia) from the Assyrian King Nebuchadnezzar, entered the tent of the invading general (named Holofernes), who found her attractive. She seduced him into drinking too much, and then beheaded him. In triumph, she brought the severed head back to the Jewish people.



Figure **7.6.2.2**: Elisabetta Sirani, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, 1638-55, oil on canvas, 129.5 x 91.7 cm (The Walters Art Museum)

For Renaissance and Baroque audiences, the story of Judith and Holofernes symbolized triumph over tyranny (much like the story of David and Goliath). Painters such as Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi and Elisabetta Sirani provided patrons with select stages in the story—at times depicting Judith in the act of severing Holofernes' head, sneaking away from the darkened enemy encampment while carrying the severed head, or marching forward in triumph, holding aloft the head by the hair, as the citizens of Bethulia look on.

Sherman's photographic interpretation of this subject conflates two of those picture types. While Judith (enacted by Sherman herself) stands, holding the general's head in a fully lit space, the array of printed textiles draped behind her evokes a middle Eastern motif—referencing Holofernes' tent. The darkened parting between two cloths implies that Judith has just left.

The subject is pushed forward in the picture plane, backgrounded by the row of hanging textiles (this treatment of space is typical of Baroque art of the 17th century). She occupies a shallow stage. Her feet splay outwards, perhaps as a reminder of proto-Renaissance artists' struggles with foreshortening of forms intended to project towards the viewer (see frescos by Giotto, for example).



Figure **7.6.2.3**: Raphael, *The Small Cowper Madonna*, c. 1505, oil on panel, 59.5 x 44 cm (National Gallery of Art)

In a nod to Raphael's many High Renaissance Madonna images (right), the rich primary colors of red, blue and yellow figure prominently, and the two heads, arms and hand form a small, triangular composition within an otherwise vertically oriented format. The suggestion of a swollen abdomen may refer to Renaissance era fashion, in which women's empire-waisted garments deemphasized natural waists and hips. It may also be a way of conflating the figure of the Virgin Mary of the New Testament—typically portrayed in reds and blues in the Renaissance period—with the Old Testament heroine Judith.

Props

Sherman's work in this series is characterized by the blatant use of props and prosthetic devices. The full mask or head appears to be a store-bought "fright mask" typically used for Halloween. It is a jarringly out-of-place element in an image that historically featured a somewhat younger adult man. Both the rounded belly and the overly large feet are also obvious prosthetic enhancements. Sherman's facial makeup exaggerates the overall effect of artificiality.



Figure **7.6.2.4**: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith and Holofernes*, 1620-21, oil on canvas, 162.5 x 199 cm (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)

Sherman asks the viewer to consider layers of un-realities, beginning with the props and prosthetics she has employed in the image. Sherman herself is a prop: a real stand-in for the idealized Judiths of art history. As the props undermine the seriousness with which we might consider the scene, the image also questions the complex implications of a violent murder. As in many of the historical paintings, Judith's hands are bloody, but her garments and face remain clean. Her face—like the bland faces of so many other images of Judith is matter-of-fact, revealing no trace of the grim act that was purportedly committed (the exception to this is Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith*). The direct studio lighting of Sherman's image dampens the drama and further heightens the artificiality of the scene.

The artist invites the viewer to consider how all of these matters converge in a photograph. In the early 19th century, painters struggled to supplant or utilize the technical advantages of photography. Both painting and photography can and do afford the opportunity for invention. By adopting contrivances from prior centuries and adding multiple contemporary contrivances to her interpretation, Sherman's *Untitled #228* both blatantly exposes and provides an art historical context for her contemplations on the nature of narrative and pictorial invention.

Additional resources:

Smarthistory essay on Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes*

Cindy Sherman from Art21

Interview with Sherman from the Walker Art Center

Cindy Sherman at MoMA

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7.7: Carrie Mae Weems, Untitled (Woman Feeding Bird), from The Kitchen Table Series

by LAUREN HAYNES, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART) and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video 7.7.1: Carrie Mae Weems, *Untitled (Woman Feeding Bird)*, *The Kitchen Table Series*, 1990, gelatin silver print (printed 2015), 27.94 x 27.94 cm @ Carrie Mae Weems (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art)

This page titled 7.7: Carrie Mae Weems, Untitled (Woman Feeding Bird), from The Kitchen Table Series is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Lauren Haynes, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art) and Dr. Steven Zucker, in Smarthistory, September 12, 2018, accessed December 4, 2020, https://smarthistory.org/carrie-mae-weems-untitled-woman-feeding-bird-from-the-kitchen-table-series/..

- **12.3: Identity and the body** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

7.8: Joel Sternfeld, On This Site—The Stonewall Inn

by DR. CHRIS BALASCHAK

Page ID
182397



Figure **7.8.1**: Joel Sternfeld, "The Stonewall Inn, 53 Christopher Street, New York, February 1994," in *On This Site*, chromogenic print © Joel Sternfeld

Joel Sternfeld's photograph, *On This Site—The Stonewall Inn*, captures the storefront window of a bar, The Stonewall Inn, located at 53 Christopher Street, in the neighborhood of Greenwich Village in New York City. Sternfeld's image is suffused with the red glow of the bar's neon sign, a tone that refracts off the fallen snow in the plant box beneath the window, and amplifies the oversized ruffled Valentine's Day heart, and the reddish-brown brick of the building. The photograph is at once warm and stark: the picture plane runs parallel to the window, flattening the image, and giving it a graphic, almost poster-like quality.

The simplicity and frankness of the photograph betray the context that lies beyond the picture's frame. An accompanying caption reads:

> ***Patrons of this gay bar were arrested and beaten in a routine early morning police raid on June 28, 1969. In the nights that followed, hundreds of men and women demonstrated in the streets of Greenwich Village, despite the continued threat of police violence. These events came to be known as the Stonewall Rebellion.***

The Stonewall Rebellion would last for several more days, through July 3, and what was at first a spontaneous demonstration became a political movement. In the years to follow, the location would host Christopher Street Liberation Day, and what would become an annual tradition of Gay Pride marches. Ironically, Sternfeld's image discloses no violence, no outward signs of Pride, no marks indicating the historical importance of this place. That knowledge rests in the caption, or knowledge of the site, rather than in the image.



Figure 7.8.2: Joel Sternfeld, "Central Park, north of the Obelisk, behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, May 1993," in *On This Site*, chromogenic print © Joel Sternfeld

Like other images from the "On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam" series, *The Stonewall Inn* juxtaposes an apparently banal landscape with a caption that reveals the striking violence that took place at that location. Other photographs from that series included the **nondescript roadside at 11777 Foothill Blvd. in Los Angeles** where Rodney King was assaulted by four white police officers on March 3, 1991, and the **façade of the former Bryant's Grocery in Money, Mississippi**, outside which Emmett Till allegedly said "Bye, Baby" to a white woman in 1955 (and for which he was murdered). In "Central Park, North of the Obelisk, Behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, May 1993," the photograph captures dappled, orange light, cast across the trunk of a tree. The earth is unsettled, and the space beneath the tree's canopy feels warm and inviting. Surrounding grass, a road, and a building frame the area, providing a point of perspective and scale. What is concealed by the image, which Sternfeld would call "bewildering . . . a scene so beautiful," is revealed in its accompanying text:

> ***Jennifer Levin and Robert Chambers were seen leaving Dorrian's Red Hand, an Upper East Side bar, at 4:30 A.M. on August 26, 1986. Her body was found beneath this crab apple tree in Central Park at 6:15 A.M. that same morning. An autopsy revealed that she had been strangled. She was eighteen years old when she died. Chambers, who was nineteen at the same time of the crime, pleaded guilty to first-degree manslaughter.***

As may be clear from these examples, Sternfeld's choice of historical events ranged from moments that inspired social movements, to tragedies that have elicited relatively little historical attention.

By 1994, Sternfeld had established himself as a master of color photography. His early body of work, called *American Prospects*, featured photographs of America's vernacular landscapes—sites of tourism, commerce, and conviviality—and Sternfeld's use of color only heightened his tendency to capture peculiar juxtapositions, rendering seemingly banal spaces beautiful. As he would later write about making his earliest color photographs, "a different sense quickly came over me: perhaps it did because of a heightened color awareness triggered by all the thinking about the interaction of color, but suddenly the ugly scene appeared beautiful to me." [1] Color photography elicits references to popular media and amateur photography, and was adopted relatively late by fine art photographers, Sternfeld's use of color photography is also a statement about photography's documentary tendencies. As noted above, color photography signified tourism, commercial portraiture, and popular print media, and not the objectivity of a documentary.

With *On This Site*, Sternfeld makes a statement about photography's limits as a historical document. The work can be seen as part of a broader trend in American photography in the final decades of the 20th century, when photographers such as **Martha Rosler** and Allan Sekula, and writers like Janet Malcolm and Susan Sontag, questioned the notion that documentary photography was transparent and free of bias. The aim of these artists and critics was to reveal how the ways in which a photograph is presented, such as how a caption or label written by someone other than the photographer, might relay meanings from beyond the image itself. While photographic documents may be historical records, documentary photography narrates such history. Sternfeld's work makes us aware of the disjunction between a photographic image and its accompanying text, recognizing the inconsistencies between these two forms of language.

On This Site

On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam was published in 1996 as a photobook, or an intentional sequence of photographs meant to be read and understood as a whole. While the fifty-one photographs in the photobook are not arranged geographically or chronologically, a central idea binds them together. As the book's inscription reads, the work is "For those who will not forget." It is a line reinforced in the book's untitled afterword, where Sternfeld wrote, "I set out to photograph sites that were marked during my lifetime." [2] How these sites are "marked" is not apparent in the photographs themselves. As with The Stonewall Inn, the photographs in *On This Site* are all vacant, devoid of human activity, and absent of any outward indication of the tragic events that occurred there. Sternfeld's photograph is tightly cropped, revealing little of the surrounding area, not to mention the Inn's interior. Contrasting the piled snow, the red neon glow in the window conveys warmth, comfort, and a happiness disrupted by the violence mentioned in Sternfeld's caption. Taken as a whole, *On This Site* reminds us of the many tragedies that have marked American history and yet remain unmarked, on-site and in the present. Sternfeld's texts are the reminder of the events themselves, while the photographs insinuate how easy it may be to forget.

Notes:

[1] Joel Sternfeld, "**Color Interaction and the Color Photograph**," *Writings*, May 29, 2020.

[2] Joel Sternfeld, Untitled Afterword, *On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), n.p.

Additional resources

See all *On This Site* photographs and captions

Christopher Street Liberation Day

Kate Palmer Albers, "Joel Sternfeld's Empty Places," *Environmental History* 20, no. 1 (January 2015): pp. 113–119.

Joel Sternfeld, *On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996).

Catherine Zuromskis, "Crimes Seen and Unseen: Fantasies and Failures of Photographic Truth in Joel Sternfeld's *On This Site* and Trevor Paglen's *Limit Telephotography*," in Kris Belden-Adams, ed., *Photography and Failure: One Medium's Entanglement with Flops, Underdogs, and Disappointments* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 81–93.

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7.9: Stan Douglas, Every Building on 100 West Hastings

by **DR. GABRIELLE MOSER**

Page ID
182398

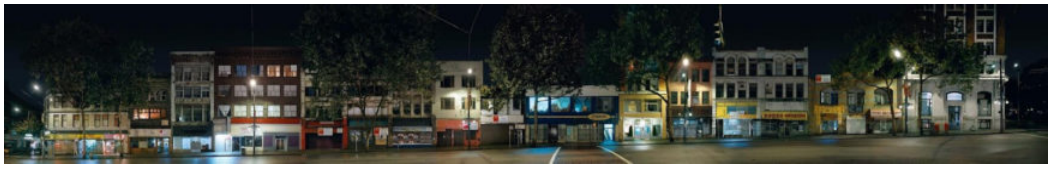


Figure **7.9.1**: Stan Douglas, *Every Building on 100 West Hastings*, 2001, chromogenic print, 66 x 426.9 cm (courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner, New York)

How do we picture a shifting urban landscape constantly on the verge of disappearing? Stan Douglas's 14-foot-long panoramic photograph of one block of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighborhood addresses this difficulty, documenting every building in exacting detail. But just as important in Douglas's photograph is what goes unseen and uncaptured by the camera: the human subjects that usually populate the street, the pressures of real estate speculation on housing, and the shifting identity of the city in the lead-up to the 2010 Olympic Games. Though the image is a careful study of a specific place, the photograph offers us evidence of how Vancouver is impacted by global forces that are shaping city streets everywhere.

Gentrification, protest, and the landscape

Taken at night and theatrically illuminated with soundstage lighting, *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* captures an otherwise unremarkable city block with remarkable clarity. The neighborhood pictured has been called **"the poorest postal code in Canada"** and is the site from which dozens of women, many of them Indigenous, have disappeared (the remains of many of them were subsequently discovered on convicted serial killer Robert Pickton's farm in 2002). Vancouver has prospered in the past few decades thanks to international trade and the success of the tech and film industries, but the Downtown Eastside neighborhood, operates as a point of contrast for the rest of the city, where poverty, homelessness, drug use, and sex work have increased as the divide between the rich and poor deepens. [1]

Digitally stitched together from twenty-one separate photographs, Douglas's panoramic view of the block would be impossible to replicate with natural sight. With the camera aimed squarely at each building façade, the image allows us to take in the entirety of the streetscape without bending the horizon line, or losing focus. Its massive scale encourages our eye to skip along the length of the street, noticing that hotels, pawnshops and convenience stores are the most common surviving businesses, while six lots are either for sale or lease by realtor Fred Yuen, hinting at the economic downturn the neighborhood has experienced. Handmade signs in shop windows advertise closing sales, pawnshops offer to "buy, sell, or trade" goods, convenience stores announce ATMs and cheap cigarettes, and two closed circuit cameras surveil the left-hand street corner outside Jaysons Food Market.

At the time Douglas made the image, the neighborhood was on the verge of another change, however, represented by the coming of the Olympic Games to Vancouver in 2010. Fierce debates were raging between residents, city officials and real estate developers about whether it would be possible to "clean up" the Downtown Eastside in time for the international event, and over the future of the Woodwards department store, located immediately across the street, behind Douglas's camera. Closed due to increased competition from American big-box stores, local residents occupied the building to demand it be converted into affordable housing rather than condominiums, culminating in a stand off between police, developers and local activists in 2002 known as Woodsquat. *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* does not picture these events, but by devoting such large-scale attention to a neighborhood whose future was contested, Douglas's image raised questions about the value of the landscape for local communities (a community that includes the artist himself, whose studio is located only three blocks from the site of the photograph).

Missing bodies and the ethics of documentary photography

Unlike photojournalistic images of the neighborhood, which show sidewalks busy with cars and people, Douglas photographs an empty West Hastings Street. While this is usually a bustling street, even late at night, the artist blocked off the sidewalk with city permits to photograph its sidewalks empty of people. If you look closely, temporary "no parking" signs dot the lampposts in the image.

Without human subjects in the scene, the photograph recalls documentation of Hollywood film sets and studio constructions of city façades, referencing Vancouver's history as "Hollywood North," an affordable stand-in for American cities in movies and television series. But removing the neighborhood residents from the camera's gaze is also a response to decades-long questions about the ethics of street photography, particularly when documenting poorer urban areas. The Downtown Eastside was often depicted in news media across Canada at the time Douglas was working, but while photojournalists frequently turned the camera's lens towards the neighborhood's unhoused residents, the artist purposely removes them from view. By obscuring human subjects from his frame, Douglas avoids the potential of re-victimizing local residents a second time, through the invasive view of the camera, as photographer **Martha Rosler** once famously argued in her landmark essay on the ethics of documentary photography in the Bowery neighborhood of Manhattan.

Some of the bodies missing from the block were forcefully disappeared, however, by police enforcement of anti-loitering laws, or more nefariously, drug overdoses and the disappearances and deaths of women involved in sex work. Douglas's ability to control the movement of bodies across the streetscape has led several commentators to question if a problematic power dynamic is still at play between the photographer and his un-pictured subjects. It is telling that, in 2003, the Vancouver Book Award was presented as a tie between *Heroines* by Lincoln Clarkes—a series of black and white photographs, inspired by 1990s fashion advertising of unnamed women subjects in the Downtown Eastside—and a small catalogue devoted to *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* produced by the Contemporary Art Gallery: a tie that speaks to the charged place the Downtown Eastside occupied in citizens' imaginations. While Douglas's photograph imaged a city block that was poised to be transformed by unseen actors (either gentrified by developers or reclaimed by the community), Clarkes's series seemed to re-center the neighborhood's fate on its individual residents, using the established language of photojournalism to expose them as victims.



Figure **7.9.2**: Edward Ruscha, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966, offset lithograph on paper in silver Mylar-covered box, 1/87 x 5-5/8 inches .1 – closed (**Walker Art Center © Ed Ruscha**)

Conceptual photography in Vancouver

Though taken well before the invention of Google Street View, Douglas's image evokes a similar perspective of a city block as seen out the window of a car. This viewpoint is not accidental: the title and structure of Douglas's photograph is borrowed directly from a famous photo book, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, by American conceptual artist, Ed Ruscha. In his accordion-style fold out book published in 1966, Ruscha took black and white photographs of every building along the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles and placed them side by side to create a panorama of both sides of the street. Though Douglas borrows Ruscha's title and structure for his image, his choice of aesthetic is strikingly different. While Ruscha was interested in making a banal, black-and-white document of vernacular architecture, copying amateur photography and inhabiting the role of the "non-artist" to challenge the artist-as-genius narrative of modernist formalism, Douglas borrows the visual language of commercial film studios to capture the block in vivid, full color detail. In this way, Douglas's photograph responds to the flow of ideas between West Coast conceptual artists, like Ruscha, and artists in the so-called Vancouver School of photo-conceptualism.

One of the hallmarks of the Vancouver School's approach is the use of cinematic conventions in fine art photographs. The theatrical lighting used in Douglas's nighttime image would be familiar to many Vancouver residents accustomed to seeing film crews

cordoning off public space for television shows and movies. But unlike his contemporary, Jeff Wall, whose cinematographic photographs are often staged in Vancouver, but are not meant to depict Vancouver (or anywhere), in Douglas's photographs, the location plays itself. Detroit is Detroit, Cuba is Cuba, and Vancouver is Vancouver in Douglas's studies of the urban landscape. He nevertheless connects local conditions to global forces in each of these series, demonstrating the ways the landscape is transformed in response to the pressures of globalization, capitalism and urban renewal.

Notes

[1] See Jeff Sommers and Nicholas Blomley, "The Worst Block in Vancouver." *Every Building on 100 West Hastings*. Vancouver: Contemporary Art Gallery, 2002, pp. 19–58.

Open Art Histories

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7.10: Will Wilson interview about The Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange

by **PORTLAND ART MUSEUM**



Will Wilson (Diné) – Contemporary Native Photographers and the Edward Curtis Legacy

A major exhibition featuring contemporary photographs by Native American photographers Zig Jackson, Wendy Red Star, and Will Wilson in dialogue with photographs from Edward Sheriff Curtis' renowned body of work The North American Indian. In juxtaposing non-Native with Native perspectives, this unique exhibition asks audiences to think critically about the portrayal of Native experience through photography.

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7.11: Annie Leibovitz, Queen Elizabeth II

by DR. GRETCHEN GASTERLAND-GUSTAFSSON

Page ID
182400



Figure **7.11.1**: Annie Leibovitz, *HM Queen Elizabeth II Wearing Garter Robes, Buckingham Palace, March 28, 2007*, 2007, C-print, 31.6 x 48 cm (Royal Collection Trust)

Queen Elizabeth II sits with impeccable posture in the ornately decorated Drawing Room at Buckingham Palace. She is bathed in natural light streaming from an unseen window to the viewer's right. Like earlier formal images of royals (for example, of Elizabeth I), it was created with the ideal purpose of reinforcing their power, authority, and personas as solid, devoted, and steadfast rulers.

Leibovitz places Queen Elizabeth II in an interior space that reveals hints of her character and everyday life—recalling the humanizing relatability of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in Sir Edwin Landseer's painting *Windsor Castle in Modern Times*. Leibovitz provides the viewer with the expected royal portrait of a single stately figure in full regalia, while also including incidental details that reveal more about the life of Queen Elizabeth II, despite the rigorously scheduled and heavily controlled nature of the photography session.



Figure **7.11.2**: Sir Edwin Landseer, *Windsor Castle in Modern Times; Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and Victoria, Princess Royal*, 1840-43, oil on canvas, 113.3 x 144.5 cm (The Royal Collection)

Leibovitz's choice to position Her Royal Majesty off-center departs from the conventions established by the Queen's previous frequent photographer, Cecil Beaton. **Examples of his royal portraits** are now in the holdings of the Victoria and Albert Museum. In Beaton's photographs, the Queen is always centered in the frame, and no members of her staff are visible in the portraits, only her family members. Leibovitz includes several of the Queen's staff members in the background of her photograph (two figures in dark suits can be seen reflected in the mirrors), but because of her positioning in front of the mirror, we especially notice the woman on the left side of the frame.

The staffer and the queen



Figure **7.11.3**: Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, *Las Meninas* (detail), c. 1656, oil on canvas, 125 1/4 x 108 5/8″ / 318 x 276 cm (Museo Nacional Del Prado, Madrid)

In Leibovitz's portrait, a much smaller figure stands in the left edge of the frame by a large mirror in the back of the room. The woman is barely noticeable in the shadows—a reminder perhaps of the background figures in Diego Velásquez's **Las Meninas**. This figure, likely a member of the Queen's staff who is keeping close watch over the photo shoot, is positioned so close to the left edge of the photographic frame that she could have been easily cropped out (and was cropped out of the **final version of the photograph** that was published in Vanity Fair). [1] This leaves even more focus on the regalia-adorned queen, who is clearly the central figure, even if she is not centered in the frame in accordance with 16th-century royal portraiture conventions.

The staffer and the queen are a study in contrasts. The queen's regalia attests to her elevated station, power, and importance, even if she appears small in the way Leibovitz has positioned and framed her in the enormous room. Even without the title of the photograph, many Englanders (as well as people living in about thirty-five other former British colonies) would know who she is because they see her face every time they pay for goods and services with cash or coins. Queen Elizabeth II's visage has been reproduced so many times that she probably rivals the sitter of Leonardo da Vinci's **Mona Lisa** for recognition. The woman in the

background, though shadowed and far smaller in scale, echoes the main figure's hairstyle (although her hair is dark), and her posture (although she is standing). Her gown is a plain, pale blue, rather than a resplendent pale gold brocade. The staffer's face is similarly half-lit from the left, and she wears a similarly dignified expression—not quite a smile, but not a frown. The details of facial expressions of both women are nearly lost in the details of the room in which both are ensconced (and some might suggest, subsumed).

By royal standards, the room has a lived-in elegance, with its enormous patterned rug in warm colors, its brocade-upholstered chairs, side-chairs, and sofas offering a saucy mix of Queen Anne, understated Rococo, and Empire styles. All the furnishings, window treatments, chandeliers, and sconces are the inherited trappings of old wealth. The matriarch — the oldest serving British monarch in history—has lived in this house for her whole life, as has her family since inheriting it from the House of Hannover in 1901. She is the most prominent member of the House of Windsor—as everything about this picture tells us.

A royal photo shoot

This picture was taken to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's official state visit to the United States in 2007. Leibovitz was selected by the Royal Household as the first U.S. photographer to capture her in an official portrait. Leibovitz, who began her career photographing for *Rolling Stone* magazine before moving to *Vanity Fair*, is best known for producing engaging celebrity portraits in intimate poses (including a **pregnant, nude Demi Moore; Whoopi Goldberg in a bathtub of milk**; a photograph of **LeBron James with an arm around Gisele Bündchen** that sparked conversations about racial stereotypes; and a semi-nude 15-year-old **Miley Cyrus**). She also captured an image of **Beatle John Lennon with wife Yoko Ono** five hours before he was murdered. Leibovitz is a designated "Living Legend" by the Library of Congress, an honor reserved for Americans who have offered significant creative contributions. [2]

Leibovitz and her team of eleven spent three weeks choosing the settings for four photographs of Queen Elizabeth II, and they were given just 30 minutes for the shoot. But because the queen's elaborate regalia took too much time to don, Leibovitz had just 25 minutes to photograph her sitter, and the shoot was documented by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the documentary *A Year with the Queen/The British Royal Family at Work*. [3] During the shoot, Leibovitz explained that she was so impressed that the Queen does her own hair and makeup, and remarked that she does both so beautifully. But Leibovitz then immediately had the audacity to suggest that the Queen take off her tiara, because it was "too dressy." The Queen snapped back "Less dressy?! What do you think this is?!" One of the queen's assistants patiently explained to the photographer that they cannot remove the tiara as it would mess up the Queen's hair. Leibovitz, with equal patience, conceded that they could take a couple of photographs before removing the tiara, and the queen replied that she would have to "tidy her hair."At that point, Leibovitz began giving her directions about where to look for the shot. [4] Leibovitz apparently won the battle because the BBC footage cuts to another location, where the Queen is seen posing without her robe and tiara.

Perhaps this tense interchange led Leibovitz to include the Queen's patient servants in the fame, as if to point out that the queen, for all of her regal glory, is entirely dependent on her staff (a lineup that, for thirty minutes, included Leibovitz), to help maintain her public image, and thus, her power.

Notes

1. "**Annie Leibovitz's Intimate Portraits of Queen Elizabeth II and the Royal Family**," Vanity Fair (Summer 2016). Accessed July 23, 2021

2. "**Living Legends: Americans Honored for Creative Contributions**" Library of Congress Information Bulletin, Vol. 59, No.5, May 2000. Accessed July 22, 2021

3. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *A Year with the Queen/ The British Royal Family at Work – The Monarchy State Visit, Dir. Matt Reid* (**episode 1, part 1**) 2007

4. BBC, *A Year with the Queen*.

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7.12: Trevor Paglen, The Black Sites—The Salt Pit, Northeast of Kabul, Afghanistan

by **DR. CHRIS BALASCHAK**



Figure **7.12.1**: Trevor Paglen, *The Black Sites – The Salt Pit, Northeast of Kabul, Afghanistan*, 2006

As early as August of 2002, the United States Department of Justice drafted a set of legal documents that would come to be known as the "Torture Memos." [1] The documents advised the Central Intelligence Agency on the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" on individuals detained by the CIA during the "war on terror." [2] These techniques included mental and physical abuse, humiliation, deprivation of sleep, food, and water, and were labeled "torture" (a human rights abuse) by Amnesty International in 2003. [3]



Figure **7.12.2**: Trevor Paglen, *Black Site, Kabul, Afghanistan*, 2006

The abuse described in these documents is nowhere to be seen in Trevor Paglen's photograph of *The Salt Pit*, located outside of Kabul, Afghanistan. Like a companion in the series, *Black Site, Kabul, Afghanistan*, Paglen's photograph of *The Salt Pit* is unassuming. *The Salt Pit* captures a hillside that might be any number of arid regions worldwide; beneath it, a warehouse that, if we knew no better, might be abandoned. In the foreground, though, barbed wire, and a high, beige wall, partially obstruct our view. As with its companion, *Black Site*, there is also the slight appearance of pixelation, as if the subject is out of focus, or (as is the actual case), the photograph was taken from a great distance. The banality of the subject matter in each photograph, and the obstructed view they impart, affirm a theme of concealment, indicative of the photographs' true content: secret CIA prisons, or *black sites*, facilities used as prisons and interrogation centers, whose existence is denied by their respective governments.

The "enhanced interrogation techniques" counseled in the "Torture Memos" were made visible to the public on April 28, 2004, when *60 Minutes II* broadcast photographs taken by a U.S. soldier of the torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad. [4] In the week to come, Seymour Hersh's article, "Torture at Abu Ghraib," published alongside additional photographs in *The New Yorker*, would further reveal the graphic and abject character of the CIA's interrogations. [5] The Abu Ghraib prison

photographs became symbols of the coercively inhumane U.S. occupation of Iraq, while indicating a broad and largely invisible infrastructure of interrogation and intelligence gathering at *black sites*. While it remains unclear what actions took place in the locations he photographed, Trevor Paglen's *Black Sites* only further opened our eyes to the U.S. military's clandestine operations.

Exposing Black Sites

Trevor Paglen has a multi-disciplinary practice that has ranged from making photographs, writing investigative journalism, creating interactive digital exhibits, and, in 2018, launching the first "purely artistic" object into space, the ***Orbital Reflector***. What connects this disparate practice is Paglen's Ph.D. in Geography. He is interested in mapping, digital technology, and surveillance. In 2006, for example, Paglen published *Torture Taxi: On the Trail of the CIA's Rendition Flights*. Part investigative journalism, part photographic survey, *Torture Taxi* was co-written with the journalist A.C. Thompson and offered, in their words, "a quick glimpse into this new and hidden world" of rendition flights. [6] "Extraordinary rendition" was a policy pursued by the George W. Bush presidential administration that allowed for detaining and transporting enemy combatants from their country of origin to a third-party state, such as to the Guantanamo Bay detention camp (a U.S. Naval base on the island of Cuba). Transportation to the third-party state is referred to as a "rendition flight," and were made using private, civilian aircraft, in order to conceal their true operators (the US State Department) behind corporate designations. Once transported, combatants were subject to "enhanced interrogation" in an extra-legal situation, outside the U.S. jurisdiction (where torture is illegal). As critics of the program would claim, subjects were abducted for the sake of torture. Paglen's *Torture Taxi* was an attempt to document this network of *black sites* used by the United States. To photograph the *black sites*, and make them visible to the public, not only implied a desire for truth and substantiation, but also illustrated the extent to which the CIA's use of torture and "extraordinary rendition" was hidden.

The Salt Pit, revealed

Black Sites – The Salt Pit was taken in Kabul, Afghanistan, from a significant distance, and using an astronomy telescope. The image reveals blurry flat buildings surrounded by security fencing, a desolate landscape, and mountains. No human activity is visible. The site's code name, *The Salt Pit*, was revealed in a story in *The Washington Post* in 2005. However, finding the site's particular location proved to be a more difficult task. Paglen describes his search here:

> ***To find the Salt Pit, I used a collection of commercial satellite imagery, a compass, testimonies from former prisoners, and a map drawn by a former prisoner. Although they were blindfolded, hooded, and shackled, prisoners held who spent time at the Salt Pit consistently describe a ten-minute ride from the Kabul International Airport to the prison. I also had a map drawn by a man named Khaled el-Masri of what he believed the interior of the prison looked like. If you draw a circle around the Kabul airport that represents the distance that one might travel in ten minutes, and compare that to el-Masri's map, the Salt Pit jumps out at you.[7]***

Paglen's photograph of the outside of *The Salt Pit* is neither sharp nor clearly defined. The image's significance lies not in its aesthetic clarity, but simply in its existence: it is the visible trace of a location where many individuals were illegally detained and subjected to inhumane treatment. The image corroborates allegations as much as el-Masri's memories.



Figure **7.12.2**: Trevor Paglen, *Large Hangars and Fuel Storage, Tonopah Test Range*, 2006

In photographs such as *The Salt Pit* and *Large Hangars and Fuel Storage, Tonopah Test Range, NV*, which was shot from a distance of "about 18 miles," according to Paglen, the image is the product of careful research into the whereabouts of rendition flights as much as the use of high-power telephotographic lenses, with between 1,300-7,000 millimeter focal lengths. [8] The lack of detail, and subtle blur across the image, are evidence of Paglen's intent to make "hidden aspects of the landscape become apparent," while the image's lack of focus also testifies to the U.S. government's efforts to conceal their existence from the public. [9]

Susan Sontag

In her landmark 2004 essay, "Regarding the Torture of Others," Susan Sontag addressed the gravity of the Abu Ghraib photographs and their revelation of U.S. war crimes while speaking to their significance within visual culture: "What is illustrated by these photographs is as much the culture of shamelessness as the reigning admiration for unapologetic brutality." [10] Noting the pervasive use of digital photography in contemporary U.S. culture, Sontag reflected on the ways in which photography enables trauma as spectacle. But, she was careful to assert, "they were necessary to get our leaders to acknowledge that they had a problem on their hands." [11] Paglen's photographs of the CIA's *black sites* speak to an enduring quality of photography as a means of visual testimony.

Notes:

[1] "A Guide to the Memos on Torture," *The New York Times*, n.d. Accessed Feb. 26, 2022.

[2] The "Torture Memos" included three documents written by the United States Department of Justice and signed in August 2002, including "Standards of Conduct for Interrogation under 18 U.S.C. sections 2340–2340A" and "Interrogation of al Qaeda." These two documents were drafted by Assistant Attorney General Jay Bybee.

[3] "Torture," Amnesty International. Accessed Feb. 26, 2022.

[4] "Abuse of Iraqi POWs by GIs Probed: 60 Minutes Has Exclusive Report on Alleged Mistreatment," 60 Minutes II (April 28, 2004). Accessed Feb. 26, 2022.

[5] Seymour M. Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib," *The New Yorker* (April 30, 2004). Accessed Feb. 26, 2022.

[6] Trevor Paglen and A. C. Thompson, *Torture Taxi: On the Trail of the CIA's Rendition Flights* (Hoboken, N.J.: Melville House Publishing, 2006).

[7] Trevor Paglen, "The Black Sites." Accessed Feb. 26, 2022.

[8] "Limit Telephotography: Gallery, San Francisco," *Limit Telephotography*. Accessed Feb. 26, 2022.

[9] Trevor Paglen, "Limit Telephotography." Accessed Feb. 26, 2022.

[10] Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 23, 2004, 29. Accessed March 23, 2022.

[11] Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others," p. 42.

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Seymour M. Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib," *The New Yorker* (April 30, 2004). Accessed Feb. 26, 2022.

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Susan Sontag, "**Regarding the Torture of Others,**" *The New York Times Magazine* (May 23, 2004). Accessed Feb. 26, 2022.

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7.13: Chris McCaw, Sunburned, GSP #166, Mohave/Winter Solstice

by **DR. CHRIS BALASCHAK**

Page ID
182402



Figure **7.13.1**: Chris McCaw, *Sunburned, GSP #166, Mohave/Winter Solstice*, 2007, gelatin silver prints, each print: 34.7 x 26.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) © Chris McCaw

In 1839, at the very beginning of photography's history, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre wrote that his invention (the daguerreotype) "gives her [Nature] the power to reproduce herself." [1] Chris McCaw's series, *Sunburn*, takes this maxim as a defining rule. In his quadriptych made of four black-and-white gelatin-silver photographic prints, *Sunburn GSP #166 (Mohave/Winter Solstice Day)*, he traced the arc of the Sun over four hours as it moved across the sky in the Mojave Desert during the Winter solstice (when the days are their shortest) in 2007. In McCaw's work we don't so much *see* the arc of the Sun, but instead the direct *record* of Sunlight's energy which has left a scorched line on the paper negative, running across the four photographic prints.

Sorcery and solarization



Figure **7.13.2**: A shot of Chris McCaw at work on a beach in Santa Monica in the *Los Angeles Times*'s Arts & Music section, accompanying an article on the photographer's "Sunburns" exhibition (photo: Daniel Miller / Duncan Miller Gallery)

In order to produce his photographs, McCaw has developed unique, homemade large-format cameras. His cameras are built to house custom film holders that will carry the paper (not film) that we see in his finished work (each roughly 11 x 14 inches, in this example). Mounted on dollies, McCaw's cameras appear as industrial relics when compared to microscopic contemporary digital cameras. To seize the Sun's light, McCaw's cameras use military-grade lenses, often from aerial-reconnaissance cameras used during World War II and the Korean War, and that have long focal lengths (of around 600 millimeters) that can bring distant objects closer, while also narrowing the field of view. His use of aerial reconnaissance lenses enables the Sun to appear larger on paper than it would otherwise. Furthermore, what were once used to create clear images of the ground from above here play a reversed role in McCaw's hands, and are aimed at the brightest object in the sky. In his photographs, the Sun imprints itself so strongly on the photographic paper that it obliterates its own image.

McCaw, like a photographic sorcerer, stated that the process for making the *Sunburn* series was developed by accident:

> ***In 2003, in Utah, I just happened to have pointed the camera East, with the aperture wide open, to get as many stars in as possible, focus to infinity, and, um … I woke up around nine or ten the next morning, and I just woke up going, welp, didn't get that shot! [I] didn't really think too much about it, until I went to go close the shutter, and***

> ***the smell of smoke was kind of coming out. I didn't even think too much of that, and closed the shutter, put the dark slide back in, and took photographs the rest of the day. That evening I was changing film and this one sheet had a tear in it—how did I do that?—and then the lightbulb: oh, that's right, the Sun.[2]***

The image that resulted from McCaw's accident was a *solarized* negative—an image in which the grayscale tones are reversed, and light areas appear dark (and vice-versa).



Figure **7.13.3**: Chris McCaw, *Sunburned, GSP #166, Mohave/Winter Solstice* (detail), 2007, gelatin silver prints, each print: 34.7 x 26.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) © Chris McCaw

McCaw's choice of gelatin-silver, black-and-white photographic paper contributes to the representation of delicate details, glimmering highlights, and atmospheric shadows. Though subtle, McCaw's images such as *Sunburn GSP #166* are nothing short of dramatic, seeming to harness elemental aspects of his medium as well as our nearest star. The crisp edges of the Sun-burned track not only reveal the understated beauty of his analog photographic materials, but the work also records a particular place and time. It reminds us of our relative scale in the solar system. As McCaw stated in 2012: "I've become attuned to the reality that we're all running around on a spinning marble orbiting a fiery ball." [3]

Index

All photographs are inherently convey a trace resulting from physical contact with a now-absent object. Another way to say this is that they are indexical. For example, a footprint, a shadow, and a burnt ember are indexical signs, because they result from a physical relationship with something no longer present. Likewise, the imprinting of light from the Sun on a light-sensitive surface is another indexical transaction, as the Sun's light, concentrated by the lens, burned the paper. *Sunburn GSP #166* also indexes the Earth's rotation, as well as the time it takes for our "star" to rise and fall over a horizon.

McCaw's gesture also expresses the pictorial possibilities of abstraction. He violates the purity of the empty canvas (or allows the Sun to do so), a desecration we understand not as transgression, but as a means to revel in the sublime wonder about our cosmic home.

Notes:

[1] Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, "Daquerreotype," in *Classic Essays on Photography*. ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), p. 13.

[2] The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. "Chris McCaw Discusses his Photograph, Sunburned." (Sept. 28, 2011), minute 4:21.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

8: Revisiting histories

8.1: Betye Saar, Liberation of Aunt Jemima
8.2: Nari Ward, We the People (black version)
8.3: Kara Walker
8.3.1: An interview with Kara Walker
8.3.2: Darkytown Rebellion
8.3.3: Kara Walker, A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Bab
8.3.4: Kara Walker, Fons Americanus
8.4: Alison Saar, Topsy and the Golden Fleece
8.5: Kerry James Marshall
8.5.1: An interview with Kerry James Marshall about his series Mementos
8.5.2: Kerry James Marshall- Mastry
8.5.3: Kerry James Marshall on his process
8.6: Clarissa Rizal, Resilience Robe
8.7: Tenzing Rigdol, Pin drop silence- Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara
8.8: Thornton Dial, Blood and Meat- Survival For The World
8.9: Titus Kaphar, The Cost of Removal
8.10: Omar Victor Diop- Black subjects in the frame
8.11: Wendy Red Star, 1880 Crow Peace Delegation
8.12: Yee I-Lann, Picturing Power #6…
8.13: Roger Shimomura, Diary- December 12, 1941
8.14: An interview with Fred Wilson about the conventions of museums and race
8.15: Ken Gonzales-Day, Erased Lynching Series
8.16: Kenseth Armstead, Surrender Yorktown 1781
8.17: Lam Tung Pang on “A day of two Suns”
8.18: Michael Rakowitz- Haunting the West

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8.1: Betye Saar, Liberation of Aunt Jemima

by SUNANDA K. SANYAL

Page ID
182267



Figure **8.1.1**: Betye Saar, *Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, 1972, assemblage, 11-3/4 x 8 x 2-3/4 inches (Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive)

An upright shadow-box, hardly a foot tall and a few inches thick, is fronted with a glass pane. In it stands a notepad-holder, featuring a substantially proportioned black woman with a grotesque, smiling face. She is clad in a red dress with floral patterns, a yellow polka-dotted scarf, and a red-and-white bandana tied in a knot above her forehead. The woman carries a broom in her right hand, while her folded left hand, with a rifle leaning on it, rests on her waist. The barrel of a pistol appears in the gap between her body and right arm. The space where the notepad was originally held, which covers the lower half of the woman, shows a painting of a similar woman standing in front of vegetation and a picket fence, carrying a crying white child. The lower half of this painted figure is concealed by an upright black fist. The floor of the box is filled with cotton and cotton pods, while the background shows repeated images of the logo of a smiling woman representing the Aunt Jemima brand of breakfast foods.



Figure **8.1.2**: Joseph Cornell, *Blue Soap Bubble*, 1949–50, various materials, 24.5 x 30.5 x 9.6 cm (Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid)

Such co-existence of a variety of found objects in one space is called **assemblage**, a type of sculpture that emerged in modern art in the early twentieth century. One of the pioneers of this sculptural practice in the American art scene was the self-taught, eccentric, rather reclusive New York-based artist Joseph Cornell, who came to prominence through his boxed assemblages. There is no question that the artist of this shadow-box, Betye Saar, drew on Cornell's idea of miniature installation in a box; in fact, it is

possible that she made the piece in the year of Cornell's passing as a tribute to the senior artist. There is, however, a fundamental difference between their approaches to assemblage as can be seen in the content and context of Saar's work.

The Mammy caricature in the Jim Crow era

The central item in the scene—the notepad-holder—is a product of the Jim Crow era, a period of violent repression and racial segregation that lasted from approximately the 1890s to the 1960s. The hope and optimism that African Americans felt after the defeat of the Confederacy in the American Civil War (1861–65) and the end of slavery were soon eclipsed by the end of the federal government's Reconstruction policy in the southern states. Without the might of the federal government to enforce Black civil rights, the formerly rebel states regained the power to maintain a white supremacist system in the south, where Black people would occupy the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder.

The Jim Crow era that followed Reconstruction was one in which southern Black people faced a brutally oppressive system in all aspects of life. In addition to depriving them of educational and economic opportunities, constitutional rights, and respectable social positions, the southern elite used the terror of lynching and such white supremacist organizations as the **Ku Klux Klan** to ruthlessly enforce the Jim Crow hierarchy. What is more, determined to keep Black people in the margin of society, white artists steeped in Jim Crow culture widely disseminated grotesque caricatures that portrayed Black people either as half-witted, lazy, and unworthy of human dignity, or as naïve and simple people that fostered nostalgia for the bygone time of slavery.

Inventing various Black stock characters that appeared repeatedly in songs, poems, black-face minstrelsy, and other literary and popular performative genres, white artists created a specific visual culture that presented Blackness as ugly and expendable. Pictorial images of black inferiority in magazines, advertisements, and other outlets were extended to a variety of domestic objects, such as ashtrays, furniture, cookie jars, and here, a notepad holder, intended to amuse white audiences by debasing the Black body. These images became widely popular not just in the south, but all over the country. Not only did such propaganda foster a deep disregard and disdain for Black people in the white mind, but it also succeeded in infusing the Black mind with an equally deep sense of self-loathing and inferiority. Generations of Black Americans saw themselves, at least in part, through the lens of the dominant culture, convinced of their own inferior status in the racial hierarchy and of the bleakness of their own future. The notepad-holder in Saar's work, featuring the Mammy caricature, is one such example of Jim Crow art.



Figure **8.1.3**: Betye Saar, *Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (detail), 1972, assemblage, 11 3/4 x 8 x 2 3/4 inches (Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive)



Figure 8.1.4: Sheet music cover, "Jemima's Wedding Day: Cake Walk. Martin Saxx" (Boston, MA: Saxx Music Co., 1899)

The Mammy character was one of the popular Jim Crow inventions recalling what was seen as the "good old days" of slavery. A product of the southern white fantasy of the "happy slave," she is an overweight, congenial, affectionate woman who served the plantation owner's household. Her smile, claimed to be a sign of southern hospitality, is actually the most visible marker of her docility and her acceptance of the racial hierarchy of Jim Crow.



Figure 8.1.5: Aunt Jemima pancake flour advertisement, circa 1960

In the 1920s, Pearl Milling Company drew on the Mammy archetype to create the Aunt Jemima logo (basically a "normalized" version of the Mammy image) for its breakfast foods. The archetype also became a theme-based restaurant called Aunt Jemima Pancake House in Disneyland between 1955 and 1970, where a "live Aunt Jemima" (played by Aylene Lewis) greeted customers. To further understand the roles of the Mammy and Aunt Jemima in this assemblage, let's take a quick look at the political scenario at the time Saar made her shadow-box, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*.

Civil Rights and Black Power

From the mid-1950s through the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement was a watershed event in American history. The leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the efforts of grassroots organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), led to the achievement of many of the goals long pursued by African Americans activists in the United States, including the end of southern segregation. Equally consequential in that era was a new wave of the feminist movement that exposed gender oppression in a patriarchal society. By the mid-1960s, many activists within the Civil Rights movement grew critical of what they saw as a largely male-dominated effort, that was more interested in compromises with the existing power structure of American society than with the real empowerment of Black Americans.

Questions arose on the feminist front as well. What, for example, would be the position and priority of a woman of color, who was in a double bind, dominated in the contexts of both gender and race? Should she join hands with the largely upper middle-class white leadership of the feminist movement against Black patriarchy, or fight against white racial hegemony under the largely male Civil Rights leadership? As an alternative to the mainstream Civil Rights movement, the Black Panther party was founded in 1966 as the face of the militant Black Power movement that also foregrounded the role of Black women. Many creative activists were attracted to this new movement's assertive rhetoric of Black empowerment, which addressed both racial and gender marginalization.



Figure **8.1.6**: Betye Saar, *Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (detail), 1972, assemblage, 11 3/4 x 8 x 2 3/4 inches (Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive)

The centrality of the raised Black fist—the official gesture of the Black Power movement—in Saar's assemblage leaves no question about her political allegiance and vision for Black women. Saar's decision to supplement the Mammy's broom with guns is a bold attempt to rescue the character from her demeaning, servile role in Jim Crow fantasy; entirely out of place, the presence of guns resolutely challenges the popular understanding of the Mammy figure. Her feet are planted in cotton (a crop closely associated with slave labor in the south). This fictional product of systemic racism threatens revolt from within her stereotypical context; behind the disguise of docility, her smile can now be interpreted as ominously evocative of revenge. Furthermore, if the fist below is seen as the source of the discomfort of the child carried by the painted Mammy, then that reading intensifies the unsettling mood of the scene. Finally, since Aunt Jemima is yet another fiction derived from the Mammy, the artist logically liberates her by turning the latter into a symbol of resistance to her prescribed role; if there were no enslaved Mammy archetype to begin with, there would be no Aunt Jemima destined to serve white desire, in this case for packaged food.

The revolutionary role of Black women

In the light of the complicated intersections of the politics of race and gender in America in the dynamic mid-twentieth century era marked by the civil rights and other movements for social justice, Saar's powerful iconographic strategy to assert the revolutionary role of Black women was an exceptionally radical gesture. But this work is no less significant as art. Much of the white, male-dominated American art world in the postwar years was involved in a diverse range of creative experiments, yet the dominant tendency was to skirt, if not totally avoid, thorny social and political issues. The prominent routes included formal experiments like **Abstract Expressionism**, where the artist's role as a creator superseded any extraneous associations; **Pop**, which celebrated consumer culture with an ironic slant; and **Minimalism** and **Conceptual art**, both of which were known for esoteric intellectual explorations. For many artists of color in that period, on the other hand, going against that grain was of paramount importance, albeit using the contemporary visual and conceptual strategies of all these movements. Thus, while the incongruous surrealistic juxtapositions in Joseph Cornell's boxes offer ambiguity and mystery, Saar exploits the language of assemblage to make unequivocal statements about race and gender relations in American society.



Figure 8.1.7: Faith Ringgold, *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?* (1983), acrylic on canvas, dyed, painted and pieced fabric, 90 x 80″ (private collection)

Faith Ringgold's story quilt *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima* and **Jeff Donaldson's painting *Aunt Jemima Fighting the Pillsbury Doughboy*** are prominent examples of the same subject addressed by two other notable Black artists. Such innovative transgressions by Black American artists are, without question, groundbreaking contributions to the rich diversity of postwar American art.

****Following decades of protests and appeals, the Aunt Jemima logo was at last removed in 2020. Quaker Oats, the current owner of the brand, also announced that the name of the brand would change back to the Pearl Milling Company.*

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8.2: Nari Ward, We the People (black version)

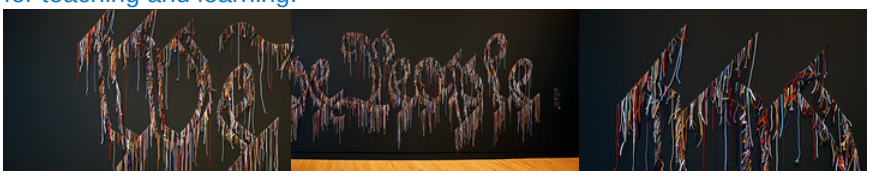
by DR. MINDY BESAW, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
182268

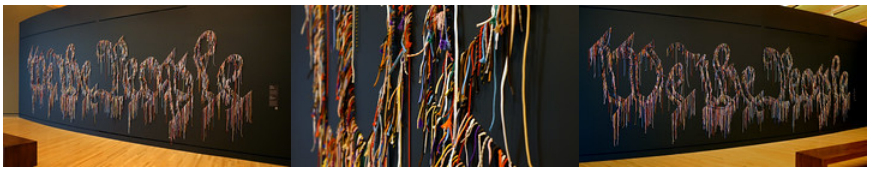


Video **8.2.1**: Nari Ward, *We the People (black version)*, 2015, shoelaces, 8 × 27 feet (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art), a Seeing America video

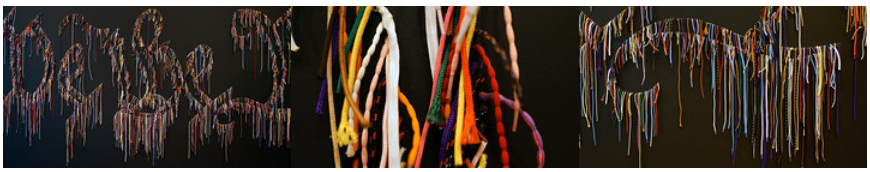
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SECTION OVERVIEW

8.3: Kara Walker

8.3.1: An interview with Kara Walker

8.3.2: Darkytown Rebellion

8.3.3: Kara Walker, A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Bab

8.3.4: Kara Walker, Fons Americanus

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8.3.1: An interview with Kara Walker

- by **SFMOMA**

Page ID

182270



Artist Kara Walker talks about on the often-violent subject matter of her work, and wonders what her imagination reflects about society as a whole.



Artist Kara Walker discusses her interest in popular literature, including romance novels, slave narratives, and even Thomas F. Dixon's 1905 novel *The Clansman*, and how all of these have influenced her work.

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8.3.2: Darkytown Rebellion

by DR. DORIS MARIA-REINA BRAVO

Page ID
182271

Brilliant patterns

The Art of Kara Walker, a "PBS Culture Shock" web activity, tests the participant's tolerance for imagery that occupies the nebulous space between racism and race affirmation. Though the activity gives the participant only two options at the end (whether or not to feature one of Walker's silhouettes on the "Culture Shock" homepage), the activity explores the multiple and complex reactions Walker's work elicits. Yet to focus solely on the controversy Walker's art generates is a disservice to her artistic training and the strength of her art, especially in a stunning and absorbing installation like *Darkytown Rebellion*. Here, a brilliant pattern of colors washes over a wall full of silhouettes enacting a dramatic rebellion, giving the viewer the unforgettable experience of stepping into a work of art. Walker's talent is not about creating controversy for its own sake, but building a world that unleashes horrors even as it seduces viewers.



Figure **8.3.2.1**: Kara Walker, *Darkytown Rebellion*, 2001, cut paper and projection on wall, 4.3 x 11.3m, (Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg) © Kara Walker

In contrast to larger-scale works like the 85 foot, *Slavery! Slavery!* (1997), *Darkytown Rebellion* occupies a 37 foot wide corner of a gallery. This ensemble, made up of over a dozen characters, plays out a nightmarish scene on a single plane: one figure stands upright over his severed limb, despite his bleeding leg stump, with bones protruding from his hips; another figure, also exhibiting a severed limb, rolls on his back; a woman with a bonnet and voluminous hoop skirt may be attacking a smaller figure on its back, perhaps a crying baby, with a long, plunger-like instrument.

