SMARTHISTORY OF ART IXB - MODERNISM 1945-1980



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10: SmartHistory of Art IXb- Modernism 1945-1980

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SECTION OVERVIEW

1.1: France

European artists responded to the devastation of World War II with new subjects and methods.

1945 - 1980

1.1.1: Jean Dubuffet, A View of Paris- The Life of Pleasure

1.1.2: Jean Dubuffet, Childbirth

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1.1.1: Jean Dubuffet, A View of Paris- The Life of Pleasure

by DR. STEPHANIE CHADWICK

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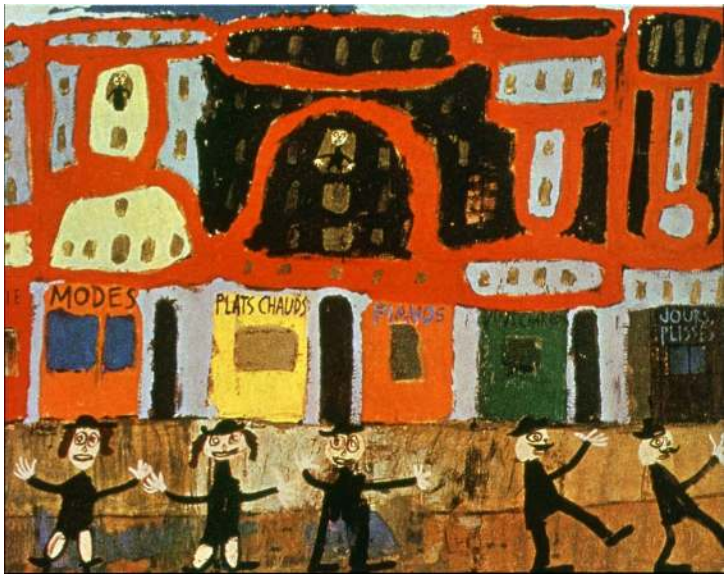


Figure **1.1.1.1**: Jean Dubuffet, *View of Paris*, *The Life of Pleasure*, 1944, oil on canvas, 88.5 x 116 cm (private collection)

Perhaps the first response to Dubuffet's *A View of Paris: The Life of Pleasure* is the sense that it could have been painted by a child. In fact, Dubuffet looked to children's art as a model of unbridled creativity and he emulated it in his work, marking his canvases with scribbles, smears, and crudely rendered figures. Dubuffet was not the first European artist to mimic children's art. Many artists in the earlier decades of the twentieth century had turned to children's drawings for inspiration—and to breathe fresh life into European painting. The efforts of these early twentieth-century painters to infuse their art with the seemingly innocent expression of children's drawing were so successful that they created an artistic revolution. Overturning the rigorous craftsmanship dictated by academic convention in favor of free and expressive rendering became an important step for modern artists. As many painters turned their backs on their formal artistic training, their work demonstrated both an urge to rebel against convention and a desire to tap into what was seen as the unfettered, even primal creativity of childhood.



Figure **1.1.1.2**: Watercolor, 20 x 32 cm, Plate XIV in Hans Prinzhorn, Bildnerei der Geisteskranken: ein Beitrag zur Psychologie und Psychopathologie der Gestaltung (Berlin, 1922)

Irony and discontent

Dubuffet's style was seen as a particularly aggressive expression of his discontent with Western culture. The Second World War was just ending in France as he painted this canvas and everywhere he was surrounded by its destruction and its implications. One would hardly guess this extreme historical context, given the childlike qualities of the rendering and Dubuffet's title, which presents Parisian life as a "life of pleasure." The irony becomes apparent by looking closer at the painting.

Vacillating between joyful and jarring, Dubuffet's bright reds appear garish in the context of war-torn Paris, which had suffered many hardships while occupied by German forces. Similarly, Dubuffet's painting style, characterized by roughly handled paint and crude, thick marks, leans more toward unrestrained forcefulness than the presumed innocence of children's art. Another important source for Dubuffet was art produced by societal outsiders, including those with psychiatric disorders. Dubuffet had begun researching and collecting such art, which he called Art Brut (roughly translated as raw art) at the end of World War II. His interest had begun as early as the 1920s, when he and other modern artists became fascinated with the book, ***Artistry of the Mentally Ill*** by the German psychiatrist and art historian Hans Prinzhorn (above, left). Just as they had looked to children for imaginative forms, these artists emulated what they took as the crude, forceful expressiveness of the mentally ill. In this art, they saw creativity untamed by Western cultural traditions. Dubuffet became so fascinated with this art that he started a collection that is now in a museum in Lausanne, Switzerland. Although Dubuffet claimed that he did not directly copy the art produced by the mentally ill, or the art of children, their impact on this painting is undeniable.

Fashions

Dubuffet's painting, *A View of Paris: The Life of Pleasure*, is a great example of his efforts to change the way people view and think about art. On the one hand, the painting makes use of multiple perspectives to create a forceful visual impact. Parisian storefronts shift between a frontal elevation seen from street level and a plan, or bird's eye view, seen from above. Dubuffet used this dislocating strategy in many of his paintings of the mid-1940s.

Dubuffet was a wine wholesaler who sold his own version of pleasure—wine—before becoming a full time artist during the war. He was concerned that art and culture had been overtaken by market forces. Dubuffet also had a contentious relationship high culture and used playful double entendres in his art to parody these forces. One example in this painting is the sign at left that reads "Modes," the French word for fashion. At first glance this sign simply advertises a clothing store, but "modes" also translates as "ways" as in the ways that something is done. Dubuffet was interested, not in the ways the market drove artistic fashions, but with doing away with the idea of artistic styles and trends altogether. Instead, Dubuffet sought to create art that spoke to the viewer's memories of childhood adventure and discovery. He wanted art to be freed from rules and other forces that he believed stifled creative expression.

Dubuffet's painting is both a parody of high culture and also a celebration of the energy of the city and its inhabitants. The people on the street recall stick figures drawn by children, nevertheless they suggest action. The three at the bottom left address the viewer directly with outstretched arms, and the two at right march stiffly off the side of the canvas, as if leading a carnivalesque parade. Carnivals, circuses, and parades also intrigued Dubuffet, and he saw them as sites where childlike playfulness, cultural transgression, and creativity collide. This was the collision he hoped to convey in this painting, and with which he hoped to inspire the viewer.

Additional Resources

Jean Dubuffet, *Asphyxiating Culture and other Writings*, trans. Carol Volk (New York: Four Walls, 1986).

Mildred Glimcher, *Jean Dubuffet: Towards an Alternative Reality* (New York: Pace Publications, 1987).

Michael Hall, D. E. W. Metcalf, and Roger Cardinal, *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

Hans Prinzhorn, *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken: ein Beitrag zur Psychologie und Psychopathologie der Gestaltung* (Berlin, 1922)

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1.1.2: Jean Dubuffet, Childbirth

by DR. STEPHANIE CHADWICK

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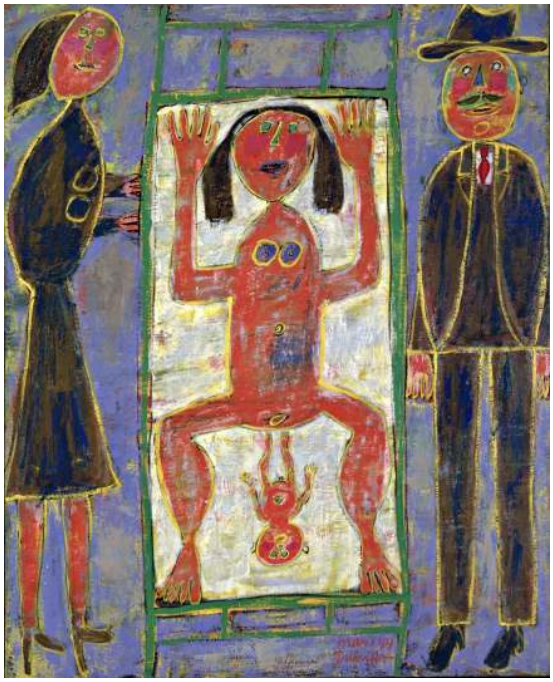


Figure **1.1.2.1**: Jean Dubuffet, *Childbirth*, 1944, oil on canvas, 99.8 x 80.8 cm (MoMA)

Jean Dubuffet's *Childbirth* is a particularly striking work of art, but not because it's aesthetically pleasing. In fact, Dubuffet intended quite the opposite. He wanted his art to disturb his viewers. Perhaps, the most jarring aspect of this painting is the central image of a mother giving birth. The figure has been flattened and tilted forward toward the picture plane (the surface of the canvas). Her hands are raised, as if gesturing "STOP!" or as if signaling shock or fear. Also arresting are the figure's rounded eyes, which open wide to gaze confrontationally toward the viewer, or alternately, off into space, suggesting an image of trauma. Dubuffet used these compositional strategies, combined with rough looking brushwork, pronounced outlines, and both murky and vivid colors to achieve this unnerving impact. He wanted his painting to be so agitating that it would change the way people look at art, the way people feel about art, and even the ways we define what art is. Dubuffet believed art was a liberating encounter that had been suppressed by museums, commercial art galleries, and other cultural institutions.



Figure **1.1.2.2**: (Bioma), early to mid-20th century, Wapo People, Papua New Guinea, wood and paint, 57.5 x 18.7 x 3.2cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Art Brut

Dissatisfied with artistic practices that had persisted since the Italian Renaissance, many painters in the early twentieth century sought to invigorate their art with pictorial forms that challenged the European tradition. When Dubuffet began painting professionally during WWII, he turned for inspiration to radically alternative imagery, including children's drawings, the art of the mentally ill, and other marginalized artists. He coined the term *Art Brut* (raw art) to describe the raw, untrained qualities he wanted to emulate in his painting. Like other artists of this period, Dubuffet also drew on various types of non-Western art for inspiration.

The desire to infuse art with primal creativity led artists like Dubuffet to erroneously conflate the art of children, mental patients, and non-Western cultures. They lumped together the pictorial forms these sources inspired and called them "primitivist" Primitivism became a loosely defined style, characterized by the visual contrast to established artistic conventions; and works such as Dubuffet's were either celebrated by fans or derided by hostile critics for their apparent crudeness. Although people today acknowledge primitivism's Eurocentricism (primitivism critiques Western culture while nevertheless privileging it), it is important to note that for these artists, "primitive" meant art that is essentially free from, and subversive to, Western cultural traditions. For Dubuffet, this was what art should really be about—a primal creative act.

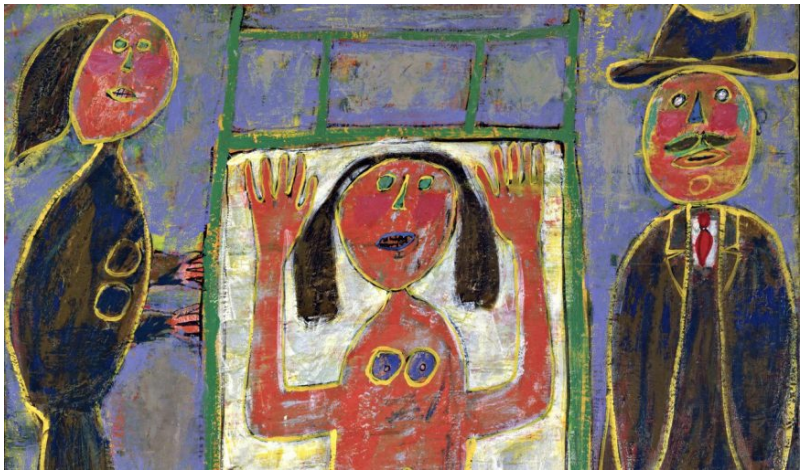


Figure **1.1.2.3**: Jean Dubuffet, *Childbirth* (detail), 1944, oil on canvas, 99.8 x 80.8 cm (MoMA)

Primal creation

The painting *Childbirth* is filled with references to non-Western art, particularly the art of the **Pacific Islands**. French Surrealist artists with whom Dubuffet associated, believed such art was an expression of primal creativity. For example, the central figure with raised arms is a motif seen in art from Papua New Guinea (above) that can sometimes refer to fertility and kinship. Dubuffet's used the image both for its subject, which may have signaled the primal creative act of childbirth for the artist, but also for its formal qualities, particularly the linear design and flattened forms. By emphasizing the flat canvas surface, Dubuffet reminds the viewer that the painting is a representation of reality, in contrast to Renaissance painters who relied on the illusionism of **linear perspective** (an artistic device used to create the illusion of depth in a painting) to create idealized scenes as though seen through a window.

Dubuffet plays with the notion of framing in his composition. The flattened figures of the mother and child have been tipped up so that the white rectangle of the hospital gurney presses forward rather than receding back into space, with its legs shown parallel to the floor. This is one of the ways Dubuffet subverts Renaissance perspective by calling attention to the canvas surface. Bluish colored rectangles surround the white rectangle of the gurney, creating planes occupied by the figures on the left and right that frame the child's birth.



Figure **1.1.2.4**: Jean Dubuffet, *Childbirth* (detail), 1944, oil on canvas, 99.8 x 80.8 cm (MoMA)

In Dubuffet's painting, these outside figures could represent a mother and father (perhaps the woman's parents) or perhaps the father of the child and another female participant, such as a sister or midwife. These figures are also crudely rendered, and may symbolize parenthood in general. A key difference is that these visitors wear Western garb whereas both mother and child are nude, a more natural state that that represents the act of childbirth.

Additional Resources

Jean Dubuffet, "Anticultural Positions," in *Dubuffet and the Anticulture* (New York: R. L. Feigen & Co, 1969).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1.2: Switzerland

1.2.1: Alberto Giacometti, Walking Man II
1.2.2: Jean Tinguely, Homage to New York

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1.2.1: Alberto Giacometti, Walking Man II

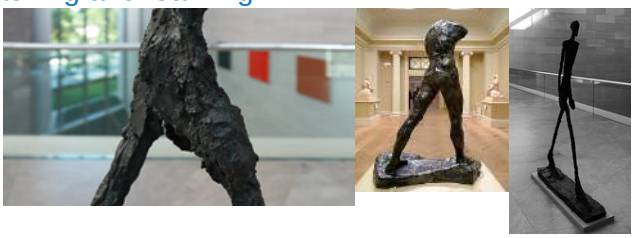
by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **1.2.1.1**: Alberto Giacometti, *Walking Man II*, 1960, bronze, 188.5 × 27.9 × 110.7 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington)

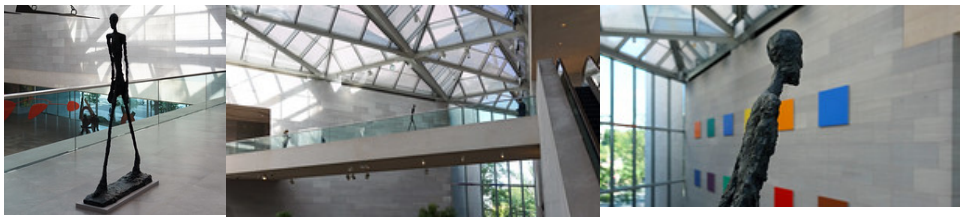
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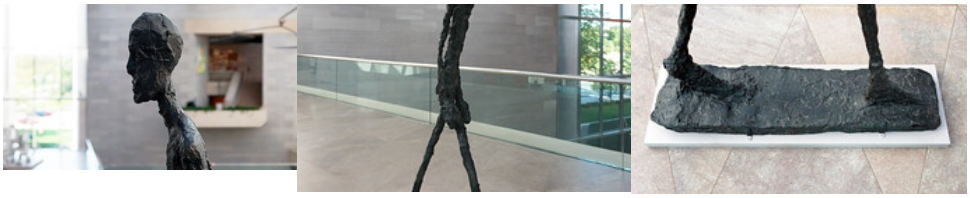
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1.2.2: Jean Tinguely, Homage to New York

by **DR. THOMAS FOLLAND**

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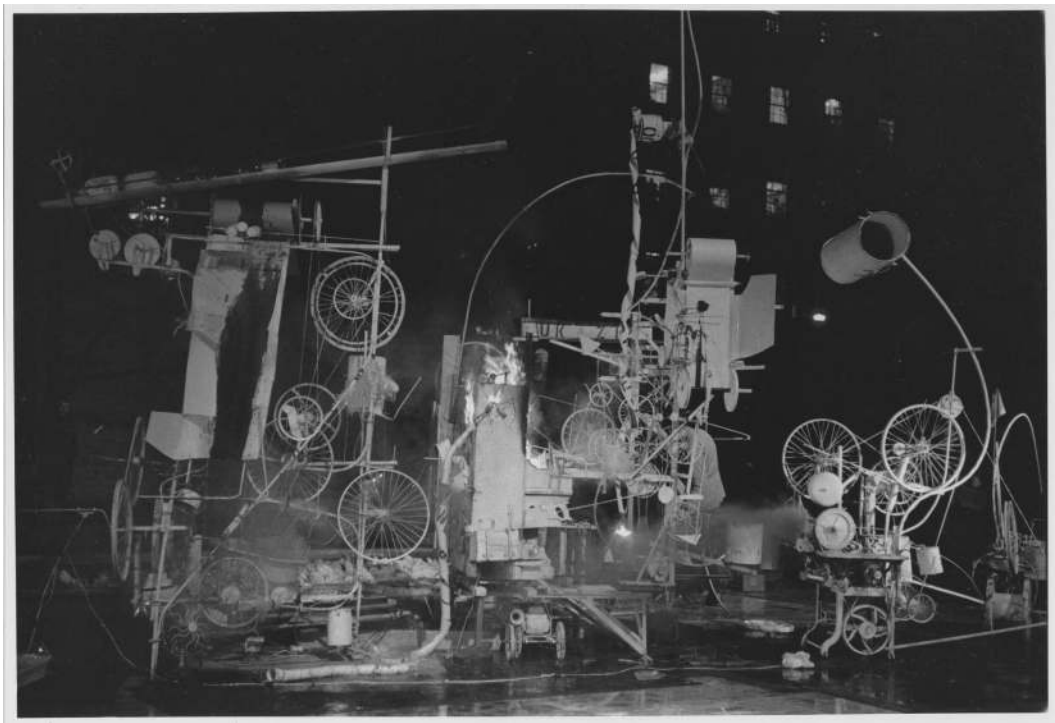


Figure **1.2.2.1**:Jean Tinguely, *Homage to New York*, 1960 (MoMA)

A self-destructing spectacle

In the spring of 1960, *Homage to New York* counted as one of the most exciting artistic events of the season. To create his spectacularly exploding machine, Swiss artist Jean Tinguely forged together a 23-foot-long by 27-foot-high assemblage of bicycle wheels, motors, metal drums, an old address labeling machine, a child's go-cart, a piano, and an enameled bathtub—all disparate emblems of industrial modernism. The resulting assemblage was built to slowly self-destruct before an invited audience, and it did just that in the garden of The Museum of Modern art on a Thursday evening in March. As if to erase any doubt as to its artistic merits, Tinguely described the entire construction, laboriously painted in white, as a "a sculpture, a picture, a painting." Delay timers were used to control the 15 motors that powered its various parts at intervals, as the artist began to dismantle other parts to assist in its self-destruction. After 30 minutes the entire thing buckled; its component parts lay smoking on the ground in ruins. As museum patrons sorted through the ruins for artistic souvenirs, the Fire Department arrived (unplanned) to put a stop to the whole affair.

It must surely have seemed that a new era was dawning— Pop Art was in its infancy, and the heroic period of the Post-war abstract painters and sculptors (such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning) was entering its twilight. The American art critic Clement Greenberg had written an essay in 1959 called "New York Only Yesterday," its title already tinged with a sense of nostalgia for a bygone era of the large gestural abstractions Greenberg had championed early on. Newer movements like happenings and performance art would soon become the talk of town.

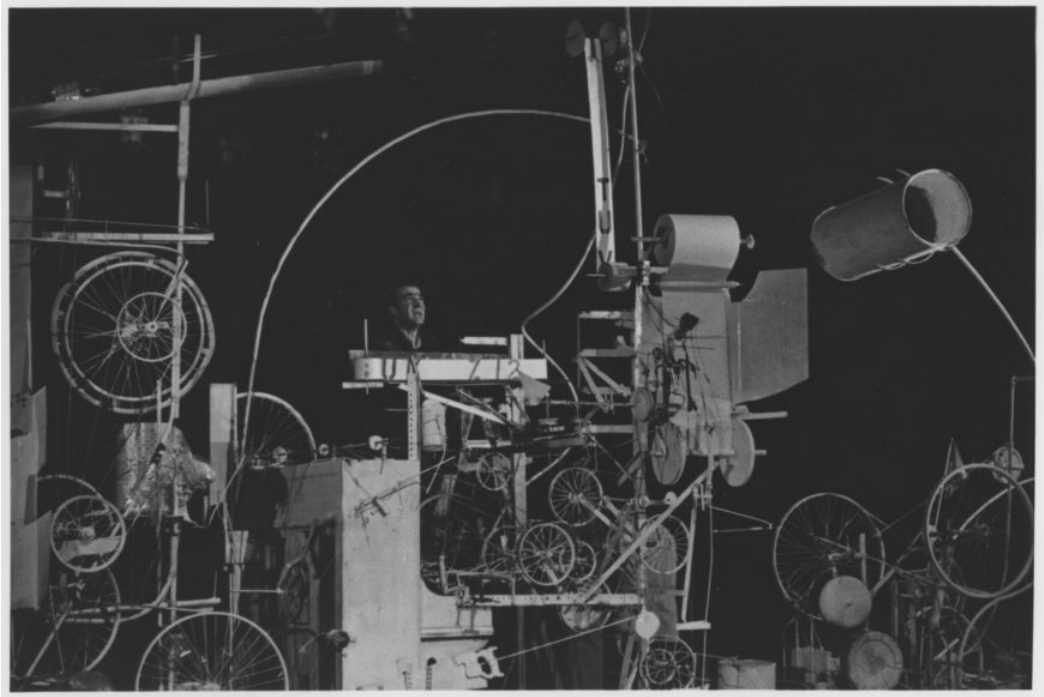


Figure **1.2.2.2**: Jean Tinguely installing *Homage to New York*, 1960 (MoMA)

A New Realism

Tinguely (himself only 30) had attached himself to the daring innovations of young artists like **Robert Rauschenberg** and the engineer Billy Kluver who collaborated with Tinguely on parts of *Homage to New York*. In October of 1960, Tinguely would participate in the creation of new movement: he signed *The Nouveau Réalisme Manifesto* along with a number of mostly French artists in the Parisian apartment of Yves Klein, all of whom advocated for a new kind of art, a "new realism" as the title of the manifesto translates. New realism sought to dissolve the distinction between art and the everyday world and often sought to create work out of the detritus of everyday life: fragments of movie posters, garbage, and for Tinguely, an enameled bathtub.

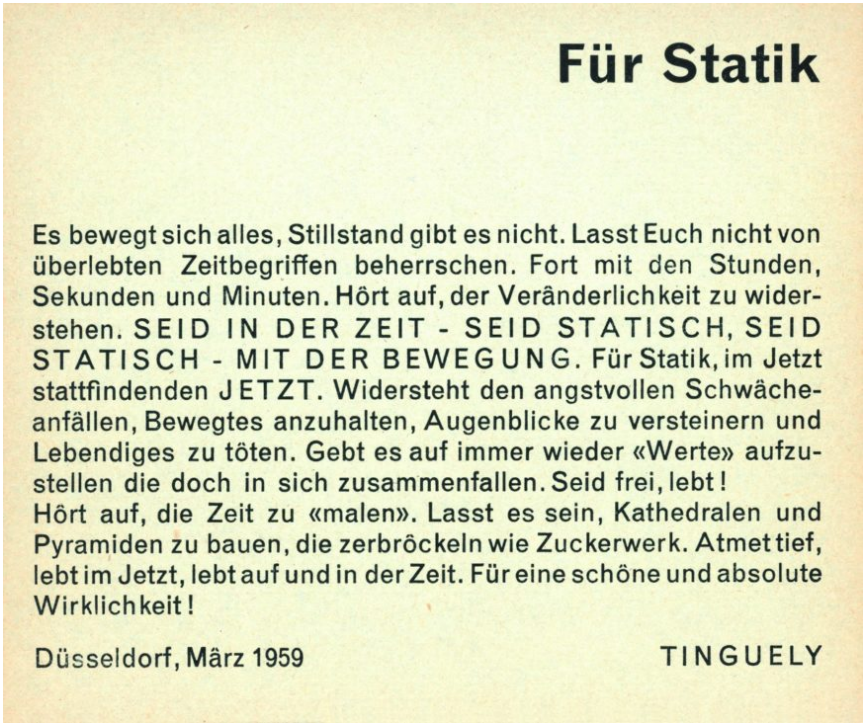
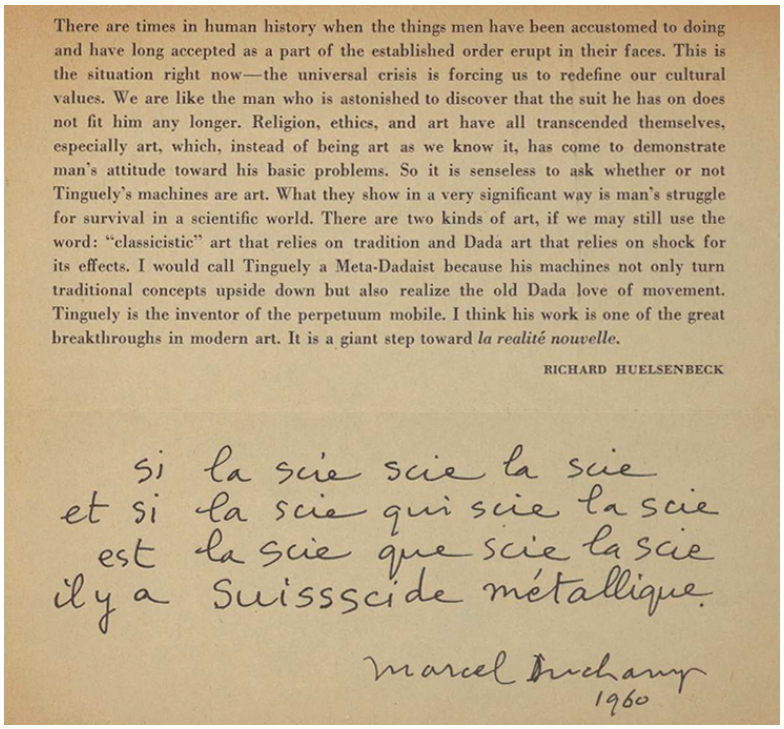


Figure **1.2.2.3**: Jean Tinguely, '*Für Statik*' (For Statics), flyer, March 1959

Another of Tinguely's contributions included an artistic action, in 1959, in which he dropped 150,000 copies of his manifesto *Für Statik* ("For Statics") on the German city of Dusseldorf and its suburbs. This action made clear reference to the dropping of propaganda leaflets during the Second World War which had only ended fourteen year earlier.[1]

The provocative strategies of these artists recalled the antics of the early twentieth-century Dada movement, a fact that did not go unnoticed by some of its surviving members. Both Richard Huelsenbeck and **Marcel Duchamp** enthusiastically endorsed Tinguely's new take on an old anti-art tactic of destruction: Huelsenbeck wrote a brief for MoMA's press release and Duchamp, with his characteristic love of puns, wrote a word play on Tinguely's Swiss origins: "Il y a un swissscide metallique" (roughly, "it is a metallic Swiss suicide").



There are times in human history when the things men have been accustomed to doing and have long accepted as a part of the established order erupt in their faces. This is the situation right now—the universal crisis is forcing us to redefine our cultural values. We are like the man who is astonished to discover that the suit he has on does not fit him any longer. Religion, ethics, and art have all transcended themselves, especially art, which, instead of being art as we know it, has come to demonstrate man's attitude toward his basic problems. So it is senseless to ask whether or not Tinguely's machines are art. What they show in a very significant way is man's struggle for survival in a scientific world. There are two kinds of art, if we may still use the word: "classicistic" art that relies on tradition and Dada art that relies on shock for its effects. I would call Tinguely a Meta-Dadaist because his machines not only turn traditional concepts upside down but also realize the old Dada love of movement. Tinguely is the inventor of the perpetuum mobile. I think his work is one of the great breakthroughs in modern art. It is a giant step toward *la realité nouvelle.*

RICHARD HUELSENBECK

si la scie scie la scie
et si la scie qui scie la scie
est la scie que scie la scie
il y a Suisssciede métallique.

Marcel Duchamp
1960

Figure **1.2.2.4**: Statements from Richard Huelsenbeck and Marcel Duchamp, Museum of Modern Art, "Homage to New York: a self-constructing and self-destroying work of art conceived and built by Jean Tinguely, the Museum of Modern Art Sculpture Garden, March 17, 1960, 6:30-7:00 P.M," press release, 1960 (MoMA)

Statements from Richard Huelsenbeck and Marcel Duchamp, Museum of Modern Art, "Homage to New York: a self-constructing and self-destroying work of art conceived and built by Jean Tinguely, the Museum of Modern Art Sculpture Garden, March 17, 1960, 6:30-7:00 P.M," press release, 1960 (MoMA)

Art and industrialization

Yet for all its seeming newness, Tinguely's *Homage to New York* spoke to a sentiment of the modern period that had haunted its culture for a long time. Industrialization has featured as an anxious part of modern art for a least as long as the 250 years or more since the Industrial Revolution. Its implications were evident with the advent of **photography**: the mechanical replication of landscapes, portraits, and urban scenes threatened to nudge the making of art, with its association of the unique characteristics of the hand, from its exalted position within **modern life**. Artistic life was soon defined by its turning away from the crasser aspects of modernization, reveling instead, as in the example of the **Romantic** landscape painting movement of the early nineteenth century, in the sublime features of nature, ignoring, at least for the moment, the devastation of the wilderness wrought by the forces of modernization.

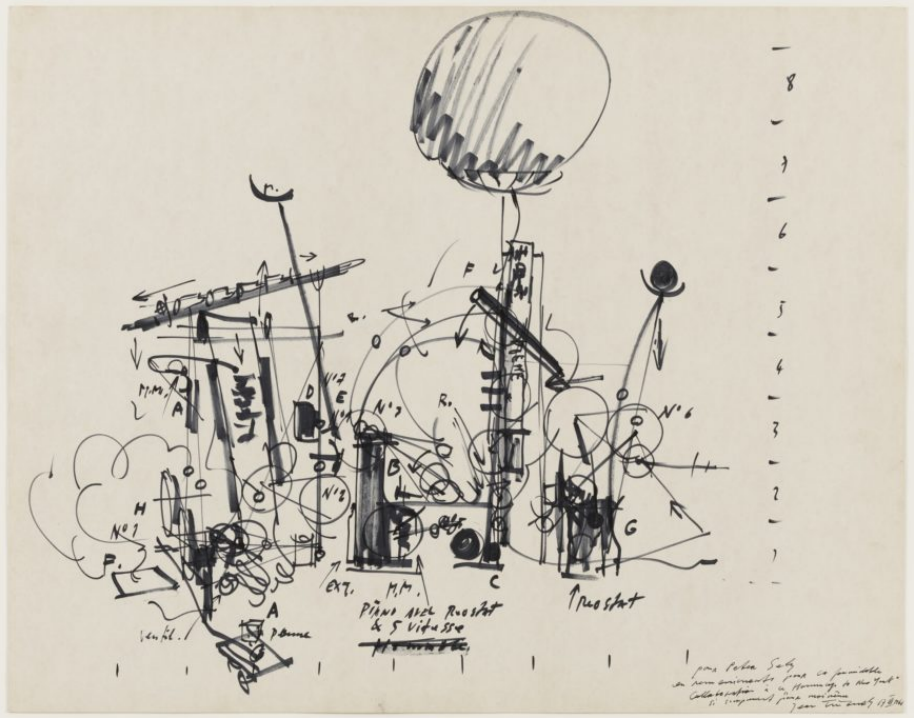


Figure 1.2.2.5: Jean Tinguely, *Sketch for Homage to New York*, 1960, felt-tip pen and ink on board, 22 1/8 x 28 inches (MoMA)

In the second half of the nineteenth century, we see the identity of the artist as *flâneur*—a figure based in literature (who first appeared in a story by Edgar Allan Poe) who would reject the conventions of society with its rhythms of life increasingly corresponding to the punctuality and routine of factory life. *Flâneurs*, detached from purpose and wandering the boulevards of late nineteenth-century Paris, became popular in literature and art. They were the observers, walking turtles on leashes, the pace of which defied the speeded-up sense of time that modern life now demanded. The *flâneur*'s disdainful observation of the world of contemporary urban society became a template for the modern artist's withdrawal from society. When Paul Gauguin famously proclaimed that "I am a savage" he was announcing his rejection of industrial modernity.

But Tinguely is on the opposite end of this spectrum of anxiety around industrialization that runs throughout modern art. On the cusp of the 1960s, his art embraced the machine, if only as a symbol of the destructive nature of the modern world, or at least as an example of his, and our, disillusionment with Modernism's promise of utopia, a promise that seems only to recede.

the security of your connection.

Access to this content has been

Jean Tinguely – Homage to New York (1960) from Stephen Cornford on Vimeo.

Notes:

1. The Tinguely Museum asserts that there is some question as to whether or not this action actually took place) Museum Tinguely, https://www.tinguely.ch/en/tinguely/tinguely-biographie.html [accessed 2 September 2020].
2. Museum of Modern Art, "Homage to New York : a self-constructing and self-destroying work of art conceived and built by Jean Tinguely, the Museum of Modern Art Sculpture Garden, March 17, 1960, 6:30-7:00 P.M," press release,

1960.https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_3369_300305208.pdf?_ga=2.204470736.137841735.1597685153-1480820940.1597270751 [accessed 2 September 2020].

Additional resources:

Watch a film of the making of *Homage to New York*

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1.3.1: Joseph Beuys

1.3.1.1: Table with Accumulator (Tisch mit Aggregat)

1.3.1.2: Fat Chair

1.3.1.3: Feet Washing and Conceptual Performance

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1.3.1.1: Table with Accumulator (Tisch mit Aggregat)

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

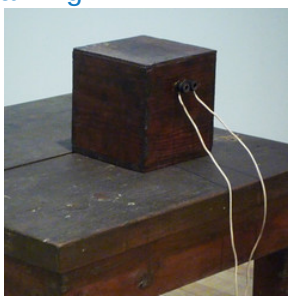
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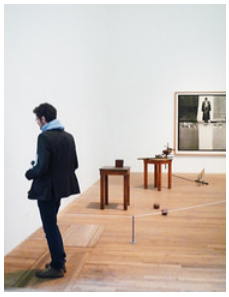
Video **1.3.1.1.1**: Joseph Beuys, Table with Accumulator (Tisch mit Aggregat)

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1.3.1.2: Fat Chair

by DR. DAVOR DŽALTO

Page ID
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Figure **1.3.1.2.1**: Joseph Beuys, *Fat Chair*, 1964-1985, wood, glass, metal, fabric, paint, fat and thermometer, 183 x 155 x 64 cm (Tate Modern, London)

The artist as “shaman”

The first encounter with a work by Joseph Beuys is often surprising. Look, for example, at *Fat Chair*. It is composed of an old, rather ordinary chair with fat placed on the seat. Keep in mind all of the features that fat possesses as a material, and it is clear that a lot of fat and an old chair are not meant to produce feelings of aesthetic pleasure. Other materials that Beuys uses in his work: wax, filth, animal hair, and blood, possess similar qualities. Each is a natural material but none are very pleasant in their appearance, structure or smell. Why should artwork be like that? Shouldn’t art be “fine” or “beautiful” in some sense?

These works of art are part of Beuys’ broader artistic strategy, which can be called “shamanism.” Beuys often used natural materials and cult-like ceremonies through which he tried to underline the importance of the irrational and mystical in human beings. With this practice, Beuys tried to oppose the “rational” in contemporary society. He perceived his art as a social mission, needed to heal post-war German society. He wanted to heal, first of all, those who built Auschwitz—that terrible symbol of Nazi horror. This task required an even deeper reform–since in Beuys’ eyes, the real source of National Socialism was found in the extreme rationality of modern society.

For Beuys, extreme rationality, efficiency and technocracy, defined the modern era; and although seemingly good, he viewed these trends as extremely dangerous. The Holocaust was only possible because of Germany’s rationality, efficiency and functionality coupled with its specific ideological premises. Beuys sought to contrast the Holocaust’s rationality with the irrationality he believed could be found in so-called “primitive societies.” Irrationality, understood in this way, focused on concrete people, not on abstract or theoretical principles. Beuys suggested that only this could prevent human destruction. “Shamanism” was a part of this “primitive” practice of healing human beings physically, morally, and spiritually.

This shamanistic use of natural materials is meant to underscore man’s relation to nature and to a concrete human community in which the practice of healing takes place. These practices do not have an aesthetic purpose and the materials used by Beuys do not pretend to be anything other than what they are—unpleasant, rough natural materials. They are real and do not mislead and this truthfulness yields a kind of beauty.

Additional resources:

This work at the Tate

Walker Art Center biography of the artist

Walker Art Center article on the materials Beuys used and their meaning

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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1.3.1.3: Feet Washing and Conceptual Performance

by DR. DAVOR DŽALTO

Page ID
194658

“Every man is an artist”

What can art be? Can a lecture or a public discussion be art? The 20th century has taught us that almost everything can be used as art. The photographs that record the teaching and discussion practices of Joseph Beuys force us to think about the borders of art.



Figure 1.3.1.3.1: Joseph Beuys lecturing in Achberg, Germany 1978 (Photo: Rainer Rappmann, CC: BY-SA 3.0)

We are also compelled to ask “what does it mean?” and even “why is it art at all?” Does it mean that everyone can be an artist? Can everything be art? According to Beuys, “everyone is an artist.” But to grasp the full meaning of this statement, one must look closely at the context of Beuys’ thought, which represents a general framework in which particular artwork appears.

For Beuys, there should be no clear demarcation between art and life. Human life means life in a community, with other people. Therefore, artistic activities (should) have a direct social impact. Beuys does not have in mind any kind of “applied arts” in service of a society, nor does he speak simply of “making society better.” He sees rather a metaphysical significance of human creative capacities and, consequently, art. Each human being has a creative potential in Beuys’ eyes. This potential is to be realized in communion with others. So the particular activities of individuals do matter but gain full meaning only if they lead to building a new society based on solidarity, creativity and freedom. In such a communion, man can reach his/her real identity, not only as a social atom, but as a person. This is the reason that Beuys perceives society as the greatest work of art, a “total work of art” (Gesamtkunstwerk).

This is what Beuys called the “social sculpture” (*Soziale Plastik*). This concept should not be understood in terms of aesthetics. “Social sculpture” does not mean that a society should adopt the aesthetic properties of, let’s say, sculpture, in order to become a total work of art. On the contrary, it is insistence on the very human capacity of freedom and creativity that should form the new society. In such a society, human beings will not just live “better” but will come to a broader exercising of their own humanity. In this sense, they will not only live a better life; they will also be able to be in a more fundamental sense. Here we see what the phrase “every man is an artist” (*jeder Mensch ist ein Kuenstler*) really means.

Beuys did not think that each human being should paint or produce particular things we call “art.” He rather sees creativity as a universal human capacity which enables man to be what he/she really is. Thus one’s existence becomes the same as artistic creation. The form of this creation is not of particular importance. This is the reason why Beuys can teach, give public lectures, or engage in political action and consider these activities “art.”

Another aspect of the idea of the “social sculpture” consists in Beuys’ critique of the modern society not only as an extremely rationalized but also as a highly individualized one. His understanding of the society as a “sculpture” is based on the concept of community in which people are tied by personal relations not by laws or any force.

Imitatio Christi

In his work *Feet Washing* (1971), Beuys is performing an action which reminds us of a famous story from the Gospel. It is the story when Christ washed the feet of his disciples showing his humility and demonstrating the principle “let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.”



Figure **1.3.1.3.2**: Joseph Beuys, *Celtic* + 1 of 13 parts, 1971, silver gelatin print, 19 3/4 x 15 3/4 in. (Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kansas)

In this action, Beuys represents Christ himself, giving a lecture on modesty and service instead of dominance. The action also shows one of the principal Christian virtues—rejection of individuality and selfishness in order to make room for God in human souls. In this example, we can see the impact of Christianity on the formation of Beuys' artistic concepts, not only as a symbol or illustration of Biblical stories but to which connect the artist's work with his understanding of the Christian tradition. These relations touch on some of Beuys's basic ideas on the world and art.

Beuys speaks of "the essence of Christ" (*das Wesen des Christus*) suggesting that every human being must be, potentially at least, "a kind of Christ." Stressing creativity and freedom as fundamental values, Beuys sought a means to build a new society in which "every man is an artist."

Additional resources:

This work at the Wichita Art Museum

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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1.3.2: Bernd and Hilla Becher, Water Towers

by **DR. CHRIS BALASCHAK**

Page ID
194659



Figure **1.3.2.1**: Bernd Becher, Hilla Becher, *Water Towers*, 1988, grid of nine gelatin silver prints, 172 × 140 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, © Estate of Bernd Becher & Hilla Becher)

In the late 1950s, photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher began documenting industrial architecture. Initially beginning in the Ruhr region of what was then West Germany and areas in the vicinity of their home and studio in Düsseldorf, they would go on to pursue their practice across Western Europe, the United Kingdom, and in the Rust Belt regions of the United States. Focused on infrastructure of the Industrial Age, the married couple and collaborators captured structures that were overlooked, declining, and would be dismantled after the onset of the Information Age in the late twentieth century. The Bechers' systematic documentation of industrial infrastructure resulted not in singular images of historically important examples, however, but in gridded typologies: a series of images that, when presented together, emphasized the formal similarities of buildings constructed for the same function.

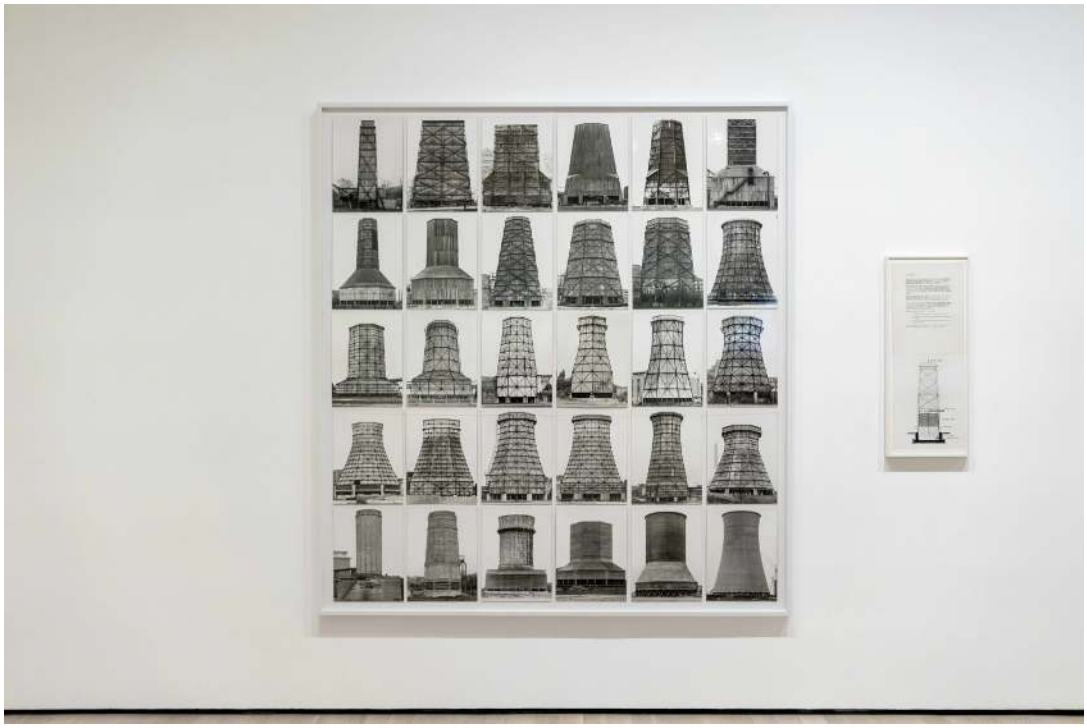


Figure **1.3.2.2**: Bernd Becher and Hilla Becher, *Anonymous Sculpture* (cooling towers), 1970, grid with 30 gelatin silver prints plus diagram, 207.3 × 188.4 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, © Estate of Bernd Becher and Hilla Becher)

Typologizing noble, modest, industrial structures

Water Towers is typical of the Bechers' approach to typological studies. Die Wassertürme, in their native German, were not the only buildings the Bechers would photograph as typological studies throughout their career as collaborators. Their subjects ranged from structures used in the coal and steel industries (mine tipples, blast furnaces) to farming (silos, framework houses, grain elevators) and modern energy infrastructure (oil refineries, gas holders, and cooling towers as seen above).



Figure **1.3.2.3**: Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Water Tower, Verviers, Belgium*, 1983, printed 1989, gelatin silver print, 60.6 x 50.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, © The Estate of Bernd and Hilla Becher)

They captured these places with stunning austerity and incredible consistency. The black-and-white photographs in any given typology may have been taken over the course of several years (note the date range in their Winding Towers, dated 1966–97). Despite such historical breadth, each photograph captures its subject with uniform lighting, accentuating the structure with such clarity as to convey both a common shape across the group, while highlighting individual idiosyncrasies.

Consisting of nine photographs of concrete water towers, the grid of photographs that make up Water Towers (each in a separate frame, though exhibited together as a single unit) draws attention to a common form. Form relates to function (at least in these

structures), and a water tower's function is quite simple: it holds water from an elevated structure so the weight of the water's downward gravitational force will push the water throughout the system. As individual specimens isolated within their respective landscapes, the water towers may be unremarkable. However here, photographed vertically with a large-format, 8-inch-by-10-inch view camera, the images read as portraits, and present the viewer with an opportunity to relish the peculiarities of each patched, stained, graffiti-adorned, defiantly enduring, well-worn remnant of the Industrial Age.



Figure **1.3.2.4**: August Sander, *Pastry Cook (Konditor)*, 1928, gelatin silver print, 30.32 × 22.54 cm (Carnegie Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute)

Antlitz der Zeit (The Face of Our Time)

The Bechers' distinct approach to their subject matter belies the historical works that inspired their photographic pursuits. Particularly important is the work of **August Sander**, whose 1929 book *Antlitz der Zeit (The Face of Our Time)* reproduced sixty photographic portraits of a myriad of contemporary Germans. Sander's photographs of German society were organized as a spectrum of social castes, and his camera treated everyone as equals—whether they were Black, white, Jewish, a baker, a lawyer, a politician, or housing insecure. Likewise, Sander's subjects were nearly always identified by vocation, rather than name, and were centered in the frame as they made eye contact with the camera. Like the Bechers' work, Sander's project was formally and technically rigorous as its multiple images drew attention to differences and similarities across his subjects. For some, such an equitable treatment of individuals across races and classes was seen as threatening, and Sander's bookplates were confiscated and destroyed in 1933 as the Nazi Party rose to power. While the Bechers' approach can appear, in contrast to Sander, austere and desolate, their project was likewise marked by the social and economic conditions of their time.



Figure 1.3.2.5: Bernd Becher, Hilla Becher, *Water Towers*, 1971–2009, grid of nine gelatin silver prints, 172 × 142 cm (Tate, © Estate of Bernd Becher & Hilla Becher)

Picturing Western Economic Unification

While the Bechers' "portraits" of industrial buildings may appear less politically motivated than Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit*, installations such as Water Towers are perhaps more politically engaged than one might at first suspect. When displayed as gridded typologies, the photographs are notably devoid of particular historical indicators or even individual senses of place. These typologies present a uniform whole, and the focus is on form and format rather than geographic and political differences. In a manner, their work is about the transnational homogeneity of industrial architecture, communicating Western industrialization as a broad social and economic force. Of note, the Bechers' careers coincided with the creation of the European Economic Community (E.E.C.), an alliance of liberal democratic states in Western Europe that began in 1957 (the same year Bernd Becher made his first photographs of industrial buildings). The E.E.C. was the economic and political predecessor to the European Union. The Bechers' typologies visualize capitalism and industrialization as a transnational expression.

Minimalism and "Prime Objects"

In 1972, the Bechers' work was shown at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York. The exhibition was seen by many artists associated with Minimalism, a movement that emphasizes geometric simplicity, and industrial manufacture, thus calling attention to an object's form and spatial context within the exhibition space. The Bechers' rigorous, gridded, typologies were systematic, series-based works, like the work of many Minimalists. Importantly, many artists associated with Minimalism, including Robert Smithson, Mel Bochner, Carl Andre, and others, shared an affinity for the art historian George Kubler. His 1962 book *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* made the claim that all forms of art shared common denominators, or "Prime Objects." [1] These prototypical forms of art, according to Kubler, were a means of classifying all art objects, regardless of their original cultural context. A work such as the Bechers' *Water Towers* appears to express this same idea—between all of the formal differences in the nine water towers, we can perceive common attributes, a primary form.

While the Bechers' never confirmed if they were aware of Kubler's theories, they did make clear the importance of Ernst Haeckl's *Kunsformen der Natur* (1904), a visual work that, like Kubler's writings, used visual forms as a means for understanding the natural world. [2] Alongside their peers in the late-1960s (Smithson interpreted Kubler's theory of the prime object as, in short, "a shape that evades shape"), we can understand the Bechers' organizational conceit—the typology—as indicative of a shift toward ways of seeing that drew on influences from outside the canon of Western fine art practice. [3] The Bechers' unique approach

allowed for an appreciation style and beauty in forms of architecture that might be overlooked for their sheer functional and standardized appearance.



Figure **1.3.2.6**: Candida Höfer, *British Library I, London*, 1994, 38.1 × 57.8 cm (Israel Museum, Jerusalem, © Candida Höfer)

The Düsseldorf School of Photography

With their formal and conceptual rigor, it is not surprising to know that Bernd and Hilla Becher were respected and influential teachers. From the mid-1970s through the mid-1990s, they taught together at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf—which, prior to their arrival, had not viewed photography on equal grounds with other "fine arts." That would change as they established a rigorous and uniform aesthetic that would be known as "The Düsseldorf School of Photography," or the "Becher School."

The couple's propensity for using large-format cameras resulting in precise images that would be presented in a formally austere manner, influenced many of their students' works. An early generation of their students, including Candida Höfer, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Ruff, and Thomas Struth, became some of the most influential photographers of the 1980s and 1990s, a moment when digital photography brought into question the salience of analog photographic processes. These students' tendency for capturing the contemporary landscape, using color photography, printing their work in a large scale, pushed the technical limits of the medium, and reflected their teachers' contribution to the history of photography. In both their capacity as professors, and in their published and exhibited work, the Bechers' photography showed the conceptual and formal possibilities of the medium, and the ability for landscape photography to make incisive comments on contemporary society.

Notes:

[1] George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

[2] Hilla Becher, interview by Chris Balaschak, August 19, 2008, Duesseldorf, Germany.

[3] Robert Smithson, "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space," *Arts Magazine* 41, no. 1 (November 1966): p. 28.

Additional Resources

Carl Andre, "A Note on Bernhard and Hilla Becher," *Artforum* 11, no. 4 (December, 1972): p. 59.

Chris Balaschak, "Between Sequence and Seriality: Landscape Photography and Its Historiography in Anonyme Skulpturen." *Photographies* 3, no. 1 (2010): pp. 23–47.

Bernd Becher and Hilla Becher, *Anonyme Skulpturen* (Düsseldorf: Verlag Michelpresse, 1969).

Mel Bochner, "The Serial Attitude," *Artforum* 6, no. 4 (December 1967): pp. 28–33.

Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” *October* 9 (Summer, 1979): pp. 50–64.

Susanne Lange, *Bernd and Hilla Becher: Life and Work* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006).

Blake Stimson, “The Photographic Comportment of Bernd and Hilla Becher,” *Tate Papers* no. 1 (Spring, 2014).

This page titled 1.3.2: Bernd and Hilla Becher, Water Towers is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Chris Balaschak, "Bernd and Hilla Becher, Water Towers, 1988," in Smarthistory, June 16, 2022, accessed January 15, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/becher-water-towers/.\.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1.3.3: Sigmar Polke

1.3.3.1: Bunnies

1.3.3.2: Watchtower series

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1.3.3.1: Bunnies

by KATRINA KLAASMEYER

Page ID

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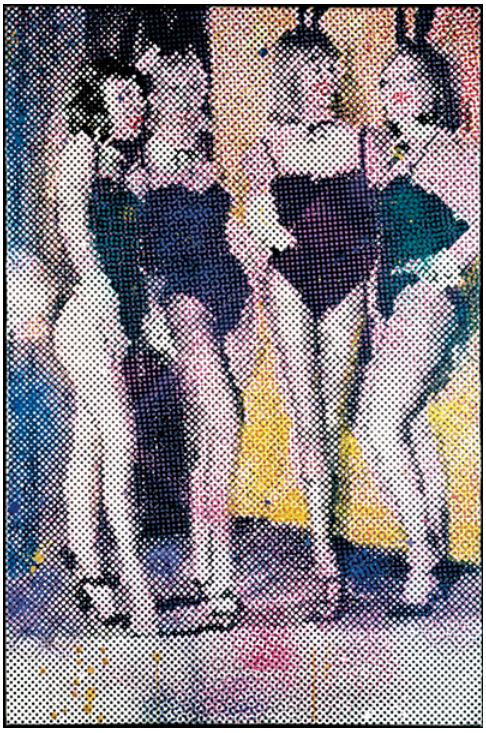


Figure **1.3.3.1.1**: Sigmar Polke, *Bunnies*, 1966, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 100 cm / 59 x 39-½" (Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C.)

Multi-colored dots swirl throughout the picture plane. Smudges, blurs, irregularities—all are intentional. The artist, Sigmar Polke, delights in imperfections. Stand too close to the canvas and you are immersed within the erratic whirl of dots. Take a step back, and the imagery coheres into the loosest arrangement, merely suggesting specific forms and thereby hindering the usual intent of a picture of Playboy bunnies—clarity and the illusion of proximity. Blurring forms and subverting content is a trademark of this artist who is known for his experimental methods. The repetitive dots may bring to mind the comic book style of Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein, with his neatly arranged Ben-Day dot patterns, but this is not a bad imitation of American Pop Art. It is something else entirely.



Figure **1.3.3.1.2**: Detail, Sigmar Polke, *Bunnies*, 1966, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 100 cm / 59 x 39-½" inches (Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C.)

Crucible of the Cold War

In the mid-1960s, Sigmar Polke was an art student in Düsseldorf, West Germany; however, he was born and lived in the Eastern Bloc until he was 12 (Polke's birthplace, Silesia, is now part of Poland). The Cold War was then at its height, and Germany was a microcosm of the conflicts that then divided Europe. Likewise, the differences between the zones of this divided country were substantial. By 1970 West Germany had one of the world's largest economies, and its citizens enjoyed increasing financial prosperity and a steady rise in the standard of living. Conversely, in East Germany, coffee, beer, and cigarettes remained luxuries, and the average household did not have modern appliances such as refrigerators and color televisions, items that had become common in the West.

Moving from the Communist East to the capitalist West had a profound effect on Polke. Yet importantly, he took a distanced view of the West's glittering facade of consumer paradise.



Figure **1.3.3.1.3**: The Eastern Bloc (basic membership only) (map: **Mosedschurte**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

The visual arts were different as well. West Germany looked to the radical art movements occurring in New York—Abstract Expressionism and later Pop Art. In contrast, East Germany, which was controlled by the Soviet Union, dictated that art should portray an idealized future, and should serve the people as a means of education and inspiration. This was the basis of East German Socialist Realist art.

Capitalist Realism

In the mid-1960s, Sigmar Polke applied the label "Capitalist Realism" to his work. This term was conceptualized with his fellow students Gerhard Richter, one of the most highly regarded contemporary artists, and Konrad Lueg, whose later career as a gallerist (under his proper name Konrad Fischer) influenced the course of art in Europe.

This term mocks East German Socialist Realism, critiques capitalism, and distinguishes the art made by these young Germans from American Pop Art. Capitalist Realism is characterized by ambiguity, the banality of its representations, and a dialogue between traditions in the fine arts and popular consumer culture. These artists were not mimicing Pop Art, but were searching for a way to express the complexities of the dual political and socioeconomic systems in Germany.

Polke's early painting, *Bunnies*, is an example of the artist's ability to simultaneously distance the viewer while immersing them within the imagery. The painting may have been based on an advertisement for membership into Hugh Hefner's Playboy Clubs. The first of these clubs opened in 1960 and the original image would have functioned as more than just a photograph of beautiful

women meant to evoke physical desire, it was also a tantalizing portrayal of a lifestyle that could be purchased. Polke dissolves these sex symbols into clusters of dots and smudges exposing the image's seductive illusion. Polke frustrates the viewer's desire by emphasizing the materiality of the image at the expense of the clarity and individuality of the women.

In the end, the label "Capitalist Realism" was simply a tool for Lueg, Polke, and Richter at the start of their careers. The artists abandoned it quickly, refusing to be limited by even this self-imposed term.

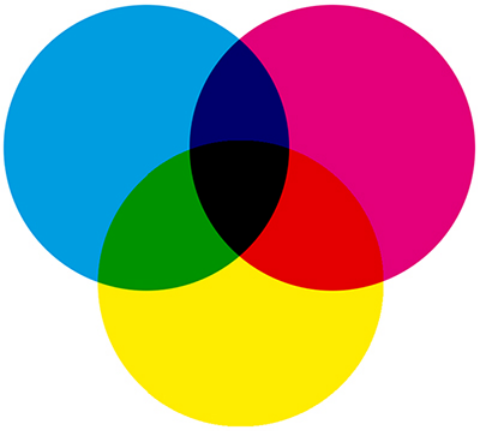


Figure **1.3.3.1.4**: CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow and black)

Rasterbilder

In his *rasterbilder* (paintings that overtly mimic printing) such as *Bunnies*, Polke often used photographs taken from the newspaper. In recognition of this inexpensive printing process, Polke's color *rasterbilder* are composed entirely of four colors—cyan, magenta, yellow, and black—the standard process colors of commercial printing. Polke composed this work by overlapping layers of paint, which he applied through a stencil simulating halftone dots. It was important to Polke for the hand of the artist to be visible. In other words, Polke wanted to make it obvious that this was a painting produced by an artist, and not by mechanical reproduction despite the references he was making. He accomplished this in two ways.

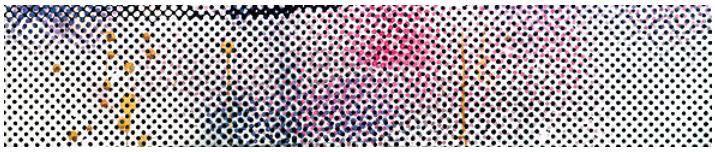


Figure **1.3.3.1.5**: Detail, Sigmar Polke, *Bunnies*, 1966, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 100 cm / 59 x 39-½" (Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C.)

First, he meticulously hand-painted dots of varying sizes and shapes; some are full and rounded, others are square and only partly formed. Distances between the dots lengthen and shorten with no regular pattern and varies in intensity. Next, he experimented with color gradations and intensity. Sometimes the dots are multi-colored with a white background. Sometimes the dots are white against a multi-colored background.

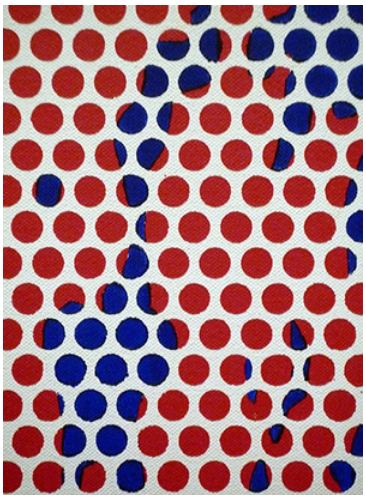


Figure **1.3.3.1.6**: Detail, Roy Lichtenstein, *Rouen Cathedral Set V*, 1969, oil, magna on canvas, 3 canvases: 63-5/8 x 141-7/8 x 1-3/4 inches (SFMOMA)

Roy Lichtenstein's process was very different. The American artist would project a drawing onto a canvas and then stencil uniform dots using large, pre-cut metal screens. He also used heavy, dark lines to enclose this orderly system of dots. Lichtenstein's paintings articulate the original image with crisp legibility and glamorize the mass media. In contrast, Polke plays games of concealment and revelation.

What then is the subject of the painting *Bunnies*? Is it the women, or the painted dots that refuse to define them? For Polke's work, the question may be more important than the answer.

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1.3.3.2: Watchtower series

by KATRINA KLAASMEYER

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194662

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 **1.3.3.2.1**: 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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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1.3.4: Gerhard Richter

1.3.4.1: Uncle Rudi

1.3.4.2: Betty

1.3.4.3: Gerhard Richter, September

1.3.4.4: Gerhard Richter, The Cage Paintings (1-6)

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1.3.4.1: Uncle Rudi

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Figure **1.3.4.1.1**: 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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1.3.4.2: Betty

- *by SAL KHAN and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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Video **1.3.4.2.1**: Gerhard Richter, *Betty*, 1988, oil on canvas, 102 x 72cm (Saint Louis Art Museum)

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1.3.4.3: Gerhard Richter, September

- *by GERHARD RICHTER STUDIO*

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Video **1.3.4.3.1**: 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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1.3.4.4: Gerhard Richter, The Cage Paintings (1-6)

- by **GERHARD RICHTER STUDIO**

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Video **1.3.4.4.1**: Robert Storr talks about Gerhard Richter’s Cage paintings.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1.3.5: Anselm Kiefer

1.3.5.1: Anselm Kiefer, Shulamite
1.3.5.2: An interview with Anselm Kiefer

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1.3.5.1: Anselm Kiefer, Shulamite

by REBECCA TAYLOR

Page ID
194669



Figure 1.3.5.1.1: 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).

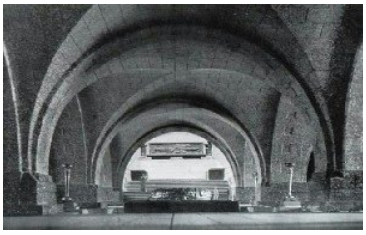


Figure **1.3.5.1.2**: Wilhelm Kreis, Funeral Hall for the Great German Soldier in the Hall of Soldiers, c. 1939 (Berlin)

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:

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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1.3.5.2: An interview with Anselm Kiefer

- by **SFMOMA**

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194670



Video **1.3.5.2.1**: 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 **1.3.5.2.2**: 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.

This page titled 1.3.5.2: 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 15, 2020, accessed January 15, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/sfmoma-talks-with-anselm-kiefer/..

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1.4: Britain

Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud returned to the academic tradition of figure painting—but with wholly different goals.

1945 - 1980

1.4.1: Barbara Hepworth, Pelagos

1.4.2: Describing Sculpture- Henry Moore's Reclining Figure

1.4.3: Francis Bacon, Triptych – August 1972

1.4.4: Lucian Freud, Standing by the Rags

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1.4.1: Barbara Hepworth, Pelagos

- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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Video **1.4.1.1**: Dame Barbara Hepworth, *Pelagos*, 1946, elm and string on oak base, 43 x 46 x 38.5 cm (Tate Britain). Pelagos is the word for “sea” in Greek.

This page titled 1.4.1: Barbara Hepworth, Pelagos is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Sheltered by the sea, Barbara Hepworth’s Pelagos," in Smarthistory, April 22, 2019, accessed August 27, 2020, https://smarthistory.org/hepworth-pelagos/..

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1.4.2: Describing Sculpture- Henry Moore's Reclining Figure

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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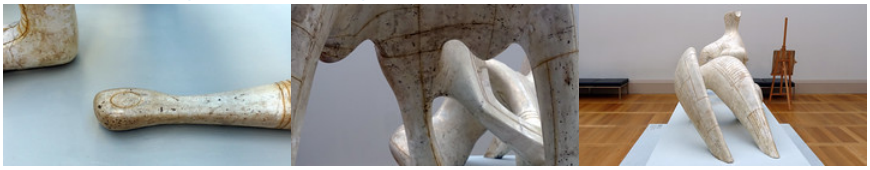
Video **1.4.2.1**: Describing what you see: Sculpture, Henry Moore's *Reclining Figure*, 1951, plaster and string, 105.4 x 227.3 x 89.2 cm (Tate Britain) © The Henry Moore Foundation.

This plaster was the result of a commission from the Arts Council of Great Britain for the Festival of Britain. A single bronze was cast from it.

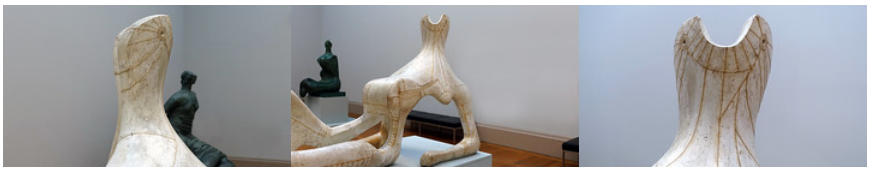
Additional resources

This sculpture at Tate Britain

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1.4.3: Francis Bacon, Triptych – August 1972

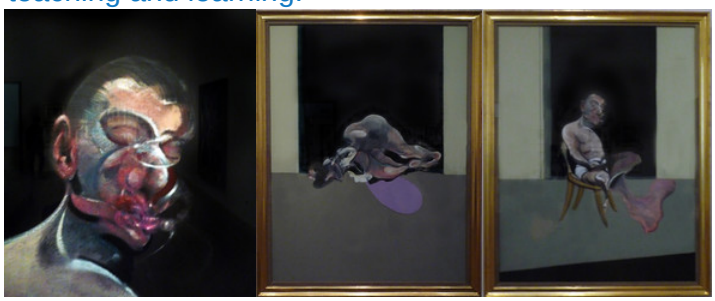
by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **1.4.3.1**: Francis Bacon, *Triptych – August 1972*, 1972, oil on canvas, 72 x 61 x 22″ / 183 x 155 x 64 cm, (Tate Modern, London)

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1.4.4: Lucian Freud, Standing by the Rags

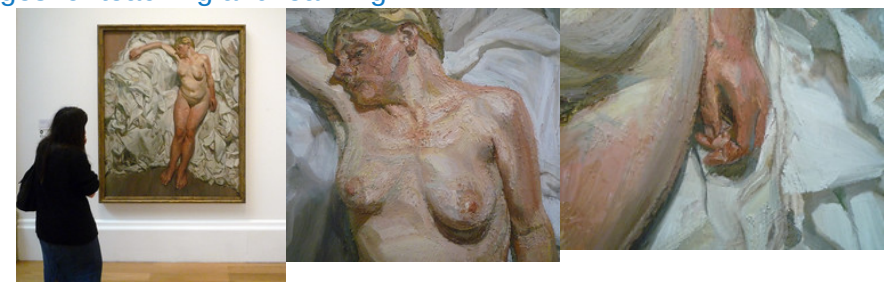
- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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Video 1.4.4.1: 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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1.5: Poland Magdalena Abakanowicz, Androgyne III

by DR. MARY KINNECOME

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Becoming: Between myself and the material with which I create, no tool intervenes. I select it with my hands. I shape it with my hands. My hands transmit energy to it. In translating idea into form, they always pass on to it something that eludes conceptualization. They reveal the unconscious.

– Magdalena Abakanowicz

War and childhood

At the beginning of World War II, Abakanowicz, then a young girl, witnessed German tanks enter her family's estate. At one point, a drunken soldier burst into her house and, in Abakanowicz's presence, shot off her mother's arm. In 1944, the family was forced to flee the advance of the Soviet army and ended up in Warsaw, where the artist still lives and works. As a teenager, Abakanowicz worked as a nursing assistant in a makeshift hospital caring for the wounded while also finishing her high school education. Her family lost everything during the war and had to hide their aristocratic roots when the nobility became the enemy in postwar Communist Poland. Abakanowicz remembered, "…we, as family, lost our identity. We were deprived of our social position and… thrown out of society. We were punished for being rich. So I had to hide my background. I had to lie. I had to invent."[1]



Figure **1.5.1**: Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Androgyne III*, 1985, burlap, resin, wood, nails, and string, 121.9 x 161.3 x 55.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Magdalena Abakanowicz was born in 1930 and and spent her early years on the family's estate about 200 miles east of Warsaw. There, she often played in the nearby forest, an experience that later influenced the materials she uses in her work. Her family had both Tartar and aristocratic roots (the term Tartar has a complex history but in this case the artist's father was a descendant of Abaqa Khan, a thirteenth-century Il-khan of Persia). Who were Abaqa Khan, Il-khan, and Ghengis Khan?

After the war

Abakanowicz graduated the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in in 1955. Post-war Poland was part of the Soviet bloc and had a Communist government. Social Realism was the style taught in art schools during this era and initially Abakanowicz experimented with textiles and weaving in order to avoid it. Social Realism demanded images of smiling workers and a perfected society and although Abakanowicz disliked the style, she was ultimately required to adopt it in order to obtain a degree and enter the Polish Artists Union—a step required of all professional sculptors. What is Socialist Realism?

Throughout her life Abakanowicz has continued to live in Poland despite the communist government that held power there until 1989 and the hardships that she and her fellow Poles endured. After Joseph Stalin's death in 1953 there was considerable hardship in Warsaw but also a flourishing of the arts. Abakanowicz attended gatherings of artists, intellectuals, scientists, and politicians in the one-room apartment of the Polish Constructivist painter Henryk Stażewski. Who was Joseph Stalin?



Figure **1.5.2**: Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Abakan Red*, 1969, sisal and metal, 405 x 382 x 400 cm, Tate (photo: Rachel, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Unconventional materials

In 1967 Abakanowicz began creating forms made with fabric and tapestry. She became well known for work she called *Abakans* (left), a series of monumental fiber sculptures that created the framework for her later work. The *Abakan* sculptures refer to clothing but are not functional. They hang from the ceiling and although they allude to human figures, they also reference the natural world. Some gently swing, suggesting the rocking of underwater vegetation, or the flight of birds.

In the 1970s, Abakanowicz began to experiment with other materials including burlap, string, and cotton gauze. In 1974, she began to form figures by dipping burlap and string into resin, which she then pressed into a plaster mold. Sometimes she took a cast from the body of a friend for these forms. The figures are hollow and repetitious as can be seen in ***Seated Figures*** (1974-79) and ***Backs*** (1976-80).

Androgyne III

The body as a structure became increasingly important to Abakanowicz and she visited laboratories to learn more about dissection and the construction of the human body. The effect of *Seated Figures* and *Backs* can be chilling and is often understood as expressing dehumanization in the twentieth century. In these works, the same shape is repeated but the surface of each figure has an individual texture, the result of Abakanowicz's unique handling of the materials.[2]



Figure 1.5.3: Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Androgyne III*, 1985, burlap, resin, wood, nails, and string, 121.9 x 161.3 x 55.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Androgyne III uses the same molded-torso shell that Abakanowicz employed in her sculpture series *Backs* (1976-1980). The piece is made of burlap, resin, wood, nails, and string. Unlike the *Back* series, however, in which the figures sat directly on the floor, the *Androgyne* torsos are seated on low stretchers of wooden logs, perhaps filling in for lost legs.

Abakanowicz's figures are mostly androgynous, with their sexual characteristics de-emphasized. The artist wants the viewer to focus on the humanity of the figures rather than their gender. At the same time, the fragmentary nature of the figures is important, perhaps a reflection of the time she spent helping in the hospital during World War II and her memories of the attack on her mother. A distinguishing feature of all of the burlap casts is the wrinkled skin and the implication of backbones, musculature and veins. The bodies, or body parts, more accurately, are intended to be seen in the round as the hollow interior is as much a part of the piece as the molded exterior. Space is as significant as mass in these works.

Abakanowicz draws on her personal history, but her sculptures possess an ambiguity that encourages multiple interpretations that speak broadly to human experience. *Androgyne III* alludes to the brutality of war and the totalitarian state. The body is a husk without arms, legs or a head. It is an expression of suffering, both mournful and disturbing.

[1] Michael Brenson, "Abakans," *Art Journal*. spring 95, volume 54, issue 1, p. 59

[2] Mara Witzling, ed., *Voicing Today's Visions: Writings by Contemporary Women Artists*, New York, NY: Universe Publishing, 1994, p. 92

Additional resources:

This sculpture at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

http://www.abakanowicz.art.pl/about/-about.php.html

Magdalena Abakanowicz at the National Museum of Women in the Arts

Michael Brenson, "Abakans." *Art Journal*, Spring 1995, vol. 54, issue 1, pp. 56-62.

Michael Brenson, "Survivor Art," *The New York Times Magazine*, November 1991, vol 142, issue 49165, pp. 46-53.

John Dornberg, *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 85, Vol. 16 Issue 1, pp. 110-119.

Joanna Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz: Bodies, Environments, and Myths*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

Mara Witzling, ed., *Voicing Today's Visions: Writings by Contemporary Women Artists* (New York, NY: Universe Publishing, 1994).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Pop Art

2.1: A beginner's guide

2.1.1: Contemporary Art, an introduction

2.1.2: Pop Art

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2.2.2: Marilyn Diptych

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.1: A beginner's guide

2.1.1: Contemporary Art, an introduction

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2.1.1: Contemporary Art, an introduction

by **DR. VIRGINIA B. SPIVEY**

Page ID
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Figure **2.1.1.1**: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79, ceramic, porcelain, and textile, 1463 x 1463 cm (Brooklyn Museum) © Judy Chicago

"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 **2.1.1.1**: Girl looking at: Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962, synthetic polymer on 32 canvases each 20 x 16 inches (The Museum of Modern Art; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

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.

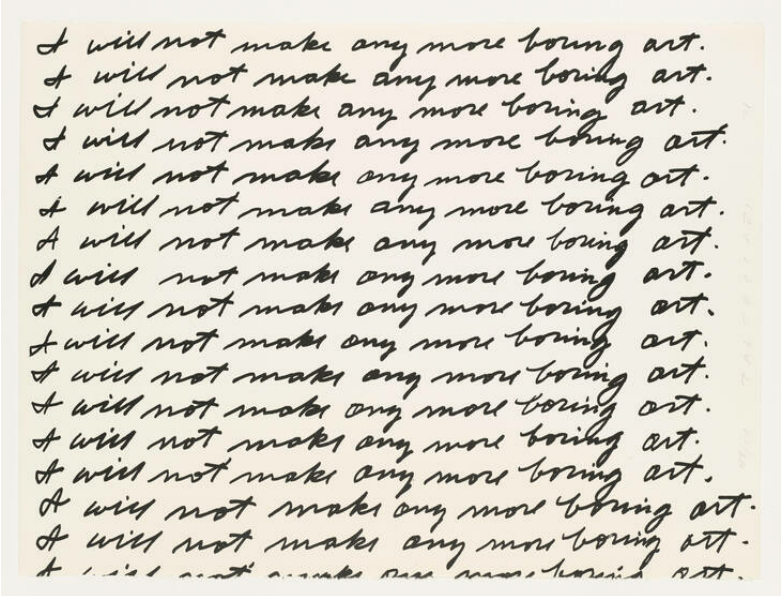


Figure **2.1.1.3**: John Baldessari, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, 1971, lithograph, 57.3 x 76.5 cm (Whitney Museum of American Art) © John Baldessari, courtesy of the artist

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.

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.

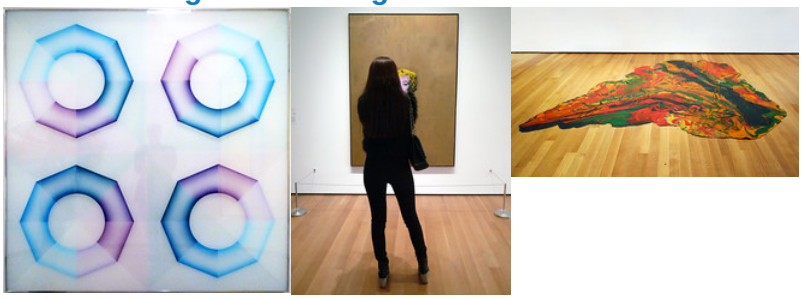


Figure **2.1.1.4**: Maya Lin, *Storm King Wavefield*, 2009, earthwork, 240,000 square feet (Storm King Art Center, New Windsor; photo: Glenn Kraeck, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

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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2.1.2: Pop Art

by **DR. VIRGINIA B. SPIVEY**

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Figure **2.1.2.1**: Andy Warhol, *Gold Marilyn Monroe*, 1962, silkscreen on canvas, 211.4 x 144.7 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Popular culture, “popular” art

At first glance, Pop art might seem to glorify popular culture by elevating soup cans, comic strips and hamburgers to the status of fine art on the walls of museums. But, then again, a second look may suggest a critique of the mass marketing practices and consumer culture that emerged in the United States after World War II. Andy Warhol’s *Gold Marilyn Monroe* clearly reflects this inherent irony of Pop. The central image on a gold background evokes a religious tradition of painted icons, transforming the Hollywood starlet into a Byzantine Madonna that reflects our obsession with celebrity. Notably, Warhol’s spiritual reference was especially poignant given Monroe’s suicide a few months earlier. Like religious fanatics, the actress’s fans worshipped their idol; yet, Warhol’s sloppy silkscreening calls attention to the artifice of Marilyn’s glamorous façade and places her alongside other mass-marketed commodities like a can of soup or a box of Brillo pads.



Figure **2.1.2.1**: Richard Hamilton, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, 1956, collage, 26 cm × 24.8 cm (Kunsthalle Tübingen, Tübingen)

Genesis of Pop



Figure **2.1.2.1**: Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, 1955, oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports, 191.1 x 80 x 20.3 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

In this light, it's not surprising that the term "Pop art" first emerged in Great Britain, which suffered great economic hardship after the war. In the late 1940s, artists of the "Independent Group," first began to appropriate idealized images of the American lifestyle they found in popular magazines as part of their critique of British society. Critic Lawrence Alloway and artist Richard Hamilton are usually credited with coining the term, possibly in the context of Hamilton's famous collage *Just what is it that makes today's home so different, so appealing?* Made to announce the Independent Group's 1956 exhibition "This Is Tomorrow," in London, the image prominently features a muscular semi-nude man, holding a phallically positioned Tootsie Pop.

Pop art's origins, however, can be traced back even further. In 1917, Marcel Duchamp asserted that any object—including his notorious example of a urinal—could be art, as long as the artist intended it as such. Artists of the 1950s built on this notion to challenge boundaries distinguishing art from real life, in disciplines of music and dance, as well as visual art. Robert Rauschenberg's desire to "work in the gap between art and life," for example, led him to incorporate such objects as bed pillows, tires, and even a stuffed goat in his "combine paintings" that merged features of painting and sculpture. Likewise, Claes Oldenberg created *The Store*, an installation in a vacant storefront where he sold crudely fashioned sculptures of brand-name

consumer goods. These “Proto-pop” artists were, in part, reacting against the rigid critical structure and lofty philosophies surrounding Abstract Expressionism, the dominant art movement of the time; but their work also reflected the numerous social changes taking place around them.

Post-war consumer culture grabs hold (and never lets go



Figure 2.1.2.1: c. 1950s advertisement for the American Gas Association

The years following World War II saw enormous growth in the American economy, which, combined with innovations in technology and the media, spawned a consumer culture with more leisure time and expendable income than ever before. The manufacturing industry that had expanded during the war now began to mass-produce everything from hairspray and washing machines to shiny new convertibles, which advertisers claimed all would bring ultimate joy to their owners. Significantly, the development of television, as well as changes in print advertising, placed new emphasis on graphic images and recognizable brand logos—something that we now take for granted in our visually saturated world.

It was in this artistic and cultural context that Pop artists developed their distinctive style of the early 1960s. Characterized by clearly rendered images of popular subject matter, it seemed to assault the standards of modern painting, which had embraced abstraction as a reflection of universal truths and individual expression.



Figure \(\PageIndex{1}\): Left: Roy Lichtenstein, *Girl with a Ball*, 1961, oil on canvas, 153 x 91.9 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York); right: Detail of face showing Lichtenstein's painted Ben-Day dots, Roy Lichtenstein, *Girl with a Ball*, 1961, oil on canvas, 153 x 91.9 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York, photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Irony and iron-ons

In contrast to the dripping paint and slashing brushstrokes of Abstract Expressionism—and even of Proto-Pop art—Pop artists applied their paint to imitate the look of industrial printing techniques. This ironic approach is exemplified by Lichtenstein's methodically painted Ben-Day dots, a mechanical process used to print pulp comics.

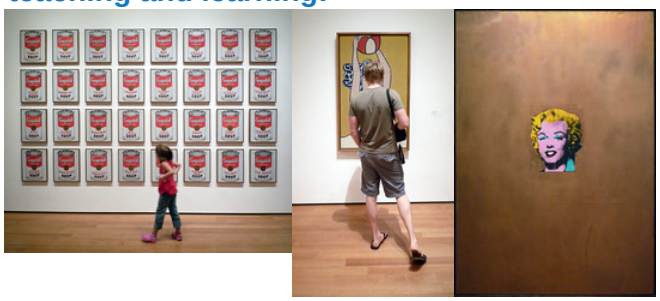
As the decade progressed, artists shifted away from painting towards the use of industrial techniques. Warhol began making silkscreens, before removing himself further from the process by having others do the actual printing in his studio, aptly named "The Factory." Similarly, Oldenburg abandoned his early installations and performances, to produce the large-scale sculptures of cake slices, lipsticks, and clothespins that he is best known for today.

Additional resources

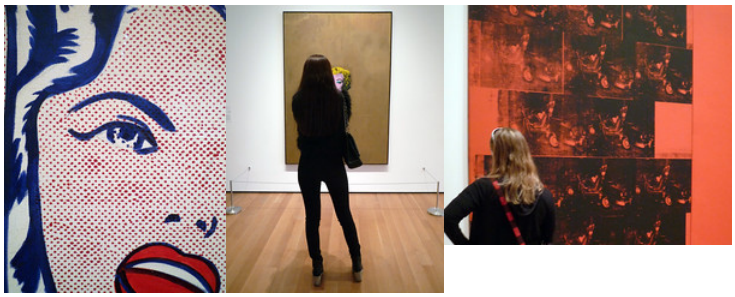
Read a chapter in our textbook, *Reframing Art History*—"Popular, Transient, Expendable: Print Culture and Propaganda in the 20th century."

Pop art on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2.2: Andy Warhol

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2.2.1: Coca-Cola [3]

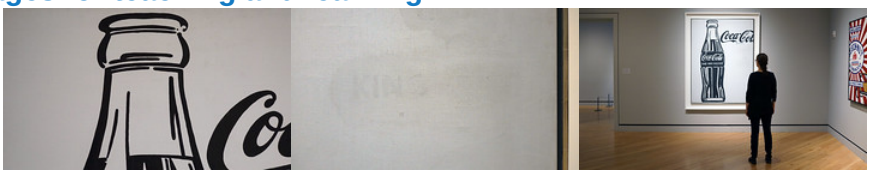
by ALEJO BENEDETTI, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **2.2.1.1**: Andy Warhol, *Coca-Cola [3]*, 1962, casein on canvas, 176.2 x 137.2 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts), a Seeing America video

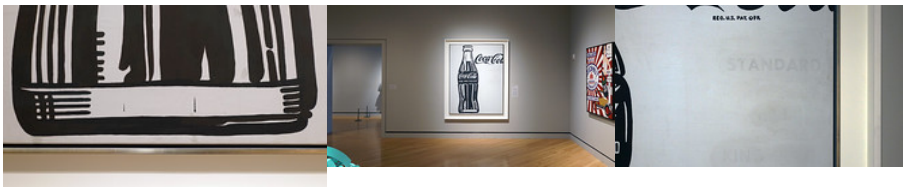
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2.2.2: Marilyn Diptych

by **TINA RIVERS RYAN**

Page ID
194683



Figure **2.2.2.1**: Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Diptych*, 1962, acrylic on canvas, 2054 x 1448 mm (Tate) © 2022 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. (photo: **rocor**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Diptych* is made of two silver canvases on which the artist silkscreened a photograph of Marilyn Monroe fifty times. At first glance, the work—which explicitly references a form of Christian painting (see below) in its title—invites us to worship the legendary icon, whose image Warhol plucked from popular culture and immortalized as art.



Figure 2.2.2.2: *Diptych with the Virgin and Child Enthroned and the Crucifixion*, 1275–80, tempera on panel, 38 x 59 cm (Art Institute of Chicago)

But as in all of Warhol's early paintings, this image is also a carefully crafted critique of both modern art and contemporary life.

Not only pop culture

With sustained looking, Warhol's works reveal that he was influenced not only by pop culture, but also by art history—and especially by the art that was then popular in New York. For example, in this painting, we can identify the hallmarks of Abstract Expressionist painters like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning.



Figure 2.2.2.3: Visitor, Tate Modern, London (photo: Barbara Piancastelli, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

As in the work of these older artists, the monumental scale of *Marilyn Diptych* (more than six feet by nine feet) demands our attention and announces the importance of the subject matter. Furthermore, the seemingly careless handling of the paint and its "allover composition"—the even distribution of form and color across the entire canvas, such that the viewer's eyes wander without focusing on one spot—are each hallmarks of Abstract Expressionism, as exemplified by Jackson Pollock's drip paintings. Yet Warhol references these painters only to undermine the supposed expressiveness of their gestures: like Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, whose work he admired, he uses photographic imagery, the silkscreen process and repetition to make art that is not about his interior life, but rather about the culture in which he lived.

Emotional flatness

Warhol takes as the subject of his painting an impersonal image. Though he was an award-winning illustrator, instead of making his own drawing of Monroe, he appropriates an image that already exists. Furthermore, the image is not some other artist's drawing, but a photograph made for mass reproduction. Even if we don't recognize the source (a publicity photo for Monroe's 1953 film *Niagara*), we know the image is a photo, not only because of its verisimilitude, but also because of the heightened contrast between the lit and shadowed areas of her face, which we associate with a photographer's flash.



Figure **2.2.2.4**: Publicity still for the film *Niagara*, 1953 left; center and right, details from: Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Diptych*, 1962, acrylic on canvas, 2054 x 1448 mm (Tate) © 2022 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

True to form, the actress looks at us seductively from under heavy-lidded eyes and with parted lips; but her expression is also a bit inscrutable, and the repetition remakes her face into an eerie, inanimate mask. Warhol's use of the silkscreen technique further "flattens" the star's face. By screening broad planes of unmodulated color, the artist removes the gradual shading that creates a sense of three-dimensional volume, and suspends the actress in an abstract void. Through these choices, Warhol transforms the literal flatness of the paper-thin publicity photo into an emotional "flatness," and the actress into a kind of automaton. In this way, the painting suggests that "Marilyn Monroe," a manufactured star with a made-up name, is merely a one-dimensional (sex) symbol—perhaps not the most appropriate object of our almost religious devotion.

Repetitions

While Warhol's silkscreened repetitions flatten Monroe's identity, they also complicate his own identity as the artist of this work. The silkscreen process allowed Warhol (or his assistants) to reproduce the same image over and over again, using multiple colors. Once the screens are manufactured and the colors are chosen, the artist simply spreads inks evenly over the screens using a wide squeegee. Though there are differences from one face to the next, these appear to be the accidental byproducts of a quasi-mechanical process, rather than the product of the artist's judgment. Warhol's rote painting technique is echoed by the rigid composition of the work, a five-by-five grid of faces, repeated across the two halves of its surface.



Figure 2.2.2.5: Detail, Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Diptych*, 1962, acrylic on canvas, 2054 x 1448 mm (Tate) © 2022 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. (photo: rocor, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Here, as in many Neo-Dada, minimalist and conceptual works, the grid is like a program that the artist uses to "automate" the process of composing the work, instead of relying on subjective thoughts or feelings to make decisions. In other words, Warhol's "cool," detached composition is the opposite of the intimate, soulful encounter with the canvas associated with Abstract Expressionism. But whereas most works that use grids are abstract, here, the the grid repeats a photo of a movie star, causing the painting to resemble a photographer's contact sheet, or a series of film strips placed side-by-side. These references to mechanical forms of reproduction further prove that for Warhol, painting is no longer an elevated medium distinct from popular culture.

Ghostly symmetry

Aside from radically changing our notion of painting, Warhol's choices create a symmetry between the artist and his subject, who each seem to be less than fully human: the artist becomes a machine, just as the actress becomes a mask or a shell. Another word we could use to describe the presence of both the artist and the actress might be *ghostly*, and in fact, Warhol started making his series of "Marilyn" paintings only after the star had died of an apparent suicide, and eventually collected them with other disturbing paintings under the title "Death in America." Her death haunts this painting: on the left, her purple, garishly made-up face resembles an embalmed corpse, while the lighter tones of some of the faces on the right make it seem like she is disappearing before our eyes.

Warhol once noted that through repeated exposure to an image, we become de-sensitized to it. In that case, by repeating Monroe's mask-like face, he not only drains away her life, but also ours as well, by deadening our emotional response to her death. Then again, by making her face so strange and unfamiliar, he might also be trying to re-sensitize us to her image, so that we remember she isn't just a symbol, but a person whom we might pity. From the perspective of psychoanalytic theory, he may even be forcing us to relive, and therefore work through, the traumatic shock of her death. The painting is more than a mere celebration of Monroe's iconic status. It is an invitation to consider the consequences of the increasing role of mass media images in our everyday lives.

Additional resources

This painting at Tate

"Andy Warhol's 'Marilyn Diptych', a Scene of Tragic Glamour" (Sotheby's)

Hal Foster et al., *Art Since 1900: modernism antimodernism postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011).

Steven Henry Madoff, ed., *Pop Art: A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

Kynaston McShine, ed., *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989).

Annette Michelson, ed., *Andy Warhol (October Files)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

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2.2.3: Why is this art? Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans

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

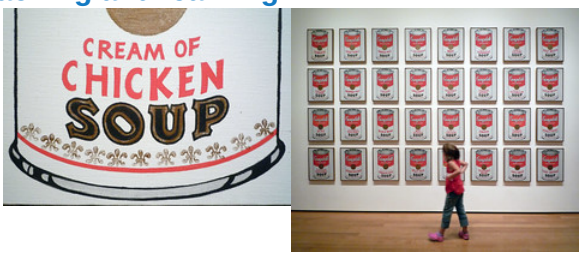
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Video **2.2.3.1**: Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962 (MoMA)

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2.2.4: The Case for Andy Warhol

- by **THE ART ASSIGNMENT**

Page ID

194685



Video **2.2.4.1**: Speaker: Sarah Urist Green

Additional resources:

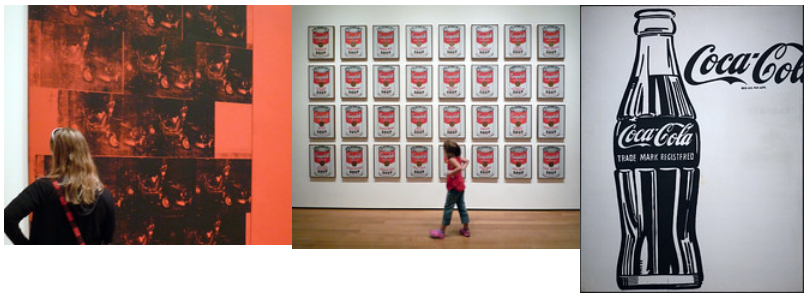
Resources from The Warhol, PIttsburgh

Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* at MoMA

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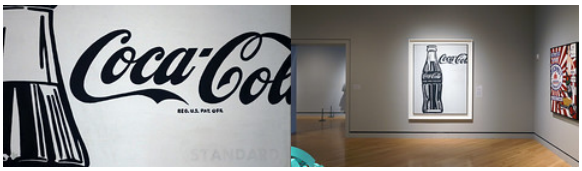
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2.2.5: Gold Marilyn Monroe

- by **DR. BETH HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

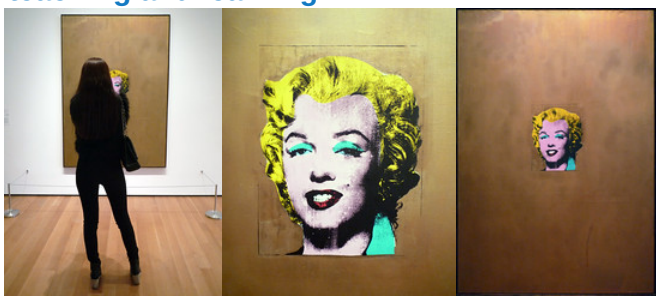
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Video **2.2.5.1**: Andy Warhol, *Gold Marilyn Monroe*, silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 71.25 x 57″ (211.4 x 144.7 cm), 1962 (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.3: Claes Oldenburg

2.3.1: Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks

2.3.2: Floor Cake

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2.3.1: Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks

by **DR. MYA DOSCH**

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194688



Figure **2.3.1.1**:Claes Oldenberg standing next to *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks* in the Beinecke Plaza at Yale University. Claes Oldenberg, *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks*, 1969 (photo: **Yale University**)

A monumental tube of lipstick sprouting from a military vehicle appeared, uninvited, on the campus of Yale University amidst the 1969 student protests against the Vietnam War. While the sculpture may have seemed like a playful, if elaborate artistic joke, Claes Oldenburg's *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks* was also deeply critical. Oldenburg made the 24-foot-high sculpture in collaboration with architecture students at his alma mater and then surreptitiously delivered it to Yale's Beinecke Plaza. In Beinecke Plaza, the sculpture overlooked both the office of Yale's president and a prominent World War I memorial. *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks* claimed a visible space for the anti-war movement while also poking fun at the solemnity of the plaza. The sculpture served as a stage and backdrop for several subsequent **student protests**.



Figure **2.3.1.2**: Maquettes for Claes Oldenburg, *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks*, 1969, showing the stages of inflation (photo: © **Kate Owen for *The New York Times***)

Oldenburg and the architecture students never intended for the original *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks* sculpture to be permanent. They made the base of plywood, and the red vinyl tip of the lipstick could be comically inflated and deflated—although

the balloon mechanism didn't always work. The original remained in Beinecke Plaza for ten months before Oldenburg removed it in order to remake the form in metal. The resulting sculpture was placed in a less-prominent spot on Yale's campus, where it remains to this day.

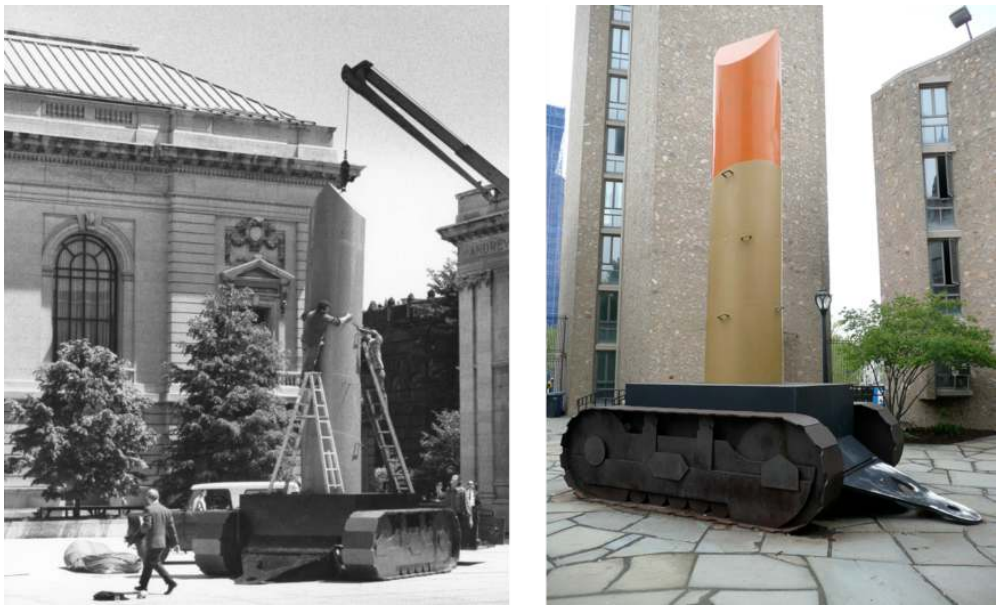


Figure **2.3.1.3**: Left: Installation of *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks*, 1969. Claes Oldenburg, *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks*, 1969–74, cor-ten steel, aluminum, cast resin, polyurethane enamel, 740 × 760 × 330 cm, Yale University (photo: Lippincott Sculpture); right: Claes Oldenburg, *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks*, 1969–74, cor-ten steel, aluminum, cast resin, polyurethane enamel, 740 × 760 × 330 cm, Yale University (photo: (photo: vige, CC BY 2.0) © Claus Oldenburg

Gender, consumerism, and war

Oldenburg had experimented with lipstick forms earlier in the 1960s, pasting catalog images of lipstick onto postcards of London's Picadilly Circus. The resulting collages showed lipstick tubes looming like massive pillars over Picadilly's plaza. In the Yale sculpture, the artist combined the highly "feminine" product with the "masculine" machinery of war. In doing so, he playfully critiqued both the hawkish, hyper-masculine rhetoric of the military and the blatant consumerism of the United States.

In addition to its feminine associations, the large lipstick tube is phallic and bullet-like, making the benign beauty product seem masculine or even violent. The juxtaposition implied that the U.S. obsession with beauty and consumption both fueled and distracted from the ongoing violence in Vietnam.



Figure **2.3.1.4**: Claes Oldenburg, *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks*, 1969–74, cor-ten steel, aluminum, cast resin, polyurethane enamel, 740 × 760 × 330 cm, Yale University (photo: Oldenburg van Bruggen Studio) © Claus Oldenburg

Going public



Figure **2.3.1.5**: Claes Oldenburg, *Clothespin*, 19756, cor-ten steel, stainless steel, concrete, Philadelphia (photo: Cle0patra, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Oldenburg had been designing large-scale, vinyl versions of household objects since his Green Gallery exhibition in 1962. He had created collages and drawings that played with the notion of massive domestic objects in public places, but *Lipstick* was his first large-scale public artwork. Oldenburg went on to make several other public sculptures that enlarged everyday domestic items to monumental dimensions. For example, he rendered a clothespin on the scale of an ancient Egyptian obelisk in a 1976 sculpture for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

By bringing both domestic and military objects into a public space, *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks* blurred the lines between public and private, and between the war in Vietnam and culture of the United States. In doing so, it upheld Oldenburg's 1961 declaration that "I am for an art that is political-erotical-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum . . . I am for an art that imitates the human, that is comic, if necessary, or violent, or whatever is necessary. . . ." [1]

Notes:

1. Claes Oldenburg, "I Am For an Art…" in *Environments, Situations, Spaces* (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1961); reprinted in an expanded version in Oldenburg and Emmett Williams, eds., *Store Days: Documents from The Store (1961) and Ray Gun Theater (1962)* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), pp. 39–42.

Additional resources

This sculpture at Yale University

Artist biography and related sculpture at Tate Britain

Judith Ann Schiff, "**The Lipstick: From Anti-War to 'Morse Resource**'" in *Yale Alumni Magazine*

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2.3.2: Floor Cake

by **DR. BETH HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID
194689



Video **2.3.2.1**: Claes Oldenburg, *Floor Cake*, 1962, synthetic polymer paint and latex on canvas filled with foam rubber and cardboard boxes, 58.375 x 114.25 x 58.375″ / 148.2 x 290.2 x 148.2 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

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2.4: James Rosenquist, F-111

- by **THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

Page ID

194690



Video **2.4.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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2.5: Roy Lichtenstein, Rouen Cathedral Set V

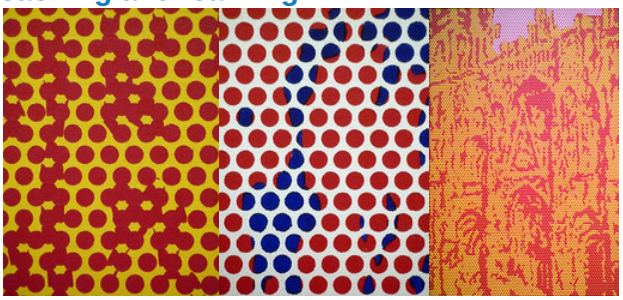
by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
194691



Video **2.5.1**: Roy Lichtenstein, *Rouen Cathedral Set V*, 1969, oil and magna on canvas, 3 canvases: 63-5/8 x 141-7/8 x 1-3/4″ / 161.61 x 360.36 x 4.45 cm (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.6: Harry Fonseca

2.6.1: Two Coyotes with Flags

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2.6.1: Two Coyotes with Flags

by **ROXANNE BEASON** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID

194693



Video **2.6.1.1**: Harry Fonseca, *Two Coyotes with Flags*, acrylic on canvas (Gilcrease Museum) © Estate of Harry Fonseca

Additional resources

This work at the Gilcrease Museum

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Conceptual + Performance Art

The Modernists proposed that art could be anything—so why couldn't it be an idea or an action?

c. 1960 - present

- 3.1: Conceptual Art
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    - 3.1.1.1: Conceptual Art, An Introduction
    - 3.1.1.2: The Case for Conceptual Art
  - 3.1.2: Joseph Kosuth, One and Three Chairs
  - 3.1.3: Martha Rosler, The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems
  - 3.1.4: The Case for Yoko Ono
  - 3.1.5: John Baldessari, I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art
  - 3.1.6: Hans Haacke, Seurat’s “Les Poseuses” (small version), 1884-1975
  - 3.1.7: Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii
  - 3.1.8: Yayoi Kusama
    - 3.1.8.1: Narcissus Garden
    - 3.1.8.2: Yayoi Kusama (Tate)
  - 3.1.9: Bruce Nauman, The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths
  - 3.1.10: Mónica Mayer, The Clothesline
- 3.2: Performance Art
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  - 3.2.3: Black Mountain College
  - 3.2.4: Shiraga Kazuo, Challenging Mud
  - 3.2.5: Vito Acconci, Following Piece
  - 3.2.6: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Washing/Tracks/Maintenance- Outside (July 23, 1973)
  - 3.2.7: Gordon Matta-Clark, Splitting
  - 3.2.8: Marina Abramović, The Artist is Present

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.1: Conceptual Art

Conceptual art can include just about any material: text, photography, found objects, and even the physical space of the gallery.

c. 1960 - present

3.1.1: A beginner's guide

- 3.1.1.1: Conceptual Art, An Introduction
- 3.1.1.2: The Case for Conceptual Art

3.1.2: Joseph Kosuth, One and Three Chairs

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3.1.5: John Baldessari, I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art

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

3.1.7: Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii

3.1.8: Yayoi Kusama

- 3.1.8.1: Narcissus Garden
- 3.1.8.2: Yayoi Kusama (Tate)

3.1.9: Bruce Nauman, The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths

3.1.10: Mónica Mayer, The Clothesline

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.1.1: A beginner's guide

3.1.1.1: Conceptual Art, An Introduction

3.1.1.2: The Case for Conceptual Art

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3.1.1.1: Conceptual Art, An Introduction

by DR. TOM FOLLAND and DR. LETA Y. MING

Page ID
194698



Figure **3.1.1.1.1**: Tom Marioni, *My First Car*, 1972, De Saisset Gallery, Santa Clara, California (photo from ***Performance Anthology: Source Book of California Performance Art***, eds. Carl E. Loeffler and Darlene Tong)

In 1972 the De Saisset Art Museum at Santa Clara University in the San Francisco Bay Area gave the artist Tom Marioni several hundred dollars to help cover expenses for mounting an exhibition of his work at the institution. Instead of using the money to purchase art materials, Marioni bought an older model used car, a Fiat 750, which he carefully maneuvered into the museum for the opening of his show. The vehicle, parked on top of an oriental rug, formed the centerpiece for this exhibition, titled *My First Car*. Was this really art, or was it a scam to get the museum to pay for a car the artist wanted? After learning about the show, the University President concluded that it was more of the latter and ordered the show closed. Presumably he was put off by how *My First Car* profited Marioni without involving any technical skill or hard work on the part of the artist.

Not just a prank

Marioni's work was in many ways typical of the late 1960s and early 1970s art practices that came to be known as Conceptual art. As the term suggests, Conceptual art placed emphasis upon the concept or idea, and deemphasized the actual physical manifestation of the work. Thus an artist did not need manual skill to produce his work, and in fact could get away with not making anything at all. Rather than being a mere prank (as many dismissed it at the time), Marioni's work was a proposal for a new kind of art that deliberately disavowed art's traditional role as a showcase for the creative genius and technical abilities of the artist.



Figure **3.1.1.1.2**: Mel Bochner, *Measurement Room*, 1969, tape and letraset, dimensions variable (**The Museum of Modern Art**)

Marioni's appropriation of a car is only one example of a number of very diverse art practices that are grouped under the term Conceptual art. Refusing to work in any one medium, and especially hostile to the painting and sculptural traditions in Western art, Conceptual artists would broaden their approach to art-making to include just about any material: text, photography, found objects, and even the physical space of the gallery, as long as there was a conceptual dimension that emphasized a set of principles or process involved in producing a given artwork, rather than a finished product.

Take the artist Mel Bochner's *Measurement Room*, for example, a work that consisted of labeling gallery walls with numbers to indicate each wall's dimensions. In the place of attractive objects and captivating imagery, Bochner presented emotionless, mechanical text overlaid onto a pre-existing space. Art's new role, as proposed by Conceptual artists, was to convey information in

the most straightforward, objective manner as possible and to engage the viewer within their immediate environment (instead of presenting a transcendent and imaginary world that accentuated the pleasures of looking).

Minimalism as precursor



Figure **3.1.1.1.3**: Carl Andre, *144 Aluminum Square*, 1967, aluminum, 144 units, 1 x 365.8 x 365.8 cm (**Norton Simon Museum**)

Conceptual art constituted a dramatic departure from traditional art-making, but it did not come out of nowhere. Minimalism, the movement that directly preceded Conceptual art and the style that dominated the 1960s, conceived of art not as something internally complete and detached from the everyday world (a view that had been strongly held by the **Abstract Expressionists** throughout the 1950s), but rather as something that related to both its site of display as well as the viewer's body. A Minimalist work like Carl Andre's *144 Aluminum Square*, for example, offered a spare, industrially-produced, geometric installation that was radical because it made spectators think of the floor on which it was placed and how their bodies related to it (by trampling on it!).

Emerging out of Minimalism, a Conceptual work like Bochner's *Measurement Room* also made viewers aware of the proportions of the physical gallery space and encouraged them to compare how they measured up to the room's dimensions. Minimalism, however, always maintained a reliance on a physical object, which was, in many cases, a highly finished and aestheticized form that lent itself to being traded on the art market and shown on gallery circuit. By contrast, Conceptual works like *Measurement Room* and *My First Car* not only departed from the conventional media of painting and sculpture, but moreover, their unusual forms prevented them from being easily sold or collected.

The art market

With the explosive expansion of the contemporary art market in the 1960s that included high auction prices for living artists (previously it was only dead European masters who fetched such prices), one of the main concerns of artists in the 1960s was that art had become increasingly commodified, and yet artists weren't the ones benefiting from the growing market. At the mercy of dealers, collectors, and museum trustees, artists felt they had little control over their own work and careers. So it is not entirely surprising artists in the late 1960s and early 1970s began to reject technical artistic skill and material objects altogether. To make an object the essence of the artwork was to be in thrall to the concerns of the market and art institutions.

A radical era

The 1960s and early 1970s was tumultuous and divisive era defined by the Vietnam War, passionate social liberation movements (including the Black Power, Feminist, Chicano, and Gay Liberation Movements), as well as a massive countercultural youth rebellion. The emergence of such a radical practice as Conceptual art should be understood as part of this oppositional culture that envisioned a radically new world. To the new generation of Conceptual artists, the old rules of art making and the traditional art establishments could feel just as oppressive as the institutions of the state or police felt to the youthful protester on the streets.



Figure **3.1.1.1.4**: Martha Rosler, *Cleaning the Drapes* from the series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*, c. 1967-72, pigmented ink jet print (photomontage), 44 x 60.3 cm (**The Museum of Modern Art**)

The backdrop of immense social upheaval in the 1960s and early 1970s relates to another important aspect of Conceptual art: the sense that it was entangled with larger social and political realities. In a series of collages called *House Beautiful: Bringing the War*

Home, Martha Rosler combined graphic images of the Vietnam War from the popular news journal *Life* with those of upscale interiors from the home decorating magazine *House Beautiful* to make direct reference to the Vietnam War.

In one collage, a middle-class housewife vacuums billowing drapes whose window reveals helmeted, rifle-wielding American soldiers in the trenches of war. This jarring juxtaposition not only commented on the war's insidious effects on the home front, but also signaled a sense that art should engage with and could reshape the social world. Likewise, *My First Car* employed a similar technique of inserting a temporal, everyday object into a sacred space of high art in order to highlight the connectedness of the art sphere to the social, physical, and economic world. Not afraid to embrace the mundanity of the everyday world, Conceptual artists polluted the museum space with commerce, contemporary images of war, and even leaking motor oil.

Conceptual goes mainstream

Conceptual art had its precursors, notably early twentieth-century Dada artists like **Marcel Duchamp**, whose "readymades" (mass-produced objects like a urinal or bicycle wheel that he designated as artworks) also questioned the tenet that art be solely a demonstration of an artist's creative and technical abilities. In the 1950s and early 1960s, movements such as **Fluxus**, Happenings, Neo-Dada, and Nouveau Réalisme also employed techniques we could categorize as Conceptual art from today's vantage point. Embracing ephemeral and performative practices, and provoking viewers with sometimes aggressive assaults upon "good taste," they, too, let go of the notion of art as refined object. In the decades following, Conceptual art strategies were taken up by feminist as well as postmodern artists, and today conceptualism has become a global phenomenon, with artists from around the world deploying video, photography, text, body art, performance, and installation, often interchangeably. Ironically, the strategies of Conceptual art, once a challenge to orthodox, mainstream modern art, have now become so fundamental that they are taken to be a given of contemporary art practice.

Additional resources:

Short essay on Conceptual art from Tate

Conceptual art at the Guggenheim

Conceptual art from MoMA Learning

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3.1.1.2: The Case for Conceptual Art

- *by THE ART ASSIGNMENT*

Page ID
194699



Video **3.1.1.2.1**: Sometimes art is paintings, and sometimes it’s a chair. Why?

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3.1.2: Joseph Kosuth, One and Three Chairs

by DR. TOM FOLLAND

Page ID
194700

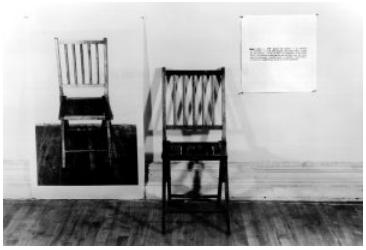


Figure **3.1.2.1**: Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*, 1965, wood folding chair, mounted photograph of a chair, and mounted photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of "chair" (MoMA)

You would not be wrong, standing in front of *One and Three Chairs*, to think, "there is not much to see here." Joseph Kosuth, a conceptual artist, has placed a wooden folding chair against the wall and flanked it with two prints: a black and white photograph of the chair, and a photostat of its dictionary definition. Nevertheless, *One and Three Chairs* is a defining work of conceptual art, a movement that emerged in the mid-1960s and advocated a radically new form of artwork: one whose value, meaning and existence was rooted in its *concept*, rather than in the work's physical or material properties.

In Minimalism's wake



Figure **3.1.2.2**: Donald Judd, *Untitled (Stack)*, 1967, lacquer on galvanized iron, twelve units, each 22.8 x 101.6 x 78.7 cm, installed vertically with 9″ (22.8 cm) intervals (MoMA)

Questions of form (the visual elements of works of art) had been paramount for many modern artists during the twentieth century and especially post-World War II, when New York City replaced Paris as the center of the most advanced art of the time. Modernism's focus on pure form (works of art that sought to contain no references or likenesses to the external world and focused instead on their own inherent visual and material aspects) reached a peak in the 1960s with Minimalism, the movement that directly preceded conceptual art.

Minimalism pushed abstraction to its limits and set out to strip art of its historical meaning. For instance, the Minimalist artist Donald Judd produced a series of geometric boxes using industrial materials. There was no evidence of skill or handicraft—the artist had in some cases not even constructed the object—and the viewer was left with no references to a subject or theme. The result was a work that was purely formal: that sought to insulate itself from external meaning beyond its material, color, and shape.

For the Minimalists, art's role was no longer to render scenes of nature, spirituality, or humanity, as had been central to Western art since before the Renaissance, or even to celebrate the artist's vision and hand as had been the case with Abstract Expressionism. The credo of Minimalist art was "what you see is what you see." With these pure forms, art was emptied of all other meaning. It

was as if the word “sculpture” needed quotation marks. It certainly strained credulity to imagine an industrially-fabricated object made from lacquered, galvanized iron as the equal to the historic sculptural processes such as carved marble or cast bronze produced by Donatello or Bernini.

“Art After Philosophy”



Figure **3.1.2.3**: Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs* (detail), 1965, wood folding chair, mounted photograph of a chair, and mounted photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of “chair” (MoMA)

By the end of the 1960s, these Minimalist practices were being challenged. Minimalism’s value remained tied directly to the physical object—a visual form that invited viewers to see it, walk around it, and enjoy its aesthetic qualities. Conceptual artists like Kosuth wanted to downplay the pleasures associated with looking at art as part of a rejection of what they saw as outdated ideas about beauty. While retaining Minimalism’s critical stance toward traditional art forms, they wanted to engage with the unseen relationships that Minimalism had put aside: ideas, signification, and the construction of meaning. “Being an artist now means to question the nature of art,” Kosuth wrote in his 1969 essay “Art After Philosophy.” To this end, he created works that directed the viewer away from *form* and toward the *ideas* that generated them.

In the case of *One and Three Chairs*, the central idea was to explore the nature of representation itself. We know instinctively what a “chair” is, but how is it that we actually conceive of and communicate that concept? Kosuth presents us with a photograph of a chair, an actual chair, and its linguistic or language-based description. All three of these could be interpreted as representations of the same chair (the “one” chair of the title), and yet they are *not* the same. They each have distinct properties: in actuality, the viewer is confronted with “three” chairs, each represented and experienced—*read*—in different ways.

Semiotics

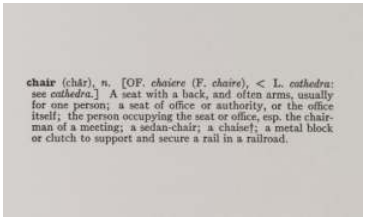

chair (chãr), *n.* [OF. *chaiere* (F. *chaire*), < L. *cathedra*: see *cathedra*.] A seat with a back, and often arms, usually for one person; a seat of office or authority, or the office itself; the person occupying the seat or office, esp. the chairman of a meeting; a sedan-chair; a chaise†; a metal block or clutch to support and secure a rail in a railroad.

Figure **3.1.2.4**: Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs* (detail), 1965, wood folding chair, mounted photograph of a chair, and mounted photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of “chair” (MoMA)

Kosuth was influenced by new theories of language and signification that had emerged in the early twentieth century, particularly semiotics—the study of the meaning of signs (words or symbols used to communicated information). Semiotics grew out of the science of linguistics, which looks at how language structures meaning. However, the field of semiotics had a broader set of goals: it sought to explore how both linguistic and image-based forms of communication shaped larger social and cultural structures.

Why photography and text, and not a painting or a sculpture? Kosuth’s avoidance of the traditional media was also a critique of the ways that art institutions had historically accepted and promoted only certain types of artworks. This criticality had roots in the radical **Dada** practices of Marcel Duchamp and other early twentieth-century artists who pushed for the acceptance of new forms of art. Artists from the 1960s onward were increasingly interested in building on this legacy, challenging the ways that museums, academies, and other art institutions adhered to traditional, nineteenth-century notions of what art was and should be.

The viewer's role

When we look at *One and Three Chairs*, we are not drawn to admire its beauty, nor are we presented with a relatable story or a figure to be admired. Rather, we are invited to consider the concept of what a "chair" is, as well as the nature of visual and linguistic representation itself—fundamental questions that Plato asked more than two thousand years ago. And like the ancient Greek philosopher, Kosuth focuses on the idea of a "chair," rather than simply its physical representation. But he also reveals the importance of the viewer's role in the function of conceptual artwork. It is not until we approach pieces such as *One and Three Chairs* and begin to engage with them intellectually that the actual "artworks"—the concepts—emerge. In this sense, conceptual art can only exist in tandem with its audience, and is created anew each time we view it. This emphasis on the participation of the viewer was also important for the related movements of **performance and participatory art**, which gained momentum as well beginning in the 1960s.

One and Three Chairs stripped art of its outer casing and celebrated, instead, the importance of the conceptual for both the artist and the viewer. Importantly, it also stripped the artist of his or her role as a romantic and existential agent of personal expression (an aspect of art that was increasingly important from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century). The conceptual artist appears, instead, as a philosopher questioning the nature of reality and the social world in which art and audience reside.

Additional resources:

This work at MoMA

Essay on Joseph Kosuth from the Guggenheim

Essay on conceptual art from Tate

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3.1.3: Martha Rosler, The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems

by **DR. THOMAS FOLLAND**

Page ID
194701

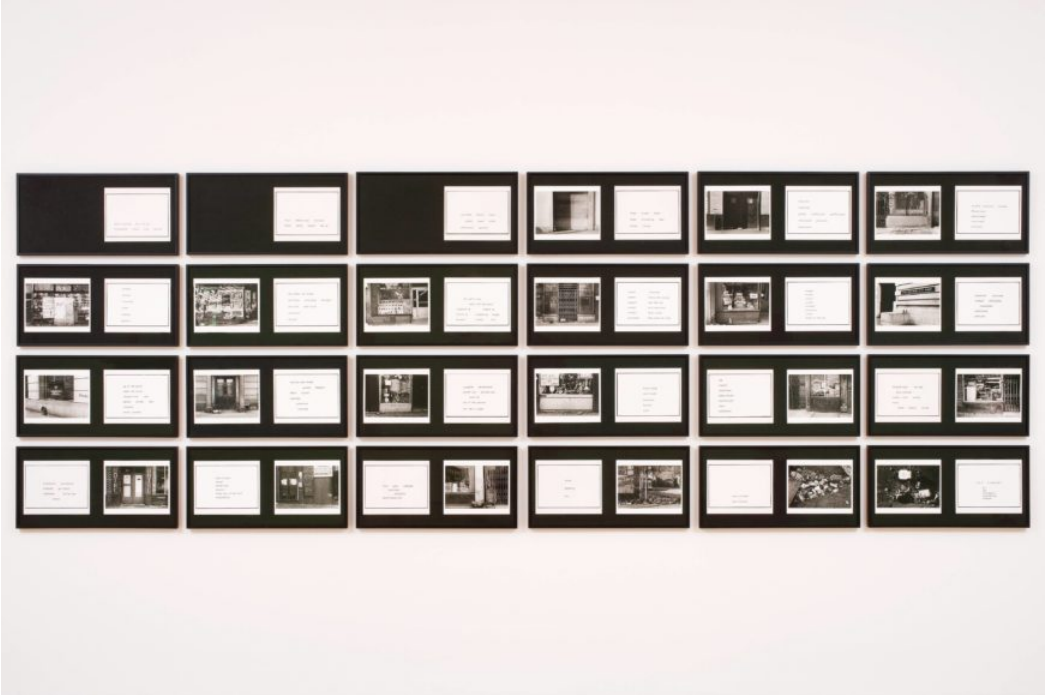


Figure **3.1.3.1**: Martha Rosler, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, 1974–75, forty-five gelatin silver prints of text and image mounted on twenty-four backing boards (SFMOMA) © Martha Rosler

"A poetics of drunkenness" is how the artist Martha Rosler once described her 24-panel photo-text installation, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*. [1] The work pairs black-and-white photographs of abandoned storefronts and building façades with metaphors for drunkenness composed on typewritten pages, and was created during a severe economic crisis in New York City at the end of the Vietnam War.

Rosler's images of buildings on the Bowery, a string of mostly abandoned structures on Manhattan's lower east side, came about, as the artist described in a **2014 interview**, as the result of strolls the artist took in the evening from her apartment in the East Village through the Bowery on the way to Battery Park. Conceived partly as a meditation on the current economic downturn in New York, *The Bowery* was at the same time a response to the documentary tradition in American photography.

Questioning the documentary approach

Rosler's decision not to include any actual people in her photographs—but to show traces of human presence, such as empty liquor bottles and other litter—was a counter-documentary practice, a refusal of the conventions of long-standing practices of documentary photography. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, social reform photographers including **Jacob Riis** and Lewis Hine made portraits of American immigrants and laborers to advocate for improvement in housing, work conditions, and other social reforms. In the 1930s, several photographers such as **Walker Evans**, **Dorothea Lange**, and **Gordon Parks** furnished images of sharecroppers and others impacted by the Great Depression in the 1930s and 1940s to encourage support for Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal programs. These pre-World War II, socially engaged photographic practices were dependent upon the privileged making images of the less privileged.

This particular documentary approach was soon questioned by Robert Frank's book of photographs *The Americans* (1955), as well as by **Garry Winogrand**, Lee Friedlander, and Diane Arbus (featured together in the 1967 show "**New Documents**" at the influential Museum of Modern Art in New York). As curator of "New Documents," John Szarkowski, suggested, "[t]heir aim has

been not to reform life but to know it." [2] That "knowing" occurred not in mass magazines or government reports, but in art museums and galleries. It was a newly cynical, unsentimental, post-World War II approach to documentary photography.

The human-free cityscapes of Rosler's *The Bowery* could be seen as part of this trajectory, however it is important to underscore that Rosler took aim at the documentary tradition in total, as well as the museum's effort to turn documentary photography into art. This was part of a larger assault upon modern art by a younger generation of artists who rejected the idea that artworks should be beautiful objects languishing in museums and disconnected from life. The movement of conceptual art that arose in the late 1960s took aim at the museum and sought to create a bridge between art, everyday life, and social politics. Rosler wedded the concerns of conceptual art to those of documentary photography.

"Poetics of Drunkenness": How Text and Images Connect

By the 1970s, it became clear that utopian visions of a "universal" language of art and architecture, an important feature of modernism were no match for a century of wars, genocides, and other global catastrophes. Postmodernism brought a new wave of questioning the modernism and its certainty in the power of art to improve all it touched.



Figure **3.1.3.1**: Detail. Martha Rosler, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, 1974–75, forty-five gelatin silver prints of text and image mounted on twenty-four backing boards (SFMOMA) © Martha Rosler

Language (visual and textual), Rosler suggests, fails when it comes to the task of "knowing" the toll of the economic downturn and wars on the people of the Bowery. For example, in one panel (see above, top set), Rosler pairs a photograph of an abandoned storefront filled with objects that appear to be lampshades (the Bowery was then also home to wholesalers) with a vertical, left-justified list of various synonyms for "alcoholic": "sot," "tippler," "winebibber," "elbow bender," "overindulger," "toper," and "lushington." The verticality of the list echoes the columns, window panes, and gated doorway as it suggests that the inactive, empty store that has been left to ruin has a plight parallel to the unseen human actors who have also fallen into homelessness and self-destruction. In another panel, discarded empty alcohol bottles are juxtaposed with the personifying words "dead soldiers" and "dead marines," which are centered and bottom-justified to accentuate their downtrodden fates. In the mid-1970s, many men who fought in the Vietnam War found themselves in the Bowery, homeless, and turning toward alcohol for solace.



Figure **3.1.3.1**: Detail. Martha Rosler, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, 1974–75, forty-five gelatin silver prints of text and image mounted on twenty-four backing boards (SFMOMA) © Martha Rosler

While Rosler suggests connections between the plights of homelessness, alcoholism, war, displacement, and economic downturn, she avoids the language of social reform photography through redirecting the viewer to consider the framing conditions that govern how we see. Sometimes, Rosler's language can be darkly humorous as it showcases urban and human decay. As such, she draws our attention to the invisible gaps of absent people in the scenes, as well as the ethical dilemma at the heart of the documentary tradition: to speak for another is at the same time to silence them. That silence is further perpetuated by the aestheticization of documentary photography in the context of museum display.

From The Bowery to the Museum

The Bowery suggests that the museum adds yet another inadequate descriptive system, since it further removes art from its context. Moreover, the museum participates in a socio-economic "othering" of the invisible people of the mid-1970s Bowery, a world that is presumably remote from the lives and experiences of the museum-goer. In this sense, Rosler can be included in a group of 1970s artists (including Michael Ascher, Daniel Buren, and Marcel Broodthaers) who were associated with Institutional Critique. These artists made conceptual art that drew attention to the ideologies and power structures of gallery or museum displays, particularly those tied to the project of Modernism and its immaculate ideals." [4]

Rosler's purposeful arrangement of the text and images into a grid in *The Bowery* is itself agitational. The grid is the symbol par excellence of Modernist abstraction and its attendant ideas of an autonomous (self-referential) purity of art. In pairing these two paradigms of Modernism (one a documentary, humanist tradition that promised social reform; the other a supposedly universal visual language of abstraction) and demonstrating the inadequacy of both for the then-present social moment, *The Bowery* is a twentieth-century Trojan horse in the house of Modernism.

Notes:

[1] Martha Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography) Martha Rosler, 3 Works" (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981), p. 79.
[2] John Szarkowski, ed. "New Documents" (Museum of Modern Art, New York City, 1967).
[3] Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts," p. 75.
[4] Although some museums are now more interested in contextual displays (restoring lost context if referenced symbolically in artworks), in the heyday of the Modernist museum, the typical display sought to remove context using neutral white walls and separating art works from one another to create an experience of viewing based on visual terms alone. Abstract art became the perfect example of this: an art with neither content nor context! (Although even many abstract artworks had both content and contexts.)

Additional resources

Martha Rosler, “In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography) Martha Rosler, 3 Works” (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981).

John Szarkowski, ed. “New Documents,” Museum of Modern Art, New York City, 1967.

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3.1.4: The Case for Yoko Ono

- *by THE ART ASSIGNMENT*

Page ID

194702



Video **3.1.4.1**: Speaker: Sarah Urist Green

Additional resources:

Works by Yoko Ono at the Walker Art Center

Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* at MoMA

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3.1.5: John Baldessari, I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
194703



Video 3.1.5.1: John Baldessari, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, 1971, lithograph, 22-7/16 x 30-1/16″ (MoMA), images © John Baldessari, courtesy of the artist

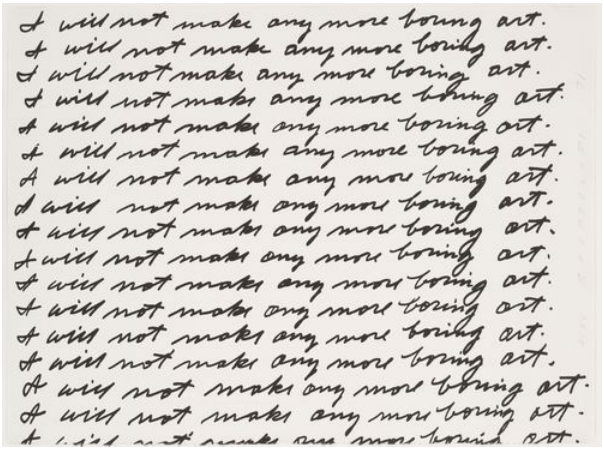


Figure 3.1.5.2: John Baldessari, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, 1971, lithograph, 57 x 76.4 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) (© John Baldessari, courtesy of the artist)

Serious Humor

"I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art," repeated in a neat cursive script down the length of a sheet of lined paper is clearly reminiscent of an old-fashioned school-room punishment. But just who is it that the artist, John Baldessari, is punishing? The lines are stark and simple, and like so much of John Baldessari's art, employs a wry humor that turns on the art world, only in this case, the blackboard is a canvas.

Only a year earlier, in 1970, Baldessari underlined a key rupture in his career and one that was taking place in the art world as well at that time. Since the 1950s, Abstract Expressionism had been the dominant avant-garde style in galleries and art schools. For example, Jackson Pollock's huge canvases, dense with paint he applied directly, were understood (however inaccurately) to be a direct expression of his internal emotional state.

Cremation Project

As a young artist, Baldessari had also painted abstractions. But in 1970, a year before *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, Baldessari, together with friends and students from University of California at San Diego, gathered paintings he had made as a young artist and drove them to a crematorium where they burned them. The artist then placed the ashes into an urn with a bronze plaque inscribed,

JOHN ANTHONY BALDESSARI

MAY 1953 MARCH 1966

The urn and plaque, together with documenting photographs of the cremation constitute Baldessari's *Cremation Project*, 1970. The previous year, the artist had written of this project as an act to,

> ***…rid my life of accumulated art….It is a reductive, recycling piece. I consider all these paintings a body of work in the real sense of the word. Will I save my life by losing it? Will a Phoenix arise from the ashes? Will the paintings having become dust become materials again? I don't know, but I feel better.***[1]

In *Cremation Project*, Baldessari defined the clearest possible demarcation between his early and mature work. By sacrificing his early paintings, by burning them, he emphasized their physicality. They existed as a thing in the world that could be destroyed. But he shifts our frame of reference from the physical, the material, by creating a work of art that relied on the physical artifact, the ashes and urn, only as a way to draw the viewer to the larger conceptual issues—including the construction of a division in his career.

With the *Cremation Project*, John Baldessari staked his place in the highly intellectualized space of 1960s and 70s conceptual art practice. By 1970, Conceptual art had established a place for itself in the art world. The stark machined repetitions created by the artist Donald Judd and the grids painted by Agnes Martin laid the groundwork for artists like Sol Lewitt who created written instructions for lines drawn with mathematical precision onto a wall to create dazzling geometries. Lewitt had created conceptual works of art that asked the Platonic question, where is the art itself actually located? Does it exist as the completed drawing on the wall? Does it exist in the originary act of writing the instructions? Is the art embedded in the performance of the work when assistants do the drawing? What happens when the wall drawing is painted over and is remade somewhere else? This was the world of ideas into which Baldessari entered.

Word Paintings

In Baldessari's art, words, photographs and paint offer visual statements that are so flat, so bald-faced in their directness and sincerity that they become ironic visual statements aimed at the very definition of what art is. And because these statements are on canvas or within a galley context, they challenge the most sacred theories of modern art, what the artist calls "received wisdom."

Baldessari's word paintings of the late 1960s and early 1970s are a case in point. Many were hand-lettered onto stretched canvas by sign painters that Baldessari had hired to render statements that that he had not even written but had only read. These are often statements that naively set out define the most elusive of questions that confront artists. And they are rendered in the clearest most direct lettering possible, the lettering found on a sign, the most earnest typography that directs and informs in the most straightforward manner possible. We cannot help but trust what these sign paintings tell us, even when Baldessari's word paintings offer audaciously innocent solutions to the complex theory-soaked issues that define modernism.

Works of art such as *What is Painting*, 1966-68, *Everything is purged from this painting but art, no ideas have entered this work*, 1966-68 and *Composing on a Canvas*, 1966-68 are brilliantly ambitious. They layer the false objectivity of didactic grammar and clear careful hand lettering over impossibly trite yet seductive solutions at the very core of art's definition.

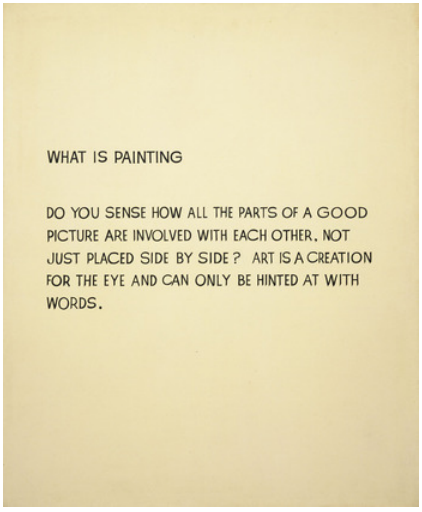


Figure 3.1.5.3: John Baldessari, *What is Painting*, 1966-68, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 172.1 x 144.1 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) (© 2014 John Baldessari, courtesy of the artist)

For example, *What is Painting* tries to define what painting is and does so in only three short sentences. But these sentences are written on a canvas and so inherit a fraught five hundred year history of art making. What makes these issues all the more pleasantly absurd is that Baldessari is at least as well known for his long career as a teacher as he is as an artist. So when he offers paintings with statements such as, "Everything is purged from this painting but art, no ideas have entered this work," the allegedly instructive nature is given more weight and is ultimately more absurd.

Nova Scotia College of Art and Design

Soon after the *Cremation Project*, Baldessari was asked by the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design to exhibit his work there. Instead of sending art, Baldessari sent instructions to the school in the form of a letter for the initial iteration of *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, a work based on a sentence Baldessari had written to himself in a notebook he then kept. The letter reads in part,

…I have no idea what your gallery looks like of course, and I know that you do not have much money for shows so that conditions my ideas of course….I've got a punishment piece. It will require a surrogate or surrogates since I cannot be there to… impose punishment. But that's ok, since the theory is that punishment should be instructive for others. And there is a precedent for it, Christ being punished for our sins, and many others. So some student scapegoats are necessary. If you can't induce anybody to be sacrificial and take my sins upon their shoulders, then use whatever funds there are, fifty dollars, to pay someone as a mercenary.

The piece is this, from floor to ceiling should be written by one or more people, one sentence under another, the following statement: I will not make any more bad art.

At least one column of the sentence should be done floor to ceiling before the exhibit opens and the writing of the sentence should continue everyday, if possible, for the length of the exhibit. I would appreciate it if you could tell me how many times the sentence has been written after the exhibit closes. It should be hand written, clearly written with correct spelling….[2]

By the end of the exhibit the walls were covered with Baldessari's statement of sacrificial punishment and he allowed the school to create a lithograph of the work for their fundraising based on his own handwriting.

A Strategist

Baldessari has called himself "purely a strategist" and in *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* he references the fundamental modernist tension between the word and image that Magritte had exposed in *The Treachery of Images* and the cool, spare, self-referential repetitions of the minimalists. John Baldessari has spent his career coaxing beauty and complexity from our prosaic visual culture.

Special thanks to Sandy Heller, The Heller Group, LLC

1. Excerpt from, John Baldessari, *Cremation Piece*, 1969 in Donald Kuspit, "**Semiotic Anti-Subject**," *Artnet*, originally from three Getty lectures delivered at the School of Fine Arts at the University of Southern California, April 4, 6 and 10, 2000.

2. Excerpt transcribed from video, "**Curator Chrissie Iles on John Baldessari's *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art***," Whitney Museum of American Art, December 2010.

Additional Resources:

The artist's website

Baldessari on Art 21

Whitney Museum recreation of *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*

Baldessari essay and podcast on NPR

Yale Books Blog on the Cremation Project

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3.1.6: Hans Haacke, Seurat’s “Les Poseuses” (small version), 1884-1975

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

Page ID
194704



Video **3.1.6.1**: Hans Haacke, *Seurat’s “Les Poseuses” (small version), 1884-1975*, 1975

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3.1.7: Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway- Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii

by TINA RIVERS RYAN

Page ID
194705



Video **3.1.7.1**

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.



Figure **3.1.7.1**: 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, roughly 15 x 40 x 4′ (Smithsonian American Art Museum, © Nam June Paik Estate)

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 **3.1.7.2**: 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 **3.1.7.3**: 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.



Figure **3.1.7.4**: 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 3.1.7.5: 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

Electronic Superhighway – American Experience in the Classroom (The Smithsonian American Art Museum)

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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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.1.8: Yayoi Kusama

3.1.8.1: Narcissus Garden

3.1.8.2: Yayoi Kusama (Tate)

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3.1.8.1: Narcissus Garden

by DANIELLE SHANG

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Narcissism

Today there are few female artists who are more visible to a wide range of international audiences than Yayoi Kusama, who was born in 1929 in Japan. Kusama is a self-taught artist who now chooses to live in a private Tokyo mental health facility, while prolifically producing art in various media in her studio nearby. Her highly constructed persona and self-proclaimed life-long history of insanity have been the subject of scrutiny and critiques for decades. Art historian Jody Cutler places Kusama's oeuvre "in dialogue with the psychological state known as narcissism," as "narcissism is both the subject and the cause of Kusama's art, or in other words, a conscious artistic element related to content."[1] It is within this context that we examine Kusama and her infamous *Narcissus Garden* (narcissism is, in part, the egotistic admiration of one's self).

Mirrors

Kusama arrived in New York City from Japan in 1958 and immediately approached dealers and artists alike to promote her work. Within the first few years she began to exhibit and associate herself with seminal artists and critics, such as Donald Judd, Joseph Cornell, Yves Klein, and Lucio Fontana who later was instrumental in her realizing *Narcissus Garden*.



Figure **3.1.8.1.1**: Installation view, *Infinity Mirror Room–Phalli's Field* (or *Floor Show*), (no longer extant) Castellane Gallery, New York. 1965 (photo ©Eiko Hosoe)

In 1965, she mounted her first mirror installation *Infinity Mirror Room-Phalli's Field* at Castellane Gallery in New York (left). A mirrored room without a ceiling was filled with colorfully dotted, phallus-like stuffed objects on the floor. The repeated reflections in the mirrors conveyed the illusion of a continuous sea of multiplied phalli expanding to its infinity. This playful and erotic exhibition immediately attracted the media's attention.

Narcissus Garden, 1966

The pinnacle of her *succès de scandale* culminated in the 33rd Venice Biennale in 1966. Although Kusama was not officially invited to exhibit, according to her autobiography, she received the moral and financial support from Lucio Fontana and permission from the chairman of the Biennale Committee to stage 1,500 mass-produced plastic silver globes on the lawn outside the Italian Pavilion. The **tightly arranged 1,500 shimmering balls** constructed an infinite reflective field in which the images of the artist, the visitors, the architecture, and the landscape were repeated, distorted, and projected by the convex mirror surfaces that produced virtual images appearing closer and smaller than reality. The size of each sphere was similar to that of a fortune-teller's crystal ball. When gazing into it, the viewer only saw his/her own reflection staring back, forcing a confrontation with one's own vanity and ego.

During the opening week, Kusama placed two signs at the installation: "NARCISSUS GARDEN, KUSAMA" and "YOUR NARCISSIUM [sic] FOR SALE" on the lawn. Acting like a street peddler, she was selling the mirror balls to passers-by for two dollars each, while distributing flyers with Herbert Read's complimentary remarks about her work on them. She consciously drew attention to the "otherness" of her exotic heritage by wearing a gold kimono with a silver sash. The monetary exchange between Kusama and her customers underscored the economic system embedded in art production, exhibition and circulation. The Biennale officials eventually stepped in and put an end to her "peddling." But the installation remained.[2] Her interactive performance and

eye-catching installation garnered international press coverage. This original installation of *Narcissus Garden* from 1966 has been frequently interpreted by many as both Kusama's self-promotion and her protest of the commercialization of art. [3]

The life of Narcissus Garden after 1966



Figure **3.1.8.1.2**: Yayoi Kusama, mirror balls, *Narcissus Garden*, Inhotim (Brazil) installation, original installation and performance 1966 (photo: **emc**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Since then, Kusama's oeuvre has become integrated into the canon of art history, and popular with art institutions around the world. In 1993, Kusama was officially invited to represent Japan at the 45th Venice Biennale.

Her *Narcissus Garden* continues to live on. It has been commissioned and re-installed at various settings, including the Brazilian business tycoon Bernardo de Mello Paz's Instituto Inhotim (left), Central Park in New York City, as well as retail booths at art fairs.

The re-creation of *Narcissus Garden* has erased the notion of political cynicism and social critique; instead, those shiny balls, now made of stainless steel and carrying hefty price tags, have become a trophy of prestige and self-importance. Originally intended as the media for an interactive performance between the artist and the viewer, the objects are now regarded as valuable commodities for display.



Figure **3.1.8.1.3**: Yayoi Kusama, mirror balls, Narcissus Garden, Inhotim (Brazil) installation, original installation and performance 1966 (photo: **emc**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The profound narcissistic undertone however has been ironically amplified not only by the artist's pervasive ostentation, but also by the viewership in the age of Internet. Seduced by his/her own reflective images on the convex surfaces, viewers snap photographs with a smart phone and instantly upload them to social media for the rest of the world to see. The urge to capture and disseminate the moment one's own image coalesces onto a privileged object in a privileged institution seems to motivate the obsession with the self. To further accentuate the effect of gazing at one's multiple selves, many installations now take place on the water where the original Narcissus from the Greek mythology fell in love with his own reflection and eventually drowned.

[1] Jody Cutler. 2011. "Narcissus, Narcosis, Neurosis: The Visions of Yayoi Kusama," in *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth*, edited by Isabelle Loring Wallace, Jennie Hirsh, (London: Ashgate Publishing ltd), p. 89.

[2] There are a few discrepancies in the anecdote of this event between Kusama's autobiography and art historians and critics. For example, 1) Kusama claims that the installation was not exactly a guerrilla act, because she received permission from the Biennale official, though she did not have an official invitation as a Biennale participant; 2) according to Kusama, the installation itself was NOT removed after she was asked to stop selling the balls; and 3) in her autobiography, the balls were made of plastic in 1966 not stainless steel.