Silhouettes and concealment

What is most remarkable about these scenes is how much each silhouette conceals. Without interior detail, the viewer can lose the information needed to determine gender, gauge whether a left or right leg was severed, or discern what exactly is in the black puddle beneath the woman's murderous tool. The color projections, whose abstract shapes recall the 1960s liquid light shows projected with psychedelic music, heighten the surreality of the scene.

Walker is a well-rounded multimedia artist, having begun her career in painting and expanded into film as well as works on paper. The layering she achieves with the color projections and silhouettes in *Darkytown Rebellion* anticipates her later work with shadow puppet films.

In addition to creating a striking viewer experience, *Darkytown Rebellion* reflects on the historical representation of African Americans in American visual culture. From the infamous Brookes slave ship print (1789), to *Birth of a Nation* (1915) to the Aunt Jemima logo (c.1890-today), powerful visuals shape African-American stereotypes and inform how popular culture perceives this community. Walker is one of several African-American women who use art to engage with and challenge visualizations of race within popular culture; others include Renee Cox, Adrian Piper, and Faith Ringgold.

Perverse ingenuity

Walker anchors much of her work in documents reflecting life before and after the Civil War. *The Daily Constitution 1878* (2011) emerged after Walker read an 1878 article from the eponymous Atlanta newspaper about a mob lynching a black woman and the brutal way the tree flung the woman's body into the air. Walker converted the article into a drawing because, as she stated, "it's this completely absurd, extreme, violent situation that required so much perverse ingenuity."[1]

Darkytown Rebellion is also born from a desire to translate the past into visual form. Walker discovered a landscape painting in *American Primitive Painting*, a book featuring artwork by unschooled artists. One anonymous landscape, mysteriously titled *Darkytown*, intrigued Walker and inspired her to remove the over-sized African-American caricatures. She placed them, along with more figures (a jockey, a rebel, and others), within a scene of rebellion, hence the re-worked title of her 2001 installation. Through *Darkytown Rebellion*, Walker is not attempting to correct a late-nineteenth century depiction of African-Americans but rather to broach a discussion: are these merely images from the past or do these caricatures still resonate in the twenty-first century?

Incomplete histories

Walker's dedication to recovering lost histories through art is a way of battling the historical erasure that plagues African Americans, like the woman lynched by the mob in Atlanta. Though this lynching was published, how many more have been forgotten? Who was this woman, what did she look like, why was she murdered? The impossibility of answering these questions finds a visual equivalent in the silhouetted voids in Walker's artistic practice.

Silhouettes began as a courtly art form in sixteenth-century Europe and became a suitable hobby for ladies and an economical alternative to painted miniatures, before devolving into a craft in the twentieth century. Traditionally silhouettes were made of the sitter's bust profile, cut into paper, affixed to a non-black background, and framed. Except for the outline of a forehead, nose, lips, and chin all the subject's facial details are lost in a silhouette, thus reducing the sitter to a few personal characteristics. In Walker's hands the minimalist silhouette becomes a tool for exploring racial identification. All things being equal, what distinguishes the white master from his slave in *Darkytown Rebellion*? Walker forces the viewer to confront the visual cues that make up stereotypes: these cues distill human forms into basic and arbitrary shapes that compose the basis of racial discrimination.

Though *Darkytown Rebellion* is full of shapes lacking detail, Walker reserves sharp outlines for faces and limbs. Walker's silhouettes are (mostly) full-bodied figures, captured in various poses from the traditional profile, to a three-quarter turn, to full frontal. This plurality of poses, often in a single body, is another example of obscured detail within the silhouette tradition: here not only is the face absent, but the body's action is also ambiguous. As mentioned earlier, it is impossible to make out which leg is severed on the standing figure near the corner, yet Walker manages to give the gory details of that man's tragedy. If traditional silhouettes illustrated a contained shape, Walker's figures overflow these boundaries, whether through graphic violence or metaphorically, in terms of subject matter.

Getting at the truth

In contrast to *The Daily Constitution 1878*, which was born from a news article, Walker herself developed the narrative for the orphaned figures that compose *Darkytown Rebellion*. Though the title suggests a historical event, both the original nineteenth-century painting and Walker's response are visual inventions rather than documents in a traditional sense. Walker enjoys this ambiguity between history and fiction: "I'm not making work about reality; I'm making work about images. I'm making work about fictions that have been handed down to me, and I'm interested in those fictions because I'm an artist, and any sort of attempt at getting at the truth of a thing, you kind of have to wade through these levels of fictions, and that's where the work is coming from."[2]

Darkytown Rebellion does not attempt to stitch together facts, but rather to create something more potent, to imagine the unimaginable brutalities of an era in a single glance.

1. Laura Barnett, "**Kara Walker's Art: Shadows of Slavery**," *The Guardian* (October 10, 2013)

2. "**Kara Walker Rattles Art World Again**," NPR (March 07, 2008)

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8.3.3: Kara Walker, A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Bab

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182272



By art21. an in-depth look at the creation of Kara Walker's monumental public project, "A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby" (2014), at the Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn, NY. Seated in her Manhattan studio, Walker explains how the molasses-covered space, along with her extensive research into the history of sugar, inspired her to create a colossal sugar-coated sphinx, as well as a series of life-sized, sugar and resin boy figurines. A team of artists and fabricators are shown constructing and coating the sphinx, which, as Walker says, gains its power by "upsetting expectations, one after the other." Commissioned by Creative Time, "A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby" is the first large-scale public project by Walker who is best known for her cut paper silhouette installations, drawings, and watercolors. "A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby" was on view until July 6, 2014. Thereafter, the factory is scheduled to be demolished to make way for condominiums. Kara Walker explores the raw intersection of race, gender, and sexuality in her work, crafting vivid psychological narratives from a contemporary perspective on historical conditions. Over the past two decades, Walker has unleashed the traditionally Victorian medium of the silhouette onto the walls of the gallery, creating immersive installations that envelop the viewer. Walker's multi-media work—which includes drawing, watercolor, video, and sculpture—often reconsider grotesque caricatures, probing their persistence in popular culture and reclaiming their subjugating power to alternative ends.

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8.3.4: Kara Walker, Fons Americanus

- by **TATE**

Page ID

182273



Fons Americanus is a 13-metre tall working fountain inspired by the Victoria Memorial in front of Buckingham Palace, London. Created by artist Kara Walker for the 2019 Hyundai Commission, it is one of the most ambitious installations in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall to date. Rather than a celebration of the British Empire, Walker's fountain explores the interconnected histories of Africa, America and Europe. She uses water as a key theme, referring to the transatlantic slave trade and the ambitions, fates and tragedies of people from these three continents. Fantasy, fact and fiction meet at an epic scale. Based in New York, Kara Walker is acclaimed for her candid explorations of race, sexuality and violence. She is best known for her use of black cut-paper silhouetted figures, referencing the history of slavery and the antebellum South in the US through provocative and elaborate installations. Tate Modern's Turbine Hall has hosted some of the world's most memorable and acclaimed large-scale works of art, enjoyed by audiences of millions each year. This is the fifth installation in the ten-year series of the Hyundai Commission following the work of Abraham Cruzvillegas in 2015, Philippe Parreno in 2016, SUPERFLEX in 2017 and Tania Bruguera in 2018.

Additional resources

Learn more about this work by Kara Walker

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8.4: Alison Saar, Topsy and the Golden Fleece

Page ID
182274

Jason and the Golden Fleece and the American anti-Slavery novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin combine to upend our own contemporary myths



Alison Saar, *Topsy and the Golden Fleece*, 2017, wood, tar, steel, ceiling tin, wire, acrylic paint and gold leaf, 35-1/2 x 11-1/2 x-8 1/2 inches (Toledo Museum of Art, ©Alison Saar)

Additional resources

This sculpture at the museum

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SECTION OVERVIEW

8.5: Kerry James Marshall

8.5.1: An interview with Kerry James Marshall about his series Mementos

8.5.2: Kerry James Marshall- Mastry

8.5.3: Kerry James Marshall on his process

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8.5.1: An interview with Kerry James Marshall about his series Mementos

- by **SFMOMA**

Page ID

182276



Artist Kerry James Marshall explains the background of his series Mementos (1994–2003). The paintings and lithographs were inspired by Marshall's memory of 1960s-era souvenirs commemorating heroes of the civil rights movement. By San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.



Artist Kerry James Marshall discusses his relationship to the Old Masters and considers his inspiration for developing a "rhetoric of blackness" in his painting series Mementos (1994–2003). By San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

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8.5.2: Kerry James Marshall- Mastry

by **MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, CHICAGO**

Page ID

182277



This video featuring Kerry James Marshall talking about his practice and the ideas driving it accompanied the exhibition Kerry James Marshall: Mastry, organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. The exhibition is cocurated by Dieter Roelstraete, former Manilow Senior Curator at the MCA; Helen Molesworth, Chief Curator at MOCA; and Ian Alteveer, Associate Curator at The Met. At the MCA, the exhibition was realized with the assistance of former Curatorial Assistant Karsten Lund and former Research Associate Abigail Winograd.

This page titled 8.5.2: Kerry James Marshall- Mastry is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, "Kerry James Marshall: Mastry," in Smarthistory, May 10, 2021, accessed December 22, 2022, https://smarthistory.org/kerry-james-marshall-mastry/..

8.5.3: Kerry James Marshall on his process

by **THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART**

Page ID

182278



Kerry James Marshall: Mastry is his first major retrospective in the United States, and includes nearly 80 paintings, all of which contain images of Black subjects going about their daily business, presented with utter equality and humanity. A deeply accomplished artist, who makes ravishing paintings, Marshall's strategy was three fold. First, as a young artist he decided to paint only black figures. He was unequivocal in his pursuit of black beauty. His figures are an unapologetic ebony black, and they occupy the paintings with a sense of authority and belonging. Second, Marshall worked to make a wide variety of images populated with black people. This led him to make exquisite portraits, lush landscape paintings, everyday domestic interiors, and paintings that depict historical events, all featuring black subjects as if their activities were completely and utterly normal. Third, Marshall concentrated on painterly mastery as a fundamental strategy. By mastering the art of representational and figurative painting, during a period when neither was in vogue, Marshall produced a body of work that bestows beauty and dignity where it had long been denied.

In his studio in Chicago, Marshall discusses his career, his strategies to circumvent institutional inequality, and his mission to diversify the cultural representations that are prioritized and historicized by the museum and art history canon.

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8.6: Clarissa Rizal, Resilience Robe

- by **LILY HOPE AT PORTLAND ART MUSEUM** and **DR. BETH HARRIS**

Page ID

182279



Clarissa Rizal, Resilience Robe, 2014, merino wool, 64 x 53 inches (Portland Art Museum)

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8.7: Tenzing Rigdol, Pin drop silence- Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara

by DR. SARAH MAGNATTA

Page ID
182280



Figure **8.7.1**: Tenzing Rigdol, *Pin drop silence: Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara*, 2013, ink, pencil, acrylic, and pastel on paper, 232.7 x 124.8 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**, Gift of Andrew Cohen, in honor of Tenzing Rigdol and Fabio Rossi, 2013) © Tenzing Rigdol

In Tenzing Rigdol's monumental painting, *Pin drop silence: Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara*, we encounter a traditional **Buddhist** deity—though the artwork itself is anything but conventional in form, material, or meaning. Rigdol uses a combination of acrylic paint, pastel, and pieces of manuscript pages assembled on paper to create a complex rendering of a multi-armed, multi-headed deity—over seven feet tall—who emerges between the interlocking edges of a grid-like overlay. Although the main figure is one that is recognizably sacred for **Tibetan** Buddhist practitioners, the work itself constitutes a radical departure from historical precedent, and reflects contemporary questions surrounding exile, activism, and cultural heritage.

Rigdol was born in 1982 in Kathmandu, Nepal. His parents fled Tibet in the late 1960s and worked in Nepal's carpet industry. After training in traditional Tibetan arts, including *thangka* painting (a painting on fabric depicting a Buddhist subject), sand painting, and butter sculpture, the artist turned to contemporary modes of representation. He is one of the first contemporary Tibetan artists to have his work collected by major institutions, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art. By using culturally specific forms in radically new compositions, Rigdol shifts his work's focus away from the spiritual symbolism often associated with Tibetan art, and towards more politically charged content.



Figure 8.7.2: Avalokiteshvara (Bodhisattva & Buddhist Deity) – Sahasrabhujalokeshvara (11 faces, 1000 Hands), 19th century, Eastern Tibet, ground mineral pigment on cotton (private collection)

Who is Avalokiteshvara?

In the center of *Pin drop silence* is the Buddhist deity known as Avalokiteshvara (Tibetan: *Chenrezig*). Avalokiteshvara is a *bodhisattva* (an enlightened being who helps others achieve enlightenment) and is the embodiment of compassion. Avalokiteshvara remains a major figure in Buddhist art throughout Asia (he is known as Guanyin in China). The Dalai Lama is viewed as the earthly incarnation of Avalokiteshvara by practitioners, and as such, plays an important role in Tibetan Buddhism.



Figure 8.7.3: Tenzing Rigdol, *Pin drop silence: Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara* (detail), 2013, ink, pencil, acrylic, and pastel on paper, 232.7 x 124.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Andrew Cohen, in honor of Tenzing Rigdol and Fabio Rossi, 2013) © Tenzing Rigdol

In *Pin drop silence*, Avalokiteshvara is shown in his eleven-headed form, a reference to his head splitting into several parts in order to more fully observe the world and disseminate compassion. Unlike traditional imagery of Avalokiteshvara, however, none of Rigdol's Avalokiteshvara's heads are given a face. For orthodox Tibetan Buddhist practitioners, this omission is significant; *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* are traditionally drawn with very specific guidelines and gridlines in place, including precise renderings of facial features. Here, Rigdol omits these features and seemingly splits the image into pieces with his use of gridlines.



Figure **8.7.4**: Tenzing Rigdol, *Pin drop silence: Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara* (detail), 2013, ink, pencil, acrylic, and pastel on paper, 232.7 x 124.8 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**, Gift of Andrew Cohen, in honor of Tenzing Rigdol and Fabio Rossi, 2013) © Tenzing Rigdol

Guidelines and Gridlines

In traditional Tibetan Buddhist painting known as *thangka*, gridlines were (and are) used as guides to ensure the proper placement and depiction of *buddhas* (of which there are many, not just the historical **Buddha Shakyamuni**) and *bodhisattvas*. The lines are the first step of the process, and they are ultimately covered by the paint—they function merely as guidelines for the artist. Yet Rigdol makes gridlines a major component of *Pin drop silence*. They divide the image, deconstructing the form of Avalokiteshvara through their presence.

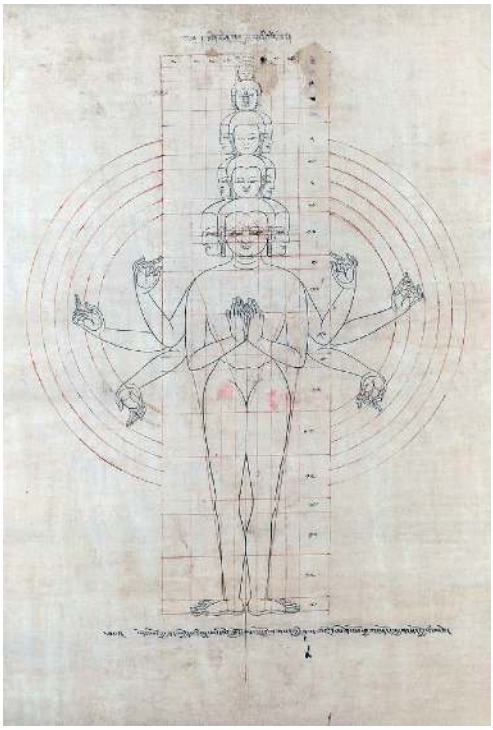


Figure **8.7.5**: Traditional use of gridlines, Buddhist (**private collection**)

Rigdol has referenced his early work as a carpet designer in Nepal as an additional point of reference for these gridlines (the design process for carpets uses a matrix as well). Further, some scholars have noted similarities between Rigdol's affinity for grids and lines and those of the modernist **De Stijl** artist **Piet Mondrian**, for whom geometric abstraction held spiritual or utopian value. [1] Rigdol says this about the lines:

> ***Lines are innocent, direct and uncompromising. There is a sense of contentment within the geometric forms. They exert no pressure on me, but instead pull me towards them to look closer. [2]***

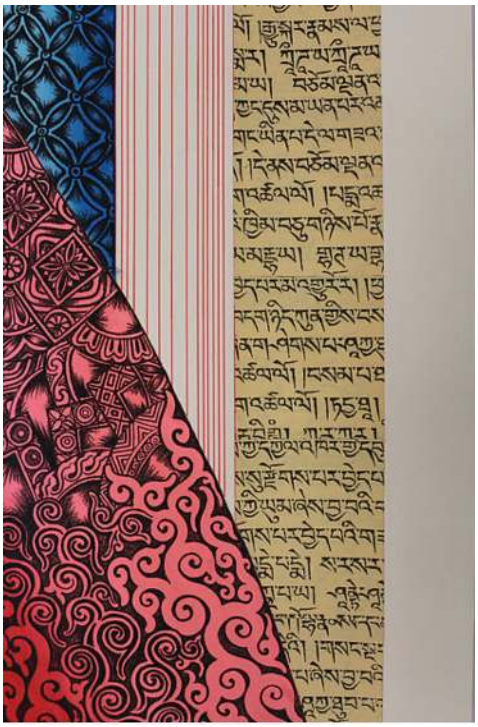


Figure **8.7.6**: Tenzing Rigdol, *Pin drop silence: Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara* (detail), 2013, ink, pencil, acrylic, and pastel on paper, 232.7 x 124.8 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**, Gift of Andrew Cohen, in honor of Tenzing Rigdol and Fabio Rossi, 2013) © Tenzing Rigdol

Replacing the Background



Figure **8.7.7**: Detail of Avalokiteshvara, 19th century, Eastern Tibet, ground mineral pigment on cotton (**private collection**)

The gridlines in Rigdol's work are constructed from intersecting fragments of manuscript pages, which hold a personal meaning for the artist. Rigdol's family had been in business as ink manufacturers in Tibet prior to their escape to Nepal in the late 1960s. This ink was used by monasteries to print the Buddhist manuscript pages used by monks, nuns, and lay Buddhist practitioners.

The script on these pages is known as *u-chen*, and is utilized across the Tibetan plateau. (Though the dialects differ across the region, this script can be read by many Tibetans). In traditional Tibetan *thangka*, the backgrounds often incorporated influences from Chinese landscape painting. By "replacing" that landscape with the unifying Tibetan script, Rigdol reimagines "tradition," questioning the role of Chinese landscape painting in the history of Tibetan art.

As he notes:

> ***Historically, the landscape elements in Tibetan thangka painting—the clouds, the rivers and so on—were influenced by Chinese painting. They later got an upgrade in Tibetan art. I have often said, sometimes jokingly and sometimes seriously, that in adopting Chinese style landscapes in their paintings, Tibetan artists of the past were foretelling the colonization of Tibet's land, sky, rivers and mountains by the Chinese. In 1959, when Tibet lost its country, the prophecy was fulfilled. [3]***

In this passage, Rigdol refers to a series of events in the 1950s that established Chinese rule over Tibet. There exist two opposing narratives about this period: the Chinese government and Chinese history books refer to it as the "Peaceful Liberation of Tibet," whereas Tibetans view the period as a devastating takeover of their land by colonizing forces, the "Chinese invasion of Tibet." Although many decades have now passed, there is still great strife in the region (now called the Tibet Autonomous Region, or TAR), resulting in ongoing political protests and efforts to silence dissent.

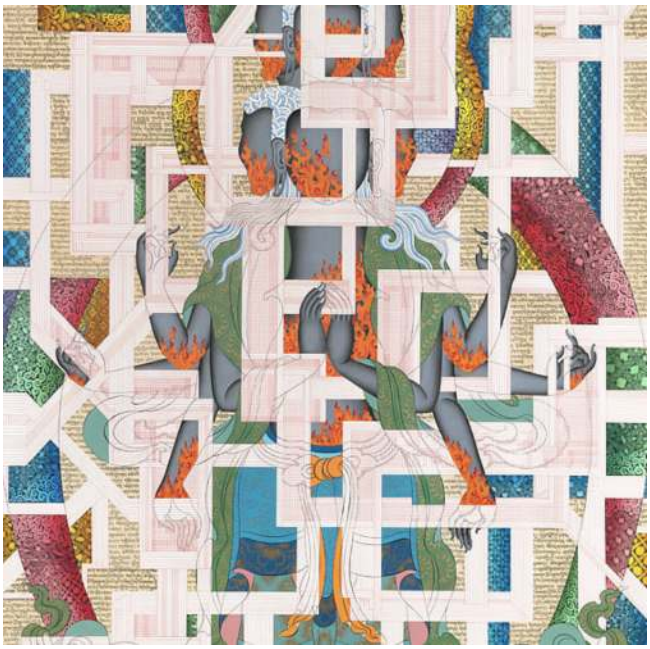


Figure **8.7.8**: Tenzing Rigdol, *Pin drop silence: Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara* (detail), 2013, ink, pencil, acrylic, and pastel on paper, 232.7 x 124.8 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**, Gift of Andrew Cohen, in honor of Tenzing Rigdol and Fabio Rossi, 2013) © Tenzing Rigdol

Representing self-sacrifice



Figure **8.7.9**: Tenzing Rigdol, *My World Is in Your Blind Spot* (1 of 5 panels), 2014, silk brocade, scripture, photographs, 72 x 72" (182 x 182 cm each) (image courtesy of Tenzing Rigdol and Rossi & Rossi) © Tenzing Rigdol

Rigdol incorporates flames throughout the body of the deity, a reference to the ongoing self-immolation by Tibetans. Since 2009, 156 Tibetans have publicly protested the rule of the Chinese government by setting themselves on fire, often resulting in death. [4]

Another work by Rigdol, *My World Is in Your Blind Spot*, incorporates these flames. This work is a direct reference to the lack of attention that these devastating protests have had in the international community. *My World Is in Your Blind Spot* is a series of five works that shows *buddhas* in meditative postures, with flames appearing within the contours of their bodies. Rigdol photographed the flames and then cut the images apart before reassembling them, claiming a preference for a "calm" and dignified flame rather than an aggressive flame to honor the sacrifice of so many Tibetans. The casual viewer of Rigdol's work is likely unaware of these protests. While the panels are beautiful to look at, they are devastating to comprehend. This political statement would not be permitted in the Tibet Autonomous Region because of strict censorship imposed by China, instead it was made in exile.

Rigdol is one of many contemporary Tibetan artists who has never set foot in Tibet. In exile communities scattered around the world, artists have established a visible global presence by creating group exhibitions such as *Waves on the Turquoise Lake* (2006), *Traditions Transformed* (2010) and *Anonymous* (2013–2015), all of which showcased work by artists located both in the Tibet Autonomous Region and those working in exile communities. Many of these artists incorporate Buddhist elements in their work, although in some cases this inclusion is more of a nod to a cultural connection than to religious identity (artists may or may not be Buddhist practitioners, and the work in these exhibitions was rarely meant to function in a sacred manner). Yet, the relationship to Tibet is firmly established, as it is in *Pin drop silence: Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara*.

Notes:

[1] Francesca Gavin, "The Construction of Harmony," *Tenzing Rigdol: Experiment with Forms* exhibition catalog (Rossi & Rossi Ltd., 2009), p. 9.

[2] Gavin, "The Construction of Harmony," p. 9.

[3] Interview of Tenzing Rigdol by Fabio Rossi, 2015 Accessed August, 2018.

[4] The International Campaign for Tibet lists the current number of self-immolations at 156, though the actual number may be higher, "Self-immolation Fact Sheet"

Additional resources:

Kurt Behrendt, "Tibetan Buddhist Art in the Twenty-First Century" (March 12, 2014)

Rossi Rossi

Sarah Magnatta, "Between the Lines," *Tenzing Rigdol: Dialogue*, exhibition catalog (Rossi & Rossi Ltd., 2019).

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- **12.5: Ritual, spirituality, and transcendence** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

8.8: Thornton Dial, Blood and Meat- Survival For The World

by TIMOTHY ANGLIN BURGARD, FINE ARTS MUSEUMS OF SAN FRANCISCO and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
182281



Video **8.8.3**: Thornton Dial, *Blood and Meat: Survival For The World*, 1992, rope, carpet, copper Wire, metal, canvas scraps, enamel, and splash zone compound on canvas on wood, 165.1 x 241.3 x 27.9 cm (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, ©Thornton Dial), a Seeing America video

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- **12.6: Histories, real and imagined** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

8.9: Titus Kaphar, The Cost of Removal

by LAUREN HAYNES, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART) and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
182282

Kaphar takes a violent history and renders it visible in this modified portrait of Andrew Jackson.



Video **8.9.1**: Titus Kaphar, *The Cost of Removal*, 2017, oil, canvas, and rusted nails on canvas, 274.3 x 213.4 x 3.8 cm, © Titus Kaphar (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art)

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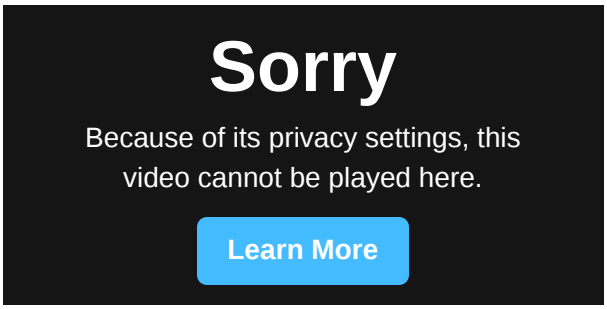
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8.10: Omar Victor Diop- Black subjects in the frame

- by **HENI TALKS**

Page ID

182283



Omar Victor Diop: Black Subjects in the Frame from **HENI Talks** on **Vimeo**.

The relationship between the state and the black subject is, in many ways, still a highly contested one. What can we draw from historic imagery in order to move forward?

In this HENI Talk, Dr Mark Sealy examines black identity during moments of social upheaval and confrontation, as represented in the oeuvre of artist Omar Victor Diop. In his photographic portraits, Diop uses his own body to restage charged moments in history in a quest for us to look at and learn from these events afresh. His work encourages the viewer to question the narrative of history that we are traditionally taught and see black people themselves as the agents of change – exploring, for example, the role of black slaves during the first major revolt in Haiti in the 1790s, or the grassroots dimension of the US civil rights movement in the 1960s, or the often hidden presence of black women in the history of activism.

Press play to hear some of the ways the framing of black identity through history has hindered, obscured and liberated the lives of many people across the globe.

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8.11: Wendy Red Star, 1880 Crow Peace Delegation

by WENDY RED STAR AT PORTLAND ART MUSEUM and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
182284



Video 8.11.6: Wendy Red Star, *1880 Crow Peace Delegation: Peelatchiwaaxpáash/Medicine Crow (Raven), Peelatchixaaliash/Old Crow (Raven), Déaxitchish/Pretty Eagle, Bia Eélisaash/Large Stomach Woman (Pregnant Woman) aka Two Belly, Alaxchiiaahush/Many War Achievements or Plenty Coups aka Chíilaphuchissaaleesh/Buffalo Bull Facing The Wind*, 2014, 10 inket prints and red ink on paper, 16 15/16 x 11 15/16 inches (each) © Wendy Red Star (Portland Art Museum)

This page titled 8.11: Wendy Red Star, 1880 Crow Peace Delegation is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Wendy Red Star at Portland Art Museum and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Wendy Red Star, 1880 Crow Peace Delegation," in Smarthistory, September 7, 2018, accessed December 5, 2020, https://smarthistory.org/wendy-red-star-1880-crow-peace-delegation/..

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8.12: Yee I-Lann, Picturing Power #6…

by **SOYOON RYU**

Page ID
182285

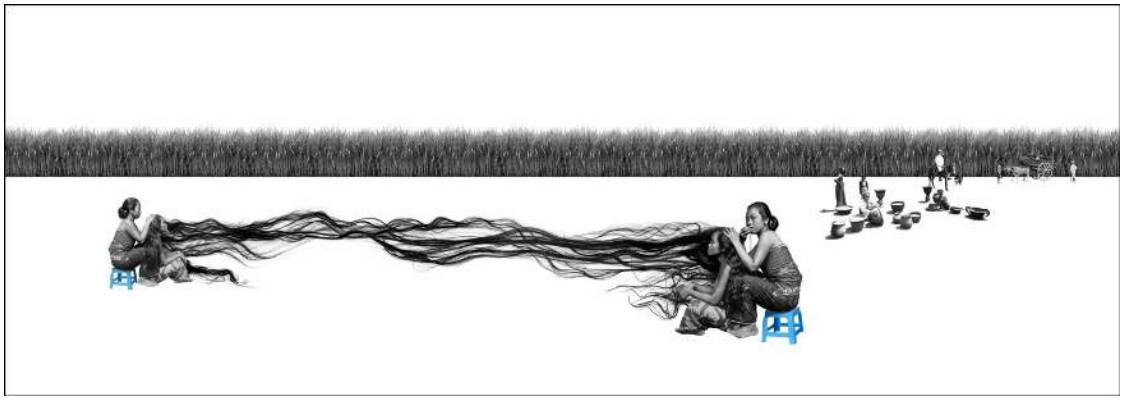


Figure **8.12.1**: Yee I-Lann, *Picturing Power #6: Wherein one cultivates cultural codes, the noble endeavors of mankind and thereby puts them in their place*, 2013, Giclée print on cotton rag paper, 25 x 71 inches (courtesy of the artist)

Picturing Power #6 by Yee I-Lann presents two prominent horizontal elements. Above, a row of sugarcane spans the width of the picture as an almost perfect line. Below, the undulating hair of a Javanese woman stretches across a white field. Accompanying this woman is another who delouses her scalp while sitting on a light blue plastic stool—the only color in an otherwise black-and-white image. This woman looks up at the camera with a sharp, penetrating gaze. This pair appears again, reversed, on left side of the image. Their scale and placement locates the pair on the left in the middle ground, while the pair on the right is set in the foreground. Potters can be seen in the distance, and beyond them, a figure stands before a cart laden with harvested sugarcane while another squats nearby. These figures are flanked by the two men in white suits, overseers who recall the enforcement of the coercive labor practices used against local people when Java was under Dutch control.

Picturing Power #6 is part of a digital photomontage series made with images sourced from a **Dutch colonial** archive. This collection, currently housed at the Tropenmuseum of Amsterdam, offers visual documentation of the nearly 400-year-long history of colonialism in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), Dutch Formosa (now Taiwan), and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). In Yee's photomontage series, these black-and-white archival images are digitally stripped of their backgrounds and recontextualized. Yee's *Picturing Power #6*—and the series as a whole—narrates how the histories of colonialism in Southeast Asia reverberate to the present moment. At the same time, Yee's arrangement of the images challenge the original intent of the archival source material, turning it into one of refusal and recovery.

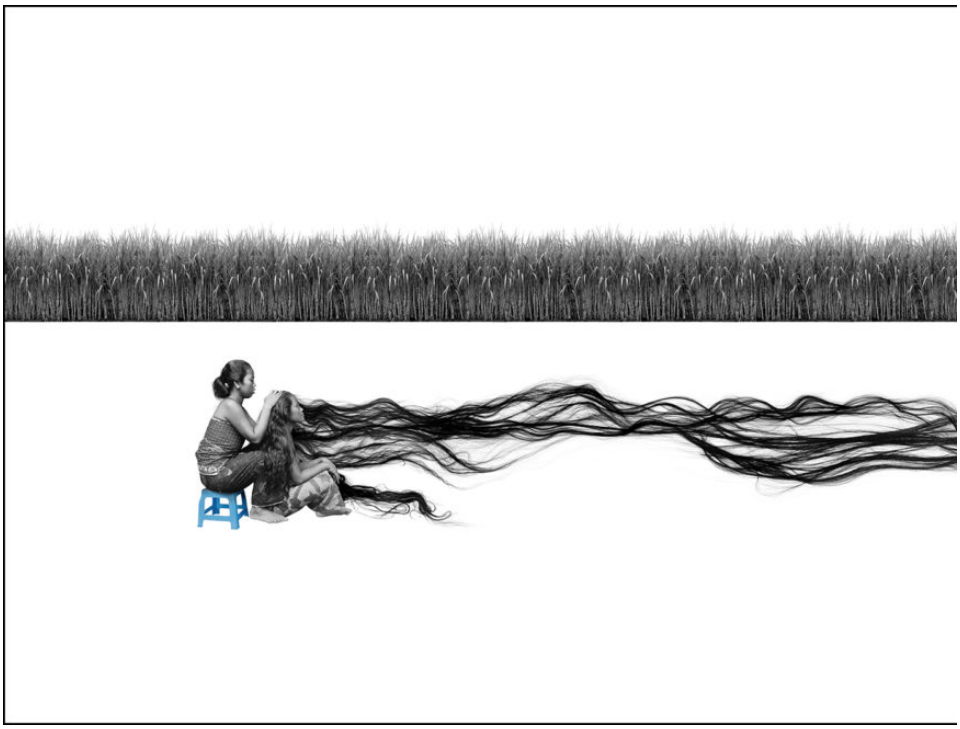


Figure **8.12.2**: Yee I-Lann, detail with left half of *Picturing Power #6: Wherein one cultivates cultural codes, the noble endeavors of mankind and thereby puts them in their place*, 2013, Giclée print on cotton rag paper, 25 x 71 inches (courtesy of the artist)

Bringing historical archives to the present

The horizontal axis of sugarcane is formed from the multiplication of a single image that repeats over and over, creating a visual barrier at the horizon. The artist's decision to multiply the same image is not unlike the method of monocultural farming, a dominant mode of colonial agricultural production in the regions spanning present-day Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Monocultural farming replaced crop variety with a single variant. As a result, a biodiverse indigenous agriculture was replaced by a system of large plantations that maximized the yield of cash crops for the global market.

Sugarcane was one of these cash crops. The Dutch oversaw sugar production in Java in the 17th century, and by 19th century the Dutch colony was one of the world's leading producers of sugar. This very lucrative colonial trade depleted the soil and required the work of an enormous number of laborers. Yee's linear arrangement of the same archival image of sugarcane references the serialized, industrial landscapes created by monocrop plantation—while also implying their persistence beyond the colonial era.



Figure **8.12.3**: Yee I-Lann, right half of *Picturing Power #6: Wherein one cultivates cultural codes, the noble endeavors of mankind and thereby puts them in their place*, 2013, Giclée print on cotton rag paper, 25 x 71 inches (courtesy of the artist)

With sugarcane as a backdrop, the images of Javanese people and colonial administrators are stitched together to form an orthogonal line that moves from the lower left to the upper right and evokes one-point linear perspective. The perspective draws our attention to the women seated in foreground and their doubles in the middle ground. One sitter delouses the other. The synthetic hue of the stool upon which she sits (and which replaced a wood block in the original photograph) implies that these figures no longer belong solely to the 19th century. These women exist in the past and in the present, a result of the artist's digital intervention. They are set against a jarring whiteness, and the almost impossibly long stands of hair that bind together the two pairs of women adds a supernatural element to the image.



Figure 8.12.4: Studio Portrait of two women delousing, c. 1870–92, paper, 5.5 x 3.75 inches (Tropenmuseum Amsterdam)

Enacting refusal of the colonial archive

The original archival photos were taken in a photography studio against a painted backdrop depicting a landscape with palm trees. The sitter would likely have posed in front of a large camera while following the photographer's instructions to enact delousing, holding still during the extended exposure of the photographic plate. The photo itself exposes the anthropological guise of the project as a social scientific study of indigenous people and their livelihoods. This is readily apparent when similar photographs in the Tropenmuseum archive are compared. In nearly identical compositions, the sitters gaze remains contained within the vignette. This act of delousing is reproduced over and over in the archive, having been circulated as postcards, souvenirs, and photo albums, and so forming a colonial narrative of Javanese women as "primitive."

Colonial photographs such as these highlight the stark division between who observes whom, and this hierarchy is reinforced by racialized and sexualized tropes such as the enactment of delousing. The artist's choice to work with these particular images was part of her effort to challenge the narrative of disempowered colonized women. By focusing on one woman's split second refusal to passively accept the colonizer's gaze—to glance back—the artist could reverse the asymmetry of colonial power documented in these photographs.

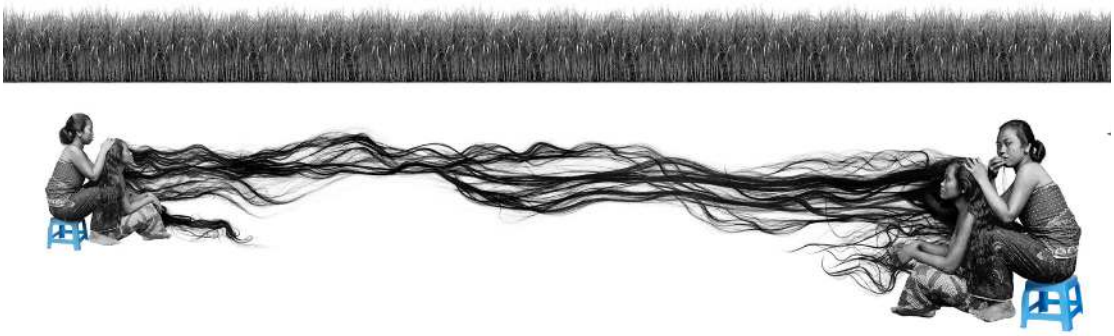


Figure **8.12.5**: Yee I-Lann, *Picturing Power #6: Wherein one cultivates cultural codes, the noble endeavors of mankind and thereby puts them in their place* (detail), 2013, Giclée print on cotton rag paper, 25 x 71 inches (courtesy of the artist)

Through the careful selection and reorganization of archival images, the artist disrupts the colonial-era narrative and reorients who is doing the seeing and who is being seen. While this strategy is visible in Yee's earlier work (*Horizon* series (2003) and *Sulu Stories* (2005) are examples), *Picturing Power #6* is perhaps her most explicit effort to counter these damaging narratives. Yee recognized the importance of a rare photo that documents one of the women looking up directly at the camera. The woman's discomfort at being photographed is evident, but in this moment she further refuses the role of passive object by choosing to look back at us.



Figure **8.12.6**: Yee I-Lann, *Kinabalu Series: Huminodun*, 2007, color digital print, 105 x 204 cm (courtesy of the artist)

As we have seen, Yee's intervention goes beyond thoughtful archival selection. By digitally mirroring images of the two women, self encounters self, connected by hair so long that it becomes an abstraction. Yee featured similarly long hair in earlier work that depicts the goddess Huminodun. Given this subject, we can read the two women in *Picturing Power #6* as two mythological beings. Like Huminodun, they might heal the earth that has been ravaged and depleted by sugarcane.

In a visual field defined by the colonial practices of global capitalism, sugarcane monoculture, and the disempowerment of indigenous women, *Picturing Power #6* presents a goddess who gazes back at the camera and the viewer. Yee's formulations lay bare the prejudices of the archive, infiltrating and destabilizing it while attesting to the possibility of resistance, even if only through a momentary glance. Her work allows the photographed object to become narrators of their own stories.

Additional resources

Alexander Supartono and Alexandra Moschovi, “Contesting colonial (hi)stories: (Post)colonial imaginings of South East Asia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 51, no. 3 (2020): pp. 343–371.

Yee I-Lann and Huzir Sulaiman, “A Sense of Place and a Sense of Home: An Interview with Yee I-Lann” in Beverly Yong and Adeline Ooi eds., *Fluid World* (Kuala Lumpur: Valentine Willie Fine Art, 2010).

Siti Fariza Md Nor and Sarena Abdullah, “Analysing the Strategy of Subversion in Yee I-Lann’s *Picturing Power* (2013) Photomontages,” *JATI* 22 (December 2017).

For a more concise account of the theorization of refusal, see Tina Campt, “**Black visuality and the practice of refusal**,” Women & Performance (February 25, 2019)

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8.13: Roger Shimomura, Diary- December 12, 1941

by DR. SARAH NEWMAN, SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID

182286

Superman makes an appearance in what looks (at first sight) like a Japanese print.



Roger Shimomura, *Diary: December 12, 1941*, 1980, acrylic on canvas, 127.6 x 152.4 cm (Smithsonian American Art Museum, gift of the artist, © Roger Shimomura). A conversation with Dr. Sarah Newman, James Dicke Curator of Contemporary Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum, and Dr. Beth Harris.

This Seeing America video was made possible by a generous grant from the Terra Foundation and the Alice L. Walton Foundation.

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Shimomura's website

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Smithsonian Learning Lab collection on Japanese American Internment, Propaganda, and Superheroes

This page titled 8.13: Roger Shimomura, Diary- December 12, 1941 is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Sarah Newman, Smithsonian American Art Museum and Dr. Beth Harris, "Superman, World War II, and Japanese-American experience," in Smarthistory, October 16, 2019, accessed December 22, 2022, https://smarthistory.org/shimomura/..

8.14: An interview with Fred Wilson about the conventions of museums and race

- by **SFMOMA**

Page ID

182287



Beginning in the early 1990s, Fred Wilson shook the museum world with his artistic interventions. At the Maryland Historical Society, he used the conventions of the the museum itself to comment on race, with startling juxtapositions such as 19th century armchairs displayed with slave shackles and a whipping post amongst finely crafted woodworking. His work uncovers inherent cultural biases and disrupts the more traditional way many Americans understand museums. By San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

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8.15: Ken Gonzales-Day, Erased Lynching Series

by DR. MARY TRENT

Page ID
182288



Figure 8.15.1: Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abraham S. Smith, Marion, IN. 1930*, Erased Lynchings Set III, 2006–19. Archival inkjet print on rag paper mounted on cardstock. 4.5 x 6 inches

A photographer's flash illuminates a crowd gathered at night looking up at the branches of a tree. Several onlookers turn to make eye contact with the camera. One points at the branches above to draw the viewer's gaze to the subject of the crowd's attention. Yet, nothing is there but a dark emptiness. A notation scratched into the photograph's emulsion marks the location as the small city of Marion, Indiana, and the date as August 7, 1930. On that day, a (warning: the original violent image will be visible if you click on the following link) **notorious lynching** occurred of two young African American men—Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith—who had been arrested as suspects in a robbery, murder, and rape case. After their arrest, word spread fast across Indiana that an unofficial hanging of the men was planned. A crowd of thousands, many of whom had traveled to Marion by train for the event, broke into the jail. Unwilling to await a trial, they dragged the young men out, brutally beat and killed them, hanging their bodies from a tree in the courthouse yard.

Photography and lynching

Local photographer Lawrence Beitler captured the crowd posing below the bodies of Shipp and Smith. He printed and sold thousands of copies. Lynching photographs like this one proliferated in the United States during the first decades of the twentieth century. Friends and family collected them, shared them, and even mailed them as postcards. The trend was so popular that the U.S. Postal Service had to ban their distribution via mail in 1908, though they continued to be shared in other ways. Later, they would largely be forgotten by the public until a New York exhibition of a private collection of 145 such photographs resurfaced them in 2000, resulting in subsequent publications and exhibitions.

In 2002, Ken Gonzales-Day began to research and manipulate these newly unearthed photographs of historical lynchings in the United States. Using Adobe Photoshop, he removed the victims' bodies and the ropes from dozens of images, including Beitler's. He then reprinted them at a similar size and on cardstock to replicate the scale and materiality of the original works, as in the example above. By removing the brutally beaten bodies like Shipp's and Smith's, his images prevent re-victimizing the subjects of the violence. They also avoid shocking contemporary audiences and creating feelings of helplessness . Additionally, they resist the fetishistic, sadistic spectatorship of viewing abused Black bodies. Nevertheless, the artist retains his subjects' identities. If it is known or can be uncovered through his research, Gonzales-Day adds the victims' names to the titles, along with the dates and

locations of their deaths. In this way, his image still honors the memory of the victims. It is almost as if his photographs have respectfully taken down and properly buried the bodies, while exposing the crowds to the viewers' gaze.

The above photograph belongs to Gonzales-Day's *Erased Lynchings* series, which shifts contemporary viewers' focus to the men, women, and children socializing underneath. Pressed closely together with some smiling, the crowds seem to enjoy the empowerment brought about by their collective action and ritual, and to invite the viewer into the celebration. In fact, the original images were celebratory assertions of a white community's power, which was meant to extend to any willing white witness of the event or its photographic depiction.

These images also functioned as weapons of terror. They were part of a broader campaign to threaten Black communities in the post-Civil War era. These threats were directed at Black claims for political, social, or economic equality with white people, such as attempting to vote.

According to the Equal Justice Initiative,

> ***After slavery was formally abolished, lynching emerged as a vicious tool of racial control to reestablish white supremacy and suppress Black civil rights. More than 4,000 African Americans were lynched across twenty states between 1877 and 1950. These lynchings were public acts of racial terrorism, intended to instill fear in entire Black Communities. Government officials frequently turned a blind eye or condoned the mob violence.Equal Justice Initiative***



Figure 8.15.2: Ken Gonzales-Day, *This Is What He Got*, Erased Lynching Series, 2006. Dye coupler print mounted on card stock, 3 3/4 x 6 inches (Edition 3 of 6, Norton Museum, Palm Beach, FL; AP 1/2: Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.)

This rise of lynching photography corresponded with a general increase in lynching fatalities in the United States starting in the late nineteenth century after Reconstruction. According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, there were 4,743 known deaths due to lynching between 1882–1968. These were extra-legal, vigilante killings of individuals whom mobs, or smaller vigilante groups, claimed had committed some transgression. Often the victims, men, women and even children, were from historically oppressed or marginalized groups, with Black Americans making up the majority. Historians today understand these attacks as spurred by rising fears among Anglo American communities that their demographic and economic power was threatened by African Americans and immigrants. In response, lynch mobs violently reasserted white authority. For their original viewers,

these photographs asserted that justice had been done, and white power protected. In one of Gonzales-Day's reproductions, we see where someone has penned on the backside to the card's recipient "this is what he got."

Gonzales-Day was originally inspired to start the series after the rise in anti-immigrant rhetoric and vigilantism along the Southern U.S. border in the early 2000s. A Los-Angeles based Mexican American, he heard echoes of the rhetoric used to justify lynching in the calls by radicalized white men for armed Americans to patrol the Southern borders against migrants. Gonzales-Day sought to shift viewers' attention away from the hyperbolic accusations that criminalize racial minorities to the aggression of the vigilantes. His images seek to prompt viewers to question the true threat to American communities in the past and today—racial minorities or white supremacist vigilantism?

Gonzales-Day's project also expands awareness of the diverse of targets of lynching. The original exhibition of lynching photography in 2000 presented lynching victims as Black men, predominantly in the South. While these comprised the vast majority of cases, Gonzales-Day has increased knowledge and awareness about other types of lynchings: Black fatalities in the North, West, and mid-West (like Shipp and Smith), female victims, and victims of other races and ethnicities including Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian Americans. He conducted rigorous scholarly research and published, *Lynching in the West: 1850–1935* (published by Duke University Press), which raised the number of documented lynchings in California from 50 to 350. Both through his art and his research, Gonzales-Day works to counteract the erasure of lynching victims from historical knowledge, while (paradoxically) erasing the problematic visuals of lynching's spectacularized violence.



Figure **8.15.3**: Ken Gonzales–Day, *Lynched by a mob of about 300: William Null, Garland Stemler, Louis Moreno, Laurence H. Johnson, Yreka, CA, 1895*, Erased Lynchings Set III (Postcards), 2019, lightjet print on archival cardstock, 6 × 4 in

The 1895 photograph of a (warning: this violent image will be visible if you click on the following link) **quadruple lynching** in the northern California town of Yreka, for example, originally depicted four bodies, one of whom (Louis Moreno) was described at the time as a "Spaniard," though he was actually a Mexican citizen. [1] The men had been arrested for murder, but a local mob did not wait for due process. After breaking into the jail, they lynched the suspects beside the courthouse.

Captions around the photograph recount the mob as having "about 300 people." Yet, the photograph does not depict the vigilantes, but instead the white picket fence of the courthouse yard. With the four hanging victims removed, only the ghostly railing remains against the black night sky, with shadows of the erased corpses eerily cast upon it. In the twentieth century, white picket fences were iconic American symbols positively associated with the nation's strong middle-class and its ability to own private family property. By removing the bodies from the original photograph, Gonzales–Day asks viewers to think more critically about what the

fence has negatively symbolized for people of color, who have historically been denial equal access to middle-class homeownership and prosperity not only via redlining, neighborhood segregation, and the erection of gated communities that are often predominently or entirely white, but also through the imposition of vigilante lynch threats made to people of color attempting to integrate middle class neighborhoods. Gonzales–Day's focus on the fence may be intended to echo contemporary efforts to build a wall separating the United States from Mexico to keep out immigrants and refugees seeking greater safety and economic opportunity.

Gonzales-Day's *Erased Lynchings* repurpose nefarious historical imagery. By concealing the subjects of the original works, the viewer is offered a seemingly banal record of everyday white supremacy—seemingly happy, homogenous communities protected behind fences. Nevertheless, these images reflect the true threat to American law and order as well as the nation's highest ideals and identity.

Notes:

[1] "Quadruple Lynch Was Done at Yreka," *San Francisco Call*, Vol. 78, No. 88 (Aug. 27, 1895).

Additional resources

Ken Gonzales-Day's *Erased Lynchings*

Fran Kaplan, "**An Iconic Lynching in the North**," *America's Black Holocaust Museum*

Equal Justice Initiative, "**Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror**." Third Edition (2017)

Renée Ater, "The National Memorial for Peace and Justice"

Vertis Hayes, *The Lynchers*

Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Lynching Photographs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West: 1850–1935* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

John Lewis, ***Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*** (Santa Fe, N.M.: Twin Palms Publishers, 1999).

Somini Sengupta, "**Racist Hatred in America's Past Stirs Emotions at Exhibition**," *New York Times*, Jan. 24, 2000.

Mary Trent and Kris Belden-Adams, eds., ***Diverse Voices in Photographic Albums: "These are Our Stories"*** (Routledge, 2022).

Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

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8.16: Kenseth Armstead, Surrender Yorktown 1781

- *by KENSETH ARMSTEAD and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

Page ID
182289



Video **8.16.1**: Kenseth Armstead and Steven Zucker discuss Kenseth's *Surrender Yorktown 1781* (2013) at the **Newark Museum**

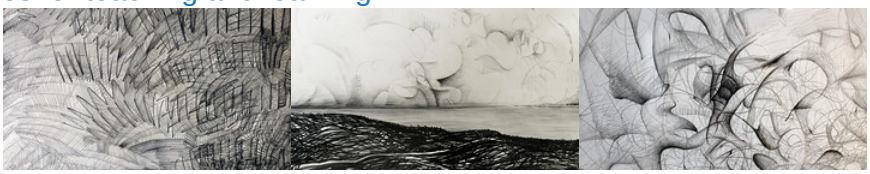
How can we begin to correct the lies of history? Artist Kenseth Armstead suggests a poetic solution.

Additional resources

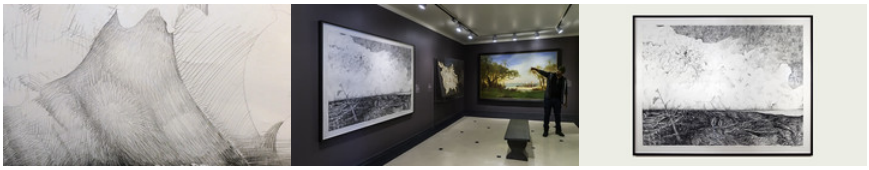
Kenseth Armstead's artist website

The American Revolution: A World War, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



Click on image for larger picture (External link to flickr)



Click on image for larger picture (External link to flickr)



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- **12.6: Histories, real and imagined** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

8.17: Lam Tung Pang on “A day of two Suns”

by **ASIAN ART MUSEUM**

Page ID

182290



Lam Tung Pang is a Hong Kong-based artist whose work encompasses painting, drawing, performance, video, and installation. Assembling traditional iconography and found objects, Lam creates layered allegorical landscapes that engage themes of history, memory, and time. These works capture the nuanced emotions that seep out from beneath the weight of drastic political change. Lam received his BFA from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and his MFA from Central Saint Martins in London.

A day of two Suns (2019) is an ensemble of plywood mountain sculptures and found objects staged around a large paper screen, upon which videos are projected on either side. These ever-shifting compositions of faded, seemingly still videos, which depict panoramic sights in Hong Kong, reflect Lam Tung Pang’s memories of his home. The assorted objects cast shadows that obscure these memories onscreen, evoking our scattered recollection of the disappearing past. The screen and geographical motifs reference classical Chinese landscape painting, in which Lam was trained.