[3] It is worth noting that the following Venice Biennale, in 1968, was marked by social and economic turmoil around the globe, and was struck by the student movement in Italy and a boycott by international artists. The Biennale was labeled as a fascist, capitalist, and commercial. In contrast to Kusama's action, many artists who were officially invited to participate decided to close exhibition halls, withdraw their works, and join street demonstrations resulting in the closure of the Biennale sales office and the end of Biennale prizes until 1986.

Additional resources:

Kusama and Experimentation (Tate blog)

Kusama and Self-obliteration (Tate blog)

TateShots: Kusama's Obliteration Room

Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, translated by Ralph McCarthy (London: Tate Enterprises Ltd., 2013) (see the section, "On an endless Highway").

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3.1.8.2: Yayoi Kusama (Tate)

- *by TATE*

Page ID

194708



Video **3.1.8.2.1**: The nine decades of Yayoi Kusama's (草間彌生) life have taken her from rural Japan to the New York art scene to contemporary Tokyo, in a career in which she has continuously innovated and re-invented her style. Video from **Tate**

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3.1.9: Bruce Nauman, The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths

by JP MCMAHON

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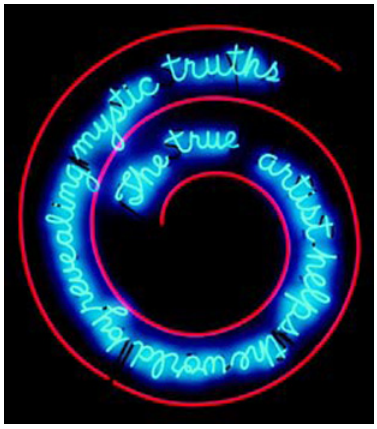


Figure **3.1.9.1**: Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*, 1967, neon and clear glass tubing suspension supports; 149.86 x 139.7 x 5.08 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

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:



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

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3.1.10: Mónica Mayer, The Clothesline

by **DR. ALBERTO MCKELLIGAN HERNÁNDEZ**

Page ID

194711



Figure **3.1.10.1**: Reactivation of *The Clothesline* by Mónica Mayer in the Contemporary Art University Museum, Mexico City, May 2016, in the context of the exhibition "When in Doubt… Ask: A Retrocollective Exhibit of Mónica Mayer" (photo: Corderokaren, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Hundreds of pink paper postcards

In 1978, artist Mónica Mayer distributed hundreds of pink paper postcards to a diverse group of women in Mexico City; each card included a statement that was meant to be completed by the participants: "As a woman, what I most hate about the city is." Most of the completed responses highlighted experiences of sexual harassment within the urban environment of Mexico City. Mayer brought attention to the untold stories and silenced voices of urban women as her contribution to "New Tendencies," an exhibition curated by Mathias Goeritz for the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City.

At the museum, the artist, who is from Mexico, presented the postcards held in place by clothespins hung from rows of pink string that were placed within a brightly-colored pink frame. By employing a color traditionally associated with femininity in multiple elements of the installation, Mayer underscored how her art project focused on women's experiences, a topic often ignored by art institutions. The title of the installation, *The Clothesline*, deliberately referenced the domestic labor traditionally described as "women's work" in Mexican society.

Several women visiting the exhibition wrote additional responses in the cards, spontaneously participating in the artistic process. Mayer's installation — constructed out of simple materials — string, paper, and clothespins — shattered the silence that surrounded experiences of sexual violence in the city, allowing women to voice their experiences within the gallery spaces of the Museum of Modern Art. The hundreds of responses revealed how sexual violence was a large-scale social problem faced by women every day.

Intersections with Mexican feminism(s)

Mayer produced *The Clothesline* after participating in the burgeoning forms of feminist activism that flourished in Mexico City throughout the 1970s. This diverse social movement sought women's emancipation in Mexican society, though individual activists and feminist organizations disagreed on how to achieve this goal. For instance, feminist groups debated whether they should

cooperate with the Mexican government to change the country's laws, or whether they should establish themselves as an independent movement that resisted any form of institutionalization.

Despite the different perspectives espoused by individual feminist organizations, several activists argued that the most pressing issues faced by contemporary women were sexual violence and reproductive rights. Members from different groups came together to establish the Coalition of Feminist Women in 1976 as a way to tackle these issues. Describing her participation in this coalition, Mayer noted the passionate debates that developed between activists: "violent discussions, radical attitudes, [and] painful recriminations were the norm." Still, the artist also emphasized how these activists banded together to provoke social changes: "A wonderful memory I have from those days is the demonstration we held in front of the Senators Building in December of 1977, demanding the liberalization of abortion" [1]— underscoring the passion and diversity of feminist activism in Mexico.

Through *The Clothesline*, Mayer developed a participatory artistic installation that resonated with the issues raised by her fellow feminist activists. The project served as a prominent example of feminist art, since it encouraged audience members to question the ways in which gender inequality and sexual violence affected the individual lives of countless women. The collaborative methods Mayer employed in the production of the work also resonated with the egalitarian ideals of her fellow feminist activists. In a later description of the project, the artist argued that "the artwork is not the clothesline itself, but the interaction that occurs when you request responses and what happens when the public gets to read them."[2] Mayer emphasized her position as both a creator and collaborator of the installation.

Transnational connections

After her participation in the exhibition, "New Tendencies," Mayer continued exploring intersections between artistic practice and feminist activism. In 1978, she traveled to Los Angeles to study at the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW), the first independent center for feminist artistic instruction in the United States. Artist Judy Chicago, art historian Arlene Raven, and graphic designer Sheila de Bretteville established the FSW in 1973. The school was part of the larger Los Angeles based institution known as the Woman's Building.



Figure **3.1.10.2**: A map of Los Angeles marked with large red "RAPE" stamps to indicate places where rapes had occurred. Created by Suzanne Lacy for *Three Weeks in May*, an activist performance art work that took place from May 8 to May 24, 1977, © Suzanne Lacy (photo)

As a student at the FSW, Mayer found Suzanne Lacy's artistic projects that explored the connections between public art, activism, and feminism particularly intriguing. In 1977, for instance, Lacy developed *Three Weeks in May*. As part of this project, the artist "went to the Los Angeles Police Department's central office to obtain confidential rape reports from the previous day."[3] Lacy then identified the locations of these crimes by stamping the word "RAPE" in a large-scale map of Los Angeles. The artist displayed this map at a public shopping center; she also presented a second map that showed the location of resource centers for women who had experienced sexual violence.

In Los Angeles, Mayer further considered the artistic potential of her clothesline installation. *The Clothesline: Los Angeles* emerged in 1979, when Communitas—a group from Ocean Park, Santa Monica—asked Lacy to explore the forms of violence experienced by women in that neighborhood. Lacy developed *Making It Safe*, a project in which "[s]he and her collaborators distributed leaflets, created a series of events, speak-outs on incest, small dialogues, and curated an art show in thirty windows of the local commercial district."[4] As part of *Making It Safe*, Mayer redeployed her earlier clothesline project. As described by Mayer, the questions in this clothesline "revolved around the perceptions of safety and danger by women in the community of Ocean Park, including their proposals to feel safer."[5]

By focusing the questions on the experiences of a particular community, the artist suggested how different geographic and cultural contexts shape the experiences of women. Instead of considering women as a monolithic group, the artist prompted participants to describe how living within Ocean Park shaped their understanding of violence and safety. Since both of the clotheslines alluded to the problem of sexual violence, the art project suggested how different communities of women, whether in Mexico City or Los Angeles, could establish alliances between them.

Legacy

Mayer's clotheslines of the late 1970s are only a small glimpse of her extensive career as a feminist artist that has lasted for more than forty years. After her studies in the FSW, Mayer was a founding member of feminist art collectives such as Women Scribes and Portraitists and Black Hen Powder in Mexico City. The foundational project of *The Clothesline* continues to engage audiences throughout her home country and abroad. In the late 2010s, Mayer developed new versions of the project in Mexico City (2016), Washington, D.C. (2017), Hermosillo, Mexico (2018), Buenos Aires, Argentina (2018), and Portland, OR (2018). Each of these clotheslines reveal how Mayer challenges gender inequality across the globe, continuing the goals of social transformation espoused by Mexican feminist activists of the 1970s.

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[1] Both quotes in this paragraph from Mónica Mayer, "On Life and Art as a Feminist," *N.Paradoxa Online*, nos. 8-9. (2010), p. 49.

[2] **Mónica Mayer, "El tendedero de la Ibero," *De archivos y redes: un proyecto artístico sobre la integración y reactivación de archivos*, December 16, 2015**.

[3] "Three Weeks in May (1977)," accessed April 10, 2019, http://www.suzannelacy.com/three-weeks-in-may.

[4] "Making It Safe (1979)," Accessed April 10, 2019, http://www.suzannelacy.com/making-it-safe-1979.

[5] See **Mónica Mayer, "El Tendedero L.A.," *De archivos y redes*, November 23, 2015**.

Additional resources:

Márgara Millán, "Traducción y política del feminismo mexicano contemporáneo," in *Cartografías del feminismo mexicano, 1970-2000*, ed. Nora Nínive García, Márgara Millán, and Cynthia Pech (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, 2007).

Álvarez Romero, Ekaterina, ed. *When in Doubt… Ask: A Retrocollective Exhibit of Mónica Mayer*, (Mexico City: Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2016).

National Museum of Women in the Arts: The Clothesline Project



Video 3.1.10.1: Mónica Mayer and *The Clothesline Project*

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.2: Performance Art

Performance art differs from traditional theater in its rejection of a clear narrative, use of random or chance-based structures, and direct appeal to the audience.

c. 1960 - present

3.2.1: Performance Art, an Introduction

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3.2.1: Performance Art, an Introduction

by DR. VIRGINIA B. SPIVEY

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When Art Intersects With Life

Many people associate performance art with highly publicized controversies over government funding of the arts, censorship, and standards of public decency. Indeed, at its worst, performance art can seem gratuitous, boring or just plain weird. But, at its best, it taps into our most basic shared instincts: our physical and psychological needs for food, shelter, sex, and human interaction; our individual fears and self-consciousness; our concerns about life, the future, and the world we live in. It often forces us to think about issues in a way that can be disturbing and uncomfortable, but it can also make us laugh by calling attention to the absurdities in life and the idiosyncrasies of human behavior.



Figure **3.2.1.1**: Roman Ondák, *Measuring the Universe*, 2007, shown enacted at MoMA, 2009

Performance art differs from traditional theater in its rejection of a clear narrative, use of random or chance-based structures, and direct appeal to the audience. The art historian RoseLee Goldberg writes:

Historically, performance art has been a medium that challenges and violates borders between disciplines and genders, between private and public, and between everyday life and art, and that follows no rules.*

Although the term encompasses a broad range of artistic practices that involve bodily experience and live action, its radical connotations derive from this challenge to conventional social mores and artistic values of the past.

Historical Sources

While performance art is a relatively new area of art history, it has roots in experimental art of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Echoing utopian ideas of the period's avant-garde, these earliest examples found influences in theatrical and music performance, art, poetry, burlesque and other popular entertainment. Modern artists used live events to promote extremist beliefs, often through deliberate provocation and attempts to offend bourgeois tastes or expectations. In Italy, the anarchist group of Futurist artists insulted and hurled profanity at their middle-class audiences in hopes of inciting political action.

Following World War II, performance emerged as a useful way for artists to explore philosophical and psychological questions about human existence. For this generation, who had witnessed destruction caused by the Holocaust and atomic bomb, the body offered a powerful medium to communicate shared physical and emotional experience. Whereas painting and sculpture relied on expressive form and content to convey meaning, performance art forced viewers to engage with a real person who could feel cold and hunger, fear and pain, excitement and embarrassment—just like them.

Action & Contingency

Some artists, inspired largely by Abstract Expressionism, used performance to emphasize the body's role in artistic production. Working before a live audience, Kazuo Shiraga of the Japanese Gutai Group made sculpture by crawling through a pile of mud. Georges Mathieu staged similar performances in Paris where he violently threw paint at his canvas. These performative approaches

to making art built on philosophical interpretations of Abstract Expressionism, which held the gestural markings of action painters as visible evidence of the artist's own existence. Bolstered by Hans Namuth's photographs of Jackson Pollock in his studio, moving dance-like around a canvas on the floor, artists like Shiraga and Mathieu began to see the artist's creative act as equally important, if not more so, to the artwork produced. In this light, Pollock's distinctive drips, spills and splatters appeared as a mere remnant, a visible trace left over from the moment of creation.

Shifting attention from the art object to the artist's action further suggested that art existed in real space and real time. In New York, visual artists combined their interest in action painting with ideas of the avant-garde composer John Cage to blur the line between art and life. Cage employed chance procedures to create musical compositions such as 4'33". In this (in)famous piece, Cage used the time frame specified in the title to bracket ambient noises that occurred randomly during the performance. By effectively calling attention to the hum of fluorescent lights, people moving in their seats, coughs, whispers, and other ordinary sounds, Cage transformed them into a unique musical composition.

The Private Made Political

Drawing on these influences, new artistic formats emerged in the late 1950s. Environments and Happenings physically placed viewers in commonplace surroundings, often forcing them to participate in a series of loosely structured actions. Fluxus artists, poets, and musicians likewise challenged viewers by presenting the most mundane events—brushing teeth, making a salad, exiting the theater—as forms of art. A well-known example is the "bed-in" that Fluxus artist Yoko Ono staged in 1969 in Amsterdam with her husband John Lennon. Typical of much performance art, Ono and Lennon made ordinary human activity a public spectacle, which demanded personal interaction and raised popular awareness of their pacifist beliefs.

In the politicized environment of the 1960s, many artists employed performance to address emerging social concerns. For feminist artists in particular, using their body in live performance proved effective in challenging historical representations of women, made mostly by male artists for male patrons. In keeping with past tradition, artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke and Valie Export displayed their nude bodies for the viewer's gaze; but, they resisted the idealized notion of women as passive objects of beauty and desire. Through their words and actions, they confronted their audiences and raised issues about the relationship of female experience to cultural beliefs and institutions, physical appearance, and bodily functions including menstruation and childbearing. Their ground-breaking work paved the way for male and female artists in the 1980s and 1990s, who similarly used body and performance art to explore issues of gender, race and sexual identity.

Where Is It?

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, performance has been closely tied to the search for alternatives to established art forms, which many artists felt had become fetishized as objects of economic and cultural value. Because performance art emphasized the artist's action and the viewer's experience in real space and time, it rarely yielded a final object to be sold, collected, or exhibited. Artists of the 1960 and 70s also experimented with other "dematerialized" formats including Earthworks and Conceptual Art that resisted commodification and traditional modes of museum display. The simultaneous rise of photography and video, however, offered artists a viable way to document and widely distribute this new work.

Performance art's acceptance into the mainstream over the past 30 years has led to new trends in its practice and understanding. Ironically, the need to position performance within art's history has led museums and scholars to focus heavily on photographs and videos that were intended only as documents of live events. In this context, such archival materials assume the art status of the original performance. This practice runs counter to the goal of many artists, who first turned to performance as an alternative to object-based forms of art. Alternatively, some artists and institutions now stage re-enactments of earlier performances in order to recapture the experience of a live event. In a 2010 retrospective exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, for example, performers in the galleries staged live reenactments of works by the pioneering performance artist Marina Abramovic, alongside photographs and video documentation of the original performances.

Don't Try This At Home

New strategies, variously described as situations, relational aesthetics, and interventionist art, have recently begun to appear. Interested in the social role of the artist, Rirkrit Tiravanija stages performances that encourage interpersonal exchange and shared conversation among individuals who might not otherwise meet. His performances have included cooking traditional Thai dinners in

museums for viewers to share, and relocating the entire contents of a gallery's offices and storage rooms, including the director at his desk, into public areas used to exhibit art. Similar to performance art of the past, such approaches engage the viewer and encourage their active participation in artistic production; however, they also speak to a cultural shift toward interactive modes of communication and social exchange that characterize the 21st century.

* RoseLee Goldberg. *Performance: Live art since the 60s*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 1998, page 20.

Additional resources:

Video of John Cage's 4″33″ performed by the BBC Symphoney Orchestra at the Barbican Centre in 2004

Carolee Schneemann's website

Marina Abramovic's MoMA exhibition website

Performance art on The Art Story

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3.2.2: The Case for Performance Art

- *by THE ART ASSIGNMENT*

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Video **3.2.2.1**: Speaker: Sarah Urist Green

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3.2.3: Black Mountain College

- by **TATE**

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Video **3.2.3.1**: Black Mountain College was a highly influential school founded in North Carolina, USA, in 1933 where teaching was experimental and committed to an interdisciplinary approach. The college's progressive principles were based on the educational theories of John Andrew Rice, its founder. In the curriculum, drama, music and fine art were given equal status to all other academic subjects. Teaching was informal, with an emphasis on collaboration, communal living and outdoor activities. Most of the work of running the college and maintaining the buildings was done by students and faculty. Black Mountain quickly became an extraordinary powerhouse of modern culture in America. Amongst its teachers were some of the greatest names of modern American culture, including the Bauhaus teacher Josef Albers, who had fled Nazi Germany after the closure of the Bauhaus that same year and became one of the first teachers at the college. Abstract expressionist painters Willem and Elaine de Kooning, artists Robert Rauschenberg and Anni Albers, composer John Cage and dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham were all also associated with the school at one time or another.

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3.2.4: Shiraga Kazuo, Challenging Mud

by **DR. NINA HORISAKI-CHRISTENS**

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Figure **3.2.4.1**: A single dramatic overhead shot captures the artist covered in a viscous mud, clothed only in a pair of white boxers, on his side apparently struggling to free his left leg from the thickly piled muck atop which he lies. The mud forms irregular streaks and blobs atop a gravel surface. Shiraga Kazuo, *Challenging Mud (Doro ni idomu)*, 1955 (2nd execution) © Shiraga Fujiko and Hisao and the former members of the Gutai Art Association

How might an artist react meaningfully in the aftermath of Japan's defeat, and its near total destruction, at the close of the Second World War? Kazuo Shiraga's 1955 performance work, *Challenging Mud*, proposed a rethinking of the boundaries and definitions of art making to clear a path forward.

The Gutai Art Exhibition

Shiraga performed his body/mud composition in the front courtyard of Tokyo's Ohara Hall three times over the run of the first Gutai Art Exhibition. The photographs that survive record the different effects of each iteration of the performance. Each time Shiraga molded, smeared, and grappled with a different combination of cement, *kabetsuchi*, and aggregates such as sand and gravel. Somewhere between painting, sculpting, and wrestling, Kazuo's radical actions defied categorical boundaries.



Figure **3.2.4.2**: Two men appear in the frame, shot at a low angle. The artist is at the center of the shot in boxers only, his arms and legs subsumed in the thickly piled mud. The other is clothed, squatting at left, holding a film camera. *Challenging Mud (Doro ni idomu)*, 1955, 1st Gutai Art Exhibition, Ohara Kaikan, Tokyo (Third Execution) © Shiraga Fujiko and Hisao and the former members of the Gutai Art Association

This emphasis on experimentation through the chance effects of action prefigured the proliferation of performance and intermedia practices that defined so much art in the 1960s and 70s, and has earned this work a place in art history. Mid-1950s Tokyo art-going audiences were accustomed to styles of painting promoted by the art academies, institutionalized artist associations, and art critics including **surrealism**, modernist abstraction, and proletarian arts, so they were unprepared for the genre-upending, aesthetic violence of Shiraga's performance.



Figure **3.2.4.3**: A pile of mud bearing an array of marks—indentations, cavities, and smears—sits at the center of a gravel field shot from a birds-eye view. A man, fully clothed in a casual suit, stands at left with hands behind him, head turned to directly face the camera following the convention of photographing painters next to their finished canvases. Shiraga Kazuo, *Challenging Mud. (Doro ni idomu)*, 1955 (3rd execution). Postcard © Shiraga Fujiko and Hisao and the former members of the Gutai Art Association

Postwar democracy

Shock was likely the reaction Shiraga sought. Gutai leader Yoshihara Jirō demanded that members "create what has never been created before" as a rejection of Japanese conventions of social conformity that became linked, in the postwar period, to wartime nationalism. Much of the Gutai Art Association's rhetoric followed the tendency in 1950s Japan to value American-style democracy and individualism as a response to the totalitarian aspects of wartime Japanese society, structures that had ended a mere ten years earlier.

Marxist-influenced political philosophers, argued that Japanese wartime fascism had been rooted in a lack of awareness of personal political power and social agency, a situation they described as insufficient to develop a sense of modern subjectivity. They argued that Japan had retained a feudalist outlook based in strict social hierarchies that allowed individuals to avoid personal responsibility by following those of a higher rank, including ultimately, the Japanese emperor.

Nine months after the performance, Shiraga illustrated a manifesto that defined what he termed creative individualism with a series of documentary photographs from his second and third performances. The text insisted on the need to nurture self-expression to create a foundation of "psychic individualism" (a recognition of individual autonomy) to guard against totalitarianism and cultural restrictions. Shiraga pushed back against the desire to create great works of "social significance or commercial value," arguing that a focus on spirit and personal expression will create works that connect to others and accrue cultural value. [1]



Figure **3.2.4.4**: left: incendiary bombs are dropped from U.S. B-29s, Kobe, Japan, June 4, 1945 (photo: U.S. Army); right: Osaka, Japan, 1945 leveled by fire-bomb attacks by U.S. B-29s (photo: U.S. Army, Library of Congress)

left: incendiary bombs are dropped from U.S. B-29s, Kobe, Japan, June 4, 1945 (photo: U.S. Army); right: Osaka, Japan, 1945 leveled by fire-bomb attacks by U.S. B-29s (photo: U.S. Army, Library of Congress)

For the Gutai artists, the value of democracy lay both in its privileging of individualism over conformity and its upending of social hierarchies. Near the end of WWII, Allied forces led by American B-29s, firebombed many of Japan's major urban centers including Osaka and Kobe, cities close to Ashiya City where the Gutai artists were based. After WWII, reconstruction was slow and was primarily carried out with inexpensive and readily available materials such as *kabetsuchi*, which was widely used for residential reconstruction in the decades following the war. Shiraga's unstudied abstract mark-making that used *kabetsuchi* positioned *Challenging Mud* as a work of art that anyone could potentially recreate. In this way, Shiraga's work was a direct attack on what the Gutai artists perceived as the elitist politics of the institutional art world centered in Tokyo (where *Challenging Mud* was staged).

A challenge to painting

The ambitions of *Challenging Mud* were not simply political. Shiraga's work was part of a broader redefinition of art by the Gutai artists. Gutai artists used the term "*e*" (picture in Japanese), to describe their work, in contrast with the term "*kaiga*," commonly

used to refer to paintings in a fine art context after Meiji period reforms modernized Japan's art world using a European model. "*Kaiga*" 絵画, written with Japanese characters that reference a flat image and a wall-hung, stretched canvas format.



Figure **3.2.4.5**: Hans Namuth, *Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner*, 1950, gelatin silver print, 28 x 27.3 cm © Hans Namuth Estate, Center for Creative Photography

In abandoning that term for "*e*" 絵, which simply refers to picture-making, Gutai artists questioned the basic formats and boundaries of modern painting. Gutai artists' approach drew inspiration from mass-media photographs of Jackson Pollock painting not on an easel but on canvas spread across the floor. But while Pollock's work ultimately resulted in wall-hung paintings, Gutai artists often moved beyond the canvas entirely. Through media including performance, installation, and electrical technology, they pursued a more expansive vision of artistic creation that embraced participation, amateurism, and everyday creativity by looking to, for example, the spontaneity of children's art as an ideal. Nevertheless, the photographic documentation of *Challenging Mud* retains some relationship to painting. Specifically, Shiraga had a nameplate placed next to one iteration of the mud pile and had himself photographed standing next to this completed composition, a parallel with exhibition practices, but one that critiques conventions of painting.



Figure **3.2.4.1**: Murakami Saburō, *Passing Through*, 1956, Performance view: 2nd Gutai Art Exhibition, Ohara Kaikan, Tokyo, 1956 © Makiko Murakami and the former members of the Gutai Art Association

Violence and masculinity

Art historian Namiko Kunimoto has argued that violence was a recurring theme in Shiraga's overall artistic practice. In the 1950s, Pollock was understood by some critics to represent the "end of painting," and an impasse to future creative expression. The Gutai

artists responded with destructive acts—the throwing of glass bottles filled with paint and ripping through paper stretched across wooden frames.



Figure **3.2.4.6**: Fujita Tsuguharu, *Honorable Death on Attu Island (Attsutō Gyokusai)*, 1943, oil on canvas, 76 x 102 inches (The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo)

Acts of violence within the context of art making could also serve as a means for artists in the postwar period to reject state-sponsored wartime propagandistic painting. For example, in the infamous wartime painting by Fujita Tsuguharu, *Honorable Death on Attu Island* (*Attsutō Gyokusai*), a violent mass of writhing soldiers form a muddy pile of monotone bodies, forgoing individuality in support of national spirit—an ethos often understood in the West through the *kamikaze* pilot who sacrifices his life to maintain the honor of family and country. By contrast, Shiraga struggled alone with the mud to reveal both its material character and his own individual spirit through a process of spontaneous, physical mark-making. In this way, Shiraga presented the violence in his art as a means of shifting the destructive energy of the war to a creative process that he used to strengthen his individuality.



Figure **3.2.4.7**: Sumo wrestlers wearing white *mawashi* during training (photo: Hiroaki Maeda, CC BY-ND 2.0)

However, throughout Shiraga's practice, violence is also marked as specifically masculine through references in his titles and materials to East Asian male archetypes including the classical warrior, the eccentric monk, and even the boar hunter. *Challenging Mud*, likewise, seems to gesture toward the soldier in the trenches; note for example Shiraga's cropped GI-style haircut and, of

course, the mud. Yet simultaneously, the work's aesthetic—a one-on-one match between the artist and a circle of mud (with the artist clad in white shorts reminiscent of a white *fundoshi*) presented at the exhibition's opening—evoked the image of a sumo match or the *doronko matsuri*, both ritual events featuring masculine figures associated with the inauguration of yearly cycles. To a certain degree, Shiraga presents himself as masculine hero echoing the American Abstract Expressionist model of the artist as a heroic individualist expressing his spirit through gesture. However, through violent performance and the abandonment of paint and canvas, Shiraga pushed this model in a distinct direction informed by the context of postwar Japan.

Happenings and media events

In some ways early Gutai works were ahead of their time. They used novel settings—parks, theaters, rooftops—and innovative formats—performance, installations, events—to maximize the accessibility and impact of their works. These novel approaches drew the attention of the press, and, in a strategy replicated several times, Shiraga's *Challenging Mud* was specifically staged for a Mainichi newsreel. Photographs were also circulated through the *Gutai* journal, with several issues ending up in the United States. This led American performance art pioneer Allan Kaprow to include images of *Challenging Mud* in his seminal compendium of 1960s experimental works *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings* (1966), alongside art stars **Jackson Pollock**, **Robert Rauschenberg**, and **Claes Oldenburg**. Placed amongst other messy, deskilled, immersive, and event-based works, *Challenging Mud*'s performative ephemerality was only captured by the documentary camera and circulated through reproductive media networks. In such a context, *Challenging Mud*'s emphasis on materiality and its challenge to painting fades in favor of the camera frame. This prefigures the engagement with media in 1960s art movements including happenings and **performance art**—temporary events captured through photography—as well as **land art**—filmed and photographed in order to bring physically distant installations to the attention of urban art audiences. Ultimately, it is *Challenging Mud*'s complex web of references, at the intersection of the post-WWII Japanese art world and the international art scene, that continues to draw audiences to its photographic remnants.

[1] Shiraga Kazuo, "The Establishment of the Individual," eds. Ming Tiampo and Alexandra Munro, trans. Reiko Tomii (New York: Solomon R. Guggenhiem Museum, 2013), 279. Originally published as Shiraga Kazuo, "Kotai no kakuritsu," *Gutai* 4 (July 1956): 6–7.

Additional Resources:

Ming Tiampo and Alexandra Munroe, *Gutai: Splendid Playground* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2013).

Namiko Kunimoto, "Shiraga Kazuo: The Hero and Concrete Violence," *Art History* 36, no. 1 (February 2013), pp. 154-179.

Reiko Tomii and Jane DeBevoise, "Conversation with Reiko Tomii," *Asia Art Archive in America*, September 6, 2011.

Ming Tiampo, "Moments of Destruction, Moments of Beauty: Gutai and Japanese Matsuri festivals," in *Moments of Destruction, Moments of Beauty: Gutai*, editors Yamamoto Atsuo, Ming Tiampo, and Florence de Mèredieu (Paris: Blusson, 2002), pp, 37-64[NH1].

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3.2.5: Vito Acconci, Following Piece

by JP MCMAHON

Page ID

194717



Figure **3.2.5.1**: Vito Acconci, *Following Piece*, between October 3 and 25, 1969, performance, photograph © Vito Acconci 2008, shown courtesy of Vito Acconci

Conceived by performance and conceptual artist Vito Acconci, *Following Piece* was an activity that took place everyday on the streets of New York, between October 3rd and 25th, 1969. It was part of other performance and conceptual events sponsored by the Architectural League of New York that occurred during those three weeks. The terms of the exhibition "Street Works IV" were to do a piece, sometime during the month, that used a street in New York City. So Acconci decided to follow people around the streets and document his following of them. But why would he do this? Why would Acconci follow random people around New York?

Acconci's work is typical of performance and conceptual art made during this period in the way that he uses his body as the object of his art in order to explore some specific idea. In essence, *Following Piece* was concerned with the language of our bodies, not so much in a private manner, but in a deeply public manner. By selecting a passer-by at random until they entered a private space, Acconci submitted his own movements to the movements of others, showing how our bodies are themselves always subject to external forces that we may or may not be able to control. In his notes that the artist kept during the performance, Acconci wrote:

Following Piece, potentially, could use all the time allotted and all the space available: I might be following people, all day long, everyday, through all the streets in New York City. In actuality, following episodes ranged from two or three minutes when someone got into a car and I couldn't grab a taxi, I couldn't follow – to seven or eight hours – when a person went to a restaurant, a movie.

In terms of the art work, rather than being just another object that we look at in the gallery, *Following Piece* was part of the revolution that took place in the art world in the late 1960s that tried to bring art out of the gallery and into the street in order to explore real issues such as space, time, and the human body. Many artists, such as Acconci, used their bodies as their chosen medium. Look at some of Acconci's notes of the period which he wrote before, during and after the event:

- I need a scheme (follow the scheme, follow a person)
- I add myself to another person (I give up control/I don't have to control myself)
- Subjective relationship; subjunctive relationship
- A way to get around. (A way to get myself out of the house.) Get into the middle of things.
- Out of space. Out of time. (My time and space are taken up, out of myself, into a larger system).

All of these ideas were influenced by Acconci's readings. As many other artists of the period, Acconci wanted to get away from specific art problems and engage with social problems. Acconci read books such as Edward Hall's *The Hidden Dimension* (1969), Erving Goffmann's *The Presentation of the Self in Every Day Life* (1959), and Kurt Lewin's *In Principles of Topological*

Psychological (1936/1966). All of these books explored the ways in which the individual and the social are interlinked in terms of complex codes that structure the way we act and live everyday.

With regard to the influence on these texts on *Following Piece*, Acconci's use of diagrams specifically refers to Lewin's notion of "field theory": that is, a model that sought to explain human behaviour in terms of relations and in relation to its environment and surroundings. Lewin placed behaviour in a "field" in order to examine it in a theoretical manner. The diagrams drawn by Acconci are an imaginative engagement with this idea of human relations as engaging in a specific field or space. So by following someone around New York, Acconci could perhaps experience what it was like to relinquish self control to others and also explore the intersecting systems that grouped different people together in one field. As we can see from the diagrams, Acconci's intentions were not subjective but much more systematic—they constituted an exploration of the private and public fields that occur in every social space.

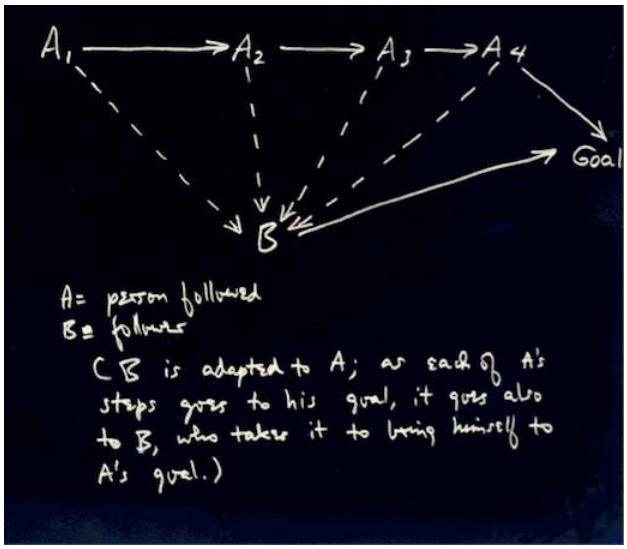


Figure 3.2.5.2: Vito Acconci, *Following Piece*, 1969 © Vito Acconci, shown courtesy of Vito Acconci

Ironically, for all the effort to get out of the gallery, much of Acconci's documentation of *Following Piece*, for example, the texts, photographs (which were taken after the event!), and diagrams, now constitutes a work of art in its own right. MoMA owns several of the photographs of *Following Piece* and other "versions" of this work are also in existence. So, even though Acconci's *Following Piece* was a performance that occurred in a very specific period (3rd to 25th October, 1969), the reproduction and circulation of the work continues. This fact not only teaches us important things about the nature of performance art and its relationship to the art world, but also how the context of the art work is also never exactly fixed and each time it is presented something new occurs with the work itself.

Additional Resources:

Following Piece photographs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Willoughby Sharp video interview with Vito Acconci (1973) includes discussion of *Following Piece*

Following Piece documentation

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3.2.6: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Washing/Tracks/Maintenance- Outside (July 23, 1973)

by PATRICIA HICKSON, WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
194718



Video 3.2.6.1: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside (July 23, 1973)*, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art ©Mierle Laderman Ukeles

Additional Resources:

This work at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Jillian Steinhauer "How Mierle Laderman Ukeles Turned Maintenance Work into Art" *Hyperallergic*

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3.2.7: Gordon Matta-Clark, Splitting

by DR. TOM FOLLAND

Page ID
194719



Figure 3.2.7.1: Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting*, 1974 (Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture, © Succession of Gordon Matta-Clark and Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark. Reprint made by the Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark from Matta-Clark negatives. Original photograph in the collection of SFMOMA)



Figure 3.2.7.2: Gordon Matta-Clark in the process of cutting the roof in *Splitting*, 1974 (Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes)

Rather surprising things

"Over the past ten years," the American art historian and critic Rosalind Krauss wrote in 1979, "rather surprising things have come to be called sculpture: narrow corridors with TV monitors at the ends; large photographs documenting country hikes; mirrors placed at strange angles in ordinary rooms; temporary lines cut into the floor of the desert." [1] To this list, we could add Gordan Matta-Clark's *Splitting*, 1974, in which a suburban home in Englewood, New Jersey slated for demolition was sliced nearly in half.

Matta-Clark had taken a chainsaw to make two parallel, vertical cuts beginning at the roof's center; the house was nearly cleaved in half, each half shifted outwards leaving a long narrow "V" shape allowing light to filter inside. It was a laborious process that involved the assistance of several friends and the resulting structure, demolished some three months later as part of an urban renewal project, was documented in photographs.

Splitting also served as the site for at least one "field trip" — the art dealer Holly Solomon (who had purportedly purchased the house as an investment), several artists, and gallery goers boarded a bus from downtown Manhattan to visit the house (a 16 mm film, now in the collection of the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, documented the trip).



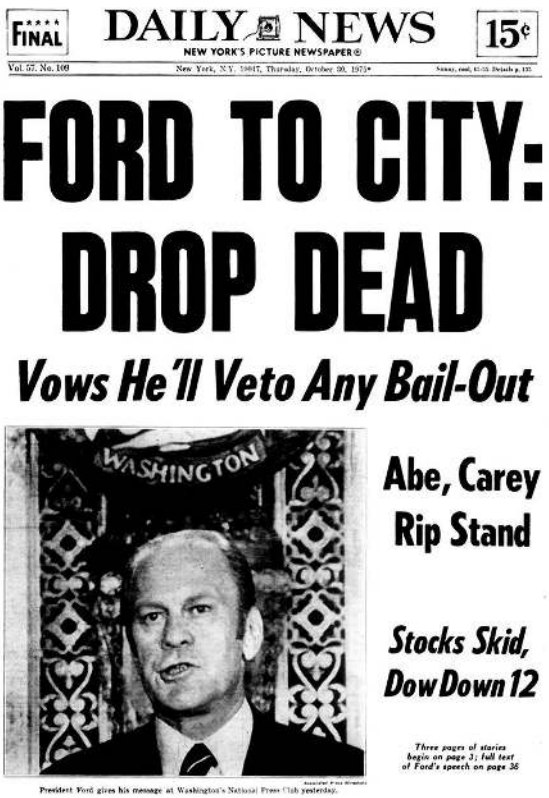
Figure 3.2.7.3: Still from Field trip to Gordon Matta-Clark's "Splitting" house, c. 1974 (YouTube)

Post-medium

Beginning in the 1970s, contemporary art abandoned the traditional forms it had historically taken. Painting and sculpture became almost unrecognizable as such. Krauss would later characterize it as a "post-medium" condition, a condition, in other words, in which the familiar categories that defined Western art for centuries were overturned. The medium, that which constituted the material or form of a given artwork, became obsolete, or at least radically reformulated: an art work could now exist in any form.

If Gordan Matta-Clark could be said to be associated with any one particular medium, it would be architecture. The entirety of his work, of which *Splitting* stands as exemplary, consisted of alterations to the architecture of abandoned or condemned buildings. In his other work, sections of floors and walls were removed, and sometimes those removed sections themselves become the artwork; in other cases it was the void formed from the removal that is the focus.

Matta-Clark began his interventions into the urban environment at a time when New York, where the artist lived and worked, was a city in crisis as a result of economic downturns. President Gerald Ford gave a speech denying federal assistance that would have rescued New York from what seemed like certain bankruptcy in the same year the artist made *Splitting*. *The Daily News* reported on its front page the very next day: "FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD."


FINAL DAILY NEWS 15¢
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER
Vol. 57, No. 109 New York, N.Y. 10017, Thursday, October 30, 1975*

FORD TO CITY:
DROP DEAD

Vows He'll Veto Any Bail-Out

WASHINGTON

President Ford gives his message at Washington's National Press Club yesterday.

Abe, Carey Rip Stand

Stocks Skid, Dow Down 12

Three pages of stories begin on page 3; full text of Ford's speech on page 36

Figure 3.2.7.4: The Daily News front page on Oct. 30, 1975 (New York Daily News)

Matta-Clark had seen his own neighborhood in lower Manhattan negatively impacted by **modernization** ever since the influential city planner Robert Moses attempted to push a freeway through Washington Square Park in the 1950s. Trained as an architect, Matta-Clark likely saw through the glossy rhetoric of urban renewal projects — though they promised regeneration such plans destroyed existing neighborhoods.

Anarchitecture



Figure **3.2.7.5**: Gordon Matta-Clark at 112 Greene Street in 1972. Photographed by Charles Denson (**Cosmos Andrew Sarchiapone papers**, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution)

In March 1974, Matta-Clark joined a collective of artists who mounted an exhibition entitled *Anarchitecture* at 112 Greene Street in New York City. The premise was embodied in the title which merged the term "anarchy" with "architecture;" the artists in the collective were all interested in exploring new ideas of form and space in the midst of urban decay. One year later, and out of his experience working with this community of like-minded artists, came *Splitting*. But Matta-Clark's destroyed house was not just giving visual shape to the crisis of a neighborhood or even of a city on the verge of collapse, dire as those conditions surely were.

Modernism formed the larger horizon of *Splitting*'s meaning; its philosophy of the new and of progress that had underwritten the utopianism of over 100 years of art and architecture was suddenly untenable. New York City had long defined industrial modernity — its soaring skyscrapers of the early twentieth century were second only to Chicago's equally impressive skyline — and its seeming collapse was yet another symbol of a crisis of modernity. No wonder many people came to speak of *post*modernity. In architecture particularly there was already a sense that the great utopian project of modernism had failed.

It has become almost obligatory to describe Matta-Clark's work as a critique of modernist architecture — and more generally modernist art — an intervention, interrogation, disruption, investigation (all words you will encounter in the study of any postmodern or contemporary art work). But as much as *Splitting* may be regarded as critical commentary on the idea of progress and a work that helps to lay the groundwork for a postmodern aesthetic (in which artists were seen to be social commentators, engaged participants in the larger realm of visual culture, or even political activism), another aspect of the artist's work bears consideration.



Figure **3.2.7.6**: Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting* (interior view), 1974 (**Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture**, © Succession of Gordon Matta-Clark and Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark. Reprint made by the Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark from Matta-Clark negatives. Original photograph in the collection of **SFMOMA**)

There is a melancholy and nostalgia that pervades Matta-Clark's fragments of walls, floors, cut-through spaces or domestic interiors opened to the outside. Much like the fascination with the ruins of antiquity that peppered the landscape of Europe during the eighteenth century when classical antiquity was discovered anew, Matta-Clark' s works speak in poignant tones of the demise of the modern as both an aesthetic ideal and a utopia.

Notes:

[1] Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field,"*October* Vol. 8 (Spring, 1979), p. 30.

References:

Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field,"*October* Vol. 8 (Spring, 1979), p. 30 – 44.

Rosalind Krauss, A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition, London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

Additional Resources:

Field trip to Gordon Matta-Clark's "Splitting" house, circa 1974, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Canadian Centre for Architecture's Gordon Matta-Clark Collection.

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3.2.8: Marina Abramović, The Artist is Present

by REBECCA TAYLOR

Page ID

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Figure **3.2.8.1**: 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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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Minimalism + Earthworks

The Modernists proposed that art could be anything—so why couldn't it be an idea or an action?

c. 1960 - present

- 4.1: A beginner's guide
  - 4.1.1: An introduction to Minimalism
  - 4.1.2: The Case for Minimalism
  - 4.1.3: The Case for Land Art
- 4.2: Carl Andre, Lever
- 4.3: Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty
- 4.4: Robert Morris
  - 4.4.1: (Untitled) L-Beams
  - 4.4.2: Bodyspacemotionthings
- 4.5: Walter De Maria, The Lightning Field
- 4.6: Nicolás García Uriburu, Coloration of the Grand Canal, Venice
- 4.7: Donald Judd, Untitled
- 4.8: Richard Serra
  - 4.8.1: Tilted Arc
  - 4.8.2: Intersection II
  - 4.8.3: Torqued Ellipse IV
  - 4.8.4: Band
- 4.9: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, The Gates

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4.1: A beginner's guide

4.1.1: An introduction to Minimalism

4.1.2: The Case for Minimalism

4.1.3: The Case for Land Art

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4.1.1: An introduction to Minimalism

by DR. VIRGINIA B. SPIVEY

Page ID
194723



Figure **4.1.1.1**: Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1969, ten copper units, each 9 x 40 x 31″ with 9″ intervals (Guggenheim Museum, New York)

A reductive abstract art

Although many works of art can be described as “minimal,” the name Minimalism refers specifically to a kind of reductive abstract art that emerged during the early 1960s. At the time, some critics preferred names like “ABC,” “Boring,” or “Literal” Art, and even “No-Art Nihilism,” which they believed best summed up the literal presentation and lack of expressive content characterizing this new aesthetic. While scholars have recently argued for a broader definition of Minimalism that would include artists in number of disciplines, the term remains closely linked to sculpture of the period.

Donald Judd’s *Untitled* (1969) is characteristic in its use of spare geometric forms, repeated to create a unified whole that calls attention to its physical size in relationship to the viewer. Like most Minimalists, Judd used industrial materials and processes to manufacture his work, but his preference for color and shiny surfaces distinguished him among the artists who pioneered the style.

Lack of apparent meaning

What most people find disturbing about Minimalism is its lack of any apparent meaning. Like Pop Art, which emerged simultaneously, Minimalism presented ordinary subject matter in a literal way that lacked expressive features or metaphorical content; likewise, the use of commercial processes smacked of mass production and seemed to reject traditional expectations of skill and originality in art. In these ways, both movements were, in part, a response to the dominance of Abstract Expressionism, which had held that painting conveys profound subjective meaning. However, whereas Pop artists depicted recognizable images from kitsch sources, the Minimalists exhibited their plywood boxes, florescent lights and concrete blocks directly on gallery floors, which seemed even more difficult to distinguish as “Art.” (One well-known story tells of an art dealer, who visited Carl Andre’s studio during the winter and unknowingly burned a sculpture for firewood while the artist was away.) Moreover, when asked to explain his black-striped paintings of 1959, Frank Stella responded, “What you see is what you see.” Stella’s comment implied that, not only was there no meaning, but that none was necessary to demonstrate the object’s artistic value.

Writings

Given these facts, it may seem odd to learn that hundreds of essays and books have been written about Minimalism, many by the artists themselves. It is significant that, although Minimalist art shares similar features, the artists associated with the movement

developed their aesthetic ideas from variety of philosophical and artistic influences. Through their writings, Minimalist artists put forth distinctive positions about the work they produced. In addition to his role as a sculptor, Judd was a prominent art critic, and his reviews provide eloquent explanations of his intent—shared by Stella and Dan Flavin—to eliminate the illusionism and "subjective" decision-making of traditional painting. Robert Morris, whose sculpture was influenced by avant-garde dance and performance, published a series of texts, arguing for sculpture to be understood in physical and psychological terms; and, Sol LeWitt introduced the term Conceptual Art to explain the use of seriality and systemic structure in his cubic grid-like forms.

Legacy

In this way, the artists, along with critics and art historians over the past 50 years, have developed a critical discourse that surrounds the art objects, but which is essential to understanding Minimalism itself. Likewise, such artists as Richard Serra, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Maya Lin and Rachel Whiteread, who use Minimalist practice of the early 1960s as a point of departure for their own creative exploration, continue to contribute to the movement's legacy and our understanding of its significance today.

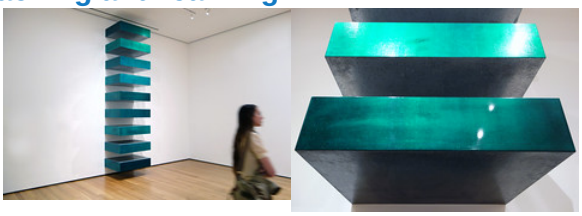
Additional resources:

Minimalism (movement and related works) MoMA, New York

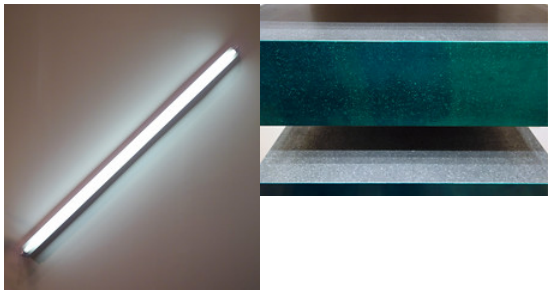
Donald Judd Exhibition, Tate Modern, London

Chinati, Marfa Texas

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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4.1.2: The Case for Minimalism

- by **THE ART ASSIGNMENT**

Page ID

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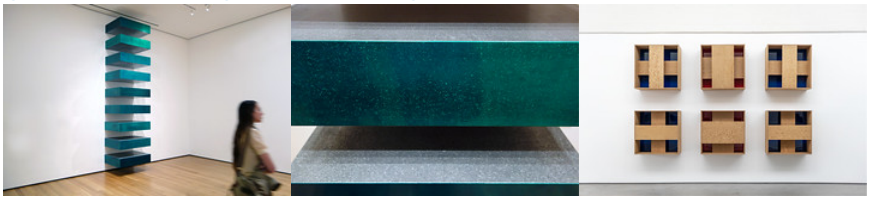
Video **4.1.2.1**: Speaker: Sarah Urist Green

Additional resources:

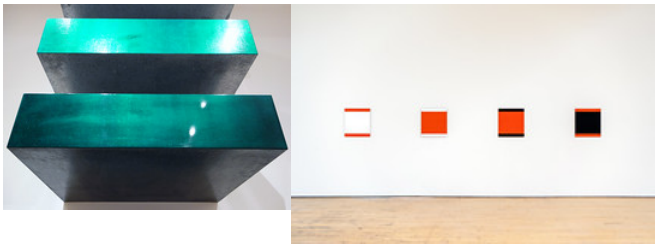
Minimalism definition from the Tate

Resources related to Minimalism from The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

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4.1.3: The Case for Land Art

- by **THE ART ASSIGNMENT**

Page ID

194725



Video **4.1.3.1**: Speaker: Sarah Urist Green

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4.2: Carl Andre, Lever

by **DR. THOMAS FOLLAND**

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194726

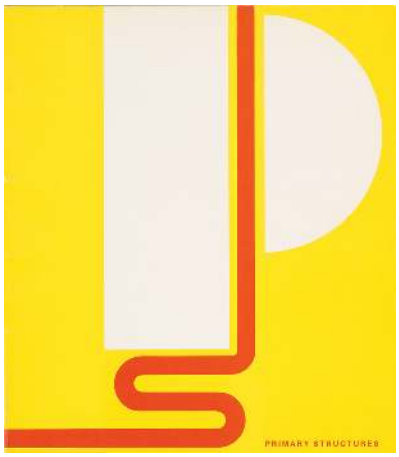


Figure **4.2.1**: Elaine Lustig Cohen, Primary Structures exhibition catalog cover, 1966, offset lithograph on paper (Jewish Museum, New York)

In 1966, the Jewish Museum held an exhibition titled Primary Structures. It was intended to be an international survey of contemporary sculpture. To the chagrin of many critics, it became the occasion of a new form of modernist art in which abstraction was taken to an almost absurd level whereby an artwork could barely be distinguished from a mere object.

These "Minimal works," the art critic Clement Greenberg famously lamented, "are readable as art, as almost anything is today—including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper."[1]

Minimalism was predominantly associated with a group of artists in New York City, but would eventually include a West Coast variant as well as a number of British and European artists, many of whom were in Primary Structures. As an identifying label it was one of many—others included ABC Art and Literalist Art—before the term minimalism was eventually settled upon to signal what was clearly a shift in an ongoing evolution of modern art. What was this shift? What does a minimalist artwork look like?

If one were to make a list to define its key features, it would read surprisingly like a list of everything art is not supposed to be:

- Industrially manufactured instead of handmade.
- Mathematically arranged instead of composed or balanced
- No pedestal (in the case of sculpture)
- Monochromatic color or the absence of color
- No representational imagery or symbolism
- Nothing to indicate the hand of the artist

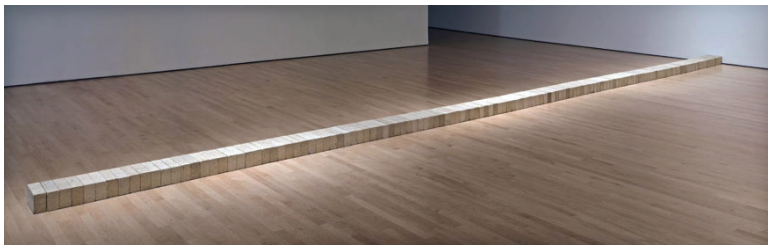


Figure **4.2.2**: Carl Andre, *Lever*, 1966, 137 firebricks, 11.4 x 22.5 x 883.9 cm (photo, © Carl Andre)

The artist Carl Andre's contribution to Primary Structures was a work called *Lever* (1966). Consisting of 137 firebricks laid out abutting one another in a simple line on the floor that extends outward from the gallery wall, it exemplified Minimalism not only

because of its extremely reductive approach to sculpture, but also because of the outrage Andre's work would elicit. Minimalism—its seeming lack of aesthetics, its theoretical elitism, its embrace of industrial modes of production—angered people. It even defied the term sculpture itself. Andre simply arranged (rather than composed) a group of prefabricated or readymade bricks.

While *Lever* might be devoid of illusion, it was rife with associations. One could start with the title which conjures up a language of machinery; a lever is a handle or switch or treadle. By laying an artwork on the floor, as Andre did with most of his work thus inviting viewers to experience it by walking on it, he violated one of the most sacred precepts of art: that it be revered, untouched, and taken in from a distance. And then there is of course the very placement of the work itself, extending outward from the wall as if it had fallen to the floor. Andre likened *Lever* to a toppled column.



Figure **4.2.3**: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Rain, Steam, and Speed — The Great Western Railway*, oil on canvas, 1844 (National Gallery, London, (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Andre often emphasized that his concern as an artist was for the material he used—wood, copper, aluminum, lead, or brick—in and of itself. In other words, he wanted the viewer to contemplate an object shorn of the interference of fussy aesthetics, illusionism, or even the personality of the artist. As he famously stated, "my ambition as an artist is to be the Turner of matter," a reference to the 19th-century British Romantic landscape painter J.M.W. Turner who had "severed color from depiction." "So I attempt," Andre continued, "to sever matter from depiction."[2] He may have succeeded in stripping any kind of representational imagery from his work, however it still made allusion to various theories of perception (phenomenology), histories of art (Constantin Brancusi is often cited as his progenitor), and even his own biography as the art historian Anna Chave argued in an important essay on the movement's origins. Routinely describing bricks as pertinent to his own identity—his grandfather was in fact a bricklayer—Andre's work could also be regarded in terms that are phallic and hyper-masculine. So much for impersonality!

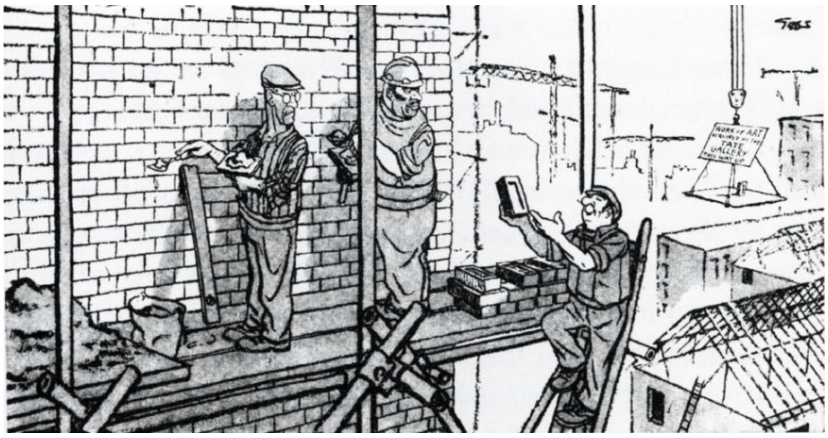
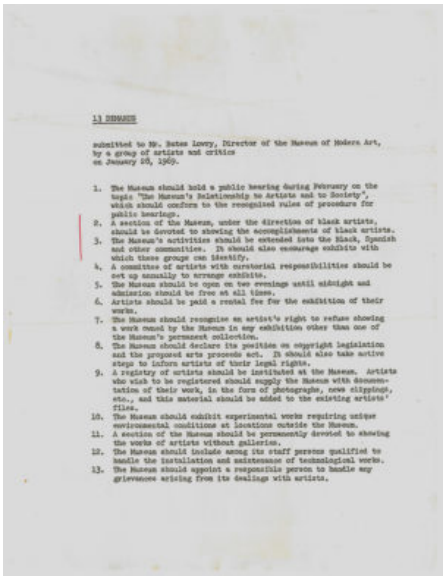


Figure **4.2.4**: “The repose and calm of this work reflects the simplicity and restraint of my earlier period, the symbolism remains personal and eludes exact interpretation.” Giles, *Daily Express*, February 19, 1976



13 DEMANDS

submitted to Mr. Bates Lowry, Director of the Museum of Modern Art,
by a group of artists and critics
on January 28, 1969.

1. The Museum should hold a public hearing during February on the topic "The Museum's Relationship to Artists and to Society", which should conform to the recognized rules of procedure for public hearings.
2. A section of the Museum, under the direction of black artists, should be devoted to showing the accomplishments of black artists.
3. The Museum's activities should be extended into the Black, Spanish and other communities. It should also encourage exhibits with which these groups can identify.
4. A committee of artists with curatorial responsibilities should be set up annually to arrange exhibits.
5. The Museum should be open on two evenings until midnight and admission should be free at all times.
6. Artists should be paid a rental fee for the exhibition of their works.
7. The Museum should recognize an artist's right to refuse showing a work owned by the Museum in any exhibition other than one of the Museum's permanent collection.
8. The Museum should declare its position on copyright legislation and the proposed arts proceeds act. It should also take active steps to inform artists of their legal rights.
9. A registry of artists should be instituted at the Museum. Artists who wish to be registered should supply the Museum with documentation of their work, in the form of photographs, news clippings, etc., and this material should be added to the existing artists' files.
10. The Museum should exhibit experimental works requiring unique environmental conditions at locations outside the Museum.
11. A section of the Museum should be permanently devoted to showing the works of artists without galleries.
12. The Museum should include among its staff persons qualified to handle the installation and maintenance of technological works.
13. The Museum should appoint a responsible person to handle any grievances arising from its dealings with artists.

Figure **4.2.5**: April 3, 1969 letter from Faith Ringgold and Tom Lloyd to Bates Lowry then Director of MoMA, Artist Workers Coalition (AWC) “13 Demands” (Barr Papers, 1.489 MoMA Archives, New York)

Some associations were intentionally cultivated by the artist; as a founding member of the Art Workers Coalition, part of a new leftist movement aligning artists with the struggles of workers, Andre saw his work in class terms, redolent of manual labor.

When the Tate Museum of London bought ***Equivalent VIII*** (1966) in 1972 controversy ensued over the fact that the museum had in essence purchased 120 firebricks for $12,000. Made in the same year and as part of the same series as *Lever*, this work was arranged in similar fashion to be laid upon the floor. A cartoon in the *Daily Mirror* showing a group of bricklayers on a scaffold transposed the words of Andre to a worker who, holding up a brick, exclaimed “The repose and calm of this work reflects the simplicity and restraint of my earlier period, the symbolism remains personal and eludes exact interpretation.” While undeniably funny, it also held up to ridicule the artist’s purported alignment with workers.

Minimalism did have a visible connection to the counter-cultural politics of the 1960s. After all, it too rejected traditional structures of authority. Andre’s Art Workers Coalition was the cultural wing of a post-war youth movement that drew its strength from numbers (the baby boomers swelled its ranks), in wanting to ally with the struggles of the working classes. The campuses of colleges and universities were not only major sites of anti-Vietnam War protest, they also swarmed with middle-class students in the traditionally working-class attire of blue jeans to advertise their allegiance to class politics.



Figure **4.2.6**: Student protesters marching down Langdon Street at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1965 (UW Digital Collections, CC BY 2.0)

Minimalist art, despite any elitist perceptions it may have cultivated, became associated in the popular imagination with this decade of the 1960s and its politics. When Maya Lin's minimalist-inspired memorial in 1981 became the winning entry in a public design competition to create a Vietnam Veterans Memorial for the National Mall in Washington D.C., this association reared into view. Lin's proposal envisioned a black granite wall upon which the names of dead soldiers were inscribed. The wall was in the shape of a V cut into the ground actively encouraging the close engagement of visitors. Its orientation to ground level and lack of overt symbolism was typical of the work of Andre and many others in the minimalist canon. Because of this (and its obvious lack of aggrandizing or heroic war imagery) the memorial precipitated an enormous backlash. Not only did it insufficiently commemorate the war, Lin's proposed project was seen by its detractors to be nothing more than a Minimalist expression of 60s anti-war radicalism.



Figure **4.2.7**: Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial (detail), 1982, granite, National Mall, Washington, D.C. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

In the end, *Lever* and Minimalism more broadly, were not so much about the making of art—most anyone can arrange a row of firebricks—but about the discourse or philosophical reflections generated by the work. And it was never that cohesive as an art movement. Andre may have insisted upon the sheer physicality of the object and the viewer's engagement with it, but for other minimalist artists, it soon became apparent that the work might not even need to be made; it could exist as a set of instructions and

diagrams. But despite the many internal differences, the true legacy of Minimalism lies in its privileging of a creative thought process, on the part of both viewer and artist, over the making of objects.

Notes:

[1] Clement Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture,” (1967), in Gregory Battcock, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 183.

[2] Paul Sutinen, “Twenty Questions For Carl Andre—June 1980,” https://paulsutinen.com/2013/11/19/2...dre-june-1980/. Accessed November 10, 2020.

Additional Resources

Anna C. Chave, “Minimalism and Biography.” *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 1 (2000): 149-63

Hal Foster, “The Crux of Minimalism.” *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, October, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1996

James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the 1960s*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001

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4.3: Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty

by **REBECCA TAYLOR**

Page ID
194727



Video **4.3.1**: Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1500 (if unwound) x 15 foot spiral, basalt, sand, and soil ©Holt-Smithson Foundation. Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris.

A monument to paradox and transience

A loud abrasive buzzing bellows from the nightstand and I raise my head, only to be blinded by the red light emanating from the small—in size, not volume—machine against a backdrop of pure blackness. 4:00 A.M. Oy. I'm immediately beset by the eternal morning conflict: ten more minutes of sleep vs. the rush of adrenaline that wants to start the adventures that await. The latter quickly usurps the former as I realize today is September 25th, a day I've waited for my entire life (metaphorically speaking) and actually been counting down to since the spring. It's *Spiral Jetty* day.



Figure **4.3.1**: Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970 (Great Salt Lake, Utah) (photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni) ©Holt-Smithson Foundation

I bound out of bed, Gianfranco Gorgoni's seminal photograph of Robert Smithson's iconic earth work on repeat in my head as I shower and "pack" for the daylong adventure that will take me to a remote area of Utah. I meet the rest of my party at the gate at LAX and it's immediately clear from the conversation that we've all arrived at this moment with decades of expectation accumulated. How would the experience compare to the visions (particular to each person) we had all conjured up over the years? Would the jetty "deliver" the transformative experience we all sought? Or would it fall victim to a case of excessively high and unattainable expectations? Time would tell.

But, it would indeed take time. An hour at the airport, followed by an hour plus on the plane, then a two plus hour bus ride over the bumpiest "trail"—it certainly wasn't a road!—imaginable, and ultimately a fifteen-minute hike. Nearly eight hours after my day had begun, it came into view. At last, *Spiral Jetty*.



Figure **4.3.2**: View of *Spiral Jetty* taken June 2016. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970 (Great Salt Lake, Utah) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

But… it was so… so… so small. That couldn't possibly be it! Naturally the distance made the work appear smaller and it "grew" as we approached, but even as we stood perched on the rocks right above it, it seemed utterly dominated by the landscape. Yet another surprise, the water from the Great Salt Lake no longer permeated the rocks, but was a significant distance beyond. Between the jetty and the lake, there was a blanket of white—a picture-perfect postcard image of a quiet winter's morn, and yet, the "snow" wasn't melted by the sun blazing down from above. Upon closer inspection, the "snow" was actually crystallized salt that brilliantly reflected the sun's rays and the nearby water.



Figure **4.3.3**: Rozel Point shore near *Spiral Jetty*, taken June 2016. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

We walked about the jetty with the sun hot upon our skin, the smell of the salt air filling our nose and lungs, and the feel of salt crystals on our fingers (having knelt to examine the minerals that carpeted the environ). An all-consuming, olfactory experience. We then decided to make our way across the white blanket to the water's edge, fighting off fears that the salt—which had the distinct characteristics of ice—would "break" and we would plunge into the Great Salt Lake below (which was a physical impossibility since the water wasn't below). From a distance the water had appeared a brilliant blue, but as we neared, gradations of color began to appear—shades of blue, purple, pink, and red—a traveler's mirage, of sorts, and undeniably picturesque.

We found our way up to a piece of land overlooking the jetty and sat down on the rocks to enjoy our sandwiches and "debate" Smithson's intentions and ethical issues in conserving the work with several scholars. One of them compared Smithson's *Spiral*

Jetty to Claude Monet's *Rouen Cathedral* series, which conveyed the same location at various times of day so that he could capture the specific lighting and other nuances of a particular moment. He said, "Smithson's doing that here but he's not doing it on canvas, he's doing it out there in the elements themselves… it has that same type of specificity too it, and yet specificity that is subject to all kinds of permutations." The question was raised about Smithson's vision for the work, his view on its ephemerality, and whether he ever envisioned groups such as ours making the journey out to this incredibly remote location to experience his work.

We were reminded that the physical jetty is only part of the work, which is actually a triad of the "sculpture" in the landscape, an essay by Smithson, and a film documenting the project. [1] But, as time has marched on, the work has become embodied in the minds of the general public in a single photograph, the aforementioned image taken by Gorgoni who hovered about the work in a helicopter and captured the piece from the perfect angle so that it looked colossal, while the hills looked minuscule.



Figure 4.3.4: View of *Spiral Jetty* partially submerged taken in 2005. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970 (Great Salt Lake, Utah) (photo: Land Use Database, CC BY-NC-SA 3.0)

This is due, in large part, to the fact that the jetty became submerged only a few years after it was made, and remained that way for decades. Only in the past ten years has it resurfaced and been "available" for visitation. Though Smithson may not have ever intended or even considered that people would take the time (and trouble) to visit, which begs the question that art historian Hikmet Sidney Loe posed to us, "Who is this work for?" Matthew Coolidge, president of the Center for Land Use Interpretation, said the work was for Gorgoni, that Smithson had literally made it for the photograph. They all agreed that the sculpture itself is the "gesture," but the documentation is every bit as much a part of it.

Up until that moment, the essay, the film, and the Gorgoni photograph were the entirety of my experience with Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, which is probably true for all but a small population who've sought out the physical experience of the "gesture." An object whose identity is so deeply intertwined with its documentation is fraught with complexities and paradox, but given interest in ephemerality and entropy, I'd imagine he'd be quite satisfied with the transient nature of his jetty—how it disappears and reappears at nature's will. Such is the foundation for arguing against any conservation of the earth work, and allowing it to emerge and submerge with the tides. And yet, the thought of the work vanishing for another thirty years beneath the lake devastates me. With this debate reeling in my head, I made my way back down to the jetty. If I couldn't be certain the work would be here waiting for my return in the distant future, I'd better take another promenade on the rocks.

This time I separated from my friends, put down my camera, and walked the spiral in absolute silence. Though physically alone, I felt the overwhelming presence of several invisible companions: Mother Nature herself, the spirit of Robert Smithson that is

somehow pervades the rocks, and God. I thought about each of them in a way that the loud noise of my crowded, urban existence prohibits. I found the transcendental calm within that often only comes to me upon reading an Emerson poem, hearing a choir sing "Amazing Grace," or staring into the floating color-field abyss of a **Mark Rothko painting**.

I began the walk back to the bus with my colleagues. We found ourselves humbled by the beauty of nature and the power of art, and hailed Smithson for giving us a reason to find our way to this breathtaking place.

On the bumpy ride back towards town, I realized that I had made a pilgrimage in search of a monument, an icon of culture and history, but found pleasure in the aesthetic of transience instead. *Spiral Jetty* looked nothing like I'd imagined—a.k.a. the Gorgoni photograph—and I'm grateful. Grateful because I saw the work on September 25, 2010 and no one will ever replicate the experience of seeing it on that day, for it reinvents itself with every change of light, tide, and weather.

Notes:

[1] Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty" (1972); **Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt's film on *Spiral Jetty*** (Holt/Smithson Foundation).

Additional resources

***Spiral Jetty* at Dia Art Foundation.**

Read a ***Reframing Art History* chapter about Re-Mapping Land Art: Earthworks, Borderlands, Ecology.**

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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SECTION OVERVIEW

4.4: Robert Morris

4.4.1: (Untitled) L-Beams

4.4.2: Bodyspacemotionthings

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4.4.1: (Untitled) L-Beams

by **JP MCMAHON**

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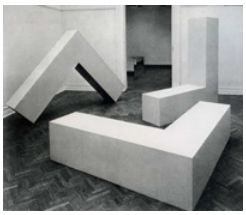


Figure **4.4.1.1**: Robert Morris, *Untitled (L-Beams)*, 1965, originally plywood, later versions made in fiberglass and stainless steel, 8 x 8 x 2′

Unfortunately, any photograph of Robert Morris's *Untitled (L-Beams)* is going to miss the point if we want to understand the object both in an artistic and material sense. Morris wanted to expose the conditions of perception and display and the fact that these conditions always affect the way we comprehend the art object—sculpture always exists somewhere in relationship to someone at sometime. This specificity, Morris felt, had not been investigated enough, even by the many avant-garde experiments that define Modernism.

By placing two eight-foot fiberglass "L-Beams" in a gallery space (often, he showed three), Morris demonstrated that a division existed between our perception of the object and the actual object. While viewers perceived the beams as being different shapes and sizes, in actuality, they were the same shape and of equal size. In direct opposition to Modernism's focus on the internal syntax of the object, that is, how the object can be understood as something "self-contained," Morris chose instead to examine the external syntax; the theatricality of the object—the way an object extends out from itself into its environment. In a series of essays written in the late 1960s, Morris observed how he wanted to make sculpture:

> ***A function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision […] for it is the viewer who changes the shape constantly by his change in position relative to the work. […] There are two distinct terms: the known constant and the experienced variable.***

This last line is revealing as it demonstrates the crux of L-Beams. No matter how hard we try, we can't reconcile what we see and what we know. Morris' objects appear one way, "the expierenced variable," but in our minds we identify them to be another, "the known constant."

Informed by theories of the body and perception, including his reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Morris explored the circumstances of the art object as we actually encounter it. He asked, why do we ignore the space and conditions of display in the presentation of art? Why do we only focus on the object? What about everything that circumscribes it; from its frame, to the wall that it is hung on, to the shape of the space that we put it in.

Like other artists of his generation, Morris pursued an advanced education in art history and earned a Master of Arts degree from Columbia University. Furthermore, Morris was associated with the Judson Dance School, an experimental group of performers who sought to push the conceptual boundaries of dance. These experiences informed Morris's understanding of what art could be, both in relation to the gallery and to history.

In relation to his artistic exploration of perception and space, Morris was explicitly influenced by Hans Namuth's photographs of Jackson Pollock and also by Allan Kaprow's reading of Pollock. Kaprow's essay, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" (1958), urged a new generation of artists to adopt the use of "sight, sound, movement [and] people" in order to make their art. Kaprow supported this call with his own brand of theatrical "Happenings," in which he staged bizarre and unplanned events in art galleries, further informing many young artists.

Morris has explained the theories behind his art practice in his teaching and in writing where he has sought to justify his art to a larger audience and enter into the debate surrounding his own practice. In particular, the summer edition of *Artforum* (1967)

included not only Morris's "Notes on Sculpture 3," but also Robert Smithson's "Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site," Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood," and Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art." This issue is of utmost importance in understanding Morris's relationship to Modernism, Minimalism, and to Conceptual Art.

Morris's *Untitled (L-Beams)* were shown in the exhibition, "Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculpture" (April 27 – June 12, 1966). This exhibition, which took place at the Jewish Museum in New York, effectively launched Minimalism into the discourse of contemporary art on the international stage. The critical and art historical discussions that followed this exhibition resulted in important debates over the inherent significance of the Minimalist object, the role of the artist in its production, and the role of the viewer in relation to the creation of its meaning.

Additional resources:

This sculpture at the Whitney Museum of American Art

Artist's biography from the Guggenheim Museum

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4.4.2: Bodyspacemotionthings

- by **TATE**

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Video **4.4.2.1**: **Video from Tate**

Interactive art was a new concept when the exhibition Bodyspacemotionthings first went on show at the Tate in 1971. Created by the American artist Robert Morris, it consists of a series of beams, weights, platforms, rollers, tunnels and ramps that people can clamber all over. It closed just four days after opening, due to safety concerns over the wildly enthusiastic reaction of the audience. For The Long Weekend 2009 the exhibition was recreated at Tate Modern using stronger, modern materials. In this film we watch the reaction of today's visitors, and speak to curators Catherine Wood and Kathy Noble about Morris's vision and influence.

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4.5: Walter De Maria, The Lightning Field

by DR. LARA KUYKENDALL

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194731



Figure 4.5.1: Walter De Maria, *The Lightning Field*, 1977 (New Mexico)

Earthwork in the city

The first earthwork I ever encountered was, ironically, in the heart of New York City. I made my way by subway and on foot to 141 Wooster Street in Soho. I climbed a narrow staircase and turned to see a work of art unlike anything I'd ever encountered: a gallery filled with dirt. The attendant told me the space was 3,600 square feet, the soil was 22 inches deep, and the weight of this natural material was 280,000 pounds. I couldn't walk on it, but I could smell the earthy air and feel the humidity that kept the dirt a dark, rich brown. I took my time, inhaling deeply and looking intently, before turning and heading back to the city street.

The New York Earth Room (1977) is a terrific introduction to Walter De Maria's artistic practice. As a maker of earthworks or land art, he crafts experiences with and in nature that appear to be simple, but are often transcendent. Like the works of fellow land artists—Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels*, and Michael Heizer's *Double Negative*, to name a few—they are also conceptual and challenge the notion that art is a commodity that can be easily bought and sold.

As part of the Postminimalist generation of the 1960s and 1970s, these artists focused on process and nontraditional materials, while they critiqued the commercialism of the New York art world. Seeing *Earth Room* in person made me want to leave the city and travel to see how De Maria work functioned in the American landscape, rather than the man-made environment of lower Manhattan. My next stop would be De Maria's largest and most famous earthwork, *The Lightning Field* in New Mexico.

Destination: art

My pilgrimage to The Lightning Field was considerably more arduous and time consuming. The closest town is Quemado, about two and a half hours southwest of Albuquerque. The drive takes you through the high desert of New Mexico. This area is flat but beautiful. The summer morning was chilly and sunny and my friends and I met our guide at the Dia Foundation office, a nearly empty building in a very sleepy town. We signed the guestbook, and eagerly piled into the big, dusty SUV that would take us to our destination. The route was hard to chart, as so many roads are unpaved and unmarked. I had trouble keeping track of the time as I watched for rattlesnakes, counted cattle, and searched for signs of De Maria's installation.

After what felt like only a moment, but must have been more than an hour, we pulled up to the edge of a large field of metal poles that look like sleek lightning rods. We unloaded our belongings and toured our overnight accommodations, a humble wooden cabin

with a pellet stove for warmth and a pan of green chile enchiladas in the fridge for dinner. We found a binder in the cabin that contained basic information about the surveys and engineering studies that the project required and that lists many of its essential physical properties. The field measures one mile by one kilometer and the 400 poles range in height from 15 feet to 26 feet 9 inches, but because the seemingly flat terrain is actually quite uneven, their tips are so level that you could lay a sheet of glass atop them. It took roughly 38,000 pounds of stainless steel to make the poles and if you laid them down in a line, they would stretch a distance of more than one and a half miles. From the porch we could see many of the poles gleaming in the late-afternoon sun, but some in the distance were hard to spot. So we spent the remaining daylight hours roaming the field, getting lost, and finding our way back.

The Invisible, isolation, and the sublime

When he announced *The Lightning Field* in the April 1980 issue of *Artforum* De Maria explained, “The invisible is real” and “Isolation is the essence of land art.” These are the statements that preoccupied us as we explored this work of art. The maximum number of visitors at any one time is six, and it is easy to venture so far out that you cannot see any of your companions. At twilight, I found myself on the far edge of the field, turned to look back at the steely gray poles and the cabin, and instead of seeing my friends, saw a pronghorn in my path. At sunrise, we all sipped coffee as we watched the poles reflect the pink and blue sky of the early morning. At midday, many of the poles seemed to disappear as the sun hit them from above and in the early afternoon the tips shone so brightly that they almost looked like burning candles. Around the clock, these man-made poles reminded us of nature’s ephemeral qualities and the poetry of consciously experiencing our surroundings.

Of course, the title of this work teases you with the possibility of seeing lightning strike and dance atop the poles. This is possible. In fact, De Maria selected this part of New Mexico precisely because of the relatively high incidence of electrical storms. The likelihood increases in the summer, especially during the rainy months of July and August. But if you don’t see lightning, don’t fret. In my two trips to *The Lightning Field* I have managed to find that sublime landscape of the modern American West even without witnessing lightning. My experiences of *The Lightning Field* were not unlike the feeling I get when looking at a painting by Albert Bierstadt (below), Frederic Edwin Church, or Thomas Moran. All of these artists make me want to get outside and find a spot where the air is crisp and clean, where I feel alone and independent, and where I can think about big ideas.



Figure **4.5.2**: Albert Bierstadt, *Among the Sierra Nevada*, California, 1868, oil on canvas, 305.13 x 182.88 cm (Smithsonian American Art Museum)

Additional resources:

Walter De Maria’s Lightning Field at Dia

***New York Times* obituary**

Cornelia Dean, "Drawn to the Lightning, *The New York Times* (September 21, 2003)

Interview with Walter De Maria, conducted by Paul Cummings in New York City (October 4, 1972) from the Archives of American Art

John Beardsley, "Art and Authoritarianism: Walter De Maria's "Lightning Field"" *October* 16 (1981), pp. 35-38.

Kenneth Baker, *The Lightning Field* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

Walter De Maria, "The Lightning Field: Some Facts, Notes, Data, Information, Statistics, and Statements," *Artforum* 18, no. 8 (April 1980), p. 58.

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4.6: Nicolás García Uriburu, Coloration of the Grand Canal, Venice

by **WILLIAM SCHWALLER**

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194732



Figure 4.6.1: Nicolás García Uriburu, *Coloration of the Grand Canal, Venice*, 1968, chromogenic print (Uriburu Foundation Collection, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

A 3-kilometer-long painting

This may look like a photo of St. Patrick's Day in Venice, but it was actually a June morning in 1968 when the Argentine painter Nicolás García Uriburu climbed aboard a gondola on Venice's Grand Canal to embark on his largest and most ambitious painting to date. He enlisted the help of Memo, a gondolier, to transport him up and down the city's main canal as he dyed the water a vibrant chartreuse green with 30 kilograms of Fluorescein, an organic non-toxic powdered dye.

Over the next eight hours the water and the city's hundreds of smaller canals glowed green, as if they had been covered with artificial turf or contaminated by toxic waste. Fearing some kind of attack on the city's waterways, the police quickly chased Memo and García Uriburu finally arresting the duo in the historic Piazza San Marco. For hours, García Uriburu was held by the police as they verified the artist's assertion that the Fluorescein was non-toxic, and that the coloration was an artistic gesture and not a malicious act. García Uriburu's *Coloration of the Grand Canal, Venice* was a playful and innovative approach to painting, bringing it out of the art gallery and into the scale of the city *and* into nature itself. He gave painting a fleeting ephemerality appropriate to both the cycles of nature and the rapidly changing world of the 1960s. In so doing, García Uriburu's radical transformation of painting produced one of the earliest monumental pieces of Land art and was a watershed moment for the artist's interest in and advocacy for art as a tool for environmental awareness.



Figure **4.6.2**: Nicolás García Uriburu, *Coloration of the Grand Canal*, Venice, 1968, chromogenic print (Uriburu Foundation collection) (photo: Romina Santarelli / Ministerio de Cultura de la Nación, CC BY-SA 2.0)

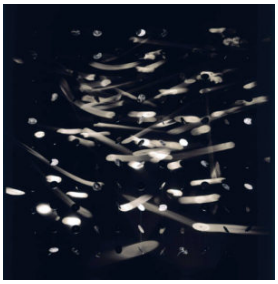


Figure **4.6.3**: Julio Le Parc, *Continuel-lumière – Mobile*, 1960/1966, painted wood, painted metal, 121 round stainless steel disks, nylon thread and lights, 217 x 200 x 20.5 cm

García Uriburu was like many other artists around the world who, throughout the 1960s, explored novel ways that paintings could be made and experienced, and what they could contain. By creating a painting with and on a body of water—and which also happened to be the center of Venice's transportation—the artist relinquished a certain amount of control that painters usually enjoyed in the composition and execution of their works. But it also enabled him to take advantage of the water's tidal ebb and flow and the circulation of the water by the city's gondolas and vaporettos to produce a painting spread the length of the city's 3-kilometer-long Grand Canal.

Art that moves

Just two years before the Argentine Julio Le Parc won the Venice Biennale's grand prize in painting, becoming the first Latin American to do so, for his presentation of paintings and sculptures that contained motors, lights, mirrors, and moving parts to introduce kinetic movement and audience participation into the artwork. Like Le Parc, García Uriburu wanted to make painting less static and more engaging for audiences but did so with the kinetic material of water and at the dynamic scale of an entire city.

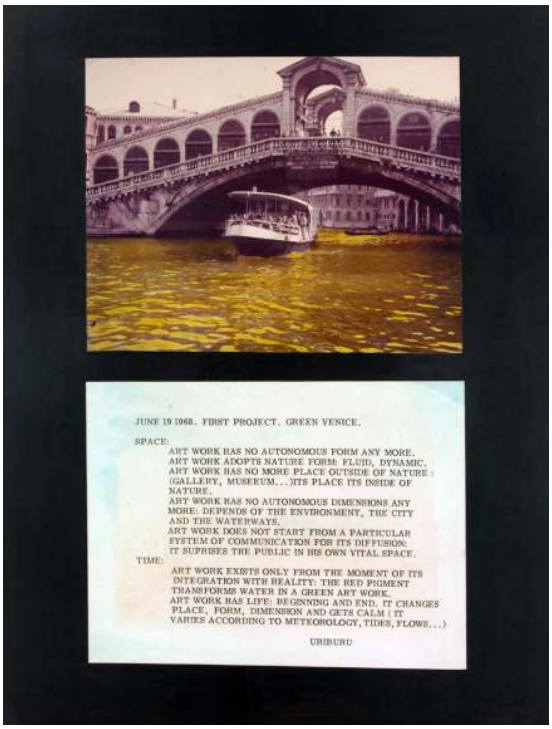


Figure **4.6.4**: Nicolás García Uriburu, *Coloración en Venecia*, 1968, manipulated photograph and typed text, 82 x 50 cm (Colección Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes)

García Uriburu expressed the ideas behind this approach to painting and the visual arts in a manifesto-like text that accompanied a color photograph of his coloration, declaring, "Art has no autonomous dimension any more: it depends on the environment: the city, the waterways. . . . It surprises the public in its own vital space. . . . Art has life of its own: a beginning and an end. Art changes place, form, dimension. It varies according to meteorology, tides, currents."

Like other contemporary artistic trends—including conceptual, minimal, process, and performance art—the Coloration of the Grand Canal, Venice broke with tradition to be temporary, participatory, and susceptible to change from outside forces (human and natural, boats or tides). By working with natural materials and embracing nature's scale and variability, García Uriburu's new approach to painting also aligned him with a richly varied and international group of artists making works in and with the natural environment, producing so called earthworks or Land art.

International hydrochromy

Executed in 1968, the *Coloration of the Grand Canal, Venice* was not only one of the earliest examples of Land art, but its massive scale anticipated later monumental earthworks like Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped Coast*, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, or Walter De Maria's *Lighting Field*. García Uriburu's work is also a useful contrast to the earthworks of Smithson or De Maria because it challenges the assumption that Land Art was made primarily by U.S. artists in remote and rural settings, when in fact it was an international tendency that occurred in urban and rural settings alike.



Figure **4.6.5**: Nicolás García Uriburu, *Hidrocromía Intercontinental*, 1970, pastel on four photographs, each one: 88.5 x 30 cm (Colección MALBA, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires; photo: William Schwaller)

This artwork and García Uriburu's career were marked by the increasingly globalized nature of art in the mid-twentieth century. Argentine artists like García Uriburu and Le Parc frequently seized upon opportunities to travel outside their home countries and study abroad in Europe and North America, both centers of international art which hosted important artistic events like the Venice Biennale. García Uriburu decided to carry out his *Coloration of the Grand Canal, Venice* just days before the inauguration of the 1968 biennale, ensuring that even though he had not been invited to represent his native Argentina in the exhibition, his work would be seen by many of the world's artists, curators, and press.



Figure **4.6.6**: Nicolás García Uriburu, Flyer for Green New York, 1970, photocopy on yellow paper

As he moved from Argentina, to Europe, and briefly to the United States, García Uriburu began to look critically at these societies' relationships to nature, principally their urban waterways. In 1970, he sketched out a "conceptual quadrilateral" of "international hydrochromy" (a fancy way of saying: coloring water), as seen in a flyer, where he would repeat his green coloration in the East River in New York, the Seine in Paris, a return to the Grand Canal in Venice, and the Riachuelo in his native Buenos Aires. His coloration of the East River occurred just weeks after New Yorkers celebrated the world's first Earth Day on April 22, 1970.

In this context of growing environmental awareness and activism, and his experiences living in mega-cities across the Western Hemisphere, García Uriburu began to reflect on his colorations as gestures for environmental awareness, highlighting in chartreuse green the nature that flows beneath and sustains our vibrant cities. These international colorations were opportunities to "sound the

alarm" about civilization's contamination and mistreatment of water and nature using the arresting power of these fluorescent rivers. He expressed this environmental shift in his art in his so-called "Green Manifesto," which stated, "I denounce with my art the antagonism between nature and civilization, between myself and civilization. To defend ecology."

Green before it was "Green"

But why dye the Grand Canal green? In an article about his coloration the artist jokingly explained, "I wanted to wish the Venice Biennale good luck. So I used green, the color of hope." Serious or not, García Uriburu also chose green because of its associations with nature. In a text titled "Green Venice" García Uriburu explained, "Man can transform and dominate nature. With a fluorescent color can be change [sic] the perceptions in an urban scale . . . all the city was transformed in a fluorescent yellow-green park."



Figure **4.6.7**: Overhead view of the Gemini 4 spacecraft showing the yellow flotation collar used to stabilize the spacecraft in choppy seas. The green marker dye is highly visible from the air and is used as a locating aid. Gemini capsule, June 7, 1965 (photo: NASA, public domain)

Environmentalism

The idea that people could overcome or alter nature was reinforced at the time by the global spectacle of the space race. It is possible that García Uriburu discovered the green Fluorescein dye from footage of NASA astronauts splashing down in the Atlantic Ocean in their Gemini space capsules, which employed Fluorescein as "sea markers." For the artist, Fluorescein's green hue represented the green of nature and our need to defend that resource which so often gets overlooked within our industrialized cities.

From the 1970s through the 2000s, García Uriburu repeated his colorations of rivers, harbors, and fountains in cities around the globe using art as a vehicle to draw awareness towards the symbiotic relationship cities have with their waterways. As an artist from Latin America, García Uriburu was always sensitive to the exploitation of natural resources in underdeveloped countries for the sake of favorable economic relationships with wealthy countries, often stating publicly, "The more advanced countries are destroying water, land, air; reserves of the future in Latin American countries." With this commitment to employ the green Fluorescein as a symbol of nature the artist was aligned with groups like Greenpeace (the international environmental organization) and the world's first "Green" political parties to associate the green of nature, the chlorophyll of plant life, with the politics of environmentalism.



Figure **4.6.8**: Joseph Beuys (left) and Nicolás García Uriburu (right), *Colouration of the Rhine*, 1981, color photograph

Over time García Uriburu was invited to carry out colorations as part of larger public protests. This one was part of a national day of protest against pollution organized by the Green Party. Joseph Beuys—German sculptor, performance artist, and co-founder of the German Green Party—asked to collaborate in this coloration, recognizing his and García Uriburu's shared commitment in art's ability to address ecological subjects. In the photo from their collaboration, García Uriburu walks in a green jumpsuit, with Beuys to the left, carrying a bucket of Fluorescein green water taken from the polluted Rhine River in Germany.



Figure **4.6.9**: On the International Day of Water, Nicolás García Uriburu and Greenpeace dyed the waters of the Riachuelo green, near the Vuelta de Rocha, in the Boca neighborhood of Buenos Aires, Argentina, March 22, 2010 (photos courtesy of © Greenpeace / Marcelo Baiardi)

García Uriburu began collaborating in the 1990s with Greenpeace, staging protests against industrial pollution, nuclear waste, and endangered species in Argentina. In 2010, the artist, again in his performative green jumpsuit, was photographed pouring a bucket of Fluorescein into the Buenos Aires Riachuelo river. The flag on the boat reads "Riachuelo: 200 years of contamination," alluding to Argentina's bicentennial celebrations and declaring the purpose of this protest-coloration. Rather than celebrate this national milestone, García Uriburu and Greenpeace re-directed attention to the 200-year history of the contamination of this urban river—from waste and by-products produced by tanneries and slaughterhouses in 1810 to contemporary industrial waste and untreated sewage in 2010.

A spirit of experimentation

From expanded painting and early earthworks to environmental activism, García Uriburu's colorations reflect the spirit of experimentation of many artists in the last few decades of the 20th century. They also demonstrate the evolution of an artistic practice that responded to the social and political issues of their time.

Additional resources

Nicolás García Uriburu – Venecia en verde

ARTISTAS – Capítulo 6: Nicolás García Uriburu

Nicolas García Uriburu – an Interview with Paula Toto Blake, 2014

Nicolás García Uriburu Foundation

Marchesi, Mariana, *Venecia en clave verde* (Buenos Aires: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2018)

For more on Beuys and García Uriburu, see Katarzyna Cytlak "La rivoluzione siamo noi," *Third Text* 30, no. 5-6 (2016), pp. 346–367.

Isabel Plante, “La distancia y el lugar: producciones visuales entre el Plata y el Sena durante los años sesenta,” *Artelogie* 6 (2014).

This page titled 4.6: Nicolás García Uriburu, Coloration of the Grand Canal, Venice is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by William Schwaller, "Nicolás García Uriburu, Coloration of the Grand Canal, Venice," in Smarthistory, July 17, 2021, accessed January 16, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/nicolas-garcia-uriburu-coloration-grand-canal-venice/..

4.7: Donald Judd, Untitled

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

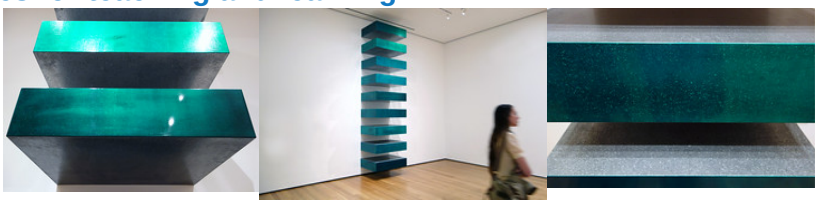
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Video 4.7.1: Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1969, ten copper units, each 9 x 40 x 31 inches with 9 inch intervals (Guggenheim Museum, New York)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

4.8: Richard Serra

4.8.1: Tilted Arc

4.8.2: Intersection II

4.8.3: Torqued Ellipse IV

4.8.4: Band

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4.8.1: Tilted Arc

- by **DR. MYA DOSCH**

Page ID

194735



Figure **4.8.1.1**: Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc* , Federal Plaza, New York, NY, installed 1981, destroyed 1989 (photo: US General Services Administration publication)

A different public art

Imagine walking past a sculpture in a city plaza — you might see a 19th-century bronze statue of a Civil War General on horseback or a marble statue of the Greek goddess of victory atop a high pedestal. Perhaps you glance up at the artwork in passing. Or, maybe you don't even take notice, as it is just one of the many urban sculptures honoring bygone heroes.



Figure **4.8.1.2**: Augustus St. Gaudens, *General William Tecumseh Sherman* , 1903 (Grand Army Plaza, Fifth Avenue between 59th and 60th Streets) (photo: Stu Rapley , CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Richard Serra wanted passers-by to have a very different relationship to public sculpture. His 1981 sculpture *Tilted Arc* was a 12-foot-tall, 120-foot-long, 15-ton steel slab that cut across Federal Plaza in Lower Manhattan. Instead of focusing on the optical experience of sculpture—looking at it from a distance—Serra wanted passers-by to experience the sculpture in a physical way. He said that the long, curving metal sheet would "encompass the people who walk on the plaza in its volume," altering their experience of the space as they moved to and from the surrounding government buildings.

Serra shared this interest with many of his minimalist colleagues such as Dan Flavin and Robert Morris, who sought to engage the spaces surrounding their sculptures. Minimalist artists considered their audience as moving beings with changing perspectives, not static viewers. For example, *Tilted Arc* could seem like a lyrical curve from some vantage points and an imposing barrier from others.

The sculpture was commissioned by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), as part of its "Art-in-Architecture" program, which commissioned large-scale, permanent artworks for new government buildings. However, Serra's work would not be permanent.

The controversy

Serra saw public art as a way to expose and critique the surrounding public space, not to beautify it. This approach made *Titled Arc* a target of criticism from the moment of its installation in 1981. *New York Times* art critic Grace Glueck called it "an awkward, bullying piece that may conceivably be the ugliest work of outdoor art in the city."[1] Employees of two government divisions that were housed on Federal Plaza collected 1,300 signatures requesting the removal of the sculpture. However, this criticism did not gain real traction until William Diamond became the GSA administrator in 1984 and took up the cause. Diamond held a public forum about *Tilted Arc*, in which 180 federal plaza workers, art critics, artists, curators, and other concerned parties expressed their opinions about the piece.

All those in favor

Another *New York Times critic*, Michael Berenson, wrote that "*Tilted Arc* is confrontational. But it is also gentle, silent and private."[2] Proponents of the sculpture stated that removing the sculpture at the request of a few would infringe upon Serra's First Amendment right to free speech, and therefore was un-American. Some emphasized that difficult artworks often become masterpieces only after an initial controversy (for example, Manet's *Olympia*).



Figure **4.8.1.3**: Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, oil on canvas, 1863 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

Serra and his supporters also stated that the artwork was site specific—that it was designed specifically for the Federal Plaza space. Because *Tilted Arc* engaged with its surroundings, it could not simply be moved to another location like other sculptures. The removal of the sculpture from Federal Plaza would destroy it.

All those opposed

Opponents of *Tilted Arc* felt that the public had not been adequately consulted. Indeed, the GSA amended its policies in 1988 to include more public awareness programming around each of its new sculptures. Furthermore, they found the resulting sculpture to be yet another rusting eyesore in New York City. Some argued that the sculpture "attracted" graffiti and rats. Others contended that the sculpture compromised the security and surveillance of the plaza, making the surrounding buildings more vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

The verdict

Many of those who defended *Tilted Arc* felt that Diamond and the rest of the jury had already made up their minds to remove the sculpture before the public forum began. Indeed, in spite of the fact that 122 people spoke in favor of the *Tilted Arc* and 58 against, the jury voted to remove the sculpture. The forum, however, brought up larger issues about the audience for public art. Who was the audience for this public sculpture? Was it the 180 concerned art critics and bureaucrats that attended the forum? The 10,000 people who worked in federal plaza? All New Yorkers? All Americans?

Serra sued the GSA, claiming violations of his contract, his copyright, and his right to Free Speech. A court found that the government owned the sculpture and thus could do as it saw fit. In 1989, the sculpture was removed in pieces and put in storage indefinitely.



Figure **4.8.1.4**: Martha Schwartz, benches and plantings in Federal Plaza, installed 1997 (photo: Lionel Martinez, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Not long after the removal of *Tilted Arc*, the GSA contacted landscape architect Martha Schwartz to re-imagine the plaza. Her design included mound-shaped hedges and long, curving benches. Proponents said that this restored the "use value" of the space by allowing office workers to enjoy their lunches on the plaza, while opponents said that it made the plaza into an ordinary park space that lacked the drama and artistry of Serra's work.

Should public art be practical? Provocative? Beautiful? Brash? Who is the audience for public art? Who gets to have a say in the process of commissioning new art? The history of *Tilted Arc* looms over these debates.

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1. Grace Glueck, "An Outdoor Sculpture Safari Around New York," *The New York Times* , August 7, 1981.

2. Michael Brenson, "Art View: The Case in Favor of a Controversial Sculpture," *The New York Times* , May 19, 1985.

Additional Resources:

The Trial of Tilted Arc (video from SFMOMA)

The Messy Saga of *Tilted Arc* Is Far From Over (NY Times, 1989 article)

Lost Art: Richard Serra (from Tate)

Richard Serra's Tilted Arc (WNYC podcast)

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4.8.2: Intersection II

- by **THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

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Video **4.8.2.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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4.8.3: Torqued Ellipse IV

- by **THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

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Video **4.8.3.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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4.8.4: Band

- by **THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

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Video **4.8.4.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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4.9: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, The Gates

by **DR. DORIS MARIA-REINA BRAVO**

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Figure **4.9.1**: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 1979-2005 (view across the pond looking southeast) © 2005 Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Nearly thirty years after the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude first conceived of *The Gates*, this logistically complex project was finally realized over a period of two weeks in New York's Central Park. Each gate, a rectilinear three-sided rigid vinyl frame resting on two steel footings, supported saffron-colored fabric panels that hung loosely from the top. The gates themselves matched the brilliant color of the fabric. The statistics are impressive: 7,503 gates ran over 23 miles of walkways; each gate was 16 feet high, with widths varying according to the paths' width. Despite a brief exhibition period—February 12th through 27th 2005—*The Gates* remains a complex testament to two controversial topics in contemporary art: how to create meaningful public art and how art responds to and impacts our relationship with the built environment.



Figure 4.9.2: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 1979-2005 (aerial photo: Roy Smith) © 2005 Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Wrapped, surrounded, suspended

Since the 1960s, Christo and Jeanne-Claude have introduced eye-catching color into the landscape, for example pink in *Surrounded Islands*, 1980-83 in Biscayne Bay, Florida.



Figure 4.9.3: Christo and Jeanne-Claude Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980-83 Photo: Wolfgang Volz © 1983 Christo

The saffron color in *The Gates* was used to create "a golden ceiling creating warm shadows"[1] for the visitor walking along the Central Park path. The same color also appeared in an earlier work by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Valley Curtain* (1970-72), in Rifle, Colorado.



Figure 4.9.4: Christo, *Valley Curtain*, Rifle, Colorado 1970-72, © 1972 Christo

In contrast to many of their works that directly intervene in urban structures like the Pont Neuf in Paris or the German Parliament building in Berlin, where architectural masses are literally wrapped, *Surrounded Islands* and *Valley Curtain* engage, rather than seek to contain nature: a pink border of fabric floating around islands or a curtain suspended across a remote valley.

A public art

The Gates respond to spaces designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux within the dense urban grid of Manhattan. The artists complicate an environment that was, in fact, entirely invented in the mid-19th century to express the Victorian ideal of the pastoral and picturesque landscape.

This intrusion into Manhattan's "natural environment" left many visitors uneasy, as in the case of Joanne Landy:

> ***Whoever…wrote about the way the exhibit draws aesthetic attention to the park itself is off the mark, in my experience anyway. The flags just draw attention to themselves, period, and there appears to be no particular relationship to the shapes and colors of the park. That's part of the problem.*** [2]



Figure 4.9.5: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 1979-2005, © 2005 Christo and Jeanne-Claude

A point of contrast can be seen at the Storm King Art Center, a renowned sculpture park 52 miles north of New York City that has successfully cultivated a dialogue between sculptures and their landscape for over fifty years. Whereas sculptures are installed within the meadows and rolling hills of Storm King's grounds, *The Gates* were tied to the paths that meander through the park. This was done for two reasons: to avoid drilling thousands of holes into the soil and potentially harming the root systems of adjacent trees, and because Christo and Jeanne-Claude were inspired by the way the city's pedestrians navigate its paths. Thus, in contrast to the works in Biscayne Bay and Rifle that divide and isolate forms in the landscape, *The Gates* aligned itself along pre-existing pathways of movement.

Pathways

A path cut into a pristine natural environment is very much an intervention, as evidenced in Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967 and Walter De Maria's *One Mile Long Drawing*, 1969.



Figure 4.9.6: Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking England*, 1967 © Richard Long

However Central Park, a much-loved urban oasis, is one of the most famous examples of urban planning. The Gates reinforce and highlight pre-existing routes within this manmade environment. Critiques of *The Gates* that are rooted in the issue of the artwork's relationship with nature are therefore curious since the Park itself is not an untouched natural space.

This installation alters the experience of seeing and walking along the paths that run throughout the park. The title alludes to a threshold, a point of exit and entrance. In fact, in some places, the structures form an oval. There is no starting point and no end point and moreover, no favored point from which to view the work. It is an installation made for the pedestrian in motion and not a static object that asks us to stand still before it.

Bureaucratic collaborators

The Gates cost 21 million dollars and both the artists and the supporting institutions (the City of New York and the Central Park Conservancy) were quick to emphasize that Christo and Jeanne-Claude financed the project themselves and that the installation was free to the public. The artists sold preparatory drawings related to *The Gates*, and other works, before the exhibition opened; they rely on this method to independently fund their projects since they do not accept sponsors. Though the City and the Central Park Conservancy did not use public money to support this project, their approval and support were seen as an invaluable currency by many critics. Months before *The Gates* debuted, both institutions had worked in concert to prevent United for Peace from holding an antiwar demonstration in Central Park to coincide with the Republican National Convention which was held in New York that year.



Figure **4.9.7**: Christo, *The Gates (Project for Central Park, New York City)*, 2003, 38 x 244 cm and 106.6 x 244 cm, pencil, charcoal, pastel, crayon, fabric sample, aerial photograph (Whitney Museum of American Art) © 2003 Christo

Christo, *The Gates (Project for Central Park, New York City)*, 2003, 38 x 244 cm and 106.6 x 244 cm, pencil, charcoal, pastel, crayon, fabric sample, aerial photograph (Whitney Museum of American Art) © 2003 Christo

It is important to remember that Christo and Jeanne-Claude's favorable turn with the powers that be was 26 years in the making. The artists submitted proposals, attended meetings, and made presentations throughout this period, persisting even after they received a 251-page official rejection only three years into their campaign. Many consider the 2001 mayoral election of Michael Bloomberg—a Christo and Jeanne-Claude collector—as the turning point in this saga. The artists are accustomed to bureaucratic battles, an inevitability given subjects that reshape iconic structures such as their *The Pont Neuf, Wrapped*, 1975-1985, *Wrapped Reichstag*, 1971-1995, and *The Gates*.



Figure 4.9.8: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Reichstag*, 1971-95, © Christo (photo: Jotefa, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Reichstag*, 1971-95, © Christo (photo: Jotefa, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Art designed to end

It might seem odd that Christo and Jeanne-Claude invest so much time, effort, reputation, and money in creating ephemeral non-collectible artwork. Yet they are completely devoted to this kind of artistic practice: “The temporary quality of the projects is an aesthetic decision. Our works are temporary in order to endow the works of art with a feeling of urgency to be seen, and the love and tenderness brought by the fact that they will not last. Those feelings are usually reserved for other temporary things such as childhood and our own life. These are valued because we know that they will not last. We want to offer this feeling of love and tenderness to our works, as an added value (dimension) and as an additional aesthetic quality.” [3]



Figure **4.9.9**: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 1979-05, © Christo, Jeanne-Claude

Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 1979-05, © Christo, Jeanne-Claude

In the end the show took about six weeks to install and *The Gates* came down the day after the exhibition ended, with most of the materials headed for recycling. The artists maintain a thorough archive of their work on their website; along with projects that never materialized (including several for New York City) and current projects (not surprisingly these are decades in the making). With Jeanne-Claude's passing in 2009, this **archive** of the past, present, and future is poignant in its meticulous documentation and optimism—evidence of the duo's perseverance and monumental dreams.

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1. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, ***The Gates***

2. Jesse Lemish, "**Art for the People, Christo and Jean-Claude's *The Gates***," *New Politics* 10, no. 3 (Summer 2005)

3. Christo and Jeanne-Claude in Their Own Words, NYC.gov, 2005

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: PostMinimalism

5.1: Alternative art spaces in NYC

5.2: Eva Hesse

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5.1: Alternative art spaces in NYC

by COURTNEY FISKE

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Figure **5.1.1**: Robin Forbes, View down West Broadway, SoHo, N.Y.C., c. 1975-76 (Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution)

Experimental, experiential, and ephemeral

In November 1970, poet Peter Schjedahl entered a strange space. “Dingly lighted,” it housed art that was “scarcely distinguishable” from its “crumbling walls,” “rugged floors,” and “ruined fixtures.”[1] The site was 112 Greene Street: one of New York City’s first alternative art spaces. Rundown and rough-hewn, it catalyzed a movement that transformed the nature of art and of its display.

An alternative art space is a venue for presenting (and, in some cases, creating and distributing) art that is distinct from the traditional commercial art gallery and the art museum. The descriptor “alternative” indicates its defiance of these older models: the first, driven by profit; the second, critiqued as rarified and exclusionary. By featuring work that expanded the definition of what art could be—often, to a point beyond recognition—alternative spaces posed a profound challenge to the art world’s status quo.

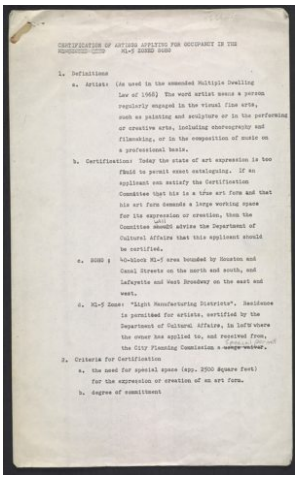
Few alternative art spaces existed before 1970. Yet, from 1971 through the decade’s close, hundreds arose in cities across the United States. New York City—specifically, the SoHo neighborhood in lower Manhattan—was their epicenter. Frequently initiated and run by artists, they cultivated art that was often neither recognized by nor admitted to established institutions. Informed by contemporaneous struggles for civil rights and liberation, they opposed the idea that art was a commodity for sale and that it should endure like work made with conventional materials such as canvas, marble, and bronze. Experimental and collaborative in spirit, alternative art spaces were sites of profound innovation. Together, they shaped the artistic ethos of the 1970s.



Figure **5.1.2**: Example of the white cube esthetic, Josef Albers exhibition at L'Espace de l'Art Concret, Mouans-Sartoux, France (photo: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, April 14, 2019, CC BY 2.0)

Not a white cube

During the 1970s, both museums and commercial galleries in New York City ascribed to the convention of the "white cube": a space structured by right angles and smooth white walls. Introduced in the early-20th century, the white cube was coincident with the advent of modern art, and replaced the crowded, upholstered exhibition spaces of the 19th century with austere, streamlined interiors. Its architecture was heralded as neutral and self-effacing: an unobtrusive container for the art on view. The white cube, however, was far from disinterested. Its pristine, polished look promoted art that upheld ideas of purity and that art was set apart from the everyday experience of the outside world. Premised on the denial of social issues and historical realities, the result was a timeless "non space," in the words of art historian Thomas McEvilley.[2]



CERTIFICATION OF ARTISTS APPLYING FOR OCCUPANCY IN THE
[illegible] M1-5 ZONED AREA

1. Definitions
a. Artist: (As used in the amended Multiple Dwelling Law of 1961) The word artist means a person regularly engaged in the visual fine arts, such as painting and sculpture or in the performing or creative arts, including choreography and filmmaking, or in the composition of music on a professional basis.
b. Certification: Today the state of art expression is too fluid to permit exact cataloguing. If an applicant can satisfy the Certification Committee that his is a true art form and that his art form demands a large working space for its expression or creation, then the Committee should advise the Department of Cultural Affairs that this applicant should be certified.
c. SOHO : 40-block M1-5 area bounded by Houston and Canal Streets on the north and south, and Lafayette and West Broadway on the east and west.
d. M1-5 Zone: "Light Manufacturing Districts". Residence is permitted for artists, certified by the Department of Cultural Affairs, in lofts where the owner has applied to, and received from, the City Planning Commission a [illegible] waiver.
2. Criteria for Certification
a. the need for special space (app. 2500 square feet) for the expression or creation of an art form.
b. degree of commitment

Figure **5.1.3**: Certification of artists applying for occupancy in Soho, 1970-71 (Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution)

Since the 1960s, New York City's commercial galleries had clustered uptown, lining 57th Street and the stretch of Madison Avenue from 57th up to about 86th Street. Alternative art spaces, by contrast, took root in SoHo. Once a bustling light manufacturing district, SoHo fell into vacancy and disrepair as the city shifted toward a postindustrial economy. Its 19th-century buildings, with their cast-iron façades, high ceilings, and unpartitioned floors, were ill-suited to the demands of modern manufacturing. In the early 1960s, artists began to settle in these disused buildings, enduring harsh conditions in exchange for cheap rent, ample space, and abundant light. Their presence was salutary: by repairing, retrofitting, and inhabiting otherwise empty structures, they improved the neighborhood's conditions, paving the way for its revitalization in the years to come.

As artists moved to SoHo, alternative art spaces followed, benefitting from the same practice of adaptive reuse. The raw interiors of former factories and warehouses became a hallmark of the first wave of these venues. Lacking the capital for major renovations, artists made improvements on a DIY basis. More than a symptom of economic constraint, the crudeness of these settings was embraced as a deliberate aesthetic. Their idiosyncrasy countered the homogeneity of the white cube—replicable anywhere and,

thus, specific to nowhere. Dilapidation became an asset: a prompt for producing art. These vacant factories once again became a means of production: a place in which art could be made.

Pushing against the white cube's ideal of static, pristine objecthood, SoHo's artists made use of unconventional materials whose unprocessed, "crummy" nature echoed that of their environment.[3] Many foregrounded the act of making, claiming the process of facture as inseparable from the form and meaning of their work. Their art crossed disciplinary bounds, often fusing media—painting, sculpture, dance, theater, architecture, and so forth—that modern art orthodoxy had deemed distinct. "Doomed to destruction," as Schjeldahl put it, such art typically lasted for a limited time period—the run of an exhibition, for instance—before ceasing to exist.[4] Recognizing ephemerality as a primary condition, much of this art survives only through photographs and verbal accounts.



Figure **5.1.4**: Alan Saret installs an exhibition at 112 Greene Street, c. 1970. (photo: Cosmos Andrew Sarchiapone, © Cosmos Andrew Sarchiapone)

112 Greene Street

112 Greene Street was founded by artists Jeffrey Lew, Alan Saret, and Gordon Matta-Clark in 1970. It occupied the ground floor and basement of a former rag-picking factory: a recycling venture that was itself recycled by artists. Secured with the financial support of Saret's uncle, it was a space where artists could make and display work. Absent a formal governing committee, artists curated their own shows in a casual, improvisatory manner. "A piece would go up and a piece would come down and another piece would come in and some other pieces would stay and then finally those pieces would go and more pieces would come in," Saret breathlessly explained.[5] The result was a collaborative, cross-disciplinary ethos where artists of diverse backgrounds created in close proximity. Sculptors and architects participated in performances; performers likewise engaged with sculpture and architecture, integrating them as props and sets. Reciprocity, revision, and flux became the conditions of artwork and built environment alike.

To the average passerby, 112 Greene Street must have seemed in dire need of repair. Lew decided to leave it as it: "112 Greene is really funky and should be left funky," he affirmed.[6] The inaugural exhibition, which opened in October 1970, was a collection of different ways to intervene in built space, with artists variously cleaving walls, removing pieces of steel from the floor, burrowing beneath the basement, wrapping columns with rubber, and extruding plastic foam from windows. The venue's name, derived from its street address in SoHo, signals the closeness with which content and context were held. "You couldn't isolate anything from the world in 112, because 112 took over," artist Richard Nonas recalled.[7]



Figure \(\PageIndex{5}\): Poetry reading by Jennifer Bartlett, April 24, 1973, Artists Space, 155 Wooster Street, N.Y.C.

Artists Space

Located at 155 Wooster Street, just a few blocks south of 112 Greene Street, Artists Space opened in October 1973. Founded by art historian Irving Sandler and arts administrator Trudie Grace, it was backed by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA). Established by Governor Nelson Rockefeller in 1960, NYSCA was a key source of funds for alternative art spaces in the city. Alongside the National Endowment for the Arts, created by President Nixon in 1965, NYSCA supported arts venues, including those without the financial means to survive otherwise. The resources of both organizations grew over the decade: NYSCA's budget increased tenfold in 1971 alone, while the NEA's budget swelled from $9 to $99.9 million between 1970 and 1977.[8]

Artists Space was a product of this upsurge in public funding for the arts, much of which was received by organizations in New York City. External money, however, did not come without strings. Grant-making agencies imposed guidelines for administration, budgeting, and programming that tempered the spontaneous, boundary-blurring spirit of alternative artistic practices. Keenly aware of this dilemma, Artists Space insisted on artists' prerogative to control their own context. All exhibitions were artist-curated, with established artists selecting lesser-known peers, with whom they showed together in the space. The first year, Sandler devised a list of 21 leading artists—among them, Vito Acconci, Romare Bearden, Nancy Graves, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Dorothea Rockburne, Richard Serra, and Jackie Winsor—each of whom nominated one unaffiliated artist.[9] New selectors were appointed for the ensuing seasons, while an artist could be chosen only once, thus ensuring a plurality of voices and approaches. Emphasizing hybridity, process, and unconventional materials, Artist Space explored urgent formal and political issues, from the nature of postmodernism (as in Douglas Crimp's 1977 exhibition, "Pictures") to questions of identity (as in Adrian Piper's 1981 installation and performance, *It's Just Art).*



Figure **5.1.6**: Some of the early members of the A.I.R Gallery, 1974 (photo: David Attie)

A.I.R.

Exemplifying the alliance of alternative art with progressive politics, A.I.R. was the first alternative art space in the United States devoted exclusively to women artists. Fueled by the burgeoning feminist movement and concurrent struggles for social justice, it strove to redress the systemic discrimination against women in the art world. Solo exhibitions by women at American museums were virtually nonexistent in the 1970s, while many uptown galleries devoted less than 10% of their programming to women artists. Short for Artists in Residence, Inc., the venue was titled after the law of the same name. Passed in 1971, the A.I.R. law granted artists in New York City the right to live in abandoned industrial buildings, which zoning rules had previously barred from residential use. The proposal was initially for a homophone, “EYRE Gallery,” after Charlotte Brontë’s eponymous feminist heroine, Jane Eyre. The feminist statement transformed into a salute to SoHo—and an affirmation of women artists’ right to establish themselves there.[10]

Inspired by feminism’s collective approach, A.I.R. assumed a cooperative structure. Artists Susan Williams and Barbara Zucker were joined by Dotty Attie, Maude Boltz, Mary Grigoriadis, and Nancy Spero, who selected fourteen additional women artists to create a stable of twenty, including Judith Bernstein, Agnes Denes, and Howardena Pindell. Absent a director, all decisions were made by majority vote. Collectively, the group obtained and renovated 97 Wooster Street, a former machine shop. The inaugural exhibition opened in September 1972 and featured ten of the twenty founding artists. Defying the notion that art made by women must somehow look “feminine,” the work exhibited was marked by a multiplicity of media and approaches—“representational, abstract, expressionist, conceptual, minimal, lyrical (or minimal-lyrical),” in the description of art critic Lucy Lippard.[11]

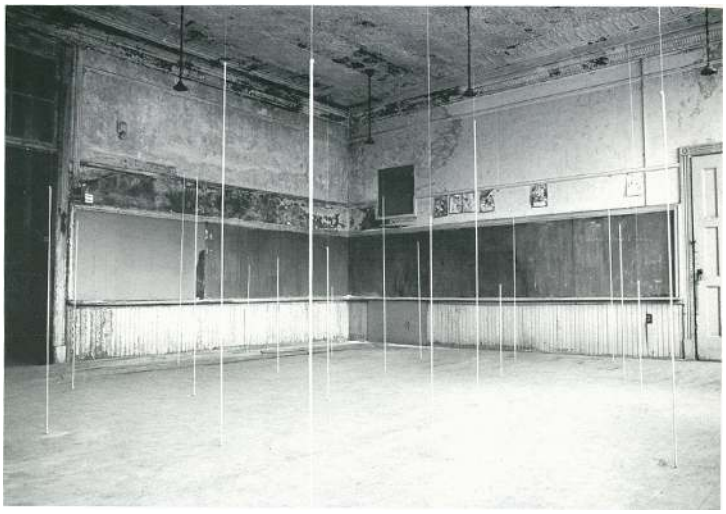


Figure **5.1.7**: Patrick Ireland (Brian O'Doherty), *Rope Drawing no. 19*, "Rooms," P.S.1., 1976

P.S.1

Part arts organization, part real-estate entity, the Institute for Art and Urban Resources (I.A.U.R.) reclaimed empty buildings throughout New York City as paired exhibition and studio spaces. Founded by Alanna Heiss, an ambitious arts administrator and organizer, in 1971, the I.A.U.R. operated through a blend of ingenuity and advocacy, collaborating with the city's government and landlords to identify and rehabilitate derelict spaces. In April 1976, the I.A.U.R. signed a twenty-year lease with the city for Public School 1 (P.S.1): a vacant school building in Long Island City, Queens, that was slated to be sold and demolished. Renamed Project Space 1, the repurposed building debuted in June 1976 with the group exhibition "Rooms."

Seventy-eight artists were assigned "rooms," including classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, closets, the basement, the attic, and the roof, in which to work. As at 112 Greene Street, P.S.1's dilapidated condition served as a prompt, with artists engaging its peeling walls, uneven floors, and strange sightlines as raw material for their projects. Defined by a "disaster area ambiance," the building compelled the creation of art that "could survive its surroundings, rather than relying on them to 'authenticate' it," as art critic Nancy Foote remarked."[12]



Figure **5.1.8**: MoMA PS1, 2008 (photo: jarito, CC BY 2.0)

A legacy of experimentation

All of the aforementioned spaces exist today, albeit in altered forms. Now named White Columns, 112 Greene Street relocated to 325 Spring Street in 1979. Artists Space made multiple moves, occupying five different buildings in lower Manhattan before securing 11 Cortlandt Alley in 2019. In 2005, A.I.R. took root in Brooklyn. In 1999, P.S.1 merged with The Museum of Modern Art, New York, to become MoMA PS1, preserving its location in perpetuity. Many other early venues were not so fortunate, folding under financial pressure caused in part by the rapid gentrification of SoHo that artists' pioneering efforts had enabled. Their legacy,

however, reverberates, informing the shifting landscape of contemporary art, which is often sited in lapsed industrial buildings prized for their idiosyncratic, unrefined, and cavernous interiors. Insisting that content and context exist in generative reciprocity, alternative art spaces fueled a moment of extraordinary creativity and promise: one that charted new paths and possibilities for art in the wake of modernism.

[1] Schjeldahl, "Sculpture 'Found' in a Rag Factory," *The New York Times*, November 1, 1970, 125.
[2] McEvilley, "Introduction," in Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986), 8.
[3] Nancy Foote, "Apotheosis of the Crummy Space," *Artforum* 15, no. 2 (October 1976): 28–37.
[4] Schjeldahl, 125.
[5] Saret quoted in *112 Workshop, 112 Greene Street: History, Artists & Artworks*, ed. Robyn Bretano (New York : New York University Press, 1981), reprinted in *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 34.
[6] Lew quoted in "112 Greene Street," *Avalanche* 2 (Winter 1971): 12.
[7] Nonas quoted in Jessamyn Fiore, *112 Greene Street: The Early Years (1970–74)* (Santa Fe: Radius Books; New York: David Zwirner, 2012), 25.
[8] "National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965–2008," **https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea-history-1965-2008.pdf**
[9] *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space: 25 Years*, ed. Claudia Gould and Valerie Smith (New York: Artists Space, 1998), 22.
[10] "Artists Space: History," **https://artistsspace.org/about#history**
[11] Lippard, "A.I.R.," **https://www.airgallery.org/essays-2/2016/6/2/air**
[12] Foote, 30.

Additional resources

A.I.R.
Artists Space
MoMA PS1
Printed Matter
White Columns

Apple, Jacki. *Alternatives in Retrospect: An Historical Overview 1969–75.* New York: The New Museum, 1981.
Ault, Julie, ed. *Alternative Art New York 1965–1985.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; New York: The Drawing Center, 2002.
Shkuda, Aaron. *The Lofts of SoHo: Gentrification, Art, and Industry in New York, 1950–1980.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.2: Eva Hesse

5.2.1: The last work of Eva Hesse

5.2.2: Eva Hesse, Untitled (Rope Piece)

5.2.3: Eva Hesse, Untitled

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5.2.1: The last work of Eva Hesse

by **DR. BETH HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

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Video **5.2.1.1**: Eva Hesse, *Untitled (Seven Poles)*, aluminum wire, fiberglass, and resin, 1970, variable dimensions (Centre Pompidou, Paris, © Estate of Eva Hesse) speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Additional resources

This sculpture at the Centre Pompidou

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5.2.2: Eva Hesse, Untitled (Rope Piece)

- by **DR. BETH HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID

194823



Video **5.2.2.1**: Eva Hesse, *Untitled (Rope Piece)*, 1970, rope, latex, string, wire, variable dimensions (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York)

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5.2.3: Eva Hesse, Untitled

by **DR. BETH HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID
194824



Video **5.2.3.1**: Eva Hesse, *Untitled*, 1966 , enamel paint, string, papier-mâché, elastic cord (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

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- **2.3: Ancient Egypt** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

5.3: Louise Bourgeois, Cumul I

by KAREN SCHIFMAN

Page ID
194825



Figure **5.3.1**: Louise Bourgeois, *Cumul I*, 1969, white marble on wood base, 51 x 127 x 122 cm (Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris) © Estate of the artist (photo: Strifu, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The Reality of Three-Dimensional Form

Bulbous mounds, and spherical or oval growths emerge, conflate and disturb. *Cumul I* is a marble sculpture, part of a series, by the late French-born artist, Louise Bourgeois. Cumul, as in, cumulus, is a reference to the forms of rounded clouds. The motif was first developed in drawings but Bourgeois wanted the reality of three-dimensional form, as she thought she could express deeper things in sculpture.

Like so much of Bourgeois' work, *Cumul I* is loaded with entangled metaphors of male and female body parts that are simultaneously abstract and descriptive. Her career breezed over so many significant trends of the 20th century that her work defies identification within any single art movement. Instead, there is an uncompromising personal symbolism throughout her oeuvre (life's work), filled with certain recurring motifs such as vessels, containers, ovoids, body parts, and spiders (a metaphor of her mother's work as a weaver).

Appealing and Disturbing

The sculpture, *Cumul I*, is designed to sit on the floor and be viewed from above. Its forms still shock nearly half a century after its completion. The artist denied any reference to sexual forms in this work, but the association is undeniable. The viewer is confronted with a cluster of mounds that resemble breasts and penises emerging from a rippling fabric. So what then was Bourgeois trying to communicate in this beautifully sculpted marble? What can be understood from a sculpture that is aesthetically appealing and at the same time disturbing?

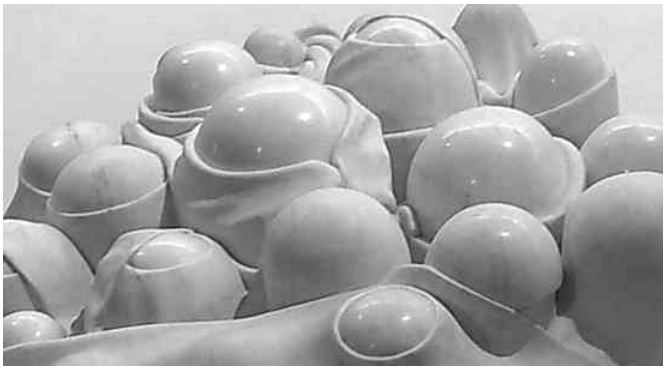


Figure **5.3.2**: Cluster of mounds (detail), Louise Bourgeois, Cumul I, 1969, white marble on wood base, 51 x 127 x 122 cm (Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris) © Estate of the artist (photo: Baddeo, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Bourgeois offered some explanation to her mysterious oeuvre and implied that the Freudian concept of a traumatized childhood was the catalyst for her artistic motives. The artist has confirmed that all of her work found inspiration in her childhood. Scholars have noted that the childhood traumas of having a sick mother and egocentric philandering father who had an affair with her nanny, had a powerful impact on the young Bourgeois who later stated, "My childhood has never lost its magic, it has never lost its mystery, and it has never lost its drama."[1] References to Bourgeois' family, and sexuality, developed over the span of her career into a personal artistic vocabulary.

Making Sense of *Cumul I*

When we try to make sense of the male and female forms that reveal and conceal themselves simultaneously in *Cumul I*, it can help to remember Bourgeois' childhood. Ambiguity and overlapping gender are characteristics found in many of Bourgeois' sculptures and installations. Her art is deeply personal, confusing, troubling, magical and quite wonderful. She was one of the most significant women artists of the twentieth century.

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1. *Louise Bourgeois: Destruction of the Father Reconstruction of the Father, Writings and Interviews 1923-1997*, edited and with texts by Marie Laure-Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, MIT Press, 1998, page 277. The quote is also found in a compilation of Bourgeois' images juxtaposed by text entitled *"Album" 1994* and published by Peter Blum.

Additional Resources:

This sculpture at the Centre Pompidou

Video of Louise Bourgeois's *Confrontation* at the Guggenhiem Museum, 1978

Louise Bourgeois PBS/Art21 video

Louise Bourgeois' New York Times obituary, May 2010

This page titled 5.3: Louise Bourgeois, Cumul I is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Karen Schifman, "Louise Bourgeois, Cumul I," in Smarthistory, August 9, 2015, accessed January 17, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/louise-bourgeois-cumul-i/..

5.4: Judy Chicago, The Dinner Party

by DR. JENNIE KLEIN

Page ID

194826



Figure **5.4.1**: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79, ceramic, porcelain, and textile, 1463 x 1463 cm (**Brooklyn Museum**)

A Place at the Table

<em

The Dinner Party research team, Santa Monica, CA (Through the Flower Archive and Judy Chicago)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-35053" loading="lazy" sizes="(max-width: 200px) 100vw, 200px" srcset="

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Figure **5.4.2**: The Dinner Party research team, Santa Monica, CA (**Through the Flower Archive and Judy Chicago**)

The Dinner Party is a monument to women's history and accomplishments. It is a massive triangular table—measuring 48 feet on each side—with thirty-nine place settings dedicated to prominent women throughout history and an additional 999 names are inscribed on the table's glazed porcelain brick base. This tribute to women, which includes individual place settings for such luminary figures as the Primordial Goddess, **Ishtar**, **Hatshepsut**, **Theodora**, **Artemesia Gentileschi**, Sacajawea, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Emily Dickinson, Margaret Sanger, and **Georgia O'Keeffe**, is beautifully crafted. Each place setting has an exquisitely embroidered table runner that includes the name of the woman, utensils, a goblet, and a plate.

The Dinner Party was intended to be exhibited in a large, darkened, sanctuary-like room, with each place setting individually lit, making it look as though it is composed of thirty-nine altars. The 999 names, written in gold, gleam softly, suggesting a hallowed or liminal space. Five years in the making (1974-1979) and the product of the volunteer labor of more than 400 people, *The Dinner Party* is a testament to the power of feminist vision and artistic collaboration. It was also a testament to Chicago's ability to create a work of art that spoke to people who had not previously been a part of the art world. When the exhibition opened at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco in March of 1979, it was mobbed. Judy Chicago's accompanying lecture was completely sold out.



Figure **5.4.3**: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79, ceramic, porcelain, and textile, 1463 x 1463 cm (Brooklyn Museum, photo: **Eric Wilcox**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Although critics praised the table runners, they ignored or disparaged the plates. These ceramic objects, which become increasingly three-dimensional during the procession from prehistory to the present in order to represent women rising, look somewhat like flowers and butterflies. They also resemble female genitalia, which many people found disturbing. Writing for the feminist journal *Frontiers* in 1981, Lolette Kuby was so taken aback by the plates' forms that she suggested that Playboy and Penthouse had done more to promote the beauty of female anatomy than The Dinner Party ever could.



Figure **5.4.4**: Judy Chicago, Emily Dickinson place setting from *The Dinner Party*, 1974-79 (Brooklyn Museum, photo: **Philipp Messner**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Kuby's distaste for pudenda was echoed more forcefully a decade later, when Chicago attempted to donate the artwork to the University of the District of Columbia. Chicago was forced to withdraw her donation after the U.S. Senate threatened to withhold funding from UDC if they accepted what Rep. Robert Dornan characterized as "3-D ceramic pornography" and Rep. Dana Rohrabacher dismissed as a "spectacle of weird art, weird feminist art at that." It was not until 2007 that The Dinner Party, an icon of feminist art, would find a permanent home in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art in the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Feminist Education

What drove Chicago to embark on such a large and controversial feminist project? She was inspired, in part, by her pioneering work in feminist education. She started the Feminist Art Program at California State University, Fresno in 1970. The following year she founded the Feminist Art Program (FAP) at the newly established California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) with the abstract painter Miriam Schapiro. The galleries were still under construction when Chicago arrived at CalArts, so the FAP had their exhibition in an abandoned mansion that was slated to be demolished shortly after. The resulting installation, *Womanhouse*, was a testament to Chicago's method of teaching, which begin with consciousness raising and then progressed to realizing a message through whatever medium was most suitable, whether it was performance, sculpture, or painting.



Figure 5.4.5: Judy Chicago, Eleanor of Aquitaine place setting from *The Dinner Party*, 1974-79 (Brooklyn Museum, photo: Mark B. Schlemmer, CC BY 2.0)

While at CalArts, Chicago and Schapiro developed the idea of "central core imagery," arguing in a 1973 article published in *Womanspace Journal* that many women artists making abstract art unconsciously gravitated towards imagery that was anti-phallic. By the time she began working on *The Dinner Party*, Chicago had come to believe that central core imagery, which celebrated feminine eroticism and fertility, could be used to challenge patriarchal constructions of women. For Chicago, there existed an irreducible difference between men and women, and that difference began with the genitals. Chicago would eventually put vaginal imagery front and center in *The Dinner Party*.

Right Out of History

After several years of work establishing various feminist art programs in Southern California, Chicago was eager to get back to making her own artwork and resigned from teaching in 1974. Her experience with *Womanhouse* inspired her to embrace materials that had traditionally been associated with women's crafts, such as embroidery, weaving, and china painting. She was determined to make a monument to women's history using china-painted plates alluding to thirteen specific figures, which she originally planned

to hang on the gallery wall. However, she soon realized that there were many more women that she wished to include, and the initial conception of the piece expanded to a large-scale installation with thirty-nine place settings.



Figure **5.4.6**: Judy Chicago, Sojourner Truth place setting from *The Dinner Party*, 1974-79 (Brooklyn Museum, photo: **Neil R**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

An important component of the piece was the educational material that represented the years of research that had been conducted by Chicago's volunteer staff, led by art historian Diane Gelon. *The Dinner Party* was accompanied by a book of the same title (published by Anchor Books in 1979 and designed by Sheila Levrant de Bretteville) that included the stories behind all 1,038 names. Filmmaker Johanna Demetrakas documented the monumental effort that it took to make this installation in her film *Right Out of History: The Making of the Dinner Party*.

Not Exactly Playboy or Penthouse



Figure **5.4.7**: Georgia O'Keeffe, *Two Calla Lilies on Pink*, 1928, oil on canvas, 101.6 × 76.2 cm (**Philadelphia Museum of Art**)

In order to understand *The Dinner Party*, we must keep in mind that the sculptural painted plates were intended to be metaphors rather than realistic representations. Take, for instance, **the final place setting on the table—the one for Georgia O'Keeffe**. This plate is the most sculptural piece in the installation. Pink and greenish gray swirls and folds radiate out from a central core framed

by fleshy looking folds that seem to have been deliberately spread apart in order to reveal what should be a hidden entrance. The plate can be read as suggestive of female genitalia, but its forms also recall the shape of a butterfly and the reproductive organs of flowers. O'Keeffe was famous for her abstracted paintings of flowers, and and the plate is an homage to some her best-known works, such as *Grey Lines With Black, Blue, and Yellow* (1923) and *Black Iris III* (1926), both of which have a central opening framed by folds, or *Two Calla Lilies On Pink* (1928), which has a similar color palette to the O'Keeffe plate.

Chicago's decision to use vaginal imagery has proven to be powerful. *The Dinner Party*, having survived rejection, critical dismissal, and political grandstanding, is now considered a key work of contemporary art, and is permanently installed in a dedicated space at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum.

Additional Resources:

The Dinner Party by Judy Chicago at the Brooklyn Museum

Through the Flower

Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party: Restoring Women to History (*Arnold L. Lehman, foreword. Brooklyn Museum of Art/The Monacelli Press, 2014).

Jane Gerhard, T*he Dinner Party: Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular Feminism, 1970-2007* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2013).

Gail Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago* (*N*ew York: Harmony Books. 2007).

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.5: Chicano Art Movement

5.5.1: Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF)

5.5.2: Self Help Graphics and Art

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5.5.1: Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF)

by DR. ELLA MARIA DIAZ

Page ID 194828

The Chicano Movement emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s against the backdrop of the broader civil rights struggles in the United States. Advocating for equality at work, at school, and in housing, immigration, and social justice, farmworkers, artists, activists, and students called themselves "Chicanos," asserting proudly their Mexican ancestry as well as their place, history, and identity in U.S. society.



Figure **5.5.1.1**: Ricardo Favela, *Huelga! Stike! Support the U.F.W.A.*, 1976 (Royal Chicano Air Force Archives, The California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives, Special Collections Department, the University of California, Santa Barbara Library)

The Chicano Movement was multidimensional and artists played key roles in each realm. While Chicano artists like José Montoya worked with Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta to unionize the farm workers, artist Harry Gamboa led student walkouts in East Los Angeles. Gamboa and other Chicanx artists formed collectives like Asco (Spanish for "disgust") while Montoya and others established the RCAF (Royal Chicano Air Force) to develop and disseminate their work through prints, murals, performances, and photography—media inherently accessible, participatory, and public.



Figure **5.5.1.2**: José Montoya, Royal Chicano Air Force, *Atencion Campesinos*, n.d., silkscreen on paper, 63.50 x 48.26 cm (Royal Chicano Air Force Archives, The California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives, Special Collections Department, the University of California, Santa Barbara Library)

Humor, politics, and public art

The RCAF was established in Sacramento, California in the early 1970s and was originally named Rebel Chicano Art Front (people confused the group's acronym, RCAF, with that of the Royal Canadian Air Force, and so the more humorous Royal Chicano Air Force was adopted instead). The group was infused with humor from its inception, and the RCAF contributed to two major genres of Chicanx visual art—muralism and silkscreen printing. The RCAF is also credited with implementing art-based social programs that decenter the individual artist. In this way, Royal Chicano Air Force can be understood in relation to other art collectives of the 1960s and 70s—such as Fluxus—that also brought together musicians, writers, and artists in experimental performances that challenged the definition of art.

Chicanx identity & diversity

Inspired by the culturally nationalist doctrine of the Chicano Movement, described in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan* (1969) and *El Plan de Santa Barbara* (1969), both of which exalted the indigenous roots of Mexican-American identity, the RCAF visualized the movement's platforms, aestheticizing a Mexican-American history and identity. In solidarity with the labor-rights campaigns of the United Farm Workers union (UFW), founded by Chavez and Huerta, the RCAF mobilized Mexican-American students, educators, veterans, artists, and activists calling for economic, educational, and political equality in the United States.



Figure **5.5.1.3**: Royal Chicano Air Force, *Southside Park Mural*, 1977 (restored 2001), 14 x 110 feet (Southside Park, Sacramento)

The group's artistic diversity is evident in murals such as Southside Park Mural which consists of stylistically diverse panels by six artists extolling Chicanx culture and tradition. Created on an outdoor stage in Sacramento, the mural offers a culturally appropriate backdrop for community events, concerts, and festivals that celebrate Cinco de Mayo, Mexican Independence Day, and an athletic event called Barrio Olympics.

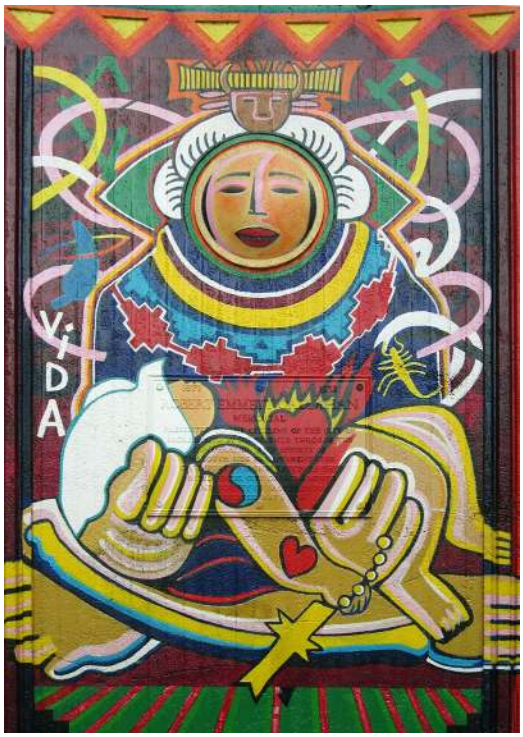


Figure **5.5.1.4**: Esteban Villa and the Royal Chicano Air Force, *Southside Park Mural*, 1977 (restored 2001), 14 x 110 feet (Southside Park, Sacramento)

Mural as public forum

In 1976, RCAF artist Ricardo Favela and member Rosemary Rasul negotiated with city officials to create the park mural. José Montoya, Juanishi Orosco, Esteban Villa, Stan Padilla, Juan Cervantes, and Lorraine García-Nakata each painted the panels in their

own styles, reflecting the collective's diversity. The distinct styles and motifs of RCAF artists is perhaps best exemplified in the social realism of Montoya, which draws attention to the conditions of the working class, and the geometric abstraction of Orosco.

The mural panels draw on pre-Columbian, neo-Amerindian, and Chicanx youth iconography. For example, in the center panel, Esteban Villa painted a priest-like figure holding a newborn. The figures are rendered in broad strokes of color and a rosary, a Sacred Heart, and the word vida (life) can be seen. Flanking Villa's panel on the left, Juanishi Orosco represented ojos de Dios (eyes of God) with Hopi influences, representing neo-Amerindian claims made during the 1960s and 70s Chicano Movement that sought to reconnect Amerindian cultures across the political border that now divides the United States from Mexico.



Figure 5.5.1.5: Stan Padilla and the Royal Chicano Air Force, *Southside Park Mural*, 1977 (restored 2001), 14 x 110 feet (Southside Park, Sacramento)

To the right of Villa's panel, Padilla continued the neo-Amerindian theme by blending indigenous imagery with a visualization of the moon's cycle and a monarch butterfly, a species native to the region but also a prototype for the RCAF's Metamorphosis mural planned later that year and installed in downtown Sacramento by 1980.

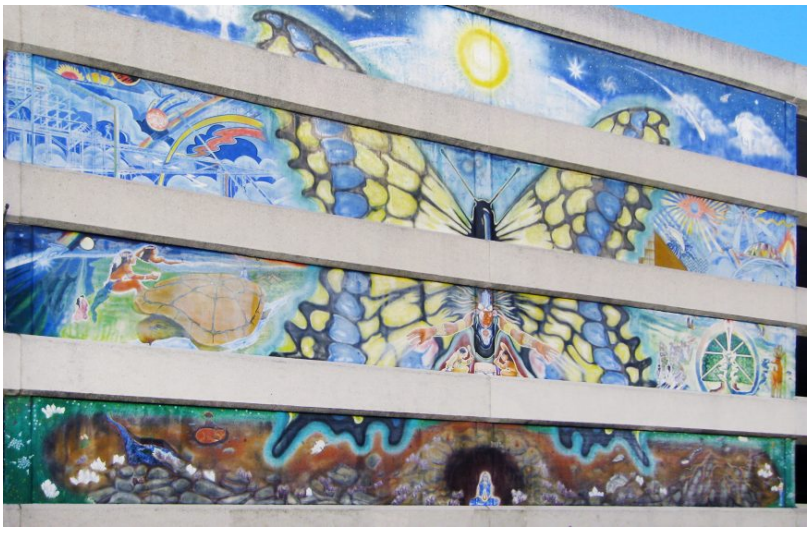


Figure 5.5.1.6: Juanishi Orosco, Stan Padilla, Esteban Villa and The Centro de Artistas Chicano, *Metamorphosis*, 1980, mural (east façade, parking garage at Third and L Street, Sacramento)

José Montoya's far left panel captures Pachuco/a couples: Mexican Americans of the 1930s and 1940s who participated in the "zoot suit" youth culture known as la pachucada. The scene gestures to the past represented by Mexican revolutionary heroes Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata who are identified by their mustaches, bandoliers, and sombreros. A young couple gazes up at

the pachucos/as, suggesting a Chicanx future as they are a contemporary Cholo/a couple (a term for Mexican-Americans associated with a working-class culture rooted in la pachucada, but vilified in mainstream U.S. media as representing gang culture.)