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8.18: Michael Rakowitz- Haunting the West

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182291



From Episode 273 of Art 21: Drawing upon his Iraqi-Jewish heritage, Michael Rakowitz critiques ongoing systems of colonization in his sculptural and participatory work. The artist recounts a formative memory from his childhood, when his mother took him to see reliefs depicting the lion hunt of Ashurbanipal in the Assyrian galleries at the British Museum and posed the question, “What is this doing here?” For Rakowitz, this moment crystalized his understanding of museums as places of extraction, colonization, and crime. In his work today, Rakowitz explores ways to subvert the imperialist role of museums, interrogate the value they place on objects over people, and create ongoing systems for repair and accountability.

From Jane Lombard Gallery in New York City, Rakowitz shares his recent bas-reliefs, “Room F, section 1, Northwest Palace of Nimrud” (2020), as part of his ongoing project, “The invisible enemy should not exist,” which began in 2007. Originally focused on creating the more than 8,000 artifacts looted from the National Museum of Iraq following the 2003 U.S. invasion, the project has expanded to include architectural reliefs stolen from the Assyrian palace of Nimrud, which was destroyed by ISIS in 2015. Rakowitz refers to his works as “ghosts” of the original artifacts, returning to haunt Western institutions. He uses the packaging of Middle Eastern food goods as papier mâché to create the reliefs and sculptures shown at Jane Lombard Gallery and the Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College, explaining that “if a ghost is going to properly haunt, it has to appear differently than the entity appeared when it was living.”

Rakowitz recounts his grandparents’ journey, fleeing from Iraq following the “farhud,” a violent dispossession of Jews from Baghdad in the 1940s, and subsequently immigrating to the U.S. He calls them as “the first installation artists” that he ever met, describing the importance of the Iraqi objects, furnishings, and food that filled their home. Now, food packaging and products function symbolically in the artist’s work, from his “Enemy Kitchen” (ongoing from 2003) cooking workshops to his monumental “Lamassu of Nineveh” (2018) sculpture, composed of Iraqi date syrup cans and installed on the Fourth Plinth in London’s Trafalgar Square. These works offer new ways to discuss Iraq and Iraqi culture outside of media narratives of war and violence, while addressing issues of empire and provenance, and proposing routes for decolonization.

At his studio in Chicago, Rakowitz describes the importance of keeping his studio connected while working apart during the COVID-19 pandemic. His assistants work independently on sculptures and busts from their homes and then gather at the studio’s outdoor space to review their work and pick up more materials. For Rakowitz, this project to create over 8,000 missing Iraqi artifacts, much like decolonization, is an ongoing process—one that will likely outlive both the artist and his studio.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

9: Mapping and migration

9.1: Julie Mehretu, Stadia II

9.2: Doris Salcedo, Shibboleth

9.3: Doris Salcedo- Third World Identity

9.4: Raúl de Nieves, Beginning and the end neither and the otherwise betwixt and between the end is the beginning and the end

9.5: Julie Mehretu, HOWL, eon (I, II)

9.6: Julie Mehretu, HOWL, eon (I, II) (Masterpiece Moment)

9.7: An interview with Alfredo Jaar

9.8: Jamie Wyeth, Kalounna in Frogtown

9.9: Zineb Sedira – 'The Personal is Political'

9.10: Suchitra Mattai, Exodus

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9.1: Julie Mehretu, Stadia II

by DR. ALLISON YOUNG

Page ID
182292



Figure **9.1.1**

Opening / Ceremonies

When looking at *Stadia II*, first try to isolate the black lines from the rest of the composition. Does this centrifugal structure remind you of a sports arena, an amphitheater or opera house? Perhaps a political chamber? It could denote all of these, broadly invoking our experiences as individuals and collective bodies in such spaces. The built environment, for Mehretu, provides a setting in which people can gather, protest, pray, and riot in mass numbers.

Now, try to imagine yourself in a large stadium, at an important athletic championship such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics. How do the crowds behave? What types of phrases or slogans are they shouting, and at what volume? Think about the matching clothing and the painted faces of spectators wearing team colors, or the flags and banners that they wave over their heads.

In her monumental paintings, murals, and works on paper, Julie Mehretu overlays architectural plans, diagrams, and maps of the urban environment with abstract forms and personal notations. The resulting compositions convey the energy and chaos of today's globalized world. *Stadia II* is part of a triptych of works created in 2004, and explores themes such as nationalism and revolution as they occur in the worlds of art, sports, and contemporary politics.

Gaze back into the painting and observe the various shards of color floating over the work's architectural skeleton. The scene, however abstract, could easily represent our visualization of the sports arena. Small circles, dots, and hash marks float through the open space at the center of the composition, resembling the eruption of confetti that announces a winning team's victory (or, alternately, that of a lucky political candidate on Election Day).



Figure **9.1.2**: Julie Mehretu, detail, *Stadia II*, 2004, ink and acrylic on canvas, 108 x 144″ (Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh) (© Julie Mehretu)

Notice the larger circles, triangles, blocks and parallelograms that float across the upper register. Far from arbitrary, these basic pictorial elements could comprise the designs of nearly any country's national flag. The cluster of red and blue stripes, for instance, located along the top-right edge of the canvas, resemble the American flag, without necessarily resolving into a perfect match. We may also find corporate logos and religious symbols interspersed throughout; Mehretu is intentional in drawing analogies between these forms and the propagandistic ways in which they are often used.

Lastly, observe the painterly grey marks that seem to rise from the lower and central registers like plumes of smoke. Stadiums and capital buildings can represent triumph, pride and celebration, but they are also common targets for bombings and acts of terror, which are often motivated by a comparable degree of zealousness and ideological fervor.

Process

Mehretu's working process begins with the projection of maps and diagrams onto the work's blank surface. From these, the artist makes traces and hash marks that eventually grow into characters and communities. The first layer is coated with an acrylic-and-silica mixture that seals the drawing under a transparent ground. After drying, this ground is itself overlaid with more figures and photographs that are again assimilated into the composition.

The artist describes her final product as containing a "stratified, tectonic geology (…) with the characters themselves buried—as if they were fossils."[1] This distinct sense of temporality serves as a metaphor for history, memory, and the legacies of past cultural epochs that still influence contemporary life.

Utopian Abstraction

While nationalism, sports and global politics are key points of entry into the work, Mehretu also considers art historical precedents for these themes.

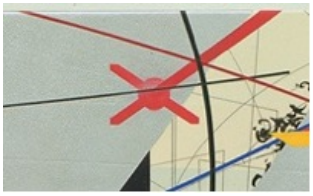


Figure **9.1.3**: Julie Mehretu, detail, *Stadia II*, 2004, ink and acrylic on canvas, 108 x 144″ (Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh) (© Julie Mehretu)

Take a look at the orange diamonds at the side edges, the black quadrilaterals interspersed above, or the dynamic red "X" found at the top edge. These lines and shapes are unmistakable references to the Russian constructivist and Bauhaus movements of the early twentieth century, and to artists such as Alexandr Rodchenko, Kasmir Malevich, El Lissitzky, and Wassily Kandinsky. These artists conceived of pure abstraction as a way to wipe clean the slate of history and to promote universalism and collectivity in art, politics and culture.

Mehretu has long explored the use of abstraction in service of revolution and utopian politics throughout the history of Modernist art, "I am (…) interested in what Kandinsky referred to in 'The Great Utopia' when he talked about the inevitable implosion and/or explosion of our constructed spaces out of the sheer necessity of agency. So, for me, the coliseum, the amphitheater, and the stadium are perfect metaphoric constructed spaces."[2] These can represent both the organized sterility of institutions and the "chaos, violence, and disorder" of revolution and mass gathering.

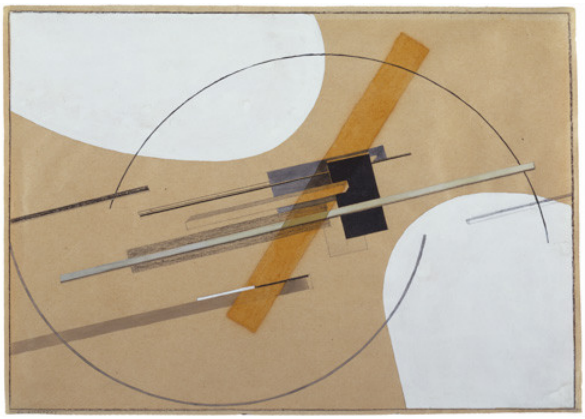


Figure **9.1.4**: El Lissitzky, *Proun (Entwurf zu Proun, S.K.)*, 1922-23, watercolor, gouache, india ink,graphite, conté crayon, and varnish on buff paper, 8 7/16 × 11 3/4″ / 21.4 × 29.7 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

Global Networks

Because Mehretu builds her piece from multiple layers of figure and ground alike, the colors, shapes, and planar forms in *Stadia II* seem to be suspended between surfaces, and are often caught in a swirling motion around the axis of her compositions. The dynamism of the work makes reference to traffic patterns, wind and water currents, migrations, border crossings and travel.

Depicting patterns of movement, Mehretu emphasizes, on one hand, the militarization of bodies moving within and between national (or digital) spaces, and acknowledges the increasing speeds at which the world seems to be moving. Yet, while her compositions might be vertiginous and disorienting at times, we are given a chance to reflect on the potential and importance of such interconnectedness.

Born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Mehretu has lived in Michigan, Rhode Island, and Dakar Senegal, and now resides in New York City.

1. Julie Mehretu, quoted in Thelma Golden, “Julie Mehretu’s Eruptive Lines of Flight as Ethos of Revolution,” in *Julie Mehretu: The Drawings*, ed. Catherine de Zegher and Thelma Golden, New York, NY: Rizzoli, 2007.

2. Julie Mehretu, “Looking Back: Email Interview between Julie Mehretu and Olukemi Ilesanmi, April 2003” in *Drawing into Painting*, Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2003: 13-14.

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- **12.2: Appropriation and ideological critique** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.2: Doris Salcedo, Shibboleth

by DR. DORIS MARIA-REINA BRAVO

Page ID
182293

The Turbine Hall

Since 2000, the Tate Modern has commissioned installations (the Unilever series) for the museum's enormous Turbine Hall, including Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* (2003) and Ai Weiwei's *Sunflower Seeds* (2010). In the eighth iteration, the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo produced *Shibboleth*, a deep meandering crack in the floor. Despite the unassuming nature of this work, it defies neat description and exists in a limbo between sculpture and installation; and the provocative title complicates the work instead of decoding it.

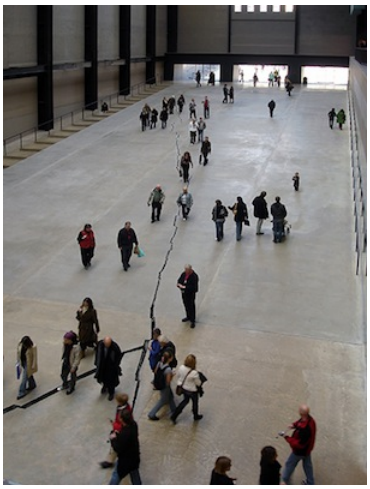


Figure **9.2.1**: Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*, 2007-08, installation, Tate Modern © Doris Salcedo (photo: Nuno Nogueira/Nmnogueira, CC BY-SA 2.5-altered)

Salcedo has offered few explanations beyond stating how the fissure represents the immigrant experience in Europe. Though this theme is apparent in the work, it is by no means the only issue raised. As photographs of the installation demonstrate, visitors contorted their bodies in infinite ways as they tried to see below the crack. In *Shibboleth*, Salcedo elaborates a complex socio-political topic in a work with a tremendous formal presence.

Coded identification

Salcedo's installation requires attentive viewing. The rupture measures 548 feet in length but its width and depth vary (changing from a slight opening to one several inches wide and up to two feet in depth). The viewer's perception into the crevice alters, as he or she walks and shifts to better glimpse inside the cracks and appreciate the interior space, notably the wire mesh embedded along the sides.



Figure **9.2.2**: Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*, 2007-08, installation, Tate Modern (photo: Chris Geatch, CC BY-NC 2.0-altered)

Change in perspective is one of Salcedo's goals. She quotes the Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno: "We should all see the world from the perspective of the victim, like Jewish people that were killed with their head down in the Middle Ages. So he wonders, what is the perspective of a person that is agonizing in this position?"

To go from viewing this installation as a fissure in concrete to an artwork about the disenfranchised may seem like a big step. It is helpful to think of *Shibboleth* as a work of conceptual art since the ideas that frame the physical crack in the floor are of equal, if not greater importance than the material work itself. Salcedo's installation at the Tate Modern would be completely different if it were simply untitled; indeed, the analysis of the work would then settle exclusively on its formal qualities. But Salcedo has bestowed a curious and specific name: "Shibboleth," a codeword that distinguishes people who belong from those who do not.



Figure **9.2.3**: Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*, 2007-08, Tate Modern (photo: Dallas Ewing, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0-altered)

Every community, culture, and nation has its shibboleth. Among the U.S. military, "lollapalooza" was used during World War II since its tricky pronunciation could identify native, English-speaking Americans. But the sinister history of the word "shibboleth" illustrates how friends and enemies are separated by fine, linguistic lines. Any stranger in a foreign land appreciates the vulnerability this entails, especially the fear of being outed as a foreigner and exposed in a hostile environment.

Irrevocably "other"

Salcedo's experience as a Colombian artist working abroad has made her especially sympathetic to the plight of marginalized people. Between 2002 and 2003, Salcedo completed two installations that make this clear. In the first work, the artist staged a performance where she lowered empty wooden chairs over the side of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. The performance lasted 53 hours and commemorated the 1985 siege in that building where three hundred people were held hostage; the siege ended in a bloody confrontation between rebels and the military.

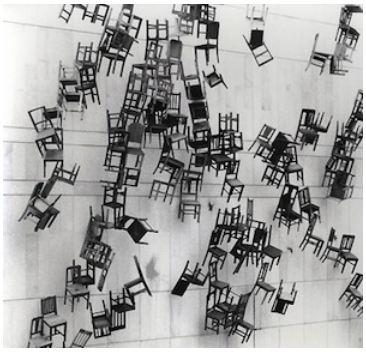


Figure **9.2.4**: Doris Salcedo, *Noviembre 6 y 7*, 2002, Supreme Court, Bogotá © Doris Salcedo

The second installation also honored the victims of senseless violence. Salcedo piled more than 1,500 chairs into a space between two buildings in Istanbul. The breathtaking sight of this nearly three-story sculpture highlighted how warfare disrupts everyday life and creates refugees out of ordinary citizens as it recalls the countless shoes discovered at concentration camps at the end of World War II.

For Salcedo, the ravine in the Tate Modern's floor represents the immigrant experience in Europe, notably the racial segregation that marks people from the third-world as irrevocably "other," a permanent state apart. Yet, the artist offers some hope. After seven

months, the show ended and the Tate Modern filled the crack, leaving a scarred floor. This is a remarkable symbol of the possibility of healing through figurative and literal closure; however, the mark is also an obstacle to any attempts to erase the past.



Figure **9.2.5**: Shibboleth filled, Tate Modern (photo: Damien Everett, CC BY 2.0-altered)

Sources

From an institutional perspective, this scar is remarkable for other reasons: it is usually unimaginable for museum officials to permit an artist to permanently alter the exhibition space.



Figure **9.2.6**: Lucio Fontana, *Spatial Concept: Expectations*, 1960, slashed canvas and gauze, 100.3 x 80.3 cm (MoMA) © 2013 Fondation Lucio Fontana

Salcedo's act remains transgressive: the act of deliberately breaking one's media (in this case a concrete floor) is an act of rebellion. In this way, *Shibboleth* joins a tradition of artists experimenting with surface. In the late 1940s Lucio Fontana developed "Spazialismo," an approach to art-making that converted the two-dimensional canvas into a three-dimensional space. Fontana slashed his monochrome canvases, and revealed a new space underneath the gashes. The artist's bold move to disrupt the canvas's nearly sacred surface was revolutionary and influenced later artists.



Figure **9.2.7**: Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting*, 1974

Throughout the 1970s Gordon Matta-Clark sawed into the walls, floors, and ceilings of buildings, often leaving cracks like the line of light in *Splitting* (1974). For centuries, a canvas was a flat plane, the support for an image rather than an object in its own right.

A building by definition sought to be structurally sound; any structural damage makes it unstable and dangerous. To highlight their subversion, these artists flaunt the negative space made by their incisions: Matta-Clark's cuts in *Splitting* are illuminated by blinding light, while Fontana's slashes and Shibboleth each reveal a startlingly dark void previously unseen.

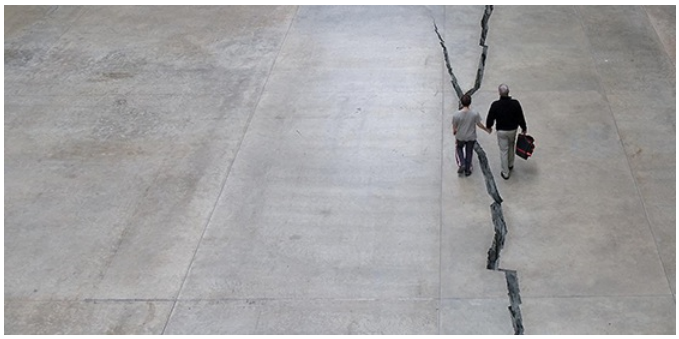


Figure **9.2.8**: Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*, 2007-08, Tate Modern (photo: Wonderferret, CC BY 2.0-altered)

Meanings

Matta-Clark, Fontana, and Salcedo create art that is difficult to classify. Is this painting? sculpture? architecture? installation? intervention? Salcedo's strength as an artist is her ability to balance the formal impact of *Shibboleth* with its message, while preventing one from overshadowing the other. Salcedo's reticence to discuss her process and meaning at length is our opportunity to develop infinite interpretations.

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- **12.2: Appropriation and ideological critique** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.3: Doris Salcedo- Third World Identity

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182294



In her Bogotá studio, artist Doris Salcedo discusses the stereotypes she faces as a citizen of a Third World country and how she embraces these first-hand experiences of discrimination to inform her art. Shown working alongside her team of assistants, whose collective labor underscores the political messages of her sculptures, Salcedo proposes a more humble role for artists working today. Doris Salcedos understated sculptures and installations embody the silenced lives of the marginalized, from individual victims of violence to the disempowered of the Third World. Although elegiac in tone, her works are not memorials: Salcedo concretizes absence, oppression, and the gap between the disempowered and powerful. While abstract in form and open to interpretation, her works serve as testimonies on behalf of both victims and perpetrators. Salcedos work reflects a collective effort and close collaboration with a team of architects, engineers, and assistants and—as Salcedo says—with the victims of the senseless and brutal acts to which her work refers. Learn more about Doris Salcedo: **http://www.art21.org/artists/doris-sa…**

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9.4: Raúl de Nieves, Beginning and the end neither and the otherwise betwixt and between the end is the beginning and the end

by **ART21**



By art21. What does it mean to be an American artist today? From his basement studio in Ridgewood, Queens, artist Raúl de Nieves creates an epic stained glass mural for the 2017 Whitney Biennial. Born in Mexico, de Nieves immigrated to San Diego at the age of nine and has been living in New York since 2008. “Growing up in Mexico was really magical because I got to see a lot of forms of celebration,” says the artist. “I got to experience death as a really young child. That’s what my work is about: it’s like seeing the facets of happiness and sadness all in one place.” His commission from the Whitney Museum of American Art gave de Nieves the opportunity to experiment with the tradition of stained glass, and combine this new light-infused installation with existing figurative sculptures. With gaffers tape, paper, and color gels, de Nieves created a narrative that begins with personal struggle and self-doubt, but ends with “a celebration of life.” In reflecting upon his father’s early death and his mother’s courageous decision to move their family to the United States, de Nieves sees the installation as a form of remembrance. “The mural talks about this experience—this journey,” says the artist, “I feel really happy that I could put so much emphasis on this idea of ‘a better tomorrow’ in my artwork.

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9.5: Julie Mehretu, HOWL, eon (I, II)

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182296



By art21. Shown working on two site-specific paintings for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), Julie Mehretu recontextualizes the history of American landscape painting by merging its sublime imagery with the harsh realities not depicted. “What does it mean to paint a landscape and be an artist in this political moment?” she asks from the decommissioned Harlem church used as her studio for the project. Referencing the ways that landscapes have been politicized through historical events—from the violent expansion of the American West, colonialism, war, and abolition, through to more recent race riots and social protests—Mehretu began by combining photographs from these events with nineteenth-century landscape paintings. Abstracting and digitizing the blended forms, she printed the resulting images on two monumental canvases, each spanning more than eight hundred square feet. Over these underpaintings, Mehretu adds gestural, calligraphic brush strokes before screen printing an additional, complicating layer of pixelated images. Collaborator Jason Moran, a composer and jazz pianist, joins Mehretu in the studio to create a musical arrangement inspired by her improvisational process of markings and erasure. Through their respective practices, the two artists create new visual and auditory languages in the hopes of processing the complex history that brought us to our present moment. As Mehretu explains, the paintings become “visual neologisms,” that combine the work and inventions of past artists, “to address when language isn’t enough.” The paintings, titled “HOWL, eon (I, II)” (2017), are currently on view in the SFMOMA atrium. Julie Mehretu’s paintings and drawings refer to elements of mapping and architecture, achieving a calligraphic complexity that resembles turbulent atmospheres and dense social networks. Architectural renderings and aerial views of urban grids enter the work as fragments, losing their real-world specificity and challenging narrow geographic and cultural readings. The paintings’ wax-like surfaces—built up over weeks and months in thin translucent layers—have a luminous warmth and spatial depth, with formal qualities of light and space made all the more complex by Mehretu’s delicate depictions of fire, explosions, and perspectives in both two and three dimensions. Her works engage the history of nonobjective art—from Constructivism to Futurism—posing contemporary questions about the relationship between utopian impulses and abstraction.

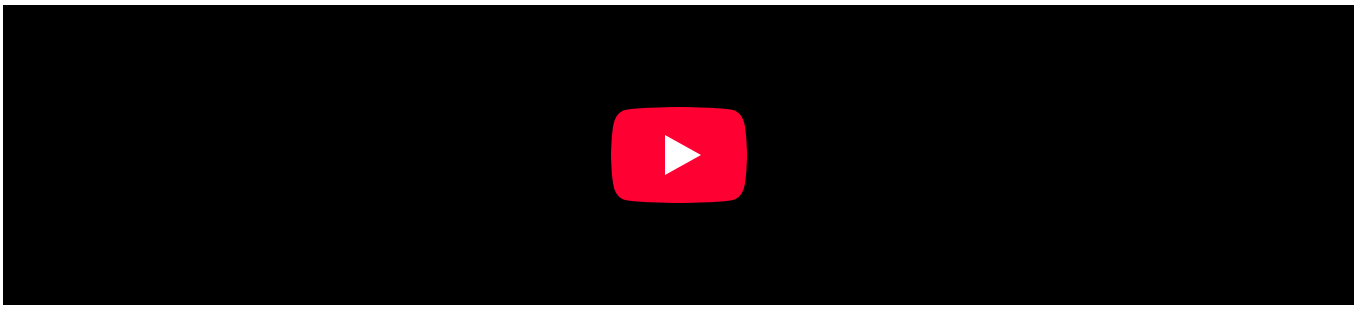
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9.6: Julie Mehretu, HOWL, eon (I, II) (Masterpiece Moment)

by **BANK OF AMERICA**

Page ID

182297



by Julie Mehretu, is an ink-and-acrylic diptych on canvas. The work is on display in the Haas, Jr. Atrium at the eum of Modern Art. The award-winning Mehretu is known worldwide for her unique way of combining layered imagery and paint with a powerful social message. The work was inspired by 1950's San Francisco and uses digital images of contemporary riots and protests that are overlayed with paint. Explore this masterpiece further with Neal Benezra, the Helen and Charles Schwab Director of SFMOMA.

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9.7: An interview with Alfredo Jaar

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182298



By art21. Alfredo Jaar in his installation “Infinite Cell” (2004) in Santiago, Chile, and various works. Through installations, photographs, and community-based projects, Alfredo Jaar explores the public’s desensitization to images and the limitations of art to represent events such as genocides, epidemics, and famines. Jaar’s work bears witness to military conflicts, political corruption, and imbalances of power between industrialized and developing nations, often taking the form of an extended meditation or elegy.

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9.8: Jamie Wyeth, Kalounna in Frogtown

by TAYLOR L. POULIN and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
182299



Video **9.8.1**: Jamie Wyeth, *Kalounna in Frogtown*, 1986, oil on masonite, 91.4 x 127.3 cm (Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Collection, 1992.163) ©Jamie Wyeth, a Seeing America video speakers: Taylor L. Poulin, Assistant Curator, Terra Foundation for American Art and Beth Harris

Additional resources

This painting at the Terra Foundation for American Art

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- **12.3: Identity and the body** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.9: Zineb Sedira – ‘The Personal is Political’

- by **TATE**

Page ID

182300



Zineb Sedira was born in Paris to Algerian parents, and moved to London to study art. Her works are often autobiographical, addressing issues of cultural identity and the personal consequences of migration. In Mother Tongue (2002) the artist appears alongside her mother and daughter to show the shifts in cultural identities that have happened within her own family. More recent works include Shipwrecks (2008), highlighting the dangers of transit and immigration, and Sugar Routes (2013), documenting the movement of a global commodity.

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9.10: Suchitra Mattai, Exodus

by **DR. SARAH MAGNATTA**

Page ID
182301



Figure **9.10.1**: Suchitra Mattai, *Exodus*, 2019, vintage saris from India, Sharjah, artist's Indo-Guyanese family and rope net, 15 x 40 ft (Collection of the Momentary, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art)



Figure **9.10.2**: Suchitra Mattai, *Imperfect Isometry*, 2019, videos of border walls (Jerusalem/Palestine, U.S./Mexico) and prison wall, vintage sari tapestry, chalk drawing, spinning found Kalba merry-go-round; Sharjah Biennial 14 (2019)

When artist Suchitra Mattai received her artwork *Imperfect Isometry* back from its outdoor showing at the Sharjah Biennial, she noticed that the materials looked quite different. The constant sun on the installation of woven saris—traditional Indian women's garments—had lightened the previously vivid colors of the silk, cotton, and polyester. These same saris made their way into Mattai's later work *Exodus*, a massive wall hanging in the collection of the Momentary, a contemporary art space of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Arkansas. In *Exodus*, the sun-bleached saris are embedded in a landscape of fabric that dominates an entire wall.

The title *Exodus*, although well-known as one of the books of the Jewish Torah and the Christian Bible, is more broadly defined as a departure or emigration (permanently leaving one's home), and fittingly relates the journey of the saris from their origins around the world (she sources the saris from her family, friends, and women of the South Asian diaspora), to the installation at the Sharjah Biennial, to the museum in Arkansas. The saris can be seen as surrogates for the women who wore them: South Asian women now living in diaspora (the dispersion of people from their original homeland) throughout the world. But the title also reflects a more personal journey of the artist and her family that began decades ago in the South American country of Guyana.

Roots and routes

Guyana sits on the northern coast of South America on the Atlantic Ocean and near the Caribbean Sea. Originally home to several Indigenous groups, Guyana became a site of ongoing and alternating colonial exploitation beginning with the Dutch in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The Dutch enslaved Africans and brought them to the region to work in various agricultural ventures. Later, the British would take over as imperial rulers, likewise engaging in slavery and forcing the migration of thousands of

Africans to Guyana, then known as Guiana. By the 1830s, slavery was officially abolished in the colonies of the British Empire, and so the British needed a new labor force to work the sugar (and later, rice) plantations. At the time, the largest British colony was India, and so Indians were offered work in Guiana for five years, at which point the indentured laborers could choose to return home with a bit of money or keep a small plot of land in Guiana. The work was still very much exploitative, as the laborers were often forced to work 14–16 hours per day for very little in return.

Mattai's grandparents arrived in Guiana from India when it was still a British colony in the 1930s, her grandfather as an indentured laborer. Following his five-year period of service, Mattai's grandfather returned to India to a difficult environment—a system immersed in caste divisions and unwelcome to Mattai's family. They traveled back to South America, dangerously navigating the Atlantic before joining the Indian community which had settled in the Caribbean region.

Suchitra Mattai, born in Guyana (which declared Independence from the United Kingdom in 1966), has likewise journeyed and lived around the globe. At three years old, her family immigrated to Canada. As a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, Mattai spent extended periods of time in India for her research toward an MA in South Asian art. Later in life, Mattai and her family moved to Europe, and then back to the United States. The artist's work often invokes notions of displacement and migration rooted in these experiences, and *Exodus* is no exception.



Figure **9.10.3**: Suchitra Mattai, *Exodus* (detail), 2019, vintage saris from India, Sharjah, artist's Indo-Guyanese family and rope net, 15 x 40 ft (Collection of the Momentary, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art)

Identity and diaspora

Looking at *Exodus* closely, one finds variations in fabric, color, pattern, and design; from afar, faint outlines of long, horizontal shapes seem to emerge. Are these mountain ranges? Clouds? A horizon? The faded saris—woven between the brightly-colored saris not exposed to the sun—work like brushstrokes across the image, creating undulating lines and echoing the peaks and valleys of the hanging itself. Looking across the image from either side, these bumps and shadows mimic a landscape, as though a three-dimensional topographic map was placed vertically on a wall. Yet the reference to place is not entirely clear.

Mattai has described disparate landscapes as faded memories as she grapples with notions of identity, displacement, and diaspora. Since she sources the saris from her family, friends, and women of the South Asian diaspora around the world, she notes that these fabrics often still retain smells of curry or perfume—the identities of the women coming together in a powerful work:

> ***The threads that carry into my current work are my desire to communicate something about the 'global,' what it is to be an immigrant, and what it feels like to be displaced and disoriented. [1]***



Figure 9.10.4: Suchitra Mattai, *Life-Line*, 2020, vintage saris, found boat, 12 x 10 ft (K Contemporary)

Saris appear in several of Mattai's work. In her *Life-Line* installation, a dramatically tipped wooden boat hangs almost vertically from the ceiling, saris pour overboard as if a liquid. The instability of the situation recalls Mattai's ancestors' dangerous trans-Atlantic journeys. The water-like appearance of the saris as they spill over into a whirlpool on the ground recalls a place or setting, perhaps Guyana, whose name means "land of many waters" in an Amerindian language (sources do not agree as to which specific one). The "life-line" of the title seems to be those very saris that connect the boat to the solid ground, a circle developing on the floor. The circle is not precarious, unlike the boat from which it emerges. It is solid, growing, and rooted, perhaps a metaphor for the Indian community of Guyana and the connections between the South Asian diaspora more broadly.

Mattai's constant exploration of materials likewise brings together several seemingly disparate parts to complete a whole. She is trained as a painter, but her art frequently employs found weavings and needlepoints so often relegated to "folk art," or a lower "handicraft" status—work generally created by women. By incorporating these older textiles into her art, Mattai reclaims agency for these artists of earlier ages, saying:

> ***My primary pursuit is to give voice to people whose voices were once quieted. [2]***



Figure 9.10.5: Suchitra Mattai, *Castaway*, 2018, embroidery floss on vintage needlepoint, 18″ x 42″

In addition to reclaiming various materials as fine art, Mattai reimagines scenes (and by extension, history) dominated by colonial narratives. In *Castaway*, Mattai begins with a found needlepoint depicting an island or coastal scene with a British ship and soldier flanking a small figure—presumably an Indigenous or Indian (South Asian) child attempting to get on the boat and perhaps the namesake for the title—at the center of the work. Mattai isolates and highlights the child by incorporating starburst-like lines around the figure. She reclaims the innocence and humanity of the child and shifts the historical narrative that so often overlooks these lives, saying:

> ***Re-writing this colonial history contributes to contemporary dialogue by making visible the struggles and perseverance of those who lived it. [3]***

A monumental reunion



Figure **9.10.6**: Suchitra Mattai, *Exodus*, 2019, vintage saris from India, Sharjah, artist's Indo-Guyanese family and rope net, 15 x 40 ft (Collection of the Momentary, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art)

Exodus continues this discussion. Although there are no figures in the massive tapestry, the presence of the South Asian diaspora is manifest through the almost 200 globally sourced saris—it is a monumental reunion. *Exodus* is quite personal for the artist, clearly drawing from Mattai's family history and experiences. But its underlying questioning of dominant historical narratives—particularly as they relate to migration and identity—is universal. As faded lines in *Exodus* slowly emerge, a sense of place—however tenuous—becomes apparent.

Notes:

[1] **Foundwork: Suchitra Mattai interview by Rebecca Hart**

[2] **Suchitra Mattai**

[3] **Suchitra Mattai**

Additional resources:

Crystal Bridges Artist Spotlight—**A Studio Tour with Suchitra Mattai: Interviewed by Lauren Haynes**

Ali, Grace Aneiza, Khadija Benn, Sandra Brewster, Erika DeFreitas, Maria del Pilar Kaladeen, Ingrid Griffith, et al. *Liminal Spaces: Migration and Women of the Guyanese Diaspora* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2021)

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

10: Borderlands

10.1: Tanya Aguiñiga, Metabolizing the Border

10.2: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Border Tuner

10.3: Postcommodity arts collective

10.4: Richard Misrach, Border Cantos

10.5: Minerva Cuevas, Crossing of the Rio Bravo

10.6: Jaime Carrejo, Border/Land

10.7: Guadalupe Maravilla, Requiem For My Border Crossing

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10.1: Tanya Aguiñiga, Metabolizing the Border

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182302



Art21 proudly presents this special extended segment as a complement to the “Borderlands” episode from the tenth season of the “Art in the Twenty-First Century” series. Edited to focus on a singular artist narrative, this film contains original material not included in the television broadcast. “Borderlands” premiered in October 2020 on PBS. Watch now on PBS and the PBS Video app: **https://www.pbs.org/video/borderlands-4m0kef/**

The binational artist Tanya Aguiñiga pushes the power of art to transform the United States-Mexico border from a site of trauma to a creative space for personal healing and collective expression. Reflecting the cultural hybridity and community of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, the artist discusses her upbringing in Tijuana, her training as a furniture and craft designer, and her artistic beginnings with the Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo collective. From her studio, the artist and her team produce objects like jewelry and housewares to fund their social-justice-based projects, workshops, and performances. Aguiñiga returns to the site of one of these projects, titled “Border Quipu,” where she and her team recorded the stories of daily commuters from Tijuana to San Diego. This segment also follows Aguiñiga as she prepares for “Metabolizing the Border,” a performance and personal reckoning with the pain caused by the border wall. The work is a demanding physical feat: the artist walks along the border wall in a glass suit that is designed to break, in order to express the effects of the wall as wounds on her body and to symbolize the struggle of the migrant experience. Aguiñiga demonstrates how art can be both a personal “physical and emotional outlet” and a vehicle to help others “empathize and think about how we’re all connected to each other.”

Learn more about the artist at:
https://art21.org/artist/tanya-aguiniga/

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10.2: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Border Tuner

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182303



From Art21. Known for his large-scale, interactive installations, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer uses contemporary technologies like computerized surveillance, heart-rate sensors, and robotics to create participatory experiences and platforms for public participation and connection. The artist frequently works in and transforms public spaces, creating awe-inspiring, poetic, and critical installations, like “Voz Alta”: a massive megaphone system erected in a Mexico City plaza to commemorate the infamous Tlatelolco student massacre in 1968. Spurred by his Mexican heritage and the growing nationalism in the United States, Lozano-Hemmer embarks on his most ambitious project to date: “Border Tuner,” an enormous intercom system at the border between El Paso and Juárez that allows participants from both sides to speak and listen to each other via radio-enabled searchlights. At his studio in Montreal, the artist works with a team of scientists, engineers, programmers, architects, and designers to develop the project; at the El Paso–Juárez border, he invites local artists and performers and members of the public to use “Border Tuner” to listen to, share, and visualize their voices and stories. Highlighting the intimate, personal relations in a public space that is otherwise systematically dehumanizing, Lozano-Hemmer explains, “The most important role that art can play is that of making complexity visible. The usage of technology is inevitable; it’s up to the artist to use those technologies to create experiences that are intimate, connected, and critical.”

“Borderlands” premiered in October 2020 on PBS. Watch now on PBS and the PBS Video app: **https://www.pbs.org/video/borderlands-4m0kef/**

Learn more about the artist: **https://art21.org/artist/rafael-lozano-hemmer/**

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10.3: Postcommodity arts collective

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182304



From Art21. The interdisciplinary collective Postcommodity creates site-specific installations and interventions that critically examine our modern-day institutions and systems through the history and perspectives of Indigenous people. Influenced by growing up in the southwestern United States, the artists Cristóbal Martínez and Kade L. Twist revisit their 2015 public installation, “Repellent Fence,” produced with previous Postcommodity artist, Raven Chacon. A two-mile-long line of enormous balloons across the Arizona-Sonora border, “Repellent Fence” symbolically sutured together cultures and lands that had been unified long before borders were drawn. Shown installing ambitious architectural interventions at the Art Institute of Chicago and LAXART in Los Angeles, Martínez and Twist consider how American cities have been supported by and will continue to be transformed by the migration of Indigenous peoples from Mexico and Central and South America. To examine our cultural institutions and their demographic future, the pair thinks of the coming decades, when the U.S. Census Bureau predicts a non-White majority. “Our job is to allow a new public memory to be born,” says Martínez. “Here’s our lens; take a look at the world through it, and tell us what you think.” Other featured projects include “Do You Remember When?” (2009), produced in collaboration with previous Postcommodity artist Raven Chacon (2009–2018), co-founder Steven Yazzie (2007–2010), and co-founder Nathan Young (2007–2015).

“Borderlands” premiered in October 2020 on PBS. Watch now on PBS and the PBS Video app: **https://www.pbs.org/video/borderlands-4m0kef/**

Learn more about the artist: **http://www.postcommodity.com/About.html**

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10.4: Richard Misrach, Border Cantos

- by ART21

Page ID

182305



From Art21. A pioneer of large-format color photography, Richard Misrach has photographed the American desert for decades, examining the impact of human activity on the natural landscape. From his Berkeley studio, the artist recounts his early work, “Telegraph 3 AM,” in which he depicted the homeless population of 1970s Berkeley. Disillusioned with the commercial success of his photographs that he hoped would instigate social change, Misrach turned to the deserts of southern California, Nevada, and Arizona. Creating otherworldly images of cacti and rock formations and unsettling pictures of military bombing ranges, nuclear test sites, and man-made fires, for his ongoing “Desert Cantos” series, Misrach explains how “our culture stands out in very clear relief in the desert.” The artist recounts the origins of his “Border Cantos” series, which focuses on the U.S.-Mexico border wall and the artifacts left behind by migrant crossings. This segment follows the artist as he travels to remote parts of the desert, photographing the visual contradiction of the ominous wall against beautiful landscapes and collaborating with the composer Guillermo Galindo to create installations and musical performances that utilize the items found in the desert. Collectively, Misrach’s work chronicles the places where nature and culture collide, highlighting where beauty and ugliness exist side-by-side.

“Borderlands” premiered in October 2020 on PBS. Watch now on PBS and the PBS Video app: **https://www.pbs.org/video/borderlands-4m0kef/**

Learn more about the artist: **https://art21.org/artist/richard-misrach/**

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10.5: Minerva Cuevas, Crossing of the Rio Bravo

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182306



From art21. March 24, 2017

Minerva Cuevas looks back on “Crossing of the Rio Bravo” (2010), a work in which she painted a bridge across a riverbed that divides Mexico and the United States. On her visit to where the Rio Bravo / Rio Grande snakes through the Chihuahuan Desert, Cuevas found the media’s depiction of the border is inaccurate. “Violence is a very strong element in this perception of what’s the border,” says the artist. “Not witnessing anything connected to that kind of mediatic violence, it’s the first liberation. You realize that what is intimidating is the desert itself.”

In light of President Trump’s proposal to build a wall along the entire border, Cuevas explains that this wall would only increase human trafficking, not stop immigration. “Nationalism is linked to violence and the Other, and the differences between communities, rather than some kind of uniting element that is more necessary,” says Cuevas.

Though she believes that projects like “Crossing of the Rio Bravo” can help us rethink our perceptions, the artist knows that collective action is required to enact lasting change. “Books and projects can be important, but they won’t be a solution,” says the artist. “The problems or the crisis in the world is generated by everybody. So it has to be also a massive reaction.”

Minerva Cuevas is a conceptual and socially-engaged artist who creates sculptural installations and paintings in response to politically-charged events, such as the tension between world starvation and capitalistic excess. Cuevas documents community protests in a cartography of resistance while also creating mini-sabotages—altering grocery store bar codes and manufacturing student identity cards—as part of her non-profit Mejor Vida Corp / Better Life Corporation. Cuevas addresses the negative impact that humans have on animals and the environment through sculptures coated in tar and tender paintings of animal rights activists, imagining a society that values all living beings.

Learn more about the artist at: **https://art21.org/artist/minerva-cuevas/**

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10.6: Jaime Carrejo, Border/Land

by **EL PASO MUSEUM OF ART**

Page ID
182307



Jaime Carrejo, *Border/Land*, 2018, neon, aluminum, bass plywood, foam, felt, mirrored acrylic, acrylic paint, and epoxy. EPMA, 2017 Members Choice purchase with funds provided by the Robert U. and Mabel O. Lipscomb Foundation Endowment.

Artist Jaime Carrejo shares the concept behind his installation *Border/Land* at the El Paso Museum of Art.

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10.7: Guadalupe Maravilla, Requiem For My Border Crossing

by **WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART**

Page ID

182308





Requiem for my border crossing and my undocumented father's #6, 2016–2018, inkjet print with graphite pencil and ink, sheet: 19 15/16 × 29 7/8in. (50.6 × 75.9 cm)

The artist Guadalupe Maravilla was brought to the United States by a coyote (or human trafficker) as an undocumented eight-year-old, fleeing civil war in El Salvador. Hear from the artist and from assistant curator Marcela Guerrero about how this experience informed his series, "A requiem for my border crossing."

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

11: Figuration, the body, and representation

11.1: How did Lucian Freud present queer and marginalized bodies?
11.2: Lucian Freud, Standing by the Rags
11.3: Identity Politics- From the Margins to the Mainstream
11.4: Louise Bourgeois, Maman
11.5: Stephanie Syjuco, The Visible Invisible
11.6: Renée Stout, interview about Fetish #2
11.7: Wangechi Mutu
11.7.1: Wangechi Mutu, Preying Mantra
11.7.2: Wangechi Mutu, The NewOnes, will free Us
11.8: Marina Abramović, The Artist is Present
11.9: Rineke Dijkstra, Odessa, Ukraine, August 4, 1993
11.10: An interview with Maryam Hoseini
11.11: Jordan Casteel paints her community
11.12: Luchita Hurtado's body of work
11.13: Shirin Neshat
11.13.1: Rebellious Silence, Women of Allah series
11.13.2: 'Dreams Are Where Our Fears Live'
11.14: Kehinde Wiley
11.14.1: Rumors of War
11.14.2: Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps
11.15: Yinka Shonibare, The Swing (After Fragonard)
11.16: Figures and Fictions- Santu Mofokeng
11.17: Kiki Smith, Lying with the Wolf
11.18: Catherine Opie
11.18.1: Self-Portrait/Cutting
11.18.2: Figure and Landscape series
11.19: Stefanie Jackson, Bluest Eye
11.20: Ellen Galagher, DeLuxe
11.21: Ah Xian artist interview
11.22: Takashi Murakami
11.23: Will Wilson, Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange
11.24: Lorna Simpson – 'Everything I Do Comes from the Same Desire'
11.25: Amy Sherald, Precious Jewels by the Sea
11.26: Michelle Browder, Mothers of Gynecology
11.27: Douglas Coupland, Terry Fox Memorial

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11.1: How did Lucian Freud present queer and marginalized bodies?

- by **THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON**

Page ID

182309



Art historian Gregory Salter considers Freud’s paintings of queer and marginalized bodies in the age of Section 28, the early years of HIV/AIDS, and preoccupations about class and gender.

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11.2: Lucian Freud, Standing by the Rags

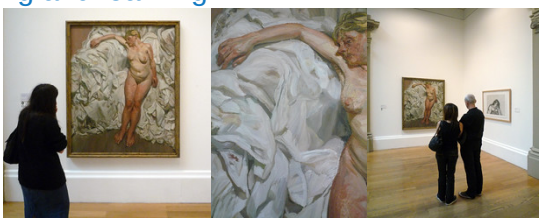
by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
182310



Video **11.2.1**: Lucian Freud, *Standing by the Rags*, 1988-89, oil on canvas, 66.5 x 54.5″ / 168.9 x 138.4 cm (Tate Britain, London)

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- **12.3: Identity and the body** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

11.3: Identity Politics- From the Margins to the Mainstream

by **DR. JORDANA MOORE SAGGESE**

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182311

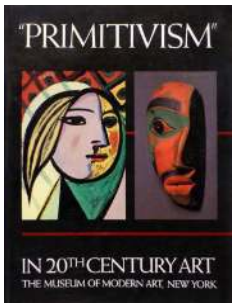


Figure **11.3.1**: Cover of volume 1 of the catalog to the exhibition, "*'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern*," 1984 (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Whose art history?

For most of the twentieth century, major American museums rarely exhibited the work of artists from underrepresented groups, preferring instead to privilege the dominant narratives of a white, male, heterosexual art history. The 1984 blockbuster exhibition "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern" at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, for example, juxtaposed the work of recognized masters of modern art with artifacts from nonwestern (mostly African or East Asian) populations. However, the relative positioning of the nonwestern works seemed to many observers to present these objects as inferior to the works of European and American artists.

Critics of the exhibition specifically took issue with MoMA's emphasis on formal comparisons of western objects by well-known modern and contemporary artists (e.g., Constantin Brancusi, Paul Gauguin, and Pablo Picasso) and nonwestern objects produced by unidentified artists and artisans. The exhibition failed to consider the significant political, ideological, and social contexts of its nonwestern objects—a presentation that some critics argued positioned the works of European and American artists as more "advanced." For many artists, critics, and curators positioned outside the so-called mainstream art world it was becoming increasingly clear that nonwhite artists were only included in major museum exhibitions if they reinforced these hierarchies.

Addressing a history of exclusion: "The Decade Show"

In response to this history of exclusion, and to MoMA's "Primitivism" show specifically, three cultural institutions in New York City collaborated on an exhibition that would recognize the perspectives of marginal groups and assign them a place in a mainstream. The landmark exhibition "The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s," organized by curators from The New Museum of Contemporary Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem, and The Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, opened in May 1990 and featured more than 200 objects by ninety-four artists of diverse heritage. According to the organizers, "The Decade Show" artists were connected by their willingness to address the phenomenon of exclusion in their work. This exhibition worked from the idea that as the perspectives of the marginalized entered the mainstream, they would likewise receive greater political agency.



Figure **11.3.2**: James Luna, *Artifact Piece*, 1987, photograph of performance 121.9 x 152.4 cm, courtesy of the artist © James Luna, photograph by Robin Holland (New Museum)

James Luna, a Pooyukitchum and Mexican-American artist included in "The Decade Show," was one of many artists working in this period to reconstruct a political position via representational visibility. For his performance *Artifact Piece*, the artist lay inside a display case at the Studio Museum in Harlem with his nude body covered only by a breechcloth. Small white cards with stories describing the origin of several body markings (scars, tan lines, etc.) and written in the third person were scattered alongside the artist's body. The perceived objectivity of the descriptive cards and Luna's own prone position in the display case, allows *Artifact Piece* to directly reference the history of ethnographic displays, which often positioned "other" bodies as objects to be looked at by a mainstream public.

As Luna explained in a 2008 interview: "I had long looked at representation of our peoples in museums and they all dwelled in the past. They were one-sided. We were simply objects among bones, bones among objects, and then signed and sealed with a date." Luna's inclusion of his own subjective narrative radically transforms the historically marginalized body of the "other" in the museum from a passive object to a speaking agent. *Artifact Piece* also played an important part in inverting the power dynamics between the observed and the observer. Here, Luna placed himself on display; his presence in an art museum creates an unsettling effect for the viewer, who is forced to consider their own relationship to this history of display and exploitation.

1993 Whitney Biennial

On the heels of "The Decade Show," several other institutions began to reconsider their relationship to artists outside the mainstream. Perhaps the most well known of these exhibitions was the 1993 Biennial exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, which many scholars consider to be the turning point for identity-based art discourse. The main theme of this exhibition, according to David Ross, the Whitney's director at the time, was "the construction of identity." Contemporary artists, Ross claimed, "insist on reinscribing the personal, political, and social back into the practice and history of art." Reviews of the exhibition show that the effects of this reinscription were received ambivalently; many critics praised the shows risk-taking, while others questioned the aesthetic merits of the works. Nevertheless, it was impossible to ignore the emergence of an entire generation of artists, including Renée Green, Byron Kim, Glenn Ligon, Pepón Osorio, and Lorna Simpson, who were explicitly working to de-center the institutional focus on whiteness.

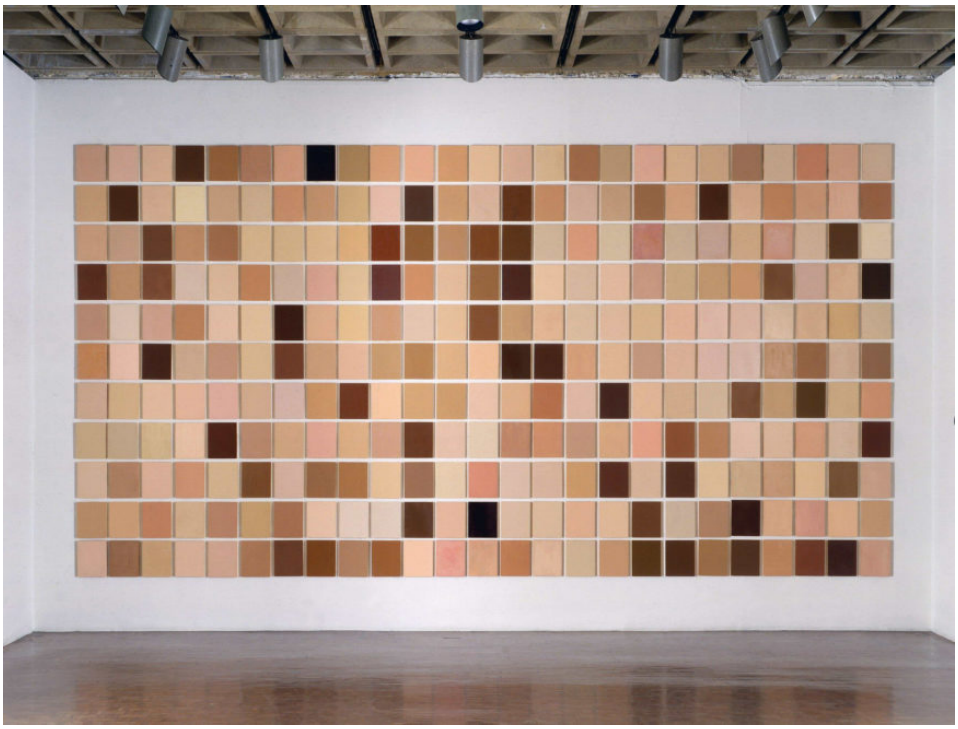


Figure **11.3.3**: Byron Kim, *Synecdoche*, 1991–present, oil and wax on 275 panels, each 25.4 x 20.32 cm, courtesy the artist and Max Protetch Gallery, New York © 2008 Byron Kim (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Byron Kim's contribution to the exhibition, a multi-paneled painting titled *Synecdoche*, 1991-present, captures both the aesthetic and political ambitions of art in this period. On first glance, Kim's monochromatic palette and his arrangement of small paintings into a grid seem to recall minimalist work of the 1960s. However, visitors to the exhibition quickly learned that *Synecdoche* was much more than an aesthetic exercise. To construct the work, Kim asked members of his community (friends, neighbors, strangers) to let him copy the color of their skin, which the artist then reproduced in oil on a ten-by-eight-inch canvas panel.

Far from an exercise in objectivity or geometry, each small painting is a portrait. The title of Kim's work refers to a figure of speech, in which a term for a part of something refers to the whole of something, or vice-versa (e.g., saying "all hands on deck" to refer to a group of sailors). In *Synecdoche*, each individual person pictured is reduced to and represented by skin color alone. But in highlighting the uniqueness and individuality of every skin tone, this painting provokes us to reconsider the ways in which skin color has been used to stereotype or otherwise marginalize individuals. In this way, *Synecdoche* set a standard for dealing with the complexity of the visual markers of identity.

Shifting art history

As the ideas and perspectives from non-white artists, queer artists, and those with other intersectional identities were given space in the museum throughout the 1990s, the terrain of art history began to shift as well. We are still seeing the effects of this today as more and more artists from the margins enter mainstream institutions and their histories. In the words of author and activist bell hooks, difference means not only exclusion but "the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance."