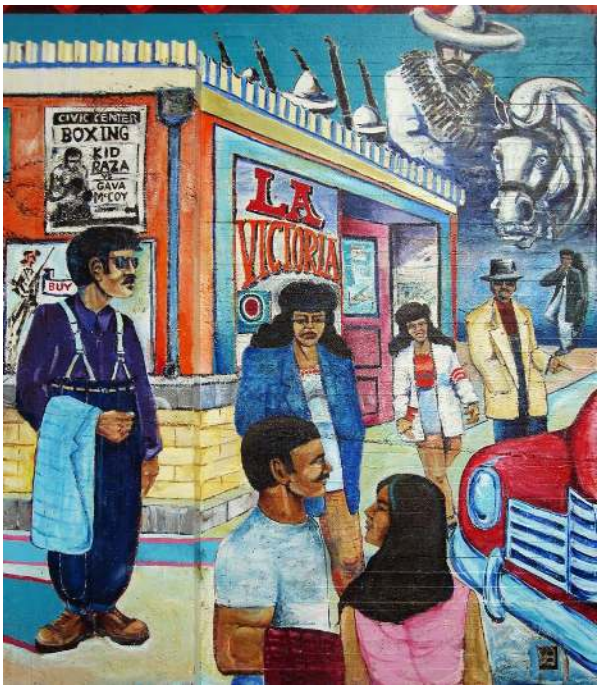


Figure **5.5.1.7**: José Montoya and the Royal Chicano Air Force, *Southside Park Mural*, 1977 (restored 2001), 14 x 110 feet (Southside Park, Sacramento)

The murals flanking the outer walls of the stage at Southside Park were created by Lorraine García-Nakata, one of the few Chicana artist members of the RCAF. García-Nakata designed, outlined, and painted two Amerindian women with open hands. While the women stand proudly with outstretched arms and from a position of power, they also seem to caution those who approach the stage, a message underscored by the size of their hands.

Centro de Artistas Chicanos

The RCAF championed aesthetic diversity and labor equality, exemplifying members' commitment to the United Farm Workers' labor platforms. The group also rejected the notion of individual artistic genius, and capitalist values of art ownership. In fact, the practice of signing work shifted to include both individual artist and the initials RCAF, a practice that dates to the late 1970s when institutions began to collect Chicanx artwork.



Figure 5.5.1.8: Ricardo Favela, *El centro de artistas chicanos* poster, 1975, screenprint on paper, 56.5 x 40.6 cm (Smithsonian American Art Museum ©1975 Ricardo Favela)

RCAF members were committed to public art. They painted murals and taught printmaking to their communities and to university students, as well as in local prison programs. They also exhibited artwork made by community members and by their students in both art institutions and in community spaces. In 1972, they founded the Centro de Artistas Chicanos as an operational hub for the RCAF and local area artists, in order to facilitate grants, teach classes, and better support community-based art programs.

Additional Resources:

Royal Chicano Air Force archives at the Online Archives of California

Royal Chicano Air Force in Calisphere, University of California Libraries

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5.5.2: Self Help Graphics and Art

by **DR. J.V. DECEMVIRALE**

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194829



Figure **5.5.2.1**: Self Help Graphics staff posing in Carlos Bueno's work space. Partial listing from left to right: Carlos Bueno, Pete Tovar, Sister Karen Boccalero, and Sister Beth Gregory, c. 1976 (Self Help Graphics and Art Collection)

Multiple artistic centers

From the **Museum of African American Art** (in South LA) to **Self Help Graphics and Art** (in East LA), Los Angeles's network of culturally specific art centers and museums is one of the nation's largest. Their numbers have ebbed and flowed with the availability of public arts funding over the decades, but of those that have survived, many were formed in the fervor of the Black and Chicano Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Fighting on the cultural front of these movements, these organizations created artistic projects and educational programming based in their communities' rich cultural heritage—a heritage that was ignored in the city's public schools and well financed art institutions. It was a variety of cultural activism that worked to serve communities and to combat the dominant culture's perception that Black and Chicano neighborhoods were culturally deprived.



Figure **5.5.2.2**: An artist examines monoprints (prints that can only be made once, unlike most printmaking which allows for multiple originals), Self-Help Graphics & Art, March 2000 (UC Santa Barbara, Special Research Collections)

On a practical level, these organizations established arts infrastructure where there was none. Setting up shop in some of the cities most disenfranchised neighborhoods, they offered all the traditional services of art schools, museums, galleries, and art advocacy organizations in one place, at no cost. When city leaders would not invest in the creative and cultural lives of neighborhoods of color, culturally specific arts centers initiated their own arts education and public programs, provided the tools and materials for making art and facilitated public artworks and spaces for community-building. Self-identified as "community art centers," their focus was on serving the communities they were situated within through participatory public artworks like large-scale mural projects, communal print studios, and multimedia festivals and parades.

Self Help Graphics and Art



Figure **5.5.2.3**: Sister Karen Boccalero, Self-Help Graphics & Art, no date (UC Santa Barbara, Special Research Collections)

Self Help Graphics and Art, a Chicana/o and Latinx community art center in Boyle Heights, offers a unique example within this history. In 1972, Italian-American Franciscan nun and artist, Sister Karen Boccalero, and queer, undocumented Mexican artists, Carlos Bueno and Antonio Ibañez, turned the garage of the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity's convent into an art studio classroom. What was once just a garage of a modern-day convent quickly became an impromptu and international community art center with artists hailing from local Chicano neighborhoods, Ecuador, and Mexico. Not just a testament to the founder's cross-cultural appeal, it was a representation of the range of immigrants who made East Los Angeles their home.

The studio classroom garage soon became too small and, through a donation facilitated through Sister Karen's affiliation with the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis, Self Help moved into its first location on Brooklyn Avenue (now Cesar Chavez Avenue, named

after the American labor leader and civil rights activist who advocated for migrant farm workers) in Boyle Heights. It would officially incorporate as a non-profit in 1973 offering art classes, materials, and support to aspiring artists.

Based on photographs and archival documents, we know that in its early years, the space was abuzz with activities that included screen-printing, batik (an Indonesian cloth dying technique), ink drawing, and sculpture, as well as the more routine but equally important work of exhibition preparation, filing grant applications, and even serving as a multi-function meeting space for start-up advocacy groups looking to combat discrimination against Chicana/o artists. Open to supporting any serious artistic endeavor, Self Help worked as a facilitator, as best it could, for a marginalized constituency largely absent from mainstream art institutions who nevertheless still had pressing political and creative needs.



Figure **5.5.2.4**: Artist teachers, students, and participants working on an art activity. The converted UPS step van in the back included a dark room for processing photographs, water and electrical hook-up, fold-out tables, and storage shelves. Carlos Bueno painted a Chicano on the side of the BMAS which served all parts of Los Angeles from Malibu to El Monte. Community Workshops and the Barrio Mobile Art Studio, Self-Help Graphics & Art, c. 1970s (UC Santa Barbara, Special Research Collections)

Sister Karen had trained under the printmaker and artist-teacher, Sister Corita Kent, in the legendary Immaculate Heart College Art Department in Hollywood in the 1960s. Self Help's openness and willingness to support any type of creative practice or project was indebted to Kent's own expanded and non-exclusive definition of art. For Sister Karen, art was a way of living a socially engaged and creative life in the service of others.



Figure 5.5.2.5: Leo Limón, announcement poster for Día de los Muertos, 1979. The image is of the Virgin of Guadalupe is paired with two skulls at each side. The poster announces events, such as: "A quiet Indigenous Ceremonial"; "Candle Light Parade"; "Parade"; "Mass at Our Lady Of Guadalupe Church"; "Entertainment"; "Public Art Center." (UC Santa Barbara, Special Research Collections)

Self Help Graphics' *Día de los Muertos*

Aware of their roles as non-Chicano artists in a predominantly Chicano neighborhood, Self Help's founders at first struggled to find a method of connecting with their neighbors beyond the coterie of affiliated artists who worked in the space. Sister Karen had been trained as a master printer at the Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia, and her co-founders Carlos Bueno and Antonio Ibañez trained as muralists and draughtsmen at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City. Despite coming from distinct artistic traditions and training, they found overlap in their commitment to a socially engaged artistic practice in the service of others. It was in this overlap that they worked together to facilitate participatory art frameworks that both served and manifested Chicano community.



Figure 5.5.2.6: Day of the Dead ’77 Procession, Self-Help Graphics, November 1977 (UC Santa Barbara, Special Research Collections)

The collaborative Día de los Muertos procession and festivity would become the most well-known. Beginning in 1973, the trio of founders and affiliated artists partnered to redeploy the Mexican Día de Muertos for their neighborhoods in East Los Angeles. A Catholic and Indigenous Mexican celebration of the dead, Día de Muertos is traditionally celebrated on November 2, although preparations begin the week before when celebrants prepare and gather decorations, mementos, specific foods, and flowers, and construct altars of remembrance at the cemetery or in their homes.



Figure 5.5.2.7: Day of the Dead ’77, Self-Help Graphics, November 1977, (Self-Help Graphics and Art archives, UC Santa Barbara, Library, Department of Special Research Collections)

Marigolds are often scattered from the grave to their respective altar to ensure ancestors find their favorite objects, foods, and acknowledgements, thereby completing the ritual that will bring good fortune to family members. Altar-making is common to Chicano and Mexican households, but there was no equivalent holiday-like ritual in Los Angeles.



Figure **5.5.2.8**: Artists and child participants resting in Asco's *Three Causes of Death* (1976). Asco artists are costumed as a switchblade and a pharmaceutical drug along with children dressed as zombie cholos all referencing the linked realities of addiction, murder, and violence caused by these items in East Los Angeles. ASCO, Self-Help Graphics & Art, November 1976 (UC Santa Barbara, Special Research Collections)

The first Día de los Muertos in Los Angeles began as a collaboration with Self Help and Chicano art collectives like Asco (Spanish for "disgust") and Los Four. The procession of mostly elementary and college students began with a Catholic mass in Evergreen Cemetery and ended at Self Help Graphics' location on Brooklyn Avenue where participants laid marigolds (traditionally used by the Indigenous peoples of Mexico) to guide spirits to the traditional multi-stepped altar created to commemorate the dead.



Figure 5.5.2.9: A float designed for Día de Los Muertos by Leo Limon processes down Brooklyn Avenue bedecked with an image of the Virgen de Guadalupe, a silver cross and a grinning *calavera* (skull) on the front. Day of the Dead '77, Self-Help Graphics, November 1977 (Self-Help Graphics and Art archives, UC Santa Barbara, Library, Department of Special Research Collections)

Subsequent iterations expanded on this structure, eventually including elaborate floats, handmade costumes, painted faces, theater performances, live music, and exhibitions of artworks made by local school children.



Figure 5.5.2.10: Carlos Bueno and Antonio Ibañez (Ibañez y Bueno), *Bodas de Oro*, 1973, silkscreen, Self Help Graphics and Art Collection

Ibañez y Bueno produced *Bodas de Oro* (Wedding Anniversary) most likely as a commemorative print for Self Help's first Día de los Muertos in 1973. The artists relied on their Mexican compatriot, the great José Guadalupe Posada, who had developed the *calavera* (skeleton) as his signature visual vehicle through which he interpreted late 19th- and early 20th-century Mexican society, politics, and cultural practices. Great admirers of the master printmaker, Ibañez y Bueno depicted a village wedding anniversary in which two calaveras wearing traditional dress sit below a curtain. While Ibañez y Bueno lived in East Los Angeles, this print is a reminder that they dwelled in a Mexican cultural imaginary which made them an important reservoir of practices, visual vocabularies and attire from a wide range of Mexican places. The artists drew from this wealth of experiences in re-deploying the Mexican tradition in Los Angeles.



Figure **5.5.2.11**: Day of the Dead '77 Bread-Making (Pan de Muerto) Workshop, Karen Boccalero, November 1977 (Self-Help Graphics and Art archives, UC Santa Barbara, Library, Department of Special Research Collections)

Día de Los Muertos intentionally blurred the boundaries between life, death, art, audience and observer, asking a community to join in festivities in which everyone had a role to play. Invested in an art-making that facilitated dialogue and manifested community, the collective performance would become a hallmark event in East Los Angeles and eventually become synonymous with Los Angeles itself.

Current headquarters of Self Help Graphics & Art at 1300 E. 1st Street in Boyle Heights

An ongoing ally

Approaching its 50th year anniversary, Self Help has continued to serve and adapt to the needs of an increasingly pluralistic Latinx Los Angeles. Very much as it began, the organization still helps artists with grant applications and remains an important facilitator between the ambitions of young artists and the realities of implementation. Directly in line with the legacy of its founders, it continues a tradition of socially engaged cultural work that addresses not only Chicanx issues, but those that affect the broader Latinx community, ranging from the need to encourage Latinxs to participate in the 2020 census to the need to train and nurture a new generation of Latinx cultural workers and researchers. Now one of the oldest community art centers in the city, Self Help remains a stalwart ally to the evolving needs of the great creative cauldron of East Los Angeles.

Additional resources

Self Help Graphics & Art

Check out Self Help Graphics & Art's **instagram**

Self Help Graphics and Art archives

Learn more about the exhibition ***Arte Sin Fronteras: Prints from the Self Help Graphics Studio*** at the Blanton Museum of Art

Watch a PBS episode about **Día de Los Muertos / Day of the Dead**

Read about the **Royal Chicano Air Force**

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.6: Arte Povera

5.6.1: Mario Merz, Giap's Igloo

5.6.2: Michelangelo Pistoletto, Newspaper Sphere

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5.6.1: Mario Merz, Giap's Igloo

by **DR. LUCIENNE AUZ**

Page ID

194831



Figure **5.6.1.1**: Mario Merz, *Igloo di Giap (Giap's Igloo)*, 1968, metal structure, wire mesh, bags of clay soil, neon, batteries, accumulators, 120 x 200 cm (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, photo: Yannick, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

North Vietnamese General Võ Nguyên Giáp said, "If the enemy masses his forces, he loses ground; if he scatters, he loses strength" to describe the perils one faces in battle. Regardless of the benefits gained from a military strategy, it could lead to other disadvantages. So why did the contemporary Italian artist Mario Merz include this statement on *Igloo di Giap*? What was he trying to say to the viewer of his work?

At first glance, Merz's *Igloo di Giap* (translated as *Giap's Igloo*) might confuse the viewer with its unusual appearance. It is a four-foot-tall igloo made from a metal frame covered with wire mesh on top of which are clear bags filled with clay soil. Across the surface of the igloo in white neon tubing is written the statement made by General Giáp translated into Italian: "*Se il nemico si concentra perde terreno se si disperde perde forza*."

Arte Povera

To understand the meaning behind Merz's *Giap's Igloo*, we need to go back to 1968 when the work was made. At the time, Merz was associated with a group of artists known as Arte Povera. The term Arte Povera [poor art] was coined by the Italian art critic and curator Germano Celant to refer to artists who often exhibited together in the late 1960s though each worked in different styles, with diverse materials, and with varying concepts. One commonality they shared was that they each sought to bring life and art together. They encouraged viewers to actively engage with the artwork and experience underlying forces that we all respond to such as fire, gravity, electricity, or social and political tensions that existed in the present moment. Though these artists often utilized common, everyday "poor" materials such as glass, metal, stone, beeswax, and dirt in their work, this was not the basis for the term "Arte Povera." Instead, Celant envisioned Arte Povera artists as stripping away—impoverishing—the codified ideas, words, and ideologies attached to traditional western culture to allow the viewer to have a more direct experience of art and life.

Merz and the other Arte Povera artists were responding to changes occurring globally. Many of these artists came of age after World War II, when the socio-economic landscape of Italy was rapidly transforming as it recovered from the devastation of the war. This was also a period of intense social upheaval. Students and workers united to protest unfair labor and education conditions. U.S. monetary aid sent to rebuild Europe's economy helped to improve the production of material goods and repair infrastructure. At the same time, a new influx of American capitalist and consumer values was transforming Italian culture, which led many Italians to oppose U.S. influence, a reaction that was expressed through works of art. The U.S. military presence in Vietnam in the 1950s and 60s led to heightened hostility among Europeans who grew increasingly critical of the violence occurring abroad.

Arte Povera artists rarely created politically overt work; instead, they sought to create art that would provoke viewers to question the social and political systems and structures of the world around them. Within this context, it becomes clearer why Merz incorporated General Giáp's statement onto his igloo. The phrase asks viewers to consider the actions being taken by Giáp and other Vietnamese during the Vietnam War, which had been ongoing for more than a decade when Merz created his sculpture. At the same time, Giap's Igloo encourages viewers to contemplate their actions in the moment by encouraging them to physically engage with the object. As they walk around the work, they might consider how the words implicate them within larger cultural systems.

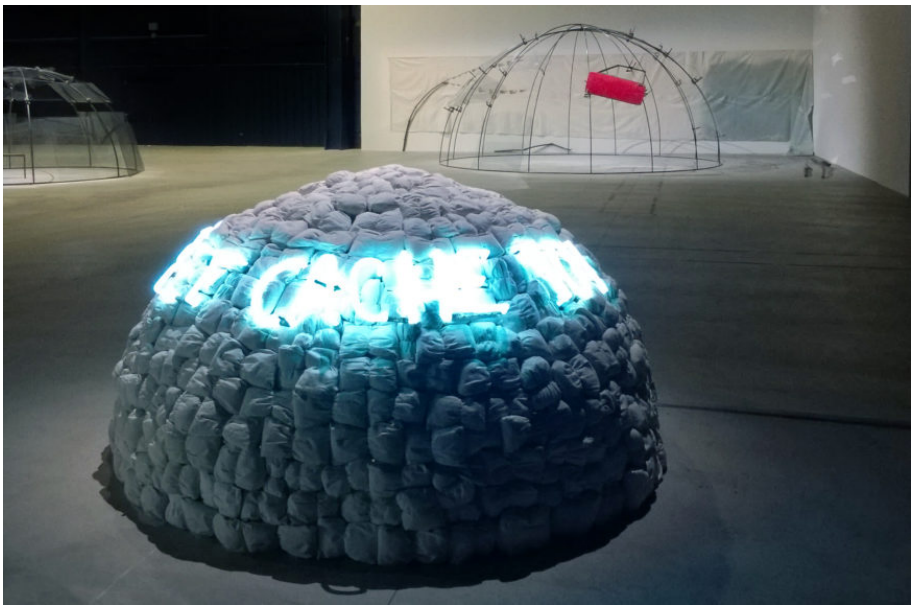


Figure **5.6.1.2**:

Mario Merz, Igloos, Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Milano, 2018 (photo: CiaoMilano, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Why an igloo?

Giap's Igloo was the first igloo created by Merz. During his career, he made over 30 igloos in various sizes and with a variety of organic and industrial materials. An igloo is a basic architectural structure that provides shelter and warmth and dates back to ancient nomadic cultures. The igloo form raises many different associations. It is a space that can be built by children to play in, and its shape can be seen in a dome atop a cathedral. Merz would typically collect many of the materials for his igloos from the local area and rebuild them differently each time they were installed. In this way, the artist was similar to a nomad, always on the move and constructing his shelters in response to each new environment he encountered.



Figure **5.6.1.3**: Mario Merz, *Luoghi senza strada*, 1994, slate, neon, wire (photo: Giovanni Sighele, CC BY 2.0)

At first glance, General Giáp's quote might not seem relevant to an igloo made of wire and clay, but the clay-filled bags are reminiscent of sandbags used in bunkers during war and have a defensive appearance. Art historian Elizabeth Mangini has proposed that the bags of clay are suggestive of General Giáp's statement—the clay might provide strength in its structure, but it covers much less ground than it would if the clay was spread out.



Figure **5.6.1.4**: Mario Merz, *Igloo di Giap (Giap's Igloo)*, 1968, metal structure, wire mesh, bags of clay soil, neon, batteries, accumulators, 120 x 200 cm (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris)

Viewers engage with *Giáp's Igloo* as they walk multiple times around it to read the neon text. Art historian Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev has suggested that the viewer's involvement with the work mirrors Giáp's words. When reading the first half of the quote that begins at the top of the igloo, viewers must walk slowly for a short distance around the igloo to read the phrase and so cover little ground. The second half of the quote is spread out across the lower half of the igloo and causes the viewer to walk much more quickly to read all the text and therefore scatters and loses strength.



Figure **5.6.1.5**: Mario Merz, *Spirale di cera*, 1970–81 (photo: Giovanni Sighele, CC BY 2.0)

The Fibonacci sequence

Requiring the viewer to expend energy to understand *Giap's Igloo* is closely tied to Merz's interest in conveying the presence of underlying invisible energies present in life. [1] The igloo's shape is, for Merz, a metaphor for this energy. Merz was drawn to the igloo because he saw within its design, a spiraling line that begins at the structure's apex and slowly spreads outward to its base. Merz's fascination with the spiral motif as an expression of the expansion of energy into space is closely tied to the artist's interest in the Fibonacci sequence, which he incorporated in different ways throughout his artmaking.

Named after the 13th-century Italian mathematician, Leonardo of Pisa (later known as Fibonacci), this famous mathematical series consists of a sequence of numbers in which each is the sum of the two proceeding numerals: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, etc. and produced, for example, by 0+1=1, 1+1=2, 1+2=3, 2+3=5 and so on. This increasing mathematical sequence can be found in biological growth patterns, such as how certain flowers produce petals or the family tree of honeybees. When the Fibonacci sequence is drawn out in a diagram, it represents an ever-expanding spiral. For Merz, the Fibonacci series illustrates how everything, from nature to society, is in a transformative state of progression and change.

The Fibonacci sequence is implicit within *Giap's Igloo*. The artwork turns out to be not just a simple structure made of humble materials, but a multifaceted dialogue with the past, present, and future. Its shape harkens back to the past, the written statement speaks to the contemporary actions of humanity, and the essential form contains within it the mathematical expression of how the future will continue to develop and transform. When encountering *Giap's Igloo*, Merz invites you to consider your actions, and how those actions will contribute to our larger existence.

Notes:

[1] Giorgio Guglielmino, "Mario Merz's Language," in *Mario Merz* (Turin: hopefulmonster, 2003), p. 54.

Additional resources

Igloo di Giap at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

Fondazione Merz

The term Arte Povera from Tate

Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn. *Arte Povera* (London: Phaidon, 1999).

Eccher, Danilo. *Mario Merz* (Turin: hopefulmonster, 2003).

Mangini, Elizabeth. "Solitary/Solidary: Mario Merz's Autonomous Artist," *Art Journal* vol. 75, no. 3 (fall 2016).

Mario Merz (Turin: Fondazione Merz, 2006).

This page titled 5.6.1: Mario Merz, Giap's Igloo is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Lucienne Auz, "Mario Merz, Giap's Igloo," in Smarthistory, November 21, 2021, accessed January 19, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/merz-giap-igloo/..

5.6.2: Michelangelo Pistoletto, Newspaper Sphere

- by **TATE**

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Video **5.6.2.1**: A key artist of the arte povera movement, Michelangelo Pistoletto came to London in May to recreate a seminal 1966 performance in which he rolled a ball of newspapers through the streets of Turin. At Tate Modern he pasted together newspapers to make a two-metre sphere, and accompanied by his wife Maria and a huge crowd, took it out into the city. We follow Pistoletto as he travels over the Millennium Bridge, through the streets, then back to Tate Modern on a boat. The artist also explains the political and personal significance of staging such an action today.

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5.7: Kay WalkingStick (Cherokee), Me and My Neon Box

by **GABRIELLA SHYPULA**

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194833



Figure 5.7.1: Kay WalkingStick, *Me and My Neon Box*, 1971, acrylic on canvas, 54 x 60 inches (Newark Museum of Art, © Kay WalkingStick)

A nearly life-sized silhouetted human figure sits atop a purple box at the center of *Me and My Neon Box*. The hard-edge lines that contour her warm-toned figure starkly contrast the surrounding field of neon coral. The subtle changes in tone and large sections of color complicate where the figure is located within the pictorial plane—do the planes of color move forward or recede? At the top left, the foot of another cropped figure is lifted, as if caught in the midst of taking a step. The same section of coral that anchors the stepping feet also frames the contour of the central figure's left side, further tangling our ability to distinguish between figure and ground.

The only head we can see belongs to the central figure, sitting upright on the angled purple box. We soon realize that the figure's hands cup the front edge and corner of the box. Though the silhouette includes no internal drawing, and thus no facial features, we sense the figure's gaze looking out towards us. But who is this? As hinted at in the title of this painting, the chromatic figures in *Me and My Neon Box* are based on the body of Kay WalkingStick, the artist who created this composite self-portrait in 1971. The painting belongs to a series of works made by WalkingStick from 1969 to 1973, featuring multiple naked silhouettes, primarily of her own body, in alternating pastel and vivid colors.

> ***I wanted to be part of this activity that was going on in New York at the time, but I wanted to be different.Kay WalkingStick [1]***



Figure 5.7.2: Helen Frankenthaler, *The Bay*, 1963, acrylic on canvas, 6′ 8-7/8″ x 6′ 9-7/8″ (Detroit Institute of Arts, © Estate of Helen Frankenthaler)

Around 1962 and in her late 20s, married with two children living in northern New Jersey, WalkingStick began to take regular trips to New York City. There she would visit art galleries and museums, studying the work of painters including **Helen Frankenthaler**, **Ad Reinhardt**, and **Sam Gilliam**. The art world experienced by WalkingStick in the mid-to-late 1960s was one of openness and new possibilities. **Abstract Expressionism** (or New York School painting), which used gesture to respond to the devastating conditions in the aftermath of World War II, was no longer center stage, replaced in the art press by color field painting. The application of pure color with subtle tonal variation to create a flattened composition was characteristic of many younger color field painters like Frankenthaler, and with vigorous support of key art world critics, the practice continued to develop into the 1960s. The introduction of acrylic paint and the action of materials through techniques of pouring, taping, and staining provided an entry point for many younger artists, including WalkingStick, to make art that addressed their current realities relating to social and sexual liberation.



Figure 5.7.3: Kay WalkingStick, *Me and My Neon Box*, 1971, acrylic on canvas, 54 x 60 inches (Newark Museum of Art, © Kay WalkingStick)

My body, my box

WalkingStick's *Me and My Neon Box* engages and adapts the tenets of color field painting with great originality; as she describes the series, it is "hard-edge acrylic, but it is figurative rather than abstract." [2] As the clean edges of each figure's contour meets the surrounding environment, the hue shifts, to create a flat, yet spatially complex painting. The warm yellow-green-brown tones of the figures, converge with the equally bright, yet matte, fields of orange, blue, and purple, making it difficult to separate the figures from their environment. Our perception of figure and ground is challenged by WalkingStick's use of color and line. The bodies shape the space they inhabit (rather than the reverse): the feet delineate the coral-hued ground, the central figure grasps the edge of the box, and the bent arm of the standing figure on the right side creates a pocket of pastel blue. WalkingStick, among many artists during this period, including Emma Amos, was interested in new ways of handling color and figuration to examine the coding of space.



Figure **5.7.4**: Emma Amos, *Baby*, 1966 (© Estate of Emma Amos, Ryan Lee Gallery)

WalkingStick's use of the silhouette originates from the experience of going to the beach and observing her shadow, its dual function as both index of her body and part of the sandy beach. [3] Her experience at the beach reveals WalkingStick's nuanced understanding of the social production of bodies within space. The artist's flattened figure is shaped by, is a part of, and gives form to her environment simultaneously. *Me and My Neon Box* encapsulates a critical period in WalkingStick's artistic practice when she begins to use her own body as a mode to examine interconnected questions about gender, race, and sexuality in social space.

My body, freedom and power

> ***I was raised to be a feminist.***
> ***Kay WalkingStick [4]***

WalkingStick's silhouettes, or shadows, are defined by color and, as WalkingStick pointedly states, they are "not white girls." [5] WalkingStick's father, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, was not an active part of her life. Raised by her Scottish-Irish mother, the way WalkingStick viewed her Native and gender identity was strongly shaped by her mother's influence. She would say, "Stand up straight Kay, you're a Cherokee, be proud of who you are," and "[I]t's a man's world, Kay. All you have to do is be better than the men." [6] Growing up surrounded by working women and with the continual reminder that she—a Cherokee woman—better "make something of herself" drove WalkingStick to make a career of her own. [7]

Although WalkingStick was made aware of society's white, patriarchal structures at an early age, she shifted her artistic practice to focus on topics of gender and sexuality at the advent of the women's movement and sexual revolution of the 1960s and early 1970s. While WalkingStick was not a publicly active figure in the women's movement, she did "read all the books that everybody read" and "went to a few meetings." [8] The meetings that WalkingStick attended were known as consciousness-raising groups, where women would draw connections between their private, social, and public lives, becoming aware of the hegemonic and patriarchal structures that commonly shaped their daily lives. Participants in these groups, and women interested in feminism more broadly, often read books that drew these connections, including Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and others. Within this feminist context and consciousness, WalkingStick formed a different relationship to her body and her sexuality:

> ***"[J]ust accepting the fact that I'm a woman in a woman's body, having a good time in a woman's body is in these paintings. And the feminist kind of view of ourselves as being potent, strong individuals, sexually as well as everything the other way, was in these paintings. These were not about my heritage at all."Kay WalkingStick [9]***



Figure 5.7.5: Kay WalkingStick, *Me and My Neon Box*, 1971, acrylic on canvas, 54 x 60 inches (Newark Museum of Art, © Kay WalkingStick)

The only interior details in the painting can be seen in the rightmost silhouette in *Me and My Neon Box's* composition: her breast and the triangular shadow painted in her pelvic area alluding to her vulva. The eroticism of WalkingStick's silhouettes develops alongside the rise of erotic art during the sexual revolution of the 1960s. [10] But while some erotic art with a pop sensibility created during this period reinscribed gendered dynamics of spectatorship by objectifying women's bodies for the heterosexual male viewer, apart from the breast and vulva, *Me and My Neon Box's* flattened space and vast areas of flat color limits visual access to her body.

By sharply cropping her form with the painting's edge and the other means of abstraction that she employs, WalkingStick resists the misogynistic art historical trope of depicting nude women's bodies as passive objects for visual pleasure. She asserts that her figures are not representations of "nudity"; rather, there is a "joyousness in their nakedness." [11]

Of the artist's three silhouettes moving and interacting across space, only one shadow gives a fleeting glimpse of her nakedness through profile and shadow. Through her subtlety, WalkingStick emphasizes the everyday, matter-of-factness of her body, rather than centering an idealized perspective. WalkingStick's reversal of nude to naked bodies is common to feminist art-making and writing of the period. The multiple versions of her own body in *Me and My Neon Box*—more subject than object—render vivid WalkingStick's experience as a Native woman and sexual being finding freedom and power in her body.

Me and My Neon Box embodies WalkingStick's remarkable artistic practice in the early 1970s, when she was working through questions in painting simultaneously and in dialogue with questions of sexuality, gender, and race. She creates a space where her naked body is uninhibited by her environment and denies a direct relationship to the viewer. This iridescent space and neon box are hers.

Notes:

[1] Kay WalkingStick in "Kay WalkingStick: An American Artist" (interview), YouTube, 8:16, posted by "SmithsonianNMAI," November 25, 2015, 6:26–6:35.

[2] Kay WalkingStick, "Artist Talk: A Conversation at Dartmouth with Artist Kay WalkingStick," YouTube, 58:09, posted by "Dartmouth," 6:46–6:52.

[3] Kate Morris, "What Lies Beneath: Sacred Geometries, 1970–83," in *Kay WalkingStick: An American Artist*, exh. cat., eds. Kathleen Ash-Milby and David Penney (Washington, D.C.; New York: Smithsonian Books, 2015), p. 53.

[4] Kay WalkingStick in Sally Swenson, "Kay WalkingStick" (interview), in *Lives and Works: Talks with Women Artists* (Lanham, MD; London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1996), 2:212.

[5] Kay WalkingStick in "Kay WalkingStick | April Contemplating May" (interview), YouTube, 1:53, posted by "Whitney Museum of American Art," April 23, 2019, 00:18–00:20.

[6] Kay WalkingStick in "Artist Talk: Kay WalkingStick – A Painted Life," YouTube, 59:38, posted by "Smithsonian," April 29, 2011, 12:40–12:59; Oral history interview with Kay WalkingStick, conducted by Mija Riedel, 2011 December 14–15, transcript, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, p. 4.

[7] Oral history interview with Kay WalkingStick, 2011, p. 4.

[8] Oral history interview with Kay WalkingStick, 2011, p. 19.

[9] Oral history interview with Kay WalkingStick, 2011, p. 20.

[10] For more on the history of heterosexual eroticism in 1960s women's art as its own distinct artistic mode, see Rachel Middleman, *Radical Eroticism: Women, Art, and Sex in the 1960s* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

[11] Kay WalkingStick quoted in Kate Morris, "The Embodied Landscape," in *Shifting Grounds: Landscape in Contemporary Native American Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), p. 117.

Additional Resources:

See this painting at The Newark Museum of Art

Kay WalkingStick's website

Kay WalkingStick's artist talk at the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C.

Kay WalkingStick talks about *April Contemplating May*, another figurative work in the series and created a year after *Me and My Neon Box* (closed captioning available)

Kay WalkingStick: An American Artist (subtitles included, closed captioning available)

Oral history interview with Kay WalkingStick, conducted by Mija Riedel, 2011 December 14–15. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

Kathleen Ash-Milby and David Penney, eds. *Kay WalkingStick: An American Artist*, exh. cat. Washington, D.C.; New York: Smithsonian Books, 2015

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5.8: Eleanor Antin, Carving- A Traditional Sculpture

by DR. TOM FOLLAND

Page ID
194834



Figure 5.8.1: *Aphrodite of Knidos*, torso: Roman copy, 2nd century C.E., restoration, 17th century, marble (Rome, Roman National Museum, Palazzo Altemps)

In 1972, the artist Eleanor Antin decided she would make an "academic" sculpture:

> ***"I got out a book on Greek sculpture, which is the most academic of all….This piece was done in the method of the Greek sculptors…carving around and around the figure and whole layers would come off at a time until finally the aesthetic ideal had been reached."***

Of course she did no such thing—make an academic sculpture, that is. What she produced instead was a work entitled *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* in which the typical marble or bronze medium of sculpture was replaced with a grid of 148 black and white photographs of the artist's naked body. They are arranged in 37 vertical columns, corresponding to the number of days Antin spent following a diet plan proposed in a popular magazine for women. Each row consists of four photographs showing back, front, and side profiles, with a text panel at the bottom listing each day, time, and the artist's weight. When first exhibited, the photographs were simply pinned to the wall, eschewing the conventional use of frames in the display of art.



Figure 5.8.2: Eleanor Antin, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, 1972, 148 gelatin silver prints and text panels, each photograph 17.7 x 12.7 cm (**The Art Institute of Chicago**)

It is not sculpture per se, but the performance of sculpture. We might think of it as sculpture transposed into a living form, which is then presented as documentation—an analytical practice somewhat akin to laboratory research. The result might seem more informational than artistic.

Critiquing representations of women

Carving: A Traditional Sculpture could be seen as one answer to the rhetorical question posed by art historian Linda Nochlin's now famous essay published one year earlier: "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Nochlin's argument was that the history of art included few women, not because there were few women artists of note, but because art history was an extension of a patriarchal system in which women were excluded from almost everything. The answer Nochlin proposed was not to simply re-

insert women into history, but to scrutinize the very structure of history itself: to analyze the role of women within patriarchy, and by extension in the history of art.

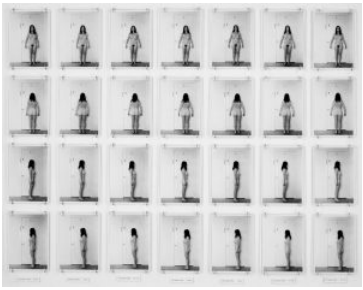


Figure **5.8.3**: Eleanor Antin, Carving: A Traditional Sculpture, 1972 (detail) (**Henry Moore Foundation**)

Antin's "traditional" sculpture is a witty and humorously feminist attack on tradition in which women were more often subjects than authors. Antin took the *idea* of sculpture as the subject of her work, thereby also following the dictates of **Conceptual art**, a dominant movement of the 1970s in which traditional notions of art were contested and redefined. Women artists at this time, in tandem with second wave feminism, embraced the Conceptual art movement's focus on concepts and processes, its adaptation of new media, and its overturning of past artistic conventions.

Though the ancient Greeks predominantly sculpted male bodies, the lasting tradition of Western art, which was rooted in the **classical ideal of ancient Greek and Roman art,** was one in which the bodies of women served as primary subject matter. Subjected to scenarios of **violence and abduction**, and the **distortion**, **abstraction** and **idealization** that supposedly served the higher goals of art, that tradition became a key target of feminist interventions into visual culture in the 1970s.

Dispensing with clichéd notions of beauty and femininity, in this piece Antin presents her body for the purposes of critical analysis (signaled by the detached presentation in black and white) rather than visual pleasure, thereby presenting a critique of the ways women had been depicted in the history of art. However, it was not just the Western tradition of fine art that Antin interrogated in this conceptual sculpture. Popular culture similarly demands that women hold to an idealized form of femininity. Antin's joining of these two mutually reinforcing systems—the weight loss program found in a typical "women's" magazine and the chiseling away of stone to reveal an ideal form in academic art—became the template for women artists in the 1970s and 1980s who were interested in examining cultural representations of gender. (**Mary Kelly** and **Cindy Sherman** are two other important examples.)



Figure **5.8.4**: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974-79, 1463 x 1463 cm (**Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum**)

Socially constructed, or essentially feminine?

Antin's *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* was one of the first artworks that looked critically at how women are portrayed within the contexts of both art and popular culture, but it represented only one strand of feminist art in the 1970s. Antin's work could be viewed as an example of "social constructionism." According to this way of thinking, imagery of women was seen as *constructing*, rather than simply reflecting, concepts of femininity.

A different school of thought, called “essentialism,” argued that a truly feminist art meant finding and highlighting an essential female aesthetic experience. Instead of analyzing women’s experience in relation to patriarchy, this approach argued that women’s art should be celebrated as separate in its own right. Judy Chicago’s massive installation *The Dinner Party* is an example of this theory. Created between 1974 and 1979, this work embodied a sense of essential femininity through a collaborative project that employed several hundred volunteers specialized in crafts (embroidery and ceramics, for example) that were typically associated with the domestic labor commonly practiced by women. The end result was a triangular dinner table with place settings dedicated to famous women in history and myth.



Figure **5.8.5**: Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea*, 1952, oil and charcoal on unsized, unprimed canvas, 219.4 × 297.8 cm (The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)

Whatever the differences between these camps (and those differences would form a rich area of feminist scholarly debate in the years to come), by the 1970s the issue of gender could no longer be ignored. We can get a sense of how vastly different the new climate was when looking at a particular moment in a film, released the very next year, in 1973, after Antin first exhibited her work. *Painters Painting: The New York Art Scene 1940-1970* was a documentary of the school of painting that had reigned since World War II. At one point in the film, the artist Helen Frankenthaler, known for her stained abstractions in which pools of color saturated the canvas, was asked “What was it like to be a woman painter?” Like many female modernists, Frankenthaler had faced the hostility of critics who claimed women did not have the wherewithal to produce the heroically large abstractions of their male counterparts. But Frankenthaler was clearly uncomfortable with the question. Despite the fact that she had just given an impressive overview of the history of modernist painting and the problems it represented for her own generation of artists, Frankenthaler’s only response to this question was a brief one—“well first of all I am a painter”—followed by an averting of her eyes. For the younger generation that came of age in the 1960s, this was no longer a tenable position. The personal was political, as the saying would go, but so too was the aesthetic.

Additional resources:

This work at the Art Institute of Chicago

The Dinner Party at the Brooklyn Museum

Eleanor Antin cited in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, eds, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-1985* (Pandora Press, 1987), p.271.

Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (1971) in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (Thames & Hudson,1989).

Painters Painting: The New York Art Scene 1940-1970, 1973, documentary directed by Emile de Antonio.

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5.9: Robert Colescott, I Gets a Thrill Too When I Sees De Koo

by **DR. JESSI DITILLIO**

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194835



Figure **5.9.1**: Robert Colescott, *I Gets a Thrill Too When I Sees De Koo*, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 213.36 x 167.64 cm (**The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University**)



Figure **5.9.2**: Willem de Kooning, *Woman I*, 1950–52, oil on canvas (MoMA)

Robert Colescott's massive painting, *I Gets a Thrill Too When I Sees De Koo*, vibrates with vigorous brushstrokes in brightly saturated colors—peachy pinks and seafoam greens crash into patches of coral, teal, yellow, and gestural black marks. Standing close to the painting allows it to dissolve into abstract form but stepping back reveals a female figure wearing a kerchief on her head, her brown skin adorned with pastel pink cheeks and glossy lips.

On the surface, Colescott's painting is a parody of ***Woman I***, the most famous work by **Abstract Expressionist** painter Willem de Kooning—the "de Koo" of Colescott's title. De Kooning was a dominant figure in American art when Colescott parodied his work

—he was known for his innovative use of paint and fusion of figuration and abstraction.

Parodies that reflect on race, gender, and art history

Colescott is most well-known for a series of parodies he began in 1975 that use a similar tactic to *I Gets a Thrill Too*—he repainted canonical European and American paintings but changed some or all of the figures into racist caricatures of Blackness. For example, he repainted Jan van Eyck's ***Arnolfini Portrait*** (1434), and Picasso's ***Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*** (1907). These works ask us to reflect on the way stereotypes about race and gender communicate, and to think about what kind of stories they tell, in both popular culture and art history.



Figure 5.9.3: Left: Robert Colescott, *Natural Rhythm: Thank You Jan van Eyck*, 1976, acrylic on canvas (Collection of Robert H. Orchard, St. Louis, Missouri); right: Robert Colescott, *Les Desmoiselles d'Alabama: Vestidas*, 1985, acrylic on canvas, 96 x 92 in. (**Seattle Art Museum**)

Critics often discuss de Kooning's *Woman I* as a painting about the images of women that circulated in the 1950s, an image shaped by widespread gender inequality and sexist stereotypes (discussed more below). Colescott's parody of *Woman I* complicates de Kooning's image of women by highlighting the different ways that white and Black women are (mis)understood and discriminated against in a patriarchal society such as the United States. Colescott's work underscores the idea that de Kooning's *Woman I* is not a universal woman, but a *white woman*. In contrast, Colescott's painting asks, what are the implicit messages about Black womanhood embedded in American visual culture?

The philosopher king

De Kooning's prominence in the mid-century art world made him a loaded figure for emerging painters in the 1970s—he was both a role model of avant-garde innovation and an oppressively famous "father figure" to painters like Colescott. By the late 1970s, when Colescott painted *I Gets a Thrill Too*, de Kooning had become a kind of contemporary "old master." Case in point—in 1972, *The New York Times*, art critic Peter Schjeldahl crowned de Kooning the "philosopher-king" of contemporary painting and declared, "few younger painters are any longer being misled by his example into thinking that because they have a sense of what he's doing, they can do it too. There can be only one de Kooning, and by now, everybody knows it." [1] While critics like Schjeldahl lauded de Kooning's innovation, some feminist scholars accused de Kooning of outright misogyny. For critic Carol Duncan, de Kooning was typical of the so-called "geniuses" of avant-garde art in his presentation of women as monstrous and loathsome sexual objects. [2]



Figure 5.9.4: Left: detail of Willem de Kooning, study for *Woman I*, 1950, oil, cut and pasted paper on cardboard, 37.5 x 29.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art); right: T-Zone, detail from Camel cigarette ad, back cover of Time Magazine, January 17, 1949.



Figure 5.9.5: Robert Colescott, *I Gets a Thrill Too When I Sees De Koo*, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 213.36 cm x 167.64 cm (The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University)

Like Colescott, de Kooning looked to both art history and popular culture as models for his work. *Woman I* was inspired by archetypal images of women, from ancient fertility figures and Renaissance-era madonnas to pin-up girls and Hollywood bombshells. In early studies for his version of *Woman I*, de Kooning experimented with facial and anatomical elements cut directly from advertisements, such as lips and teeth meant to make cigarettes seem healthful and sexy.

If de Kooning's *Woman I* shows a woman who is both alluring and terrifying, Colescott's *I Gets a Thrill Too* does something startlingly similar. In *I Gets A Thrill Too*, Colescott also looks to the representation of women on product packaging. Colescott's revised woman appears to be a "mammy" figure—a racist trope embodied most famously by the syrupy sweet brand icon, Aunt Jemima. Colescott's mammy smiles, but her smile seems a bit tentative, and her eyes have a sidelong gaze.

The "mammy" archetype derives from 19th-century depictions of enslaved older women, who were often tasked with the most intimate forms of labor, such as rearing children, cooking, and managing their enslavers' households.



Figure 5.9.6: Aunt Jemima pancake flour advertisement, circa 1960

"Old Aunt Jemima" was originally a song sung by enslaved field workers, adapted and sung countless times during minstrels shows by white (and usually male) performers in blackface makeup and drag. Cultural studies scholar Michele Wallace describes how the mammy symbolized a paradoxical combination of opposites—she was both comforting and monstrous, complicit and rebellious. [3] Colescott's mammy figure is both adorable and grotesque, her cartoony smile made unsettling by the way her head seems to float, disembodied in the picture plane.



Figure 5.9.7: Willem de Kooning, Woman I, 1950–52, oil on canvas (MoMA) ;right: Robert Colescott, *I Gets a Thrill Too When I Sees De Koo*, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 213.36 x 167.64 cm (The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University)

Looking at Colescott and de Kooning's paintings side by side reveals some of the subtle aesthetic differences between the two. In *I Gets a Thrill Too*, Colescott emphasizes flat, cartoonish planes of color in his mammy's face by juxtaposing them with the more expressionistic marks used by de Kooning. Where de Kooning had applied layer upon layer of oil paint in muddy tones, adding and subtracting paint by scratching at the surface, Colescott has filled in thin patches of brightly colored acrylic. Colescott's graphic style resonates with the tactics of Pop Art by alluding to American product packaging, where the mammy stereotype continued to be seen in the 1970s.

Who gets a thrill?

The title of Colescott's painting requires a little extra context to unpack. Try reading "I Gets A Thrill Too When I sees de Koo" aloud to get a better sense of its sound. Colescott modeled this linguistic style after white renditions of Southern Black speech found in pre-Civil Rights era media such as Mark Twain's novels or advertisements for Aunt Jemima's maple syrup. While African Americans did not *actually* speak in a significantly different accent than white Southerners, writing their voices in so-called "dialect," as if they were speaking a foreign language, was a dominant convention of literature intended to express the otherness of enslaved (and formerly enslaved) people. While some Black writers, such as Zora Neale Hurston and Claude McKay, used dialect in their story-telling—this linguistic form was controversial among the Black literati because of its strong link to the tradition of Blackface minstrelsy. [4] The phrase "de Koo" in Colescott's title, when spoken aloud, seems to suggest the derogatory slur "coon."



Figure **5.9.8**: Mel Ramos, *I Still Get a Thrill When I See Bill #3*, 1977, watercolor on Paper, 301/2" x 22 1/2" (Collection of Mr. and Mrs James S. Morgan, Prairie Village, Kansas)

Colescott's title has another intriguing element—the word "too." If he gets a thrill *too* when he sees "de Koo," who got the first thrill? Earlier in 1978, Colescott participated in an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art called "Art about Art," which surveyed the phenomenon of contemporary American artists who were copying, reproducing, and altering images from art history in bold, unprecedented ways. The exhibition exposed Colescott to several parodies of de Kooning, including one by an artist named Mel Ramos, *I Still Get a Thrill When I See Bill #3.*

In Ramos's version of *Woman I*, the artist mimicked the body of de Kooning's figure in rough strokes, but replaced her head with a glamorous blonde bombshell. Ramos didn't usually paint like de Kooning but instead made slick, seductive images of women posing evocatively with consumer products.

Ramos's paintings draw on the style of vintage pin-ups, Hollywood posters, and pulp magazines. They push advertising imagery from implicit to explicit sexuality with slick images of beautiful, flirtatious women and mass-produced American commodities, as in his work *Lucky Lulu Blonde*. Ramos's paintings of women posing with commodities are both objectifying and potentially subversive—they highlight the way that marketers use sexual desire to drive consumerism while also reveling in that desire. Ramos's parody of de Kooning's *Woman I* seems to mock de Kooning's objectification of women, but also participate in it with his own style.



Figure 5.9.9: Mel Ramos, *Lucky Lulu Blonde*, 1965, oil on canvas, 48 x 40 inches

But, as Ramos's title indicates, the painting was the third iteration in his "I Still Get a Thrill When I See Bill" series, which includes more than twelve works. Ramos's *I Still Get a Thrill When I See Bill* #1, the first of these paintings, is a devoted brushstroke for brushstroke reproduction of de Kooning's original *Woman I*. As he explained,

> ***I was just really troubled by Willem de Kooning's paintings at one time. So it was quite a challenge for me actually to try to attempt to do that painting just sort of outright, blatant, straightforward—here's Woman No. 1—and still make it, you know, a Ramos painting . . . it was the kind of thing that I was doing with that painting, that is, the involvement with the paint itself, the painting of brushstrokes, the reconstituting of those brushstrokes, painting them visually the way they appear in magazines, as opposed to the way they actually appear on the paint, on the surface, which has nothing to do at all with the way they appear in magazine. Mel Ramos [5]***

In one sense, the title "I Gets a Thrill Too When I Sees de Koo," may be the voice of the mammy figure, who gets a thrill, just like de Kooning's female figure. In another sense, perhaps the title is a reference to Colescott, who, like Ramos, is thrilled by the legacy of de Kooning's work even as he makes fun of it. To this day, African American art is often sidelined by mainstream narratives of art history, as if Black artists worked in a vacuum, without being influenced by artists of other races. Colescott's parody of de Kooning emphasizes that he, too, is following in de Kooning's footsteps as a participant in the ongoing progression of American avant-garde painting.



Figure 5.9.10: Installation view, Colescott and Ramos's de Kooning parodies (photo: Deborah Barlow). Left: Robert Colescott, *I Gets a Thrill Too When I Sees De Koo*, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 213.36 cm x 167.64 cm (The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University); right: Mel Ramos, *I Still Get a Thrill When I See Bill #1*, 1976, oil on canvas, 203.2 x 177.8 cm (The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University)

Ramos and Colescott's dual parodies now live together in the collection of the Rose Museum at Brandeis University. Together, they offer an opportunity to reflect on appropriation, the creative act, *and* the way images of women circulate through art history and popular culture.

Notes:

[1] Peter Schjeldahl, "Willem de Kooning: Even His 'Wrong' Is Beautiful." *New York Times*. 1972, p. D23.

[2] See Carol Duncan, Cheryl Bernstein, and Guerrilla Art Group, *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[3] See Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Warner Books, 1980).

[4] For more about the history of dialect in African American literature, see Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[5] Oral history interview with Mel Ramos, 1981 May 15 (Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution).

Additional Resources:

Colescott's *I Get a Thrill Too When I See De Koo* at The Rose Museum

De Kooning's *Woman I* at MoMA

Mel Ramos's *I Still Get a Thrill When I See Bill #1* at The Rose Museum

Raphaela Platow and Lowery Stokes Sims, eds., *Art and Race Matters: The Career of Robert Colescott* (Rizzoli Electa, 2019).

Jacqueline Francis and Lowery Stokes Sims, *Figuring History: Robert Colescott, Kerry James Marshall, Mickalene Thomas*, ed. Catharina Manchanda (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

Deborah G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Norton Paperback (New York: Norton, 1987).

Marlon Riggs, *Ethnic Notions*, Kanopy California Newsreel Package (San Francisco, California, USA: Kanopy Streaming, 2014).

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5.10: Mary Kelly, Post-Partum Document

by RACHEL WARRINER

Page ID 194836

Anyone who has been in the unpleasant position of changing a dirty nappy will know that normally your first instinct is to get it as far away from it as possible. So it might seem strange that American artist Mary Kelly (born 1941) took the liners of her son's used cloth nappies, printed them with details of his diet, and displayed them as artworks. Causing some controversy at their debut exhibition, the nappy liners formed the first part of the epic and fascinating *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79).



Figure **5.10.1**: 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

Kelly has made works that examine complicated social issues such as the ramifications of war, and the politics of how our identities are constructed. In *Post-Partum Document*, she was engaging in a discussion that was happening at the emergence of second-wave feminism about the way in which women worked in the home. At a time where many feminist artists were looking at reclaiming the body through performance – such as Marina Abramovic and Carole Schneeman – or revising history in order to incorporate our foremothers – such as Judy Chicago – Kelly looked more directly at the invisible daily experience of women engaged in domestic labour.

Post-Partum Document consists of six sections of documentation that follow the development of Kelly's son, Kelly Barrie, from birth until the age of five. Kelly intricately charts her relationship with her son, and her changing role as a mother by writing on artefacts associated with child care: baby clothes, his drawings, items he collects, and his first efforts at writing. In addition, there are detailed analytical texts that exist in parallel to the objects.

In 'Documentation III: Analysed Markings and Diary Perspective Schema,' Kelly includes three types of text. She describes them in the documentation that accompanies their exhibition as:

R1 A condensed transcription of the child's conversation, playing it back immediately following the recording session

R2 A transcription of the mother's inner speech in relation to R1, recalling it during a playback later the same day

R3 A secondary revision of R2, one week later, locating the conversation (as object) within a specific time interval (as spatial metaphor) and rendering it "in perspective" (as a mnemic system)

Kelly's documentations that accompany the work are heavily indebted to Lacanian psychoanalysis, which conceives of the unconscious as being structured like a language. This is interesting in relation to *Post-Partum Document* because it is so layered with text. The quote above strongly contrasts with extracts taken from column R1 (the transcripts) from the piece dated 27.9.75, which is written in lowercase on a typewriter. They state:

> ***Come'n do it (wants to fly the kite)***
> ***Down dis, its falling. (I'm pretending to fly the kite)] Ask Daddy flying the kite, go ask him (I say Daddy will fly it tomorrow)***

We can see how much range there is in the text that she uses. Adding to this, there are the sections in R2 that provide a picture of an adult's day to day interaction with a small child. This column is typed in capital letters, using the aesthetic of the text in order to separate the voices. From the same piece R2 reads:

> ***I say it would be nice to take it outside as it's very windy but it's also very late so I try to change the subject.***

> ***As I started this game of pretending to fly the kite standing on a chair holding it and making sounds like wind, now I'm stuck with it.***
>
> ***He remembers promises very well.***

Finally, in section R3, Kelly describes her anxiety following an accident in which her son drank liquid aspirin and had to be rushed to hospital. This section is handwritten and is much longer, with candid text that explores the difficulties of childrearing. A part of this section states:

> ***Sometimes I forget to give him his medicine which makes me feel totally irresponsible or I just feel I wish it was all over i.e. he was 'grown up' but my mother says it never ends the worry just goes on and on.***

Over the top of all this worry and analysis are Kelly Barrie's drawings. They are typical of the drawings made by a young child, not much more than scribbles on rice paper. However, his lines cut over his mother's careful work; their carelessness seems all the more free when contrasted with her deliberations.

What makes this piece important is the way in which motherhood—so often seen in art history as a sentimental connection between mother and child—is shown as a difficult and complex relationship. Kelly's voice does not overbear her son's, instead it exists in tandem; we see Kelly develoraping and adapting as much as her child.

This is an extensive project (comprising in total of 139 individual parts) and Kelly's attention to the material qualities of these mundane objects is outstanding. This piece is a central work within feminist art that is still a relevant and a fascinating picture of what motherhood means for women.

Additional Resources:

Mary Kelly Artist Website

Mary Kelly at Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (1976)

Mary Kelly interviewed by Josefina Ayerza

Mary Kelly, Four Works in Dialogue (video)

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5.11: Jackie Winsor, #1 Rope

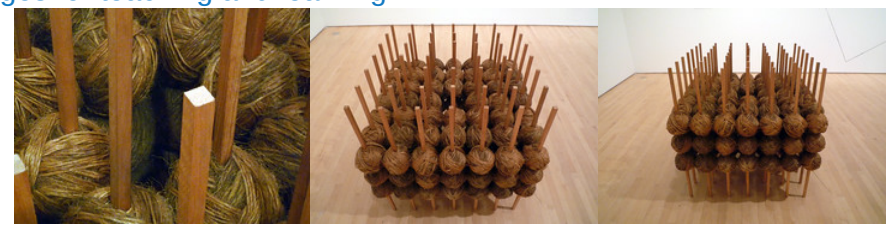
by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video 5.11.1: Jackie Winsor, *#1 Rope*, 1976, wood and hemp, 40-1/4 x 40 x 40″ (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

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5.12: Senga Nengudi, Linda Goode Bryant and the Just Above Midtown Gallery

- by **TATE**

Page ID

194838



Video **5.12.1**: Senga Nengudi and Linda Goode Bryant remember the pioneering work of Just Above Midtown (JAM) art gallery.

Senga Nengudi is an African-American visual artist best known for her abstract sculptures that combine found objects and choreographed performance.

Linda Goode Bryant is an American documentary filmmaker and the founding director of Just Above Midtown (JAM), the first gallery space to exhibit the work of African-American artists and other artists of colour in a major gallery district.

Goode In this film, Senga and Linda remember the many obstacles and struggles faced by the African-American artistic community which led to the foundation of the ground-breaking institution.

This page titled 5.12: Senga Nengudi, Linda Goode Bryant and the Just Above Midtown Gallery is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Tate, "Senga Nengudi, Linda Goode Bryant and the Just Above Midtown Gallery," in Smarthistory, January 13, 2022, accessed January 19, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/senga-nengudi-linda-goode-bryant-and-the-just-above-midtown-gallery/..

5.13: Lynda Benglis – ‘Form and Texture Create the Magic’

- by **TATE**

Page ID

194839



Video **5.13.1**: American artist Lynda Benglis is best known for her wax paintings, poured latex sculptures and for posing naked with a giant dildo in Art Forum magazine to advertise a show. Benglis looks back over her long career in this interview with TateShots.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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6.1: Ethiopia

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6.1.1: Skunder Boghossian, Night Flight of Dread and Delight

by **DR. PERRIN LATHROP**

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194742



Figure **6.1.1.1**: Skunder (Alexander) Boghossian, *Night Flight of Dread and Delight*, 1964, oil on canvas with collage, 56 5/8 x 62 5/8 in. (143.8 x 159.1 cm) (North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Purchased with funds from the North Carolina State Art Society (Robert F. Phifer Bequest), 98.6; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

> ***"African art created a condition in my mind. I learned that creation must be an immense and unceasing modulation of concept."—Skunder Boghossian (1965) [1]***



Figure **6.1.1.2**: Francisco de Goya, *Los Caprichos: The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, 1799, etching and aquatint, 21.2 x 15.0 cm (British Museum, London)

In his 1964 painting *Night Flight of Dread and Delight*, Ethiopian artist Skunder Boghossian divides the composition in two with a boundary line that represents the separation of the earth from the heavens. Two wide-eyed, winged creatures, one with the face of a cat, another an owl, echo the monsters conjured in Francisco Goya's etching *The Sleep of Reason* and breach the barrier between realms. Haunting biomorphic and cosmic forms emerge and retreat from the depths of space, and paint splatters seem to pulse like

dark matter. Noting the primordial duality to which this composition refers, Boghossian's close friend, the Ethiopian writer and poet Solomon Deressa, commented that "The vision menaces and delights at the same time. Images both attack and yet remain connected. Subdued colors are exploded from within their dark nether until they become shimmering jewels." [2]

In works such as *Night Flight*, Boghossian aspired to use painting to represent the metaphysical world, imagining the universe beyond normal human perception. Metaphysics refers to the study of abstract concepts like being, knowing, identity, time, and space. Shaped by a deep interest in pan-African cosmologies, histories, iconographies, knowledge systems, and politics, Boghossian's art is an expression of "*afro*-metaphysics." He formally and conceptually investigated spiritual and historical knowledge from traditions as diverse as Dogon cosmology from Mali and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. His art freely subjected their forms to new pictorial relationships that reflected the postcolonial reality of the mid-1960s.



Figure **6.1.1.3**: Skunder (Alexander) Boghossian, detail of winged creature with a cat's face, *Night Flight of Dread and Delight*, 1964, oil on canvas with collage, 143.8 x 159.1 cm (North Carolina Museum of Art; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

A pioneer of African modernism, Boghossian drew upon pan-African visual languages and references, from Coptic art and West African sculpture to the magical realist literature of Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola, to give form to both visible and invisible realities in his paintings. He manipulated symbolic and spiritual visual and literary traditions to picture the metaphysical world. In Boghossian's hands, each of *Night Flight*'s animal subjects become worlds unto themselves, with a universe of graphic patterns, talismanic designs, and amoebic forms proliferating within their porous boundaries. *Night Flight* is a cosmological painting enabled by the artist's study of wide-ranging global artistic traditions during the formative years he spent in Paris, from 1957 to 1966.



Figure **6.1.1.4**: Skunder (Alexander) Boghossian, detail, *Night Flight of Dread and Delight*, 1964, oil on canvas with collage, 143.8 x 159.1 cm (North Carolina Museum of Art; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Pan-African Paris

> ***"I grew up in the streets of Paris, I had no problem being black or yellow or green. I learned my craft."—Skunder Boghossian (1999) [3]***

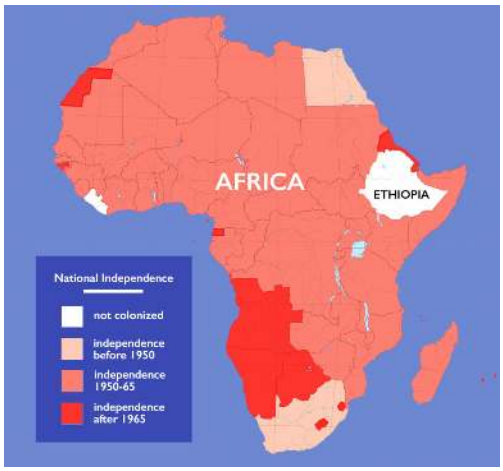


Figure **6.1.1.5**: Map of the end of colonial rule. in Africa (base map: Eric Gaba, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Pan-Africanism refers to an ideology of racial solidarity among people from Africa and its diaspora. Ethiopia holds a prominent place within the Pan-African imagination as an ancient African nation that was able to successfully resist colonization. Still, Skunder Boghossian's childhood there was marked by colonial trauma. The artist was born in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa in 1937 during Italian dictator Benito Mussolini's occupation of the country two years before the outbreak of World War II. While the artist was still an infant, his father was taken to Italy as a prisoner of war; he was not repatriated until Boghossian was eight years old. As a youth, Boghossian won a scholarship from Emperor Haile Selassie I to study art in London. Two years later, in 1957, Boghossian relocated to Paris and remained there until 1966 when he moved back to Addis Ababa to teach at the university alongside the prominent Ethiopian modernist Gebre Kristos Desta.

In Paris, Boghossian encountered art and individuals who shifted his artistic practice towards a sustained inquiry into both European modernism and African artistic traditions. He became enmeshed with the Black intelligentsia in Paris, engaging with modernist artists like Ibrahim El-Salahi (Sudan), Wifredo Lam (Cuba), Gerard Sekoto (South Africa), and Merton Simpson

(United States); the political and cultural leaders of the Négritude movement; and the liberating improvisation of global jazz musicians.

Négritude was first developed as a concept in Paris in the late 1920s by three Black students from French colonies in West Africa and the Caribbean—Aimé Césaire from Martinique, Léon Damas from French Guiana, and Léopold Senghor from Senegal. It was a political and philosophical movement that affirmed the value of Black civilization to counter and refuse its denigration by colonial powers. Boghossian's participation in Négritude circles in Paris encouraged him to explore African heritage, history, and culture beyond his native Ethiopia. He studied African art at the ethnographic Musée de l'homme at the Trocadéro in Paris, and became inspired by the forms and meanings of Dogon and Bwa masks from West Africa, Oromo and Konso sculpture from Ethiopia, and ancient Nubian, Aksumite, and Ethiopian Christian imagery.



Figure **6.1.1.6**: Skunder Boghossian, *Hallucination*, oil on canvas, 1961. 39 x 25 1/16 in. (Gift of Merton Simpson in memory of Sylvia H. Williams, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art)



Figure **6.1.1.7**: Amedeo Modigliani, *Young Woman in a Shirt*, 1918, oil on canvas (Albertina, Vienna)

Boghossian also studied the work of European modernists who engaged African art forms, like Amedeo Modigliani (Italy), Paul Klee (Germany), and the leader of the surrealist movement, André Breton. Like his fellow postcolonial modernist artists, including Uche Okeke, Ibrahim El-Salahi, and others, Boghossian's interest in European modernism deliberately confronted and revealed its primitivist origins. In the early 1960s, Boghossian worked in the figurative style seen in his painting *Hallucination* from 1961 that demonstrates—with its elongated features, sloping shoulders, and three-quarter length focus on a single subject—his interest in Modigliani's portraits.



Figure **6.1.1.8**: Memorial Head (Nsodie) 17th–mid-18th century, Akan peoples, terracotta, roots, quartz fragments, 20.3 × 14 × 12.1 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

His subject's prominent brow and eyes, rounded facial shape, ringed neck and decorative background also call to mind 17th- to 18th-century terracotta Akan memorial heads known as *nsodie* from present-day Ghana and **Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts.** Boghossian self-consciously combined multiple visual traditions from different points in history to comment on the breadth of African art's influence on global modernist art movements. Boghossian exhibited similar figurative paintings from this period in New York during his 1962 visit there that earned him attention among American audiences.



Figure **6.1.1.9**: Skunder Boghossian, *Explosion of the World Egg*, from the Nourishers series, oil on paper, 1963, dimensions unknown

Upon his return to his studio in Paris, his earlier encounters with the **surrealist strategies** of fragmentation and imaginative reassembling began to take shape and expanded the formal and conceptual possibilities Boghossian saw for his own work. His experimental *Nourishers* series, begun in 1963, marked a shift in his formal style. He began to subject the varied artistic, philosophical, and religious traditions he had studied to new pictorial relationships informed by surrealism by creating complex collage-like compositions that defy the legibility of his earlier figurative paintings.

Produced in the wake of independence movements across Africa, paintings like *Explosion of the World Egg* from the Nourishers series used primal, organic forms and cosmic patterns to convey themes of rebirth and new life that symbolized the promise of postcolonial Pan-Africanism. The primordial egg at the heart of this painting reappears in *Night Flight*, a recurrent symbol of the hope for Pan-African liberation that accompanied independence in the 1960s.



Figure **6.1.1.10**: Skunder Boghossian, *Juju's Wedding*, tempera and metallic paint on cut-and-torn cardboard, 1964. 21 1/8 x 20 in. (Museum of Modern Art)

The Black Atlantic

Boghossian's exposure to Pan-Africanist networks in Paris gave conceptual weight to the formal experiments that culminated in his painting *Night Flight of Dread and Delight*. The painting fully engaged the artist's developing philosophy of "afro-metaphysics" that drew on the power of religion and myth and prefigured **afrofuturism** in art, music, and literature. Boghossian often referred to "juju" as a shorthand for this philosophy. In fact, an alternate title for *Night Flight* used by Solomon Deressa, who often provided Boghossian's paintings their poetic titles, is *Juju's Flight of Delight and Terror*. The term also shows up in a related work from this period, *Juju's Wedding.*



Figure **6.1.1.11**: Skunder (Alexander) Boghossian, *Night Flight of Dread and Delight*, 1964, oil on canvas with collage, 56 5/8 x 62 5/8 in. (143.8 x 159.1 cm) (North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Purchased with funds from the North Carolina State Art Society (Robert F. Phifer Bequest), 98.6; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Though Boghossian first developed his new pan-African philosophy in Paris, it fully emerged across the Atlantic Ocean, in Tuskegee, Alabama in the heart of the American South during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Boghossian produced *Night Flight* and other important paintings and sculptures in the productive months following his August 1964 wedding in Tuskegee to Marilyn Pryce, an American student and Civil Rights activist he met in Paris, whose father worked at the historic Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University). [4]

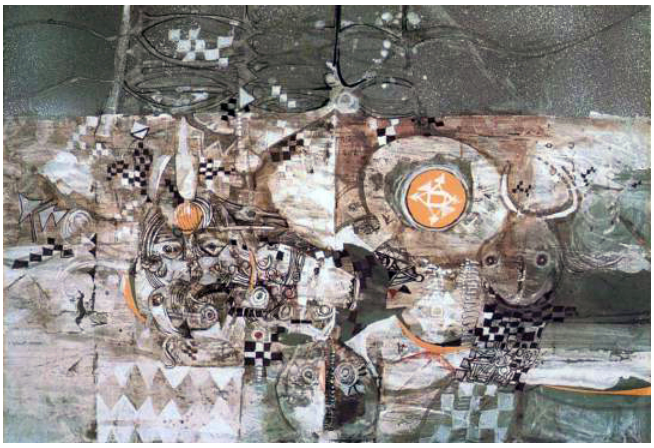


Figure **6.1.1.12**: Skunder Boghossian, *Ghosts of the Atlantic Ocean*, opaque watercolor, acrylic and ink on paper board, 1964. 27 5/8 x 40 1/4 in. (Hampton University Museum)

Reflecting Boghossian's own Black diasporic experience, *Night Flight* visualizes the feeling of being between worlds. Produced in the wake of a terrifyingly turbulent flight from Paris to New York the month before his wedding, on the surface, the work meditated on real experience and anxiety. But it also refers to a deeper legacy of Black trauma perpetrated during the violent trans-Atlantic voyages of the slave trade. In his 1964 painting *Ghosts of the Atlantic Ocean*, Boghossian more pointedly mourned the lives lost to the Middle Passage and addressed the unresolved histories of oppression. Just as *Night Flight* sought to visualize the cosmic expanse of the extraterrestrial universe, *Ghosts* examines the infinite and unknown worlds trapped beneath the sea's surface. Boghossian again repeats and combines recognizable designs and forms from across Africa, including the black and white

geometric patterns of Bwa masquerades from present-day Burkina Faso and the abstracted horns and circular face of Goli masquerades made by Baule peoples in Côte d'Ivoire to preserve the potency of the visual and cultural traditions that slavery and colonialism threatened to erase.



Figure **6.1.1.13**: Amhara or Tigrinya peoples (Ethiopia), Healing Scroll, 19th century; detail on the right, pigment on parchment, 3-1/2 x 75 inches (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Both *Night Flight* and *Ghosts* reveal the artist's longstanding formal and compositional experiments with Ethiopian healing scrolls, which surface in Boghossian's paintings as strips that disrupt his compositions and as formal elements like winged creatures or talismanic designs. In Boghossian's hands, these narrow vertical scrolls used to treat sickness through textual incantations and graphic design are invoked to heal historical trauma.

In 1970, after three years back in Addis Ababa, Boghossian resettled, this time permanently, in the United States, where he taught art at the famed Howard University in Washington, D.C. and became involved in the Black Arts Movement (an African American-led art movement, active during the 1960s and 1970s). Boghossian's time in the United States deepened his awareness of the shared histories, politics, and cultures that shape global Black experience.

Notes:

[1] Quoted in *Skunder Boghossian: Ethiopian Painter* (New York: Harmon Foundation and Merton D. Simpson Primitive and Modern Arts, 1965).

[2] Solomon Deressa, "Skunder in Context," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, No. 11–12 (Fall/Winter 2000): pp. 84–85.

[3] Interview with Elizabeth Giorgis, June 1999 in Washington, DC. Quoted in Elizabeth Giorgis, *Modernist Art in Ethiopia* (Ohio University Press, 2019), p. 140.

[4] Kate Cowcher, "Chapter 11 A Postcard from Addis: Ethiopian Modernism(s) in the World," in *Multiple Modernisms* (Routledge, forthcoming).

Additional resources:

Read about Afrofuturism on The Tate's Art Terms

Read about Negritude on The Tate's Art Terms

Read about Ethiopian healing scrolls on the Heilbrunn Timeline

Kate Cowcher, "Chapter 11 A Postcard from Addis: Ethiopian Modernism(s) in the World," in *Multiple Modernisms* (Routledge, forthcoming).

Solomon Deressa, "Skunder in Context." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*. no. 11–12 (Fall/Winter 2000), pp. 80–85.

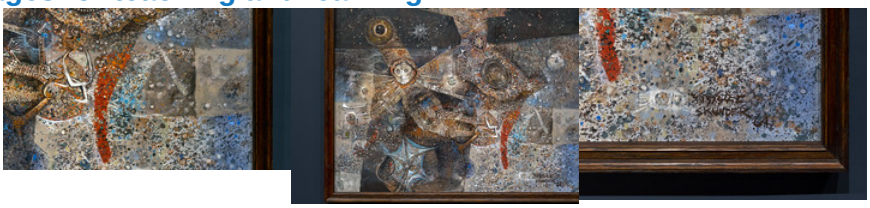
Elizabeth Giorgis, *Modernist Art in Ethiopia* (Ohio University Press, 2019).

Elizabeth Harney, “Constellations and Coordinates: Repositioning Postwar Paris in Stories of African Modernisms,” in *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism*, edited by Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips (Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 304–34.

Salah Hassan, “Alexander ‘Skunder’ Boghossian,” in *To Conserve A Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, edited by Richard J. Powell and Jock Reynolds (MIT Press, 1999), pp. 179–80.

Chika Okeke-Agulu, “Contemporary African Artists and the Pan-African Imaginary,” in *Diaspora Dialogue: Art of Kwabena Ampofo-Anti, Alexander “Skunder” Boghossian and Victor Ekpuk* (University of Maryland University College, 2013), pp. 9–19.

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



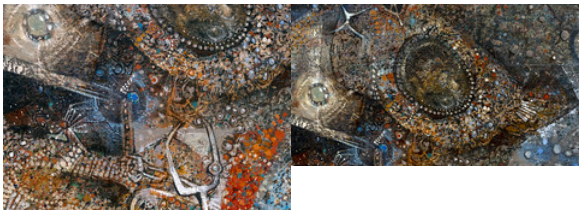
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6.1.2: Battle of Adwa

- by **DR. PERI KLEMM** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID

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Video **6.1.2.1**: Unidentified artist, *Battle of Adwa*, c. 1968, oil on canvas, 192.2 x 92 cm (Smithsonian National Museum of African Art)

Additional resources

Battle of Adwa teaching materials

Raymond Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2015)

Learn more about the Battle of Adwa with supplemental materials on Raymond Jonas's **website**

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6.2: Nigeria, Uche Okeke

by PERRIN LATHROP

Page ID
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"Young artists in a new nation, that is what we are! We must grow with the new Nigeria and work to satisfy her traditional love for art or perish with our colonial past."

—Uche Okeke, from the "Zaria Art Society Manifesto," Natural Synthesis, 1960

The Art Society of Zaria

During the period leading up to and following Nigerian independence in 1960, artists appropriated cultural and aesthetic traditions from around the country as a means of defining a new national identity. They drew upon narratives from Yoruba, Igbo, Urhobo and other cultures, Bible stories, local histories and artistic traditions to inform the content and style of their works, manipulating tales from the past to produce a mythology for the present.

This practice was defined as "natural synthesis" by the Art Society at Zaria, an arts group formed in the late 1950s by Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Simon Okeke, Bruce Onobrakpeya and other art students at the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology (now Ahmadu Bello University) at Zaria in the northern region of Nigeria. The Art Society sought to reconsider the emphasis on Western academic artistic traditions espoused by the largely European faculty at Zaria, an art program associated with Goldsmiths (part of the University of London). Moving away from traditions steeped in colonialism, "natural synthesis" merged the best of indigenous art traditions, forms and ideas with useful ones from Western cultures to create a uniquely Nigerian aesthetic perspective.



Figure **6.2.1**: Uli body designs from Awka District, collected by W.B. Yeatman c. 1933 (Pitt-Rivers Museum, University of Oxford)

Later known as the Zaria Rebels, the members of the Art Society devised an academic program outside of the official university curriculum. The members thoroughly researched indigenous cultural and artistic traditions, produced works based on their findings and met regularly to discuss the outcomes. Though they took a similar conceptual approach to art making, the vast diversity inherent in the practices they analyzed led to great variation in their formal and stylistic synthesis.

The *Uli* aesthetic

Uche Okeke, the Art Society's second president, drew inspiration for a new visual language from *uli*, an Igbo female body and wall painting tradition from southeastern Nigeria that is based on sinuous abstract forms derived from nature (above). In *uli*, Okeke saw "limitless expression," internalizing the drawing technique he learned from his mother, a renowned uli draughtswoman, to serve a modernist sensibility.



Figure 6.2.2: Uche Okeke, *Owls*, From the *Oja Suite*, 1962, ink on paper © The Estate of Uche Okeke (Newark Museum)

While waiting in Abule Oje, Lagos in 1962 for traveling papers to Munich, Germany, where he was to train in stained glass and mosaic at the Franz Meyer Studio, Okeke created a series of pen and ink drawings that make up his remarkable *Oja Suite*. In one drawing, *Owls* (left), vertical lines, zigzags, spirals (*agwolagwo* or snake motif) and v-shapes (*okala isinwaoji* or three-lobed kola nut motif) come together to form two owls perched amidst dense foliage under a full moon. With his spare manipulation of line and spontaneous employment of *uli* symbols, Okeke distills cosmic and animal forms to their essential components. Okeke does not simply mimic *uli* forms but internalizes the flowing, poetic process of the drawing tradition itself, analyzing and exploiting its formal potential.

In drawings like *Owls*, the meanings of particular *uli* symbols become untied from their referents and depend entirely upon the other lines, motifs and spaces within the composition for interpretation. In Okeke's hands, the flowing lines and naturalistic patterns of *uli* converge to form vegetal, human and animal compositions that give form the artist's conception of a new Nigeria.

Civil war

After his return from Germany in 1963, Okeke settled in Enugu, then capital of Nigeria's Eastern Region. With the help of other former Art Society artists, Okeke established a cultural center, which he directed from 1964 to 1967. Modeled on prominent scholar Ulli Beier's Mbari Artists and Writers Club in Ibadan, Okeke's Mbari Enugu brought together artists, writers, dramatists and intellectuals to exchange ideas, collaborate, exhibit and discuss new work.

From 1967 to 1970, Nigeria's brutal civil war, known as the Nigerian-Biafran War, tore apart the newly independent nation with economic, ethnic, cultural and religious conflict. Though the southeastern provinces attempted secession to establish the short-lived Republic of Biafra, Nigeria remained largely united despite endemic corruption, poverty, inequality and injustice.



Figure 6.2.3: Uche Okeke, *Refugee Family*, 1966, linotype

In the lead up to and during the war, Okeke mobilized participants at the Mbari to produce art, literature and performances that reflected their experiences of the conflict. With a heightened awareness of the failure, hope and tragedy of humanity, Okeke produced works like *Refugee Family* (1966) that meditated on the pogroms (organized massacres of particular ethnic groups) inflicted upon Igbo in Northern Nigeria at the start of the war. Alienated figures in earth tones are sparely outlined with thick *uli*-influenced strokes. The work's modest medium (linocut on paper) and technique represent the artist's need to process the conflict through visual production, despite the dearth of art materials available at the time.

Nsukka

After the war, Okeke joined the faculty of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he ran the Department of Fine and Applied Arts from 1971 to 1983. Under his direction, Nsukka rose to prominence as a center of Nigeria's artistic creativity, drawing artists like the renowned El Anatsui to its ranks. At Nsukka, Okeke further developed his synthesis theory, encouraging students to research Nigerian art traditions to solve formal problems in their work. The artist's own experiments with *uli* became increasingly abstract in prints like ***Isi Nwoji* (1972)** where *uli* motifs, like the diamond-shaped kola nut (*isioji*), are clearly defined but with a bolder graphic approach.

The oil boom of the mid-1970s expanded Nigeria's income capacity, but also brought massive official corruption and the institution of a series of military regimes from 1983 to 1998. Under Okeke's supervision, Nsukka students like Obiora Udechukwu manipulated *uli*, and later *nsibidi*, another indigenous graphic system, and even Chinese *li* calligraphy to give form to the social and political struggles preoccupying everyday life in Nigeria.

Through Udechukwu, who later became a prominent professor at Nsukka, Okeke's rigorous intellectual inquiry into *uli* influenced another generation of artists, including Tayo Adenaike, Olu Oguibe, Chika Okeke-Agulu and Marcia Kure, among others. Like Okeke, these artists continue to think deeply about place and history in their very contemporary manipulations of design traditions from the past.

Additional Resources:

"The Poetics of Line: Seven Artists of the Nsukka Group," National Museum of African Art

Ulli Beier, *Contemporary Art in Africa* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1968).

Clementine Deliss, *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* (New York: Flammarion, 1995).

C. Krydz Ikwuemesi, ed. *The Triumph of a Vision: An Anthology on Uche Okeke and Modern Art in Nigeria* (Lagos: Pendulum Art Gallery, 2003).

Chika Okeke-Agulu, "Nationalism and Rhetoric of Modernism in Nigeria: The Art of Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko, 1960-1968," *African Arts*, vol. 39, no. 1 (Spring 2006): pp. 26-37, 92-3.

Simon Ottenberg, *New Traditions from Nigeria: Seven Artists of the Nsukka Group* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).

Simon Ottenberg, ed. *The Nsukka Artists and Nigerian Contemporary Art* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian National Museum of African Art and University of Washington Press, 2002).

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SECTION OVERVIEW

6.3: Sudan

6.3.1: Ibrahim El-Salahi, Reborn Sounds of Childhood Dreams

6.3.2: Ibrahim El-Salahi , Reborn Sounds of Childhood Dreams 1 studio visit

6.3.3: Ibrahim El-Salahi, The Inevitable

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6.3.1: Ibrahim El-Salahi, Reborn Sounds of Childhood Dreams

by DR. ALLISON YOUNG

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Figure **6.3.1.1**: Ibrahim El-Salahi, *Reborn Sounds of Childhood Dreams*, 1961-65, enamel and oil on cotton, 258.8 x 260 cm (Tate, London)

How would you paint a picture of something that's not quite representable… like the sound of voices chanting, a spiritual vision, a childhood memory, or a dream that you can't remember?

In his painting *Reborn Sounds of Childhood Dreams*, the Sudanese artist Ibrahim El-Salahi creates a masterful and haunting scene inspired by just these types of experiences.



Figure **6.3.1.2**: Ibrahim El-Salahi, *Reborn Sounds of Childhood Dreams*, detail, enamel and oil on cotton, 258.8 x 260 cm (Tate, London)

A group of harrowing, evanescent figures approaches the viewer, some occupying the full height of the canvas. Their limbs are elongated and skeletal, and their mask-like faces are accented by hollow, circular eyes. Upturned crescent shapes sit atop their

heads, reminiscent of bull's horns or celestial symbols, giving them a sense of timeless power. Yet, the figures' lower bodies seem to gradually fade into the background, transforming into abstract shapes like circles, lines, and hooks. Along the lower register, atmospheric mists of sandy and ashen tones disturb the limits of the figures' outer contours—and all depicted forms seem to move fluidly between positive and negative space. Our eyes begin to deceive us: Are these creatures human, animal, or spirit?

This piece is typical of the artist's work from the early-to-mid 1960s. El-Salahi uses an earthy color palette that invokes the region's natural environment, and blends elements of modernist abstraction with a number of motifs drawn from the breadth of Sudanese cultural histories: the elegance of **Arabic calligraphy**, the attenuated forms of **sub-Saharan figural sculpture**, and aspects of ancient **Nubian art**. As such, it is also exemplary of the wider genre of postcolonial Modernism; created during the years in which many African countries gained independence from oppressive colonial regimes, it reflects a new articulation of African identity as being markedly global, and defiantly modern.

From Western realism to calligraphic abstraction

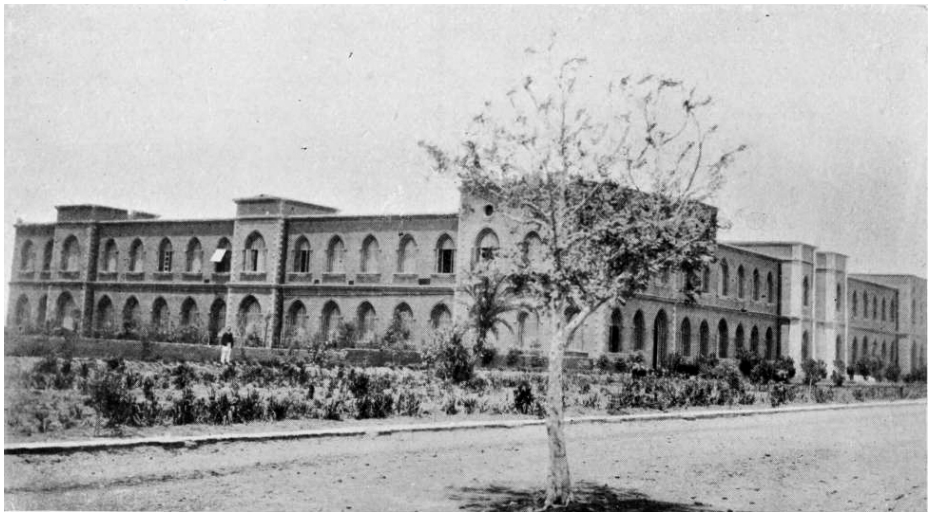


Figure **6.3.1.3**: Gordon Memorial college in 1906

Born in 1930 in Omdurman, Sudan, El-Salahi's initial artistic development was informed by his training under the British colonial system. He began his studies in 1949 as a painting major at Khartoum's Gordon Memorial College, which offered a Western academic curriculum, before leaving his home country to attend the Slade School of Fine Art in London in the mid-1950s. There, he excelled in creating realistic portraits and landscape studies. It was during his time abroad that Sudan sought and gained its independence from the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, an alliance between Egypt and the British Empire that had asserted political control over the region since the late 19th century.



Figure 6.3.1.4: Ibrahim El-Salahi, *Portrait of a Sudanese Gentleman*, 1951, oil on board, 52.5 x 36cm (private collection)

When he returned to Sudan in 1957, El-Salahi suddenly found himself feeling disconnected from his home country. He realized that his Western training had alienated him from the concerns and visual expressions of the community he grew up in. As he later reflected:

> ***[T]his radically changed attitude, the attitude of an extravagant, conceited young artist fresh from London, actually just hemmed me in. Over time, I came to see that conditions in Sudan required a very different approach on the part of the artist, who would otherwise be completely isolated from his audience. If I was to have a relationship with an audience, I had to examine the Sudanese environment, identify what it offered, assess its potential as an artistic resource and explore its possibilities as a complementary element in artistic creation. [1]***

The artist began to experiment with a style of calligraphic abstraction that was, at the time, associated with the work of pioneering Sudanese artist Osman Waqialla. A leading figure in what would loosely become known as the Khartoum School, Waqialla was fascinated by the formal properties of calligraphic writing—its balancing of lights and darks, positive and negative space, and the lyrical motion of sweeping, interconnected strokes. He and his pupils worked to detatch the aesthetic components of calligraphic text from the sacred connotations it often carried, making reference instead to secular works of contemporary poetry.



Figure 6.3.1.5: Osman Waqialla, *Kaf ha ya ayn sad*, 1980, calligraphic text on paper, 17.5 x 13 cm (**British Museum**, London)

Similarly captivated by Arabic lettering, El-Salahi undertook a rigorous study of its visual elements. Eventually, he liberated the written text from its semiotic meaning: “I squeezed letters and decorative units into a narrow, limited space within the overall pictorial field. The letter became legible, yet abstract,” he reflected. “Later I considered separating the calligraphic symbol from its verbal representation, so that what was read referred only to the letter form and nothing else.” [2] In a number of early works, El-Salahi inventively transformed written marks into entangled webs of lines and curves.

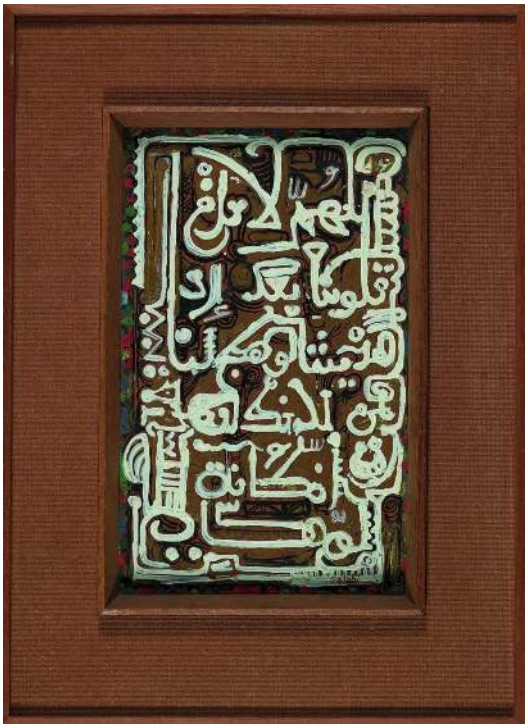


Figure 6.3.1.6: Ibrahim El Salahi, *The Prayer*, 1960, oil on masonite, 61.3 × 44.5 cm (Iwalewahaus, Universität Bayreuth)

Adopting a subdued and somber color palette that is representative of the desert landscape of northern Sudan, the artist would gradually expand his experimentation to include art forms beyond Arabic calligraphy. The lines and hooks, associated with **kufic** writing, soon morphed into other forms: ghostly figures, animals, and vegetal motifs came to populate his compositions, as well as concentric linear patterns that the artist associated with sonic waves. In one of his most abstract canvases from this period, *The Last Sound* (1964) he represents the Islamic prayers for the dying, which accompany the soul’s passage between life and death.



Figure **6.3.1.7**: Ibrahim El-Salahi, *The Last Sound*, 1964, oil on canvas, 121.5 X 121 .5 cm (Barjeel Art Foundation)

Postcolonial modernism

El-Salahi's work should be situated within the broader history of postcolonial Modernism in Africa. Throughout the 1960s, creative practitioners from across the continent and its diasporas produced radical innovations in art, literature, music and theatre. They wanted their art to reflect the cultural and political transformations that were sweeping the continent as it was liberated from colonial rule. Many looked to fuse modernist Western styles (to which they had been exposed through school or travel) with pre-colonial African visual forms. **This essay** on Uche Okeke, for instance, chronicles the influence of Igbo aesthetics on Nigerian art of the same period.

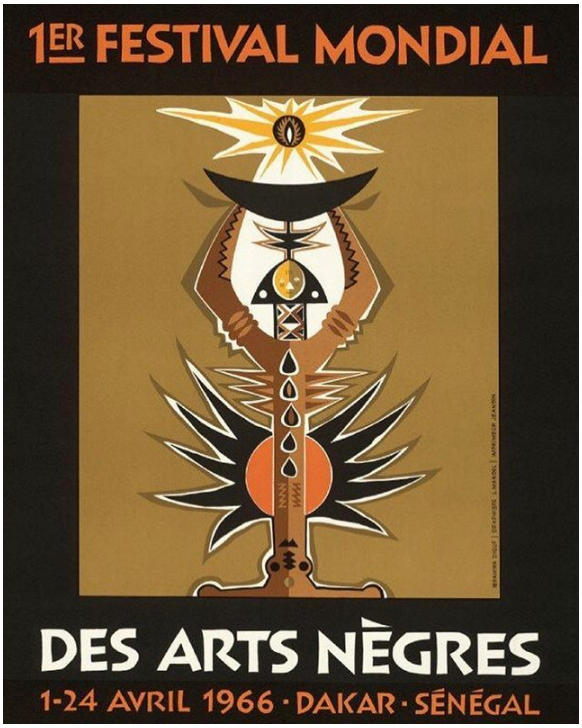


Figure **6.3.1.8**: Poster advertising the First World Festival of Black Arts

In the early 1960s, El-Salahi took part in a transnational workshop called the Mbari Artists and Writers Club. Located in Ibadan, Nigeria, it was run by the German expatriate Ulli Beier, and brought together artists and writers like Uche Okeke, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, **Jacob Lawrence**, and many others. El-Salahi also participated in landmark events of the Pan-Africanist movement,

such as the 1966 First World Festival of Black Arts (*Premier festival Mondial des arts nègres*) in Dakar, Senegal, where artists, dancers and musicians from across the African diaspora gathered to express pride in Black artistic and cultural expression.

"The Jungle and The Desert"

In his unique interpretation of postcolonial Modernism, El-Salahi tapped into the diverse cultural history of Sudan and its surrounding regions. His home country saw the birth of the ancient Nubian civilization, later encountered by the **Egyptian**, Ptolemaic Greek and **Roman** Empires. It was also a crucial juncture in the early history of **Christianity** and the expansion of **Islam**.

When El-Salahi was growing up, the national borders of Sudan encompassed both the North (which is predominantly Islamic and culturally Arab) as well as the sub-Saharan South (largely inhabited by the Dinka and Nuer peoples). El-Salahi's interest in this diverse artistic legacy is mirrored by the parallel evolution of a literary and poetic movement, The Jungle and Desert School (*Madrasat al-Ghaba wa al-Sahra*), whose writers also drew inspiration from both African and Arab sources. Unfortunately, long-standing religious and economic rifts between each of these contingencies have led to a series of violent civil wars across the region in recent decades, and the nation has since been divided following the secession of South Sudan in 2011.

El-Salahi's style is, ultimately, expressive of his uniquely personal vision. Spiritual visions, childhood dreams, and sonic memories infuse his work with a haunting, elegiac quality that masterfully interweaves cross-cultural sources and personal experiences. As the artist stated,

> ***[T]he work of art is but a springboard for the individual intellect, or is like a reflecting mirror bring us back to our own selves. The picture floats freely within the realm of a simple relationship between viewer and form, an invitation to visual meditation and to a better knowledge of the self. [3]***

Notes:

1. Ibrahim El-Salahi, "The Artist in His Own Words," in *Ibrahim El-Salahi: A Visionary Modernist*, ed. Salah Hassan, Museum for African Art, New York (2012): p. 84.
2. Ibid., p. 88.
3. Ibid., p. 91.

Additional resources:

This work on the Tate website

Ibrahim El-Salahi – Studio Visit | Tate Shots

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- **10.16: Global vanguards** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

6.3.2: Ibrahim El-Salahi , Reborn Sounds of Childhood Dreams 1 studio visit

- by **TATE**

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Video **6.3.2.1**: Artist Ibrahim El-Salahi discusses his work ‘Reborn Sounds of Childhood Dreams 1’ 1962-3, a large-scale oil painting acquired by Tate.

This page titled 6.3.2: Ibrahim El-Salahi , Reborn Sounds of Childhood Dreams 1 studio visit is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Tate, "Ibrahim El-Salahi , Reborn Sounds of Childhood Dreams 1 studio visit," in Smarthistory, September 10, 2021, accessed January 19, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/ibrahim-el-salahi-reborn-sounds-of-childhood-dreams-1-studio-visit/..

6.3.3: Ibrahim El-Salahi, The Inevitable

- by **TATE**

Page ID

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Video **6.3.3.1**: Often considered El-Salahi's masterpiece, 'The Inevitable' was first conceived by the artist during his wrongful imprisonment. Deprived of paper, El-Salahi would sketch out plans for future paintings on the back of small cement casings, before burying them in the sand whenever a guard would come near. Working in this manner led to the artist developing a new style, one seen in 'The Inevitable', where a painting spreads out from what he refers to as the 'nucleus', or the germ of an idea, with a meaning hidden even from the artist himself until the work is finished.

Only when he saw 'The Inevitable' completed did El-Salahi realise how clear the message was; that people must rise up and fight tyranny and those that suppress them. This was something he felt was relevant not just to his own life when he created the work in the mid-eighties, but to all of Sudan.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

6.4: Mali

6.4.1: Seydou Keïta, Untitled (Seated Woman with Chevron Print Dress)

6.4.2: Mickalene Thomas on Seydou Keïta

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6.4.1: Seydou Keïta, Untitled (Seated Woman with Chevron Print Dress)

by **DR. CHRISTA CLARKE**

Page ID
194750



Figure **6.4.1.1**: Seydou Keïta, *Untitled [Seated Woman with Chevron Print Dress]*, 1956, printed 1997, Mali, Bamako, gelatin silver print, 60.96 x 50.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) © Seydou Keïta

Commercial studio portrait photography was introduced in Mali in the 1930s and developed into a thriving industry in Bamako, the capital city, during the postwar period. Bamako's rapid economic development and accompanying population boom fueled demand for photographic portraits. Such photographs were commissioned by members of the growing middle class as mementos to be displayed on the walls of their homes or sent to faraway family members.Among the busiest portrait studios in Bamako was that of photographer Seydou Keïta. Born in 1923, Keïta originally apprenticed as a carpenter but found his vocational calling when he was given a 6 x 9 Kodak Brownie camera by his uncle. After experimenting on his own, Keïta learned darkroom techniques from two established commercial photographers. He opened his own studio in 1948 in Bamako-Koura, an area of the city whose proximity to a train station and popular marketplace ensured a steady stream of potential clients.

Keïta soon became highly successful as a commercial photographer, producing tens of thousands of **portraits** over the course of his career. He developed a consistent and recognizable signature style that proved popular with local clients, who requested that their prints include a stamp with Keïta's name. A typical sitting took place during the day in his outside courtyard and could last up to an hour. Keïta gave his sitters the opportunity to **individualize their portraits**, helping them select a **flattering pose** and offering a variety of **accessories as props**. He posed his clients against a printed cloth, which often resulted in vibrant juxtapositions between the patterns of the sitter's clothes and that of the backdrop. Other compositional strategies included the use of a shallow depth of field and an emphasis on repetition and symmetry in framing his subject.

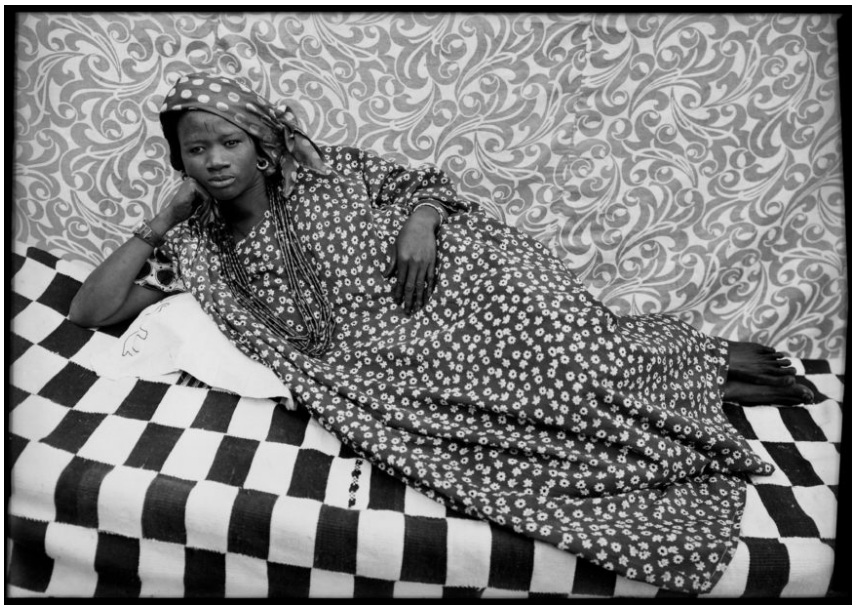


Figure **6.4.1.2**: Seydou Keïta, *Untitled*, 1956–57, gelatin silver print, 39.1 x 55.2 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) © Seydou Keïta

In this portrait, a woman reclines on her side with a relaxed and self-possessed dignity. The tight cropping places the focus entirely on the sitter, while the camera angle makes her appear on a slightly tilted slope, creating a symmetrical composition. The floral print of the woman's boubou (a traditional form of dress) contrasts with the bold black and white checkered blanket in the foreground and the swirling arabesques of the cloth backdrop, creating a syncopated clash of patterns and rhythms. Her dress and pose communicate significant aspects of her identity, revealing how traditional concepts of portraiture are maintained and modified through the medium of photography. Her head wrap is worn in a trendy style called *à la Gaulle*, its jaunty angle framing the scarification marks of ethnic affiliation that she bears on her forehead. She rests her left arm casually at her waist, dangling her long slender fingers, which are considered a sign of high social standing.

When Mali won independence from France in 1962, Keïta was offered a position as official government photographer, where he remained until 1977. His governmental responsibilities required him to close his studio in 1964 and he never reopened his portrait practice, although he did continue his photography. Beginning in the 1990s, Keïta's work was included in several exhibitions in the United States and Europe, bringing him considerable fame in the international art world.

© 2006 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (by permission)

Additional resources

Works by Seydou Keïta at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"**Seydou Keïta, Portraits of Bamako**" by the Contemporary African Art Collection—The Jean Pigozzi Collection on Google Arts & Culture.

Western and Central Sudan, 1900 A.D.–present on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History.

The website of the artist, Seydou Keïta.

Read a *Reframing Art History* textbook chapter that includes Keïta's work—"**Itinerant Modernisms: Cosmopolitans, Exiles, Travelers since 1950**"

Mickalene Thomas on Seydou Keïta

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6.4.2: Mickalene Thomas on Seydou Keïta

- by **THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART**

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Video **6.4.2.1**: The Artist Project is an online series in which artists respond to works of art in The Met's encyclopedic collection. **http://artistproject.metmuseum.org/1/mickalene-thomas/**

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6.5: Turkey, Fahrelnissa Zeid – ‘She Was the East and the West’

- by **TATE**

Page ID

194752



Video **6.5.1**: Turkish Princess and artist Fahrelnissa Zeid is best known for her large-scale abstract compositions blending Byzantine, Islamic and Western influences. To better understand the artist’s inspirations, we travel to Jordan to meet Fahrelnissa Zeid’s family and friends who recount her exceptional character and multifaceted life ahead of this first major retrospective exhibition at Tate Modern opening June 2017.

This page titled 6.5: Turkey, Fahrelnissa Zeid – ‘She Was the East and the West’ is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Tate, "Fahrelnissa Zeid – ‘She Was the East and the West’," in Smarthistory, September 10, 2021, accessed January 19, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/fahrelnissa-zeid-she-was-the-east-and-the-west/..

6.6: South Asia Amrita Sher-Gil, Self-Portrait as a Tahitian

by **DR. ORIN ZAHRA**

Page ID
194753



Figure **6.6.1**: Amrita Sher-Gil, *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, 1934, 90 x 56 cm (Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi)

In a large self-portrait, the modernist painter Amrita Sher-Gil stands half nude with a plain white wrap around her waist. Her loosely tied jet-black hair, parted down the middle, flows down her back. Her brown skin is dappled in varied shades of ochre, nutmeg, and cinnamon, created with multiple layers of paint.

Her upright posture and her hands crossed in front of her convey a measured and firm stance. She turns to the side and gazes off into the distance, a pensive expression on her face, though she leaves us with no clear indication of what the subject of her ruminations might be.

In the background, we see a seated man and slender kimono-clad women occupying the interior or exterior of a pagoda-like structure. [1] Although the oblique angles of the walls give the impression of some spatial depth in this scene, the dramatic difference in scale between Sher-Gil and the other figures, as well as the presence of a large grey shadow cast in a frontal pose behind her, suggest that she does not inhabit the same space as the Japanese figures, but rather stands in front of a flat screen or wallpaper that is decorated with an Asiatic tableau.

In this challenging painting, Sher-Gil engages with the artists Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh and their entanglements with representations of non-European cultures in their individual quests to find their place within and actively shape the discourse of modernist art. It also speaks to her own multi-faceted identity and training as an artist.

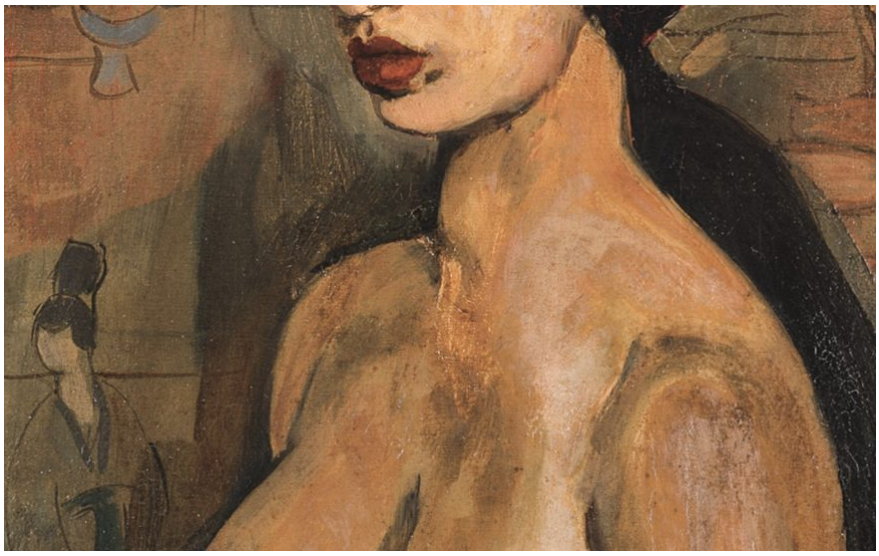


Figure **6.6.2**: Detail, Amrita Sher-Gil, *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, 1934, 90 x 56 cm (Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi)

Gauguin and cross-cultural entanglements



Figure **6.6.3**: Paul Gauguin, *Two Tahitian Women*, 1899, oil on canvas, 94 x 72.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Sher-Gil's painting, entitled *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, is a direct reference to the art of Gauguin who, like many other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artists adopted subject matter outside the European tradition (primarily the arts of the Pacific Islands and modern peasant culture in France). Embracing subjects he saw as "primitive" was, for Gauguin, a critique of traditional European painting and at the same time, a return to a perceived, more natural way of life in response to increasing industrialization. Artists like Gauguin were looking for a way to reinvigorate the language of modern art.

After Gauguin lost his job as a stockbroker in the French financial crash of 1882, he turned his focus to the arts. In search of new, exotic subject matter, he travelled to Panama, **Martinique**, Brittany, Arles, and finally the Pacific Islands. Inspired by the pictorial possibilities of these locations, he worked increasingly in a style of bold colors and simplified flat forms. Through his paintings, drawings, sculptures, and crucially his writings, he crafted a myth and a persona of a self-exiled **Western observer** and admirer of so-called "primitive" cultures. Gauguin famously and frequently sourced his imagery from reproductions, books, and postcards of scenic vistas, art, architecture, and artifacts from South America, India, China, Japan, Java, and Egypt.

Although Gauguin was disappointed to see the marks of French colonization during his travels to the South Seas in the 1890s, his paintings of the Polynesian Islands nonetheless perpetuated a long-standing Western myth of a utopia untouched by European influence. In his famed *Two Tahitian Women*, the figures entice the presumed male viewer with exposed breasts, pink blossoms, and a platter of mangoes, offering fantasies of a primeval Tahiti inhabited by exotic, sexually available Indigenous women.

Sher-Gil engages with Gauguin's iconic Tahitian women. Like Gauguin, she also employs color for its affective and emotive qualities. In her painting, a Tahitian identity takes the form of an Indian body, with brown skin substituting for brown skin. Her monochromatic palette of terracotta shades helps to flatten the space, which is a pictorial strategy that was characteristic of modernist art. But the brown background also works to focus the eye on the artist's body. If green and yellow tones were necessary for Gauguin to convey the "otherness" of the Tahitian women, then brown in all of its dynamic layers uncompromisingly confronts the viewer throughout Sher-Gil's composition. As the color of the colonized body with its connotations of inferiority in Western culture, brown here is not alien, but prevalent.



Figure **6.6.4**: Amrita Sher-Gil with 3 paintings, 1930s, photograph

Foreigner in Paris



Figure **6.6.5**: Amrita Sher-Gil, *Young Girls*, 1932, oil on canvas, 134 x 164 cm (National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi, India)

Sher-Gil's own biracial identity perhaps enabled her to masquerade as a Tahitian woman. She was born in 1913 in Budapest to a Hungarian-Jewish mother and a **Sikh** father, and moved with her family to Paris in 1929, where she studied art at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière and later at the **École Nationale des Beaux-Arts**.

She was an active participant in the city's bohemian lifestyle, ingrained in its cultural and artistic social circles, and she found success in the art world. At the École des Beaux Arts, she won the first prize for the annual still-life and portrait competition every year for the first three years of her study. In 1932, she exhibited at the Grand Salon to many favorable reviews by art critics who remarked on the force and vigor of her work. The next year, she won a Gold Medal for her large-scale painting *Young Girls*, which was "the picture of the year," and subsequently she was elected as an Associate of the Grand Salon, making her the youngest and the only Asian individual to have received this recognition.

However, as a foreigner, she never quite escaped her exotic status. The artist was described by a friend and art critic, Denise Proutaux, as "an exquisite and mysterious little Hindu princess" who "speaks French like a Parisian" and whose "blue silk sari brings out the amber and ochre skin that conjures up the mysterious shores of the Ganges." [2]

Sher-Gil's biographer Yashodhara Dalmia notes that the artist's self-portraits from her Paris period (1929–1934) reflected her academic training, but also denoted a way to grapple with her Euro-Indian identity. The shadow behind Sher-Gil in the self-portrait —possibly a male onlooker with cropped hair and broad shoulders—might symbolize the looming influence of male modernists in

the art world, like Gauguin and van Gogh. It might also suggest the hybrid roles which she has had to negotiate; she was both objectified as an exotic outsider figure while holding agency as a painter with the ability to portray herself as she desired.

Was Sher-Gil identifying with the position of women from the many regions that Europe had colonized, or was she making a more specific association between her body and the Tahitian nude constructed by Gauguin? Or was it more about the language of modernism itself as practiced by her forebearers than the actual nude that was of significance here? These layered possibilities combined with her evocative and not-easily-accessible disposition in the painting break with established tropes of representing colonized women as lacking intellectual depth and solely existing for the consumption of the male, Western viewer. Instead, her self-portrait is an expression of sophisticated ideas and individualism, evoking a desire for self-discovery that she saw in the work of Vincent van Gogh.

Van Gogh and the quest for self



Figure **6.6.16**: Vincent van Gogh, Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear, 1889, oil on canvas, 60 x 49 cm (Courtauld Galleries, London)

In her discussion of the nuances of *Self Portrait as a Tahitian*, art historian Saloni Mathur notes how unusual or improbable the Japanese background was for a Tahitian subject. It was an intentional bringing together of the formal elements of varied "exoticisms" that preoccupied artists of her time. Sher-Gil's artistic training in Paris would surely have fostered an understanding of the Western fascination with the art of Japan in the later part of the nineteenth century (referred to as **Japonisme**). With an influx of Japanese art and design into Europe and America at this time, progressive artists adopted compositional devices, such as large areas of flat color, abrupt cropping, and oblique vantage points, as well as explored new subject matter, and reflected a deep admiration for the decorative arts found in the visual language of Japanese aesthetics.

Japonisme had an indelible impact on Western modernist art. Artists like van Gogh even became avid collectors of Japanese prints and readers of Japonisme literature of the day. In his *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear*, a Japanese woodblock print of women in traditional attire in a landscape with Mount Fuji can be seen behind the artist, which he had adapted from his own personal collection of prints that he pinned to the walls of his studio. Van Gogh believed Japanese people to be untainted by the corruptions of Western society.



Figure **6.6.7**: Detail with Japanese figure on the right, Amrita Sher-Gil, *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, 1934, 90 x 56 cm (Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi)

Van Gogh's infusion of his individual temperament and psychological state through markers of exoticism into his paintings may have partly inspired Sher-Gil's own self-portrait. It should be noted that Sher-Gil's Japanese figures are thinly painted and more sketchily rendered than the careful handling of paint that the artist dedicates to the representation of her own body. The architectural perspective lines of the walls are even visible through the body of the seated man suggesting that Sher-Gil was not as concerned with the individual details of the Japanese imagery, but rather wanted to convey her overall awareness of Japonisme's crucial role in modernist practice, and more importantly draw an artistic lineage to van Gogh.

Sher-Gil never met Gauguin and van Gogh, who were decades removed from the young emerging artist. As Mathur argues, Sher-Gil related to van Gogh's desire to foster an image of himself as an artist, while negotiating a relationship to a space outside of Europe via personal experiences and feelings of social displacement. Over the years, she grew to increasingly identify with van Gogh over Gauguin, even explicitly writing in a letter from 1937,

> ***In spite of the fact that till now my special favorite has been Gauguin, I sometimes feel that van Gogh was the greatest of the two.[3]***

But in *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, Sher-Gil's engagement with the work and lives of both modernist precursors is palpable. Using their innovations to work through her own complex explorations of identity and cultural difference, she subverted the power of the Western male gaze on the colonized nude female body.

The Turn to India

By the end of 1934, Sher-Gil returned to India (she had temporarily moved to India with her family in the 1920s due to financial difficulties and political unrest in Hungary), expressing that her prolonged encounter with Europe's modernist art scene incited in her a need to develop her own style and point of view. She felt that the colors, light, and natural environment in India would help to improve her painting.

When she painted the self-portrait in 1934, Sher-Gil was herself a colonial subject since India was still a British possession despite intense and ongoing efforts for self-rule. Sher-Gil, who died at age twenty-eight, would not live to see India's independence from the British Empire in 1947. While she disrupted the structures of power normally held by the imperial West in reformulating Gauguin's colonialist views for her own purpose, her affluent, aristocratic background and international mobility complicated her identity and distinguished her from a subject of the colonial crown in India who had little to no agency. Her relatives even owned a major sugar plantation where her family briefly stayed, and where her husband, Victor Egon, had worked as a medical officer of the dispensary attached to the factory. That the sugar industry, encouraged by the colonial state, benefited Indian capitalists like the

artist's family while placing millions of common workers in indentured servitude further distances her from the subjects whom she portrayed.



Figure 6.6.8: Amrita Sher-Gil, *Bride's Toilet*, 1937, oil on canvas, 146 x 88.8 cm (National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi, India)

Perhaps aware of her global and Eurocentric identity, she replaced her Western fashions with traditional sarees, painted Indian peasantry, and brightened her color palette to reflect her cultural surroundings. As Gauguin had done in Tahiti, Sher-Gil too carefully cultivated a persona to make her mark in the art world. In Sher-Gil's case, it was imperative that she be accepted as an *Indian* modernist, as seen through her bold claim that while European modernism fell within the purview of Matisse, Picasso, and other avant-gardists, "India belongs to me." [4]

Indeed, the murals of Ajanta, sculptures and frescoes of temples and palaces, and Mughal and Rajput miniature painting inspired new creative avenues. As Sher-Gil progressed in her painting, she went even further than Gauguin and Western modernists in the simplification of forms, reduction and stylization of shadows, and elimination of extraneous details, focusing only on the monumentality of the Indian figures, the central interest of her compositions. Her work evolved to merge Western and Eastern stylistic and formal vocabularies and subject matter and led to the artist's legacy as a pioneer of modern Indian art.

Notes:

[1] The Japanese identification is based on Saloni Mathur's "A Retake of Sher-Gil's Self-Portrait as Tahitian," *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (2011): pp. 515–44.

[2] Denise Proutaux quoted in N. Iqbal Singh, *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Biography* (New Delhi, India: Vikas, 1984), p. 25.

[3] Sher-Gil, letter to Karl J. Khandalavala, 16 May 1937, in *Amrita Sher-Gil* (Bombay, India: New Book Company, 1944), 1: p. 375.

[4] Amrita Sher-Gil quoted in Deepak Ananth et al, *Amrita Sher-Gil: An Indian Artist Family of the Twentieth Century* (Prestel Pub, 2007), p. 13.

Additional Resources

Elizabeth C. Childs, "Taking Back Teha'amana: Feminist Interventions in Gauguin's Legacy" in *Gauguin's Challenge: New Perspectives After Postmodernism*, edited by Norma Broude (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), pp. 246–67.

Geeta Kapur, “Bodies as Gesture: Women Artists at Work” in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi, India: Tulika Books, 2000), pp. 3–60.

Saloni Mathur, “A Retake of Sher-Gil’s Self-Portrait as Tahitian” in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 37, 3 (Spring 2011): pp. 515–44.

Yashodhara Dalmia, *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Life* (Penguin Books, 2006).

Amrita Sher-Gil, *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Self-portrait in Letters & Writings*, volume 1, edited by Vivan Sundaram (New Delhi, India: Tulika Books, 2010).

Amrita Sher Gil, “Evolution of My Art,” in *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Reader*, edited by Yashodhara Dalmia (Oxford University Press, 2014).

Tariro Mzezewa, “Overlooked No More: Amrita Sher-Gil, a Pioneer of Indian Art,” in *The New York Times* (June 20, 2018).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Postwar Asia

7.1: Liu Chunhua, Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan

7.2: Song Su-Nam, Summer Trees

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7.1: Liu Chunhua, Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan

by DR. KRISTEN LORING BRENNAN

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195122



Figure 7.1.1: Liu Chunhua, *Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan*, 1967, oil on canvas

Striding atop a mountain peak wearing a look of determination on his face, *Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan* shows a young Mao Zedong (Chinese Communist revolutionary, founding father of the People's Republic of China, and leader of China from 1949-76) ready to weather any storm. In picturing a moment in Chinese Communist Party history, Liu Chunhua celebrated Chairman Mao (then in his seventies) and his longstanding commitment to Communist Party ideals. Painted in 1967 at the dawn of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, this work uses socialist realism to portray Chairman Mao as a revolutionary leader committed to championing the common people.

Socialist realism and Mao paintings



Figure 7.1.2: Li Keran, *Ten Thousand Crimson Hills*, 1964, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper (collection of the artist's family, Beijing)

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), artists focused on creating portraits of Mao, or "Mao paintings," which represented Mao's effort to regain his hold after bitter political struggles within the party. With the leadership of Mao's last wife, Jiang Qing, the movement aimed to quell criticisms of Mao in drama, literature, and the visual arts. More broadly, it aimed to correct political fallout from the disasters of the 1950s, especially the widespread famine and deaths that resulted from the Great Leap Forward (an attempt from 1958–61 to rapidly modernize China, transforming it from an agrarian economy into an industrialized, socialist society), and reinvigorate Communist ideology in general. In the years that followed, Mao would lead the country through a decade of violent class struggles aimed at purging traditional customs and capitalism from Chinese society.

In the early years of the Cultural Revolution, artists such as Liu Chunhua turned to a style known as socialist realism for creating portraits of Mao Zedong. Socialist realism was introduced to China in the 1950s in order to address the lives of the working class. Suitable for propaganda, socialist realism aimed for clear, intelligible subjects and emotionally moving themes. Subjects often included peasants, soldiers, and workers—all of whom represented the central concern of Mao Zedong and the Communist Party. Modeled after works in the Soviet Union, paintings in this style were rendered in oil on canvas. They notably departed from Chinese hanging scrolls in ink and paper, such as Li Keran's *Ten Thousand Crimson Hills*, painted in 1964 (left).

Standardized by the Central Propaganda Department, Mao paintings typically pictured the Chinese leader in an idealized fashion, as a luminous presence at the center of the composition. Unlike *Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan*, portraits usually depicted Mao among the people, such as strolling through lush fields alongside smiling peasants.

The Anyuan Miners' Strike of 1922

Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan presents a critical moment in Chinese Communist Party history: Mao marching toward the coal mines of Anyuan, Jiangxi province in south-central China, where he was instrumental in organizing a nonviolent strike of thirteen thousand miners and railway workers. Occurring only a year after the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, the Anyuan Miners' Strike of 1922 was a defining moment for the Chinese Communist Party because the miners represented the suffering of the masses at the heart of the revolutionary cause. Many of the miners enlisted as soldiers in the Red Army (the army of the Chinese Communist Party), intent on following the young Mao toward revolution.



Figure 7.1.3: Map showing Anyuan within Jiangxi province in China

Painting nearly half a century after the Anyuan Miners' Strike, Liu Chunhua created *Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan* for a national exhibition. Liu Chunhua was a member of the Red Guard, or the group of radical youth whose mission was to attack the "four olds" (customs, habits, culture, and thinking). To create this painting, he studied old photographs of Mao and visited Anyuan to interview workers for visual veracity. Based on his findings, he rendered Mao wearing a traditional Chinese gown rather than Western attire, which is more commonly seen in portraits of Mao created during the Cultural Revolution. The cool color tonalities of *Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan* also differ from other Mao paintings, which tended toward warm tones with clear, blue skies, such as Chen Yanning's *Chairman Mao Inspects the Guangdong Countryside* (below). Others often featured vibrant red accents—red being the color of revolution. Instead, Liu Chunhua opted for deep blue and purple hues to capture Mao's determination as he marched to address the plight of those suffering.



Figure 7.1.4: From the painting by Chen Yanning, *Chairman Mao Inspects the Guangdong Countryside*, 1972, oil on canvas, 67 15/16 x 116″ (Sigg Collection)

In *Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan*, Liu Chunhua adapted Chinese landscape conventions to a new style and purpose—an evocative portrayal that suggested that Mao was capable of leading the country toward revolution. He pictured his subject emerging atop a mountain with clouds of mist below. In China, landscapes such as this often evoked immortal realms, or extraordinary sites invested with the misty vapors of the mountain. However, a telephone pole is discernable in the lower left corner of the composition, and water cascades from a dam in the right—hints of modernity within the ethereal landscape. With an umbrella tucked beneath one arm and the other hand clenched into a fist, and wearing windswept robes, Mao appears superhuman, yet also practical and charismatic.

As a prominent icon in the Cultural Revolution, *Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan* celebrated the grassroots nature of revolutionary history and cultivated devotion to Mao during a tumultuous time. As a brilliant example of Chinese Communist Party propaganda, it was reportedly reproduced over nine hundred million times, and distributed widely in print, sculpture, and other media.

Additional resources:

This painting on Art Through Time

Propaganda: Power and Persuasion—Defining propaganda video (The British Library)

Melissa Chiu and Zheng Shengtian, *Art and China's Revolution* (New York: Asia Society, 2008).

Elizabeth J. Perry, *Anyuan Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

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7.2: Song Su-Nam, Summer Trees

by **DR. HANNAH SIGUR**

Page ID
195123



Figure **7.2.1**: Song Su-Nam, *Summer Trees*, 1979, ink on paper, 2 feet 1-5/8 inches high (© Trustees of the British Museum) © Song Su-Nam

Modern, but deeply rooted in tradition

In Song Su-nam's *Summer Trees*, broad, vertical parallel brush strokes of ink blend and bleed from one to the other in a stark palette of velvety blacks and diluted grays. The feathery edges of some reveal them to be pale washes applied to very wet paper, while the darkest appear as streaks that show both ink and paper were nearly dry. The forms overlap and stop just short of the bottom edge of the paper, suggesting a sense of shallow space—though one that would be difficult to enter. Only a practiced hand could control ink with such simplicity and impact. The painting exudes psychological power, despite its relatively modest proportions (it is only a little more than 2 feet high).

Song's exploration of tone (the shades of black and gray) and the effects produced by the marks of the brush, the wet paper, and dripping ink, has led some to think that these abstract, formal qualities are the real subject of this very modern-looking work. But it is important that the title refers to the natural world. Song created *Summer Trees* in 1979, but he made at least two similar paintings. One, in 1985, he called *Tree*. Not until the second, painted in 2000, did he fully embrace abstraction. His title—and even his decision to create a work in ink—shows us that though clearly addressing issues of contemporary art—Song's work is deeply rooted in tradition.

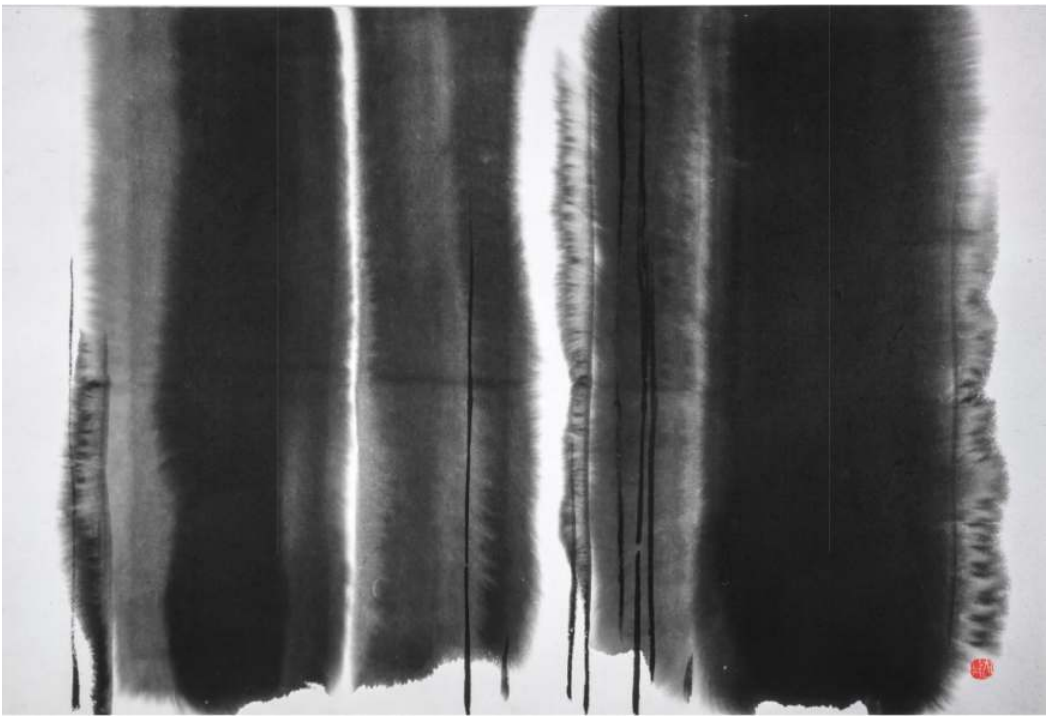


Figure **7.2.2**: Song Su-Nam, *Tree*, 1985, ink on paper, 94 x 138 cm (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea) © Song Su-Nam



Figure **7.2.3**: Ni Zan, *Six Gentlemen*, 1345, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 61.9 x 33.3 cm (Shanghai Museum; photo: Difference engine)

To choose the medium of ink on paper was important for the artist, a leader of Korea's *Sumukhwa* or Oriental Ink Movement of the 1980s. *Sumukwha* is the Korean pronunciation of the Chinese word for "ink wash painting," also called "literati painting." The "literatus" can be defined as a "scholar-poet" or "scholar-artist," a type of ideal man that emerged in China in the 11th century or before. Chinese poetry was considered the noblest art, and "ink wash painting" was its twin, because writing a poem and making a painting used the same tools and techniques—one resulting in words, the other a picture. In their simplicity and reductiveness, the style of ink wash paintings created centuries ago often seem to match Western notions of abstraction.

In Chinese poetry, mountainous landscapes and the plants that grow in them serve as metaphors for the ideal qualities of the literatus himself—qualities such as loyalty, intelligence, spirituality, and strength in adversity. The world the literatus wants to live

in is one of beauty, deep in nature, away from the centers of power and money. These themes provided painters with a library of motifs. From the 1970s–90s, Song created many such landscapes, executed unconventionally, with and without titles. *Summer Trees* may also reference a traditional theme: a group of pine trees can symbolize a gathering of friends of upright character. Whatever his intention with this title, Song was clearly alluding to the special world of the literati. Highly educated and a respected professor, he stood among the modern literati of Korea.

Song's interest in abstraction and the formal properties of ink has led some art historians to attribute the inspiration for his work to that of American artists like Morris Louis, who used the medium of acrylic resin on canvas in his "Stripe" paintings of the 1960s, which resemble Song's works of later decades such as *Summer Trees*. But in Korea during the 1980s, there was a tension between the influence of Western art that used oil paint (whether traditional or contemporary in style), and traditional Korean art that used an East Asian style, the vocabulary of traditional motifs, and the medium of ink for calligraphy and painting. Song felt very strongly that the materials and styles of Western art did not express his identity as a Korean.



Figure **7.2.4**: Morris Louis, *Pungent Distances*, 1961, Magna on canvas, 231.8 x 150.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) © 1961 Morris Louis

Sumukwha provided Song and his circle with a way to express Korean identity. Since antiquity, the country had taken great pride in a political and cultural distinctiveness that was recognized throughout Asia. Yet the twentieth century had brought trauma: the end of Korea's ancient monarchy, colonization by the Japanese who had attempted to obliterate the Korean language, mass destruction during the Korean War (1950–53), and the partitioning of the nation. In South Korea, where Song lived, the country was healing but endured authoritarian government and student unrest. People lived in constant fear of hostility from North Korea. For protection, they accepted a conspicuous American military presence, but this cast modernization in a decidedly Westernized light.

Sumukwha's ideal—the literatus—presented a compelling antidote to the psychological displacement felt by Song's circle of artists and intellectuals: a model individual of character and moral compass no matter what challenges life presents; and a way of expressing those ideals through his iconic tools of ink and brush. *Summer Trees*, with its allusions to friendship and a balmy season, could be Song's statement of optimism in the rediscovery of traditional values recast for modern times.

Additional resources

Song's work at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (Korean).

Special Exhibition of Donated Works: Song Soo-nam at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea.

Park Soo-mee. "Artist's Willingness to Experiment with Korean Ink Bent Boundaries" *Korea JoongAng Daily*, February 26, 2004.

Kim Seong-Heui, translated by Seung Il Oh, "On the Basis of Art Educational Implications."

Joan Kee, "The Curious Case of Contemporary Ink Painting" *Art Journal*, vol. 69, no. 3, 2010, pp. 88–113.

Lee Kyeung-sung. “Song Su-nam: The Ink Images Expanding Into Infinity,” exhibition of Song Su-nam, Center for Korean Studies, University of Hawaii, March 1–17, 1980.

Francis Mullany, *Symbolism in Korean Brush Painting* (Kent: Global Oriental 2006)

Jane Portal, *Korea, Art and Archaeology* (London: The British Museum Press, 2000)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

8: Architecture, design, and dance

The architecture of the 20th century responded to radically new ways of living and working.

1900 - 1980

8.1: A beginner's guide, What is- brutalism?

8.2: Vienna Secession

- 8.2.1: Josef Maria Olbrich, The Secession Building
- 8.2.2: Otto Wagner, Postal Savings Bank

8.3: The Wiener Werkstätte

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8.1: A beginner's guide, What is- brutalism?

- by **HENI TALKS**

Page ID

194755



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What is: Brutalism? from **HENI Talks** on **Vimeo**.

One might consider Brutalism as the ‘marmite’ of architectural history: it is a style that is systematically loathed and revered. HRH Prince Charles once compared one of the icons of Brutalism, Britain’s National Theatre, to a nuclear power station. A strong reaction to the hulking concrete edifice… But is that the point?

Learn about some of the key facets and figures of Brutalist history with Professor Richard J. Williams.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

8.2: Vienna Secession

8.2.1: Josef Maria Olbrich, The Secession Building

8.2.2: Otto Wagner, Postal Savings Bank

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8.2.1: Josef Maria Olbrich, The Secession Building

by **DR. LAURA MOROWITZ**

Page ID
194757



Figure **8.2.1.1**: Josef Maria Olbrich, Secession Building, Vienna 1897–98 (photo: John Lord, CC BY 2.0)

A New Freedom for Art

Imagine yourself walking down the street in Vienna and coming across the Secession Building. It's oddness would likely stop you in your tracks. It certainly looks like nothing else around it—no school, no church, no government building. It's gleaming white walls, lack of windows, gilded inscriptions and strange floating sphere of golden leaves looks like a temple built by some secretive, mythic people who long ago disappeared.

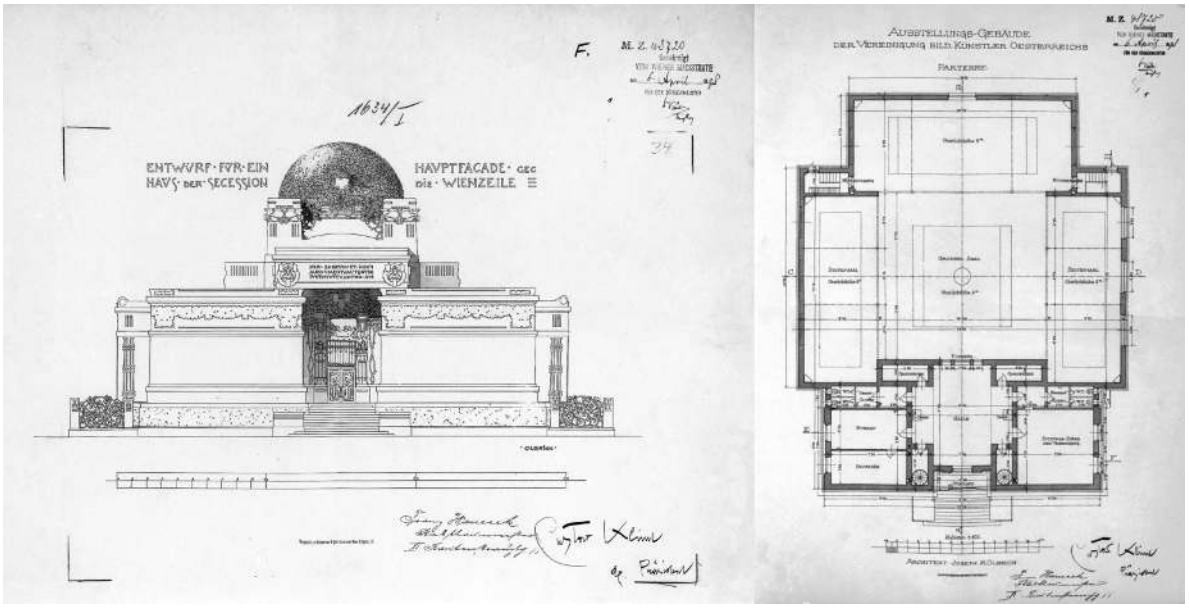


Figure **8.2.1.2**: left: Joseph Maria Olbrich, elevation for Secession, 1898 (Secession Archive); right: Joseph Maria Olbrich, plan for Secession parterre, 1898 (Secession Archive)

Architect Josef Maria Olbrich's building perfectly expressed the aim of the group for whom it was built, the Vienna Secession: to set themselves apart, to shock and put forward a new form of beauty, something at once profoundly modern and as old as human nature. The Secession— a term meaning "to break away"—formed in April of 1897 when a number of members within the Association of Austrian Artists departed in frustration. These artists, architects, and designers had grown tired of nineteenth-century ideals and beliefs such as historicism (the constant reference to the past in art), positivism (a focus on that which can be rationally or scientifically proven), realism (a focus on art that creates an illusion of reality), and the commercialism of art (the idea that artists were working strictly for profit, rather than a more noble calling).



Figure **8.2.1.3**: "Der Zeit ihre Kunst/Der Kunst ihre Freiheit" (To Each Age its Art/To Art its Freedom), Josef Maria Olbrich, Secession Building, Vienna 1897–98 (photo: HatschiKa, CC BY-SA 4.0)

The Secession referred to the Union of Austrian Fine Artists (Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs). Painter Gustav Klimt was nominated as President and original members included architect Josef Hoffmann and designer Kolomon Moser. The central credo of the Secession was emblazoned in gold above the doorway: "Der Zeit ihre Kunst/Der Kunst ihre Freiheit" (To Each Age its Art/To Art its Freedom). With this rallying cry the group made clear that it was the task of artists of each new generation to find their own language and subjects to express the moment in which they lived, rather than to constantly recycle the past. Throughout the nineteenth century, architects like **Charles Garnier** had created historicist buildings which drew upon both classical and baroque styles; the members of the Secession saw this as inherently dishonest. For them, art stood above politics, above commerce, and above ideology.



Figure 8.2.1.4: Gustav Klimt, Beethoven Frieze detail with “Ode to Joy,” 1901, casein, color, gold leaf, semi-precious stone, mother-of-pearl, plaster, charcoal and pencil on lime plaster, 215 x 481 cm (Secession Building, Vienna)

Exhibiting the New

Olbrich’s Secession building was the site for all the exhibitions of this group, beginning in October of 1898. Rather than nodding to periods or styles glorified in the nineteenth century, such as the High Renaissance or classicism, the building evokes other styles, including those of **archaic Greece** (as opposed to the art of the classical period) a style embraced in Klimt’s **Beethoven Frieze** in the interior) as well as other Mediterranean civilizations like ancient Egypt. The stretch of flat walls, made of plaster covered in whitewash, recalled the city walls and friezes of **ancient Assyrian** and Egyptian palaces and the strange proportions of Olbrich’s building include distant echoes of **pylons** (the gateway of ancient Egyptian temples). The forms of Western architecture—columns, arches, sloping roofs— are nowhere to be found.



Figure 8.2.1.5: Josef Maria Olbrich, Secession Building, Vienna 1897–98 (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Many commentators of the time found the open metal work sphere at the top, composed of 3,000 golden leaves, and recalling both laurel-leaf crowns and the thinly hammered gold jewelry of ancient Mediterranean, to be the strangest of all. The weirdness of the

building earned it some memorable nicknames in its time including “Mahti’s tomb” and “The Golden Cabbage.” In addition to their rallying cry, the name of the group’s journal, *Ver Sacrum* (Sacred Spring), is written on the building.



Figure **8.2.1.6**: Gorgons, Josef Maria Olbrich, Secession Building, Vienna 1897–98 (photo: HatschiKa, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Like the title, the three Greek gorgon masks that hover above the doorway evoke the world of archaic Greek art. The play of austerity against elements of decoration, like the stylized trees with gilded leaves is characteristic of the style of many artists within the early Secession, in media including architecture, ceramics, jewelry, painting and the graphic arts.

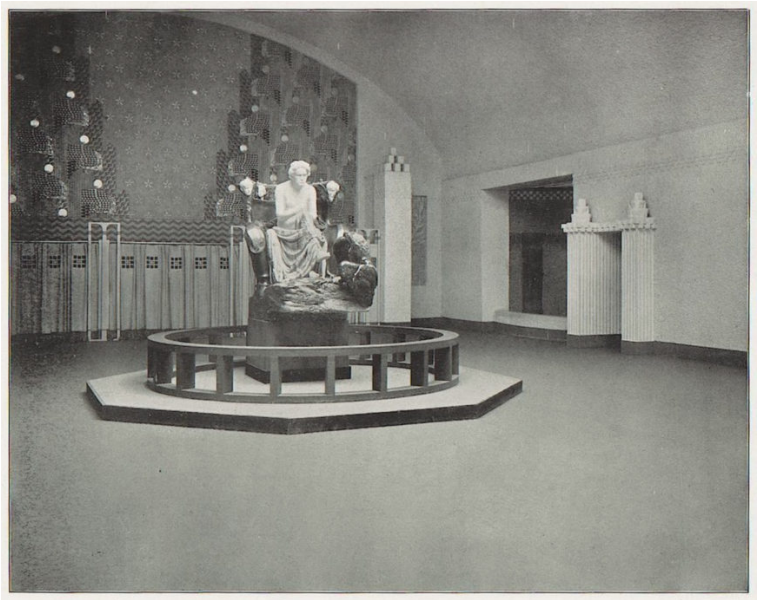


Figure **8.2.1.7**: XIVth exhibition 1902, main hall with Beethoven statue by Max Klinger (photo: Secession Archive)

Inside the building, the innovative architecture continued. It was the first exhibition space designed with movable walls to accommodate different types of work. Beginning in 1898, the Secession held annual exhibits where the most innovative art, not only in Vienna, but throughout Europe, was put on display. It was one of the only spaces within Austria where artists could see a full range of the European avant garde including the work of artists like Honorary Secession members Fernand Khnopff, Edward Burne-Jones, and August Rodin. In addition to Klimt, Secession artists such as Hoffmann, Moser, and Otto Wagner would form the heart of Viennese Modernism in the arts and architecture. Perhaps the most famous of the Secession exhibits was the XIVth one, in 1902, devoted to the German composer Beethoven.



Figure **8.2.1.8**: Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*, detail with "The longing for happiness finds its end in poetry," 1901, casein, color, gold leaf, semi-precious stone, mother-of-pearl, plaster, charcoal and pencil on lime plaster, 215 x 516 cm (Secession Building, Vienna)

The entire building was turned over in tribute to him, with a sculpture by Max Klinger and Klimt's enigmatic Beethoven Frieze painted around the upper walls of one gallery. The work was inspired by Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, played by Gustav Mahler at the opening of the exhibition, creating a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art—inspired by composer Richard Wagner's concept where many art forms combine to express a unified vision.



Figure **8.2.1.9**: Kolomon Moser, *Ver Sacrum* cover, 1899



Figure **8.2.1.10**: Gustav Klimt, Hope I, 1904, oil on canvas, 181 x 67 cm (National Gallery of Canada)

A bridge between the old and the new

The work of the Secessionists was innovative and scandalous in its formal experimentation, for example in Moser's woodcut for an 1899 cover of *Ver Sacrum*, with its non-naturalistic colors, flatness, surface design (as in the closely related **Jugendstil**), and simplified, bold drawing, at once elegant and powerful. It was also shocking in the way it dealt with new subjects and modern life in ways that were utterly shocking to the staid denizens of Viennese society; Gustav Klimt's *Hope I* juxtaposed a nude, very pregnant woman with visible pubic hair, against symbols of death and decay.

While some of the twentieth century's greatest minds (including Sigmund Freud, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Arnold Schoenberg), were already at work in the city, Vienna was still the crown jewel of the vast Austro-Hungarian Empire, which had been ruled for decades by Emperor Franz Josef.



Figure **8.2.1.11**: Wilhelm Gause, *Ball of the City of Vienna*, 1904, oil on canvas, 60 x 87 cm (Vienna Museum)

Writer Stephen Zweig captured the conservative nature of this culture when he noted that at twenty years, a man would know exactly what his life would be like at fifty. Into this stiff world of imperial pomp, elaborate waltzes and tight corsets, the members of the Secession displayed images of frank sexual desire, psychological fears, and morbid fantasies. For example, one of the most common motifs of Secession members was the femme fatale, the deadly seductive woman who reigns in the works of Klimt, Felicien Rops, **Ferdinand Khnopff** and others.