Additional resources

"The Decade Show", New Museum digital archive.

James Luna, *The Artifact Piece* at The Decade Show, New Museum digital archive.

Byron Kim discusses *Synecdoche*, MoMA audio.

Roberta Smith. "At the Whitney, A Biennial with a Social Conscience," NYTimes, March 5, 1993.

Elisabeth Sussman, one of four curators of the 1993 Whitney Biennial discusses the show, Whitney audio.

Press release for the MoMA exhibition, "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern."

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11.4: Louise Bourgeois, Maman

by **BANK OF AMERICA**

Page ID
182312



French sculptor Louise Bourgeois is best known to audiences around the world for her spider sculptures. At more than thirty feet tall, her work *Maman*, an homage to her mother cast in bronze, stainless steel and marble, is a spider that towers above all the rest and not just literally. Bourgeois' bold imagination and ambition to create such a work with not only technical precision, but deep love, reflects an artist of depth. Learn more about this masterpiece, the iconic artist, and the woman who inspired her with Rod Bigelow, Executive Director and Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas.

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11.5: Stephanie Syjuco, The Visible Invisible

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182313



By art21. At work in her Berkeley studio, Stephanie Syjuco navigates the deeply embedded visual tropes of American history applied in her practice. Describing the shift in priorities associated with progressing in a career as an artist, Syjuco notes a correlation in time spent between project management and art making. “My reality is,” she says, “it’s a lot more paperwork than I wish it were.” To center herself, Syjuco spends time in her garden, harvesting vegetables and “empire crops”—such as tobacco, corn, cotton, and indigo—as part of her research into colonialism and the writing of American history. Preparing an installation for the Renwick Invitational at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Syjuco lays out garment patterns for creating American-prairie- and Civil-War-antebellum style dresses. Though self-admittedly not historically accurate, the dresses serve to act as signifiers, conjuring images of specific time periods in American history, as well as the tropes of womanhood, Western expansion, and Puritanism that viewers may associate with such garments. The dresses are made with a chroma key green fabric, a color typically used as a temporary backdrop for photo and video shoots—replaced in post-production and never intended to be seen. “The idea of American history is so embedded in our national psyche that it’s almost invisible,” says Syjuco. “It’s like manifesting ghosts, hauling forward all of this American history.” Stephanie Syjuco was born in Manila, Philippines, in 1974. Syjuco works in photography, sculpture, and installation, moving from handmade and craft-inspired mediums to digital editing. Her work explores the tension between the authentic and the counterfeit, challenging deep-seated assumptions about history, race, and labor.

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11.6: Renée Stout, interview about Fetish #2

- by **DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART**

Page ID

182314



Renée Stout explains the personal and found objects included in her life-size sculpture “Fetish #2,” 1988, mixed media (plaster body cast), height: 64 in. (**Dallas Museum of Art, ©Renée Stout, Washington, D.C.**). This interview was recorded in conjunction with the 1989 exhibition “Black Art, Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African-American Art” organized by the Dallas Museum of Art.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

11.7: Wangechi Mutu

11.7.1: Wangechi Mutu, Preying Mantra

11.7.2: Wangechi Mutu, The NewOnes, will free Us

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11.7.1: Wangechi Mutu, Preying Mantra

by DR. SHAWNYA L. HARRIS

Page ID
182316



Figure **11.7.1.1**: Wangechi Mutu, *Preying Mantra*, 2006, mixed media on mylar (Brooklyn Museum) © Wangechi Mutu, all rights reserved

Using the medium of collage, the artist Wangechi Mutu creates new worlds that re-imagine culture through the realm of fantasy. Mutu was born in Nairobi, Kenya and educated in Europe and the United States. Her art is global in nature and she clearly relishes complicating both Western and non-Western cultural norms, questioning how we see gender, sexuality, and even cultural identity.

Wangechi Mutu's artistic practice includes video, installation, sculpture, and mixed-media collage. One of her recurrent themes concerns the violence of colonial domination in Africa (particularly in her native Kenya). Her images incorporate the female body, specifically an imagined "African" body, subjected to sexism and racism on a global scale.

Sources for Mutu's collages include fragments from fashion magazines, pornography, medical literature or even popular magazines such as National Geographic. Inspiration for her collages can be traced to the early photomontages of the German Dada artist Hannah Höch (below left) and the American artist Romare Bearden (below right). Mutu appreciates Bearden's use of collage—how it emphasizes community and the African American traditions found in jazz, while the spliced images in Höch's photomontages reflect Mutu's interest in disrupting societal convention in art. Mutu creates a space for exploring an informed consciousness about being "African" and female that incorporate these artists' techniques yet develops a new visual vocabulary.



Figure **11.7.1.2**: Left: Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*, collage, mixed media, 1919-1920 (Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin); right: Romare Bearden, *The Calabash*, 1970, collage (Library of Congress)

Preying Mantra centers on female subjectivity, exoticism and the notion of hybridity—both in concept and imagery. Hybridity is a concept often used in postcolonial studies. It describes how mixing the cultures of colonized and the colonizer can produce a third space for newer and often disruptive understanding of cultural identity. Colonialism in Africa, which began in earnest in the nineteenth century, violently wrested power from Africans for the benefit of European nations through the enforcement of strict military and administrative controls. As colonialism waned during the mid-twentieth century, other social and political issues emerged. Mutu's work was shaped by this complex history and by issues such as the rights of women that came to the fore at the end of the century.

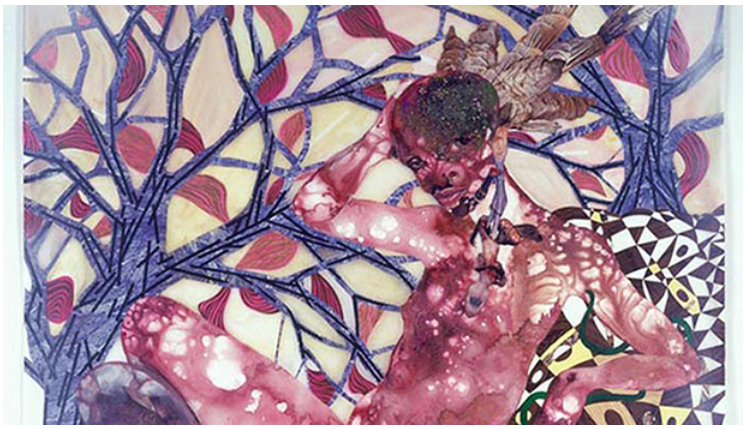


Figure **11.7.1.3**: Wangechi Mutu, *Preying Mantra* (detail), 2006, mixed media on mylar (Brooklyn Museum) © Wangechi Mutu, all rights reserved

In Mutu's *Preying Mantra*, a female creature appears to recline on a geometrically patterned blanket that is sprawled between trees or perhaps on a tree branch. The blanket resembles a Kuba cloth (traditional fabric created by the Kuba people). Legs tightly crossed in front of her, the figure stares suggestively at the viewer with her right hand positioned behind her head, which is surmounted by a cone-like crown. Her relaxed posture is camouflaged by her skin, which appears dappled by sunlight and which mirrors the colors of the tree's leaves. Like the female body, the tree is emblematic of the creation myths found in many cultures, including Mutu's Kikuyu ancestors in Kenya. In her left hand, the figure holds a green serpent that rests on the blanket which fills much of the scene. The serpent, linked with the role of Eve in the biblical creation narrative, provides yet another cultural source for Mutu's protagonist. The tree envelops the female figure, reinforcing links between history and fiction, African and Non-African cultural myths as well as natural versus unnatural phenomena.



Figure **11.7.1.4**: Wangechi Mutu, *Preying Mantra* (detail), 2006, mixed media on mylar (Brooklyn Museum) © Wangechi Mutu, all rights reserved

The title *Preying Mantra*, recalls the praying mantis—an insect that resembles the protagonist in Mutu's collage, with her prominently bent legs. As a carnivorous insect, praying mantises camouflage themselves to match their environment, snaring their prey with their enormous legs. During mating, the female can become a sexual cannibal—eating her submissive mate. Such imagery and its association with natural phenomena creates a primal sensibility. Despite this reference to a real praying mantis, Mutu's "preying mantra" is also vulnerable to our gaze, suggesting that the figure may be a victim that is "preyed" upon by "mantras." Mutu creates a natural, even primitive, fictional environment that entices and disturbs us even as she invites us to

explore stereotypes about the African female body as explicitly sexual, dangerous, and aesthetically deformed in relation to Western standards. Given that elements of the collage are assembled from sociocultural documents found in popular literature from the West, the figure may be preying on the viewer's own fears and desires.



Video **11.7.1.5**



Video **11.7.1.6**

Additional resources:

This work at the Brooklyn Museum

Wangechi Mutu on Failure (Art21 Magazine)

Wangechi Mutu (Art21 Blog)

Wangechi Mutu + Santigold – The End of eating Everything – Nasher Museum at Duke, animated video by Mutu

Artist Breakfast With Wangechi Mutu (artnet video)

Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey (video from the Brooklyn Museum)

Trevor Schoonmaker, *Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey* (North Carolina: Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, 2013)

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11.7.2: Wangechi Mutu, The NewOnes, will free Us

- by **THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART**

Page ID

182317



Go behind the scenes with contemporary artist Wangechi Mutu, who discusses the inspiration and making of The NewOnes, will free Us, an exhibition of four sculpture that inaugurate The Met's annual facade commission, on view September 9, 2019, through January 12, 2020. Learn more about this exhibition: **https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2019/facade-commission-wangechi-mutu**

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11.8: Marina Abramović, The Artist is Present

by REBECCA TAYLOR

Page ID

182318



Figure **11.8.1**: Marina Abramović sitting with Rebecca Taylor at *The Artist is Present* performance at The Museum of Modern Art, 2010

Transcendence

"Sit silently with the artist for a duration of your choosing"—so the instructions read on a small plaque in the second-floor atrium at The Museum of Modern Art. Behind the plaque, a queue of visitors forms, eager to enter a large square space—demarcated only by tape on the floor—to sit down at a wooden table across from a dark-haired woman in a navy-blue dress that conceals every part of her body save her face and her hands.

The woman is the pioneering artist Marina Abramović, but its likely that few of the people in line have any sense of this woman's indelible impact on contemporary art. As I wait, an anthology of her performances scrolling through my head. Watching her from afar, I look to see the courage and fearlessness in a woman capable of incising a five-pointed star on her own stomach, screaming until she loses consciousness, and living in a gallery for 12 days without food. Strangely, she doesn't seem reckless at all, but peaceful and wise. I then remember she trained with Tibetan Buddhists and has said she's able to transcend the limits of her own body and mind through meditation. She'll need these skills now more than ever as she attempts her longest performance-to-date, sitting at this table for every hour of every day that her retrospective is open at MoMA. No food. No water. No breaks.

My turn

So, I wait for my moment with the artist, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. A young girl is sitting across from Marina and the two seem engaged in a staring contest, though from that distance it's impossible to tell if they're actually making eye contact or simply staring ahead in a daze. Seventy-five minutes later she finally stands up and exits the square, declaring she lost all sense of time and thought it had only been a few minutes. Marina leans forward and closes her eyes, while the next sojourner steps forward and takes the empty seat. Marina sits up and another staring contest commences—this one lasting sixty-seven minutes. This process repeats —ten minutes, fifty-five minutes, twenty minutes, forty-five minutes, etc. Finally, the man in front of me takes the seat and I'm next. More than three hours from when I entered the succession I've seen only six people participate in the performance and more than thirty leave the line in frustration. The nameless, faceless strangers I queued with hours ago are now friends—an artist from Poughkeepsie, an art history undergrad from Chicago, a nurse from outside Philly—and we share our excitement as our turn approaches. Finally, after nearly four hours, my time has come.

I enter the square and approach the table, immediately noting the heat of the lights and the watchful eyes of the crowds gathered to gawk at the spectacle. I put my purse on the floor and take a seat. While Marina leans forward, I settle into the chair and imagine I'll last about ten minutes before I become either bored or totally uncomfortable. She begins to sit up and I try to prepare myself for the moment she opens her eyes. I have many skills, but sitting still and being silent are not traits I'm known for, so I was afraid: afraid of the judgment implicit in staring, afraid of the silence, afraid I wouldn't have the transformative experience that had captivated those before me, afraid, afraid, afraid. Her lids opened and our eyes locked, not in a stare but in a friendly gaze. For the first few minutes, I thought only about who this woman was—a renegade, a feminist, an inspiration—but quickly realized that

those things were more about her persona than the person. I discarded my preconceived notions and expectations and, as soon as I stopped thinking of her as an artist-celebrity, saw the woman behind the legend. We sat absolutely still in deafening silence, exchanging energy, and just being with each other. I've heard it said that couples married for decades can sit in silence and understand one another perfectly, but I'd never imagine that sort of intimacy could be possible between two total strangers. It is.

I could have stayed in that moment for hours but thought of my fellow line-mates, now friends, and decided it would be selfish to bask in this experience any longer. But, could I leave? It felt as rude as leaving a lecture in the middle. How would I leave? Abruptly just wouldn't do, so I said good-bye and thanked her. More than thirty minutes had passed, thirty minutes of epic silence I'll never forget.

Additional Resources:

MoMA exhibition website

"Performance Art Preserved, in the Flesh," *New York Times* article, 2010

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11.9: Rineke Dijkstra, Odessa, Ukraine, August 4, 1993

by JOSH R. ROSE

Page ID
182319



Figure **11.9.1**: Rineke Dijkstra, *Odessa, Ukraine, August 4, 1993*, 1993, Chromogenic print, 153 x 128.9 cm, © Rineke Dijkstra, courtesy of the artist

What makes a portrait so compelling? Historically, portraits were reserved for the elite and wealthy, but with the advent of the camera in 1839 portraiture became increasingly democratized and accessible across social classes. Today, we all appear in numerous portraits: family photos, formal school pictures, even the increasingly common "selfie" created for social networks. In an age of ubiquitous portraiture, what makes Dutch artist Rineke Dijkstra's photograph of a teenage boy standing on a Ukrainian shoreline so evocative?

Working in series

Dijkstra's photograph *Odessa, Ukraine, August 4, 1993* comes from the series *Beaches*, which was created between 1992 and 1998 across locations as diverse as Poland, Great Britain, South Carolina, Belgium, Coney Island, and the Ukraine. Typically working in series, Dijkstra prefers single subjects documented over time or multiple subjects recorded after moments of intensity, such as new mothers in the days after giving birth or Portuguese bullfighters immediately after a match. Working in series necessitates revealing through comparison.

In *Beaches*, her earliest series, Dijkstra was interested not just in capturing young men and women on the cusp of adulthood, but the unexpected social and cultural nuances that became apparent by portraying teenagers from different parts of the world:

"I think that in Poland [the subjects' bathing suits] reminded me of the '60s, they have twenty-year old bathing suits and no one cares…They were very easygoing. The Americans had very fancy bathing costumes and the poses were more self-conscious. One girl was really holding her belly in and her mother was behind her yelling 'You're too fat.' She was so unhappy."[1]

These powerful emotional responses are expressed through intricately captured details across the series *Beaches* and in each of the individual portraits. Dijkstra draws us in with the details captured using a flash (even in sunlight), from the type of swimming garment (full length swimsuit, speedo, underwear, cut-off jeans) to the expressions on the subjects' faces (cool, pensive, inquisitive).

Standing on a beach

Dijkstra's process entailed asking unknown adolescents to pose for her at the shore, and while she set up lighting and prepared her camera on a tripod, her subjects assumed their own stance.[2] As with each photograph in this series, the anonymous boy's vertical body is set against the rigid horizontals of the shore and horizon. He stands in contrapposto, causing his angular shoulders to protrude up and out, and his gangly frame is sunken in at the torso.

The careful lighting, which one writer has described as “clinical,” starkly contrasts his pale skin against the cool tones of sky, water, and sand. The overwhelming blues and greys are augmented by the boy’s dark red trunks that extend to the sharp bend of his pelvis, appearing unnaturally flattened as if pasted on the image afterward. In contrast to his young body, his mature face stares outward unabashedly, which is daunting when seen in its six foot tall printed form.

Behind his emotionless expression is a self-awareness that appears mature, relaxed, and casual. Dijkstra often strives to capture self-consciousness: “People think that they present themselves one way,” the photographer once stated, “but they cannot help but show something else as well. It’s impossible to have everything under control.”[3] Dijkstra bridges the difficult gulf between self-presentation and photographic representation by allowing the subjects to assume their own pose. Despite choosing nearly identical settings for each photographs in the series, Dijkstra’s portraits transcend simple visual documentation and become revelatory images of the awkwardness and transitory nature of puberty.

Typologies?

Because her title emphasizes location and date but excludes the name, Dijkstra intends for her subject to remain unknown. This insistence on anonymity and working in series is suggestive of a typology, or a system of classification based on type. As Allen Sekula has discussed, photographic typologies became increasingly common at the end of the nineteenth century, linked to the popular pseudo-sciences of physiognomy and phrenology.[4] Another photographer, the German August Sander, is important here. Dijkstra has often stated that Sander was a primary influence on her work and methodology; moreover, he also produced typological photographs.



Figure **11.9.2**: August Sander, Sisters, 1927, gelatin silver print, 33 x 24.5 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

From 1910 to the early 1950s, Sander encyclopedically documented German people, emphasizing lifestyle and profession as an extensive photographic typology of *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts (People of the Twentieth Century)*. Although his visual approach was modified over time, Sander’s photographs emphasized clothing, tools, ephemera, and setting. In Sander’s 1927 photograph *Sisters*, the simple folk dresses of the young girls standing on a forest path suggest their lineage with traditional German customs and love of nature (though offset somewhat by their wristwatches!). Sander likely posed and carefully composed his portraits, evident by the visual alignment of the waistline embroidery on the sisters’ dresses.

While the influence of Sander on Dijkstra’s own work is important, there are some key differences, most notably her method of unifying the composition with the shoreline. This, along with allowing her subjects to settle into their own stance, does not classify as much as expose by focusing less on extraneous details and more on the expressions and bodies of her subjects.

Posing as art history

One interesting byproduct of Dijkstra’s method of allowing her portrait subjects to be conscious of the pose they strike is that at times her figures end up in stances that are remarkably similar to famous works of art. In one *Beaches* photograph from Poland, a young girl unconsciously mirrors a pose similar to that of Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*. In the Odessa photograph, the young man’s contrapposto and nearly nude figure evokes the idealized youthful males of Early Classical Greek statuary.

These references, which Dijkstra states are unintended by her, are quite evocative, and suggest an ingrained, resonant sense of how late twentieth-century adolescents wish themselves to be portrayed when a Dutch photographer asks them to pose for her while spending their day at the beach.

Special thanks to Sandy Heller, The Heller Group, LLC

[1] As quoted in an interview with Jennifer Morgan, *Rineke Dijkstra: Portraits. Hatje Cantz* (Institute of Contemporary Art, 2001), p. 80.

[2] Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters As Art As Never Before* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2008), p. 206.

[3] As quoted in Katy Siegel, “Real People,” *Rineke Dijkstra: Portraits, Hatje Cantz* (Institute of Contemporary Art, 2001) p. 10.

[4] Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (1986), p. 3.

Additional Resources:

Dijkstra’s work at the Saatchi Gallery

Dijkstra in conversation with Abigail Christenson (Tate video)

August Sander on The Museum of Modern Art website

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11.10: An interview with Maryam Hoseini

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182320



By art21. How does a painter translate the real into the abstract? From her Brooklyn studio, artist Maryam Hoseini explores the spaces in between painting and drawing, figuration and abstraction, and the personal experiences embedded in her work and the multiple interpretations viewers can bring to it. As she flips through her pencil drawings and resumes work on an acrylic painting, the artist recounts her early interest in drawing classes and the strong, female art teacher in her native Iran that inspired her. Hoseini's current work depicts fragmented—often female—bodies floating in abstract, flattened architectural spaces, in suggestive, but open-ended narratives. With her work shown at major exhibitions around the world, Hoseini explains the concept behind her recently commissioned series of paintings for an exhibition coinciding with the 58th Venice Biennale. A reimagining of the famous 12th-century poem about Laylah and Majnun, Hoseini's paintings focus on the female character in the legend, a woman who, as the artist puts it, "was banned from speaking and desiring what she really wanted." This sense of fear and anxiety, punctuated with strength and humor, pervade Hoesini's work. The artist tracks the evolution of her style, coming to the conclusion that her choice to depict fragmented, headless bodies and fractured, illegible spaces reflects her "own personal experiences and life as an immigrant and as a person who is not even able to travel to my country and to return to my work and life here in America."

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11.11: Jordan Casteel paints her community

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182321



By art21. Where does a painter find her subject matter? With a process that takes her from the streets of Harlem to her studio in DUMBO, Brooklyn, artist Jordan Casteel paints vibrant large scale portraits, making visible the often unrepresented humanity of Black men. At first struggling to find subject matter that could speak to the political realities of police violence and implicit bias, Casteel drew inspiration from her twin brother. “People follow me like I’m a threat,” the artist remembers her brother saying, “but they don’t know anything about me.” Together Casteel’s paintings illustrate the multiplicity of Black male experience; she began with nudes in domestic interiors before expanding to men on the sidewalk, the color and compositions celebrating the visual texture of her Harlem neighborhood. Casteel’s work is probing in its tender depiction of Black men who, although often strangers to the artist, gaze directly and intimately out at the viewer.

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11.12: Luchita Hurtado’s body of work

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182322



Luchita Hurtado reflects on her eight-decade-long career and the relationship between the human body and the natural world that is embedded in her work. In her Santa Monica studio, Hurtado works on a new painting from her “Birthing” series, discussing how her experience of motherhood and her commitment to environmental activism merge in this most recent body of work. Born in Venezuela, Hurtado describes her childhood growing up in New York City, her first art classes, and the challenges of starting a family while maintaining an artistic practice. “It takes a great deal of energy, having the life of a parent and having the life of an artist,” recounts Hurtado. “My real painting, I could do at night after everyone was asleep.” Speaking with her studio director, Ryan Good, Hurtado explains that it was not until recent years that her work began receiving more attention from curators and museums. The artist travels to the Serpentine Galleries in London to celebrate her first solo exhibition at a public institution, showcasing over one hundred works and charting her many styles of painting and drawing: from dynamic abstractions of human figures to bold self-portraits that depict the artist’s body from her own downward-facing perspective, from swirling blue skies with floating feathers to paintings with words like “AIR,” “WATER,” and “EARTH” embedded within them. Back in Los Angeles, Hurtado paints “en plein air” in a local park and elucidates on the tenuous relationship between humans and nature, which is the focus of her newest work. “We’re all on this planet together and we’re all related,” says the artist. “To be in this park, with these trees, it’s just the joy of life.” Working in painting, drawing, and prints, Luchita Hurtado has experimented with many different styles over the course of her 80-year career, yet maintained a unique, independent practice that explores the relationship between the human body and the natural world. In reference to a striking series of self-portraits from the 1960s and 1970s, in which the artist painted her body from her own downward facing perspective, Hurtado states, “I concluded that’s all I had in the world, was myself. I am who I am because I’m doing what I want to do, not what I’m told to do.”

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SECTION OVERVIEW

11.13: Shirin Neshat

11.13.1: Rebellious Silence, Women of Allah series

11.13.2: ‘Dreams Are Where Our Fears Live’

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11.13.1: Rebellious Silence, Women of Allah series

by DR. ALLISON YOUNG

Page ID 182324

In *Rebellious Silence*, the central figure's portrait is bisected along a vertical seam created by the long barrel of a rifle. Presumably the rifle is clasped in her hands near her lap, but the image is cropped so that the gun rises perpendicular to the lower edge of the photo and grazes her face at the lips, nose, and forehead. The woman's eyes stare intensely towards the viewer from both sides of this divide.

Shirin Neshat's photographic series *Women of Allah* examines the complexities of women's identities in the midst of a changing cultural landscape in the Middle East—both through the lens of Western representations of Muslim women, and through the more intimate subject of personal and religious conviction.

While the composition—defined by the hard edge of her black chador against the bright white background—appears sparse, measured and symmetrical, the split created by the weapon implies a more violent rupture or psychic fragmentation. A single subject, it suggests, might be host to internal contradictions alongside binaries such as tradition and modernity, East and West, beauty and violence. In the artist's own words, "every image, every woman's submissive gaze, suggests a far more complex and paradoxical reality behind the surface." [1]



Figure **11.13.1.1**: Shirin Neshat, *Rebellious Silence*, *Women of Allah* series, 1994, black and white RC print and ink, photo by Cynthia Preston ©Shirin Neshat (courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels)

The *Women of Allah* series confronts this "paradoxical reality" through a haunting suite of black-and-white images. Each contains a set of four symbols that are associated with Western representations of the Muslim world: the veil, the gun, the text and the gaze. While these symbols have taken on a particular charge since 9/11, the series was created earlier and reflects changes that have taken place in the region since 1979, the year of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

Islamic Revolution

Iran had been ruled by the Shah (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi), who took power in 1941 during the Second World War and reigned as King until 1979, when the Persian monarchy was overthrown by revolutionaries. His dictatorship was known for the violent repression of political and religious freedom, but also for its modernization of the country along Western cultural models. Post-war Iran was an ally of Britain and the United States, and was markedly progressive with regards to women's rights. The Shah's regime, however, steadily grew more restrictive, and revolutionaries eventually rose to abolish the monarchy in favor of a conservative religious government headed by Ayatollah Khomeini.

Shirin Neshat was born in 1957 in the town of Qazvin. In line with the Shah's expansion of women's rights, her father prioritized his daughters' access to education, and the young artist attended a Catholic school where she learned about both Western and Iranian intellectual and cultural history. She left, however, in the mid-1970s, pursuing her studies in California as the environment in Iran grew increasingly hostile. It would be seventeen years before she returned to her homeland. When she did, she confronted a society that was completely opposed to the one that she had grown up in.

Looking back

One of the most visible signs of cultural change in Iran has been the requirement for all women to wear the veil in public. While many Muslim women find this practice empowering and affirmative of their religious identities, the veil has been coded in Western eyes as a sign of Islam's oppression of women. This opposition is made more clear, perhaps, when one considers the simultaneity of the Islamic Revolution with women's liberation movements in the U.S. and Europe, both developing throughout the 1970s. Neshat decided to explore this fraught symbol in her art as a way to reconcile her own conflicting feelings. In *Women of Allah*, initiated shortly after her return to Iran in 1991, the veil functions as both a symbol of freedom and of repression.

The veil and the gaze

The veil is intended to protect women's bodies from becoming the sexualized object of the male gaze, but it also protects women from being seen at all. The "gaze" in this context becomes a charged signifier of sexuality, sin, shame, and power. Neshat is cognizant of feminist theories that explain how the "male gaze" is normalized in visual and popular culture: Women's bodies are commonly paraded as objects of desire in advertising and film, available to be looked at without consequence. Many feminist artists have used the action of "gazing back" as a means to free the female body from this objectification. The gaze, here, might also reflect exotic fantasies of the East. In **Orientalist painting** of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for instance, Eastern women are often depicted nude, surrounded by richly colored and patterned textiles and decorations; women are envisaged amongst other beautiful objects that can be possessed. In Neshat's images, women return the gaze, breaking free from centuries of subservience to male or European desire.



Figure **11.13.1.2**: Shirin Neshat, *Faceless*, *Women of Allah* series, 1994, black and white RC print and ink, photo by Cynthia Preston ©Shirin Neshat (courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels)

Most of the subjects in the series are photographed holding a gun, sometimes passively, as in *Rebellious Silence*, and sometimes threateningly, with the muzzle pointed directly towards the camera lens. With the complex ideas of the "gaze" in mind, we might reflect on the double meaning of the word "shoot," and consider that the camera—especially during the colonial era—was used to violate women's bodies. The gun, aside from its obvious references to control, also represents religious martyrdom, a subject about which the artist feels ambivalently, as an outsider to Iranian revolutionary culture.

Poetry

The contradictions between piety and violence, empowerment and suppression, are most prevalent in the use of calligraphic text that is applied to each photograph. Western viewers who do not read Farsi may understand the calligraphy as an aesthetic signifier, a reference to the **importance of text** in the long history of Islamic art. Yet, most of the texts are transcriptions of poetry and other writings by women, which express multiple viewpoints and date both before and after the Revolution. Some of the texts that Neshat has chosen are feminist in nature. However, in *Rebellious Silence*, the script that runs across the artist's face is from Tahereh

Saffarzadeh's poem "Allegiance with Wakefulness" which honors the conviction and bravery of martyrdom. Reflecting the paradoxical nature of each of these themes, histories and discourses, the photograph is both melancholic and powerful—invoking the quiet and intense beauty for which Neshat's work has become known.

As an outspoken, feminist and progressive artist, Neshat is aware that it would be dangerous to show her work in conservative modern-day Iran, and she has been living in exile in the United States since the 1990s. For audiences in the West, the "Women of Allah" series has allowed a more nuanced contemplation of common stereotypes and assumptions about Muslim women, and serves to challenge the suppression of female voices in any community.

[1] **Shirin Neshat, "Artist Statement," *Signs Journal*** (accessed July 2015)



Video **11.13.1.4**

Additional resources:

Neshat at Gladstone Gallery

Neshat on NPR (audio)

Neshat from LACMA

Interview with Neshat from PBS

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11.13.2: ‘Dreams Are Where Our Fears Live’

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SECTION OVERVIEW

11.14: Kehinde Wiley

11.14.1: Rumors of War

11.14.2: Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps

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11.14.1: Rumors of War

by VALERIE CASSEL OLIVER, VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID

182327



Kehinde Wiley, *Rumors of War*, 2019, patinated bronze with stone pedestal, overall: 27’4 7/8” x 25’5 7/8” x 15’9” 5/8” (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts) © Kehinde Wiley; a conversation with Valerie Cassel Oliver, Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and Beth Harris

Additional resources

This sculpture at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Kehinde Wiley Studio

This sculpture in Times Square

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11.14.2: Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps

by DR. GAYLE CLEMANS

Page ID
182328



Figure **11.14.2.1**: Kehinde Wiley, *Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps*, 2005, oil paint on canvas, 274.3 x 274.3 cm (108 x 108 in) (Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York) © Kehinde Wiley

Confronting Art History

In this large painting, Kehinde Wiley, an African-American artist, strategically re-creates a French masterpiece from two hundred years before but with key differences. This act of appropriation reveals issues about the tradition of portraiture and all that it implies about power and privilege. Wiley asks us to think about the biases of the art historical canon (the set of works that are regarded as "masterpieces"), representation in pop culture, and issues of race and gender. Here, Wiley replaces the original white subject—the French general-turned-emperor Napoleon Bonaparte (below)—with an anonymous black man whom Wiley approached on the street as part of his "street-casting process." Although Wiley does occasionally create paintings on commission, he typically asks everyday people of color to sit for photographs, which he then transforms into paintings. Along the way, he talks with those sitters, gathering their thoughts about what they should wear, how they might pose, and which historical paintings to reference.

Napoleon Leading the Army is a clear spin-off of Jacques-Louis David's painting of 1800-01 (below), which was commissioned by Charles IV, the King of Spain, to commemorate Napoleon's victorious military campaign against the Austrians. The original portrait smacks of propaganda. Napoleon, in fact, did not pose for the original painting nor did he lead his troops over the mountains into Austria. He sent his soldiers ahead on foot and followed a few days later, riding on a mule.



Figure **11.14.2.2**: Left: Jacques-Louis David, *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, 1803 version, oil on canvas 275 × 232 cm (Österreichische Galerie Belvedere); right: Kehinde Wiley, *Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps*, 2005, oil paint on canvas, 274.3 x 274.3 cm (108 x 108 in) (Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York)

Wiley calls attention to ideas about authority and historical representation, keeping many original elements and making significant alterations. The royal blue coat of the original makes an appearance (peeking out from the young man's camouflage shirt), as does the gold-encased sword (held in place by a red strap). But Wiley's subject wears an outfit that is completely contemporary and reflective of a culture notorious for flashy imagery and larger than life figures: hip hop culture. This young man wears camouflage fatigues, Timberland work boots, and a bandana—conjuring up militaristic associations with the original painting and with the violence of contemporary urban America, particularly as experienced by young black men. The subject of Wiley's painting reveals his tattoos and wears red wristbands from the Starter sportswear company, details that add to the sense that this is a real individual living in the early 21st century.

Instead of the naturalistic setting of David's painting, Wiley has inserted a decorative, unrealistic backdrop reminiscent of luxurious French fabric. This background, along with the high-keyed colors, and ornate frame (complete with faux family shields and the artist's self-portrait at the top) call attention to the artificiality and pompousness of image-making.



Figure **11.14.2.3**: Sperm (detail), Kehinde Wiley, *Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps*, 2005, oil paint on canvas, 274.3 x 274.3 cm (108 x 108 in) (Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York) (photo: Gayle Clemans)

The background is also infused with tiny paintings of sperm—Wiley's way of poking fun at the highly charged masculinity and propagation of gendered identity that are involved in the Western tradition of portraiture. This particular subgenre of portraiture—the equestrian portrait—is particularly infused with the lineage of male power. From classical Rome to post-revolutionary France, political and military leaders on horseback have evoked and perpetuated social norms of masculine might and control (for example, this equestrian portrait of the **Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius**).

Through his demonstration of extraordinary painting skill and his use of famous portraits, Wiley could be seen as wryly placing himself in line with the history of great master painters. Here, for example, he has signed and dated the painting just as David did, painting his name and the date in Roman numerals onto the band around the horse's chest. Wiley makes another reference to lineage in the foreground where he retains the original painting's rocky surface and the carved names of illustrious leaders who led troops over the Alps: NAPOLEON, HANNIBAL, and KAROLUS MAGNUS (Charlemagne). But Wiley also includes the name WILLIAMS—another insistence on including ordinary people of color who are often left out of systems of representation and glorification. Not only is Williams a common African-American surname, it hints at the imposition of Anglo names on black people who were brought by force from Africa and stripped of their own histories.

About the Artist

Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977) attracted media and art world attention almost immediately after earning his MFA from Yale University in 2001. He was an artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem and has been included in many significant group and solo exhibitions. Wiley now employs studio assistants who participate in his "street-casting" process and in the various stages of painting and sculpture fabrication. In addition to large-scale paintings, Wiley has created stained glass, painted altarpieces, and cast bronze sculptures, all of which examine of art history, race, gender, and the power of representation.

Additional Resources:

Gayle Clemans, "The Stunning and Subversive Pageantry of Artist Kehinde Wiley," *The Seattle Times*, February 16, 2016.

Shahrazad A. Shareef, "The Power of Decor: Kehinde Wiley's Interventions into the Construction of Black Masculine Identity" (UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2010).

Roberta Smith, "Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic at the Brooklyn Museum," *New York Times*, February 19, 2015.

Eugenie Tsai, ed., *Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic* (Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2015).

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11.15: Yinka Shonibare, The Swing (After Fragonard)

by DR. ALLISON YOUNG

Page ID
182329



Figure **11.15.1**: Yinka Shonibare MBE, *The Swing (After Fragonard)*, 2001 (Tate, London) © Yinka Shonibare

With her fingers delicately grasping the thickly coiled rope of a swing suspended mid-flight, a life-sized female mannequin flirtatiously kicks up her left foot, projecting her slipper into the air where it hovers above a tangle of branches. Our gaze is directed from the arch of her foot towards the vibrant trim of her petticoat, gown and coat.

A recreation of a Rococo painting

The Swing (After Fragonard) is a three-dimensional recreation of the Rococo painting after which it was titled, which itself offers testimony to the opulence and frivolity of pre-Revolutionary France. Painted in 1767, Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *The Swing* depicts a coquettish young girl swinging in a lush and fertile forest and, of course, playfully kicking up her shoe. A sculpture of a bashful cherub looks on, but he is not alone; the female figure is flanked by two male figures lurking in the shadows, one seems to push her swing from behind, as the other mischievously glances up the layers of her dress to catch a glimpse of what is beneath.

Living with History

> ***Living in England, with my colonial relationship to this country, one cannot escape all these Victorian things, because they are everywhere: in architecture, culture, attitude…***



Figure **11.15.2**: Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Swing*, oil on canvas, 1767 (Wallace Collection, London

Shonibare's quotations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century style and sensibility are visually captivating; at the same time, tableaux such as *The Swing* contain some dark undertones. To begin with, the beautiful young protagonist of Fragonard's painting has somehow become headless. This is likely a reference to the use of the guillotine during the Reign of Terror in the 1790s, when members of the French aristocracy were publicly beheaded. Drawing our attention to questions of excess, class and morality that were raised by revolutionaries two centuries ago, Shonibare invites us to also consider the increasing disparity between economic classes today, especially alongside the growing culture of paranoia, terror and xenophobia in global politics since 9/11.

As a British-born Nigerian, raised between Lagos and London, Shonibare is especially perceptive to the ways in which issues of access, nationalism and belonging have their roots in modern European history, particularly with regards to the United Kingdom

and its relationship to its former colonies. Here is where the specific fabrics that Shonibare utilizes become more relevant, as their symbolism is steeped in histories of cultural appropriation, imperialism and power.

Indonesian motifs, made by Europeans, sold in West Africa

Though tailored in the fashion of eighteenth-century French aristocratic style, the costume that is modeled by Shonibare's protagonist has been sewn from colorful and abstractly patterned fabrics with quite different origins: the bright golds, reds and blues arranged in geometric motifs across her ruffled skirt are typical of the "African" Dutch wax fabrics that Shonibare has famously used to adorn his figural tableaux throughout his career.



Figure **11.15.3**: Dutch wax print fabrics (photo: **ipercher**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

While these fabrics have come to signify African identity today, the patterns on Dutch wax fabrics were originally based on motifs found in Indonesian batiks, and were manufactured in England and Holland in the nineteenth-century. Predictably, the European imitations did not prove lucrative when sold in South Asian markets, so Dutch manufacturers then marketed the textiles to their West African colonies, where they have since been appropriated and integrated into local visual culture.

As such, Dutch wax fabrics as we know them today are the product of the complex economic and cultural entanglements that resulted from European imperialism. As curator Okwui Enwezor has explained, Shonibare uses the fabrics "as a tool to investigate the place of ethnicity and the stereotype in modernist representation. (…) The textile is neither Dutch nor African, therefore, the itinerary of ideas it circulates are never quite stable in their authority or meaning."

Aesthetics and Authenticity

As fictional as their "African-ness" may appear to be, however, the fabrics have now been completely assimilated in places like Nigeria, where Shonibare grew up. As Enwezor points out, the material is "both fake and authentic, both readymade and original," not to mention indisputably cosmopolitan.

The question of what is "authentically" African has personal resonance for Shonibare, who, as an art student in London, was shocked when one of his instructors suggested that he make work that expressed his African identity. This conversation prompted him to think about stereotypes and the areas that exist between categories of identity and culture. The artist began using the material in 1992.

In Pursuit of Leisure

What might Shonibare wish to communicate by bringing together these "African" textiles with Fragonard's Rococo images, or any of the other European masterpieces that the artist has appropriated in his sculptural installations?

In imaging this particular moment in European history, Shonibare wishes to forge connections between imperialism, the aristocracy, and the "colonized wealthy class." In *The Swing (After Fragonard)*, which is loaded with references to the French Revolution, the Age of Enlightenment and colonial expansion into Africa, Shonibare asks us to consider how a simple act of leisure can be so controversial.

> ***While the leisure pursuit might look frivolous (…) my depiction of it is a way of engaging in that power. It is actually an expression of something much more profoundly serious insofar as the accumulation of wealth and power that is personified in leisure was no doubt a product of exploiting people.***

In this and other works, Shonibare chooses stories—including biographies, world events, and works of art—which are already effective allegories concerning race, class, corruption and greed, calling our attention to some of the darker moments in Western history. However, his use of the Dutch Wax fabric, with its spurious origins and its misleading aesthetic identity, serve as a reminder that history and truth are also themselves constructions.

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11.16: Figures and Fictions- Santu Mofokeng

by **VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON**

Page ID
182330



Mofokeng lives in Johannesburg where he began his career as a photojournalist. But he has long been engaged with the poetic and symbolic potential of black and white photography. As he has noted: ‘My approach has always been based on poetry and philosophy, in standing back. I don’t believe in one truth: I like to look at things from many sides.’ The series Chasing Shadows documents a set of caves used both as a Christian prayer site and a place of traditional healing. Mofokeng’s concern with the rituals, costume and ceremonies is balanced with personal interest, in a portrait of his brother, seeking a cure for AIDS. Another series, Child-Headed Households, registers the blight of AIDS without depicting it directly. Here, Mofokeng frames the new reality of families formed of sibling communities who fare for themselves in impoverished circumstances. Interviewed by Tamar Garb, South Africa, 2010

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11.17: Kiki Smith, Lying with the Wolf

by DR. ALLISON YOUNG

Page ID
182331



Figure **11.17.1**: Kiki Smith, *Lying with the Wolf*, 2001, ink and pencil on paper 88 x 73″ (Centre Pompidou, Paris) © Kiki Smith

This delicate but large-scale work on paper, which depicts a female nude reclining intimately alongside a wolf, represents the assimilation of several themes that Kiki Smith has explored throughout her decades-long career. Featuring an act of bonding between human and animal, the piece speaks not only to Smith's fascination with and reverence for the natural world, but also her noted interests in religious narratives and mythology, the history of figuration in western art, and contemporary notions of feminine domesticity, spiritual yearning, and sexual identity.

Lying with the Wolf is one in a short series of works executed between 2000 and 2002 that illustrates women's relationships with animals, drawing from representations found in visual, literary, and oral histories. Smith is most interested in narratives that speak to collectively shared mythologies; these include folk tales, biblical stories and Victorian literature, yet the once-familiar stories are then fragmented and conflated with one another to form new clusters of meaning and association.

Intimate Relationships with Nature



Figure **11.17.2**: Kiki Smith, *Rapture*, 2001, bronze, 67-1/4 x 62 x 26-1/2″, edition of 3, © Kiki Smith

Many of Smith's works from this period feature a female protagonist who is based on Little Red Riding Hood as well Sainte Geneviève, the Patron Saint of Paris. Geneviève is herself often associated with Saint Francis of Assisi because of her close

relationships with animals and her ability, in particular, to domesticate wolves.

Other works in the series include *Geneviève and the May Wolf*—a bronze sculpture in which a standing female figure calmly embraces the wolf—and *Rapture*, which is perhaps more closely aligned to Red Riding Hood, as it depicts a woman stepping out from the stomach of the recumbent creature.

The pair as depicted in *Lying with the Wolf*, however, seems locked in a more intimate embrace, as the wolf nuzzles affectionately into the nude woman's arms. She wraps herself around the animal's body in a gesture of comforting, her fingers stroking the soft fur beneath its ears and along the side of its stomach. The wolf's wildness is tamed, and both figures seem to nurture one another, floating within the abstract space of the textured paper surface upon which they are delicately drawn. Smith imbues a story that is normally quite violent with a kind of tenderness that is characteristic of her overall aesthetic.

Feminist Approaches to Narrative

It has been suggested by some critics that Smith's reinterpretations of Red Riding Hood and Sainte Geneviève represent a feminist approach to popular folktales. This is supported by her placement of "woman" amidst the natural world, but also, importantly, at a structural level: in the way in which the two narratives are fragmented and combined. Borrowing from divergent sources in order to forge a new storyline, Smith demonstrates the slippery relationship between a visual image and its multiple references, adopting a narrative style indebted to feminist re-writings of history.

As the curator Helaine Posner has explained: "Instead of presenting them in their traditional roles as predator and prey, Smith re-imagined these characters as companions, equals in purpose and scale." The distinction between "predator" and "prey" might be thought of as a metaphor for hierarchies of power in human relationships, which have traditionally been drawn along the lines of gender, race, and class. Because patriarchal societies typically grant more power to men, while requiring women to be submissive or dependent, we can think of this "overturning" in Smith's art as a political statement against such inequalities. The artistic narratives portrayed in her work are ones in which binaries are flipped and opposing qualities are merged; in so doing, Smith asserts a critical feminist position that favors the articulation of multiple meanings.

"Walking Around in a Garden"

"My career has stopped being linear. A couple of years ago, the story line or narrative fell apart…"[1]

As is the case with *Lying with the Wolf*, several of Smith's works integrate a diverse list of themes and motifs that she has accumulated over the course of her career. The artist continuously re-imagines tropes she has used in past works, with the result that her practice does not seem to progress through discrete artistic stages. Rather, she works in cycles and layers; she has described her career as an act of meandering, or "walking around in a garden."

Kiki Smith grew up in a vibrant artistic family; she is the daughter of the sculptor Tony Smith and the opera singer Jane Lawrence Smith. She has spoken fondly of the Victorian house in which she was raised in South Orange, New Jersey, and how it captured her young imagination, as a historical artifact with its own memories and indices to the past. The notion of "home" has been central to her practice, and she likens it to the human body, a theme that is pervasive across her oeuvre. Domesticity, fragility, and the humble materials of craft and folk arts feature strongly in her work.

Abjection and The Body

While Kiki Smith's early work is aligned with the collaborative and activist art scene of the 1980s, she became known for intimate explorations of the human body in the following decade, often through life-sized sculpture that honored the figural tradition in Western art.



Figure **11.17.3**: Kiki Smith, *Blood Pool*, 1992, wax, gauze, and pigment, 42 x 24 x 16″, © Kiki Smith

These works emphasized the body's vulnerability and made reference to feminist theories of the "abject," which conceived of the body as a messy, porous, and boundary-less system. *Blood Pool*, for instance, features a small, apparently violated figure, huddled into a fetal position on the floor . Many other works of this period feature bodily fluids or marks of injury.

Mysticism and Mythologies

Throughout the 1990s, Smith would come to embrace her religious upbringing, creating works that are spiritual, ethereal, and markedly more decorative. Celestial motifs and references to the natural world became ubiquitous, although these themes are still deeply connected to the body. As an investigation of the body in its capacity for fertility, reproduction, and nurturing, this turn towards the natural environment would eventually lead Smith to her interest in animals and our connections to them.

Lying with the Wolf is an extension of this yearning to connect the earthly with the spiritual and the personal with the collective.

1. As quoted in Christopher Lyon, "Free Fall: Kiki Smith on Her Art" in *Kiki Smith*, ed. Helaine Posner and Christopher Lyon, New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, Inc: page 37.

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- **12.3: Identity and the body** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

SECTION OVERVIEW

11.18: Catherine Opie

11.18.1: Self-Portrait/Cutting

11.18.2: Figure and Landscape series

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11.18.1: Self-Portrait/Cutting

by **DR. GRETCHEN GASTERLAND-GUSTAFSSON**

Page ID
182333



Figure **11.18.1.1**: Catherine Opie, *Self-Portrait/Cutting*, 1993, chromogenic print, 40 x 30 inches (**Guggenheim © Catherine Opie**)

Catherine Opie's unaltered photograph *Self-Portrait/Cutting* offers a picture within a picture. [1] The photograph is a richly colored, sharply focused, highly detailed chromogenic print of a person seen from the back, pictured naked from the waist up. The subject faces a floral damask backdrop in a jewel-toned emerald green that provides the **complementary** contrast to the pinks and reds of the flesh.



Figure **11.18.1.2**: Hans Holbein the Younger, *Christina of Denmark, Duchess of Milan*, 1538, oil on oak, 179.1 x 82.6 cm (**The National Gallery, London**)

The emerald-colored background with detailed patterning, straightforward, centered composition, and the dignity of the sitter, recall, ironically, the formal royal portrait conventions used by Henry VIII's court painter **Hans Holbein the Younger**, particularly

in this 1538 portrait of *Christina of Denmark*. Opie has looked to Holbein's work for inspiration more generally. In *Self-Portrait/Cutting*, Opie grants herself, a member of the LGBTQI+ community, similar importance as members of the royal court.

In *Self-Portrait/Cutting*, Opie's short-cropped hair is dark with copper highlights at the crown, above the dark-brown shorn under-layer by the neck. Both ears feature multiple piercings with a tangle of sturdy silver hoops that refer to the creation of multiple holes in the ears, and the pain of that process. The sitter's shoulders are broad and rounded toward the relaxed, soft arms, seen above the elbow. We see a black tattoo encircling the upper right arm with stylized animals and a Celtic-inspired knot, which also implies the act of enduring repeated needle pricks to the body. The broad back is pale and flushed, covered in freckles, sloping inward toward the waist. The sitter is evenly lit with few shadows, except for where the inner arms meet the expanse of the back.

The smaller picture is hand carved into the sitter's back, consisting of blood-red lines on pink flesh that is inflamed from the incisions. The image is a child-like drawing of two skirt-wearing, smiling stick figures standing while holding hands in the foreground. A square house with two windows and a door, a triangle roof with smoke emerging in carved curls, and a cloud rests above the heads of the stick figures, with a flaming sunshine emerging above it. Two squiggled "birds" fly to the right toward the shoulder. Though very roughly carved, it is an idealized picture of domestic coupled bliss.

This scene was carved into her back by an unnamed assistant, at her direction, and the photograph was also staged by Opie. The image left a scar, and like her tattoos, it became a permanent mark. While the pain was temporary, the mark endures like a visible memory of that physical and psychological pain.

Opie's families

Opie produced this self-portrait in response to the trauma of a failed relationship, and stated that the female figures and the house are symbolic of her yearning for domestic bliss. [1] At the time, Opie was a visibly "out" lesbian member of the BDSM leather community. BDSM stands for the sexual practices of bondage and sadomasochism. In the 1990s, Opie was a part of this close-knit and active community of people with shared interests and pleasures. That was her chosen family, and she featured photographs of members displayed with great dignity in her 1991 portrait series *Being and Having*. Opie's early fine-art work was often dedicated to bringing recognition to her marginalized found-family community.

Opie was born in 1961 in Sandusky, Ohio, and recalls living an upper-middle-class Midwestern life. She remembers that her parents never fought, genuinely enjoyed each other, and presented an idyllic family life until the family business was sold while her father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. [2] Around that time, the ideal family image faded as Opie was subjected to abuse and childhood trauma by her brother, whose friends sexually assaulted her. [3]

Opie had been using photography as a means of self-expression—and making friends through taking portraits—since she had received a camera at age nine. After studying photography at The San Francisco Art Institute for her BFA, she earned an MFA from California Institute of Arts, where she studied with prominent conceptual documentary photographers like Allan Sekula, whose work stressed the importance of having a socially committed practice. In *Self-Portrait/Cutting* we see her vulnerable longing for an idyllic family life, but one that was not yet recognized as a legal partnership in 1993. Opie's photograph can be read as a painful form of advocacy for the recognition of lesbian partnerships.

Queering art history

Opie's aesthetic choices are formally driven, much like Robert Mapplethorpe, whose photographs sympathetically depict communities too often overlooked, in whose ranks he included himself. While Classical sculpture inspired Mapplethorpe, Opie instead looks to art-historical depictions of nobility by portrait painters like Holbein for guidance. As she stated:

> ***[M]uch of my work is related to painting and photography history. It gives me the ability to use a very familiar language that people understand when looking at my work and seduce the viewer into considering work that they might not normally want to look at. [4]***



Figure **11.18.1.3**: Lewis W. Hine, Group of boys who work at the Brown Shoe Factory, Moberly, Missouri, October 1910, gelatin silver print, 11.9 × 16.8 cm (The J. Paul Getty Museum)

Her engagement of royal portraiture enables her to seduce the viewer with familiar compositions and rich color, while she replaces the portraits of kings with dignified portraits of drag kings and others who had been marginalized for their sexuality or practices. Opie, who fondly regarded the work of U.S. social-reform photographer **Lewis Hine**, similarly evokes viewers' sympathies for the subjects of her images. [5] Like Hine's photographs of child laborers, Opie focuses her camera on people who have been marginalized and portrays them in a way that confers dignity while not hiding their identities.



Figure **11.18.1.4**: Catherine Opie, *Self-Portrait/Pervert*, 1994, chromogenic print, 101.6 x 75.9 cm (**Guggenheim © Catherine Opie**)

Opie's *Self-Portrait/Pervert*, made one year after *Self-Portrait/Cutting*, deepens her allegiance to the BDSM sub-community by showing a series of needles inserted into the skin of her bared arms, as well as a label "Pervert" carved into her bare chest. Her head is covered with a leather hood used in bondage practice. As she explained,

> ***I thought it was important, if I was going to document my community, to document myself within that community. [6]***



Figure **11.18.1.5**: Catherine Opie, *Bo from "Being and Having"*, 1991, chromogenic print, 43.2 x 55.9 cm

Opie photographed her male alter-ego "Bo" as part of *Being and Having*. By including herself, Opie sidesteps criticism regarding attempted sensationalism of the BDSM and LGBTQI+ community as "the Other" by showing her own belonging.

Again in *Self-Portrait/Pervert*, the background is a richly patterned black-on-gold drape, echoing formal portraiture conventions with a rigidly symmetrical pose, and by framing the subject in the center. *Self-Portrait/Pervert*, Opie mentions, expresses her reaction to the ways that certain groups in the late twentieth century advocated to legalize marriage between gay men and lesbian couples while trying to downplay important cultural and political differences to gain political favor. Opie instead **advocates for her LGBTQI+ community** and BDSM sub-culture precisely as she saw and experienced them, without trying to make them "safe" for average American consumption. [7] She sought increased visibility and acknowledgment as a means to combat her communities' further erasure.

The year Opie made *Self Portrait/Cutting*, 1993, featured a **Whitney Biennial** that for many art critics was a pivotal event. It signaled a turn in art toward engaging identity politics, to question the normative position of the cisgender Western male as the locus of all importance, and included pivotal artwork by **Fred Wilson**, **Lorna Simpson**, Glenn Ligon, Byron Kim, and more. While Opie's work was not included until the Whitney's **1995 Biennial**, her photographs were already in tune with the turn toward identity as subject matter for art.

Notes:

[1] Catherine Opie, "I Have Represented This Country: An Interview with Catherine Opie," Interview by Russell Ferguson, in *Catherine Opie: American Photographer* (New York City: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2009), p. 260.

[2] Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, "**Oral History Interview with Catherine Opie, 2012 August 13-27**," *Smithsonian Archives of American Art* (2012), pp. 4–5. Accessed Aug. 11, 2021

[3] Drohojowska-Philp, p. 6.

[4] Jennifer Blessing, *Catherine Opie: American Photographer* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2008), p. 15.

[5] Drohojowska-Philp, p. 4.

[6] Catherine Opie is quoted in: Elisabeth Lebovici "Destabilizing Gender: Interview with Catherine Opie," *Make: The Magazine of Women's Art*, No. 89 (September-November 2000), p. 19.; Blessing, *Catherine Opie*, p. 14.

[7] "Catherine Opie with Russell Ferguson," *Index Magazine* Vol. 1, No. 2 (April-May 1996): p. 29.

Additional resources:

Jennifer Blessing, *Catherine Opie: American Photographer* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications) 2008.

Catherine Opie, "I Have Represented This Country: An Interview with Catherine Opie," Interview by Russell Ferguson, in *Catherine Opie: American Photographer* (New York City: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2009).

Nadja Spiegelman, "**From Catherine Opie, A Visual Diary of the Recent Past**," *New York Times: Style Magazine* (July10, 2020). Accessed August 10, 2021

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11.18.2: Figure and Landscape series

- by **LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART**

Page ID

182334



Artist Interviews /// Catherine Opie – Figure and Landscape. On the occasion of her exhibition Figure and Landscape, Opie talks about the series.

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11.19: Stefanie Jackson, Bluest Eye

by **DR. SHAWNYA L. HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID

182335



Stefanie Jackson, *Bluest Eye*, 1999, oil on canvas, 48 x 60 inches (Georgia Museum of Art), a Seeing America video. Speakers: Dr. Shawnya Harris, Larry D. and Brenda A. Thompson Curator of African American and African Diaspora Art, and Dr. Steven Zucker

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11.20: Ellen Galagher, DeLuxe

- by **TATE**

Page ID

182336



Take a closer look at artist Ellen Gallagher's *DeLuxe* with assistant curator Carine Harmand. *DeLuxe* is a grid of sixty individually-framed prints. The imagery is based on magazines dating from the 1930s to the 1970s aimed at African-American audiences, many of which feature advertisements for 'improvements' including wigs, hair pomades, and skin bleaching creams. Gallagher transformed these images using a variety of printing techniques, combining traditional processes of etching and lithography with recent developments in digital technology. She also made modifications by cutting and layering images and text and adding a range of materials including plasticine, glitter, gold leaf, toy eyeballs and coconut oil. Her witty and sophisticated interventions emphasize the complex construction of identity.

Additional resources

Learn more about this work at Tate

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11.21: Ah Xian artist interview

- by **NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA**

Page ID

182337



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11.22: Takashi Murakami

by **MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, CHICAGO**

Page ID

182338



In his New York City studio, Takashi Murakami discusses his three-decades-long practice in which he blends traditional and modern art techniques to create enormous paintings with a visual power unmatched in contemporary art. Murakami talks about his position as an outsider in the Western contemporary art world and his interest in breaking down the boundaries between art and popular culture through collaborations with Kanye West, Louis Vuitton, and Complex. Michael Darling, James W. Alsdorf Chief Curator, is also featured in the video and discusses Murakami's history and accomplishments. They each delve into the origins of Murakami's iconic Mr. DOB, as well as his influences, including Star Wars, natural disasters, and fashion branding.

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11.23: Will Wilson, Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange

by **CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART**

Page ID

182339



Will Wilson, native Diné photographer and center of our focus exhibition, is hosting a pop-up portrait studio where he will engage guests in the Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange (CIPX). Referencing the photographs of Edward Curtis, Wilson intends to produce a contemporary visual reimagining of Native American culture through his photographs. Depicting local Native Americans who work to expand the role of their customs and heritage in today's society, Wilson follows Curtis's documentary practice, but with a renewed, open, and more fully representative eye. He uses the historic wet plate collodion process, and offers the tintype itself as a gift to the subject in return for the photograph. This pop-up will be open to all who wish to view the process in action. Wilson will then speak on the exhibition's panel later this evening, alongside various Native individuals whose work focuses on seeking justice and a more prominent role for Native culture in contemporary America.

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11.24: Lorna Simpson – ‘Everything I Do Comes from the Same Desire’

- by **TATE**

Page ID

182340



Old sports photographs and hair commercials provide inspiration for American artist Lorna Simpson. The artist uses combinations of image and text to examine the processes through which meaning and understanding take place. Here Simpson shows us how she arrived at this methodology and why her surroundings are so important to her work. #TateShots

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11.25: Amy Sherald, Precious Jewels by the Sea

by **DR. AUSTEN BAILLY** and **DR. LAUREN KILROY-EWBANK**

Page ID

182341



Amy Sherald, *Precious Jewels by the Sea*, 2019, oil on canvas, 304.8 x 274.3 x 6.4 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art)

Additional resources

This work at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

More about Amy Sherald from Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

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11.26: Michelle Browder, Mothers of Gynecology

by **MICHELLE L. BROWDER** and **DR. BETH HARRIS**

Page ID

182342



Michelle L. Browder (with Deborah Shedrick), *Mothers of Gynecology*, 2021, found metal objects and other media, roughly 15 feet high (Mission for More Up campus Montgomery, Alabama, © Michelle L. Browder)

Caution

warning: this video discusses racial violence

Additional resources

Learn more about the Mothers of Gynecology park at The More Up Campus

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11.27: Douglas Coupland, Terry Fox Memorial

by **DR. EFRAT EL-HANANY**

Page ID

182343



Figure 11.27.1: Douglas Coupland, *Terry Fox Memorial*, 2011, bronze and mixed media, dimensions variable, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada (photo: BC Place)

Douglas Coupland, *Terry Fox Memorial*, 2011, bronze and mixed media, dimensions variable, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada (photo: BC Place)

In the shadow of BC Place Stadium in Vancouver, passers-by encounter a line of four bronze statues of a young man running on a prosthetic leg. This memorial commemorates Canadian icon Terry Fox. Each of the four figures is a slight variant on the previous pose, and each grows from life-size to twice that. Spaced equally about half a meter apart, the statues are installed by a simulated highway marked out in darker paving stones. The smoothly finished surfaces of the bronzes display a traditional greenish-brown patina. With muscles tensed, foreheads wrinkled, and determined—even pained—facial expressions suggesting Fox's struggle and determination. Realistic and dynamic, the bronze figures invite visitors to run beside them by being situated at ground level. At the front of the plaza, the largest image of Fox—symbolically heroic in scale—stands directly on his prosthesis with his left biological leg lifted off the ground. He raises his right arm in a welcoming wave, while his left hand is clenched in a fist—encouraging viewers to confront the magnitude of his accomplishment and legacy.



Figure **11.27.2**: Terry Fox running in his Marathon of Hope, May 25, 1980 (photo: The Terry Fox Foundation)

Marathon of Hope

In 1980 the young Canadian athlete Terry Fox, who had grown up in British Columbia and had lost his right leg to cancer, embarked on an ambitious cross-country run using a prosthetic leg. His journey, known as the Marathon of Hope, was intended to raise funds and awareness for cancer research. The run began on April 12, 1980, in St. John's, Newfoundland, and was intended to conclude in Victoria, British Columbia. As Fox made his way from town to town across Canada, his fame grew exponentially. He set himself a grueling 26 mile daily regime, eventually covering over 3,339 miles in 143 days. Having completed half of his projected journey, Fox ended his run near Thunder Bay, Ontario, on September 1. He died the following year at the age of 22.

In a letter to the Canadian Cancer Society (October 15, 1979), Fox explained why he felt compelled to do the run:

> ***The night before my amputation, my former basketball coach brought me a magazine with an article on an amputee who ran in the New York Marathon. It was then I decided to meet this new challenge head on and not only overcome my disability, but conquer it in such a way that I could never look back and say it disabled me.[1]***

The artist Douglas Coupland has noted just how profound Fox's action was in the 1970s:

> ***It's important to remember that in 1979 people with disabilities . . . didn't participate in the everyday world the way they do now. For someone with one leg to enter a race of this length was quite shocking.[2]***

Terry Fox immediately became a Canadian cultural icon, and starting with a statue in Thunder Bay, public monuments to his memory have appeared in cities across Canada.

A different kind of memorial



Figure **11.27.3**: Douglas Coupland, *Terry Fox Memorial*, 2011, bronze and mixed media, dimensions variable, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada (photo: Ross, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Three decades after the Marathon of Hope, Vancouver-based novelist, designer, and visual artist Douglas Coupland was commissioned by the BC Pavilion Corporation to design a new public memorial to Terry Fox for BC Place Stadium in Vancouver. In this busy location, adjacent to a popular sports venue, the monument would be accessible to a large and diverse audience. Working with sculptor Stephen Harman, Coupland's guiding principle was public legibility—the importance of Fox's story had to be made clear to passers-by. The result is a memorial that is relatively conventional in terms of its material—bronze—and in its straightforward representational approach. In this sense it matches expectations for public statues and invites a broad cross-section of the public to remember Terry Fox. In fact, the choice of materials was largely to ensure the work's permanence: as the artist stated at the 2011 unveiling, he wanted people living a thousand years from now to understand Fox's achievement.

Coupland used photographs and videos for reference, specifically a series of sequential photographs that illustrated the four movements that made up Fox's running style. This distinctive hop-and-skip gait became a symbol of the Marathon of Hope in the minds of many Canadians. Fox discussed his unique stride: "Some people can't figure out what I'm doing. It's not a walk-hop, it's not a trot, it's running, or as close as I can get to running, and it's harder than doing it on two legs." [3] By separating out the different postures of Fox's gait and by multiplying and sequentially enlarging his image, Coupland emphasized a prolonged process of pain, struggle, and courage, saying: "You realized through the run that there wasn't one single step he took where his body wasn't in some kind of pain, large or small. . . . Boy, it really puts you in your place." [4] At the same time, Coupland intended the growing height of each figure to symbolize the increasing fame and importance of the subject as the Marathon of Hope progressed.

Coupland made no attempt to beautify or idealize Fox's proportions, facial features, or pose. Instead, he invites viewers to embrace a new set of standards regarding diverse representations of the human body in public art. It is notable that the fourth and largest of the four statues depicts Fox standing erect and determined on his prosthesis. All other earlier Fox monuments across Canada—notably those in Thunder Bay, Ottawa, Burnaby, and Victoria—show him leaning forward to take his weight on his biological leg, which serves to move his body toward his goal. In Coupland's work, the prosthesis has become a full part of Terry, and his "disability" is not hidden but brought forward and validated.



Figure **11.27.4**: Left: Edwin Railton, E.H. Bailey, and Sir Edwin Landseer, *Nelson's Column*, 1840–43, granite and bronze, 169 feet 3 inches high, Trafalgar Square, London (photo: Elliott Brown, CC BY 2.0); right: Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, *Peter Stuyvesant*, 1941, granite and bronze, 8 feet high (photo: Wally Gobetz, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

There are several famous examples of disabled figures in earlier Western public statuary—Edward Baily's Lord Nelson in London's Trafalgar Square, or Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's Governor Peter Stuyvesant in New York. Both historical figures had missing limbs, yet their bronze representations follow traditional nineteenth-century formulas for heroic monuments. They are raised above the viewer on tall pedestals, and their disabilities—if not totally concealed—are minimized.

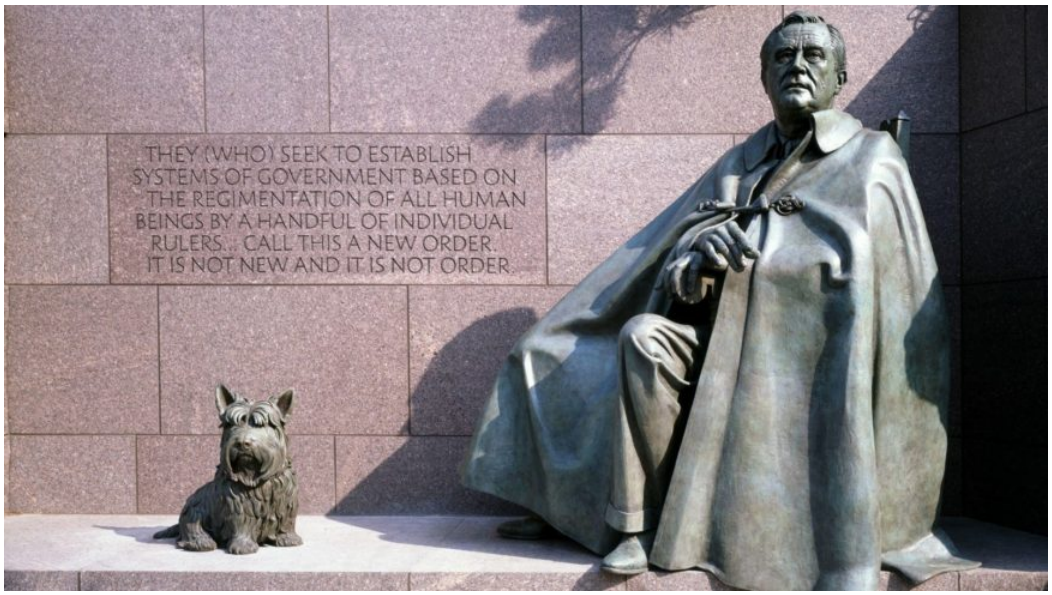


Figure **11.27.5**: Neil Estern, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Fala*, 1997, at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, Washington, D.C. (Carol M. Highsmith, Library of Congress)

More recently, an over-life size statue of President Franklin D. Roosevelt by artist Neil Estern caused some debate when unveiled at the new FDR Memorial in Washington, D.C. in 1997. Controversy arose when historians and disability-rights advocates noted that the president's disability and wheelchair had been concealed underneath a large cloak, following the precedent of public

images of FDR made during his lifetime. (In 2001, a new life-size statue of FDR was added to the Memorial; following recommendations that the president's wheelchair be shown openly in the interests of historical accuracy and the need to inspire people in comparable circumstances, artist Bob Graham depicted FDR sitting in a wheelchair similar to the one he actually used.)



Figure **11.27.6**: Bill Koochin, Man in Motion, 1997, granite (photo: Fred – Rebelrat, CC BY 2.0)

Interestingly, it was in the same year that Bill Koochin's stone statue of Canadian athlete Rick Hansen in his wheelchair was installed in Vancouver without incident. In this case, however, Hansen's achievement was clearly linked to his disability, and images of him engaging in athletic activities in his wheelchair were widely known. This new kind of frank realism in public monuments invites viewers to interact with a new set of aesthetic and ethical ideals. As Susan Wendell reminds us in her book, *The Rejected Body*, "the lack of realistic cultural representations of experiences of disability not only contributes to the 'Otherness' of people with disabilities by encouraging the assumption that their lives are inconceivable to non-disabled people but also increases non-disabled people's fear of disability by suppressing knowledge of how people live with disabilities." [5] **Marc Quinn's landmark representation of artist Alison Lapper** also comes to mind, and in this context Coupland's monument in Vancouver appears as the culmination of a long series of public works that represent differently abled figures in a heroic guise.



Figure **11.27.7**: Douglas Coupland, *Terry Fox Memorial* (detail from behind), 2011, bronze and mixed media, dimensions variable, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada (photo: **Karen Lee Photography**, CC BY-SA 2.0)

A participatory monument in a digital age

Coupland's monument replaced an earlier Fox monument on the site, created in 1984 by architect Franklin Allen and artist Ian Bateson. This had taken the form of a postmodern, **Roman**-inspired triumphal arch, topped by stylized lions—traditional Western symbols of strength and heroism—on each corner of the roof. This design met with an immediate and ongoing negative reaction from the public, partly because many felt that it did not reflect Fox's humble personality. Most importantly, it initially contained no

actual representation of Fox (at a later date a larger-than-life etching of the athlete, as well as a map showing his journey across Canada, were added by artist Ian Bateson.) But Coupland's new monument introduces a powerfully immersive approach to its subject that differs from all the earlier—and perhaps more traditional—monuments to Fox.

Coupland invites the viewer to recreate the spirit and energy of Fox's run by providing an experiential and participatory component. This typifies a trend in many contemporary monuments that aim to actively engage visitors in a physical interaction rather than encourage passive contemplation. In this case, visitors can run beside the statues of Fox, installed at ground level, on the simulated highway to one side. The receding lines of the highway, in combination with the differing heights of the figures, create a forced perspective that suggests Fox moving toward us from a distant point of origin. Approaching the monument from across the street, visitors may feel that they are witnessing a segment of Fox's run all over again. In an interview with a local newspaper, Coupland also suggested that he "wanted to create something that people could interact with on a digital level." [6] He demonstrated his intention by picking up an iPhone, suggesting that visitors could create their own photographic animations of Terry's run. Coupland's monument, with its naturalistic approach, participatory goals, and outreach to our own digital age is intended to inspire current and future generations with Terry Fox's belief that "anything's possible if you try; dreams are made possible if you try." [7]



Notes:

[1] Frank Cosentino, *Not Bad, Eh?: Great Moments in Canadian Sports History* (Burnstown, Ontario: General Store Publishing House, 1990), p. 63.

[2] Douglas Coupland, *Terry* (Toronto: Douglas & Macintyre, 2005), p. 29.

[3] Leslie Scrivener, *Terry Fox His Story (Revised)* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart/Penguin Random House, 2000), p. 108.

[4] Tim Weeks and Terry Donnelly, "**New Terry Fox Memorial Unveiled in Vancouver**," *CBC News*, September 16, 2011.

[5] Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 43.

[6] Michelle da Silva, "**Concept for New Terry Fox Memorial by Douglas Coupland Unveiled**," *The Georgia Straight*, January 18, 2011.

[7] Leslie Scrivener, *Terry Fox His Story (Revised)* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Penguin Random House, 2000), p. 152.

Additional resources

The Terry Fox Foundation

More about the artist

Adrienne L. Burk, *Speaking for a Long Time: Public Space and Social Memory in Vancouver* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

Carole Gold Calo, "Memorializing the Unspeakable: Public Monuments and Collective Grieving," in C.G. Calo, ed., *Viewpoints: Readings in Art History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), pp. 187–193.

Sally Chivers, "Ordinary People: Reading the TransCanadian Terry Fox," *Canadian Literature* 202: pp. 80–94.

Douglas Coupland, *Terry* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005).

Efrat El-Hanany, "Public Bodies," *The Capilano Review* 3 no. 10: pp. 5-11.

Annie Gérin and James S. McLean, *Public Art in Canada: Critical Perspectives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

Christine Hearn, "Honouring Terry Fox," *The Magazine of Simon Fraser University* (November 2001).

Denise Markonish, *Oh, Canada: Contemporary Art from North North America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

Leslie Scrivener, *Terry Fox His Story (Revised)* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart/Penguin Random House, 2000).

Michael Serapio, John McQuaker, Robert Fisher, and Deborah Goble, *Terry Fox: Remembering a Canadian Hero* (Toronto: News in Review/CBC, 2011).

John Steil and Aileen Stalker, *Public Art in Vancouver: Angels among Lions* (Vancouver: Touchwood Editions, 2009).

Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

12: Social practice

12.1: Guerrilla Girls, ‘You Have to Question What You See’ (interview)

12.2: Ai Wei Wei, Remembering and the Politics of Dissent

12.3: Ai Wei Wei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds)

12.4: Tania Bruguera, The Francis Effect

12.5: Tania Bruguera, Immigrant Movement International

12.6: Theaster Gates on collecting

12.7: Danh Vo Interview- Art Should Estrange

12.8: Lida Abdul – ‘A Beautiful Encounter With Chance’

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12.1: Guerrilla Girls, ‘You Have to Question What You See’ (interview)

- by **TATE**

Page ID

182188



The Guerrilla Girls are an anonymous group of feminist, female artists devoted to fighting sexism and racism within the art world. The group formed in New York City in 1985 with the mission of bringing gender and racial inequality into focus within the greater arts community. The group employs culture jamming in the form of posters, books, billboards, and public appearances to expose discrimination and corruption. To remain anonymous, members don gorilla masks and use pseudonyms that refer to deceased female artists.

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12.2: Ai Wei Wei, Remembering and the Politics of Dissent

by JP MCMAHON

Page ID
182189



Figure **12.2.1**: Ai Weiwei, *Remembering*, 2009, backpacks on the facade of the Haus der Kunst* (Munich)

Dangerous Art

All art is political in the sense that all art takes place in the public arena and engages with an already existing ideology. Yet there are times when art becomes dangerously political for both the artist and the viewers who engage with that art. Think of Jacques-Louis David's involvement in the French Revolution—his individual investment in art following the bloodshed —and his imprisonment during the reign of terror. If it were not for certain sympathisers, David may well have ended up another victim of the guillotine. Goya is another example of an artist who fell foul of government power. There are instances in the 20th century when artists have faced down political power directly. Consider the photomontages of John Heartfield. Heartfield risked his life at times to produce covers for the magazine A/Z, which defied both Hitler and the Nazi Party.

Ai Weiwei

The Chinese artist, Ai Weiwei, offers is an important contemporary example. In 2011, Weiwei was arrested in China following a crack down by the government on so-called "political dissidents" (a specific category that the Chinese government uses to classify those who seek to subvert state power) for "alleged economic crimes" against the Chinese state. Weiwei has used his art to address both the corruption of the Chinese communist government and its outright neglect of human rights, particularly in the realm of the freedom of speech and thought. Weiwei has been successful in using the internet (which is severely restricted in China) as a medium for his art. His work is informed by two interconnected strands, his involvement with the Chinese avant-garde group "Stars" (which he helped found in 1978 during his time in the Beijing Film Academy) and the fact that he spent some of his formative years in New York, engaging there with the ideas of conceptual art, in particular the idea of the readymade. Many of the concepts and much of the material that Weiwei uses in his art practice are informed by post-conceptual thinking.



Figure 12.2.2: Ai Weiwei, *Sunflower Seeds*, 2010, one hundred million hand painted porcelain seeds (Tate Modern)

An International Audience



Figure 12.2.3: Handpainted seeds (detail), Ai Weiwei, *Sunflower Seeds*, 2010, one hundred million hand painted porcelain seeds (Tate Modern)

Weiwei has exhibited successfully in the West in many major shows, for example, the 48th Venice Biennale in Italy (1999) and Documenta 12 (2007). He also exhibited *Sunflower Seeds* (October, 2010) in the Turbine Hall in the Tate Modern. In this work, Weiwei filled the floor of the huge hall with one hundred million porcelain seeds, each individually hand-painted in the town of Jingdezhen by 1,600 Chinese artisans. Participants were encouraged to walk over the exhibited space (or even roll in the work) in order to experience the ideas of the effect of mass consumption on Chinese industry and 20th-century China's history of famine and collective work. However, on October 16, 2010, Tate Modern stopped people from walking on the exhibit due to health liability concerns over porcelain dust.

"…a natural disaster is a public matter."

Perhaps the work that contributed most to Weiwei's current imprisonment and the destruction of his studio was his investigation of corruption in the construction of the schools that collapsed during the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, China. Like many others, Weiwei investigated how improper material and the contravention of civil engineering laws led to the wholesale destruction of schools (which led in turn to the deaths of thousands of children trapped within them), Weiwei has produced a list of all the victims of the earthquake on his blog. This act is typical Weiwei's use of the internet to communicate information. This information is his "art", in much the way that American artists of the late 1960s used words and ideas as art.



Figure 12.2.4: Visitors entering the Ai Weiwei show *So Sorry* in the Haus der Kunst (detail), Ai Weiwei, *Remembering*, 2009, backpacks on the facade of the Haus der Kunst* (Munich)

So Sorry

In his retrospective show *So Sorry* (October 2009 to January 2010, Munich, Germany), Weiwei created the installation *Remembering* on the façade of the Haus der Kunst. It was constructed from nine thousand children's backpacks. They spelled out the sentence "She lived happily for seven years in this world" in Chinese characters (this was a quote from a mother whose child died in the earthquake). Regarding this work, Weiwei said,

> ***The idea to use backpacks came from my visit to Sichuan after the earthquake in May 2008. During the earthquake many schools collapsed. Thousands of young students lost their lives, and you could see bags and study material everywhere. Then you realize individual life, media, and the lives of the students are serving very different purposes. The lives of the students disappeared within the state propaganda, and very soon everybody will forget everything.***

The title of the show referred to the apologies frequently expressed by governments and corporations when their negligence leads to tragedies, such as the collapse of schools during the earthquake. Two months before the opening of this exhibition Weiwei suffered a severe beating from Chinese police in Chengdu in August 2009, where he was trying to testify for Tan Zuoren, a fellow investigator of the shoddy construction and the student casualties. Weiwei underwent emergency brain surgery for internal bleeding as a result of the assault.

The Arrest



Figure **12.2.5**: Blue, yellow, and red backpacks (detail), Ai Weiwei, *Remembering*, 2009, backpacks on the facade of the Haus der Kunst* (Munich)

On April 3rd 2011, Weiwei was arrested at Beijing's airport while while waiting for a flight to Hong Kong. While his detention is broadly believed to be linked to his criticism of the Chinese government, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that he is "under investigation for alleged economic crimes." Weiwei's participation in the Jasmine Rallies, a series of peaceful protests which took place all over China in February, no doubt contributed to his arrest.

Additional Resources:

*Historical Note on the Haus der Kunst: The Haus der Kunst (designed by Paul Ludwig Troost, "first master builder to the führer") was sited by Adolf Hitler and sought to express Nazi ideology by using stone from German quarries and with its references to the work of Klenze and Schinkel. From its opening in 1937, the Haus der Kunst held exhibitions glorifying the "Blood and Soil" propaganda of the Nazi regime.

Ai Weiwei's TED Video

Tate Modern: Sunflower Seeds Video

Simon Elegant, "Ai Weiwei: Interview Transcript", *Time*, May 12, 2009

Roberta Smith, "12 Heads Do the Talking for a Silenced Artist," *The New York Times*, May 2011

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- **12.2: Appropriation and ideological critique** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

12.3: Ai Wei Wei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds)

by MEGAN LORRAINE DEBIN

Page ID
182190



Video **12.3.1**: Video from **Tate**

Subversive seeds

Ai Weiwei often uses his art to critique political and economic injustice. This can be seen in work such as his 2010 installation, *Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds)* at Tate Modern, London.



Figure **12.3.1**: Ai Weiwei, *Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds)*, 2010, one hundred million hand painted porcelain seeds (photo: **Drew Bates**, CC BY 2.0)

Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds) consists of more than 100 million tiny, handmade porcelain sunflower seeds, originally weighing in at 150 tons. They filled the enormous Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, an industrial building-turned-contemporary art space. Sunflower seeds evokes a warm personal memory for the artist, who recalls that while he was growing up, even the poorest in China would share sunflower seeds as a treat among friends. The use of sunflower seeds as the basis of his installation was also designed to subvert popular imagery rooted in the artist's childhood. Communist propaganda optimistically depicted leader Mao Zedong as the sun and the citizens of the People's Republic of China as sunflowers, turning toward their chairman. Ai Weiwei reasserts the sunflower seed as a symbol of camaraderie during difficult times.



Figure **12.3.2**: Ai Weiwei, *Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds)*, 2010, one hundred million hand painted porcelain seeds (Tate Modern, London)

Though each of the 100 million carefully crafted individual seeds can draw the viewer's attention, once arranged together in a neat rectangle, or covering the floor of an entire room, the hyper-realistic seeds create a sense of vastness. In the Tate installation, there was a sense of precision in the arrangement of the seeds, creating visual order and uniformity. The individual seed is lost among the millions, a critique of the conformity and censorship inherent in modern China.



Figure **12.3.3**: Ai Weiwei, *Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds)*, 2010, one hundred million hand painted porcelain seeds (Tate Modern, London) (photo: **Waldopepper**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Made In China

More than 1,600 artisans worked to make the individual porcelain seeds by hand in Jingdzhen, the city known as the "Porcelain Capital," where artists have been producing pottery for nearly 2000 years. Porcelain, first produced during the Han dynasty in about 200 B.C.E. and later mastered during the Tang dynasty, is made by heating white clay (kaolin) to a temperature over 1200 degrees Celsius. The fusion of the particles within the clay during firing allowed artists to create vessels with thin but strong walls. Porcelain— a symbol of imperial culture in China—was also made for export via the Silk Road and became important to the creation of the idea of China in the West.



Figure 12.3.4: Some of the 1,600 highly skilled craftspeople from Jingdezhen hired to create and paint porcelain sunflower seeds

Ai Weiwei's use of porcelain comments on the long history of this prized material while also rejecting the common negative connotations of the modern term "Made in China." Utilizing skilled artisans known for their exquisite craftsmanship to make objects that can only be differentiated one from another upon close inspection, alludes to the important porcelain tradition in Jingdzhen, as well as to the uniformity and diffusion of modern (cheap and fast) labor that is responsible for China's hard-won place in the world economy. *Sunflower Seeds* asks us to examine how our consumption of foreign-made goods affects the lives of others across the globe.

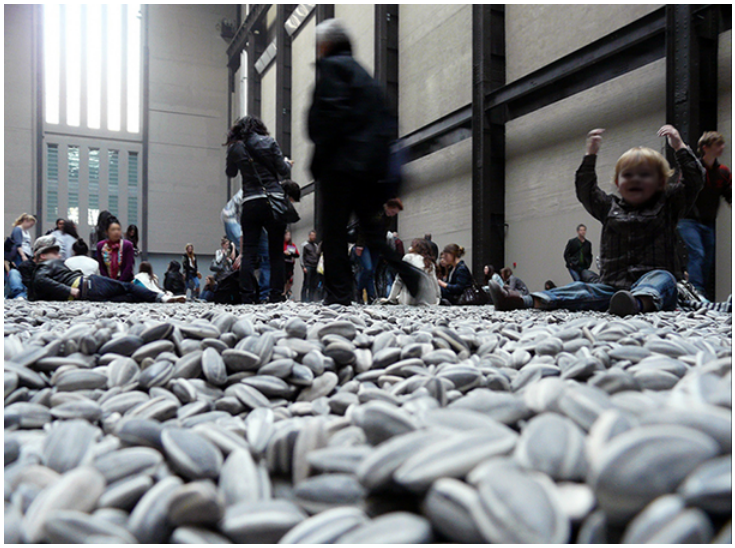


Figure 12.3.5: Ai Weiwei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds), 2010, one hundred million hand-painted porcelain seeds (Tate Modern, London) (photo: Loz Flowers CC BY-SA 2.0)

How we experience an artwork impacts our perception of the work. In the tradition of participatory contemporary art, *Sunflower Seeds* asks the public to physically interact with the art. Initially, Tate visitors were invited to walk over and lie on the seeds, though the museum, in consultation with the artist, suspended this opportunity about a week into the exhibition because of safety concerns.

Art and activism

Ai Weiwei was arrested at the Beijing Capital International Airport on April 3, 2011 during his Tate exhibition.[1] He was detained for 81 days. The artist, along with many in the international community, asserted that his true offense was his political activism for democracy and human rights. Ai Weiwei had blogged for four years—investigating cover-ups and corruption in the government's handling of a devastating 2008 earthquake in Sichuan and the country's hosting of the Olympics. Ai Weiwei's blog was shut down in 2009. Since then, he has turned to Twitter and Instagram. During his detention, the international community, including major US

art institutions, rallied for his release. Officials eventually released him, charging Ai Weiwei with tax evasion, but his passport was withheld, preventing him from leaving the country for four years. It was returned in 2015.



Figure **12.3.6**: Ai Weiwei's continues to address issues of human rights in his work. The 2015 exhibit *@Large*, installed on Alcatraz, the former island prison in the San Francisco Bay, comments on surveillance, freedom, and political prisoners by mixing fine and traditional arts with pop culture materials including silk dragon kites and Lego portraits (above).

[1] Andrew Jacobs, "**China Takes Dissident Artist Into Custody,**" *The New York Times*, 4/3/11, A4

Additional resources:

You can follow Ai Weiwei on Instagram and Twitter @aiww

More information on Ai Weiwei's Sunflower Seeds

Sunflower Seeds exhibition at the Tate

Ai Weiwei from art21

This page titled 12.3: Ai Wei Wei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Megan Lorraine Debin, "Ai Weiwei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds)," in Smarthistory, September 7, 2018, accessed December 4, 2020, https://smarthistory.org/ai-weiwei-kui-hua-zi-sunflower-seeds-3/..

- **12.2: Appropriation and ideological critique** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

12.4: Tania Bruguera, The Francis Effect

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182191



This episode of ART21 “Exclusive” features artist Tania Bruguera collecting signatures as part of her socially engaged performance project “The Francis Effect” (2014). For fifteen weeks Bruguera stood outside of the Guggenheim Museum in New York asking passersby to sign a petition to Pope Francis that requests Vatican City citizenship for undocumented immigrants. “A lot of people know it’s impossible,” says Bruguera. Yet she believes “the impossible is only impossible until somebody makes it possible.” In her engagement of our political imaginations, Bruguera demonstrates the power of art to change perceptions and mobilize political action. Tania Bruguera explores the relationship between art, activism, and social change, staging participatory events and interactions that build on her own observations, experiences, and understanding of the politics of repression and control. Her work advances the concept of arte útil, according to which art can be used as a tool for social and political empowerment.

Learn more about the artist: **http://www.art21.org/artists/tania-bruguera**

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12.5: Tania Bruguera, Immigrant Movement International

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182192



From Art21. “Immigrant Movement International” (IMI), an ongoing project initiated by artist Tania Bruguera in 2010, located in Corona, Queens, New York, functions as a community space where art and education are used to empower immigrants personally and politically. Bruguera says that by engaging with contemporary art “[immigrants] understand how to work from their fear and the limitations they put on themselves once they enter this country.” Artist Aliza Nisenbaum, who taught an English class at IMI using art, painted portraits of her students. “A lot of these women are people that hide in some way,” says Nisenbaum. “I was trying to give a sense of agency to the women that were here in terms of finding their voice, in terms of art, and in terms of basic English skills.” Members of Tletlpapalotzin, an Aztec dance group, perform a traditional ceremony at IMI’s Community Celebration Day and discuss their experiences as immigrants living in New York City. “For me being in a ceremony gives me the strength to go forward day to day,” says Tletlpapalotzin member Ana Ramirez. “It gives me pleasure to work together with my family of the Tletlpapalotzin group.” Tania Bruguera explores the relationship between art, activism, and social change, staging participatory events and interactions that build on her own observations, experiences, and understanding of the politics of repression and control. Her work advances the concept of arte útil, according to which art can be used as a tool for social and political empowerment.

Learn more about the artist: **http://art21.org/artist/tania-bruguera**

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12.6: Theaster Gates on collecting

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182193



By art21. From his Chicago studio, Theaster Gates reflects on the various collections he has acquired and created artworks with, including the Jet magazine archives and the inventory of an entire hardware store. In addition to serving as source material for the artist, the collections provide Gates with insight into how one person or institution sees the world. “It’s like this little time capsule of things that were important to someone,” he says. The majority of the collections come from his immediate surroundings on Chicago’s South Side. “How do you catalog the everyday, especially as the phenomena of the everyday is changing?” Gates asks, “And is this another way of tracking Black space?” The materials function as an archive when shown in their original state, or they can be amalgamated and transformed into a painting or sculpture. “It’s the thing, and it’s the thing that makes the thing,” says the artist. Theaster Gates creates sculptures with clay, tar, and renovated buildings, transforming the raw material of urban neighborhoods into radically reimagined vessels of opportunity for the community. Establishing a virtuous circle between fine art and social progress, Gates strips dilapidated buildings of their components, transforming those elements into sculptures that act as bonds or investments, the proceeds of which are used to finance the rehabilitation of entire city blocks. Many of the artist’s works evoke his African-American identity and the broader struggle for civil rights, from sculptures incorporating fire hoses, to events organized around soul food, and choral performances by the experimental musical ensemble Black Monks of Mississippi, led by Gates himself.

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12.7: Danh Vo Interview- Art Should Estrange

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182194



“There’s all this bullshit that art is bridging!” Meet the Danish-Vietnamese artist Danh Vo in his studio located between a chicken farm and a compost station outside Berlin.

In Danh Vo’s art you’ll find religious sculptures that are cut up, old American flags and his grandmother’s laundry machine. By using objects from his upbringing in a strict Catholic household and presenting them in a white cube gallery he wishes to alienate people and make them question what they know: “Everybody is born under systems,” Vo says and continues: “Somebody has created what you should do and think. And I’m very skeptical towards that.”

Often in Vo’s work, you’ll find a juxtaposition of objects. “Contradictions are very real in everybody’s life.” Danh Vo argues that we learn that life should be harmonies, which it rarely is. This is what he’s trying to project into contrasting pieces such as in the work Your Mother Sucks Cocks in Hell (2015) where an old, wooden, religious sculpture has been merged together with a piece of marble sculpture.

Even though Danh Vo uses personal objects, the goal is not to reveal any intimacy with the viewer. “I was interested in the distance between different social groups,” he says. “I wanted to deal with estrangement, when you would come in a white cube where information is amputated. That you would just not understand.” To Vo art should not be bridging, it should estrange.

Danh Vo (b. 1975) is a Danish-Vietnamese artist. Vo has presented solo shows at several prominent art institutions, including The Royal Academy of Arts in London, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, and Museo Jumex in Mexico City. In 2015, Vo represented Denmark in the Venice Biennial’s Danish pavilion. Vo is the recipient of prestigious awards a.o. the Hugo Boss Prize (2012).

Danh Vo was interviewed by Roxanne Bagheshirin Lærkesen in June 2020 at his studio Guldenhof in Germany.

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12.8: Lida Abdul – ‘A Beautiful Encounter With Chance’

- by **TATE**

Page ID

182195



Afghan artist Lida Abdul describes the chance encounter that became the basis for her elegiac film *Dome*. Abdul calls her pieces ‘anti-monuments’, and in Dome we see a small boy dancing alone in the centre of a bombed-out building in Kabul. The boy’s circling movements trace the shape of the roofless dome as he looks up at the sky, then comes the sinister throbbing of whirling rotor blades as a helicopter passes overhead.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

13: Public memory and the politics of place

13.1: An-My Lê, 29 Palms

13.2: Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii

13.3: Kerry James Marshall, Our Town

13.4: SAAM- Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii, 1995

13.5: Do Ho Suh, Rubbing/Loving

13.6: The National Memorial for Peace and Justice (Equal Justice Initiative)

13.7: Krzysztof Wodiczko, Monument

13.8: Daniel Libeskind, Imperial War Museum North, Manchester, UKNew Page

13.9: Birdhead – ‘We Photograph Things That Are Meaningful To Us’

13.10: Contemporary politics and classical architecture

13.11: Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, Native Hosts (Arkansas)

13.12: What's in a map? Jaune Quick-To-See Smith's State Names (2000)

13.13: Graciela Iturbide, Photographing Mexico

13.14: Contemporary Native American Architecture

13.15: Mark Bradford’s 150 Portrait Tone

13.16: Artist Richard Bell – ‘My Art is an Act of Protest’

13.17: Yatika Starr Fields and mural painting

13.18: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)

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13.1: An-My Lê, 29 Palms

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182197



By art21. “I just wanted to approach the idea of war in a more complicated and more challenging way” says artist An-My Lê, whose photographic series and film “29 Palms” (2003–04) explore the training exercises and desert landscape near Joshua Tree National Park as a staging ground for the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. An-My Lê’s photographs and films examine the impact, consequences, and representation of war, framing a tension between the natural landscape and its violent transformation into battlefields. Suspended between the formal traditions of documentary and staged photography, Lê’s work explores the disjunction between wars as historical events and the ubiquitous representation of war in contemporary entertainment, politics, and collective consciousness.

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13.2: Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii

by TINA RIVERS RYAN



Figure **13.2.1**: Nam June Paik, *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii,* 1995, fifty-one channel video installation (including one closed-circuit television feed), custom electronics, neon lighting, steel and wood; color, sound, approx. 15 x 40 x 4′ (Smithsonian American Art Museum) (© Nam June Paik Estate)

Getting on the "Electronic Super Highway"

In 1974, artist Nam June Paik submitted a report to the Art Program of the Rockefeller Foundation, one of the first organizations to support artists working with new media, including television and video. Entitled "Media Planning for the Post Industrial Society—The 21st Century is now only 26 years away," the report argued that media technologies would become increasingly prevalent in American society, and should be used to address pressing social problems, such as racial segregation, the modernization of the economy, and environmental pollution. Presciently, Paik's report forecasted the emergence of what he called a "broadband communication network"—or "electronic super highway"—comprising not only television and video, but also "audio cassettes, telex, data pooling, continental satellites, micro-fiches, private microwaves and eventually, fiber optics on laser frequencies." By the 1990s, Paik's concept of an information "superhighway" had become associated with a new "world wide web" of electronic communication then emerging—just as he had predicted.

From Music to Fluxus

Paik was well-positioned to understand how media technologies were evolving: in the 1960s he was one of the very first people to use televisual technologies as an artistic medium, earning him the title of "father" of video art. Born in Seoul in 1932, Paik studied composition while attending college in Tokyo; he eventually travelled to Germany, where he hoped to encounter the leading composers of the day. He met John Cage in 1958, and soon became involved with the avant-garde Fluxus group, led by Cage's student George Maciunas. Explain Fluxus.

Following the example of Cage's oeuvre, many of Paik's Fluxus works undermined accepted notions of musical composition or performance. This same irreverent spirit informed his use of television, to which he turned his attention in 1963 in his first one-man gallery show, "Exposition of Music—Electronic Television," at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany. Here, Paik became the first artist to exhibit what would later become known as "video art" by scattering television sets across the floor of a room, thereby shifting our attention from the content on the screens to the sculptural forms of the sets.

The father of video art



Figure 13.2.2: Nam June Paik, *Magnet TV*, 1965, modified black-and-white television set and magnet (Smithsonian American Art Museum) (© Nam June Paik Estate)

Paik moved to New York in 1964, where he came into contact with the downtown art scene. In 1965, he began collaborating with cellist Charlotte Moorman, who would wear and perform Paik's TV sculptures for many years; he also had a one-man show at the 57th Street Galeria Bonino, in which he exhibited modified or "prepared" television sets that upset the traditional TV-watching experience. One example is *Magnet TV*, in which an industrial magnet is placed on top of the TV set, distorting the broadcast image into abstract patterns of light.

According to an oft-cited story, on October 4th of that same year, Paik purchased the first commercially-available portable video system in America, the Sony Portapak, and immediately used it to record the arrival of Pope Paul VI at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Later that night, Paik showed the tape at the Café au Go Go in Greenwich Village, ushering in a new mode of video art based not on the subversion or distortion of television broadcasts, but on the possibilities of videotape. The evolution of these tendencies into a new movement was announced by a 1969 group show, "TV as a Creative Medium." Held at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York, the show included one of Paik's interactive TVs, and also premiered another one of his collaborations with Moorman.

TV as a Creative Medium

For Paik and other early adopters of video, this new artistic medium was well-suited to the speed of our increasingly electronic modern lives. It allowed artists to create moving images more quickly than recording on film (which required time for negatives to be developed), and unlike film, video could be edited in "real-time," using devices that altered the video's electronic signals. (Ever the pioneer, Paik created his own video synthesizer with engineer Shuya Abe in 1969.) Furthermore, because the image recorded by the video camera could be transmitted to and viewed almost instantaneously on a monitor, people could see themselves "live" on a TV screen, and even interact with their own TV image, in a process known as "feedback." In the years to come, the participatory nature of TV would be redefined by two-way cable networks, while the advent of global satellite broadcasts made TV a medium of instant global communication.



Figure 13.2.3: Nam June Paik, *TV Garden*, 1974 (image shows 2000 version), video installation with color television sets and live plants (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum) (© Nam June Paik Estate)

As television continued to evolve from the late 1960s onward, Paik explored ways to disrupt it from both inside and outside of the institutional frameworks of galleries, museums, and emerging experimental TV labs. His major works from this period include *TV Garden* (1974), a sculptural installation of TV sets scattered among live plants in a museum (image above), and *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* (1984), a broadcast program that coordinated live feeds from around the world via satellite. In these and other projects, Paik's goal was to reflect upon how we interact with technology, and to imagine new ways of doing so. The many retrospectives of his work in recent decades, including one organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2012, speak to the increasing relevance of his ideas for contemporary art.

The nation electric



Figure 13.2.4: Nam June Paik, *V-yramid* (detail), 1982, video installation, color, sound, with forty television sets (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York) (photo: Mark B. Schlemmer, CC BY 2.0) (© Nam June Paik Estate)

By the 1980s, Paik was building enormous, free-standing structures comprising dozens or even hundreds of TV screens, often organized into iconic shapes, as in the giant pyramid of *V-yramid* (1982). For the German Pavilion at the 1993 Venice Biennale, Paik produced a series of works about the relationship between Eastern and Western cultures, framed through the lens of Marco Polo; along with Hans Haacke, another artist representing Germany, Paik was awarded the prestigious Golden Lion. One of the works, *Electronic Superhighway*, was a towering bank of TVs that simultaneously screened multiple video clips (including one of John Cage) from a wide variety of sources. Two years later, Paik revisited this work in *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*, placing over 300 TV screens into the overall formation of a map of the United States outlined in colored neon lights (see image at the top of the page and the detail below). Roughly forty feet long and fifteen feet high, the work is a monumental record of the physical and also cultural contours of America: within each state, the screens display video clips that resonate with that state's unique popular mythology. For example, Iowa (where each presidential election cycle begins) plays old news footage of various candidates, while Kansas presents the *Wizard of Oz*.



Figure **13.2.5**: Detail, Nam June Paik, *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*, 1995, fifty-one channel video installation (including one closed-circuit television feed), custom electronics, neon lighting, steel and wood; color, sound, approx. 15 x 40 x 4′ (Smithsonian American Art Museum) (© Nam June Paik Estate)

The states are firmly defined, but also linked, by the network of neon lights, which echoes the network of interstate "superhighways" that economically and culturally unified the continental U.S. in the 1950s. However, whereas the highways facilitated the transportation of people and goods from coast to coast, the neon lights suggest that what unifies us now is not so much transportation, but electronic communication. Thanks to the screens of televisions and of the home computers that became popular in the 1990s, as well as the cables of the internet (which transmit information as light), most of us can access the same information at anytime and from any place. *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*, which has been housed at the Smithsonian American Art Museum since 2002, has therefore become an icon of America in the information age.

While Paik's work is generally described as celebrating the fact that the "electronic superhighway" allows us to communicate with and understand each other across traditional boundaries, this particular work also can be read as posing some difficult questions about how that technology is impacting culture. For example, the physical scale of the work and number of simultaneous clips makes it difficult to absorb any details, resulting in what we now call "information overload," and the visual tension between the static brightness of the neons and the dynamic brightness of the screens points to a similar tension between national and local frames of reference.

Additional resources:

Nam June Paik, *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Nam June Paik, bio and collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Nam June Paik, *TV Garden* at the Guggenheim

Nam June Paik from the National Endowment for the Arts

Nam June Paik archive at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Nam June Paik from the Asia Society

Melissa Chiu and Michelle Yun, eds., *Nam June Paik: Becoming Robot* (New York: Asia Society Museum, 2014).

John G. Hanhardt and Ken Hakuta, *Nam June Paik: Global Visionary* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2012).

John G. Hanhardt and Jon Ippolito, *The Worlds of Nam June Paik* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2000).

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13.3: Kerry James Marshall, Our Town

by ALEJO BENEDETTI, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
182200



Kerry James Marshall, *Our Town*, 1995, acrylic and collage on canvas, 256.5 x 363.2 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art)

Additional resources

This work at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

Google Arts & Culture story about this work.

This page titled 13.3: Kerry James Marshall, Our Town is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Alejo Benedetti, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and Dr. Beth Harris, "Kerry James Marshall, Our Town," in Smarthistory, August 22, 2022, accessed December 23, 2022, https://smarthistory.org/kerry-james-marshall-our-town/..

13.4: SAAM- Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii, 1995

by SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM

Page ID

182201



Take a trip across the U.S.A. with Nam June Paik's "Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii, 1995." Learn more about this iconic artwork that was a gift from the artist to the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM). Saisha Grayson, SAAM's curator of time-based media, shares insights about Paik's life and the personal associations that, along with popular culture references, inform the media clips the artist included within this monumental map of the United States. Grayson also discusses the installation's complexity and continued relevance today.

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13.5: Do Ho Suh, Rubbing/Loving

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182202



By art21. Artist Do Ho Suh makes one final artwork in the New York apartment that was his home and studio for eighteen years. Suh covered every surface in the apartment with white paper which he then rubbed with colored pencil to reveal and preserve all of the space's memory-provoking details. "My energy has been accumulated and in a way I think my rubbing shows that," says Suh. "I'm trying to show the layers of time." Suh's landlord, who was initially hesitant to rent to a young artist, became a close friend and supported him in making earlier fabric works about the apartment. Before passing away, the landlord gave Suh permission to make this final work: "Rubbing/Loving." It serves as a transportable testament to the home's emotional importance to Suh and the owner's family. "I try to understand my life as a movement through different spaces," says Suh, who was born in South Korea, studied in Rhode Island and Connecticut and now lives in London. Best known for his intricate sculptures that defy conventional notions of scale and site-specificity, Do Ho Suh draws attention to the ways viewers occupy and inhabit public space. Whether addressing the dynamic of personal space versus public space, or exploring the fine line between strength in numbers and homogeneity, Suh's sculptures continually question the identity of the individual in today's increasingly transnational, global society.

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13.6: The National Memorial for Peace and Justice (Equal Justice Initiative)

by DR. RENÉE ATER

Page ID
182203



Figure 13.6.1: The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: Shawn Calhoun, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Located in Montgomery, Alabama, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice is the first monument to commemorate the over 4,000 African Americans who were lynched in the United States between 1877 and 1950. The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) envisioned and realized the memorial as "a sacred space for truth-telling and reflection about racial terror in America and its legacy."



Figure 13.6.2: Meta Warrick Fuller, *In Memory of Mary Turner: As a Silent Protest Against Mob Violence*, 1919, painted plaster (Museum of African American History, Boston & Nantucket)

While writing my dissertation on the sculpture of Meta Warrick Fuller, I investigated the history of lynching in the United States. My research was motivated by the fact that Fuller had created a small painted plaster to honor the memory of Mary Turner, a pregnant woman who was lynched in Brooks County, Georgia, in 1918. I was interested to see if Turner was identified in the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, which I discovered she was. I also was deeply curious as to how EJI would handle the visual representation of trauma and violence. At the end of April 2018, I flew to Atlanta, rented a car, and drove through the Georgia and Alabama countryside to Montgomery to participate in the opening ceremonies and the two-day social justice conference.



Figure **13.6.3**: The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, opened 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: **Soniakapadia**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Sited on six acres of land, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice is an arresting and emotionally powerful memorial to lynching victims. EJI with MASS Design Group conceived the memorial as a sober and sacred site where people can gather and reflect on America's history of slavery, lynching, and racial inequality. EJI believes that such a monument will allow for national reconciliation and redemption.