In many ways, the art produced during the early Secession, like Olbrich's building, is a bridge between nineteenth-century Academic art and the abstraction that would come in the twentieth. Academic art refers to the manner and style taught in the European art academies of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, rooted in the classical art of Greece and Rome. Works produced in the academies were highly finished, naturalistic, and greatly idealized, like Frederic Leighton's ***Bath of Psyche***, painted for the British Royal Academy. The enticing, languid figures of the early Secession hark back to Academic ideals of beauty, but begin to abandon the traditional, illusionistic language passed down from the Renaissance.

The work of the Secessionists was often still tied to nineteenth-century ideas of beauty and sophistication, in contrast to the artistic movements that would emerge in the second decade of the twentieth century, like the **Futurists** or **Die Brücke**. For all its oddity, Olbrich's building, like the art of the Secession, makes no reference to the world of industry, machinery, or mass culture. Like **Art Nouveau and Symbolism**, to which it is connected, it is deeply escapist at its heart.

Even the Secession itself proved too restrictive, and in 1905 a group led by Klimt and including Moser and Hoffmann (the later two had formed the Wiener Werkstätte, or Viennese Workshops, in 1903) broke away, wishing to pursue a more complete intertwining of the visual and decorative arts. At the same, a group of women artists, such as Broncia Koller-Pinell and designer Fanny Harlfinger-Zakucka (excluded from joining the all-male group), pursued parallel innovations and practices, forming a kind of "Female Secession" whose achievements have until recently largely been lost to history. Their multifaceted achievements in the fine and decorative arts are only now being recognized, changing our understanding of the wider artistic landscape in Vienna. [1]



Figure **8.2.1.12**: Secession Building damaged by Allied bombing and being set on fire by retreating German troops, 1945 (Secession Archives)

The currents of history

Both the Secession building and its exhibitions were under the control of the Nazi cultural offices after the Anschluss (the annexation of Austria into the Third Reich from 1938 to 1945). In February of 1945 an allied bomb landed squarely on the building, shattering the glass dome and destroying large parts of the structure. The current building is largely a reconstruction. Despite the Secessionists' fervent desire for art to maintain its freedom, their works, like all art, can never be detached entirely from the larger currents of history.

Notes:

1. Megan Brandow-Faller, *The Female Secession: Art and the Decorative at the Viennese Women's Academy* (Bloomsbury, 2020); Julie Johnson, *The Memory Factory: The Forgotten Women Artists of Vienna 1900* (Purdue University Press, 2012).

Additional resources

The Secession website

360 view of the Klimt's Beethoven Frieze

Klimt's Beethoven Frieze and the 14th exhibition of the Vienna Secession

Peter Vergo, *Art in Vienna 1898-1918: Klimt, Kokoschka, Schiele and their Contemporaries* (Phaidon Press, 1993)

Chuck LaChiusa, "Architecture around the World: Secession Building," European Architects and Artists on Buffalo Architecture and History, 2008

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8.2.2: Otto Wagner, Postal Savings Bank

by **DR. ELIZABETH M. MERRILL**

Page ID
194758



Figure **8.2.2.1**: Otto Wagner, Postal Savings Bank, Vienna, 1904-06 and 1910-12

A truly modern architecture

> ***What is impractical can never be beautiful.Otto Wagner***

In his 1896 manifesto *Modern Architecture*, Wagner expressed his ideal of practical and efficiently designed architecture. The purpose of beauty, he argued, was to give artistic expression to function. Extraneous ornament, therefore, was not only impractical and inefficient, it was also decidedly unmodern. In elucidating his theory, Wagner applied the metaphor of fashion to building design. The daily attire of the modern businessman or athlete provided a model for architecture in that they were stylish yet sleek, comfortable, well-made and practical for a wide range of uses. “A man in a modern traveling suit,” he noted, “fits very well with the waiting room of a train station with sleeping cars, with all our vehicles.” Such sportswear was an easy complement to the industrialized and rapidly growing society of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth century Austria, and by Wagner’s light, was categorically distinguished from the “costumes” of past generations. “It is simply an artistic absurdity,” he believed, for a man to spend his “life in interiors executed in the styles of past centuries.”



Figure **8.2.2.2**: Otto Wagner, Bank hall, Postal Savings Bank, Vienna, 1904-06 and 1910-12 (photo: Jorge Royan, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Realized in two phases, the first in 1904 – 1906 and the second in 1910 – 1912, the Postal Savings Bank was Otto Wagner's first major building commission and allowed him to realize his "functional" principles of architecture for the first time.

Functionalist design

Polished marble, ebonized beech-wood, nickel-plated and aluminum detailing, and everywhere broad panels of curved and beveled glass. This is not what one immediately associates with "functionalist design," yet, within Otto Wagner's Austrian Postal Savings Bank, it is the very materiality of the finely crafted stone, concrete, glass, wood, and metal that makes the building decidedly "functional."

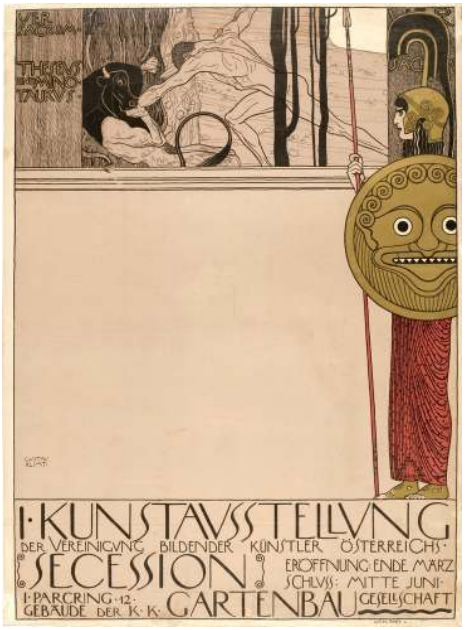


Figure **8.2.2.3**: Gustav Klimt, Poster for the First Secession Exhibition (censored version), 1898, lithograph, 63.5 x 46.9 (The Museum of Modern Art)

Wagner's approach to design was closely tied to that of the Secession—a progressive group of Austrian artists, architects and designers who pursued artistic rejuvenation in combining quality building processes with new materials and technologies, and expressive modernist forms. Secessionist architects, including Josef Hoffmann and Joseph Maria Olbrich, were drawn to the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*—or the "total work of art"—in which all aesthetic elements are subordinated to the whole effect. In practice, this concept promoted artistic craftsmanship across a wide spectrum of disciplines and favored collaborative models of creation over individual authorship. In 1903, the craftsmen cooperative called the Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshop) was developed by a group of Secessionists to facilitate this end. Bringing together designers of fashion, furniture and books, with architects, sculptors, painters, ceramists, and jewelers, the Werkstätte elevated the status of the craftsman while at the same time facilitating the unification of artistic endeavors in single fully-designed products.

The Postal Savings Bank might well be considered a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and perfectly epitomizes Wagner's comprehensive approach to building design. Rising seven-stories and occupying an entire city block, the Savings Bank is one of the many monumentally-scaled civic buildings erected in Vienna in the years 1880 – 1910, a period in which the historical city was transformed into a modern metropolis.

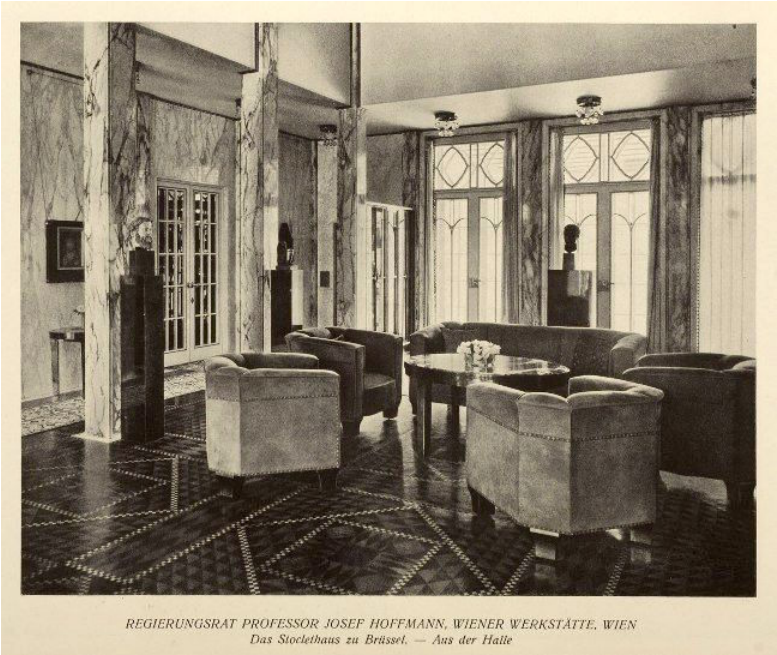


Figure 8.2.2.4: Josef Hoffmann, Stoclet House, Brussels, 1905-11 (decoration by artists from the Wiener Werkstätte, including Koloman Moser, Gustav Klimt, Frantz Metzner, Richard Luksch, and Michael Powolny)

Plan

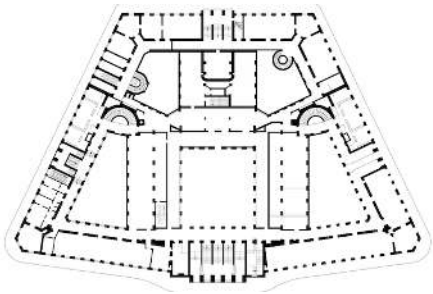


Figure 8.2.2.5: Plan, Otto Wagner, Postal Savings Bank, Vienna, 1904-06 and 1910-12 source

In plan, the bank is nearly trapezoidal. The rectilinear central block is occupied by the main banking hall, and is symmetrically flanked by triangular building wings, each perforated by a courtyard, in which dozens of bank offices neatly align along the structure's perimeter. The linearity and systematized quality of the plan is echoed in the building's façade—an austere yet artful interpretation of the building-as-machine. Here, thin profiled sections of white Sterzing marble are punctuated by aluminum bolts, precisely placed so as to create a mechanized aesthetic across the building's surface. The functional necessity of the bolts is not only left unconcealed, but is actually emphasized as the façade's primary ornament.

But it is the bank's interior—and in particular, the central top-lit banking hall (image near top of page) and adjacent office spaces—that most deftly asserts Wagner's functionalist approach to total building design. Framed by a riveted steel superstructure, the central banking hall takes the form of a glass atrium, and every surface—wall, counter, door, window or pillar—bears the trace of the craftsman. In laying out the interior spaces, Wagner's sought to maximize efficiency and minimize the amount of daily cleaning and future repair. Wide hallways, elevator lifts, telephone lines, and a pneumatic tube system were installed to facilitate internal communication, and within the offices, adjustable partitions allowed bank employees to reform their workspaces according to desire and need.



Figure 8.2.2.6: Aluminum hot-air blowers, Otto Wagner, Postal Savings Bank, Vienna, 1904-06 and 1910-12

Materials and furnishings

Materials were selected due to their durability, economy and functionality. For the flooring, glass-block, porcelain tile and linoleum was laid over asphalt to create insulated, easily cleaned and long lasting surfaces. In high traffic areas, marble wall paneling thwarts wear and prevents the need for repainting, and aluminum hot-air blowers are not only sleek and sanitary, but occupy minimal floor space.

The bank's furniture and detailing were also under Wagner's purview and he developed an entire catalogue of standard-design furnishings that allowed for maximum economic and functional flexibility, depending on the respective location and use of each piece. With the exception of the chief executive's office—where brass, velour and mahogany was used in the furniture—light fixtures were made of aluminum, porcelain and nickel, and the wood used in desks, cabinets, counters and chairs was artfully-treated beech.

Thus, from its light fixtures to its systematic building plan, The Postal Savings Bank is both a manifestation of Otto Wagner's ideal of modern "functionalist" architecture and an exemplary work of Secessionist design. In its austere lines, simple construction, and minimal use of materials, exemplifies Wagner's belief that "The architect always has to develop the art-form out of construction."

Backstory

When it was built at the turn of the last century, Otto Wagner's building appeared strikingly modern compared to the baroque architecture that characterized most of central Vienna at the time. Today, though, it makes up part of the historic urban fabric that led UNESCO to inscribe the city's center into the World Heritage List in 2001:

> ***…its architectural and urban qualities and layout…illustrate [Vienna's] three major phases of development—medieval, Baroque, and the Gründerzeit—that symbolize Austrian and central European history. The Historic Centre of Vienna has also maintained its characteristic skyline.***

It is Vienna's skyline that is now a cause for concern by UNESCO and others. A project by a private developer to create a hotel, conference center, and ice rink on the edge of the city's historic district prompted UNESCO to put Vienna on its List of World Heritage in Danger in 2017. The design for the hotel entailed the remodeling of an existing International Style tower that was built

in 1964, as well as the construction of an additional apartment tower that exceeded the average height of the surrounding buildings (though it still complied with the city's planning rules). UNESCO and ICOMOS strongly condemned the project, as well as the city's new planning policies with regard to height limits, drawing on the language of the Vienna Secession to argue for the tower's incompatibility with the cityscape:

> ***Today, the mass of the Intercontinental Hotel still creates a contrast with the "Gesamtkunstwerk" character of the close surrounding context which, as a manifestation of late 19th century's architecture, is an attribute of the property "Historic Centre of Vienna."***

The architect and developer, on the other hand, argued that the new plans highlighted important phases of the city's architectural history:

> ***Like no other part of [historical Vienna], the area surrounded by the Vienna Concert Hall (built in 1913), the Vienna Ice Skating Club (WEV) (established in 1899) and the InterContinental Vienna (built in 1964) documents the (architectural) history of Vienna in the 20th century.***

Urban development is a growing threat to cultural heritage around the globe. In some places, sites need strict protections to ensure that historically important structures are not built over or encroached upon by newer ones. However, in this case, UNESCO and other organizations are arguing for something more subtle: the preservation of the historic *character* of a particular neighborhood. The developer and city planners in Vienna are interested in economic growth, and value the history of 20th-century architecture as a valid part of the city's story. Organizations like UNESCO (as well as local groups) would prefer to preserve the city as it looked in the nineteenth century and earlier. These differing points of view reveal how "preservation" and "heritage" are not stable concepts: they grow and change over time as societies themselves change. Balancing these ideas—and the tensions between history and modernity—while still allowing for growth is a difficult task faced around the world by city planners and preservationists, not only in high-risk zones, but in wealthy metropolises like Vienna, as well.

Backstory by Dr. Naraelle Hohensee

Additional resources:

UNESCO webpage for the Historical Center of Vienna

"Historic Centre of Vienna inscribed on List of World Heritage in Danger," UNESCO, July 6, 2017

"Isay Weinfeld high-rise puts Vienna UNESCO world heritage site under threat," Dezeen, November 22, 2017

Otto Wagner, Postal Savings Bank, Vienna (video)

Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture. A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980).

Nicholas Powell, *The Sacred Spring. The Arts in Vienna 1898 – 1918* (London: Studio Vista, 1974).

Otto Wagner, *Modern Architecture*, trans. Harry F. Mallgrave *Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1988).

Mark Wigley, "White-out: Fashioning the Modern (Part 2)," *Assemblage* 22 (1993), pp. 6-49.

Christian Witt-Dörring, ed. *Vienna Art and Design: Klimt, Schiele, Hoffmann, Loos* (Victoria: National Gallery of Victoria, 2011).

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8.3: The Wiener Werkstätte

by **DR. LAURA MOROWITZ**

Page ID
194759



Figure **8.3.1**: Josef Hoffmann, *Brooch*, 1907, silver, partly gilt, agate, coral, lapis lazuli, malachite, turquoise and other semi-precious stones (private collection)

One glance at the brooch designed by Josef Hoffmann and we get an immediate sense of the person who wore it: sophisticated, uncompromising, worldly, and wealthy, with a deep commitment to a new and modern idea of beauty. Held in a rigid scaffolding of thin metal lines, the brooch holds its luxury in perfect check. The visual pleasure of the object comes not only from the richness of its varied materials—coral, lapis, gold, agate—but from the exquisite asymmetry of the left and right sides. Nature and culture are held in perfect balance here, the dazzling organic beauty of the stones countered by the geometric order and the austerity of the metal outlines, the solidity and weight of the gems playing against the open space of the brooch. One can imagine the woman who wore it living in a world in which her most prized possession would be a gilt cigarette holder.

The brooch perfectly embodies the aesthetic of the Vereinigung für Kunsthandwerk (Arts and Crafts Association) Wiener Werkstätte (Viennese Workshops, abbreviated WW). Like many other design movements of the first decades of the 20th century, it aimed to improve real life, but only for the small elite circle that floated from salon to opera to cafe along the Ringstrasse, the main boulevard of Imperial Vienna. Despite its Imperial splendor, the city was roiled by antisemitism, conflicts between the various ethnic and language groups within the Empire, class conflict, and new ideas about gender and sexuality that bumped up against a deeply conservative culture.

Founding and aims

The Wiener Werkstätte (WW) grew out of the Vienna Secession, an organization formed in 1897 to offer artists greater aesthetic freedom and connection to wider European currents. Embracing the motto of “To Each Age its Art, to Art its Freedom,” Secession artists turned their back on the historical styles then dominant (Gothic, or classical, for example), and instead aimed to embrace the modern world. Rather than invoking well known figures from mythology or Christianity, the artists of the Secession wanted to express new ideas on love, nature, human existence, etc. and to do so using a new language based on non-Western and folk sources, as well as direct inspiration from nature. The same was true for the Wiener Werkstätte.

In 1903, architect Josef Hoffmann and graphic designer Kolomon Moser (both Secession members), formed the WW and remained committed to the Secession’s freedom, and openness to the new—but for utilitarian objects. Their endeavor was financially supported by the wealthy textile manufacturer Fritz Waerndorfer. The project was deeply ambitious, incorporating work in varied media including leather, paper, ceramics, graphic design, furniture, woodwork, and jewelry. In 1910, the WW expanded into fashion and textile design, with showrooms across Europe and in New York.

Located just outside the historic center of Vienna, the workshops would expand to 100 workers. Female designers such as ceramicist Valerie ("Vally") Wieselthier and fashion designer Maria Likarz played a prominent role. In contrast to many early 20th-century European movements that would aim for mass production, such as the Bauhaus, the WW emphasized handicraft over mass production, a focus evident in the very name of Wiener Werkstätte. In the program for the WW, Hoffmann wrote:

> ***That immeasurable damage caused on the one hand by inferior methods of mass production, on the other, by the mindless imitation of bygone styles, has become a mighty torrent of world-wide proportions. We have lost contact with the culture of our forefathers and are tossed hither and thither by a thousand different desires and considerations. For the most part, handiwork has been ousted by the machine. . . . [1]***

Despite the great freedom of the designers, the objects produced by the WW were strongly united by a shared aesthetic. Like Josef Maria Obrich's Secession building or Gustav Klimt's Beethoven Frieze, the WW excelled in a kind of linear surface design (called *flaschenkunst*). Its designers exhibited a taste for luxury materials, repeated patterns, and an underlying geometrical scaffolding. As in the brooch, this resulted in a sophisticated beauty that derived less from extraneous ornament and instead from the beauty of materials, and the slightly elongated and asymmetrical proportions.



Figure **8.3.2**: Josef Hoffmann, Palais Stoclet (Brussels), c. 1905–11 (photo: PtrQs, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Gesatkunstwerk and life as art

While many artists and architects in the early 20th century were drawn to the notion of the total aesthetic environment, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, perhaps no movement embodied it more than the WW. The concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was originally derived from the operas of Richard Wagner. The composer saw theater productions as places where all of the arts would work in unison to create an overwhelming sensory and emotional experience, embodied in productions like Wagner's opera cycle of *The Ring*.



Figure 8.3.3: Dining room of the Palais Stoclet, Brussels, c. 1905–11, designed by Josef Hoffmann. Wall frieze by Gustav Klimt includes enamel, mother-of-pearl and gold leaf.

Dining room of the Palais Stoclet, Brussels, c. 1905–11, designed by Josef Hoffmann. Wall frieze by Gustav Klimt includes enamel, mother-of-pearl and gold leaf.

For visual artists interpreting the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, every last detail of the lived environment would become part of a coordinated ensemble, turning life itself into a giant work of art. The entire aesthetic could as well be read from a brooch as from a building. The most complete embodiment of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was Hoffmann's Palais Stoclet, built in Brussels for Adolphe Stoclet. Given an unlimited budget, Hoffmann, Klimt, and assorted WW craftsmen turned the entire house into a coordinated environment, from the two dimensional exterior, lacking historical references, to the gleaming knobs on the bathtubs. Every element partook of a refined luxury, with polished stone, wood, metal, and gems fitted into severe geometric compositions.



Figure 8.3.4: Left: Morris Chair, c. 1866; right: Kolomon Moser, Highback Chair, c. 1902

In its rejection of the shoddy machine-made environment and the desire to transform life into an aesthetic program, the WW drew on the earlier British Arts and Crafts movement. But if its upholding of craft workshops relates back to the Arts and Crafts ethos, the WW could not be more different. In Britain, the artist **William Morris** had celebrated a do-it-yourself spirit, simplicity in workmanship, and a genuine inspiration from nature. In contrast, in the objects turned out by the WW, nature is fitted into a pre-existing schema, glamorous and refined rather than rustic. Materials are polished and cut to the finest degree. Kolomon Moser's

Highback Chair differs from William Morris's armchair in its willful lack of concern for comfort, embodying the philosophy that it is "better to look good than to feel good." One can hardly sink into the stiff lines and taut back of Moser's chair. The self-conscious sitter utilizing such a chair would seem concerned, first and foremost, with being seen in it, rather than being comfortable. Like the brooch, the chair displays a repetition of geometric elements, in a contained field. Its luxury comes from its slightly exaggerated proportions and austere design.



Figure **8.3.5**: Josef Hoffmann, Flatware, 1905, manufactured by the Wiener Werkstätte, Vienna (The Museum of Modern Art)

The same can be said for the silverware designed by Hoffmann for the WW. In contrast to the sleek and understated cutlery, earlier formal silver tableware, like this eighteenth-century tureen, looks fussy, overdone, and decadent. The animals, crests, and large foliage ornamentation seems to obscure the shape and surface of the vessel rather than to enhance it and are redolent of a world of aristocracy and staid manners.



Figure **8.3.6**: Edme-Pierre Balzac, Tureen with Cover, 1757–59, silver, 26 × 23.2 × 39.1 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

In contrast, Hoffmann's table service is stripped of any surface embellishments. Lacking the extraneous curves and floral designs of the tureen, the proportions of the flatware echo those of the chair, and the brooch–elongated, elegant and asymmetrical. The implements are designed to impress rather than for ease of use or serving. This set seems to be less about satisfying appetite and far more about looking good while eating. If the straight lines make it hard to get that soup on the spoon, so be it. Such silverware was designed to be wielded in a dining room conceived as a work of art, playing against the elongated shapes of furniture, the rhythms of the wallpaper, the patterns of the rug, the light fixtures, and the after-dinner schnapps set.



Figure **8.3.7**: Wiener Werkstätte Dress, possibly designed by Emile Louise Flöge

One imagines walking into a dinner party in such a WW dining room, dressed appropriately, of course, in WW clothing, where the shapes of the garment and its texture and pattern upstage the body completely. The loose-fitting Wiener Werkstätte dress (above) was entirely modern in its overthrow of corsets and the hourglass silhouette of 19th-century fashion. Like the brooch, the Secession building, and the other WW objects, the dress restricts its decoration to limited fields, which work against the dark fabric and proportions, giving it an understated elegance.



Figure **8.3.8**: Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein*, 1905, 70.7 x 35.6 in. (Neue Pinakothek, Munich)

So, too, these Wiener Werkstätte designs are like the portraits painted by Gustav Klimt, balancing decadent touches of ornament against geometric severity. It is surely no coincidence that this aesthetic emerged in Imperial Vienna, a city that remained buttoned up and proper despite the chaos of the time and its parliamentary crises, social unrest, religious and ethnic divisions that teemed beneath the surface.

World War I: a finale

While the style of the WW perfectly expressed the taste of its wealthy and highly cultured patrons, the Austro-Hungarian empire in which it flourished would not last much longer, the end of World War I bringing it to a finale. Already by 1914, the WW had run into severe economic woes and was reliant on its new patron/benefactor Otto Primavesi and a series of financial restructurings. A banker by trade, Primavesi and his wife, Eugenia, were among the most important patrons of both Josef Hoffmann and painter Gustav Klimt.



Figure **8.3.9**: Mäda Primavesi (daughter of Otto and Eugenia Primavesi),oil on canvas, 1912–13, oil on canvas, 149.9 x 110.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Aesthetically liberating and beautiful, the WW was only for those who had the wealth, freedom, and education to fully appreciate it. Given its inward-facing focus on a small circle of cultured patrons, and on the ultimate refinement of taste, the Wiener Werkstätte floundered financially during the First Austrian Republic, a time period framed by the two world wars. Such focus on rarified aesthetics was hard to sustain in a period of material shortages and worker agitation.The deep depression that spread over Europe in the early 1930s led to the Wiener Werkstätte's demise; the objects produced in its workshops remind us of a world, too, that has all but disappeared. Yet the near-exact reproductions of Hoffmann's brooch that sell today for $8,000 in the gift shop of New York City's Neue Galerie reveal the continuing hold that the Wiener Werkstätte has on our contemporary taste and our collective fantasies.

Additional resources

"Vienna 1900: Design/Art and Crafts 1890–1938," Museum of Applied Arts (MAK)

Wiener Werkstätte Archive (MAK)

Colby Jordan Mugrabi, "Wiener Werkstätte" MinnieMuse

Neue Galerie

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8.4: Chicago School, Louis Sullivan, Carson, Pirie, Scott Building

by DR. MARGARET HERMAN



Figure 8.4.1: Hancock Tower, Chicago (photo: jochemberends, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Walking amidst the endless crowd of tall buildings in Chicago's downtown neighborhoods, the twenty-first century viewer, overwhelmed by the colossal Hancock Tower (1970) almost misses the comparatively stocky, whole-block office buildings and stores in Chicago's Loop that first gave rise to the term "skyscraper" in the late nineteenth century. At the intersection of State and Madison Streets, however, one building with large glass windows and a rounded corner entryway covered with lavish decoration stands out. In contrast to its relatively plain neighbors, the pedestrian's eye is immediately attracted to the structure's bronze-colored ground floor and broad white façade stretching twelve stories above it. This is Louis Sullivan's Carson, Pirie, Scott building, a department store constructed in two stages in 1899 and 1903-04.



Figure 8.4.2: Louis Sullivan, Carson, Pirie, Scott Building, 1899 and 1903-04, Chicago (photo: Scott Fisher, CC: BY-NC 2.0)

Sullivan's building is an important example of early Chicago skyscraper architecture, and can also be seen as a fascinating indicator of the relationship between architecture and commerce. The firm of Adler & Sullivan first became known in Chicago in the early 1880s for the design of the Auditorium Building (see below) and other landmarks utilizing new methods of steel frame construction and a uniquely American blend of Art Nouveau decoration with a simplified monumentality.



Figure 8.4.3: Dankmar Adler & Louis Sullivan, Auditorium Building, 1889, Chicago

By the mid-1890s, Sullivan struck out on his own and wrote his treatise on skyscraper architecture, “The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered.” In it, Sullivan analyzed the problem of high-rise commercial architecture, arguing with his famous phrase “form must ever follow function” that a building’s design must reflect the social purpose of a particular space.



Figure 8.4.4: Louis Sullivan, Carson, Pirie, Scott Building, Chicago (while still Schlesinger & Mayer, with original cornice and before addition at right)

Sullivan illustrates this philosophy by describing an ideal tripartite skyscraper. First, there should be a base level with a ground floor for businesses that require easy public access, light, and open space, and a second story also publicly accessible by stairways. These floors should then be followed by an infinite number of stories for offices, designed to look all the same because they serve the same function. Finally, the building should be topped with an attic storey and distinct cornice line to mark its endpoint and set it apart from other buildings within the cityscape. For Sullivan, the characteristic feature of a skyscraper was that it was tall, and so the building’s design should serve that goal by emphasizing its upward momentum.



Figure 8.4.5: Louis Sullivan, The Wainwright Building, 1891, St. Louis (photo: Tom Bastin, CC: BY 2.0)

By the turn of the century, Sullivan adapted these ideas to a new context, a department store for the Schlesinger & Mayer company that was soon purchased by Carson, Pirie, Scott. In contrast to Sullivan's earlier office buildings (like the 1891 Wainwright Building in St. Louis—image left), Carson, Pirie, Scott in downtown Chicago was intended to meet its patron's needs in a much different way. Instead of emphasizing the beehive of identical windows meant to reflect the identical work taking place in each individual office, in the Carson Pirie Scott building, Sullivan highlighted instead the lower street-level section and entryway to draw shoppers into the store. This was done in a number of ways. The windows on the ground floor, displaying the store's products, are much larger than those above. The three doors of the main entrance were placed within a rounded bay on the corner of the site, so that they are visible from all directions approaching the building.



Figure 8.4.6: Detail of corner entrance, Louis Sullivan, Carson, Pirie, Scott Building, 1899 and 1903-04, Chicago (photo: Chris Smith, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The corner entryway and the entire base section are differentiated from the spare upper stories by a unified system of extremely ornate decoration. The cast-iron ornament contains the same highly complicated, delicate, organic and floral motifs that had become hallmarks of Sullivan's design aesthetic. For Sullivan, the decorative program served a functional project as well, to distinguish the building from those surrounding it, and to make the store attractive to potential customers.



Figure 8.4.7: Detail of corner entrance, Louis Sullivan, Carson, Pirie, Scott Building, 1899 and 1903-04, Chicago (photo: Dauvit Alexander, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The upper parts of the Carson, Pirie, Scott building also reflect Sullivan's adaptation of his skyscraper theory to a department store. Each successive story of the white terra-cotta façade contains identical windows, in this case the three-sectioned "Chicago" window common to late nineteenth-century skyscrapers in the city. There is an overhanging cornice at the very top that seems to signify the end of the building's ascent, and makes the slightly set-back attic level distinct from the broad mid-section and the dark cast-iron decoration of the base level.

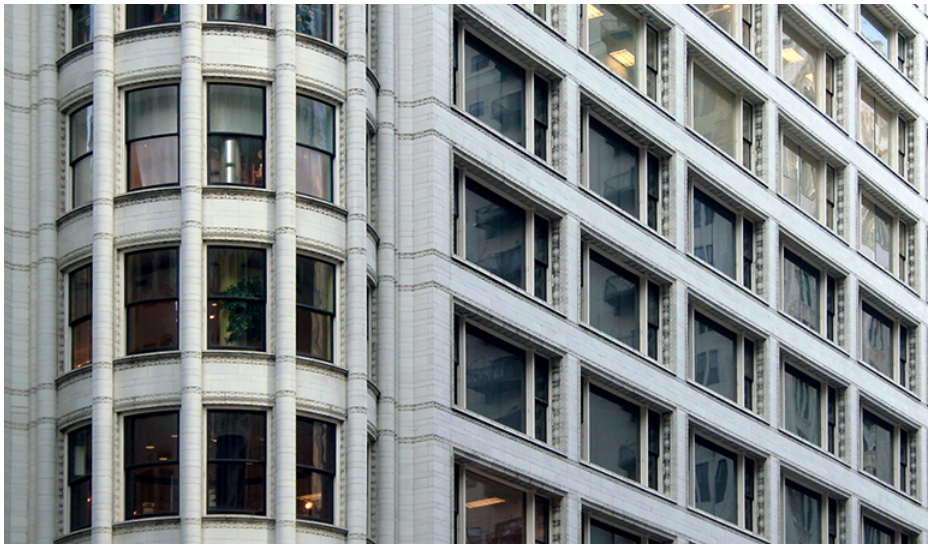


Figure 8.4.8: Detail of terracotta exterior with "Chicago" windows at right, Louis Sullivan, Carson, Pirie, Scott Building, 1899 and 1903-04, Chicago (photo: Kevin Zolkiewicz, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Unlike Sullivan's office buildings, however, the building's primary thrust is horizontal rather than vertical. Sullivan's design emphasizes the long, uninterrupted lines running under each window from each side of the building towards the entry bay, while the decorative base at the bottom and the cornice line at the top flow seamlessly around the corner.

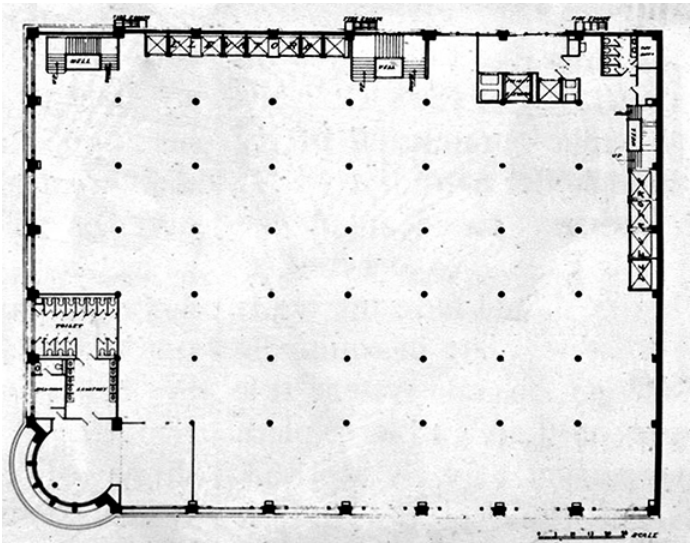


Figure 8.4.9: Open floorplan

The wide rectangular window frames and relatively squat twelve-story frame were intended to meet the specific requirements of a department store, whose mission called for expansive open spaces to display products to customers, not endless individual offices.



Figure 8.4.10: Reconstructed cornice detail, Louis Sullivan, Carson, Pirie, Scott Building, 1899 and 1903-04, Chicago

Some later critics like Lewis Mumford and Sigfried Giedion viewed the lower, ornamental section of Sullivan's Carson Pirie Scott building as an uncomfortable disruption to the otherwise stripped-down, planar style they favored. Nevertheless, the building's continuous operation well into the twenty-first century speaks not only to the prestige of Sullivan's name, but also to the sustained value of architecture as a corporate symbol.



Figure 8.4.11: Terracotta detail, Louis Sullivan, Carson, Pirie, Scott, 1899, 1903-04, Chicago (photo: **Steve Minor**, all rights reserved, by permission)

With its elaborate decorative program and attention paid to the functional requirements of retail architecture, Sullivan's design was a remarkably successful display for the department store's products, even if it diverged from the wholly vertical effect of his earlier skyscrapers.

Additional resources:

Louis Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," 1896

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SECTION OVERVIEW

8.5: New York skyscrapers and landmarks

This iconic city is home to some of the world's most memorable architecture, but people have had to fight to preserve some of it.

8.5.1: Cass Gilbert, Woolworth Building

8.5.2: Van Alen, The Chrysler Building

8.5.3: Rockefeller Center

8.5.4: A Landmark Decision- Penn Station, Grand Central, and the architectural heritage of NYC

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8.5.1: Cass Gilbert, Woolworth Building

by DR. MARGARET HERMAN

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194761



Figure **8.5.1.1**: Cass Gilbert, Woolworth Building, 1913 (New York City)

A New Skyline

Given the colossal buildings that now cover downtown Manhattan, it can be hard to understand just how distinctive Cass Gilbert's Woolworth Building appeared in relation to the skyline when it was new, one hundred years ago.

Skyscrapers emerged in Chicago the 1880s as a way to concentrate commercial office functions within the limited space downtown. New engineering technologies like safety elevators and steel-frames allowed Chicago's buildings to stretch across massive city blocks and rise to ten or twelve stories high. In New York after the turn of the century, a second generation of skyscrapers translated the Chicago School's innovations into an entirely different, even more monumental aesthetic. The Woolworth, standing on Broadway at the southwest corner of City Hall Park, is a key example of the New York style that developed in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Frank Woolworth conceived of his new corporate headquarters as the ultimate advertising campaign, a luxurious tower that would reflect his own personal wealth and the success of his five-and-dime stores. Perhaps viewing himself as an heir to the great merchant princes of medieval Italy, Woolworth sought bold architecture and economic advantage, including rental income from tenants. Woolworth hired the architect Cass Gilbert, then known primarily for his Beaux-Arts style civic buildings and art museums, to turn this dream into reality.

World's Tallest



Figure 8.5.1.2: Woolworth Building under construction, 1912 (photo: Bain News Service, Library of Congress)

Gilbert utilized the most advanced steel-frame construction techniques of the time allowing the Woolworth to soar 57 stories to 792 feet—the world's tallest building until 1930.

In contrast to the relative horizontality of Chicago skyscrapers and the sharp divisions between base and tower of earlier New York skyscrapers like the Singer Building (1908), every aspect of the Woolworth's composition and decoration is oriented up, creating a continuous vertical thrust.

The tower sits flush on the Broadway side of the large V-shaped block that contains City Hall Park. This means you can view Woolworth from a distance and see its full height with an unobstructed view, rare in such a densely built area. The result is that the tower seems to move endlessly upwards. The building's white-glazed terra-cotta tiles accentuate the piers that run from base to top with few interruptions from cornices or the window spandrels.



Figure 8.5.1.3: Terra-cotta decorations on the facade (detail), Cass Gilbert, Woolworth Building, 1913 (New York City) (photo: Michael Daddino, CC BY 2.0)

Gargoyles

The building's decorative neo-Gothic program only adds to this sense of monumentality. On the exterior, ornate sculptural arches, finials, and gargoyles over-scaled enough to be read from street-level, refer directly to European medieval architecture, and draw the eye towards the heavens in the same manner as a High Gothic cathedral.



Figure **8.5.1.4**: Woolworth building interior, postcard. Inside the building's barrel-vaulted lobby, walls covered with lavish mosaics and stained glass allude to even earlier examples of Christian art and architecture. Yet, as contemporary critics noted, the Woolworth was a tribute not to religion, but to capitalism.

The form of the New York skyscraper would soon shift again with a 1916 zoning law. This regulation used a building's "footprint" to ensure that sunlight and breezes would reach the city's narrow streets far below. The "1916 Setback Law" led to the "wedding cake" massing and streamlined style of the Chrysler Building (1930) and Rockefeller Center's RCA Building (1933), among many others. Just as with Woolworth, skyscrapers continue to serve as important symbols for the corporations that commissioned them.

Additional Resources:

New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Designation Report (PDF)

Essay from the Skyscraper Museum

Cass Gilbert biography, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution (archives)

This page titled 8.5.1: Cass Gilbert, Woolworth Building is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Margaret Herman, "Cass Gilbert, Woolworth Building," in Smarthistory, August 9, 2015, accessed August 27, 2020, https://smarthistory.org/gilbert-woolworth-building/..

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8.5.2: Van Alen, The Chrysler Building

by DR. PAUL A. RANOGAJEC

Page ID
194762



Figure 8.5.2.1: Chrysler Building, photo: David Shankbone, CC: BY-SA 3.0

With its sky-piercing spire, its sleek, metallic ornament poking out over the streetscape, and its luxurious marble- and metal-lined interiors, the Chrysler Building epitomizes its time: an era of concentrated wealth, industrial power, and large-scale city building. It is often said that architecture is a measure of civilization. If so, there may be few better artifacts of the short-lived epoch called the Roaring Twenties than the Chrysler Building. Ironically, the Art Deco Chrysler Building also marked the end of that dizzying period.

Race to the top

In 1927, Architect William Van Alen received a commission for an office tower from real-estate developer William H. Reynolds. It was to be 808 feet tall with a crowning glass dome meant to "give the effect of a great jeweled sphere." With mounting costs, Reynolds sold the lease in late 1928 to Walter P. Chrysler, who had formed his automobile manufacturing company in Detroit three years earlier and wanted to make a visible statement about his newfound prominence in business—he said the building would be "dedicated as a sound contribution to business progress." Chrysler asked Van Alen to make his tower the tallest building in the world, but this was no singular act of hubris on Chrysler's part. Both men had an interest in making the Chrysler Building as tall, glamorous, and unique as possible.

In the late 1920s, New York's architects and developers were caught in a race to construct ever-taller buildings. By 1929, the **Bank of Manhattan Trust Building** on Wall Street (927 feet tall) was set to become the world's tallest, displacing Cass Gilbert's **Woolworth Building** (792 feet tall), which had held the honor since 1913. Several other buildings going up in the late 1920s near Wall Street also aimed for distinction and height.

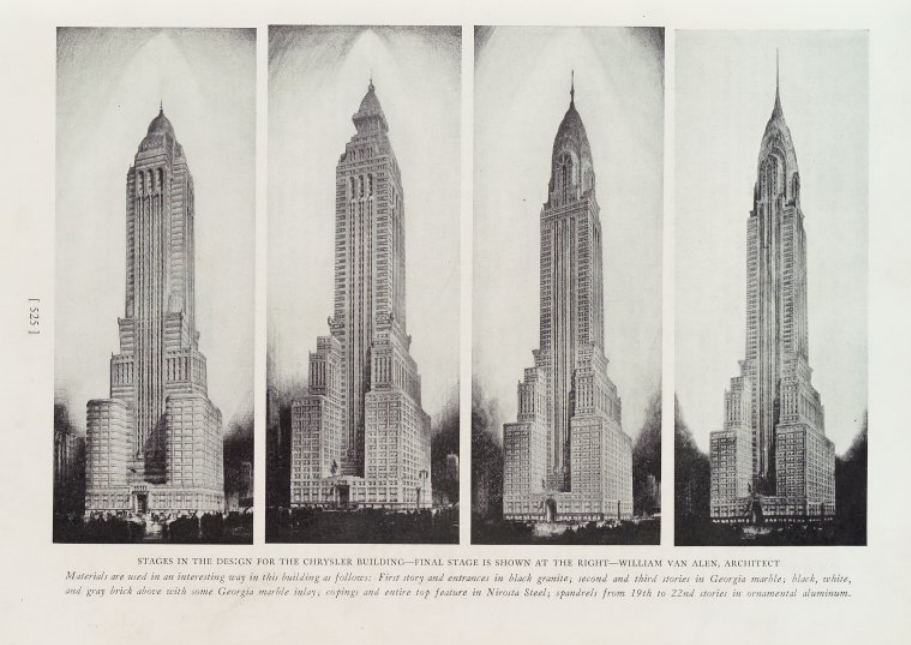


Figure 8.5.2.2: Stages in the design for the Chrysler building, *Progressive Architecture*, v. 10, July-Dec 1929, page 525

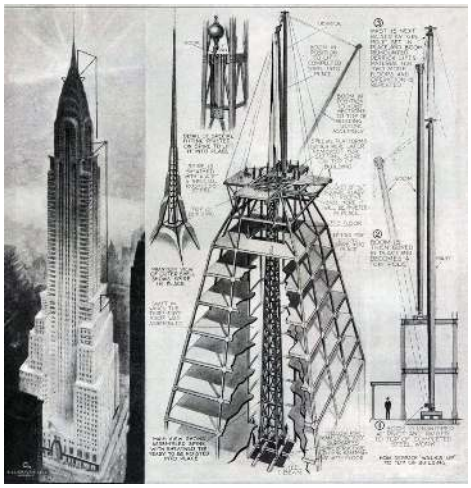


Figure 8.5.2.3: Chrysler Building Spire mechanism, ***Popular Science Monthly***, August 1930, page 52

The competition for the tallest building was fiercest between Van Alen and his former business partner, Craig Severance (architect of the Bank of Manhattan Trust Building along with Yasuo Matsui). In the end, Van Alen triumphed: in secret, he had the 185-foot spire of the Chrysler constructed in sections and assembled inside the building, then hoisted up and through the top (diagram right) only after Severance's Bank of Manhattan Trust tower had reached its full height in November 1929. With the spire, the Chrysler now reached 1,046 feet. It claimed the title of world's tallest building from its official completion on May 27, 1930, until the completion of the Empire State Building on April 11, 1931.

The Chrysler Building's overall shape and composition put it into a distinctive local tradition of skyscraper design. New York architects developed a particular way of handling New York City's 1916 zoning resolution known as the "setback" law. Although not all skyscrapers followed the model, it was a popular formula: a broad base on top of which rose a slender tower, often incorporating setbacks at multiple levels, all topped by a pyramidal cap or spire. Important examples include the **Manhattan Life Insurance Building** (completed 1894), the **Singer Building** (1908), the **Metropolitan Life Insurance Tower** (1909), the **Woolworth Building** (1913), and, of course, the **Bank of Manhattan Trust** (1930), **Chrysler** (1930), and **Empire State Building** (1931).

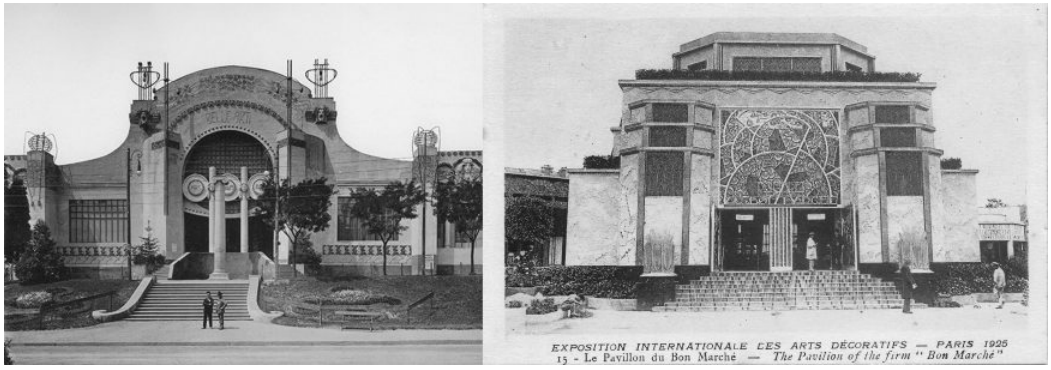


Figure **8.5.2.4**: Left: Art Nouveau architecture, Fine art building, Prima Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa Moderna, Turin, 1902; right: Art Deco architecture, Pavillon du Bon Marché, Exposition internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes de Paris en 1925, postcard, Les Éditions artistiques LIP : Paris & ses Merveilles – imprimeur: J. Cormault à Paris, 1925

Art Deco

The Chrysler Building's style—Art Deco—was considered modern, urbane, and luxurious. The term itself originated from the Exposition internationale des Arts Décoratifs et industriels modernes (International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts), held in Paris in 1925 (above right), but the roots of the style went back further. Art Deco could describe everything from the style of a corporate office tower (such as the Chrysler Building), to the decorative pattern on furniture, murals, and tilework. The style incorporated chevron, sunburst, fountain, and arc motifs, endless varieties of geometric patterns, and, in later instances especially, cubic and machine-like forms. It was generally more rectilinear than the swirling floral and vegetal patterns common in the earlier Art Nouveau (above left), and was quite distinct from the forms and details of classical **Beaux-Arts architecture** and ornament, which was prominent in the early twentieth century.

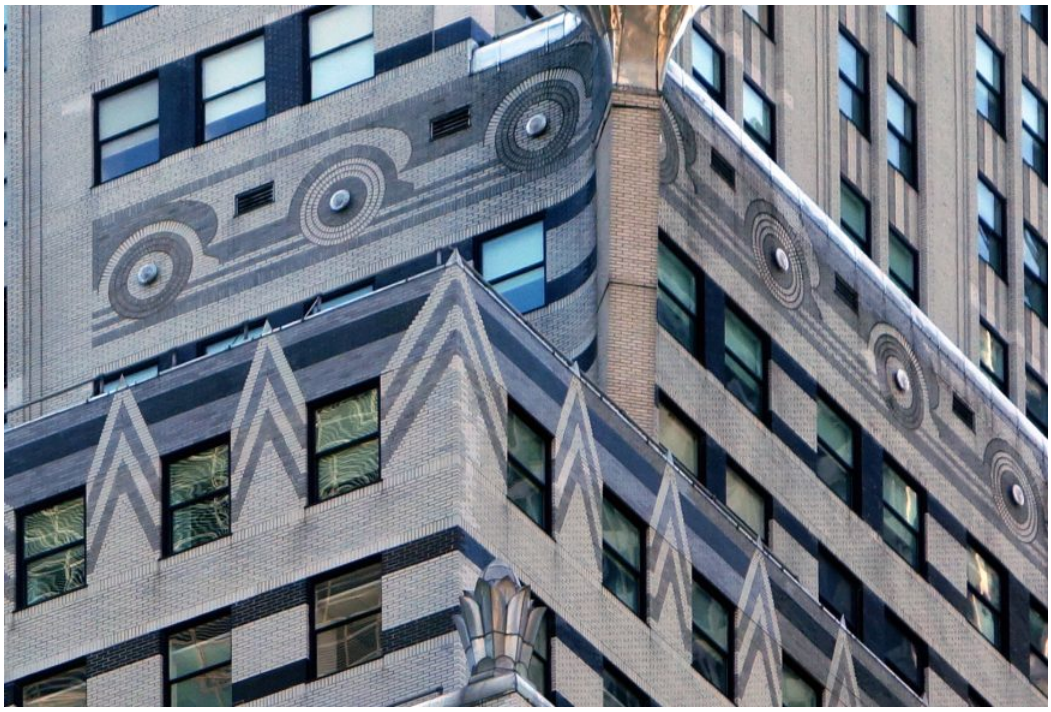


Figure **8.5.2.5**: Automobile friezes in the brickwork, photo: **cogito ergo imago**, CC: BY-SA 2.0

It would be an exaggeration to say that Art Deco fully rejected the Art Nouveau or the Beaux-Arts styles; instead, Art Deco designers synthesized and abstracted earlier motifs and patterns to create a decorative layer on buildings laid out in otherwise conventional ways. In New York, Art Deco exteriors ran a spectrum from the ornate to the spare (the Chrysler falls in the middle range of that spectrum). Interiors, however, tended to be colorful and lively, with marble and metal details in color schemes dominated by gold, silver, black, red, and green.



Figure **8.5.2.6**: Eagle, Chrysler Building, 1931, photo: **Jason Eppink**, CC: BY 2.0

At the Chrysler Building, the distinctive elements of Art Deco include the horizontal black-and-white stripes between floors, the geometric decoration concentrated at each of the setbacks, the streamlined eagle heads and radiator caps with wings (referencing the hallmark Chrysler car ornaments) jutting out from the corners, and, above all, the great crown with its seven layers of crescent setbacks inset with triangular windows. Brightly lit at night, the crown is still one of the most distinctive elements on the New York City skyline. Although the ground-level experience is often described as lackluster, the building's contribution to the skyline is its true achievement. It made the Chrysler Building a symbol of urban modernity, of New York's business dynamism, and of the vibrant nightlife of the world's newest metropolis.



Figure **8.5.2.7**: Chrysler Building at night, photo: Kim Carpenter, CC: BY 2.0

Depression and Modernity

The stock market crashed on October 29, 1929, in the midst of the Chrysler Building's construction. This initial shock did not immediately lead to the economic ruin of the Great Depression—that set in a few years later. However, the glamour, economic growth, and optimism associated with the Roaring Twenties was over. For some, the Chrysler Building came to be a symbol of a lost, hedonistic era, having resulted from the same supposedly rational economic decisions that had led to the market crash. However, some commentators in the 1930s also suggested the building's lights and upward thrust be seen as symbols of hope for a better future.



Figure **8.5.2.8**: Detail, Edward Trumbull, *Transport and Human Endeavor*, oil on canvas attached to lobby ceiling, 1930

The 1920s was a decade of great wealth disparities. Rich bankers and industrialists, including Walter Chrysler, had done very well. They used their patronage of architecture to convey their high status and the power some believed rightly accrued to those who had prospered in the system of American industrial capitalism. One could argue that the Chrysler Building's height, glamour, and prestige was concocted to celebrate one man whose wealth was the result of huge profits he accrued at the expense of poorly paid laborers and other workers.

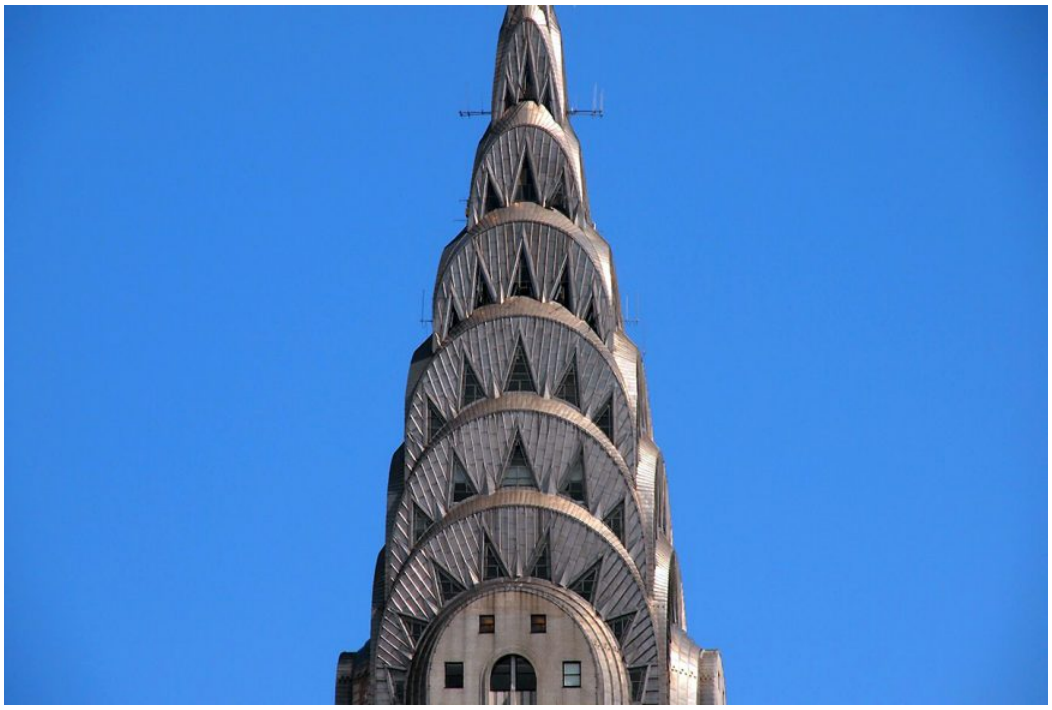


Figure 8.5.2.9: Chrysler Building Spire, photo: Paul Arps, CC: BY 2.0

But few buildings are only about one person. A huge building like the Chrysler cannot help but also be a monument in the city that surrounds it, and as such it helped fix for decades to come New Yorkers' understanding of their city as stylish and forward-looking. After the depression and World War II, New York City became the world's foremost cultural center. And the Chrysler Building was still there, glimmering high above almost everything else as a beacon and symbol of the city's persistent optimism.



Figure 8.5.2.10: New York City Skyline, Public Domain CC0 1.0

Additional Resources:

NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission designation report

1916 NYC Building Zone Resolution "set-back law"

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8.5.3: Rockefeller Center

by DR. MALKA SIMON

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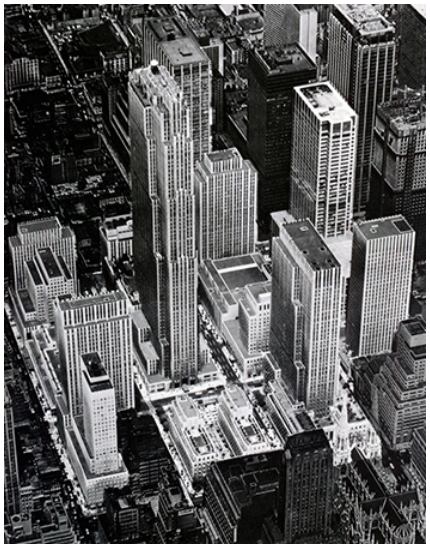


Figure **8.5.3.1**: Aerial view of Rockefeller Center

Rockefeller Center is a complex of skyscrapers and theaters in New York City developed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. in the 1930s and designed by a talented committee of architects and planners. It superbly demonstrates how tall buildings can be seamlessly integrated into the horizontal tangle of the city below.

An investment

First conceived in 1927, Rockefeller Center was intended as a mixed use complex that would house the Metropolitan Opera and assorted retail establishments. The opera later withdrew, and was replaced with the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) and its fledgling subsidiary, NBC. Rockefeller wanted a sound return on his investment, but he also wanted to build something that could serve the public good. He was passionate about architecture and he felt responsible for contributing to the urban quality of New York.

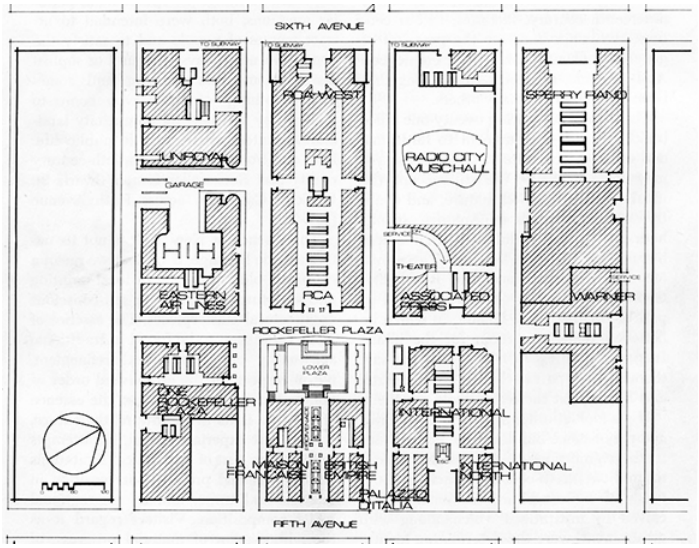


Figure **8.5.3.2**: Rockefeller Center plan

The design of Rockefeller Center is the product of collaboration between architects with expertise in a variety of fields. Real estate developer John R. Todd, who had been involved in several speculative office projects around nearby Grand Central Terminal, oversaw the project. Todd appointed the firm Reinhard and Hofmeister as general architects, since they had extensive experience

designing economic floor plans. Also on the team was the noted architect Harvey Wiley Corbett. Corbett was keenly interested in issues of city planning and traffic flow, and had been involved in the Regional Plan Association's proposals for urban expansion around the New York region. Working with him was Wallace K. Harrison, who would later collaborate on a number of modern ensembles in New York, including the United Nations and Lincoln Center. Rounding out the group was Raymond Hood, with many skyscrapers under his belt already, including the Gothic revival Chicago Tribune Tower (1922), the elaborate American Radiator Building (1924), and the more restrained Daily News plant (1929). By early 1930, the architects had established the basic setup of Rockefeller Center: a tall building anchoring the middle of the development, fronted by a plaza and flanked by shorter buildings around the periphery of the site.



Figure **8.5.3.3**: View of the RCA building Rockefeller Center from the old Union Club, September 1, 1933, 5×7″ safety negative by Gottscho-Schleisner

Cool, unfussy elegance

Raymond Hood's RCA building (since renamed the GE building and popularly known as 30 Rock) dominates Rockefeller Center. This skyscraper exudes a cool, unfussy elegance. Its limestone façade rises above its neighbors in a series of stepped verticals. Aluminum spandrels create a vertical pattern of lines that emphasize the building's height. Hood had used a similar approach in his Daily News building, but the striped effect was more subtle here, and the overall proportions more delicate. The building's profile shifts according to the viewer's perspective—its north and south façades stretch wide, while its east and west ends present slender fronts to the street. The main approach lies on the east via the long and narrow Channel Gardens (a walk that separates buildings dedicated to France and Britain) that slope gently downward, allowing an unobstructed view as the tower soars upward like the prow of a huge ship.



Figure 8.5.3.4: View of the rooftop gardens at Rockefeller Center from the International Building across to the British Empire Building and La Maison Française along Fifth Avenue (photo: David Shankbone, CC BY-SA 2.5)



Figure 8.5.3.5: View of 30 Rockefeller Plaza (photo: Tobias Schiller, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The profile of the RCA building was unusual in New York at the time. The city's zoning regulations required height setbacks, which usually resulted in stepped ziggurat profiles. The slab shape here was relatively new, though it would become more widespread in the city during the postwar period.

Streamlined moderne

The building was as efficient as it was elegant, with floor plans designed to maximize rental values. Proximity to windows was important—tenants demanded daylight and ventilation in their office spaces. Careful planning minimized the distance between windows and hallways. Elevators were brought to the center of the building in order to conserve valuable floor space along the perimeter. New high-speed elevators meant fewer banks and thus more rentable floor space. Roof gardens occupied the setbacks below the sixteenth floor—an inexpensive way to add a touch of luxury to the offices, and collect higher rent from those spaces.

The streamlined moderne[1] lines of the RCA building typified the style that dominated Rockefeller Center. The towers of the complex cannot be described as avant garde, but they are modern in their simplicity. Their minimalism was due more to cost cutting than architectural experimentation, but nevertheless resulted in a restrained and cohesive complex that primarily relies on massing and proportion for effect.



Figure 8.5.3.6: Lee Lawrie, *Wisdom* (center), with *Light* (right) and *Sound* (left), 1933, painted and gilded limestone, glass (photo: Terry Robinson, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Art and architecture

The architects did, however, welcome the addition of sculpture and paintings to their buildings, both inside and out. To name but a few examples, Lee Lawrie's rich Art Deco panels on the RCA building depicted allegorical figures of light and sound; Hildreth Meiere's panels on Radio City Music Hall rendered stylized theatrical muses in bold colors. Lawrie collaborated with sculptor Rene Chambellan on the figure of *Atlas* in front of the International Building, and Paul Manship's golden *Prometheus* lounges in the sunken plaza at the base of the RCA building.



Figure 8.5.3.7: Paul Manship, Prometheus, 1934, gilded bronze, 18 feet high (photo: Rev Stan, CC BY 2.0)

The most famous work in the center no longer exists—Diego Rivera's frescoes in the lobby of the RCA building were destroyed when the Mexican muralist refused to tone down the anti-capitalist images of his paintings. Rockefeller's son Nelson had approved the commission; he was an enthusiastic patron of contemporary artists (in this regard, he took after his mother, Abby Aldrich, one of the founders of MoMA). This time, though, his affinity for the avant garde backfired.

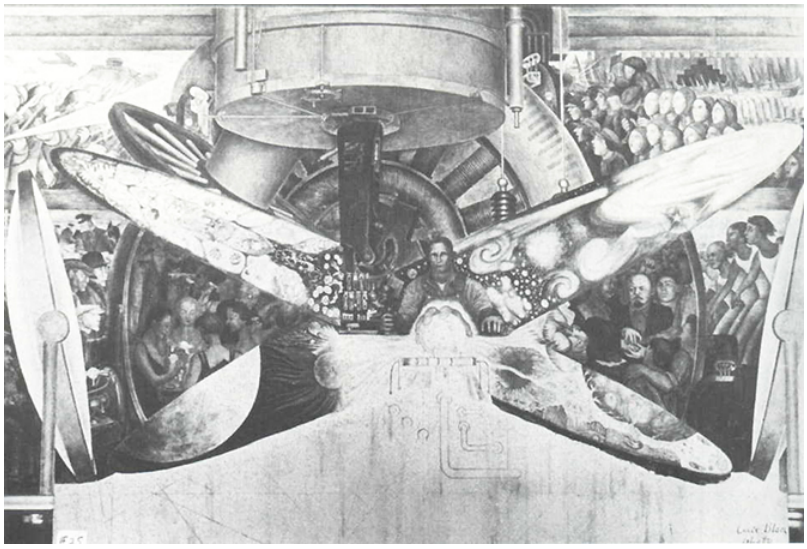


Figure 8.5.3.8: Diego Rivera, Man at the Crossroads (in progress), 1932-34 (destroyed) © Banco De Mexico, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo Museums Trust

A “city within a city”

At its heart, Rockefeller Center excels at integrating the vertical city with the horizontal one. It offers layered paths of circulation for the pedestrian and vehicular traffic generated by its many tenants. Small private streets cut into the larger grid of Manhattan to facilitate pedestrian circulation around the crowded plaza. Also crucial to keeping people moving is the Center’s underground concourse, which links every building in the complex to a subterranean shopping center and, ultimately, the subway. Rockefeller Center’s planners envisioned a “city within a city,” and the shops in the concourse meant that office workers could get what they needed without venturing far. The presence of the subway was deliberate too. The center’s transportation committee worked with the city so that its new Sixth Avenue subway line could serve the huge numbers of workers commuting to the complex. Finally, an elaborate network of garages and underground ramps accommodates trucks, facilitating shipments without further congesting the bustling streets of midtown Manhattan.

1. Streamlined moderne is an austere architectural style that grew out of Art Deco

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8.5.4: A Landmark Decision- Penn Station, Grand Central, and the architectural heritage of NYC

by DR. MATTHEW A. POSTAL and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



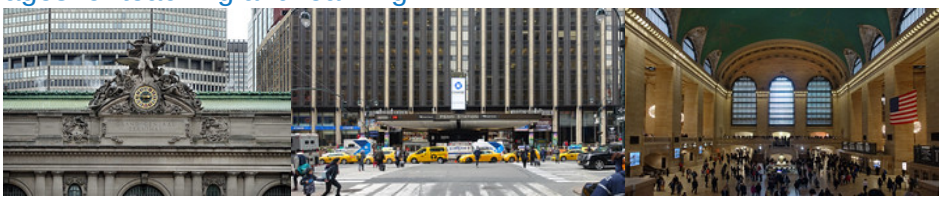
Video 8.5.4.1: Dr. Matthew A. Postal and Dr. Steven Zucker discuss landmarks preservation in New York City while visiting: Charles Luckman Associates's Madison Square Garden and Pennsylvania Station, the former site of Charles McKim for McKim Mead, & White, Pennsylvania Station (New York City), 1910 and then visiting Reed & Stem, Warren & Wetmore's Grand Central Terminal, 1912

Additional resources:

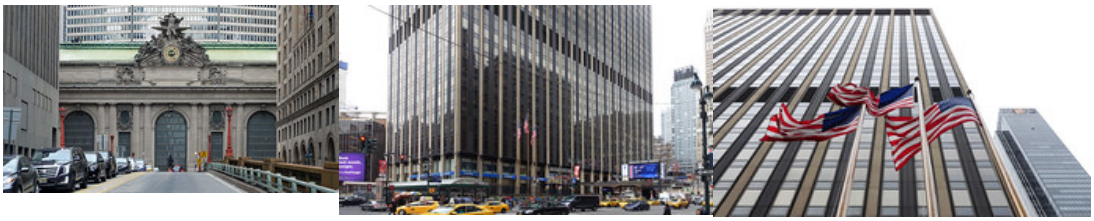
The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

Grand by Design: A History of Grand Central Terminal

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SECTION OVERVIEW

8.6: International style

Begun in Europe before World War II, this style became the leading approach to global commercial architecture after 1945.

c. 1920 - 1980

8.6.1: Peter Behrens, Turbine Factory

8.6.2: Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye

8.6.3: Frank Lloyd Wright

8.6.3.1: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City

8.6.3.2: Fallingwater

8.6.4: Gordon Bunshaft for Skidmore Owings and Merrill, Lever House

8.6.5: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Seagram Building, New York City

8.6.6: Negotiating the past in Berlin- the Palast der Republik

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8.6.1: Peter Behrens, Turbine Factory

by DR. ELIZABETH M. MERRILL

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Figure **8.6.1.1**: Peter Behrens, Turbine Factory, 1909-10

The establishment and evolution of AEG—the initials for the German Allgemeine Elektricitäts-Gesellschaft, or General Electric Company—was quintessentially linked to the rise of modernism. Founded in Berlin in 1883, AEG pioneered modern, large-scale industrial development. In 1887, having purchased several patents from Thomas Edison, the firm began producing electric light bulbs. Just over a decade later, AEG was not only one of the fastest growing companies in Germany, but a world-leader in the production of generators, cables, transformers, motors, light bulbs, and arc lamps.



Figure **8.6.1.2**: Peter Behrens, Poster for Allgemeine Elektricitäts Gesellschaft (AEG), 1910

Behrens and AEG

How exactly Peter Behrens—a painter turned graphic designer—came to receive his first commissions from AEG in 1907 remains somewhat unclear. But the credentials Behrens' brought to this appointment were substantial, and his success within the industrial powerhouse was immediate. Prior to his tenure at AEG, Behrens had acted as artist-in-residence at the Darmstadt Artist's Colony, headed the Kunstgewerbeschule ("School of arts and crafts") in Düsseldorf, and with Hermann Muthesius, Josef Hoffmann, and Joseph Maria Olbrich, among others, was a founding member of the Deutscher Werkbund (German Association of Craftsmen).

Behrens' first assignment for AEG involved the re-design of arc lamps—utilitarian hanging lamps intended for factories, warehouses, railway stations, and other public buildings. In his work in Darmstadt and Düsseldorf, Behrens had advocated for a functionally-guided approach to industrial design. "Design," he wrote, "is not about decorating functional forms—it is about creating forms that accord with the character of the object and that show new technologies to advantage." Thus while there was little about the existing AEG lamps that could be functionally improved, Behrens succeeded in formally enhancing them. He made the lamp's joints as few as possible, streamlined their moldings and contours, and adjusted their overall sculptural properties and proportions according to artistic principles. The new lamps were

so successful that AEG promptly invited him to design the AEG trademark, as well as its kettles, coffee pots, fans, clocks, a dentist's drill, and even factory buildings.



Figure **8.6.1.3**: Peter Behrens, Poster for Allgemeine Elektricitäts Gesellschaft (AEG), 1912

The impact of design

Today, the idea of an artist designing commercial, mass-produced objects or housewares is unremarkable. Numerous celebrity designers have product lines with major retailers like Target and Walmart, and as consumers, we are conditioned to look for names and labels. We associate labels with a standard of design and quality, and our fundamental reliance on "name brands" simplifies daily shopping. But this was not yet the case at the turn of the twentieth-century. The European industrial revolution had led to the rise of the factory and systematized mass-production, and at the same time had contributed to the demise of the artisan and individualized production. Retailers no longer sold what they themselves had produced. Rather, they sold the anonymous, white-label products that had been manufactured in factories and hawked by wholesalers. Thus when shopping for a kettle, for example, the consumer could find the same, standardized product in a dozen of different stores. But he had no choice in terms of the kettle's design, material or make. Moreover, because there were no labels or name brands, it was nearly impossible for him to distinguish a good-quality kettle from an inferior model.



Figure **8.6.1.4**: Peter Behrens, Poster for Allgemeine Elektricitäts Gesellschaft (AEG), c. 1910

AEG was one of the first major manufacturers to develop a label as a means to distinguish their products from those of their competitors. Beyond this, AEG was the first firm to invest in the art of industrial design. It wanted to sell not only the best-functioning kettles, but also the most streamlined, aesthetically pleasing kettles. AEG changed the nature of mass-production not only in its decision to hire talented artists like Behrens, but also its immense size and ever-increasing economic power.