Figure **13.6.4**: Peace and Justice Memorial Garden, The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: Dr. Renée Ater)

Peace and Justice Memorial Garden

The memorial includes multiple components: a garden, four sculpture groupings, explanatory texts and quotations, and a temple-like structure with hanging rectangular boxes made of corten steel. Visitors first encounter the Peace and Justice Memorial Garden before entering the long hallway of the main entrance. Within the garden are native plantings of flowers and shrubs and the so-called "Memory Wall: Strength," a brick arched wall from the Montgomery Theater, built in 1860, which enslaved masons constructed. The garden is intended as a contemplative space as well as a place to acknowledge past and present African American laborers in Montgomery. From the garden, a serpentine pathway leads to the entrance of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice.

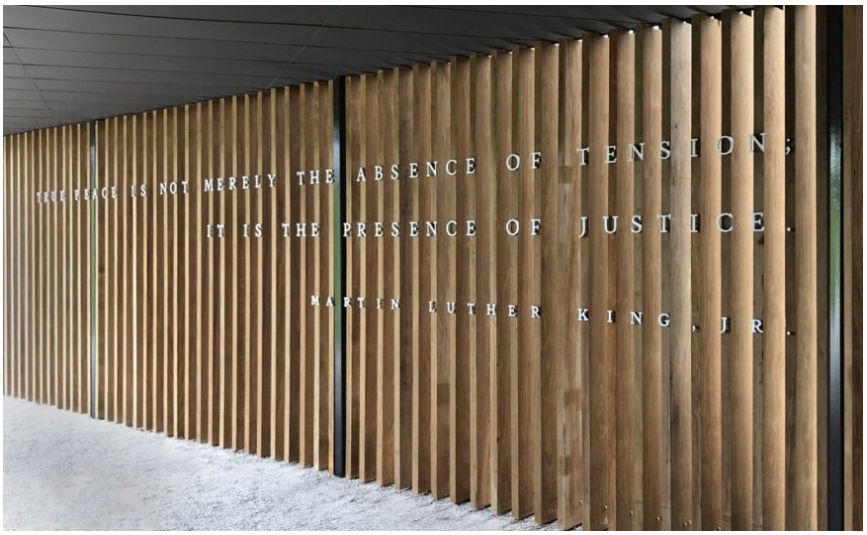


Figure **13.6.5**: Entrance, National Memorial for Peace and Justice, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: Dr. Renée Ater)

Telling the story of slavery and lynching

A quotation from Martin Luther King Jr. greets you as you enter the memorial. Placed along a wooden slat wall, it reads: "True peace is not merely the absence of tension, it is the presence of justice." This quotation frames the meaning of the memorial and the overall social activist and reparative justice mission of EJI. EJI is "committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, to challenging racial and economic injustice, and to protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society." The memorial space flows in one direction, with visitors passing King's remarks to begin a slow climb up the gently sloped landscape to the main building of the memorial.



Figure **13.6.6**: Informational plaque in the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: **Judson McCranie**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Four large grey plaques with white lettering are attached to the concrete wall along the pathway. Evenly spaced, these texts outline a history of the transatlantic slave trade and the rise of violence in the post-Civil War period; Reconstruction and the rise of convict leasing in the South; racial terror lynching in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and the justifications that white Americans gave for lynching African American men and women. The texts use direct, concise language to describe the difficult historical facts of slavery and racial terror lynching.



Figure **13.6.7**: Kwame Akoto-Bamfo, *Nkyinkyim Installation*, 2018, National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: **Michael Delli Carpini**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Monument to the transatlantic slave trade

In front of the first plaque, the artist Kwame Akoto-Bamfo created a cast concrete, multi-figure, stand-alone monument to the transatlantic slave trade. Entitled *Nkyinkyim Installation*, this work presents seven semi-nude Africans who are enchained for the harrowing journey from the interior to the coast for transportation across the Atlantic. Based on the **slavery memorial in Stone Town, Zanzibar, Tanzania**, Akoto-Bamfo's memorial evokes the horror of slavery through the figures anguished expressions; chained necks and manacled hands and feet; and simulated slashed backs. The most sorrowful of these depictions is of a chained young mother holding a screaming baby as she reaches across to an older standing male figure.



Figure 13.6.8: Memorial Square, National Memorial for Peace and Justice, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: Michael Delli Carpini, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Sacred space dedicated to lynching victims

The memorial structure suggests the form of a temple with a large peristyle. At the center of the temple-like memorial is an open space, “Memorial Square,” reached by a series of aggregate concrete steps. The grassy knoll represents spaces such as town squares and courthouse lawns used for the public spectacle of lynching. Inside the memorial, over 800 rectangular corten steel boxes, six feet in height, hang by steel poles from the ceiling at even intervals. Each of these hanging forms represents a county in the United States where a lynching took place. Names of lynching victims and the dates of their murders are laser cut into the surfaces of the boxes.



Figure 13.6.9: National Memorial for Peace and Justice, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: Dr. Renée Ater)

On the interior of the memorial structure, you begin on even ground, your body parallel to the coffin-like forms. If you choose, you can lean into the monument and even trace a finger across the cutout letters or feel the uneven surface quality. As you descend into the memorial, the corten steel boxes rise high above, suspended in the air and no longer within your bodily space. These rusted stele evoke the image of black bodies hanging from trees.

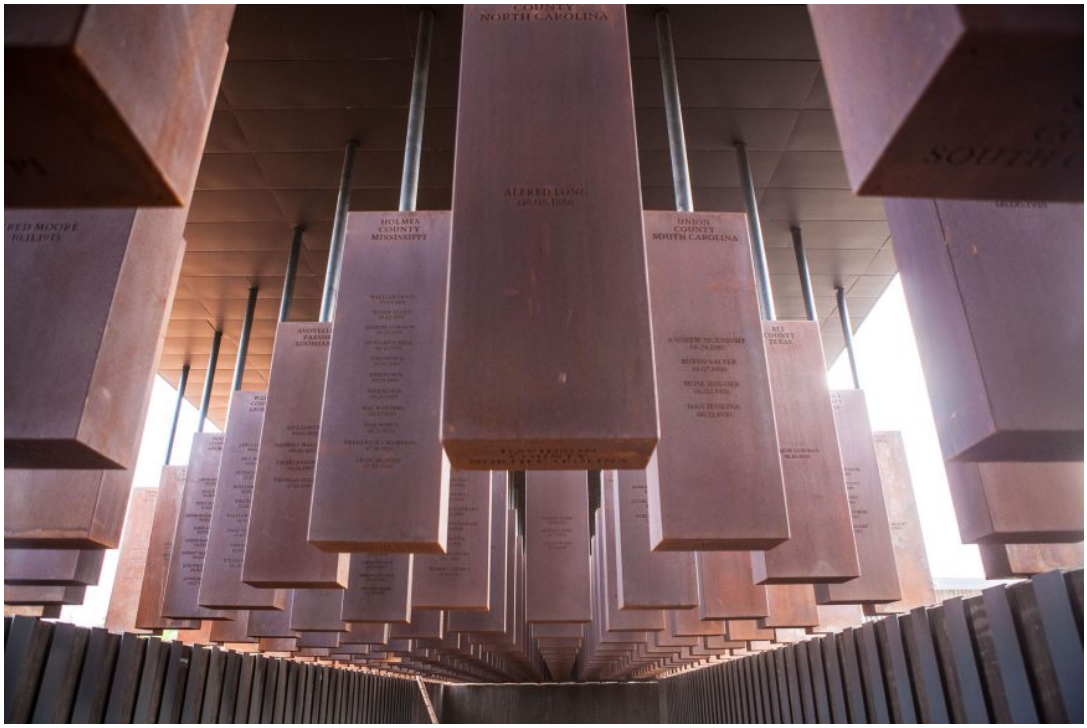


Figure 13.6.10: Memorial Corridor, National Memorial for Peace and Justice, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: Soniakapadia, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Along the third section of the memorial, bands of text panels in grey with white lettering identify the awful justifications for racial terror lynching including accusations of inappropriate conduct with white women, speaking out against lynching, and not showing

deference to whites. After reading these difficult texts, you encounter a message of reconciliation.

> ***For the hanged and beaten.***
> ***For the shot, drowned, and burned.***
> ***For the tortured, tormented, and terrorized.***
> ***For those abandoned by the Rule of Law.***
>
> ***We will remember.***
>
> ***With hope because hopelessness is the enemy of justice.***
> ***With courage because peace requires bravery.***
> ***With persistence because justice is a constant struggle.***
> ***With faith because we shall overcome.***

This text asserts unequivocally the power of this memorial to act as a remembrance device and as a space where the horror and trauma of lynching is framed in the context of peace.

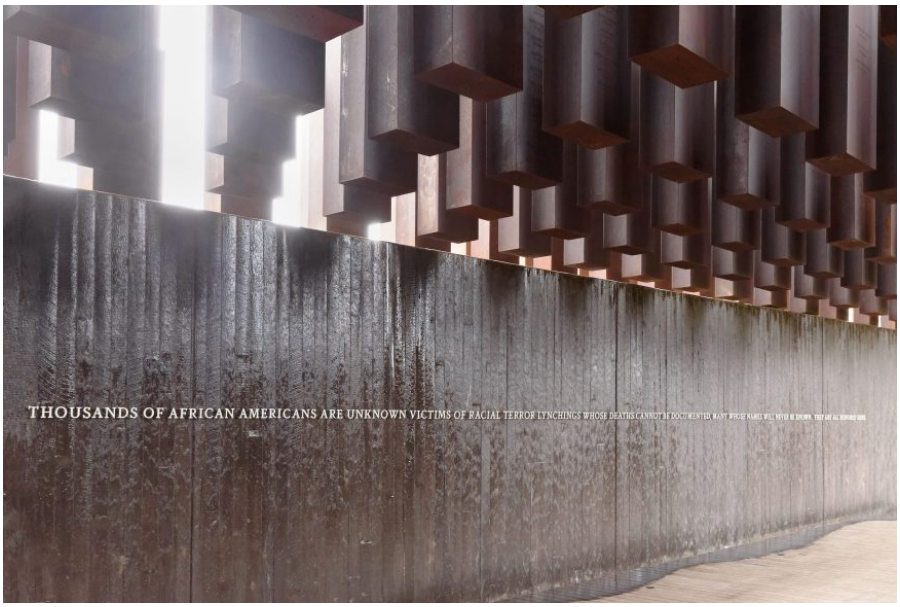


Figure **13.6.11**: Wall with flowing water, National Memorial for Peace and Justice, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: **Judson McCranie**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Nearby, water flows down the final long wall of the memorial. Metal lettering asserts that all victims of lynching now will be remembered. “Thousands of African Americans are unknown victims of racial terror lynchings whose deaths cannot be documented, many whose names will never be known. They are all honored here.” The slow sound of water cascading down the wall allows space for contemplation, as you are able to sit along rough-hewn seating across from the water feature.

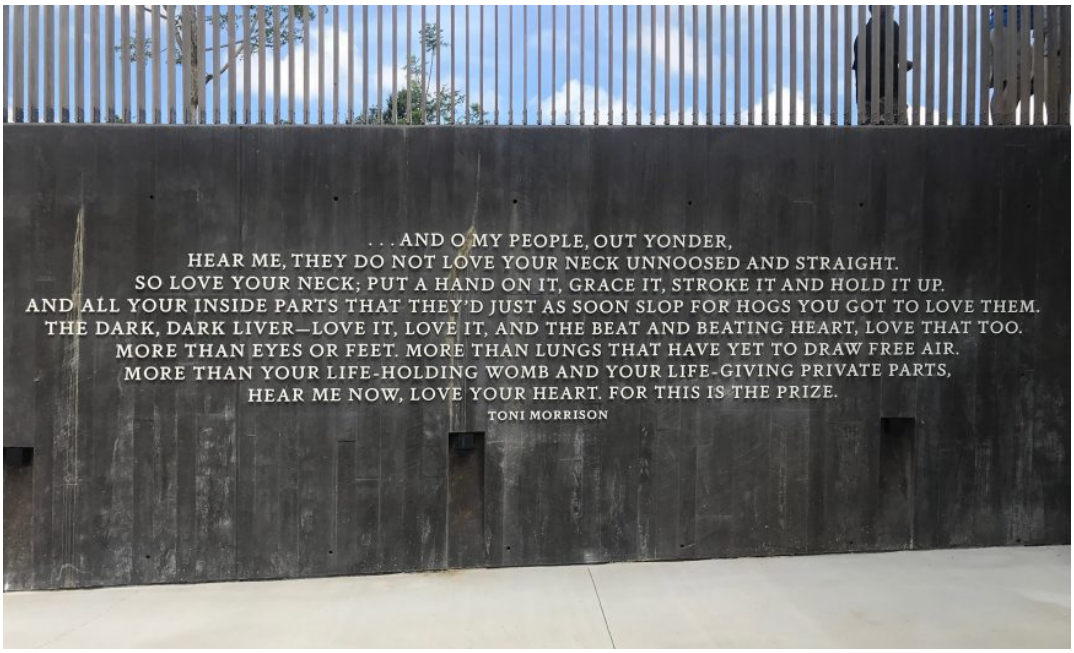


Figure **13.6.12**: National Memorial for Peace and Justice, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: **Michael Delli Carpini,** CC BY-NC 2.0)

When you exit the memorial to the surrounding park, you encounter a final quotation from Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* that stresses the power of love.

> ***And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver—love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.***



Figure 13.6.13: Duplicate monuments, National Memorial for Peace and Justice, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: Dr. Renée Ater)

Duplicate monuments

In the park, MASS and EJI included a field of duplicate monuments. Rather than hang from a roof, the corten steel boxes now serve as cenotaphs lying flat on the ground in long rows. They are waiting to be claimed and installed in the counties they represent. For EJI, the duplicate monuments serve as "a report" as to which counties have confronted the difficult history of lynching and which have chosen to not deal with such a painful legacy. EJI believes this process of claiming the duplicate monuments will "change the built environment of the Deep South and beyond to more honestly reflect our history."



Figure 13.6.14: Left: Ida B. Wells Memorial Grove; right: Dana King, *Guided by Justice*, 2018. National Memorial for Peace and Justice, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photos: Dr. Renée Ater)

Sculpture in the park

Three additional groups of sculpture are integrated into the park. The Ida B. Wells Memorial Grove honors the early twentieth-century anti-lynching activist and writer. It contains over forty black granite cylinders of various heights that visitors can sit on and reflect. In *Guided by Justice*, Dana King created three life-size bronze statues of black women dressed in coats as they "walk" on the pathway. These three statues of women at various stages of life symbolize the women arrested in 1955 for challenging racial segregation on Montgomery's public buses.



Figure **13.6.15**: Hank Willis Thomas, *Raise Up*, 2016, National Memorial for Peace and Justice, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama (photo: Dr. Renée Ater)

The final sculpture is by Hank Willis Thomas and represents systemized police violence directed towards African American men. *Raise Up* is a long horizontal, free-standing concrete wall with ten bronze portraits of black men shown from the neck up with their hands raised above their bald heads. These monuments with Akoto-Bamfo's multi-figure statue of enslaved persons underscore the main themes of the memorial and of EJI's work: slavery, lynching, segregation/resistance, and mass incarceration.

Elizabeth Alexander's "Invocation"

As visitors exit the National Memorial to Peace and Justice, they encounter the haunting lines of the poet Elizabeth Alexander's "Invocation." In the lines of her poem, Alexander asserts that the African American victims of racial terror lynching will not be forgotten, nor lost in the telling of U.S. history. Each name—"a holy word"— is forever etched on this memorial and into the nation's collective memory.

> ***The wind brings your names.***
> ***We will never dissever you names***
> ***nor your shadows beneath each branch and tree.***
>
> ***The truth comes in on the wind, is carried by water.***
> ***There is such a thing as the truth. Tell us***
> ***how you got over. Say, Soul look back in wonder.***
>
> ***Your names were never lost,***
> ***each name a holy word.***
> ***The rocks cry out—***
>
> ***call out each name to sanctify this place.***
> ***Sounds in human voices, silver and soil,***
> ***a moan, a sorrow song,***
>
> ***a keen, a cackle, harmony,***
> ***a hymnal, handbook, chart,***

a sacred text, a stomp, an exhortation.

Ancestors, you will find us still in cages,
despised and disciplined.
You will find us still mis-named.

Here you will find us despite.
You will not find us extinct.
You will find us here memoried and storied.

You will find us here mighty.
You will find us here divine.
You will find us where you left us, but not as you left us.

Here you endure and are luminous.
You are not lost to us.
The wind carries sorrows, sighs, and shouts.

The wind brings everything. Nothing is not lost.

Additional Resources:

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice on Equal Justice Initiative website

MASS Design group page on their design for the memorial

Renee Ater's public history blog

Julie Buckner Armstrong, *Mary Turner and the Memory of Lynching* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

Fritzhugh Brundage, *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Durham, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.)

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13.7: Krzysztof Wodiczko, Monument

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182204



From art21, March 18, 2020.

Video and installation artist Krzysztof Wodiczko amplifies the voices of refugees with “Monument,” his 2020 site-specific commission for Madison Square Park in New York City. From his Manhattan apartment, Wodiczko shares his early drawings of the project, where he conceived of how he would project video onto a prominent 1881 monument to Civil War admiral, David Glasgow Farragut. “It was very important for me to imagine how this statue can be animated with the projection,” says the artist. Monuments carry special significance for Wodiczko, as sites for public gatherings and protests, witnesses and recorders of history, and blank canvases upon which new narratives can be painted.

With “Monument,” Wodiczko decided to project video likenesses and spoken narratives of resettled refugees onto the Farragut statue. As Wodiczko explains, “There are more than 70 million refugees; people who are forced to leave their home countries because those countries are engaged in wars…to actually see a refugee speaking is a very rare opportunity for the public.” During a video mapping projection test in the park before the opening of the installation, Wodiczko makes sure that the faces and hands of the refugees from his recorded interviews with them align with the Farragut statue’s own body. As the final work plays in the darkened park each evening, passersby hear the refugees’ difficult and at times heartbreaking stories. The artist sees this as both a moment of catharsis for the refugees who collaborated with him for this project, but also a way to make monuments relevant to contemporary life, “so that we can build a better future, maybe a future in which some of those monuments, like war memorials, will never need to be built, because there will be no wars and no refugees.”

By appropriating public buildings and monuments as backdrops for projections, Krzysztof Wodiczko focuses attention on ways in which architecture and monuments reflect collective memory and history. Projecting images of community members’ hands, faces, or entire bodies onto architectural façades, and combining those images with voiced testimonies, Wodiczko disrupts our traditional understanding of the functions of public space and architecture. He challenges the silent, stark monumentality of buildings, activating them in an examination of notions of human rights, democracy, and truths about the violence, alienation, and inhumanity that underlie countless aspects of social interaction in present-day society.

Learn more about the artist: **https://art21.org/artist/krzysztof-wodiczko/**

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13.8: Daniel Libeskind, Imperial War Museum North, Manchester, UKNew Page

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

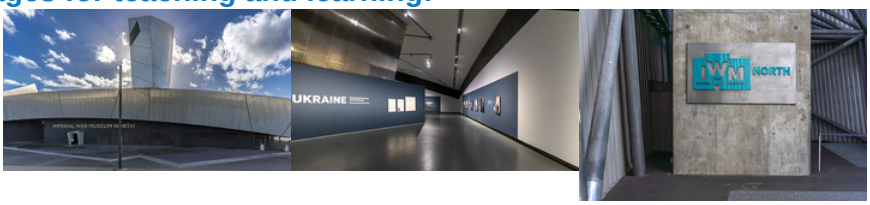


Imperial War Museum North, designed by Daniel Libeskind, 2001, Trafford Park, Manchester, UK

Additional resources

Visit the Imperial War Museum North

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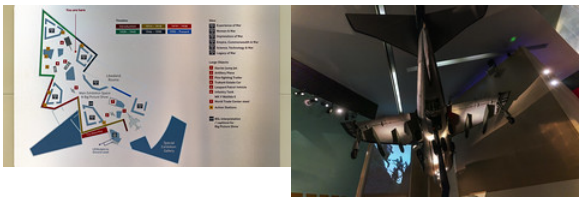
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13.9: Birdhead – ‘We Photograph Things That Are Meaningful To Us’

- by **TATE**

Page ID

182210



Shanghai based photographers Ji Weiyu and Song Tao, aka Birdhead, make art about everyday life in their home town. The duo take us on a tour around the Chinese city to discover how they work. In 2004 artists Ju Weiyu (born 1980) and Song Tao (born 1979) began to collaborate as the photographic duo Birdhead. They were both born in Shanghai and both graduated from the Shanghai School of Arts and Crafts in 2000. Using the medium of photography to capture and make sense of their experience of daily life in the metropolis of Shanghai, they create large volumes of snapshot-style images showing their existence within the contemporary urban environment. Find out more about Birdhead: **https://goo.gl/bw6k5R**

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13.10: Contemporary politics and classical architecture

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
182213



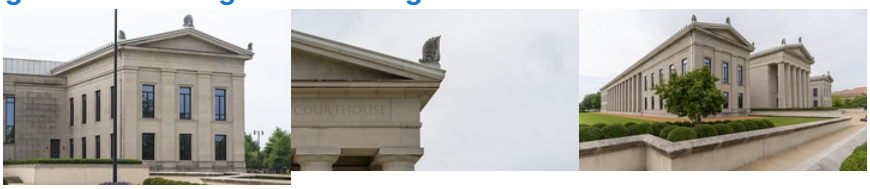
A conversation with Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris in front of HBRA Architects, United States Federal Building and Courthouse, 2011, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Additional resources

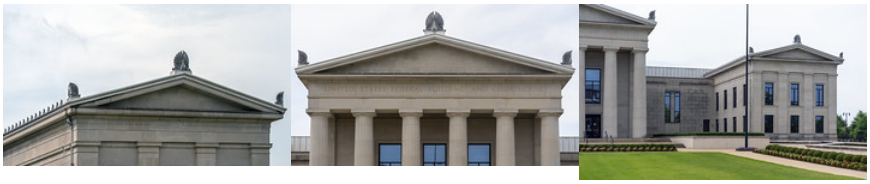
President Donald Trump, "Promoting Beautiful Federal Civic Architecture", Executive Order, December 21, 2020

Taylor Dafoe, "Joe Biden Has Revoked Trump's Executive Order Mandating Classical-Only Architecture for Federal Buildings, Restoring 'Freedom of Design'," *Artnet*, February 26, 2021

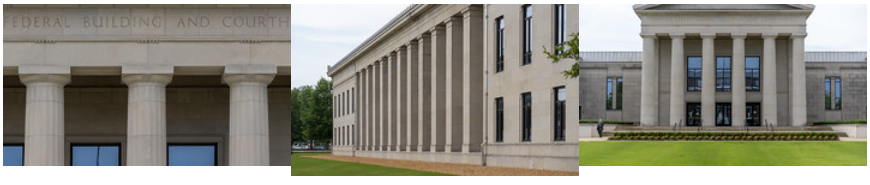
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13.11: Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, Native Hosts (Arkansas)

by DR. MINDY BESAW, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. BETH HARRIS



Video **13.11.1**: Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, *Native Hosts (Arkansas)*, 2018, aluminum sign, series of seven, 46.7 x 92.5 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, ©Hock E Aye VI Edgar Heap of Birds), a Seeing America video Speakers: Dr. Mindy Besaw, Curator of American Art, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and Dr. Beth Harris

Additional resources

This work at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

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13.12: What's in a map? Jaune Quick-To-See Smith's State Names (2000)

by **DR. ANNE SHOWALTER** and **DR. BETH HARRIS**

Page ID
182206



Dr. Anne Showalter and Dr. Beth Harris discuss Jaune Quick-To-See Smith's *State Names (*2000) at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

What's in a map? With *State Names*, the Native American artist Jaune Quick-To-See Smith suggests that thinking about our history in a different way, helps us rethink our present.

Additional resources

State Names at the **Smithsonian American Art Museum**

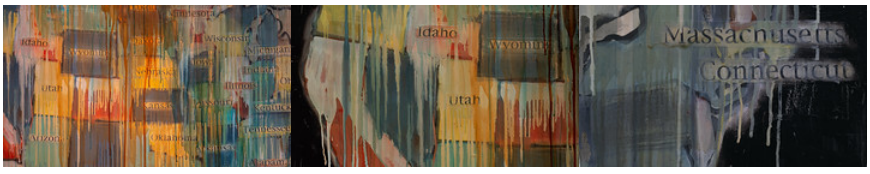
Jaune Quick-To-See Smith's **artist website**

Artist interview with Jaune Quick-To-See Smith (The Smithsonian American Art Museum)

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13.13: Graciela Iturbide, Photographing Mexico

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182207



By art21. From Mexico City, artist Graciela Iturbide discusses her personal and artistic relationship to politics and inequality in Mexico. “We have such wonderful traditions—such wonderful people,” says Iturbide, who was close to leftist parties in Mexico. “But, it’s very sad that there is so much social injustice.” In contrast to her strong political views, she prefers to photograph people “independently of the injustice” to avoid sensationalizing their lives. Iturbide embeds herself within the communities when taking photographs throughout Mexico, attending events such as births and festivals. The artist is shown at the Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico City where she produced a **series of photographs taken in Kahlo’s bathroom**. For Graciela Iturbide, the camera is just a pretext for knowing the world. Her interest, she says, lies in what her eyes see and what her heart feels—what moves her and touches her. Although she has produced studies of landscapes and culture in India, Italy, and the United States, her principal concern has been the exploration and investigation of Mexico—her own cultural environment—through black-and-white photographs of landscapes and their inhabitants, abstract compositions, and self-portraits.

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13.14: Contemporary Native American Architecture

by DR. CAROL HERSELLE KRINSKY

Page ID
182208



Figure **13.14.1**: Fountain (detail), Douglas Cardinal, Louis Weller with GBQC and Polshek Partners, National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC, 2004 (photo: Gryffindor)

Design and heritage

You are a member of one of the midwestern nations of Native Americans. Your ancestors had no permanent architecture because they were nomadic hunter-gatherers (see photo below). But now you live on a reservation in South Dakota, or near the Twin Cities in Minnesota. You and your relatives want to establish a cultural center, or a day care, or health clinic for your people.



Figure **13.14.2**: Cass Lake Health Clinic (Indian Health Service), Leech Lake Reservation (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe), Minnesota

Do you want it to look like the local museum or clinic (image left) built by the Federal or State government? Probably not, because in the post-modern era since about 1965, various groups have proclaimed their specific ethnic identity. Native Americans now reinforce cultural memory despite the near-eradication of their cultures by European-American governments and individual prejudice. This emphasis is now common among other minority and religious groups that have suffered under dominant cultures here and abroad.

Your native nation will seek an architect perhaps not of Native American ancestry; that will depend upon available talent and sensitivity to your culture, although increasing numbers of Native Americans have studied architecture. You will want the design to suggest something appropriate to your heritage.



Figure 13.14.3: Edward S. Curtis, *Moving camp* (detail), c. November 19, 1908, photographic print, Atsina on horses with travois behind them, tipis in background, Montana (Library of Congress)

Midwest

In the Midwest, the result might reflect local types of lodges, tipis, and ceremonial buildings of the past, but made of practical and accessible modern materials since an original tipi made of animal hides would be impermanent and lightweight. When the original hides no longer kept out the weather, they were easily replaced with new ones, but people today want durable materials and have time and funds for less frequent maintenance. The tipi has inspired versions in concrete, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Community Hall (1989) by Johnson, Sheldon, Sorensen, in glass, the Southern Ute Cultural Center (2011), by Jones & Jones* (see image below) and in rough stone with wood beams as in the Chief Gall Inn (1972) designed by Harrison Bagg at the Standing Rock Reservation in South Dakota.

The Four Winds School (1983) at Fort Totten on the Spirit Lake Reservation in North Dakota by Charles Archambault, Denby Deegan* and Neil McCaleb,* has the overall round shape of a ceremonial lodge or tipi but in order to accommodate classrooms, a gymnasium and cafeteria, the interior is divided into rooms around a circular core containing a tipi for counseling sessions.



Figure 13.14.4: Jones & Jones, Southern Ute Cultural Center, 2011 (photo: NorthShore Productions, Southern Ute Cultural Center and Museum)

Northwest coast

Along the Northwest coast, the building will probably be a rectangle of logs or milled wood with a pitched roof, evoking ancestral longhouses made from trees in the dense local forests. Retaining the traditional long shape while using some reinforced concrete

for the sake of permanence, the Makah nation in Washington State created a cultural center in Neah Bay (1979 by Fred Bassetti architects) that has cedar cladding to harmonize with older buildings on the reservation. The Native American student center at Oregon State University uses logs and the longhouse form to accommodate members of several Native nations, without imitating buildings of one group (image below). The longhouse is a traditional form of architecture for several Native American nations in the coastal Northwest and was built to house extended families and community functions.



Figure **13.14.5**: Jones & Jones*, Native American Longhouse (student center), 2013, Oregon State University (photo: Theresa Hogue, CC BY-SA 2.0)

At least one individual, Lawrence Joe,* of the Upper Skagit reservation in Washington has built a longhouse (1986) for therapeutic activities intended to accustom delinquent or disturbed youths to better ways of living according to traditional ethical standards. Northeastern forests, too, have provided logs for construction since ancient times, and various wood-covered buildings have been erected there for tribal offices, a student center at Cornell University (1991, by Flynn Battaglia, see detail below), museums and cultural centers. If there is insufficient money for a properly insulated wooden construction, a group may decorate a simpler building made of industrial materials with appropriate historically-based ornament, as in the Takopi Indian Health Center in Tacoma, WA (2002, by Mulvanny G2) or the Seneca-Iroquois National Museum in Salamanca NY (by Lloyd Barnwell,* designs by Carson Waterman*).

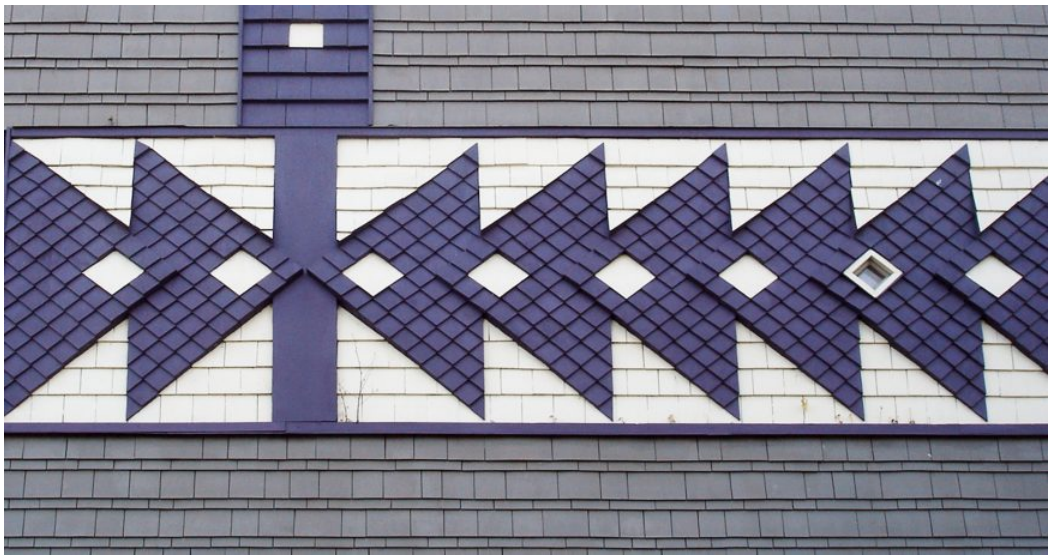


Figure **13.14.6**: Haudenosaunee wampum belt design on exterior shingles (detail), Flynn & Battaglia, Akwe:kon ("all of us" in Mohawk), 1991, student residence and community center, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

Southwest

In the southwest, a structure might be made of adobe (earthen brick structures made of sand, silt, clay, and straw), with thick walls and small windows to moderate heat during the warm months. Adobe requires frequent maintenance, however, so new buildings are often made of reinforced concrete, a durable material that can be colored to match the local earth of which adobe is composed. The San Felipe Pueblo school in New Mexico (image below) has geometric forms, close to those of an adobe building but with larger windows to admit more natural light and with subtle colors to enhance the appeal of the building to its young users.



Figure **13.14.7**: Michael Doody supervised by Robert Montoya,* The San Felipe Pueblo School, 1982, San Felipe Pueblo, New Mexico (photo: courtesy of the author)

A southwestern building may also be built primarily of other natural materials, such as stone or wood, roughly hewn as the ancestors would have left it. The Pojoaque Pueblo Council Chambers, a seriously impressive building of modest size, is one example. A stone post barely altered from its natural state supports the sapling ceiling of the principal room in a thick-walled adobe structure. The building owes its form to two designers, the pueblo's own governor, George Rivera* (also a sculptor) and Joel

McHorse, Jr., as well as to its own construction organization—rather than to an imported designer. Along the highway entrance to the pueblo, Rivera* also designed a museum and cultural center using the solid, massive geometric forms customary in adobe building (see image below).



Figure 13.14.8: George Rivera with early assistance from Dennis Holloway, Poeh Cultural Center and Museum, 2012, Pojoaque (Po'su wae geh), New Mexico (photo: Howard Lifshitz, CC BY 2.0)

Urban centers

It is less easy to imagine an urban center where members of several native nations come together despite their varied cultural and architectural traditions. Whose culture will dominate? When it is impossible to find a site and funds for a new building, members must rent space in existing buildings that can be decorated inside with art or objects pertinent to the cultures in the area. The Minneapolis American Indian Center is a purpose-built center (see image below). The design connects the inside to nature through large glass windows. Woven wood designs by George Morrison* cover large parts of the outside. A ceremonial circle with stepped seating forms part of the entrance plaza. Inside, events take place below a ramp that replaces stairs or banked seating, to accommodate the customary ways of observing events—in small groups, spaced comfortably apart from one another. This building expresses Native life ways even though it does not imitate an indigenous building type.



Figure 13.14.9: Hodne-Stageberg Partners with Denby Deegan* and Dennis Sun Rhodes,* exterior wooden design at right by George Morrison,* Minneapolis American Indian Center, 1972 (photo: Bill Forbes, by permission, all rights reserved)

Natural forms

Several buildings for Native groups specifically evoke natural forms revered by the members of the nation. The Oneida in Wisconsin built a school with a plan in the form of a turtle (below left), and the same animal, sacred to the Iroquois confederacy,

inspired the plan of a now-closed cultural center in Niagara Falls (below right).



Figure 13.14.10: Left: Aerial view, Richard Thern, Oneida Nation Elementary School, 1995, Oneida, Wisconsin (photo: ©Google). Right: Hodne-Stageberg with Dennis Sun Rhodes,* Iroquois Confederacy Cultural Center (closed), 1981, Niagara Falls, New York (photo: TC Fenstermaker, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

Left: Aerial view, Richard Thern, Oneida Nation Elementary School, 1995, Oneida, Wisconsin (photo: ©Google). Right: Hodne-Stageberg with Dennis Sun Rhodes,* Iroquois Confederacy Cultural Center (closed), 1981, Niagara Falls, New York (photo: TC Fenstermaker, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., opened in 2004, is the result of collaboration, first with Douglas Cardinal* and GBQC, then with a consortium headed by Louis Weller* and Polshek Partners. Donna House,* an ethnobotanist and others also contributed to the result. Unlike smooth white buildings on the Mall, this one has a rough yellow stone surface, and is surrounded by landscaping of only indigenous ornamental or food-yielding plants. The boldly contoured facade confronts the neoclassical design of the Capitol. Inside and out, curving lines dominate because some Native American design participants claimed that these contours were natural and indigenous; they saw rigid straight lines as imports from abroad. A domed rotunda just inside the entrance accommodates ceremonies that can be viewed both at ground level and from surrounding balconies. As a building in the nation's capital, the Museum reflects its position within the largely neoclassical context of the straight-sided Mall while accommodating various indigenous traditions.



Figure 13.14.11: Douglas Cardinal*, Louis Weller* with GBQC and Polshek Partners, National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC, 2004

The variety of native traditions, available materials, and architectural expertise has therefore given our continent new and culturally sensitive architectural forms during the last two generations.

*denotes Native American ancestry

Additional resources

Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Contemporary Native American Architecture*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996

Joy Monice Malnar and Frank Vodvarka, *New Architecture on Indigenous Lands*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2013

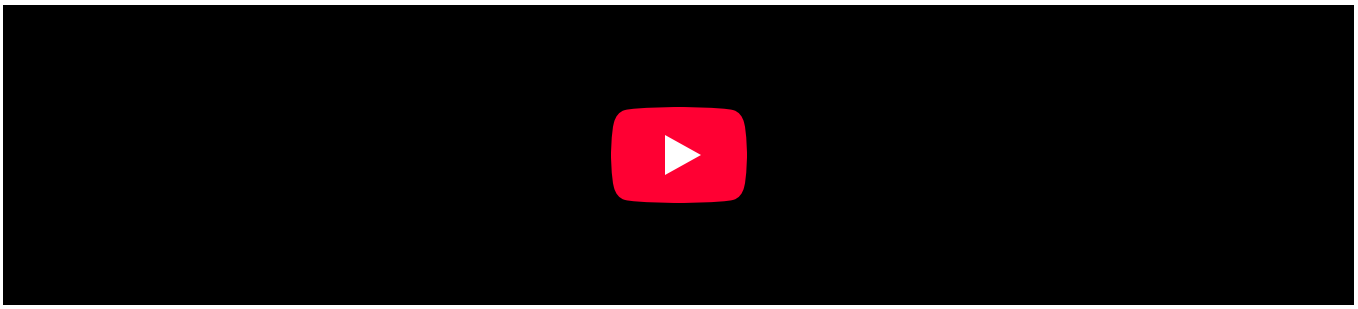
Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton, *Native American Architecture*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1990

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13.15: Mark Bradford’s 150 Portrait Tone

by **BANK OF AMERICA**

Page ID
182209



50 Portrait Tone was conceived after the fatal shooting of Philando Castile by a Minnesota police officer in July rs to the name and color code of the pink acrylic used throughout the painting. Like the now-obsolete “flesh” crayon in the Crayola 64 box, the color “portrait tone” carries inherent assumptions about who is being depicted and presents a sobering commentary on power and representation.

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13.16: Artist Richard Bell – ‘My Art is an Act of Protest’

- by **TATE**

Page ID

182211



Meet Richard Bell, an activist and artist who challenges preconceived ideas about Aboriginal art. ‘I make art for other Aboriginal people’, says Bell. ‘I want [my art] to be empowering to them.’ Bell is member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman and Gurang Gurang communities and makes art that addresses contemporary issues around identity, place and politics. ‘I found out that I could say whatever the f**k I wanted to in art and not get arrested’, says the artist. In 2002 Bell published ‘Bell’s Theorem’, stating that ‘Aboriginal Art is not controlled by Aboriginal People’. Bell proposes that Aboriginal art is a white invention.

Read ‘Bell’s Theorem’: **http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/great/a…**

Caution

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers are advised that this film may contain images and voices of people who have passed away.

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13.17: Yatika Starr Fields and mural painting

by **CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART**

Page ID

182212



Yatika Starr Fields was raised in a family of artists; his mother works in ceramics and his father is a photographer. He currently lives in Tulsa, and grew up in Tahlequah, in northeastern Oklahoma, whose nature and landscape continues to influence his work today. While attending the Art Institute of Boston and living in New York, Fields became interested in graffiti aesthetics. He has completed murals as large as one hundred fifty feet long and forty feet high in cities such as Portland, Oregon; Oklahoma City; Phoenix; and Santa Fe. For “Art for a New Understanding,” Fields has painted a large-scale, site-specific mural in downtown Bentonville.

This page titled 13.17: Yatika Starr Fields and mural painting is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, "Yatika Starr Fields and mural painting," in Smarthistory, September 15, 2021, accessed December 23, 2022, https://smarthistory.org/yatika-starr-fields-and-mural-painting/..

13.18: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)

by DR. SUZANNE NEWMAN FRICKE



Figure **13.18.1**: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)*, 1992, oil paint and mixed media, collage, objects, canvas, 152.4 x 431.8 cm (Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia) © Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

A Non-Celebration

As a response to the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in North America in 1992, the artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Indian Nation, created a large mixed-media canvas called *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)*. *Trade*, part of the series "The Quincentenary Non-Celebration," illustrates historical and contemporary inequities between Native Americans and the United States government.

Trade references the role of trade goods in allegorical stories like the acquisition of the island of Manhattan by Dutch colonists in 1626 from unnamed Native Americans in exchange for goods worth 60 guilders or $24.00. Though more apocryphal than true, this story has become part of American lore, suggesting that Native Americans had been lured off their lands by inexpensive trade goods. The fundamental misunderstanding between the Native and non-Native worlds—especially the notion of private ownership of land—underlies *Trade*. Smith stated that if *Trade* could speak, it might say: "Why won't you consider trading the land we handed over to you for these silly trinkets that so honor us? Sound like a bad deal? Well, that's the deal you gave us."[1]



Figure **13.18.2**: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, canoe (detail), *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)*, 1992, oil paint and mixed media, collage, objects, canvas, 152.4 x 431.8 cm (Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia) © Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

For *Trade*, Smith layered images, paint, and objects on the surface of the canvas, suggesting layers of history and complexity. Divided into three large panels, the triptych (three part) arrangement is reminiscent of a medieval altarpiece. Smith covered the canvas in collage, with newspaper articles about Native life cut out from her tribal paper *Char-Koosta*, photos, comics, tobacco and gum wrappers, fruit carton labels, ads, and pages from comic books, all of which feature stereotypical images of Native Americans. She mixed the collaged text with photos of deer, buffalo, and Native men in historic dress holding pipes with feathers in their hair, and an image of Ken Plenty Horses—a character from one of Smith's earlier pieces, the *Paper Dolls for a Post Columbian World with Ensembles Contributed by US Government* from 1991-92.



Figure **13.18.3**: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, toys and souvenirs (detail), *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)*, 1992, oil paint and mixed media, collage, objects, canvas, 152.4 x 431.8 cm (Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia) © Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

She applied blocks of white, yellow, green, and especially red paint over the layer of collaged materials. The color red had multiple meanings for Smith, referring to her Native heritage as well as to blood, warfare, anger, and sacrifice. With the emphasis on prominent brushstrokes and the dripping blocks of paint, Smith cited the Abstract Expressionist movement from the 1940s and 50s with raw brushstrokes describing deep emotions and social chaos. For a final layer, she painted the outline of an almost life-sized canoe. Canoes were used by Native Americans as well as non-Native explorers and traders in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century to travel along the waterways of North America. The canoe suggests the possibility of trade and cultural connections—though this empty canoe is stuck, unable to move.



Figure **13.18.4**: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, toys and souvenirs (detail), *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)*, 1992, oil paint and mixed media, collage, objects, canvas, 152.4 x 431.8 cm (Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia) © Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

Above the canvas, Smith strung a clothesline from which she dangled a variety of Native-themed toys and souvenirs, especially from sports teams with Native American mascots. The items include toy tomahawks, a child's headdress with brightly dyed feathers, Red Man chewing tobacco, a Washington Redskins cap and license plate, a Florida State Seminoles bumper sticker, a

Cleveland Indian pennant and cap, an Atlanta Braves license plate, a beaded belt, a toy quiver with an arrow, and a plastic Indian doll. Smith offers these cheap goods in exchange for the lands that were lost, reversing the historic sale of land for trinkets. These items also serve as reminders of how Native life has been commodified, turning Native cultural objects into cheap items sold without a true understanding of what the original meanings were.

The Artist

The artist was born on January 15, 1940, at the St. Ignatius Jesuit Missionary on the Reservation of the Flathead Nation. Raised by her father, a rodeo rider and horse trader, Smith was one of eleven children. Her first name comes from the French word for "yellow" (jaune), a reminder of her French-Cree ancestors. Her middle name "Quick-to-See" was not a reference to her eyesight but was given by her Shoshone grandmother as a sign of her ability to grasp things readily. From an early age Smith wanted to be an artist; as a child, she had herself photographed while dressed as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Though her father was not literate, education was important to Smith.



Figure **13.18.5**: National Bison Range (near St. Ignatius, Flathead Reservation) (photo: **Jaix Chaix**, Check All Home Inspection Corp., CC BY-SA 2.0)

She received a bachelor of arts from Framingham State College in Massachusetts in 1976 in art education rather than in studio art because her instructors told her that no woman could have a career as an artist, though they acknowledged that she was more skilled than the men in her class. In 1980 she received a master of fine arts from the University of New Mexico. She was inspired by both Native and non-Native sources, including petroglyphs, Plains leger art, Diné saddle blankets, early Charles Russell prints of western landscapes, and paintings by twentieth-century artists such as Paul Klee, Joan Miró, Willem DeKooning, Jasper Johns, and especially Kurt Schwitters and Robert Rauschenberg (see image below). Both Schwitters and Rauschenberg brought objects from the quotidian world into their work, such as tickets, cigarette wrappers, and string.



Figure 13.18.6: Robert Rauschenberg, *Canyon*, 1959, oil, pencil, paper, metal, photograph, fabric, wood, canvas, buttons, mirror, taxidermied eagle, cardboard, pillow, paint tube and other materials, 207.6 x 177.8 x 61 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) © 2014 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

In addition to her work as an artist, Smith has curated over thirty exhibitions to promote and highlight the art of other Native artists. She has also lectured extensively, been an artist-in-residence at numerous universities, and has taught art at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico the only four-year university dedicated to teaching Native youth across North America. In her years as an artist, Smith has received many honors, including an Eitelijorg Fellowship in 2007, a grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation to create a comprehensive archive of her work, a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women's Caucus for the Arts, the College Art Association's Committee on Women in the Arts award, the 2005 New Mexico Governor's award for excellence in the arts, as well as four honorary doctorate degrees.

Smith's art shares her view of the world, offering her personal perspective as an artist, a Native American, and a woman. Her work creates a dialogue between the art and its viewers and explores issues of Native identity as it is seen by both Native Americans and non-Natives. *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)* restates the standard narratives of the history of the United States, specifically the desire to expand beyond "sea to shining sea," as encompassed in the ideology of Manifest Destiny (the belief in the destiny of Western expansion), and raises the issue of contemporary inequities that are rooted in colonial experience.

1. Arlene Hirschfelder, ***Artists and Craftspeople, American Indian Lives***, New York: Facts On File, 1994, page 115.

Additional resources:

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

"Smith, Jaune Quick-to-See" in American Indian History Online

Lawrence Abbot, *I Stand in the Center of the Good: Interviews with Contemporary Native American Artists*, University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, 1994.

Carolyn Kastner, *Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: An American Modernist*, University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 2013.

Melanie Herzog, "Building Bridges Across Canada: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith." *School Arts* (October 1992): 31–34.

Tricia Hurst, "Crossing Bridges: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Helen Hardin, Jean Bales." *Southwest Art*, April 1981, 82–91.

Tricia Hurst, "Jaune Quick-to-See Smith," January 17–March 14, 1993. Norfolk, Virginia: Chrysler Museum, 1993.

Joni L. Murphy, "Beyond Sweetgrass: The Life and Art of Jaune Quick-To-See Smith." Ph.D. dissertation. University of Kansas, 2008.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

14: Landscape and ecology

14.1: Stéphane Couturier, Fenetre, Eastlake Greens, San Diego
14.2: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Earth's Creation
14.3: Maya Lin, Silver Upper White River
14.4: Courtney Leonard, ARTIFICE Ellipse, 2016
14.5: Sebastião Salgado's Kuwait
14.6: Michel Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe (Corned Beef 2000)
14.7: James Turrell, Skyspace, the way of color
14.8: Roger Minick, Woman with Scarf at Inspiration Point, Yosemite National Park
14.9: Binh Danh, Bridalveil Fall, Yosemite CA, May 31, 2012
14.10: Thiebaud, Ponds and Streams
14.11: Noel Harding, The Elevated Wetlands
14.12: Artist Dale Harding – 'Environment is Part of Who You Are'
14.13: Mel Chin, Paydirt

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14.1: Stéphane Couturier, Fenetre, Eastlake Greens, San Diego

by ELIZABETH GERBER, LACMA and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID 182215

Building the American dream in the California desert.



Video **14.1.1**: Stéphane Couturier, *Fenetre, Eastlake Greens, San Diego*, edition 4/8, 2001, dye coupler print, 130.81 x 107.95 x 2.54 cm (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, © Stéphane Couturier)

This painting at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

The artist's website

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14.2: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Earth's Creation

by DR. ALLISON YOUNG

Page ID
182221



Figure **14.2.1**: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Earth's Creation*, 1994, synthetic polymer paint on linen mounted on canvas, four panels (private collection)

At nearly twenty feet wide and nine feet high, Emily Kwame Kngwarreye's painting *Earth's Creation* is monumental in its scale and impact, rivaling Abstract Expressionist masterpieces by Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock not only in size but also in its painterly virtuosity (see a photo of it **in a gallery here**, to get a sense of its scale). Patches of bold yellows, greens, reds and blues seem to bloom like lush vegetation over the large canvas. Comprised of gestural, viscous marks, each swath of color traces the movement of the artist's hands and body over the canvas, which would have been laid horizontally as she painted, seated on (or beside) and intimately connected to her art.



Figure **14.2.2**: Still from a short video produced by The National Museum of Australia **source**

The work made records at auction when it was sold in 2007 for over $1,000,000—the highest price ever fetched for a work by a female artist in Australia. Yet, just decades earlier, Kngwarreye was virtually unknown to the world outside her small desert community in the Australian country of Alhakere. A self-taught artist who was trained in ceremonial painting, she rose to international prominence only in her eighties, and enjoyed a flourishing career at the end of her life.

Rooted in tradition

Kngwarreye was born around 1910, and spent most of her life in an isolated Anmatyerr community in Central Australia. The area, however, was forcibly occupied by European pastoralist settlers in the 1920s, and the artist, alongside other members of her community, worked on the pastoral property (pastoral refers to the tending of cattle and sheep). In 1976, Aboriginal land rights were legally granted, and she was able, finally, to live independently.

Aboriginal culture has long been intimately connected to the landscape of Australia; inhabited by humans for over 40,000 years, the region is characterized by deserts, grasslands and dramatic arched rock formations. Kngwarreye was an established elder of her community and was trained to create ceremonial sand paintings inspired by her ritual "dreamings,'" as well as to paint decorative motifs on women's bodies as part of a ceremony called *Awelye*. These visual forms were connected to cultural expressions in song, storytelling and dance. While her paintings have never been figural, they remain influenced by the culture in which she grew up as well as the natural environment.

Artistic intervention

In the late 1970s, Kngwayere began to work in the medium of batiks, making works that were purely artistic endeavors for the first time. In 1977, she was a founding participant of the Utopia Women's Batik Group. Her compositions were abstract and featured the motif of repeated dots, acting sometimes as a linear stroke, or elsewhere used to fill large patches of space. A decade later, in 1988, the S.H. Ervin Gallery in Sydney initiated a "Summer Project" that sought to facilitate the creation of Aboriginal art, as well as to

establish a market for the genre. Sponsored by the collector Robert Holmes à Court, curators traveled to the Aboriginal homeland of Utopia and delivered acrylic paints and materials. After two weeks they returned to find “abstract and richly expressive” compositions created by many of the artists, and held a group exhibition in Sydney.



Figure **14.2.3**: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Emu Woman*, 1988–89, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 92.0 x 61.0 cm (The Holmes à Court Collection, Heytesbury)

Kngwarreye’s painting *Emu Woman* (above) was selected for the cover of the exhibition catalogue as a gesture of respect for her seniority, as she was the oldest artist from the community. Dominated by rich, earthy tones, the painting—her first ever on canvas–contained references to plants and seeds that featured in her “dreaming” ritual. Against a dark field of charcoal, violet and black, the piece is punctuated with bright marks in tangerine and white hues, which lend the work an electric sense of energy and rhythm. Her decades-long experience in painting directly on the human body informs the curving swells of dotted marks that comprise the composition.

Critics lauded the piece, and virtually overnight, the artist received international exposure and unprecedented acclaim. The following year, Kngwarreye held her first solo exhibition at Utopia Art Sydney, after which she would be invited to participate in several renowned international exhibitions and biennales.

The “global” turn

The arc of Kngwarreye’s career runs alongside a period of tremendous change in Australia, moving from the end of a phase of colonial settlement through to a more ethical embrace of Aboriginal culture by the nation’s Western population. Yet the period in which she came to prominence also reflects changes taking place in the contemporary art world internationally, as the 1980s and 1990s saw a notable expansion within the mainstream to include non-Western or minority artists.

“Green time”

Earth’s Creation belongs to the “high colorist” phase in Kngwarreye’s work, which is characterized by a loosening of her compositions—which were no longer reliant on pseudo-geometric patterns—and the expansion of her color palette to include a range of tones beyond the familiar clay and ochre hues that dominated her prior works. Still connected to the natural environment, however, these works reference the changing atmospheric character of seasonal cycles. *Earth’s Creation* documents the lushness of the “green time” that follows periods of heavy rain, and makes use of tropical blues, yellows and greens. The piece has often been likened to Claude Monet’s studies of seasonal and temporal change, and given its formidable, room-filling scale, a comparison to the artist’s *Water Lilies* of 1914-26 (MoMA) might be remarkably apt.

Earth’s Creation was created as part of the larger Alhalkere Suite which contains twenty-two panels, and is still considered one of the most virtuosic of Kngwarreye’s immense and prolific artistic output. In the last two weeks of her life, Kngwarreye completed a suite of twenty-four small paintings. These were characterized by extremely broad, milky strokes of jewel-toned hues of blue and rose, and communicate the artist’s long-standing fascination with color and her sophisticated grasp of abstract composition.

Additional resources:

“Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye” at the National Museum Australia

Earth’s Creation at the Venice Biennale, Universes-in-Universe

The artist at the National Gallery of Australia

Emily Kame Kngwarreye, The Alhalkere suite from the National Gallery of Australia

Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye, review by Chrischona Schmidt

Teacher notes for Emily Kame Kngwarreye: Alhalkere — Paintings from Utopia

Australia 1900-present on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

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- **12.5: Ritual, spirituality, and transcendence** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

14.3: Maya Lin, Silver Upper White River

by ALEJO BENEDETTI, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
182216



Video **14.3.1**: Maya Lin, *Silver Upper White River*, 2015, recycled silver, 332.7 x 609.6 x 1 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, © Maya Lin) Speakers: Alejo Benedetti, Assistant Curator, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and Steven Zucker, a Seeing America video

Additional resources

This sculpture at Crystal Bridges

What Is Missing?

Maya Lin, *Folding the Chesapeake*, at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Maya Lin, Pin River-Yangtze at the United States Embassy in Beijing

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- **12.6: Histories, real and imagined** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

14.4: Courtney Leonard, ARTIFICE Ellipse, 2016

by COURTNEY M. LEONARD and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
182217



Video \(\PageIndex{1}\): A conversation with Courtney M. Leonard and Beth Harris in front of Courtney Leonard's *ARTIFICE Ellipse | Log: 18-3*, coiled micaceous clay with glaze, 5 3/8 x 15 x 7 inches (Newark Museum of Art) © Courtney M. Leonard

Additional resources:

This work of art at the Newark Museum

The artist's website

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14.5: Sebastião Salgado’s Kuwait

by **EVE SCHILLO, LACMA** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID

182218



Sebastião Salgado’s *Kuwait*, 1991, gelatin silver print, 45.24 × 30.1 cm (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Gary Sato, AC1998.162.1, ©Sebastião Salgado), a Seeing America video, speakers: Eve Schillo, Assistant Curator, Wallis Annenberg Photography Department, Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Steven Zucker

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14.6: Michel Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe (Corned Beef 2000)

by **DR. BILLIE LYTHBERG**

Page ID
182219



Figure **14.6.1**: Michel Tuffery, *Pisupo Lua Afe (Corned Beef 2000)*, 1994, flattened cans of corned beef (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Collection) ©Michael Tuffery

What can a tin can bull teach us about ecological and population health issues in the Pacific? Michel Tuffery is one of New Zealand's best-known artists of Pacific descent, with links to Samoa, Rarotonga and Tahiti. He majored in printmaking at Dunedin's School of Fine Arts, and describes art quite literally as his first language because he didn't read, write or speak until he was 6 years old. Encouraged instead to express himself through drawing, he now aims artworks like *Pisupo Lua Afe* primarily at children, hoping to engage their curiosity and inspire them to care for both their own health and that of the environment.

Pisupo Lua Afe is one of Tuffery's most iconic works, made from hundreds of flattened corned beef tins, riveted together to form a series of life-sized bulls. Despite evident connections to Pop Art, especially Andy Warhol's celebrations of the humble *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962), it's impossible to read this work solely in the terms of Western art history. So what is Tuffery trying to tell us?

Pisupo—canned food in the Pacific

Pisupo is the Samoan language version of "pea soup," which was the first canned food introduced into the Pacific Islands. *Pisupo* is now a generic term used to describe the many types of canned food that are eaten in the Islands—including corned beef. Not only is corned beef a favorite food source in the Islands, it has also become a ubiquitous part of the ceremonial gift economy. At weddings and birthdays, and other important life events both in the Islands and in Islander communities in New Zealand, gifts of treasured textiles like fine mats and decorated barkcloths are made alongside food items and cash money. But unlike the Island feast foods gifted at these events—such as pigs and large quantities of root vegetables—canned corned beef is a processed food high in saturated fat, salt and cholesterol (a type of fat that clogs arteries). These are all things that contribute to disproportionately high incidences of diabetes and heart disease in Pacific Island populations as diets formerly high in locally grown fruits and vegetables, seafood, coconut milk and flesh, give way to cheap, imported foodstuffs.

So Tuffery's sculpture is impossible to separate from the ceremonies at which brightly colored tins of corned beef now figure in large quantities. But these links to traditional economic exchanges and population health only tell part of the story. *Pisupo Lua Afe* also critiques serious issues of ecological health and food sovereignty. Tuffery is interested in the introduction of cattle to New

Zealand and the Pacific Islands and how they impact negatively on the plants, landscapes and waterways of these countries, as well as how industrialized approaches to farming disrupt traditional food production.



Figure **14.6.2**: Michel Tuffery, *Pisupo Lua Afe (Corned Beef 2000)*, 1994, flattened cans of corned beef (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Collection) ©Michael Tuffery

Look at *Pisupo Lua Afe* . It's literally a "tinned bull" —solid, hard-edged and weighty. Having a real cow has a visual softness suggested by its movements, eyes and coat, Tuffery's tin cans and rivets — overlapping like large metal scales— better convey the capacity of beef and dairy cattle to destroy fragile island eco-systems. Look closer — single out just one flattened can. Think about all the cans that were emptied to make *Pisupo Lua Afe*. Then think about all the cans that are emptied and discarded in the Pacific Islands each year. Tuffery is gesturing rather obviously towards the challenge of rubbish disposal in Island economies where creative "upcycling" of materials into new objects is often more common than the civic recycling regimes of larger cities and countries (upcycling refers to reusing discarded objects to create a product of a higher value). What use is there for thousands of empty tin cans? And what use are foods that cause ill health, damage the environment, and take up large swathes of land formerly used to grow healthier, indigenous foods? Especially when the Pacific Island nations under Tuffery's scrutiny are recipients of some of the worst products of such agricultural farming: fatty lamb flaps and turkey tails, and tinned corned beef.

Food sovereignty

Food sovereignty (sometimes called food security) is a great lens through which to view the various threads of traditional economic exchanges, population health, environmental degradation and industrialized food production introduced so far. Food sovereignty is the right of a nation and its peoples to decide who controls how, where and by whom their food is to be produced, and what that food will be. For Indigenous peoples in the Pacific, food and the environment are sacred gifts. There cannot be food sovereignty without control over food production and ownership, and without appropriate care of the environment.

Alongside *Pisupo Lua Afe* and his other tin can bulls, Tuffery has produced many artworks that address challenges to food sovereignty and the continued exploitation of Pacific Island resources, including the **taro leaf blight epidemic** in Samoa in 1993, and **drift net fishing** that is depleting fish stocks. For example, he's made fish tin sculptures, like his "tinned bull," which upcycle cans that hold another "staple" food in the Pacific: tinned mackerel. Tuffery made two of these for an exhibition called **Le Folauga** , shown in Auckland, New Zealand in 2007, which are now in the collection of the Auckland War Memorial Museum.



Figure 14.6.3: Michael Tuffery, *Asiasi [Yellowfin] II (2000)* , fish cans, copper, aluminum and polyurethane, 60 x 250 x 100 cm (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Collection) © Michael Tuffery

In the exhibition's catalog he explained:

> ***Le Saosao Lapo'a and Asiasi I reflect on the ironic and irreversible impact that over-fishing and exploitation of the Pacific's natural resources has wrought on the traditional Pacific lifestyle. This includes changing virtually overnight the dietary habits of generations.***
>
> ***Is it co-incidental that significantly increasing health and dietary problems amongst Pacific Islanders has occurred during the same period that their premium fisheries catches are exported? And at the same time locals have experienced explosive growth of canned & other imported products flooding into the Pacific?***

Tuffery states the aims of his works very clearly. His fish tin sculptures are perhaps even more interesting and evocative because they are also functional fish-smokers used to cure and preserve fish. They have been used in this way at his exhibition openings, bringing a smoky, wood- and fish-scented haze to the gallery experience.

Firebreathing bulls?

Tuffery has also brought his "tinned beef" bulls to smoky life in various performative installations throughout the world, by installing fireworks inside their heads to give them the appearance of breathing fire. Mounted on castors with their necks articulated so their heads can be turned, he has staged bullfights with his fire breathing monsters, accompanied by drummers and groups of human performers issuing fierce challenges. But these performances have not been restricted to the sanctuary of the white walled gallery — these were performed outdoors, on city streets, to reach a community that might not otherwise come into the gallery to encounter his work.

Additional resources:

This work at the Museum of New Zealand

Waking up the Objects — Michel Tuffery talks about his practice (video)

Tales from Te Papa: *Pisupo Lua Afe* Michel Tuffery's fish tin sculptures (*Le Folauga*) (video)

Michel Tuffery and Patrice Kaikilekofe's artist performance *Povi tau Vaga (The Challenge)* 1999

Issue-based Assemblage Sculpture: *Pisupo lua afe (Corned Beef 2000)* , 1994 from the New Zealand Ministry of Education

Jennifer Hay, *" Povi Christlike (Christchurch Bull)* by Michael Tuffery"

Biography of the artist

More on Michael Tuffery from Tautai

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14.7: James Turrell, Skyspace, the way of color

- by **DR. BETH HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

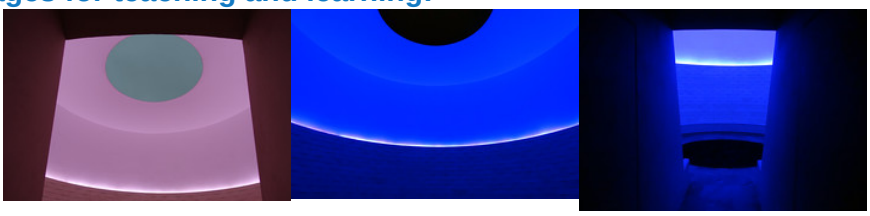
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James Turrell, *Skyspace*, *The Way of Color*, 2009, stone, concrete, stainless steel, and LED lighting 228 x 652 inches © James Turrell (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas). Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



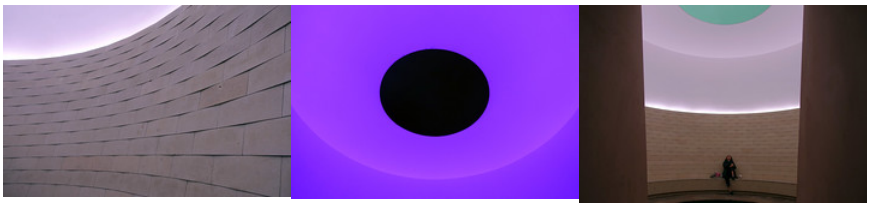
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14.8: Roger Minick, Woman with Scarf at Inspiration Point, Yosemite National Park

by ELIZABETH GERBER, LACMA and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
182222



Video 14.8.1: Roger Minick, *Woman with Scarf at Inspiration Point, Yosemite National Park* (Sightseer series), 1980, dye coupler print, 38.1 x 43.18 cm, ©Roger Minick (Los Angeles County Museum of Art), a *Seeing America* video

Additional resources:

This photograph at LACMA

The artist's website

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- **12.5: Ritual, spirituality, and transcendence** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

14.9: Binh Danh, Bridalveil Fall, Yosemite CA, May 31, 2012

by DR. CHRIS BALASCHAK

Page ID
182223



Figure 14.9.1: Binh Danh, *Bridalveil Fall, Yosemite CA, May 31, 2012*, 2012, daguerreotype. 6.5 x 8.5 inches

Can we ever really see and experience a site without comparing it to the photographs of the same scene?

Do we inevitably experience a place as a picture?

These questions are central to the daguerreotypes the Vietnamese-American photographer Binh Danh made of the Yosemite Valley in 2012. As Danh stated in an interview that same year:

> ***As a kid, I had always wanted to visit Yosemite; I discovered it by viewing the photographs of Ansel Adams. [Yosemite], like the Vietnam War, only existed in my imagination, because I only saw the landscape in photographs.[1]***

Seeing Yosemite through photographs

Danh created a body of work precisely about the dissonance between his knowledge of the tourist site—gleaned entirely through viewing photographs of it—and the experience of the place itself. His daguerreotypes of Yosemite draw our awareness to the ways in which photography informs our experience of celebrated locations.

Established as a National Park in 1890, on land of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation in what is now California, Yosemite's modern history is marked by the colonizing force of sightseeing. From the forced removal of indigenous populations from the Valley in the mid-19th century, to the establishment of tour operations when the area came under state protection in 1864, Yosemite has been a site of tourism premised on the displacement of its original inhabitants. Danh's photographs of Yosemite attest to the region's social and natural history. As Danh's view of Bridalveil Falls attests, the area is a lush wilderness, featuring sequoia groves, granite cliffs, and waterfalls. Captured from the valley floor, which is coursed by the Merced River, Danh's photograph discloses how Yosemite's natural contours lend themselves to picturesqueness. Danh's work, though, seems to point us less to lessons about the Yosemite

Valley's natural features, than how the repeated imaging of the Yosemite Valley since the mid-19th century—its status as an icon — has shaped the ways in which we see this place.



Figure 14.9.2: Ansel Adams, *Eagle Peak and Middle Brother, Winter, Yosemite National Park*, negative 1968; print 1980, gelatin silver print, 25.4 x 33.8 cm (The J. Paul Getty Museum, © The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust)



Figure 14.9.3: Carleton E. Watkins, *Tasayac, the Half Dome, 5000 ft., Yosemite*, 1865–66, albumen silver print (Stanford University Libraries)

The photographs that informed Danh's image of Yosemite are some of the most remarkable works of American photography. Photographs made of Yosemite by Ansel Adams, as well as those by Carleton Watkins, and Eadweard Muybridge in the nineteenth century, documented exploration and tourism and sought to communicate the grandeur of the American West. These photographers and countless other amateur and professional photographers, and painters (Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran), have captured views of the same sites in Yosemite over the past two centuries. Such an immense archive, often experienced by viewers far removed from the park itself, speaks to how Yosemite has been overexposed, even predetermined, by images.

This is likewise the key to defining Yosemite's iconic presence in American photography. The term iconic implies almost instant recognizability, to the degree that our experience of the place, such as the Bridalveil Falls in Yosemite Valley, is always informed by images produced of it. This was on Danh's mind as he made his photographs. Danh's work thus reminds us of a fundamental aspect of modern life: a photograph depicts life at a remove. However, by investing his own experience and memory into images that replicate well-known and widely photographed scenes of Yosemite, Danh's work serves as a response to the lack of cultural diversity in the history of landscape photography. Watkins's views, for example, envisioned Yosemite as an untouched landscape, despite the area's Indigenous population, the Southern Sierra Miwuk. Revisiting the subject matter a half-century later, Adams's photographs only reinforce the notion that 19th- and 20th-century images of Yosemite represented a point of view (white, male) that failed to recognize histories and cultures outside of Euro-American conventions. Watkins and Adams approached the landscape with much the same technology, large format view cameras, and while their compositions may have dramatic differences, their subjects—peaks, falls, valleys—reinforced the primacy of the sites still esteemed today.



Figure **14.9.4**: Eadweard Muybridge, *Tenaya Canyon from Union Point, Valley of the Yosemite*, 1872, albumen print, 43 x 53.8 cm (National Gallery of Art)

"Louis" and photography's history

Recalling Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.'s 1859 assertion that photography is a "mirror with a memory," and employing an obsolete early photographic method (**the daguerreotype**), Danh's photographs look like mirrors because the daguerreotype image is imprinted on a metal plate, creating a reflective surface. [2] As such, they bring the viewer's likeness, literally, into the picture. Danh savored the irony of seeing his own face in the image of a space that he suggested was a "white" space: "Camping for me was what white people did; it was not for people who ran through the jungles at night to get onto a fishing boat and head into the South China Sea. As a family, we already camped in a refugee camp before coming to the United States. So it never made sense to my parents to take the family out into the woods and expose us to the elements." [3]

Brought to the United States at the age of 2, as part of the second wave of Vietnam refugees in the late 1970s, Danh's family found their new home in northern California. Though his family lived within hours of Yosemite, they never visited. Nevertheless, the young Danh became enamored with images of the place, and with this series sought to photograph Yosemite in such a manner as to open its imagery to a diverse range of viewers. As Danh has stated, "I want viewers, when they look at my work, that they see themselves in the picture," continuing, "that they also become part of this land; that they, in a way, merge with the land—but they don't quite disappear into the land. That they still see themselves in it." [4] Notable for its reflective surface, among other unique qualities, the daguerreotype allows for viewers to quite literally "see themselves" in images of Yosemite.



Figure **14.9.5**: John Whipple, William Bond, and George Bond, ***The Moon***, *No. 37, 1851*, daguerreotype made through Great Refractor Equatorial Mount Telescope, Harvard College Observatory

First publicly announced in 1839 after a decade of experimentation by **Nicéphore Niépce** and **Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre**, **daguerreotypes** are silver-coated copper plates that are exposed in the camera, and developed in a chemical bath. Like Daguerre's exposures in the 19th century, Danh's take a minute or more to capture the image, and are prone to error. All of Danh's photographs from Yosemite were created in a van-turned-darkroom that he nicknamed "Louis," after Daguerre, and are similar to the darkroom-wagons employed by his 19th-century forebearers. Made on-location, Danh employed a photographic process that was outmoded by quicker, less precious, and inherently reproducible techniques as soon as the late 1850s. Danh's decision to work in an outmoded medium creates a distinct means of both literally and figuratively reflecting on photographic history. While we see ourselves reflected in his images, Danh's daguerreotypes instill a sense for the recentness of photography's invention, and all of the history the technology has allowed us to indirectly witness.

Fragility and resilience



Figure **14.9.6**: Binh Danh, *Immortality, The Remnants of the Vietnam and American War*, 2006 series

Danh's Yosemite daguerreotypes are not his only forays into experimental and alternative photographic processes. In his 2006 series, *Immortality, The Remnants of the Vietnam and American War,* Danh appropriated images of the Vietnam War, and used the natural process of photosynthesis to print the images on leaves. These chlorophyll prints were then embedded in resin, adding permeance and resilience to inherently fragile materials. The work is at once terrifying and vulnerable. Recycling press photography from the Vietnam War, Danh's unique process adds a new and humanizing dimension to the originals. We view a man holding the body of an injured child, a look of desperation on his face, while we also note the leaf's delicate surface. In the context of a war in which a biological agent—Agent Orange—caused widespread defoliation as well as irreparable harm to civilians as evidenced in increased birth defects, Danh's *Immortality* aptly conveys the callousness of the war. As with his daguerreotypes, the foliage prints provoke viewers to consider their own tactile, material, political, and visual associations to the images at hand.

While acknowledging the human tragedy captured in *Immortality*, we see here a common concern with Danh's work in Yosemite: fragility. The daguerreotype is an imperfect medium, its surface prone to scratching, fingerprints, and even erasure. Both in their

prime and today, daquerreotypes are often housed and displayed in velvet-line cases, the image set behind glass. (Danh's are shown in frames, behind glass.) The luminosity of Danh's *Yosemite* work, not unlike the delicacy of *Immortality*, indicate a profound care for the photographic image as an object. For all the cultural history at the center of Danh's *Yosemite* daquerreotypes, their materiality reminds us of the potentially fleeting character of that history, and the documents that uphold it.

Notes:

[1] Boreth Ly, "Conversation Between Binh Danh and Boreth Ly, August 2012, On the Subject of Yosemite," in *Binh Danh: Yosemite* (San Francisco: Haines Gallery, 2012), p. 5.

[2] Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1859). Appears in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg. (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980), pp. 71–82.

[3] Ly, "Conversation Between Binh Danh and Boreth Ly," pp. 5–6.

[4] Neda Ulaby, "National Park Daguerreotypes Invite Viewers to 'Merge With the Land,'" National Public Radio (July 5, 2016). Accessed Feb. 27, 2022.

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14.10: Thiebaud, Ponds and Streams

Page ID

182224

Can the commonplace working farmland of California's Sacramento River Valley be a place of of breathtaking beauty?



Wayne Thiebaud, *Ponds and Streams*, 2001, acrylic on canvas, 182.9 x 152.4 cm (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, ©Wayne Thiebaud), a Seeing America video

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14.11: Noel Harding, The Elevated Wetlands

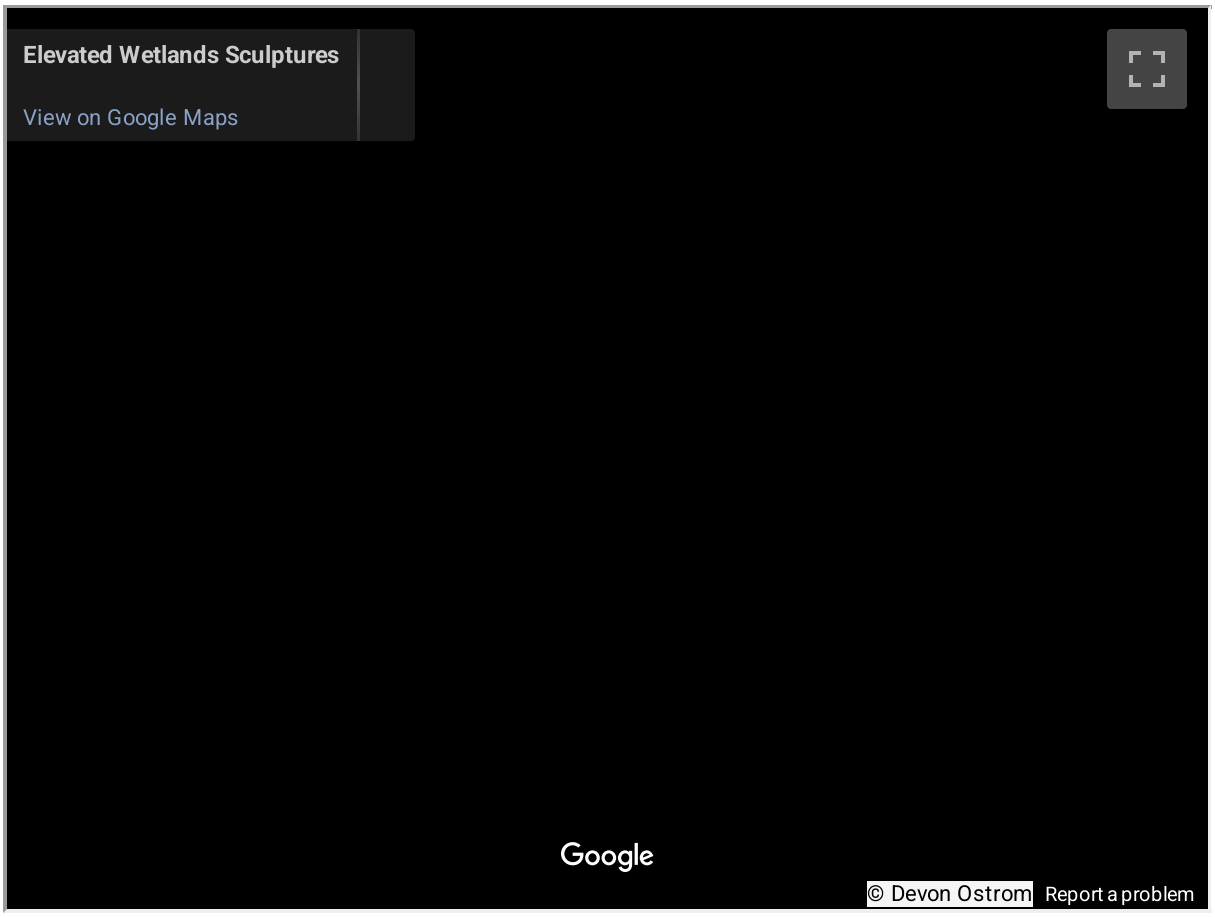
by **DR. MARK CHEETHAM**

Page ID
182225



Figure **14.11.1**: Six sculptures made of expanded polystyrene foam, acrylic stucco coating, solar powered irrigation system, recycled plastic soil structure, native plants, and water from the Don River. Commissioned by the Canadian Plastics Industry Association in cooperation with the City of Toronto. The sculptures were officially inaugurated October 1, 1998. Noel Harding, *The Elevated Wetlands*, 1997–98, Taylor Creek Park, Toronto (photo: Mark Cheetham)

Six elephantine shapes stand—or do they graze?—in two groups, one on either side of one of Canada's busiest highways, the Don Valley Parkway in Toronto. [1] The grey forms are gigantic (approximately 2–3 meters); they seem alive and unperturbed by the traffic, yet also like creatures from a prehistoric past. Visually intriguing, the artwork becomes even more compelling the more one knows about its innovative creation—it is largely made from forms of plastic—and its environmental purpose.



Where and why

The Elevated Wetlands stands in Taylor Creek Park, an oasis of wetlands in the expansive Don Valley, named for the once heavily polluted Don River that runs through the east part of Toronto and into Lake Ontario. Named Wonscotanach in Anishnaabemowin (also called the Ojibwe language), this glaciated valley registers layers of environmental and human history, from the course of the river and its tributaries and still-thriving original plants, to traces of Indigenous settlements more than 5,000 years old and the nineteenth-century mills and brickworks that helped to build the infrastructure of North America's third largest urban area. Completed in 1998 by well-known Toronto artist Noel Harding in collaboration with landscape architect Neil Hadley, the work was the result of extensive civic planning, local consultation, and partnership with the plastics industry. [2]



Figure 14.11.2: Noel Harding, *The Elevated Wetlands*, 1997–98, Taylor Creek Park, Toronto (photo: Robert Taylor, CC BY 2.0)

Functioning eco art

The Elevated Wetlands is one of the first and most enduringly effective pieces of eco art in Canada. *Elevated Wetlands* is a working water filtration system. Water from the adjacent wetlands is steadily pumped to the top of the chain of sculptures by Solar Voltaic systems (solar panels attached adorably to the backsides of some of the "elephants"). Gravity then takes the water through a simple filtration system. Treated waste from plastic bottles, automobile plastics, and shredded consumer plastics cooperates with local wetland flora atop each form to absorb and filter chemicals and other contaminants. A much cleaner sample of stream water is then returned to the soil beside the Don River. An affirmative example of the potential "green" collaboration between industry, art, and civic planning, the sculptural group is also clearly art because it is so unusual and more than strictly functional. The plastic sculptural structures topped with plants interact with one another organically, as groups of animals often do. Nose to tail, they are intimate, tactile, and purposeful. Most of all, the groups strike one as playful.



Figure **14.11.3**: Noel Harding, *The Elevated Wetlands*, 1997–98, Taylor Creek Park, Toronto (photo: End User, CC BY-ND 2.0)

Questions raised: practicality and/versus aesthetics in eco art

Pioneering in its sculptural presence and its green agenda, *The Elevated Wetlands* continues to serve as a unique water filtration apparatus, an example of collaboration and an aesthetically captivating installation. As plastic becomes more and more of an environmental burden in the present, the work not only suggests but also puts sustainability into practice. Or does it? The sculptures do function, but slowly. Alone, they cannot significantly purify the Don wetlands, nor were they intended to. Harding was not providing a water filtration prototype that would then populate similarly polluted areas at scale in the way that we see power-generating windmills in some locales. *The Elevated Wetlands* is practical—ameliorative—in a symbolic way. As eco art, the work raises issues and demonstrates solutions. If it were strictly practical, it would no longer be art. Yet *The Elevated Wetlands* continues to pose environmental questions in part because—hurtling past it on the highway or admiring it close up—most people don't register the forms as "art" at all. Its environmental message sneaks up on the viewer.



Figure **14.11.4**: Helen and Newton Harrison, 2009 installation view of Global Warming: Greenhouse Britain, 2006–09 (ronald feldman gallery)

The Elevated Wetlands is familiar to many in Toronto, but its international importance has been overlooked. Delivering what many today want from eco art—aesthetically engaging art that carries a clear environmentalist message—it is an early example of the environmentally sensitive art which artists were increasingly taking up in the USA and Europe, beginning in the 1990s. In presenting sustainability rather than providing habitat restoration on a large scale, *The Elevated Wetlands* can be compared with the eco art projects of Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison, which began in the 1970s and continue. The Harrisons describe themselves as "historians, diplomats, ecologists, investigators, emissaries and art activists." [3] Though not a functioning work in Harding's

sense, their *Greenhouse Britain*, for example, was a large-scale and multi-platform artwork that demonstrated the effects of accelerating planetary warming on the coastlines of the UK.



Figure 14.11.5: Hans Haacke, *Rhine Water Purification Plant*, 1972, glass and acrylic containers, pump, polluted Rhine water, tubing, filters, chemicals and goldfish, dimensions variable (Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Hans Haacke)

Another fruitful comparison with Harding's work is Hans Haacke's *Rhine Water Purification Plant*. Downstream from the Krefeld sewage treatment plant, he collected still-polluted water, which he purified so that goldfish could survive in the large water tank central to his installation. More politically motivated than *The Elevated Wetlands*—the artist was calling out the water treatment company, which was a donor to the art museum—Haacke's cleansing apparatus was installed indoors for two months at the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld, Germany.

Eco art and public art

These three works have a strong aesthetic impact and also ask what eco art can be and do *as art*. A notable difference between *The Elevated Wetlands* and many other eco artworks, however, is that Harding's work is also a prominent and permanent piece of public art. It does not filter or control its audiences in the way that museum exhibits inevitably do. *The Elevated Wetlands* was designed to be and remains part of the elaborate web of civic, technological, and aesthetic discussions and controversies that uniquely attend public art. As public art, it continues to pose environmental questions to a broad range of people through an unusual and laudable combination of ecological insight, technological savvy, and whimsy. It is a work for its immediate locale, for the past of this environment and its peoples, and for the future of the planet.

Notes:

[1] Jennifer Bonnell, “Writing the Environmental History of Toronto’s Don Valley Parkway,” ***NiCHE*, November 14, 2011.**

[2] Shawn Micaleff, “**Remembering artist and urban innovator Noel Harding’s legacy**.” *Toronto Star*, June 18, 2016.

[3] **The Harrison Studio**

Open Art Histories

This essay is brought to you through a partnership with Open Art Histories.

Additional resources:

A Companion to Public Art, ed. Cher Krause Knight and Harriet F. Senie (UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2016).

Mark A. Cheetham, *Landscape into Eco Art: Articulations of Nature since the ‘60s* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2018).

Andrew Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

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14.12: Artist Dale Harding – ‘Environment is Part of Who You Are’

by **TATE**

Page ID
182226



Meet Dale Harding, an artist exploring the history of his community in Queensland, Australia. ‘If the work doesn’t relate to your family and your community, then what’s the point?’, Harding asks. Harding was born in 1982 in Moranbah, Queensland. The artist is a Bidjara, Ghungalu and Garingbal man who currently lives and works in Brisbane, Queensland. Harding works with a variety of techniques and traditions including painting, installation and sculpture. Recently, Harding has created wall-based art inspired by rock art sites in Queensland. ‘The landscape was the gallery that my ancestors knew’, the artist says. ‘Working directly on gallery walls is an acknowledgment and continuation of painting stories on sandstone walls.’

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14.13: Mel Chin, Paydirt

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182227



Episode **#016**: Mel Chin describes the origins and motivations behind the nationwide art project Paydirt in a keynote address to the 2008 National Art Education Association Convention, and visits multiple sites in New Orleans adversely affected by both Hurricane Katrina and lead contamination in the soil. The high lead content of soil in New Orleans — among the worst in the country — was exacerbated by the havoc wreaked by the hurricane in 2005. Discovering that "the disaster was in the soil before the disaster," Chin felt he had to do something about it as an artist. Speaking before a crowd of thousands of art educators from across the country, Chin recounts, "I remember standing in the ruins of the Ninth Ward and realizing as a creative individual that I felt hopeless and inadequate. And I was flooded by this terrible insecurity that being an artist was not enough to deal with the tragedy that was before me." Thus Paydirt, and its sister initiative, the Fundred Dollar Bill Project was born. Learn more about Mel Chin: **http://www.art21.org/artists/mel-chin** VIDEO | Producer: Larissa Nikola-Lisa & Kelly Shindler. Camera: Larissa Nikola-Lisa. Sound: Wesley Swinnen. Editor: Lizzie Donahue & Larissa Nikola-Lisa.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

15: Digital culture

15.1: An interview with Jamian Juliano-Villani

15.2: Meriem Bennani's Exploded Visions

15.3: Art, Race, and the Internet- Mendi + Keith Obadike's Black.Net.Art Actions

15.4: Cao Fei, Building "RMB City"

15.5: Shahzia Sikander, The Last Post

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15.1: An interview with Jamian Juliano-Villani

- by ART21

Page ID

182229



By art21. Can an artist stay inspired day in and day out? Under near constant deadlines for the last four years, painter Jamian Juliano-Villani grapples with the demands of consistently producing new and better work. Her paintings have received widespread attention, including gallery and museum exhibitions, adding to the stresses of growing as an artist. “The main pressure is maintaining integrity and making work that you feel good about,” says the artist, “even under pressure, which is really difficult.” As a teenager in New Jersey, Juliano-Villani recalls watching artists like Robert Rauschenberg and Frank Stella in the 1973 documentary “Painters Painting,” which inspired her to move to New York City. After taking on a variety of odd jobs—from overnight diner waitress to gymnastics instructor—her romanticized notion of the city changed, but Juliano-Villani has maintained a relentless dedication to advancing her artwork. “You’re only as good as your last painting,” the artist explains, “so each has got to be better.” Painting a new work in her Ridgewood, Queens studio, the artist experiments with images from her vast digital image collection in a search for solutions, looking for the right content and composition to achieve a balance between psychological depth and light humor. When she gets stuck, Juliano-Villani calls upon friend, studio neighbor and 2017 Whitney Biennial artist Ajay Kurian for input. “I really want to push the paintings, but I don’t know how yet,” she says, “Hopefully I’ll figure it out and make them something that they aren’t yet.”



By art21. Where does an artist find relief from the New York art scene? Artist Jamian Juliano-Villani goes on a research trip into Manhattan, prowling two famed New York City institutions—the Strand Bookstore and Times Square—in search of the unpredictable found imagery that fuels her acclaimed paintings. Typically a creature of habit within her Bedford-Stuyvesant work space, Juliano-Villlani knows that putting in the studio time and trawling the internet can only be so inspiring. Seeking source

material in the used book carrels at the Strand Book Store, Juliano-Villani says, “It can’t just be the most obvious reference; it should from somewhere specific. And it really only happens in books. On the Internet everything’s everywhere. It feels like it’s more mine, if I get it from a book.” Later Juliano-Villani tours a more unlikely site of creative influence: the Ripley’s Believe It or Not! in Times Square, filled with a random assortment of exotica and hoaxes. Mirroring the slippery balance between good and bad taste in her own work, Juliano-Villani is fascinated by how the museum style presentation of these objects blurs the line between low and high culture. For Juliano-Villani, Times Square is a necessary antidote to the pressures of conforming to the art world in which her work resides. “I think anyone that is an artist is constantly feeling the guilt of [the pretensions of art-making] so that’s why I like these other weird elements of life, and especially life in New York,” she says.“No one cares, no one’s looking; you can act however you want, you can be whoever you want.”

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15.2: Meriem Bennani’s Exploded Visions

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182230



By art21. Can art be funny and serious at the same time? Using social media-inspired effects, artist Meriem Bennani subverts audience expectations of both pop culture and her own Muslim community with unexpected playfulness and pathos. “I feel like I have a hard time connecting to anything that doesn’t have humor,” says the artist, “because for me humor is like survival.” Taking cues from digital platforms, in her multichannel video installation “FLY,” Bennani inserts a mischievous Rihanna-singing fly over footage of daily life in her native Morocco. Projected over sculpted surfaces that mimic the compound vision of flies themselves, the effect is startlingly disorienting in its comic mash up of specific cultural details and cartoonish digital tropes. Often exploring the private lives of Muslim women, Bennani strategically navigates the line between championing and exploiting the women who appear in her films, many of whom are family members, like in her documentary-style project “Ghariba/Stranger”. “On one side, I almost feel emotionally like a monster who traps family members into this digital world. And then the other extreme is like fully loving and celebrating family,” says the artist. Bennani’s largest project to date—a thirty-second video loop of women in festive “holiday” hijabs created for the massive outdoor oculus screen at Barclays Center in Brooklyn—is both an unabashed celebration of feminine Muslim culture and a negotiation of her own identity as a secular Moroccan in a polarized political climate. “What this political climate does is that it asks you to think about your identity constantly,” says the artist. “And I feel like my reaction to that has been to make work that itself doesn’t stick to a genre or one identity.”

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15.3: Art, Race, and the Internet- Mendi + Keith Obadike's Black.Net.Art Actions

by DR. MEGAN DRISCOLL

Page ID
182231



Figure 15.3.1: Logo for *New Black Portraitures*, Rhizome website

Looking at the landscape of the internet today, it's hard to imagine conversations about race not being a central part of net culture. Consider "Black Twitter," a concept that goes beyond user demographics to describe the significant role the internet plays in promoting dialogues about race in all parts of our lives.[1] Or spend some time exploring the many social media accounts dedicated to the cultural heritage of specific racial and ethnic groups, from **influential Asian Pacific Islander women** to **artists of Africa and the African diaspora**. You'll also find these conversations happening in art-specific venues like Rhizome, which in 2017 hosted *First Look: New Black Portraitures*, a primarily online exhibition that links the history of portraiture to questions surrounding blackness, representation, and image making in our networked present.[2]

However, net culture looked very different back in the 1990s when internet use first started to become popular. It's not that no one was talking about race online—there were actually quite a few email lists and other proto-social networks focused on race and ethnicity—but these discussions tended to be ignored in the mainstream, or simply treated as peripheral.[3] Cyber enthusiasts had long promoted the misguided perception that virtual communication could allow users to interact without the prejudices associated with physical difference such as race, gender, or disability.[4] When advertisers seized on this premise as a strategy for making the strange new world of the internet seem more approachable, they popularized the idea that, to quote a **1997 internet ad for telecom MCI**, on the internet "there is no race." In fact, the notion that race was simply irrelevant to life online became so prevalent that sociologist Alondra Nelson once declared it the "founding fiction of the digital age."[5]

During this same period internet art, or net art, was becoming a more widely recognized category of artistic practice. Like in the rest of net culture, race was not a common topic in early net art—but that doesn't mean there weren't artists addressing it.[6] Here, we'll focus on Mendi + Keith Obadike's *Black.Net.Art Actions* (2001–2003), a suite of retroactively grouped artworks that argue that racial discourses aren't just relevant online, they are essential to how we interact with computer networks.



Figure 15.3.2: Mendi + Keith Obadike, *Blackness for Sale*, 2001, online performance from *Black.Net.Art.Actions* (**Rhizome**)

Blackness for Sale

In 2001 the Obadikes released ***Blackness for Sale***, an online performance in which they attempted to auction Keith's Blackness on eBay. It received twelve bids over four days before eBay shut the project down, calling it "inappropriate." The item description includes benefits like "This Blackness may be used for making jokes about black people and/or laughing at black humor

comfortably" as well as warnings like "The Seller does not recommend that this Blackness be used while voting in the United States or Florida."[7] The work thus reminds us that "Blackness" never just refers to a value-neutral color or the hue of a person's skin. Rather, it is bound to a complex history, simultaneously recalling the experiences of one individual and the condition of race relations across the United States.

By highlighting the field of meaning that surrounds language, *Blackness for Sale* also directs attention to how we talk about the platform that hosted it: eBay. As Keith Obadike has pointed out, many of the words we use to describe our activities online also describe the activities of colonization and slavery.[8] We cross the new electronic frontier, taking browsers like Navigator, Explorer, and Safari to plunder the Amazon and trade in the eBay. There we find representations of the Black body returned to the auction block, not just in this artwork but in the mammy figurines and other racist memorabilia sold alongside it as "Fine Arts and Black Americana."[9] *Blackness for Sale* argues that this digital frontierism is ideologically linked to the "real world" histories of colonialism and the slave trade, histories that cannot be divorced from how we interact online. In other words, even though our internet exchanges may appear to be virtual and therefore disembodied, what MCI called "communicating mind to mind," we still come to those exchanges with the experiences of our bodies and all of the histories that shape them.



Figure **15.3.3**: Mendi + Keith Obadike, *The Interaction of Coloreds*, 2002, website originally produced for the Whitney Museum's Artport gate page program (**Rhizome**)

Website for the Whitney Museum

The Obadikes continued their investigation into how color and race signify online with ***The Interaction of Coloreds*** (2002), a website they originally produced for the Whitney Museum's now-defunct **Artport gate page program**. Both the work's title and the grid format of its opening page reference Josef Albers's *Interaction of Color* (1963), a modernist text that theorizes the relationship between color and personal preference. Moving your mouse over that grid reveals famous lyrics from a Big Bill Broonzy song that remind us how such color preferences emerge in our ideas about race: "if you're white you're right / if you're black get back / if you're brown stick around / if you're yellow you're mellow."



Figure **15.3.4**: Mendi + Keith Obadike, *The Interaction of Coloreds*, Color Check, 2002, website originally produced for the Whitney Museum's Artport gate page program (**Rhizome**)

When you enter the main site you find the IOC Color Check System®, which the artists describe as a "brown paper bag test for the internet."[10] Using photographs of applicants' skin alongside answers to a "Hyper-Race Analysis" questionnaire, the System promises to return a precise hexadecimal color for your skin. This is a six digit HTML (hypertext markup language) code that tells your web browser what color to show you—or, in this case, assigns a color value to a human being. Now, the System exults, "Websafe colors aren't just for webmasters," a reference to the fact that when IOC was produced there were only a limited number of "websafe" codes that would display consistently on all browsers. By proposing that the color of a person can also be used to

designate her as “websafe,” IOC demonstrates how social meanings are reasserted when human beings interpret the apparently neutral mathematical system of HTML. In the Color Check System® the “true white” of #FFFFFF is like the “right white” of the Big Bill Broonzy song, representing not just a full amount of additive light but also a full human being. And the #000000 of “absolute black” (“get back”) doesn’t just signify a lack of light; it signifies the lack of humanity too often associated with blackness. (Or, as *Blackness for Sale* put it, “The Seller does not recommend that this Blackness be used while making intellectual claims.”)



Figure 15.3.5: Mendi + Keith Obadike, *The Interaction of Coloreds*, top of System, 2002, website originally produced for the Whitney Museum’s Artport gate page program (Rhizome)

The IOC Color Check System® also invites us to consider for whom we are being designated “websafe.” In addition to wry mentions of dating websites and airlines hoping to “offer lower rates on the web to customers with non-threatening bodies,” the System suggests that it may be useful to a “new African-American web portal or an old Negro social club looking for a way to maintain your club’s discriminating tastes in the information age.” This is a reference to the racially oriented proto-social networks that flourished during the 1990s, such as the immensely popular BlackPlanet. Although these networks offered an important platform for many people who didn’t see themselves reflected in other areas of internet culture, IOC points out that they also threatened to exaggerate racial segmentation and reduce Black internet users to a consumer category. In this way, the Obadikes not only challenge the idea that race is irrelevant on the internet, they also critique the assumption that simply having more Black people online will make the internet a more equitable place.[11]



Figure 15.3.6: Mendi + Keith Obadike, *The Pink of Stealth*, 2003, web interactive (Mendi + Kieth Obadike)

The Pink of Stealth or *Keeping Up Appearances*

The final work the Obadikes choose to include in the *Black.Net.Art Actions* varies depending on the url where it is accessed. In some publications it’s ***The Pink of Stealth*** (2003); in others, it’s ***Keeping Up Appearances*** (2001).[12] What these two works share in common is an emphasis on the gender and sexual politics that are only hinted at in *Blackness for Sale* and *The Interaction of Coloreds*. *Keeping Up Appearances* is a hypertextimonial poem by Mendi Obadike that explores the relationship between Blackness and femininity, in part through the visual signifier of the color pink. This signifier is picked up by *The Pink of Stealth*, which integrates a website, hypertext poem, sound collage, and Flash game to play with the different class, gender, sexual, and even health-related meanings that have been associated with pinkness over time. The inclusion of either work in the *Black.Net.Art Actions* rounds out the suite’s focus on the multiple meanings of color language by insisting that racial discourses cannot be separated from their intersections with all of the other factors that influence our experiences—online as well as off.



Figure **15.3.7**: Mendi Obadike, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 2001, hypertextimonial poem (**Rhizome**)

As discussed at the beginning, the fact that race no longer feels peripheral on the internet is a dramatic change from the years when the *Black.Net.Art Actions* were being produced. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the myth that race disappears online still shaped how many people understood the emancipatory potential of computer networks. The Actions helped to counter that myth by revealing how the histories that influence our ideas and experiences of race persist throughout our encounters on the network. In the process, these artworks also demonstrated that the relationship between race and computer networks is an essential subject for internet-based art.

Notes:

1. Donovan X. Ramsey and Meredith D. Clark, "The Truth About Black Twitter," *The Atlantic* (April 10, 2015), https://www.theatlantic.com/technolo...witter/390120/
2. Aria Dean, "An Introduction to New Black Portraitures," *Rhizome* (blog), October 26, 2017, http://rhizome.org/editorial/2017/oc...-portraitures/.
3. Email lists like the Afro-Am Listserv started popping up in the early 1990s, and by the end of the decade commercial enterprises like Community Connect were launching racially oriented social networks such as AsianAvenue and BlackPlanet. The latter quickly became a sprawling platform that would only be eclipsed in size and popularity by the rise of MySpace.
4. Two of the most well-known promoters of the model of the internet as disembodied home of the mind are John Perry Barlow, co-founder of the internet advocacy group the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), and Howard Rheingold, author of *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (1993), an oft-cited book on The WELL, the internet's first social network. This well-meaning argument is based on the assumption that a world of the mind would be inherently more just. However, it ignores the reality that embodied experience does shape life online, for better and worse, as well as the fact that not everyone is able to shed the histories associated with their bodily characteristics even in an apparently all virtual environment—nor does everyone want to.
5. Alondra Nelson, "Introduction: FUTURE TEXTS," *Social Text* 20, no. 2 (71) (Summer 2002): 1, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-20-2_71-1. In 1998, Nelson founded the influential Afrofuturism online discussion group. While scholarship on race in early net culture was also relatively rare, she's not the only person working in this area. Other prominent voices include Lisa Nakamura, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Jennifer González, and Tara McPherson.
6. It's important to note that while race wasn't central to early net art, it wasn't entirely marginalized either. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, the Mongrel group, Prema Murthy, Tana Hargest, and Mendi + Keith Obadike are just a few examples of artists who made relatively well-known work addressing the relationship between race and computer networks during the 1990s and early 2000s.
7. This is a reference to large-scale voter disenfranchisement in Florida during the 2000 US presidential election, which disproportionately affected Black voters. See Ari Berman, "How the 2000 Election in Florida Led to a New Wave of Voter Disenfranchisement," *The Nation*, July 28, 2015, https://www.thenation.com/article/ar...franchisement/.
8. Coco Fusco, "All Too Real: The Tale of an On-Line Black Sale; Coco Fusco Interviews Keith Townsend Obadike," September 24, 2001, http://blacknetart.com/coco.html.
9. This is the category to which the Obadikes submitted *Blackness for Sale* in 2001. eBay has since changed their categories, but a search for "Black Americana" still turns up plenty of racist memorabilia, much of it filed under "Ethnic & Cultural Collectibles."
10. The brown paper bag test is an historical form of colorism (racial prejudice within communities of color) that is said to have been used to admit—or deny—access to certain African American social institutions. Stories about this test claim that only those whose skin was lighter than a brown paper bag were allowed in.

11. The one area in which scholars did focus on the relationship between race and computer networks during this period was the question of access, often referred to as the "digital divide." While being able to use the internet had already become undeniably important, scholars such as Alondra Nelson argue that the digital divide narrative tends to frame Black people as inherently anti-technological while paying little attention to how race influences experience once people are online.
12. The Obadikes feature *The Pink of Stealth* as the third work in the *Black.Net.Art Actions* in Keith + Mendi Obadike, "The Black.Net.Art Actions: Blackness for Sale (2001), The Interaction of Coloreds (2002), and The Pink of Stealth (2003)," in *Re:Skin*, ed. Mary Flanagan and Austin. Booth (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 245–50. It was later replaced by *Keeping Up Appearances* in the *Black.Net.Art Actions*' **entry into the Rhizome Net Art Anthology**. Neither source is more authoritative; rather, this reflects the fluidity of internet art, which, like performance art, is often characterized by change over time.

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15.4: Cao Fei, Building “RMB City”

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182232



In her Beijing studio, Cao Fei discusses the inspirations, process, and challenges behind developing and building a virtual urban environment within the digital realm of Second Life for her project, “RMB City” (2007). Comparing the virtual landscape of “RMB City” to the styles of traditional Chinese brush paintings, Cao draws connections between the past and the present, Eastern and Western cultures, and aesthetic sensibilities developed from her upbringing.

Cao’s work reflects the fluidity of a world in which cultures have mixed and diverged in rapid evolution. Her video installations and new media works explore perception and reality in places as diverse as a Chinese factory and the virtual world of Second Life. Depictions of Chinese architecture and landscape abound in scenes of hyper-capitalistic Pearl River Delta development, in images that echo traditional Chinese painting, and in the design of her own virtual utopia, “RMB City.” Fascinated by the world of Second Life, Cao Fei has created several works in which she is both participant and observer through her Second Life avatar, China Tracy, who acts as a guide, philosopher, and tourist.

Cao Fei is featured in the Season 5 (2009) episode “Fantasy” of the “Art in the Twenty-First Century” television series on PBS.

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15.5: Shahzia Sikander, The Last Post

- by **ART21**

Page ID

182233



Artist Shahzia Sikander, filmed in her Manhattan studio in 2012, discusses her animated video work “The Last Post” (2010). Sikander also describes how beginning to create animations was a natural evolution in her studio process because she had already been working with narrative and layering in her paintings and large-scale installations.

Shahzia Sikander specializes in Indian and Persian miniature painting, a traditional style that is both highly stylized and disciplined. Her work blends the Eastern focus on precision and methodology with a Western emphasis on creative, subjective expression. Sikander juxtaposes Hindu, Muslim, and Western iconography, entangling histories, meanings, and beliefs.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

16: Assemblage and materiality

16.1: Assemblage
16.2: Magdalene Anyango N. Odundo, Symmetrical Reduced Black Narrow-Necked Tall Piece
16.3: Nick Cave's "Soundsuits"
16.4: Damián Ortega, Alias
16.5: Abraham Cruzvillegas, Autoconstrucción
16.6: Rebecca Belmore on Rising to the Occasion
16.7: El Anatsui
16.7.1: El Anatsui, Untitled
16.7.2: El Anatsui, Old Man's Cloth
16.8: Mickalene Thomas on her Materials and Artistic Influences
16.9: Fred Wilson- Beauty and Ugliness
16.10: Kohei Nawa, PixCell-Deer#24
16.11: Zheng Chongbin on "I Look for the Sky"
16.12: An interview with artist Ogawa Machiko
16.13: Lares Feliciano, Memory Mirror installation
16.14: Mona Hatoum – 'Nothing Is a Finished Project'
16.15: Jesús Rafael Soto, Houston Penetrable
16.16: Artist Profile- Sopheap Pich on Rattan, Sculpture, and Abstraction
16.17: Who is Rachel Whiteread?
16.18: Artist interview with Lee Bul about Willing To Be Vulnerable
16.19: Ellen Gallagher- Cutting
16.20: Thornton Dial, Sr., Crossing Waters
16.21: Shan Goshorn (Eastern Band Cherokee), Sealed Fate- Treaty of New Echota Protest Basket
16.22: Richard Zane Smith (Wyandotte Nation), Wyandotte Feast Pot
16.23: Marilyn Spoon, Bandolier Bag

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16.1: Assemblage

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16.2: Magdalene Anyango N. Odundo, Symmetrical Reduced Black Narrow-Necked Tall Piece

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16.3: Nick Cave’s “Soundsuits”

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16.6: Rebecca Belmore on Rising to the Occasion

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16.7: El Anatsui

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16.7.1: El Anatsui, Untitled

by DR. PERI KLEMM and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

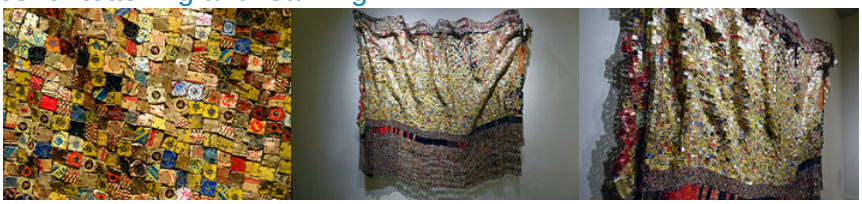
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182242

The artist transforms metal from alcohol bottles into textiles that represent libations for ancestors.

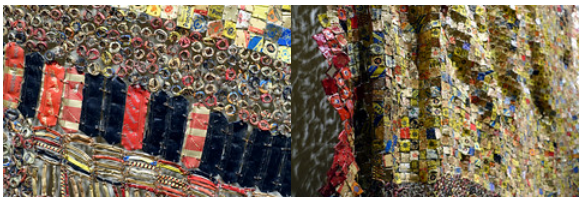


Video **16.7.1.1**: El Anatsui, *Untitled*, 2009, repurposed printed aluminum, copper, 256.5 × 284.5 × 27.9 cm as installed (Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington D.C.)

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16.7.2: El Anatsui, Old Man's Cloth

by DR. ALLISON YOUNG

Page ID 182243

Old Man's Cloth hangs like a large tapestry, but when we look closer, it's easy to become captivated by the small metal fragments that comprise the work in hundreds. Arranged within a shifting grid of stripes and blocks of color, the components form their own internal maps across the surface, melding into vertical gold bands, interlocking black and silver rows, or a deviant red piece floating in a field of black. While *Old Man's Cloth* would have been laid flat during its construction, it is contorted and manipulated during installation, so that the individual metal pieces can catch the light from every angle. This brilliant visual effect makes its humble origins all the more impressive.



Figure **16.7.2.1**: El Anatsui, *Old Man's Cloth*, 2003, aluminum and copper wire, 16′ x 17′ 1″ / 487.7 x 520.7 cm (Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, FL)

The Medium or the Message?

Old Man's Cloth has been constructed from flattened liquor bottle labels that the artist collects near his home in Southern Nigeria. While critics often write about Anatsui's metal wall hangings using the language of textiles, the labels and bottle caps are typically fastened together with copper wire and attached corner-to-corner. As such, the issue of medium is one of the first to inspire debate amongst viewers—are the wall hangings two-dimensional or three-dimensional? Are they sculptures, even as they hang against the wall like paintings? Are they individual works or immersive installations? Lastly, are they "fine art" or simply an innovative form of "craft"?

Purposefully disregarding the limited categories imposed by Western art history, Anatsui's practice emerges from a more expanded understanding of what art can be that stems from both the radical practices of the late-1960s, and from a vantage point outside of the Western tradition completely. As scholar Susan Vogel has explained, "such categories did not exist in classic African traditions, which made no distinction between art and craft, high art and low."

Anatsui's choice of discarded liquor bottle caps as a medium has as much to do with their formal properties as with their historical associations. As an African artist whose career was forged during the utopia of mid-century African independence movements, his work has always engaged his region's history and culture. The bottle caps, for Anatsui, signify a fraught history of trade between Africa and Europe. As he explained,

Alcohol was one of the commodities brought with [Europeans] to exchange for goods in Africa. Eventually alcohol become one of the items used in the transatlantic slave trade. They made rum in the West Indies, took it to Liverpool, and then it made its way back to Africa. I thought that the bottle caps had a strong reference to the history of Africa.



Figure **16.7.2.2**

The luminescent gold colors also recall the colonial past of Anatsui's home country—modern Ghana was previously a British colony called The Gold Coast until its independence in 1957. The fluid movements of the work's surface remind us of the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, which carried slave-ships and traders between Africa, Europe and the New World. By bestowing his works with titles such as Man's Cloth and Woman's Cloth, Anatsui also makes reference to the significance of textiles in African societies, and their own historical role in trade networks.

Old Man's Cloth was included in one of Anatsui's first exhibitions of hanging metal sculptures. Held at London's October Gallery in 2004, the show was entitled "Gawu," which means "metal cloak" in Ewe. Old Man's Cloth is unique for its uneven and jagged edges as well as the "rough texture" of the recycled labels that are incorporated into the piece.

Modernism in Africa

El Anatsui was born in Ghana in 1944, and was trained in an academic European curriculum. In 1964, when he began his studies, many parts of Africa were experiencing a cultural renaissance associated with decolonization movements. Anatsui himself joined the unofficial "Sankofa" movement, which was invested in unearthing and reclaiming Africa's rich indigenous traditions and assimilating these with the European-influenced aspects of society. His earliest works, for example, included a series of wooden market trays into which he burned designs inspired by African graphic systems and adinkra motifs (symbols widely used by the Akan people of Ghana).

In 1975, Anatsui joined the faculty at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Nsukka was a vibrant creative capital for African artists and writers in the 1970s, many of whom spearheaded the Zaria Rebellion in the early 1960s and revived the traditional art form of uli wall and body painting in their contemporary works.

Anatsui's work differed slightly from that of his colleagues in his insistence on abstraction. In some of his first mature works, he used an electric chainsaw to slash geometric patterns into wood. Though abstract, these works were metaphorically rich; Anatsui chose woods of different colors to represent the diversity of African cultures, while the violence of the chainsaw enacted the ruptures imposed by European imperialist expansion.



Figure 16.7.2.3: El Anatsui, *Hovor II* (detail), 2004 showing tiny bits of scrap tin, woven pieced together with wire (Photo: Amy M. Youngs, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

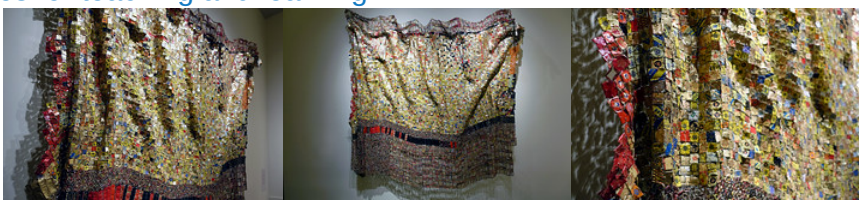
Critical Reception: African or Contemporary?

When two of Anatsui's metal wall hangings appeared in the 2007 Venice Biennale, they were lauded by the public and swiftly cemented his place as a leading international contemporary artist. He had, in fact, already shown in Venice almost two decades earlier in 1990, when he participated in a small exhibition surveying contemporary African art. During the time that lapsed between the two exhibitions, the art world became more receptive to artists outside of its Western centers, and by 2007, Anatsui could exhibit not only as a representative of the continent, but as an individual artist whose work was significant in its own right.

As such, his work provides an excellent opportunity for discussion about the relationships between artists at the center and at the periphery, and between the West and the Global South. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, for instance, has now acquired two of Anatsui's metal wall hangings, but they are owned by two different curatorial departments: the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, and Modern and Contemporary Art. Both were recently on view at the same time, but in separate galleries. Visitors, students, and art historians should continue to ask themselves which designation seems more appropriate, and for what reasons. Should we understand his art as a product of its place, its time, or both? What do we see in Anatsui's work when it is placed among African masks and ritual objects, and how do our impressions change when this work is placed beside contemporary art from around the world?

There are no correct answers to these questions, but they are indicative of the changes that have taken place both in the art world, and in today's increasingly connected society at large.

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16.8: Mickalene Thomas on her Materials and Artistic Influences

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16.23: Marilyn Spoon, Bandolier Bag

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

17: Spirituality and transcendence

17.1: Jack Whitten on Mapping the Soul

17.2: Bill Viola, The Crossing

17.2: Lee Ufan

17.3: Richard Mayhew, Indigenous Spiritual Space

17.4: Mariko Mori, Pure Land

17.6: Bruce Nauman, The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths

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17.1: Jack Whitten on Mapping the Soul

- by **WALKER ART CENTER**

Page ID

182264



“As an abstract painter, I work with things that I cannot see,” says Jack Whitten. “Google has mapped the whole earth. We have maps of Mars. We don’t have a map of the soul, and that intrigues me.” Here the painter discusses Soul Map, a large-scale acrylic collage on view in the exhibition Jack Whitten: 50 Years of Paintings.

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17.2: Bill Viola, The Crossing

by DR. ALLISON YOUNG

Page ID
182262

We have to reclaim time itself, wrenching it from the "time is money" maximum efficiency, and make room for it to flow the other way – towards us. We must take time back into ourselves to let our consciousness breathe and our cluttered minds be still and silent. This is what art can do and what museums can be in today's world.
—Bill Viola [1]



Figure **17.2.1**: Bill Viola, *The Crossing*, 1996, video/sound © Bill Viola (photo: **stunned**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Taking time back

Bill Viola's *The Crossing* is a room-sized video installation that comprises a large two-sided screen onto which a pair of video sequences is simultaneously projected. They each open in the same fashion: a male figure walks slowly towards the camera, his body dramatically lit from above so that it appears to glow against the video's stark-black background. After several minutes he pauses near the foreground and stands still. He faces forward, staring directly into the lens, motionless.

At this point the two scenes diverge; in one, a small fire alights below the figure's feet. It spreads over his legs and torso and eventually engulfs his whole body in flames; yet, he stands calm and completely still as his body is immolated, only moving to raise his arms slightly before his body disappears in an inferno of roaring flames. On the opposite screen, the event transpires not with fire but with water. Beginning as a light rainfall, the sporadic drops that shower the figure build up to a surging cascade of water until it subsumes him entirely. After the flames and the torrent of water eventually retreat, the figure has vanished entirely from each scene, and the camera witnesses a silent and empty denouement.

Expanded temporal experience



Figure **17.2.2**: Bill Viola, *The Crossing*, 1996, video/sound © Bill Viola (image: **SFMOMA**)

The Crossing makes use of Viola's signature manipulation of filmic time. Like many of the artist's recent works, it was shot using high-speed film capable of registering 300 frames per second, thus attaining a much greater level of detail than would be discerned by the naked eye. In postproduction, Viola reduces the speed of playback to an extreme slow motion—further enhancing the level of definition to a dramatic and scrutinizing effect.

However, it is not only an interest in technological experimentation that drives the artist's technical and aesthetic decisions. Viola's use of slow-motion is meant to invite a meditative and contemplative response, one that requires the viewer to concentrate for a longer duration of time and simultaneously to increase his or her own awareness of detail, movement and change. This is consistent with the artist's intent to reignite the longstanding relationship between artistic and spiritual experience. A devoted practitioner of Zen Buddhist meditation, Viola has explained that after "fifty minutes of quiet stillness in a room of solitary individuals"—a description that could, just as easily, reflect a museum-goer's experience of his installations—"time opens up in an unbelievable way." [2]

Religious symbolism



Figure **17.2.3**: Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja), Chola period, Indian (Tamil Nadu), c. 11th century, copper alloy, 68.3 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

The Crossing might be interpreted through the lens of mythology or religious thought, even though the work does not make iconographic or stylistic reference to a particular narrative. Viola has been inspired by a rich variety of spiritual traditions, including Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sufism. Viewers may recall, for instance, the ring of flames that surrounds images of Shiva Nataraja (left) in which he sets in motion the continuous cycles of creation and destruction through his cosmic dance, or the biblical tales of fire and brimstone, rapture and the Great Floods. Throughout such narratives, the elemental forces of fire and water often symbolize change, redemption, transformation and renewal— common themes in Viola's oeuvre. The artist has similarly made reference to transitions and passages in works such as *The Passing*, a 1991 video made shortly after his mother's death, or *Two Women*, a 2008 piece in which figures slowly move through a translucent and symbolic barrier of water.

Viola's education and artistic practice have long been guided by questions of "how we see, how we hear, and how we come to know the world." [3] The artist grew up in Queens, New York and attended Syracuse University in the late 1960s where he enrolled not only in fine arts classes, but also in a variety of academic subjects ranging from the humanities to the hard sciences. In particular, he was captivated by religious studies, psychology and electrical engineering, interests that are clearly assimilated throughout his oeuvre.

Technological experimentation

As early as the 1970s, Viola was one of the first visual artists to make use of new video technologies. As a student he experimented enthusiastically with new portable recording devices, with which he created short video performances that explored a variety of gestures, sounds and expressions. During the 1970s and 1980s, he was artist-in-residence at a number of media laboratories and television stations, while also serving as an assistant curator at Everson Museum of Art where he was exposed to the work of Nam

June Paik and Peter Campus, artists who were early innovators in the emerging field of video art. Eventually, Viola conceived of multi-channel and immersive installations where viewers are surrounded by carefully arranged screens and projections, sometimes displayed within an otherwise pitch-black room.

Sacred space

Between 1974 and 1976, Viola lived in Italy, where religious paintings and sculptures are often displayed in-situ, in the cathedrals for which they were commissioned. The continuing integration of historical art into contemporary public and religious life inspired Viola to design installations that mimicked the forms of devotional paintings, diptychs, predellas and altarpieces—formats that encourage intimate contemplation of religious icons. Later traveling throughout Japan and other parts of East Asia, Viola observed the same active level of engagement with art. In Tokyo, for instance, he witnessed museum visitors placing offerings at the feet of sculptural bodhisattvas or other religious statuary.

For viewers, the experience of viewing Viola's works need not be spiritually inscribed. In many cases, his works appeal to or reflect raw human emotions (the theme of his acclaimed exhibition *The Passions*) or universal life experiences. While *The Crossing* can be interpreted in light of a host of religious associations, the act of "self-annihilation" represented in the figure's disappearance at each conclusion also serves as a metaphor for the destruction of the ego. In the artist's words, this action "becomes a necessary means to transcendence and liberation," [4] especially in the face of life's inevitable unpredictability.

[1] Bill Viola, as quoted in *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 254
[2] Bill Viola, *Buddha Mind*, p. 254.
[3] "Bill Viola Interviewed by John Hanhardt, *Going Forth By Day* (Berlin: Deutsche Guggenheim and New York: Harry N Abrams, Inc, 2005), p. 87.
[4] Bill Viola, as quoted in "Emotions in Extreme Time: Bill Viola's Passions Project," in *The Passions*, John Walsh, ed. (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), p. 53.

Additional resources:

Bill Viola at SFMOMA

Bill Viola – James Cohan Gallery

Bill Viola – the artist's website

Bill Viola, The Passions from the J. Paul Getty Museum

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17.2: Lee Ufan

- by **ART BASEL**

Page ID

182265



To behold a painting or sculpture by the Korean artist and philosopher Lee Ufan is to feel suspended in a single breath longer than seems biologically possible. Whether consisting of an isolated brushstroke on canvas or an installation of carefully counterpoised rocks and steel plates, each work is an encounter between interior and exterior that produces a lasting reverberation. While the artist – also a prolific writer and critic – has deep roots in the Korean avant-garde, associated with the Mono-ha group in the late 1960s and the Dansaekhwa school of monochrome painting in the 1970s, in latter decades, his dedication to his singular vision has garnered him solo exhibitions at international institutions including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., and the Château de Versailles. In this video, the 84-year-old master grants Art Basel access to his tranquil studio enclave in Kamakura, Japan, for a meditation on creativity, the primacy of nature, and the end of man. Lee Ufan is represented by Kukje Gallery, Seoul; Pace Gallery, New York; kamel mennour, Paris; Lisson Gallery, London; and SCAI The Bathhouse, Tokyo.

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17.3: Richard Mayhew, Indigenous Spiritual Space

by DR. SHAWNYA L. HARRIS and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
182266



Richard Mayhew, *Indigenous Spiritual Space (Ser. No. 7)*, 1993–94, oil on canvas, 84.5 × 94.6 cm (Georgia Museum of Art, Athens) © Richard Mayhew

Additional resources

This painting at the Georgia Museum of Art

Art activity based on this painting, from the Georgia Museum of Art

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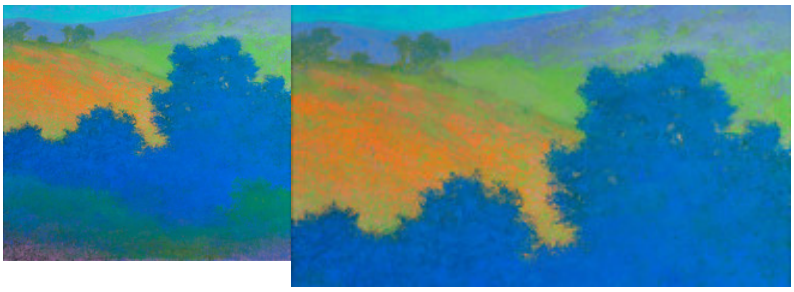
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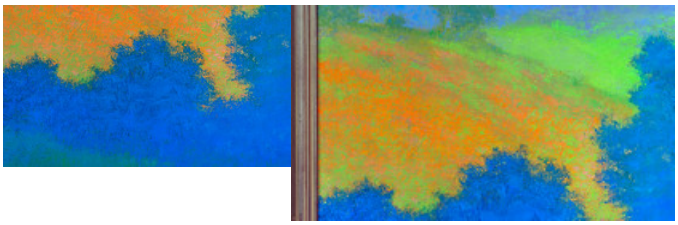
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17.4: Mariko Mori, Pure Land

by KATRINA KLAASMEYER

Page ID
182261

Floating on a lotus blossom

Set within a golden landscape, a female figure serenely floats above a lotus blossom while six alien musicians whirl by on bubbly clouds. Her pink robes mirror the predominantly pale orange, yellow and pink of the water, land and sky—firmly embedding her within the tranquil scene. *Pure Land*, a photograph set within glass, is the counterpart of Mori's three-dimensional video installation, *Nirvana*, 1997. *Nirvana* animates the imagery we see in *Pure Land*. Viewed within a darkened room with the aid of three-dimensional glasses, *Nirvana's* audience was limited to a group of 20 people at a time. During the seven minute video, the central female figure would hum and whisper echoed rhythms as if meditating, while the little musicians floated around her. At the conclusion, a fan came on and blew cool, scented air into the audience's faces. Through the integration of sensory elements such as three-dimensional imagery, sound, scent, and the gentle touch of a breeze, combined with the limited viewing audience, *Nirvana* created an immersive, intimate experience. As its photographic counterpart, *Pure Land* captures a moment of this experience, enabling the viewer a longer, perhaps more meditative, relationship with the work.



Figure **17.4.1**: Mariko Mori, *Pure Land*, 1996-98, glass with photo interlayer, 305 x 610 x 2.2 cm



Figure **17.4.2**: Mariko Mori, *Enlightenment Capsule*, 1996-1998, plastic, solar transmitting device, fiber optic cables, 108 x 83 x 83 inches

Symbolism and spiritual allusions

Every element we see here has significance that may not be apparent at first glance—the serene landscape, with its golden sky, smooth pink land masses, and perfectly still water, is rich with symbolism. *Pure Land* is set during sunrise in the landscape of the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth, called "dead" because the high salinity of its water does not support fish or plant life. In Shinto tradition, salt is used as an agent of purification. Floating in the water is a lotus blossom—symbol of purity and rebirth into

paradise. This blossom resembles one in Mori's 1998 sculptural installation, *Enlightenment Capsule* (left), which featured a rainbow-colored acrylic lotus blossom set within a space-age capsule illuminated by sunlight. In both *Enlightenment Capsule* and *Pure Land* Mori blends traditional symbolism with futuristic elements. On the right hand side of the background of *Pure Land*is a fantastical object which resembles a playful futuristic spacecraft with arms. This may be a variation of a **Tibetan stupa**—a sacred Buddhist monument originally used as a burial mound. Through her imaginative reinterpretation of symbols steeped in tradition, the artist creates a timeless setting appropriate for meditation on death, purification, and rebirth.

Immersion

The distant horizon line, combined with the larger island in the foreground that seems to continue into the viewer's space, create a sense of immersion, as if one were present with these fantastical figures. Perhaps this feeling of personal involvement ties in with the title itself, *Pure Land*, which is the paradise of Amida (or Amitabha) Buddha who descends to greet devotees at the moment of their death and takes them back to his "Pure Land of Perfect Bliss."



Figure **17.4.3**: Descent of Amitabha and the Heavenly Multitude, Heian period, 12th century, National Treasure (Yushi Hachiman Ko)

Beginning with the eleventh century in Japan, several paintings and sculptures were made on this theme, such as the *Descent of Amida and the Heavenly Multitude* (above). In this type of imagery, Amida Buddha, resting on a lotus blossom and holding his hands in a symbolic gesture known as a mudra, is typically surrounded by celestial attendants in a sea of swirling clouds. These attendants are boddhisattvas, enlightened beings who act out of great compassion to help others achieve enlightenment. In a sculptural example from Byodo-in Temple, 52 boddhisattvas fly on clouds on either side of Amida Buddha (below); some are seated quietly with their hands joined in prayer, some hold a lotus blossom to receive the soul of the deceased, while others are playing musical instruments.



Figure 17.4.4: Jōchō, Amida Buddha, Heian Period, c. 1053, wood covered with wood leaf, 295 cm (Phoenix Hall, Byodo-in, Kyoto)

Oneness and universality



Figure 17.4.5: Mark Mori, *Oneness* , on exhibit in 2007 at the Grand Duke Jean Museum of Modern Art, Luxembourg (MUDAM) (**photo: Mark Weston** , CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

In Mori's version, these celestial attendants are pastel-colored alien figures with large pointy heads and delicate bodies. Each figure plays a different instrument as they float on their light blue bubbly clouds. The two musicians in the foreground are blurred, as if they are flying quickly toward the viewer. These muscians appear again in a later sculptural installation by Mori, *Oneness* , 2003 (left). In this work, the six aliens are given three-dimensional form, complete with soft, flesh-like material. They stand in a circle facing outward as they hold each other's hands. The viewer becomes an active participant in the work — when a person hugs one of the figures, its eyes light up and you feel its heartbeat. As in the Nirvana video installation upon which *Pure Land* is based, Mori seems to want to engage more than just the viewer's sense of sight and for each participant to have a direct experience with the

artwork. Perhaps more significantly, *Oneness* is a metaphor for bringing in the outsider, achieved through revealing commonalities of experience. The binding together of seemingly disparate realities is a central theme throughout Mori's work.

Artist as object

Another element typical in Mori's work is for the artist to cast herself in the principle role, and *Pure Land* is no exception. The central female figure is the artist herself, wearing an elaborate costume and headdress, both of her own design. Born in Tokyo in 1967, Mori studied design at Tokyo's Bunka Fashion College and worked part-time as a fashion model, which she originally considered a form of personal creativity. However, she found modeling an inadequate medium in which to express herself fully, so she began to stage elaborate tableaux, taking full creative control of the process, acting as director, producer, set and costume designer, and model. This recalls the practices of other photographers, most notably **Cindy Sherman** , as well as **Yasumasa Morimura**, the Japanese photographer notorious for substituting himself for figures in famous paintings throughout art history.

In the *Pure Land* photograph, Mori's light blue, pupil-less eyes, gauze serenely somewhere beyond our vision. Like the Amida Buddha, she rests above a lotus blossom and holds her right hand in a mudra of blessing and teaching; the circle formed by the index finger and thumb is the sign of the Wheel of Law. In her left hand she holds a *hojyu*, or magical wishing jewel, in the shape of a lotus bud. This figure is inspired by Kichijoten, originally the Indian goddess, Shri Lakshmi, who was eventually incorporated into Buddhism, and typically represents fertility, fortune, and beauty. Here Mori bars comparison with a well-known eighth-century painting of Kichijoten from Yukushi-ji Temple in Nara. Similarities include the serene elegance, softly fluttering gown, and wish-granting jewel. The eighth-century painting depicts the clothing and appearance of an elegant lady of the Chinese Tang Dynasty, and it may have been an object of veneration during the annual New Year event when devotees prayed for happiness and fertility. In this manner, a beautiful, elegant woman was seen to embody the ideas of good fortune and prosperity and became an object of worship.



Figure **17.4.6**: Left: Kichijoten from Yukushi-ji Temple in Nara, 8th century, color on hemp, 53 x 31.7 cm; right: Mariko Mori, Pure Land, 1996-98, glass with photo interlayer, 305 x 610 x 2.2 cm

By taking on this ancient persona, Mori dissolves her own identity and is transformed into the elegant Tang lady and goddess of fortune, while simultaneously performing the welcoming role of Amida Buddha. Mori's enlightened self-representation descends to guide the viewer into a "Pure Land of Perfect Bliss" of her own creation. Perhaps more significantly, the artist seeks to lead the viewer into her immersive paradise. In both formats, the multi-sensory video *Nirvana* and purely visual *Pure Land* photograph, the message is clear: enlightenment is for all.

Additional resources:

Mariko Mori at the Tokyo Museum of Contemporary Art

Video — The Artist Project: Mariko Mori (from The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Scott Indriskek, "Mariko Mori wants to bring her nature-loving art to six continents," *Modern Painters* (May 2011)

Visualizing an Endless Universe: Mariko Mori Makes the Cosmos Life-Size

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17.6: Bruce Nauman, The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths

by JP MCMAHON

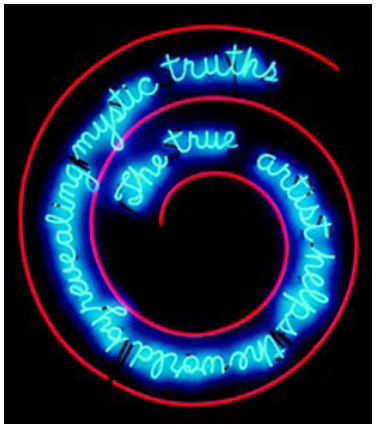


Figure **17.6.1**: Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*, 1967, neon and clear glass tubing suspension supports; 149.86 x 139.7 x 5.08 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Bruce Nauman's neon sign asks a multitude of questions with regard to the ways in which the 20th century conceived both avant-garde art and the role of the artist in society. If earlier European modernists, such as Mondrian, Malevich, and Kandinsky, sought to use art to reveal deep-seated truths about the human condition and the role of the artist in general, then Bruce Nauman's *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths* questions such transhistorical and universal statements. With regard to this work, Nauman said:

> ***The most difficult thing about the whole piece for me was the statement. It was a kind of test—like when you say something out loud to see if you believe it. Once written down, I could see that the statement […] was on the one hand a totally silly idea and yet, on the other hand, I believed it. It's true and not true at the same time. It depends on how you interpret it and how seriously you take yourself. For me it's still a very strong thought.***

The medium and the message

By using the mediums of mass culture (neon signs) and of display (he originally hung the sign in his storefront studio), Nauman sought to bring questions normally considered only by the high culture elite, such as the role and function of art and the artist in society, to a wider audience. While early European modernists, such as Picasso, had borrowed widely from popular culture, they rarely displayed their work in the sites of popular culture. For Nauman, both the medium and the message were equally important; thus, by using a form of communication readily understood by all (neon signs had been widespread in modern industrial society) and by placing this message in the public view, Nauman let everyone ask and answer the question.

While it is perhaps the words that stand out most, the symbolism of the spiral (think of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, 1969), also deserves attention having been used for centuries in European and other civilizations, such as megalithic and Chinese art, both as a symbol of time and of nature itself.

Transcendence?

Theosophy is interesting in this regard and was an important aspect of the early European Avant-garde. In particular, Theosophists believed that all religions are attempts to help humanity to evolve to greater perfection, and that each religion therefore holds a portion of the truth. Through their materials, artists had sought to transform the physical into the spiritual. In this sense, Malevich, Mondrian, and Kandinsky sought to use the material of their art to transcend it: Nauman, and other of his generation, did not.

Process over product

Instead, Nauman's work transgresses many genres of art making in that his work explores the implications of minimalism, conceptual, performance, and process art. In this sense we could call Nauman's art "Postminimalism," a term coined by the art critic Robert Pincus-Witten, in his article "Eva Hesse: Post-Minimalism into Sublime" (*Artforum* 10, number 3, November 1971). Artists such as Nauman, Acconci, and Hesse, favored process instead of product, or rather the investigation over the end result. However, this is not to say they did not produce objects, such as the neon-sign by Nauman, only that within the presentation of the object, they also retained an examination of the processes that made that specific object.

In this sense, Nauman's neon sign isn't only an object, it's a process, something that continues to make us think about art, artist, and the role that language plays in our conception of both. The words continue to ask this of each beholder who encounters them. Does the artist, the "true artist" really "reveal mystical truths"? Or confined to the specific culture that it was made in? If we are to believe the statement (remember, it is not necessarily Nauman's, he merely borrows it from our shared culture), then we might, for example, recognize Leonardo da Vinci as a Neo-Platonic artist who showed us ultimate and essential truths through painting. On the other hand, if we reject the statement, then we would probably recognize the artist as just another producer of a specific set of objects, that we call "art."

This type of logic and analytical thinking was influenced by Nauman's reading of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). From Wittgenstein, Nauman took the idea that you put forth a proposition/idea in the form of language and then examine its findings, irrespective of its proof or conclusion. Nauman's "language games," his neon-words, his proposition about the nature of art and the artist continue to resonant in today's art world, in particular with regard to the value we place on the artist's actions and findings.

Additional resources:

This work of art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art

Art:21 page about Nauman's *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truth*

Philadelphia Museum of Art biography of the artist

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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Index

D

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Glossary

Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

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    - Licensing - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 1: Beginner's guide - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.1: Contemporary Art, an introduction - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.2: Postmodernism - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.3: The Case for Copying - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.4: The Black Atlantic - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 1.4.1: The Black Atlantic- What is the Black Atlantic? - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 1.4.2: The Black Atlantic- Identity and Nationhood - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 1.4.3: The Black Atlantic- Toppled Monuments and Hidden Histories - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 1.4.4: The Black Atlantic- Afterlives of Slavery in Contemporary Art - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 2: Cold War Germany and after - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.1: Anselm Kiefer - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.1.1: Shulamite - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.1.2: Bohemia Lies by the Sea - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.1.3: An interview with Anselm Kiefer - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.2: Sigmar Polke, Watchtower series - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.3: Gerhard Richter - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.3.1: The Cage Paintings (1-6) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.3.2: Uncle Rudi - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.3.3: Betty - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.3.4: September - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 3: Art in the AIDS era - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.1: David Wojnarowicz, Untitled (One Day This Kid . . .) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.2: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Untitled” (billboard of an empty bed) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.3: Masami Teraoka, American Kabuki - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.4: Sue Coe, Aids won’t wait, the enemy is here not in Kuwait - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.5: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Horn Players - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.6: Keith Haring, Subway Drawings - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.7: Pepón Osorio - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 3.7.1: En la barberia no se llora (No Crying Allowed in the Barbershop) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 3.7.2: Badge of Honor - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 4: Post-Cultural Revolution China - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.1: Luo Zhongli, Father - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.2: Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.3: The Case for Ai Weiwei - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.4: Xu Bing, Book from the Sky - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.5: Xu Zhen – ‘Artists Change the Way People Think’ - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 5: Apartheid-era South Africa - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 5.1: The story of Ernest Cole, a black photographer in South Africa during apartheid - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 5.2: Jane Alexander, Butcher Boys - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 5.3: William Kentridge, drawing from Tide Table (Soho in Deck Chair) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 5.4: Sue Williamson, For Thirty Years Next to His Heart - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.5: Marlene Dumas, Models - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 6: Young British Artists and art as commodity - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.1: Jeff Koons, Pink Panther - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.2: The YBAs- The London-based Young British Artists - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.3: Tracey Emin, My Bed - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.4: Chris Ofili, The Holy Virgin Mary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.5: Damien Hirst, The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.6: Marc Quinn, Self - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.7: Hans Haacke, Seurat's "Les Poseuses" (small version), 1884-1975 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7: Pictures generation and post-modern photography - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.1: Alfredo Jaar, A Logo for America - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.2: Barbara Kruger, Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.3: Jeff Wall, A View from an Apartment - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.4: Sally Mann, Blowing Bubbles - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.5: The Pictures Generation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.6: Cindy Sherman - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 7.6.1: Untitled Film Still #21 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 7.6.2: Untitled #228 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.7: Carrie Mae Weems, Untitled (Woman Feeding Bird), from The Kitchen Table Series - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.8: Joel Sternfeld, On This Site—The Stonewall Inn - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.9: Stan Douglas, Every Building on 100 West Hastings - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.10: Will Wilson interview about The Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.11: Annie Leibovitz, Queen Elizabeth II - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.12: Trevor Paglen, The Black Sites—The Salt Pit, Northeast of Kabul, Afghanistan - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.13: Chris McCaw, Sunburned, GSP #166, Mohave/Winter Solstice - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8: Revisiting histories - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.1: Betye Saar, Liberation of Aunt Jemima - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.2: Nari Ward, We the People (black version) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.3: Kara Walker - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.3.1: An interview with Kara Walker - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.3.2: Darkytown Rebellion - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.3.3: Kara Walker, A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Bab - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.3.4: Kara Walker, Fons Americanus - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.4: Alison Saar, Topsy and the Golden Fleece - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.5: Kerry James Marshall - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.5.1: An interview with Kerry James Marshall about his series Mementos - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.5.2: Kerry James Marshall- Mastry - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.5.3: Kerry James Marshall on his process - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.6: Clarissa Rizal, Resilience Robe - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.7: Tenzing Rigdol, Pin drop silence- Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.8: Thornton Dial, Blood and Meat- Survival For The World - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.9: Titus Kaphar, The Cost of Removal - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.10: Omar Victor Diop- Black subjects in the frame - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.11: Wendy Red Star, 1880 Crow Peace Delegation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.12: Yee I-Lann, Picturing Power #6… - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.13: Roger Shimomura, Diary- December 12, 1941 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.14: An interview with Fred Wilson about the conventions of museums and race - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.15: Ken Gonzales-Day, Erased Lynching Series - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.16: Kenseth Armstead, Surrender Yorktown 1781 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.17: Lam Tung Pang on "A day of two Suns" - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.18: Michael Rakowitz- Haunting the West - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9: Mapping and migration - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 9.1: Julie Mehretu, Stadia II - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 9.2: Doris Salcedo, Shibboleth - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.3: Doris Salcedo- Third World Identity - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.4: Raúl de Nieves, Beginning and the end neither and the otherwise betwixt and between the end is the beginning and the end - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.5: Julie Mehretu, HOWL, eon (I, II) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.6: Julie Mehretu, HOWL, eon (I, II) (Masterpiece Moment) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.7: An interview with Alfredo Jaar - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
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- 9.10: Suchitra Mattai, Exodus - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

10: Borderlands - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 10.1: Tanya Aguiñiga, Metabolizing the Border - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
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- 10.3: Postcommodity arts collective - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
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- 10.5: Minerva Cuevas, Crossing of the Rio Bravo - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.6: Jaime Carrejo, Border/Land - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.7: Guadalupe Maravilla, Requiem For My Border Crossing - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

11: Figuration, the body, and representation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 11.1: How did Lucian Freud present queer and marginalized bodies? - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.2: Lucian Freud, Standing by the Rags - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.3: Identity Politics- From the Margins to the Mainstream - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
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- 11.6: Renée Stout, interview about Fetish #2 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.7: Wangechi Mutu - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.7.1: Wangechi Mutu, Preying Mantra - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.7.2: Wangechi Mutu, The NewOnes, will free Us - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.8: Marina Abramović, The Artist is Present - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.9: Rineke Dijkstra, Odessa, Ukraine, August 4, 1993 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.10: An interview with Maryam Hoseini - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.11: Jordan Casteel paints her community - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.12: Luchita Hurtado's body of work - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.13: Shirin Neshat - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.13.1: Rebellious Silence, Women of Allah series - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.13.2: 'Dreams Are Where Our Fears Live' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.14: Kehinde Wiley - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.14.1: Rumors of War - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.14.2: Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.15: Yinka Shonibare, The Swing (After Fragonard) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
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- 11.17: Kiki Smith, Lying with the Wolf - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.18: Catherine Opie - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.18.1: Self-Portrait/Cutting - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.18.2: Figure and Landscape series - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.19: Stefanie Jackson, Bluest Eye - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.20: Ellen Galagher, DeLuxe - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.21: Ah Xian artist interview - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.22: Takashi Murakami - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.23: Will Wilson, Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.24: Lorna Simpson – 'Everything I Do Comes from the Same Desire' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.25: Amy Sherald, Precious Jewels by the Sea - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.26: Michelle Browder, Mothers of Gynecology - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.27: Douglas Coupland, Terry Fox Memorial - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

12: Social practice - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 12.1: Guerrilla Girls, 'You Have to Question What You See' (interview) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 12.2: Ai Wei Wei, Remembering and the Politics of Dissent - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.3: Ai Wei Wei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.4: Tania Bruguera, The Francis Effect - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.5: Tania Bruguera, Immigrant Movement International - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.6: Theaster Gates on collecting - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.7: Danh Vo Interview- Art Should Estrange - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.8: Lida Abdul – 'A Beautiful Encounter With Chance' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

13: Public memory and the politics of place - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 13.1: An-My Lê, 29 Palms - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.2: Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.3: Kerry James Marshall, Our Town - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.4: SAAM- Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii, 1995 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.5: Do Ho Suh, Rubbing/Loving - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.6: The National Memorial for Peace and Justice (Equal Justice Initiative) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.7: Krzysztof Wodiczko, Monument - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.8: Daniel Libeskind, Imperial War Museum North, Manchester, UKNew Page - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.9: Birdhead – 'We Photograph Things That Are Meaningful To Us' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.10: Contemporary politics and classical architecture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.11: Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, Native Hosts (Arkansas) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.12: What's in a map? Jaune Quick-To-See Smith's State Names (2000) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.13: Graciela Iturbide, Photographing Mexico - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.14: Contemporary Native American Architecture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.15: Mark Bradford's 150 Portrait Tone - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.16: Artist Richard Bell – 'My Art is an Act of Protest' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.17: Yatika Starr Fields and mural painting - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.18: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

14: Landscape and ecology - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 14.1: Stéphane Couturier, Fenetre, Eastlake Greens, San Diego - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.2: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Earth's Creation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.3: Maya Lin, Silver Upper White River - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.4: Courtney Leonard, ARTIFICE Ellipse, 2016 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.5: Sebastião Salgado's Kuwait - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.6: Michel Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe (Corned Beef 2000) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.7: James Turrell, Skyspace, the way of color - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.8: Roger Minick, Woman with Scarf at Inspiration Point, Yosemite National Park - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.9: Binh Danh, Bridalveil Fall, Yosemite CA, May 31, 2012 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.10: Thiebaud, Ponds and Streams - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.11: Noel Harding, The Elevated Wetlands - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.12: Artist Dale Harding – 'Environment is Part of Who You Are' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.13: Mel Chin, Paydirt - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

15: Digital culture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 15.1: An interview with Jamian Juliano-Villani - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 15.2: Meriem Bennani's Exploded Visions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 15.3: Art, Race, and the Internet- Mendi + Keith Obadike's Black.Net.Art Actions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 15.4: Cao Fei, Building "RMB City" - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 15.5: Shahzia Sikander, The Last Post - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

16: Assemblage and materiality - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 16.1: Assemblage - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.2: Magdalene Anyango N. Odundo, Symmetrical Reduced Black Narrow-Necked Tall Piece - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.3: Nick Cave's "Soundsuits" - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.4: Damián Ortega, Alias - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.5: Abraham Cruzvillegas, Autoconstrucción - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 16.6: Rebecca Belmore on Rising to the Occasion - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.7: El Anatsui - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 16.7.1: El Anatsui, Untitled - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 16.7.2: El Anatsui, Old Man's Cloth - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.8: Mickalene Thomas on her Materials and Artistic Influences - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.9: Fred Wilson- Beauty and Ugliness - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.10: Kohei Nawa, PixCell-Deer#24 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.11: Zheng Chongbin on "I Look for the Sky" - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.12: An interview with artist Ogawa Machiko - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.13: Lares Feliciano, Memory Mirror installation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.14: Mona Hatoum – 'Nothing Is a Finished Project' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.15: Jesús Rafael Soto, Houston Penetrable - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.16: Artist Profile- Sopheap Pich on Rattan, Sculpture, and Abstraction - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.17: Who is Rachel Whiteread? - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.18: Artist interview with Lee Bul about Willing To Be Vulnerable - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.19: Ellen Gallagher- Cutting - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.20: Thornton Dial, Sr., Crossing Waters - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.21: Shan Goshorn (Eastern Band Cherokee), Sealed Fate- Treaty of New Echota Protest Basket - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.22: Richard Zane Smith (Wyandotte Nation), Wyandotte Feast Pot - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.23: Marilyn Spoon, Bandolier Bag - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

17: Spirituality and transcendence - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

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- 17.2: Bill Viola, The Crossing - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 17.2: Lee Ufan - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 17.3: Richard Mayhew, Indigenous Spiritual Space - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 17.4: Mariko Mori, Pure Land - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
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By Page

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  - Front Matter - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - TitlePage - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - InfoPage - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - Table of Contents - *Undeclared*
    - Licensing - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 1: Beginner's guide - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.1: Contemporary Art, an introduction - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.2: Postmodernism - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.3: The Case for Copying - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.4: The Black Atlantic - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 1.4.1: The Black Atlantic- What is the Black Atlantic? - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 1.4.2: The Black Atlantic- Identity and Nationhood - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 1.4.3: The Black Atlantic- Toppled Monuments and Hidden Histories - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 1.4.4: The Black Atlantic- Afterlives of Slavery in Contemporary Art - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 2: Cold War Germany and after - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.1: Anselm Kiefer - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.1.1: Shulamite - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.1.2: Bohemia Lies by the Sea - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.1.3: An interview with Anselm Kiefer - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.2: Sigmar Polke, Watchtower series - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.3: Gerhard Richter - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.3.1: The Cage Paintings (1-6) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.3.2: Uncle Rudi - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.3.3: Betty - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 2.3.4: September - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 3: Art in the AIDS era - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.1: David Wojnarowicz, Untitled (One Day This Kid . . .) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.2: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Untitled” (billboard of an empty bed) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.3: Masami Teraoka, American Kabuki - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.4: Sue Coe, Aids won’t wait, the enemy is here not in Kuwait - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.5: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Horn Players - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.6: Keith Haring, Subway Drawings - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.7: Pepón Osorio - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 3.7.1: En la barberia no se llora (No Crying Allowed in the Barbershop) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
      - 3.7.2: Badge of Honor - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 4: Post-Cultural Revolution China - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.1: Luo Zhongli, Father - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.2: Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.3: The Case for Ai Weiwei - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.4: Xu Bing, Book from the Sky - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.5: Xu Zhen – ‘Artists Change the Way People Think’ - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 5: Apartheid-era South Africa - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 5.1: The story of Ernest Cole, a black photographer in South Africa during apartheid - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 5.2: Jane Alexander, Butcher Boys - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 5.3: William Kentridge, drawing from Tide Table (Soho in Deck Chair) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 5.4: Sue Williamson, For Thirty Years Next to His Heart - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.5: Marlene Dumas, Models - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 6: Young British Artists and art as commodity - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.1: Jeff Koons, Pink Panther - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.2: The YBAs- The London-based Young British Artists - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.3: Tracey Emin, My Bed - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.4: Chris Ofili, The Holy Virgin Mary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.5: Damien Hirst, The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.6: Marc Quinn, Self - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6.7: Hans Haacke, Seurat's "Les Poseuses" (small version), 1884-1975 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7: Pictures generation and post-modern photography - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.1: Alfredo Jaar, A Logo for America - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.2: Barbara Kruger, Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.3: Jeff Wall, A View from an Apartment - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.4: Sally Mann, Blowing Bubbles - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.5: The Pictures Generation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.6: Cindy Sherman - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 7.6.1: Untitled Film Still #21 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 7.6.2: Untitled #228 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.7: Carrie Mae Weems, Untitled (Woman Feeding Bird), from The Kitchen Table Series - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.8: Joel Sternfeld, On This Site—The Stonewall Inn - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.9: Stan Douglas, Every Building on 100 West Hastings - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.10: Will Wilson interview about The Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.11: Annie Leibovitz, Queen Elizabeth II - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.12: Trevor Paglen, The Black Sites—The Salt Pit, Northeast of Kabul, Afghanistan - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 7.13: Chris McCaw, Sunburned, GSP #166, Mohave/Winter Solstice - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8: Revisiting histories - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.1: Betye Saar, Liberation of Aunt Jemima - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.2: Nari Ward, We the People (black version) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.3: Kara Walker - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.3.1: An interview with Kara Walker - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.3.2: Darkytown Rebellion - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.3.3: Kara Walker, A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Bab - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.3.4: Kara Walker, Fons Americanus - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.4: Alison Saar, Topsy and the Golden Fleece - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.5: Kerry James Marshall - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.5.1: An interview with Kerry James Marshall about his series Mementos - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.5.2: Kerry James Marshall- Mastry - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 8.5.3: Kerry James Marshall on his process - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.6: Clarissa Rizal, Resilience Robe - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.7: Tenzing Rigdol, Pin drop silence- Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.8: Thornton Dial, Blood and Meat- Survival For The World - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.9: Titus Kaphar, The Cost of Removal - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.10: Omar Victor Diop- Black subjects in the frame - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.11: Wendy Red Star, 1880 Crow Peace Delegation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.12: Yee I-Lann, Picturing Power #6… - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.13: Roger Shimomura, Diary- December 12, 1941 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.14: An interview with Fred Wilson about the conventions of museums and race - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.15: Ken Gonzales-Day, Erased Lynching Series - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.16: Kenseth Armstead, Surrender Yorktown 1781 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.17: Lam Tung Pang on "A day of two Suns" - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.18: Michael Rakowitz- Haunting the West - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9: Mapping and migration - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 9.1: Julie Mehretu, Stadia II - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 9.2: Doris Salcedo, Shibboleth - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.3: Doris Salcedo- Third World Identity - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.4: Raúl de Nieves, Beginning and the end neither and the otherwise betwixt and between the end is the beginning and the end - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.5: Julie Mehretu, HOWL, eon (I, II) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.6: Julie Mehretu, HOWL, eon (I, II) (Masterpiece Moment) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.7: An interview with Alfredo Jaar - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.8: Jamie Wyeth, Kalounna in Frogtown - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.9: Zineb Sedira – 'The Personal is Political' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.10: Suchitra Mattai, Exodus - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

10: Borderlands - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 10.1: Tanya Aguiñiga, Metabolizing the Border - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.2: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Border Tuner - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.3: Postcommodity arts collective - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.4: Richard Misrach, Border Cantos - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.5: Minerva Cuevas, Crossing of the Rio Bravo - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.6: Jaime Carrejo, Border/Land - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.7: Guadalupe Maravilla, Requiem For My Border Crossing - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

11: Figuration, the body, and representation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 11.1: How did Lucian Freud present queer and marginalized bodies? - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.2: Lucian Freud, Standing by the Rags - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.3: Identity Politics- From the Margins to the Mainstream - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.4: Louise Bourgeois, Maman - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.5: Stephanie Syjuco, The Visible Invisible - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.6: Renée Stout, interview about Fetish #2 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.7: Wangechi Mutu - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.7.1: Wangechi Mutu, Preying Mantra - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.7.2: Wangechi Mutu, The NewOnes, will free Us - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.8: Marina Abramović, The Artist is Present - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.9: Rineke Dijkstra, Odessa, Ukraine, August 4, 1993 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.10: An interview with Maryam Hoseini - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.11: Jordan Casteel paints her community - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.12: Luchita Hurtado's body of work - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.13: Shirin Neshat - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.13.1: Rebellious Silence, Women of Allah series - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.13.2: 'Dreams Are Where Our Fears Live' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.14: Kehinde Wiley - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.14.1: Rumors of War - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.14.2: Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.15: Yinka Shonibare, The Swing (After Fragonard) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.16: Figures and Fictions- Santu Mofokeng - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.17: Kiki Smith, Lying with the Wolf - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.18: Catherine Opie - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.18.1: Self-Portrait/Cutting - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.18.2: Figure and Landscape series - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.19: Stefanie Jackson, Bluest Eye - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.20: Ellen Galagher, DeLuxe - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.21: Ah Xian artist interview - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.22: Takashi Murakami - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.23: Will Wilson, Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.24: Lorna Simpson – 'Everything I Do Comes from the Same Desire' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.25: Amy Sherald, Precious Jewels by the Sea - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.26: Michelle Browder, Mothers of Gynecology - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.27: Douglas Coupland, Terry Fox Memorial - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

12: Social practice - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 12.1: Guerrilla Girls, 'You Have to Question What You See' (interview) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 12.2: Ai Wei Wei, Remembering and the Politics of Dissent - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.3: Ai Wei Wei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.4: Tania Bruguera, The Francis Effect - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.5: Tania Bruguera, Immigrant Movement International - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.6: Theaster Gates on collecting - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.7: Danh Vo Interview- Art Should Estrange - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.8: Lida Abdul – 'A Beautiful Encounter With Chance' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

13: Public memory and the politics of place - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 13.1: An-My Lê, 29 Palms - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.2: Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.3: Kerry James Marshall, Our Town - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.4: SAAM- Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii, 1995 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.5: Do Ho Suh, Rubbing/Loving - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.6: The National Memorial for Peace and Justice (Equal Justice Initiative) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.7: Krzysztof Wodiczko, Monument - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.8: Daniel Libeskind, Imperial War Museum North, Manchester, UKNew Page - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.9: Birdhead – 'We Photograph Things That Are Meaningful To Us' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.10: Contemporary politics and classical architecture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.11: Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, Native Hosts (Arkansas) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.12: What's in a map? Jaune Quick-To-See Smith's State Names (2000) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.13: Graciela Iturbide, Photographing Mexico - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.14: Contemporary Native American Architecture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.15: Mark Bradford's 150 Portrait Tone - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.16: Artist Richard Bell – 'My Art is an Act of Protest' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.17: Yatika Starr Fields and mural painting - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.18: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

14: Landscape and ecology - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 14.1: Stéphane Couturier, Fenetre, Eastlake Greens, San Diego - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.2: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Earth's Creation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.3: Maya Lin, Silver Upper White River - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.4: Courtney Leonard, ARTIFICE Ellipse, 2016 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.5: Sebastião Salgado's Kuwait - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.6: Michel Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe (Corned Beef 2000) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.7: James Turrell, Skyspace, the way of color - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.8: Roger Minick, Woman with Scarf at Inspiration Point, Yosemite National Park - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.9: Binh Danh, Bridalveil Fall, Yosemite CA, May 31, 2012 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.10: Thiebaud, Ponds and Streams - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.11: Noel Harding, The Elevated Wetlands - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.12: Artist Dale Harding – 'Environment is Part of Who You Are' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.13: Mel Chin, Paydirt - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

15: Digital culture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 15.1: An interview with Jamian Juliano-Villani - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 15.2: Meriem Bennani's Exploded Visions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 15.3: Art, Race, and the Internet- Mendi + Keith Obadike's Black.Net.Art Actions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 15.4: Cao Fei, Building "RMB City" - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 15.5: Shahzia Sikander, The Last Post - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

16: Assemblage and materiality - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 16.1: Assemblage - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.2: Magdalene Anyango N. Odundo, Symmetrical Reduced Black Narrow-Necked Tall Piece - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.3: Nick Cave's "Soundsuits" - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.4: Damián Ortega, Alias - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.5: Abraham Cruzvillegas, Autoconstrucción - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 16.6: Rebecca Belmore on Rising to the Occasion - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.7: El Anatsui - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 16.7.1: El Anatsui, Untitled - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 16.7.2: El Anatsui, Old Man's Cloth - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.8: Mickalene Thomas on her Materials and Artistic Influences - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.9: Fred Wilson- Beauty and Ugliness - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.10: Kohei Nawa, PixCell-Deer#24 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.11: Zheng Chongbin on "I Look for the Sky" - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.12: An interview with artist Ogawa Machiko - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.13: Lares Feliciano, Memory Mirror installation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.14: Mona Hatoum – 'Nothing Is a Finished Project' - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.15: Jesús Rafael Soto, Houston Penetrable - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.16: Artist Profile- Sopheap Pich on Rattan, Sculpture, and Abstraction - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.17: Who is Rachel Whiteread? - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.18: Artist interview with Lee Bul about Willing To Be Vulnerable - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.19: Ellen Gallagher- Cutting - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.20: Thornton Dial, Sr., Crossing Waters - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.21: Shan Goshorn (Eastern Band Cherokee), Sealed Fate- Treaty of New Echota Protest Basket - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.22: Richard Zane Smith (Wyandotte Nation), Wyandotte Feast Pot - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.23: Marilyn Spoon, Bandolier Bag - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

17: Spirituality and transcendence - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 17.1: Jack Whitten on Mapping the Soul - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 17.2: Bill Viola, The Crossing - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 17.2: Lee Ufan - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 17.3: Richard Mayhew, Indigenous Spiritual Space - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 17.4: Mariko Mori, Pure Land - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 17.6: Bruce Nauman, The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

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