AEG's introduction of design to industrial production heralded a new age of capitalism. It also created a new role for the artist within the industrial marketplace. According to Behrens, the role of the artist was to give form to the culture in which he lived. In the age of industry and modernization, therefore, the artist was not to replicate historical models and age-old forms, but was to create designs that expressed the spirit and rhythm of the moment. Still, good design was never to sacrifice aesthetics in favor of functionality. This was also the case in architecture. In designing highly functional factory buildings for AEG in Berlin, Peter Behrens chose not to emphasize pure functionalism.

Rather, he sought to contextualize his modern constructions within the ever-evolving political and social milieu of early-twentieth-century Europe.

AEG Turbine Factory

Located in the Moabit district of Berlin, the AEG Turbine Factory was Behrens' first factory design. The structure was to house the production of steam turbines—engines that use pressurized steam to generate electricity—a rapidly growing industry in the early-20th century Germany, as the country's maritime power developed in rivalry with that of Britain. The essential contours of the factory—a steel-frame rectangular structure, approximately 122 meters long, 40 meters wide and 26 meters tall—were specified by AEG's turbine fabrication director Oscar Lasche. The main assembly hall had to accommodate two large cranes, capable of lifting 100 tons and installed at such a height that the largest turbine parts could be lifted over the machines on the assembly floor. Smaller, flanking constructions were also necessary for storage and secondary manufacturing operations, and it was imperative that railroad cars enter directly into the work space.

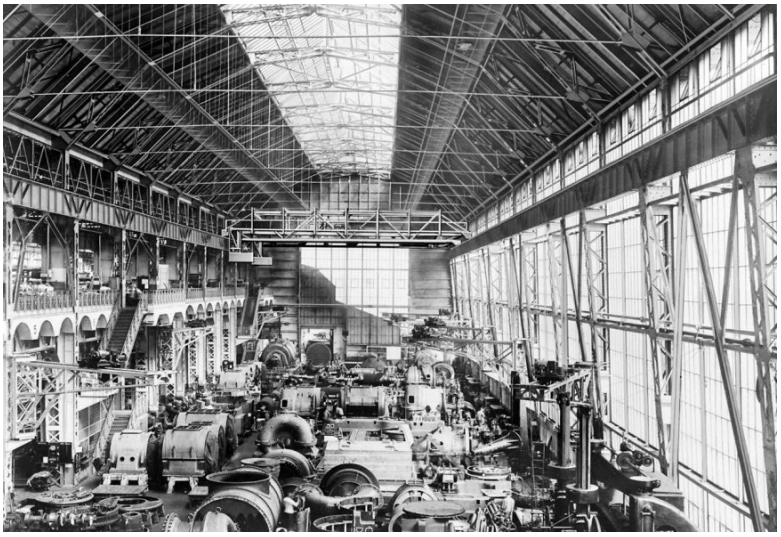


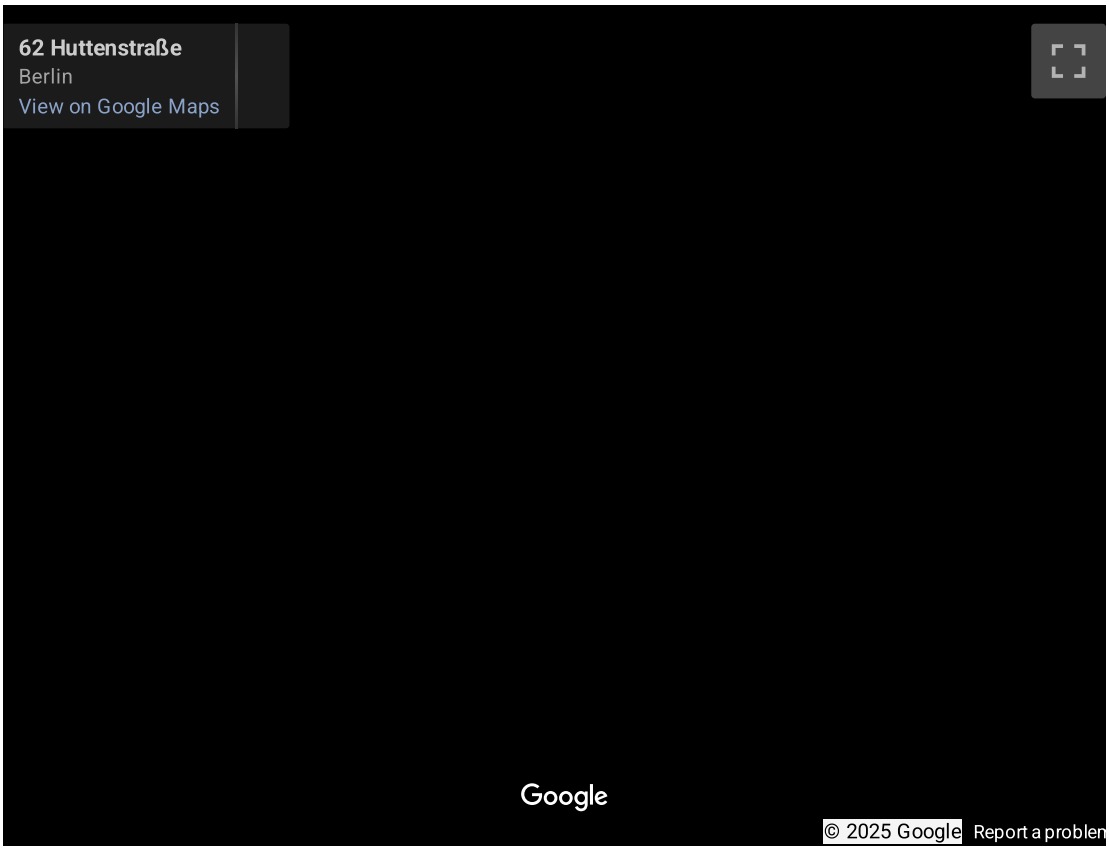
Figure **8.6.1.5**: AEG Turbine Factory interior, 1909

As a self-taught architect, untrained in engineering, Behrens was willingly reliant on the expertise of Lasche and other talented engineers when it came to the building's materials and structural dimensions. But as an artist, Behrens was able to give form and meaning to the factory in way that eluded the engineers. Behrens saw the Turbine Factory as a symbol of modernism, and its attributes of speed, noise and power. He wanted to make the interior and exterior as simple as possible, and in collaboration with the engineers chose to use fewer, but more massive girder frames than was commonly employed in such a large building. The AEG Turbine Factory was to be a temple dedicated to a new age of production. The classicism evoked in its reinforced concrete, pedimented façade was not of bygone traditions, but a new classicism that expressed the industrial advances that were reshaping contemporary life.



Figure **8.6.1.6**: AEG-Turbinenhalle, Berlin-Moabit, Juli 2013 (photo: **Bernd**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The monumental iconic façade—at the center of which stood Behren's hexagonal logo for the AEG—was also to become the company's corporate face. It is here that we can best recognize how Behrens used symbolically-charged forms to create new functions. In its materiality, the concrete façade serves no structural purpose. But in its mass, it accomplishes what the elongated steel beams of the structure's skeleton does not. The Turbine factory was not Germany's first major iron and glass building, nor was it the country's first industrial construction. It was unprecedented because it served as a cultural icon of modern industrial power. It expanded the realm of the architect's work and established new guidelines for mass-production.



Additional resources:

Stanford Anderson, *Peter Behrens and a New Architecture for the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000.

Tilmann Buddensieg, *Industriekultur: Peter Behrens und die AEG, 1907 – 1914* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1990).

Frederic Schwartz, "Commodity Signs: Peter Behrens, the AEG, and the Trademark," *Journal of Design History*, vol. 9 (1996), pp. 153–184.

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8.6.2: Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye

by DR. MALKA SIMON

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"The house is a box in the air,…"
—Le Corbusier, Précisions



Figure **8.6.2.1**: Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, France, 1929 (photo: **Renato Saboya**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The Villa Savoye at Poissy, designed by Le Corbusier in 1929, represents the culmination of a decade during which the architect worked to articulate the essence of modern architecture. Throughout the 1920s, via his writings and designs, Le Corbusier (formerly Charles-Edouard Jeanneret) considered the nature of modern life and architecture's role in the new machine age. His famous dictum, that "The house should be a machine for living in," is perfectly realized within the forms, layout, materials, and siting of the Villa Savoye.

Located just outside Paris, the Villa Savoye offered an escape from the crowded city for its wealthy patrons. Its location on a large unrestricted site allowed Le Corbusier total creative freedom. The delicate floating box that he designed is both functional house and modernist sculpture, elegantly melding form and function.

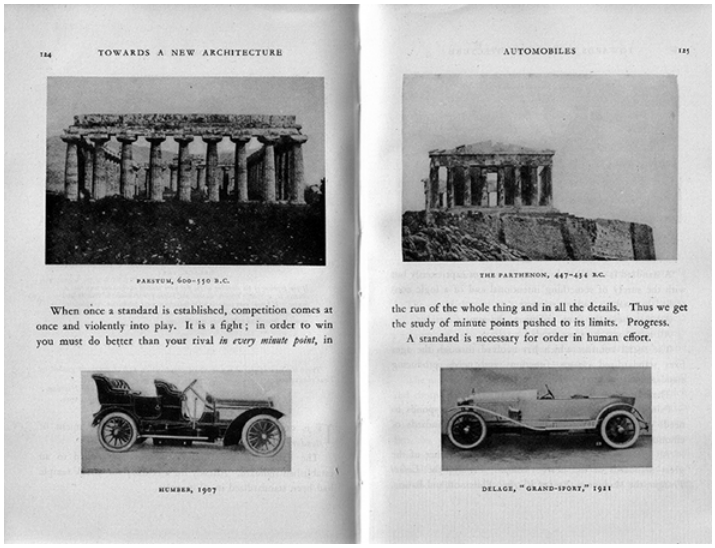


Figure **8.6.2.2**: Le Corbusier, Vers une architecture (Toward an Architecture), 1923

Le Corbusier had been developing his theories on modern architecture throughout the previous decade. In 1920, he founded the journal *L'Esprit Nouveau*, and many of the essays he published there would eventually be incorporated into his landmark collection

of essays, *Vers une architecture (Toward an Architecture)* in 1923. This book celebrated science, technology, and reason, arguing that modern machines could create highly precise objects not unlike the ideal platonic forms valued by the ancient Greeks. Le Corbusier lavished praise on the totems of modernity—race cars, airplanes, and factories—marveling at the beauty of their efficiency. However, he also argued that beauty lay not only in the newest technology but in ancient works such as the Parthenon, whose refined forms represented, in his view, the perfection of earlier Archaic systems. Le Corbusier sought to isolate what he called type forms, which were universal elements of design that can work together in a system. He found these across time and across the globe, in the fields of architecture and engineering. The many images embedded throughout the text drew striking visual parallels and eloquently expressed his search for modern perfection through universal forms.



Figure **8.6.2.3**: Le Corbusier House, Weissenhofsiedlung, Stuttgart, Germany, 1927 (photo: **Andreas Praefcke**, CC: BY 3.0)

During the 1920s, Le Corbusier designed a series of houses (above) which allowed him to develop his ideas further. By 1926, he had devised his Five Points of Architecture, which he viewed as a universal system that could be applied to any architectural site. The system demanded pilotis (slender columns) to raise the building off the ground and allow air to circulate beneath; roof terraces, to bring nature into an urban setting; a free plan that allowed interior space to be distributed at will; a free façade whose smooth plane could be used for formal experimentation; and ribbon windows, which let in light but also reinforced the planarity of the wall.

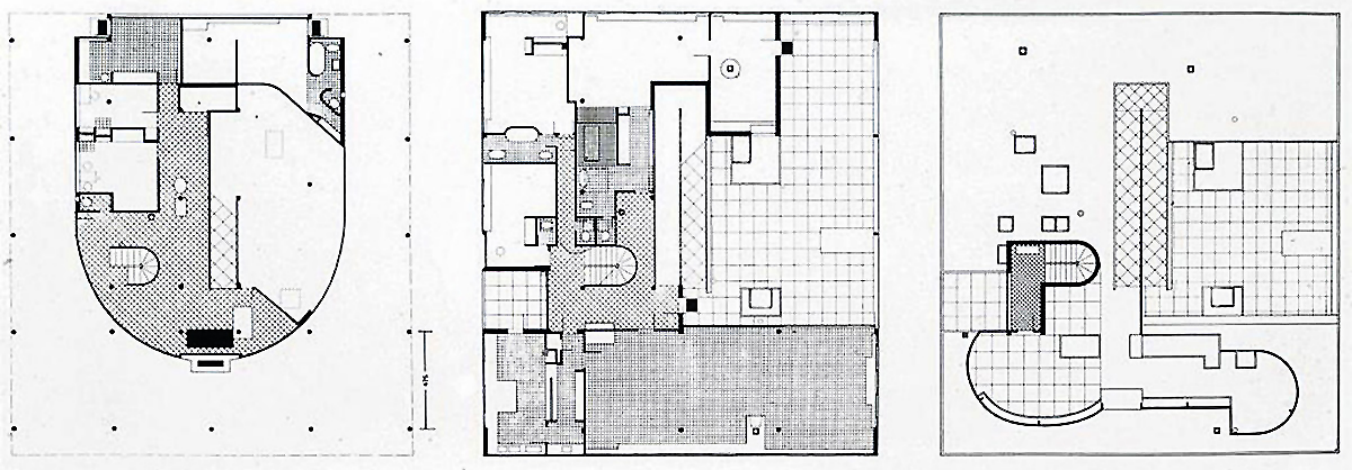


Figure **8.6.2.4**: Ground plan (left), first story (center), atrium and roof garden (right), Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, France, 1929

The Villa Savoye incorporated these principles, and also realized many of the concepts expressed in *Vers une Architecture*. Made of reinforced concrete, the ground floor walls are recessed and painted green so that the house looks like a box floating on delicate pilotis. Visitors arrive by car, in true machine-age fashion. The stark white exterior wall, with its strips of ribbon windows, has a

remarkably smooth, planar quality. This stands in contrast to the fluidity of the interior, which is organized by a multistory ramp that leads the viewer on a gently curving path through a building that is nearly square. The contrast between the sharp angles of the plan and the dynamism of the spaces inside charge the house with a subtle energy.



Figure **8.6.2.5**: Ramp and spiral staircase, Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, France, 1929 (photo: **Scarletgreen**, CC BY 2.0)

The ramp winds from the entrance up to the salon, a formal interior space that flows seamlessly into the roof terrace outside. Corbu, as he is also known, treated the terrace as a room without walls, reflecting his desire to fully integrate landscape and architecture. The ramp finally culminates in the curved solarium crowning the house, whose rounded enclosure appears to be an abstract sculpture when viewed from below. Seen from the roof terrace, the ramp and cylinder of the solarium echo the forms of the ocean liners lauded in *Vers une Architecture*. Le Corbusier and Madame Savoye believed in the health benefits of fresh air and sunshine, and considered leisure time spent outdoors one mark of a modern lifestyle. The Villa Savoye's integration of indoor and outdoor spaces allowed the family to spend time outdoors in the most efficient way possible—the house was, in a sense, a machine designed to maximize leisure in the machine age.



Figure **8.6.2.6**: Solarium viewed from the roof terrace, Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, France, 1929 (photo: **a-m-a-n-d-a**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The Villa Savoye can be understood as Le Corbusier's refinement of his architectural system, his own personal Parthenon. Its essential geometric volumes embody his concept of the type form, and its careful consideration of procession and proportion connect the building to Classical ideals. At the same time, its clean simplicity and its use of concrete evoke the precisely-calibrated works of engineering so admired by the architect. The Villa Savoye represents Le Corbusier's re-conception of the very nature of architecture, his attempt to express a timeless classicism through the language of architectural modernism.

Additional resources:

Centre des monuments nationaux

Columbia University interactive

Model at The Museum of Modern Art

Fondation Le Corbusier

Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture*, trans. John Goodman (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007).

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SECTION OVERVIEW

8.6.3: Frank Lloyd Wright

8.6.3.1: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City

8.6.3.2: Fallingwater

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8.6.3.1: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City

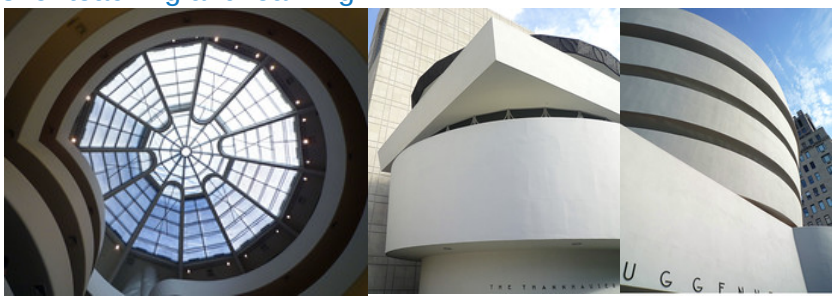
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Video **8.6.3.1.1**: Frank Lloyd Wright, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1942-1959, New York City

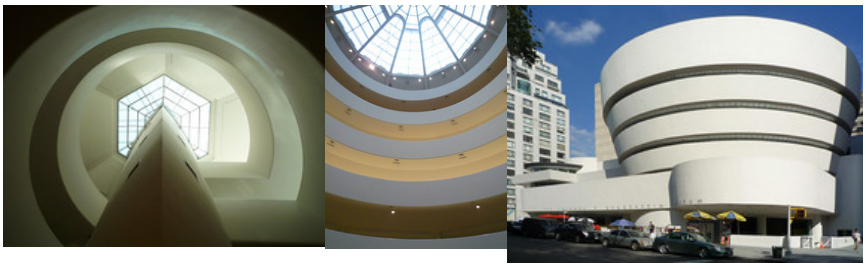
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8.6.3.2: Fallingwater

by CHARLES WIEBE

Page ID
194770



Figure **8.6.3.2.1**: Frank Lloyd Wright, Fallingwater (Edgar J. Kaufmann House), 1935-38, Bear Run, Pennsylvania (photo: Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress #LC-DIG-highsm-04261)

Perched above a mountain cataract on a rocky hillside deep in the rugged forest of Southwestern Pennsylvania, some 90 minutes from Pittsburgh, is America's most famous house. The commission for Fallingwater was a personal milestone for the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, since it clearly marked a turning point in his career. After this late-career triumph, the sixty-seven year old would go on to create a series of highly original designs that would validate his claim as "The world's greatest architect."

"The greatest architect of the nineteenth-century" —Philip Johnson

The mid-1930s were among the darkest years for architecture and architects in American history; the country's financial system had collapsed with the failure of hundreds of banks. Almost no private homes were built. Many of the architectural projects started during the boom of the late 1920s were halted for lack of funds. Now in his sixties, Wright and his new wife Olgivanna were struggling to keep Taliesin, his Wisconsin home and studio, out of foreclosure. Worse still, his peers were beginning to regard Wright as an irrelevant anachronism whose time had passed.

In 1932 Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson opened the "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition" at the newly founded Museum of Modern Art in New York and simultaneously published the book *International Style*. This was, perhaps, the most influential architectural exhibit ever mounted in the United States and the book became a manifesto for modern architecture and would profoundly affect almost every major architectural project worldwide for the next 30 years. It focused on the work of four great "European functionalists" Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and J.J.P. Oud. Wright was largely snubbed.

Hitchcock had praise for his early work, for its "many innovations," but he condemned Wright for a "[l]ack of continuity in his development and his unwillingness to absorb the innovations of his contemporaries and his juniors in Europe." Hitchcock insulted Wright further by characterizing him as "a rebel by temperament… [who] refused even the discipline of his own theories." The catalogue calls Wright a "half-modern" throwback, one of the "last representatives of Romanticism." Wright responded by denigrating European Modernism as an "evil crusade," a manifestation of "totalitarianism."

A fellowship and a commission

The Wrights devised an architectural apprenticeship program that came to be known as the "fellowship." And among the first candidates was Edgar Kaufmann Jr. who became enamored with Wright after reading his biography. Kaufmann was the son of Pittsburgh department store tycoon Edgar Kaufmann Sr.; whose thirteen story downtown Pittsburgh emporium was reported to be the largest in the world. Kaufmann senior was no stranger to architectural pursuits—he was involved in numerous public projects

and built several stores and homes. Kaufmann let Wright know that he had several civic architectural projects in mind for him. He and his wife Liliane were invited to Taliesin and were duly impressed.

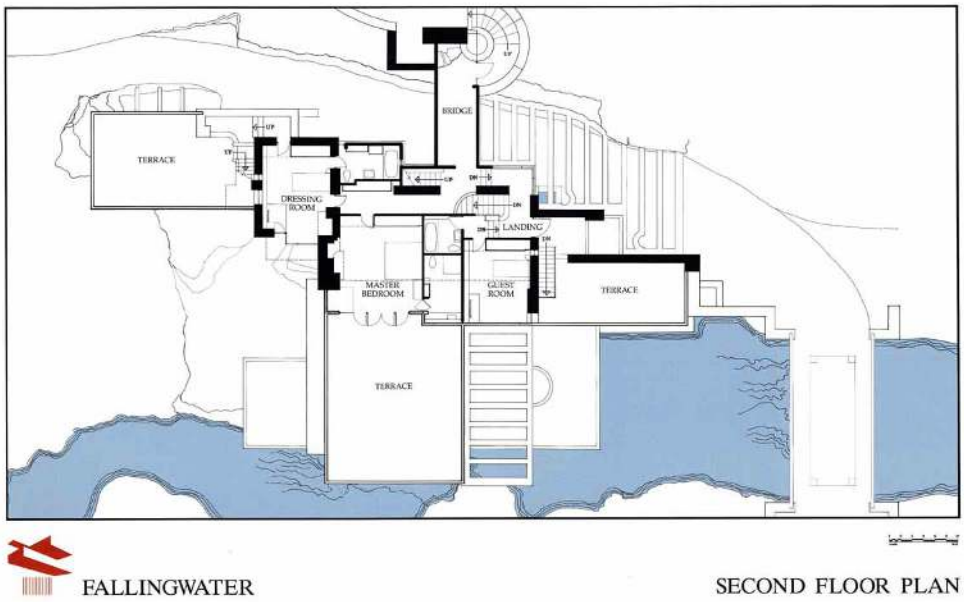


Figure \(\PageIndex{2}\): Fallingwater floorplan (diagram: **Arsenalbubs**, CC0 1.0)



Figure **8.6.3.2.3**: Frank Lloyd Wright, Fallingwater, steps to stream (Edgar J. Kaufmann House), Bear Run, Pennsylvania (photo: **Daderot**, CC0 1.0)

There are varying accounts regarding the circumstances that brought Kaufmann to offer Wright a chance to design a "weekend home" in the country; but we know that Wright made his first trip to the site on Bear Run, Pennsylvania in December, 1934. Wright's apprentice Donald Hoppen has spoken of Wright's "uncanny sense of…*genius loci*"[1] (Latin for "spirit of the place") and from the very beginning, the architect rejected a site that presented a conventional view of the waterfall; instead, he audaciously offered to make the house part of it, stating that the "visit to the waterfall in the woods stays with me and a domicile takes shape in my mind to the music of the stream." The South-southeast orientation gives the illusion that the stream flows, not alongside the house, but through it.

Fastest draw in the Midwest

Perhaps the most famous tale to come out of the lore of Fallingwater is the improbable story that Wright, after receiving the commission procrastinated for nine months until he was forced to draw up the complete plans while his patron was driving the 140 miles from Milwaukee to Taliesin. However, the essential story is validated by several witnesses. Apprentice Edgar Taffel recalled that after talking with Kaufmann on the phone, Wright "briskly emerged from his office…sat down at the table set with the plot

plan and started to draw…The design just poured out of him. 'Liliane and E.J. will have tea on the balcony…they'll cross the bridge to walk in the woods…' Pencils being used up as fast as we could sharpen them….Erasures, overdrawing, modifying. Flipping sheets back and forth. Then, the bold title across the bottom 'Fallingwater.' A house has to have a name."[2] There seems to be agreement that the whole process took about two hours.

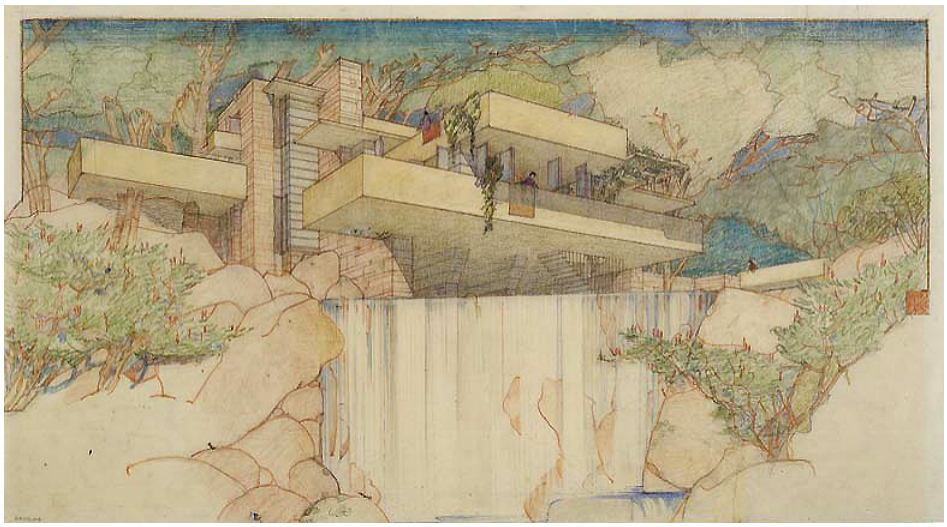


Figure **8.6.3.2.4**: Frank Lloyd Wright, *Fallingwater (Edgar J. Kaufmann House), Mill Run, Pennsylvania*, 1935, Color pencil on tracing paper, 15-3/8 x 27-1/4″ © The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation

Organic architecture

Edgar Kaufmann Jr. pointed out that Wright's famous concept of "Organic Architecture" stems from his Transcendentalist background. The belief that human life is part of nature. Wright even incorporated a rock outcropping that projected above the living room floor into his massive central hearth, further uniting the house with the earth. "Can you say" Wright challenged his apprentices "when your building is complete, that the landscape is more beautiful than it was before?"[3]

In his book, *Fallingwater Rising: Frank Lloyd Wright, E. J. Kaufmann, and America's Most Extraordinary House*, Franklin Toker wrote that,

> ***this delicate synthesis of nature and the built environment probably counts as the main reason why Fallingwater is such a well-loved work. The contouring of the house into cantilevered ledges responds so sympathetically to the rock strata of the stream banks that it does make Bear Run a more wondrous landscape than it had been before.[4]***



Figure **8.6.3.2.5**: Frank Lloyd Wright, Fallingwater (Edgar J. Kaufmann House), Bear Run, Pennsylvania, 1937 (photo: **Lykantrop**)

Wright further emphasizes the connection with nature by liberal use of glass; the house has no walls facing the falls, only a central stone core for the fireplaces and stone columns. This provides elongated vistas leading the eye out to the horizon and the woods. Vincent Scully has pointed out that this reflects “an image of Modern man caught up in constant change and flow, holding on…to whatever seems solid but no longer regarding himself as the center of the world.”[5] The architect’s creative use of “corner turning windows” without mullions causes corners to vanish. Wright even bows to nature by bending a trellis beam to accommodate a pre-existing tree.



Figure **8.6.3.2.6**: Frank Lloyd Wright, Fallingwater, detail with tree (Edgar J. Kaufmann House), 1937 (photo: **Daderot**, CC0 1.0)

Influences

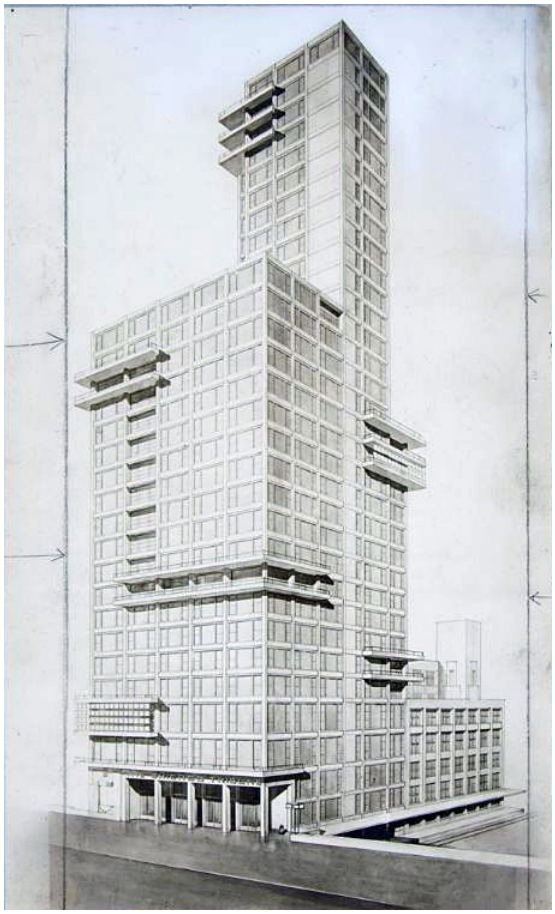


Figure **8.6.3.2.7**: Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer, competition entry for the Chicago Tribune Tower, 1922, perspective drawing, 22.5 x 13.3 cm, gelatin silver print sheet (Harvard Art Museums)

Although he denied it, Wright was influenced by every conceivable architectural style, but Fallingwater owes little to his previous designs (the only exceptions being perhaps the use of irregular stones that are also found on Taliesin and his interest in strong horizontal lines). At Fallingwater, he appears to be more concerned with responding to the European Modernist design that he had in part inspired—but that had since eclipsed him. In effect, he set out to beat the Europeans at their own game, using elements of their idiom. We see, for example, inspiration drawn from the balconies of Gropius' design for the Chicago Tribune Tower competition, though instead of the stark white of the International Style, he paints his balconies a warmer, earthen tone in deference to nature and perhaps the Adobe dwellings of the American Southwest.

Fallingwater falling down?

The Kaufmanns loved Wright's radical proposal to literally suspend the house over the waterfall. But Edgar Kaufmann Sr., ever the pragmatic business man (who had also studied engineering for a year at Yale) prudently sent a copy of Wright's blueprints to his engineer; who found the ground unstable and did not recommend that he proceed with the house. Wright was not happy with his client's lack of faith, but permitted an increase in the number and diameter of the structure's steel reinforcements—Kaufmann agreed to proceed. Its worth noting that the engineer's warnings later proved valid, an issue that "haunted" Wright for the rest of his life.



Figure **8.6.3.2.8**: Frank Lloyd Wright, Frederick C. Robie House, Historic American Buildings Survey, Cervin Robinson, Photographer, 18 August 1963, exterior from southwest, 5757 Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, Cook County, IL, 5 x 7″ (Library of Congress HABS ILL,16-CHIG,33–3)

Wright is famous for pushing the architectural envelope for dramatic effect. We see this is in the vast cantilevered wooden roof of Robie House in Chicago. In Fallingwater he chose ferro-concrete for his cantilevers, this use of reinforced concrete for the long suspended balconies was revolutionary. He boldly extended the balcony of the second floor master bedroom soaring six feet beyond the living room below.



Figure 8.6.3.2.9: Frank Lloyd Wright, Fallingwater, steps to stream (Edgar J. Kaufmann House), Bear Run, Pennsylvania (photo: **Daderot**, CC0 1.0)

However, due to the lack of proper support, cracks began appearing in the balcony floors soon after they were poured. Over the years since, cracks have been repeatedly repaired as the cantilevers continued to sag. By 2001 some of the 15 foot cantilevers had fallen more than 7 inches. To avoid a complete collapse, an ingenious system was devised using tensioned cables to correct the problem and stabilize Wright's masterwork.

Almost from the day of its completion, Fallingwater was celebrated around the world. The house and its architect were featured in major publications including the cover of *Time Magazine*. Over the years its fame has only increased. According to Franklin Toker, Fallingwater's most important contribution to Modern Architecture is surely the "acceptance of Modern architecture itself."

1. Donald W. Hoppen, *The Seven Ages of Frank Lloyd Wright: The Creative Process*, Dover Publications: New York, 1993, page 23.

2. Edgard Tafel, Y*ears with Frank Lloyd Wright: Apprentice to Genius*, Courier Dover Publications, 1979.

3. Hoppen, page 97.

4. Franklin Toker, Fallingwater Rising: Frank Lloyd Wright, E. J. Kaufmann, and America's Most Extraordinary House, Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2003, np.

5. Meryle Secrest, *Frank Lloyd Wright: A Biography*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1992, page 168.

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8.6.4: Gordon Bunshaft for Skidmore Owings and Merrill, Lever House

by DR. MATTHEW A. POSTAL and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
194771



Video **8.6.4.1**: Gordon Bunshaft for Skidmore Owings and Merrill, Lever House, 1951-52, 390 Park Avenue, New York City

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8.6.5: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Seagram Building, New York City

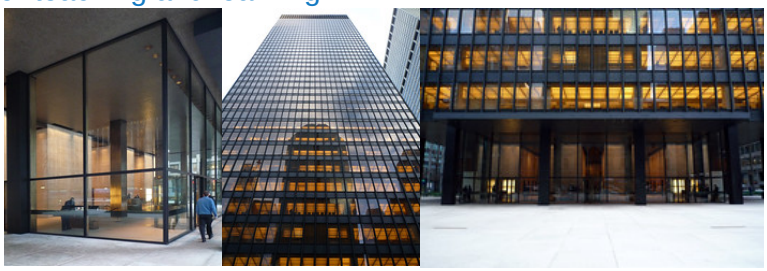
by DR. MATTHEW A. POSTAL and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



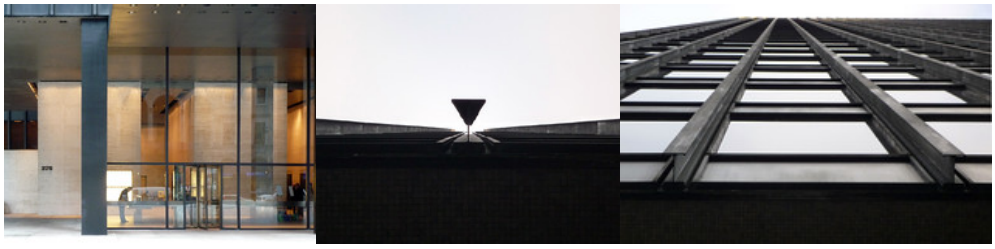
Video **8.6.5.1**: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Seagram Building, 1958, 375 Park Avenue, New York City

Note: In the video we call Le Corbusier a French architect, but he was born in Swizerland and became a French citizen in 1930.

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8.6.6: Negotiating the past in Berlin- the Palast der Republik

by DR. NARAELLE HOHENSEE

Page ID
194773



Figure **8.6.6.1**: Lars Ø Ramberg, "Palast des Zweifels" on the roof of the Palast der Republik, January 26. – May 15. 2005 (photo: **Dr. Naraelle Hohensee**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

On a frigid February day in 2005, an art installation consisting of seven giant, illuminated letters that spelled out the German word *Zweifel* (doubt, in English) appeared on the roof of a monumental modernist building in the center of Berlin called the *Palast der Republik* ("Palace of the Republic"). The building was by then an empty shell, slated for demolition, and the letters—each 8 meters (about 26 feet) high, were big enough to be seen a mile away.

Glowing brightly into the dim Berlin winter night, the massive letters were an embodiment of the doubts that many Berliners had about the future of both the Palast der Republik and their recently-reunited city. The building had been a symbol of the East German government's dictatorial rule and hypocrisy, but despite this association, many felt it was important to preserve the physical traces of the regime's past in Berlin, its former capital. Soon after the Germany's reunification in 1990, the government had quickly decided to demolish the building, but protests and debates over its preservation went on for 13 years before the Palast der Republik was finally erased from the city's historic center. The contention over this site shows how architectural preservation is often about much more than just the building itself—the real issues are often about the memory and identity of the people who create and use them.

Wounded by bombs, destroyed by politics

The Palast der Republik was especially contentious because it stood on the site where Berlin's royal palace, the home of the Prussian monarchs, had formerly existed.



Figure **8.6.6.2**: Waldemar Titzenthaler, The Berliner Schloss, photographed 1903 (**University of Texas at Austin, Department of Germanic Studies**)

This palace (or *Stadtschloss*) had been established in the 15th century and by the 17th century, it had become a splendid baroque palace and an important symbol of the Prussian royalty and its power. The Stadtschloss was damaged by bombs in World War II, but it was still standing when, in 1949, Berlin, and Germany as a whole, were divided up and reconstituted as East and West.



Video **8.6.6.1**: U.S. Air Force footage of central Berlin in July of 1945. The remains of the Stadtschloss can be seen beginning at

0:40. (Source: United States Army Air Forces, public domain)

The postwar division lines meant that the royal palace, as well as the rest of the historic city center, became part of East Berlin, capital of the German Democratic Republic (the official name for East Germany, abbreviated as “the GDR”). This border would later become the path of the Berlin Wall, which was located just a mile west of the royal palace.

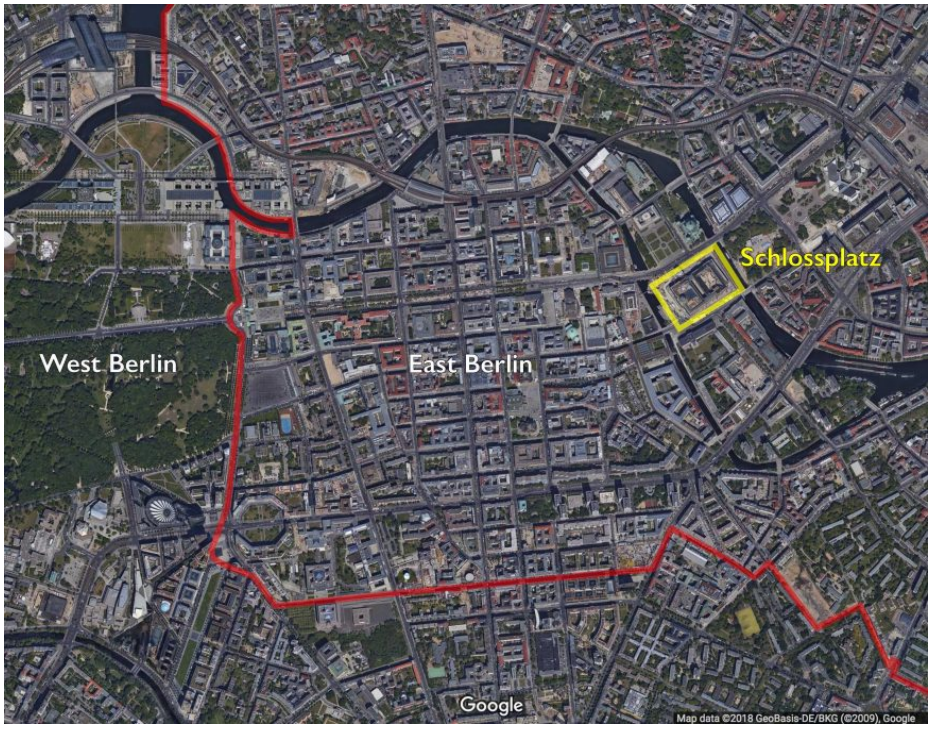


Figure 8.6.6.3: Map of the the historic center of Berlin, showing the path of the Berlin Wall in red, and the location of the Schlossplatz in yellow. (Map © 2018 Google; annotations by Dr. Naraelle Hohensee)



Figure 8.6.6.4: Demolition of the Stadtschloss, September 19, 1950 (photo: **German Federal Archives**)

The communist government of East Germany recognized the importance of the Stadtchloss, but they saw it as a corrupt symbol of monarchical power. Wanting to show their disdain for the Prussian monarchy and its history, they demolished it to make way for a set of monumental modernist buildings organized around a central plaza designed to hold official political events.

However, because of the GDR’s limited budget, the new plan was never entirely realized, and until the early 1970s, the site where the palace had stood remained a barren parking lot where tanks made U-turns during state-sponsored parades.

Erich’s Lamp Shop

In the early 1970s, Erich Honecker became the leader of East Germany. The economy was struggling, and one of his goals was to raise the standard of living for people in the GDR through what he called *Konsumsozialismus* (consumer socialism). East Germans —and especially East Berliners, who could easily pick up TV and radio signals from West Berlin—were painfully aware of the

goods and other amenities available in the West, and Honecker sought to prove that the same level of luxury was available in a communist society.



Figure **8.6.6.5**: Palast der Republik, 1977 (photo: **Istvan**, CC BY 2.0)

It was under his leadership that the massive Palast der Republik was finally constructed on the site of the old royal palace. This new "palace" housed parts of the East German government, with spaces for parliament and party meetings, but it was chiefly a palace of pleasure—with three restaurants, a bowling alley, a movie theater, a concert hall, and numerous shops, all accessible to the public. Though it might seem like a strange combination, the idea of mixing an entertainment and shopping center with governmental meeting rooms was an attempt to show the East German people that the leaders of the GDR were interested in their citizens' everyday welfare and happiness.

The exterior of the Palast der Republik recalls American shopping malls and office buildings from the 1960s. This is because the Palast's designers, a collective of architects led by Heinz Graffunder, were taking their cues from the latest commercial architectural styles in the West. With its warmly-tinged reflective glass surrounded by long strips of white marble, the Palast der Republik combined the approaches of mid-20th-century modernist design (appearing sleek, repetitive, and monolithic, using new materials like tinted glass) with shapes, lines, and masses that recall the former royal palace (which had featured neoclassical columns and sumptuous materials like marble). The glass façade was designed to symbolize governmental transparency—though this was a deeply hypocritical message, since East Germany was, in reality, a repressive police state.



Figure **8.6.6.6**: Bernd Settnik, visitors to the bowling alley in the Palast der Republik on opening day, April, 1976 (photo: **German Federal Archives**)

East Germans were not completely satisfied with the government's attempts to appear more open or to fulfill its people's desire for consumer goods. Most East Germans had, as a matter of survival, learned to effectively manage the stark difference between state ideology and their own private lives. Even though the Palast became a GDR tourist destination, it also quickly acquired cheeky nicknames such as "Ballast der Republik" and "Erich [Honecker]'s Lamp Shop." The Palast came to symbolize the GDR's hypocrisy, but it also presented citizens with opportunities for personal enjoyment—and they made ample use of them.

A doubtful future

By the late 1980s, protests across the Eastern Bloc culminated in the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening of the Berlin Wall in November of 1989. As home to the GDR parliament, the Palast der Republik was the site of the East German government's historic final vote in 1990 to join the Federal Republic of (West) Germany. The reunified federal government immediately found the Palast der Republik to be uninhabitable due to asbestos contamination, and closed the building.

It was clear that the Palast had to be either renovated or replaced. In the early 90s, the center of Berlin was in the midst of a building boom, and the Schlossplatz was prime real estate. Soon, proposals by prominent architects appeared: on the one hand, the original East German architect of the building, Hans Graffunder, proposed the addition of a reconstruction of the Stadtschloss to the existing building; while on the other, a group of wealthy and influential figures from the West began to advocate for the complete demolition of the Palast in order to make way for a full reconstruction of the earlier baroque building. Groups rallied around each of these sides, with protests, campaigns, and debates that reached from the streets to the floor of the German parliament.



Figure **8.6.6.7**: Mockup of the reconstructed Stadtschloss on scaffolding, 1993 (photo: **Friedrich-Karl Mohr**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Just as the GDR had justified its demolition of the Stadtschloss by connecting that building to the monarchy, the advocates of rebuilding the Stadtschloss claimed that the Palast der Republik was ruining the city's historic fabric with its "totalitarian" forms. To illustrate their proposed "healing" of the city, the supporters of the Stadtschloss reconstruction erected canvas on scaffolding that functioned as a *trompe l'oeil*, mimicking the old baroque façade along the edge of the parking lot next to the Palast der Republik, and creating the illusion for passersby that the Prussian palace had actually been rebuilt.

East Berliners had never loved the Palast, but as soon as it was slated for demolition, many started to recognize the building's value as a tangible expression of the nation's fraught history. [1] All over former East Berlin, GDR buildings—the buildings they had grown up with—were being torn down and replaced by shiny new office towers. Why not keep the Palast as a memorial to the city's and country's tumultuous past? Most buildings from the 20th century, including the United Nations complex in New York, were constructed using large amounts of asbestos, and many had been effectively remodeled. Surely the Palast der Republik did not have to go.

A symbol for the reunified capital?

The political battle over whether to tear down the Palast der Republik, and what to build in its place, lasted for more than a decade. The government heard endless debates at both the city and federal level, and multiple councils of experts were designated to make recommendations about what to do with the site. Fundraising and marketing campaigns were launched by those who sought to reconstruct the Baroque palace, and protests were staged by those in favor of safeguarding the East German building. Finally, in 2003, the federal government voted to demolish the Palast and to construct a new version of the Stadtschloss. This new structure was to be named the "Humboldt Forum," and would function as both a museum and public space. The result would be the architectural restoration of the Baroque character of Berlin's historic inner city and an extension of the cluster of museums that already existed just to the north of the palace on "Museum Island"—arguably Berlin's biggest tourist attraction aside from the Berlin Wall.



Figure **8.6.6.8**: The Humboldt Forum, 2018 (photo: **micharl_foto**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

After years of funding delays, construction began on the Humboldt Forum in 2015. Its baroque exterior is a faithful reconstruction of the Prussian palace on three of its sides, with the fourth side featuring a flat, stripped-down design that resembles the office buildings recently constructed elsewhere in Berlin's city center. Inside, enclosed courtyards provide access to the building's various exhibition spaces, which will house objects currently in Berlin's Ethnological Museum and its Museum for Asian Art.

Political and cultural power, it seems, will always be a prominent issue on the site of the Stadtschloss. With the destruction of the Palast der Republik, the site of the royal palace continues its long history as the central showplace for state-sponsored projections of national identity. In November of 2006, official marketing banners appeared outside the partially-demolished Palast der Republik, proclaiming in German and English: "*Eine demokratische Entscheidung* – A democratic decision." The democratic German government did make the choice to tear down the Palast der Republik, but the decision reveals the deep societal rifts that still exist between the former East, where unemployment is high and many people feel underrepresented, and the West, which is still the center of financial and political power. Architecture—even that which is deemed ugly—can be important to the people who have lived with it.

Notes:

1. Advocates included both former East Berliners and people from West Germany and the international community who saw the building as not only being of historic value, but as a potential site for experimental public events.

Additional resources:

Lars Ø Ramberg, description of "Palast des Zweifels"

The Humboldt Forum website

Association for the Berliner Schloss

Berlin city history on Berlin.de

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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8.7.1: Libbey Glass Company, Punch Bowl

by DIANE C. WRIGHT, TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART and DR. BETH HARRIS

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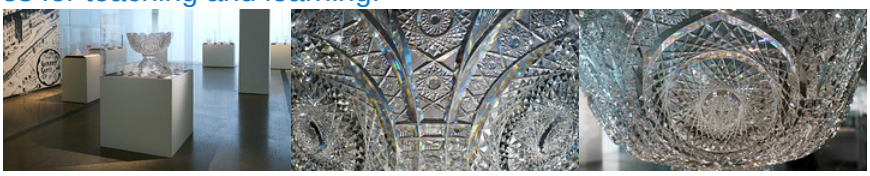


Video 8.7.1.1: Libbey Glass Company, Punch Bowl and stand with 23 cups, 1904, thick colorless glass, 54.6 x 60.6 x 60.6 cm, 134 pounds (Toledo Museum of Art)

Additional resources

This punch bowl in the Toledo Museum of Art

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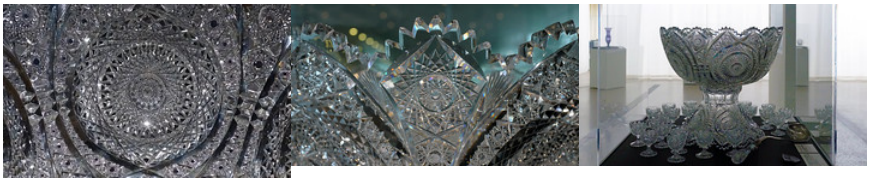
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8.7.2: Connecticut Klan robe

by DR. WILLIAM FRANK MITCHELL, THE AMISTAD CENTER FOR ART & CULTURE AT THE WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **8.7.2.1**: Ku Klux Klan robe, c. 1928 (The Amistad Center for Art & Culture at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford)

Additional resources:

The Amistad Center for Art & Culture at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

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8.7.3: Russel Wright, “American Modern” Pitchers

by DIANNE PIERCE

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Figure **8.7.3.1**: Russel Wright, made by Steubenville Pottery, Steubenville, OH, “American Modern” pitchers, 1939, earthenware

Democratizing design and stimulating the economy

Industrial designer Russel Wright released a line of dinnerware in 1939 that he called “American Modern,” a name that encapsulated much of his design philosophy. Wright was looking to create a distinctively American product that brought fresh, modern design to a wide public, all of which constituted innovative thinking in the 1930s.

Wright was one of a small group of designers, many of whom (like Wright) had started in set design for theater or movies, and were forging the new profession of designing for American industrial production. With the motto “good design is for everyone,” Wright, along with his fellow industrial designers, sought to democratize design by creating inexpensive, mass-produced objects for the American home. As the economy was struggling to recover from the Great Depression in the 1930s, industrial design became more than an aesthetic enterprise, it was also seen as a way to stimulate consumer spending and thereby pull America out of its economic malaise.

Simple shapes, unostentatious materials

Before the dinnerware line, Wright had designed “American Modern” furniture (1935), which was launched in complete display rooms—a novel marketing concept—at Macy’s in New York. In this furniture group’s design, Wright found the formula that was to inform his work from then on. Simple shapes and unostentatious materials, carefully modulated for human use, and straightforward in form: Wright’s work in all media, from the mid-1930s until he closed his office in the mid-1960s, bears this consistent design philosophy.

“American Modern” dinnerware, introduced in 1939, became the best-selling dinnerware line of all time. It quickly made Wright literally a household name, as he, along with his wife/business partner Mary, originated the idea of stamping the designer’s signature into the bottom of each mass-produced piece produced. The success of “American Modern” furniture and dinnerware catapulted Wright to national prominence as a designer, and a multiplicity of commissions followed. In the course of a thirty-year career, Wright designed hundreds of objects including furniture, lamps, glassware, metalware, and textiles for the home, as well as occasional school and outdoor furniture, appliances and other commercial applications. Quaker plainness and pioneer ruggedness distinguish his designs, along with a particularly American delight in the newest materials and their possibilities, such as plastics, the most exciting material in the post-World War II era.



Figure **8.7.3.2**: Russel Wright, “American Modern” furniture line, 1935

American forms

A rootedness in American forms and sensibility was a hallmark of Wright’s work. His use of distinctively American materials like solid rock maple; his straightforward, unadorned forms; and his simple dignity of line recalled American artisans such as the Shakers, Gustav Stickley, and the Greene brothers. The pitcher in the “American Modern” line incorporates these concepts, while its high-arching spout invites comparison to a utilitarian object like a coal scuttle.

Honesty and simplicity were not the only qualities Wright was evoking in his “American Modern” designs. He, along with his fellow industrial designers at the time, such as Charles and Ray Eames, Eero Saarinen, Henry Dreyfuss, and Raymond Loewy, picked up the banner of Modernism that had begun in Europe and transferred it to an American audience. Clean, simple forms and an avoidance of applied extraneous ornament were hallmarks of an ideology that sought to create a wholly new, non-referential, abstracted kind of design for the modern world. In objects like the “American Modern” pitcher, Russel Wright was credited with bringing an approachable Modernism to the American public, who were leery of the spare hard edges they associated with avant-garde European design. This was a synthesis for popular consumption, or as Macy’s phrased it for its buying public, “not quaint Colonial, nor dizzy modern.”

Informality—an American attribute

Not content merely to provide Americans with the kind of objects they should have for the 20th century, Wright and his wife Mary wrote a book in 1950 that verbalized ideas of a new informal lifestyle, one they considered consistent with the national character and with the times. *Guide to Easier Living* showed the country how to live more simply in a post-servant world, to have buffet suppers and design their homes with open kitchen/living/dining rooms, bring the children into the living room, and put their feet on the coffee table. Informality, the Wrights believed, was American, and this distinction from European tradition and decorum appealed to the increasingly urgent desire of Americans to distinguish themselves from the Old World politically, economically, and socially.



Figure **8.7.3.3**: Russel Wright, made by Steubenville Pottery in Steubenville, OH, “American Modern” dinnerware, 1939, earthenware

From oven to table

Tableware like the “American Modern” line allowed buyers to choose their own combinations of colors and types, and it featured the ability to go from oven to table, to reduce dish-washing. Multi-purpose pieces were also part of the line, with handled bowls that could be used for a variety of foods, and the pitcher’s generic form allowed it to be used for all kinds of liquids. In the postwar era, issues such as consumer choice, color variety, mid-point pricing, and practicality were to become important characteristics of the plethora of goods produced for the voracious American middle class.

Russel Wright’s “American Modern” pitcher is emblematic of the innovative designs that spoke to the preoccupations of the country in the pre- and post-war years. This inexpensive, mass-produced earthenware with curving, organic forms and softly-toned glazes was an introduction to the modern world in design and lifestyle for millions of Americans in the mid-twentieth century.

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The Russel Wright Design Center

Russel Wright at the Cooper Hewitt, National Design Museum

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8.7.4: Glass Chair at the 1939 New York World's Fair

by DR. EMILY ORR and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

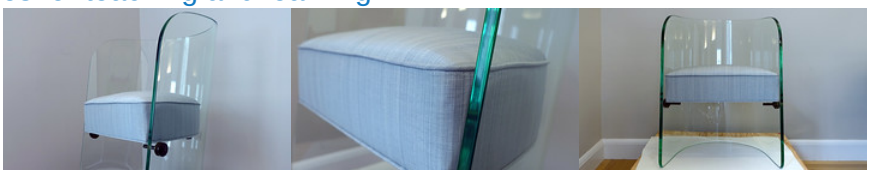
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Video **8.7.4.1**: Chair, c. 1948, attributed to Henry Turchin, design direction by Louis Dierra, manufactured by the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA), slumped plate glass, metal, woven textile (Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York City)

This video was produced in cooperation with the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

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8.8: Indians of Canada Pavilion, Expo 67, Montreal

by MAGDALENA MIŁOSZ

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Figure 8.8.1: Color photograph of the exterior of the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67. The pavilion is in the form of an abstracted tipi, with bright blue steel beams serving as "poles" and white vinyl cladding. Other elements of the pavilion are clad in cedar boards, with artwork hung or painted directly on the surface. A totem pole emerges from behind part of the pavilion and a crowd of visitors is lined up in front. Indians of Canada Pavilion, Expo 67, Montreal, 1967 (Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition)

The 1967 International and Universal Exposition in Montreal, known as Expo 67, served as the centerpiece of Canada's Centennial celebrations. Under the theme "Man and His World," the exhibition dazzled over 50 million visitors with 90 pavilions showcasing feats of technology and displays by 60 participating nations. But the late 1960s was a time of great social change, and not all corners of Expo 67 shared in the fair's prevailing mood of optimism. Whereas most pavilions exhibited laudatory images of nationalism, the "Indians of Canada" Pavilion—which represented diverse First Nations from across the country—employed the critical tone of global independence, decolonization, and civil rights movements of the time. Likewise, the pavilion's fusion of Indigenous and settler-colonial elements—represented by its art and architecture, respectively—demonstrated the ongoing control of the Canadian government alongside the resistance of First Nations.

The "Indians of Canada" Pavilion at Expo 67

At the south end of the exhibition grounds on Île Notre-Dame (an artificial island built using fill from the construction of the city's subway), a 100-foot-tall, six-sided, tipi-like structure rose like a beacon. With "poles" made of steel beams painted bright blue, and white vinyl cladding, the Indians of Canada Pavilion attracted visitors with a modernist interpretation of an instantly recognizable Indigenous architectural form. Although tipis have historically been and continue to be built by Indigenous Peoples of the Plains, they have also been typecast as a pan-Indigenous building type. Likewise, the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67 used the tipi as a key motif to represent First Nations from across the country, although many had other architectural traditions. Inuit and Métis, who along with First Nations constitute the Indigenous Peoples of Canada, were not included in the pavilion. While its iconic exterior flattened the diversity of First Nations into a stereotype that prioritized legibility to non-Indigenous audiences, the artwork

on its exterior and its interior exhibits presented a politically charged critique of Indigenous-state relations that countered the idealism permeating Expo 67.



Figure **8.8.2**: An aerial view of part of the Expo 67 site on the southern end of Île Notre-Dame, Montreal. The Indians of Canada Pavilion is towards the left of the image. The United Nations Pavilion, a short, cylindrical building surrounded by flags is to its left. The Atlantic Provinces Pavilion, a large building with rectilinear forms of different heights, is to its right. The Expo monorail is in the foreground, approaching a curved part of the track leading into the Atlantic Provinces Pavilion. Canals, bridges, and other pavilions are in the background. Indians of Canada Pavilion, 1967 (**Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition**)

The representation of Indigenous Peoples at world's fairs has a fraught colonial history. In the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century, displays of and **performances by** Indigenous Peoples at these events catered to non-Indigenous audiences and served to justify European and North American colonial expansion. At the **World's Columbian Exposition** in 1893, a simulated Kwakwaka'wakw village with performers from British Columbia conveyed anthropologists' notion of Indigenous "authenticity," which they saw as in need of preservation in the face of settler-colonial influence and cultural genocide. At the same exhibition, and somewhat paradoxically, the United States government had constructed a model boarding school for Indigenous children, demonstrating its nation-wide attempts at the cultural assimilation of Indigenous Peoples.

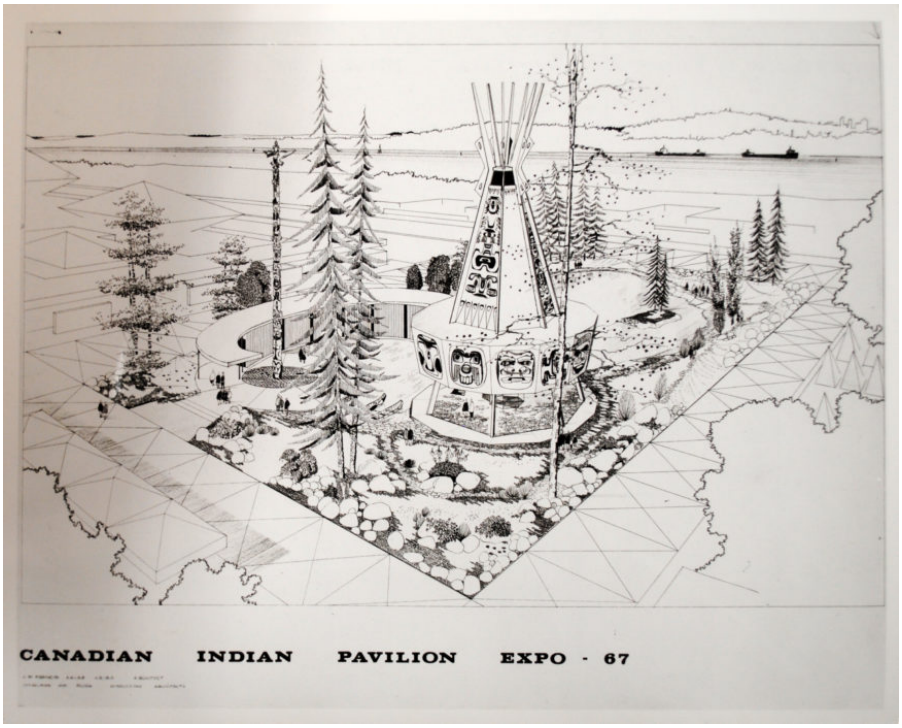


Figure 8.8.3: Unrealized design concept for the Indians of Canada Pavilion. March 1966 (© Government of Canada, reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada, Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition)



Figure 8.8.4: Indians of Canada Pavilion, Expo 67, Montreal, 1967 (Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition)

Expo 67 in Montreal was different from earlier fairs and exhibitions in that First Nations took charge of their own representation on the world stage. Although the architecture in many ways continued a colonial narrative (it was designed by a government architect with minimal Indigenous participation), Indigenous creators assumed ultimate control of the pavilion's message. Artists conceived contemporary works that defied stereotypes and presented a critical—and subversive—narrative of First Nations-state relations. The pavilion can be read as a contact zone between Indigenous and settler-colonial representations, illuminating First Nations' struggles for sovereignty within the context of Canada's celebration of nationhood.

The pavilion sat within a lush landscape, complete with a small lake and forest of trees. The plantings represented various geographical regions and included species of significance for Indigenous Peoples. The building's location between the pavilions of the Atlantic Provinces—part of the Canadian complex—and the United Nations has been interpreted as symbolic of First Nations' ambiguous position both within and outside the Canadian state.



Figure 8.8.5: Aerial view of Indians of Canada Pavilion, Expo 67, Montreal, July 1967 (Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition)

Approaching the pavilion, Expo-goers climbed three steps up to a paved plaza, in the middle of which stood a totem pole. Three geometric, cedar-clad forms linked by ramps swooped up around the open space (noticeable in the aerial photo). These elements were intended to reference other Indigenous architectural forms, but became abstracted during the design process. They led up to a large "drum," atop which the tipi was perched. The drum, another reference to diverse Indigenous traditions, was composed of six hexagonal modules that contained exhibition rooms. The tipi motif, though derivative of an architecture common to the Plains, was used to represent First Nations from across Canada—a move reminiscent of the federal government's categorization of diverse Indigenous Peoples under the single, and now outdated and offensive, label "Indians." The pavilion's architect, Joseph W. Francis, described it as follows:

> ***There will be little need, we hope, for our Pavilion to bear a label or sign to identify itself, for its total impression, including the landscape on which it rests, will be unmistakably Indian, but in a curiously contemporary way. [1] Joseph W. Francis, architect***

Francis was the chief architect of the Federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, whose Indian Affairs Branch was the pavilion's official sponsor. This department had controlled most aspects of First Nations life in the hundred years since Confederation through the Indian Act. From the perspective of Indian Affairs, the pavilion was intended to improve the government's image with regards to its relationship with First Nations. Yet bureaucrats' conception of the pavilion remained entrenched in a long history of colonial control. We can see this in Francis's description of "our" pavilion and his juxtaposition of "Indian" and "contemporary," casting Indigenous Peoples as both wards of the state and part of the past.

The idea of Indigenous representation at Expo 67—and the Centennial celebrations more broadly—originated in 1963 with the National Indian Council of Canada. Governmental bodies, including the Centennial Commission and Indian Affairs, usurped these efforts, in some cases restricting Indigenous participation to consultation on previously approved projects. For the pavilion, an "Indian Advisory Council" was formed to gather input from across the country, but the architectural design was developed with minimal input from these consultations. Instead, the architect used sketches produced by Indigenous artists invited to a seminar in December 1965 to inform the design. Francis's aim was to convey the pavilion's identity without "a label or sign" but directly through the architecture. In taking on this task, however, the architect retained final approval of the design for the government.

Building the pavilion



Figure 8.8.6: The Indians of Canada Pavilion under construction, September 20, 1966 (Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition)

Kanyen'kehà:ka steelworkers from Kahnawá:ke, a community just up the St. Lawrence River from Montreal, have a proud tradition of skilled work on bridges and skyscrapers dating to the nineteenth century. Indian Affairs asked the Dominion Bridge Company to employ these workers on the pavilion's construction site, with the aim of producing media-worthy photo-opportunities. Images of the steelworkers promoted the idea that the pavilion truly belonged to First Nations—they were building it, after all—while masking the extent of the government's control over its realization. At the same time, these images document the steelworkers' genuine contributions to the pavilion, built on a century's worth of community expertise.

Art as resistance

The artistic program of the Indians of Canada Pavilion was a turning point in the history of contemporary Indigenous art and curation. Several of the participating artists used their work to express political dissent, which countered the control the government had attempted to maintain in earlier parts of the pavilion's design process. Although the pavilion was groundbreaking in several respects, it was also characterized by gender inequality, as no contemporary women artists were represented. However, First Nations women famously participated as hostesses and some of the unattributed objects displayed inside the pavilion may have been created by women. The artworks on the grounds and exterior of the pavilion were the totem pole, located in the plaza near the entrance; three exterior murals painted directly on the building's surface; and five circular "panel murals" hung on the bays of the pavilion's drum. Several of the pieces were bound up with artistic practices of resistance.



Figure 8.8.7: Detail of totem pole by Henry and Tony Hunt and tipi in the background at the Indians of Canada Pavilion, 1967 (Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition)

Indian Affairs initially selected Haida artist Bill Reid to complete the totem pole at the pavilion. Reid withdrew from the project because officials wanted a generic pole, not one specific to the Haida Nation, and because of what he viewed as the undignified setting provided by the architect, which he referred to as "Joe Francis' California style roadside diner teepee." [2] George Manuel, a Secwépemc member of the pavilion's Advisory Council, advocated for an open bid process after Reid backed out. Kwakwaka'wakw carvers Henry and Tony Hunt, a father-and-son team, submitted the successful bid. They carved the 21.3-meter-tall pole with Simon Charlie, a Cowichan sculptor trained by the elder Hunt, out of a giant red cedar. The pole is the only element of the pavilion that remains on site today. Painted red, green, and black, with some sections left unpainted, it is composed of six figures.



Figure 8.8.8: Harry Hunt performs the Raven Dance for a crowd of spectators in front of the Indians of Canada Pavilion. Behind the crowd, to the left, is part of the totem pole carved by Henry and Tony Hunt. To the right, hung on part of the pavilion, is Alex Janvier's *The Unpredictable East* (*Beaver Crossing, Indian Colours*), a circular, abstract painting with converging forms in red, yellow, white, blue, and dark blue. Detail of totem pole and Alex Janvier's *The Unpredictable East (Beaver Crossing, Indian Colours)*, 1967 (**Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition**)

From the bottom, these are Numas (a Kwakwaka'wakw hero), tsawi (beaver), makhinukhw (orca with a seal in its mouth), sisiutl (two-headed serpent), gila (grizzly bear and salmon), and gwa'wis (sea crow). Although the pole refers to Kwakwaka'wakw traditions, it differs from most other poles in that it is not specific to one numaym (house or family) but displays the emblems of a number of houses. Reid's early protest thus made space for the Hunts to maintain the cultural integrity of their work as they presented it to a global audience.



Figure 8.8.9: A black-and-white photograph of Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau's mural at the Indians of Canada Pavilion. The mural, painted directly on the vertical cedar boards of the building, depicts the Earth Mother with long, white hair, a head covering, and exposed breasts, along with a child with long black hair, and a white and yellow bear cub. A series of circular forms linked with black lines connects the figures to the ground plane. The "tipi" and totem pole are visible in the background. Norval Morrisseau, *Earth Mother with Her Children*, 1967 (Canadian Centre for Architecture / Gift of May Cutler)

The pavilion featured three prominent murals on its exterior walls. These were *Earth Mother with Her Children*, by Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau; *West Coast*, by Tseshaht artist George Clutesi; and *The Land*, by Anishinaabe artist Francis Kagige. Morrisseau's mural design depicted a figure with long, white hair and exposed breasts, together with a bear cub and human child, in his signature Woodland style. His original concept for the Expo mural had the cub and child nursing at the Earth Mother's breast. However, the work was censored by Indian Affairs because they considered the image too explicit for the intended audience. The design was changed to create more distance between the Earth Mother's breasts and her animal and human children. Morrisseau subsequently left his assistant, Carl Ray, to complete the mural. While he did not abandon the project completely, the artist's absence from the site has been interpreted as a protest against the government's meddling in his artistic expression.



Figure 8.8.10: Alex Janvier's *The Unpredictable East (Beaver Crossing, Indian Colours)* at the Indians of Canada Pavilion, 1967 (Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition)

The exterior artwork also included five circular "panel murals," each nine and a half feet (nearly three meters) in diameter, which were hung on the hexagonal bays that composed the drum at the base of the tipi. The artists of these pieces were Alex Janvier (Denesuline), Noel Wuttunee (Cree), Gerald Tailfeathers (Kainai), Ross Woods (Lakota), Tom Hill (Seneca) and Jean-Marie Gros-Louis (Huron).

Janvier's piece, *The Unpredictable East*, was a striking, abstract composition of flowing forms that converged near the center of the circular frame. The forms, some with outlines and some without, were painted with a limited palette of light and dark blue, red, yellow, and white. Some of the shapes met smoothly, while others touched with jagged lines and right angles. The painting's ironic title was a critique of dictates emanating from Ottawa (Canada's capital) around what was permissible in the art exhibited at the pavilion. The artist signed the painting with his name as well as his treaty number, 287, a practice of political protest that characterized his work at the time. While *The Unpredictable East* first appeared at the front of the pavilion, it was later moved to the rear, and Wuttunee's *The Garden of Indians*, a seemingly less politically charged piece, took its place (visible in the first photo). The latter painting had a similarly limited palette with swathes of flat color, but a more decorative aesthetic that non-Indigenous audiences may have more readily associated with Indigenous art. The piece was symmetrical in four directions with a floral motif at the center, as well as the side profiles of eight faces. In addition to moving Janvier's painting, Indian Affairs compelled the artist to change the title, which became the more innocuous *Beaver Crossing, Indian Colours*.

Inside the pavilion



Figure 8.8.11: Simon Charlie, welcome figure, Indians of Canada Pavilion, 1967 (© Government of Canada, reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition)

The interior of the pavilion presented a linear narrative of Indigenous history, including life prior to European contact, European arrival and settlement, present conditions, and the future. In the naturally lit reception area immediately inside the entrance was a three-meter-tall welcome figure carved by Simon Charlie, accompanied by a wall text that began, "The Indians of Canada bid you welcome." The figure, representing a nude male, received guests to the pavilion with a gesture of outstretched arms.



Figure 8.8.12: Illustration of "Awakening of the People" exhibit, Indians of Canada Pavilion. 1967 (Library and Archives Canada)

From the reception area, visitors went up through the next section, "The Land" which consisted of a narrow, darkened ramp framed by trees and other plants. This section of the exhibit interpreted Indigenous relationships with the land and included a second mural by Morrisseau, which could be seen through the foliage, as well as a reproduction of a Coast Salish moon mask.

Next came "The Awakening of the People" in a bright, five-sided room that spanned the lake below. This section presented Indigenous Peoples' adaptation to their environments with photographs and displays of housing and functional objects such as tools and weapons. A short bridge then led into the main exhibits, housed in the six hexagonal bays that surrounded the base of the tipi.

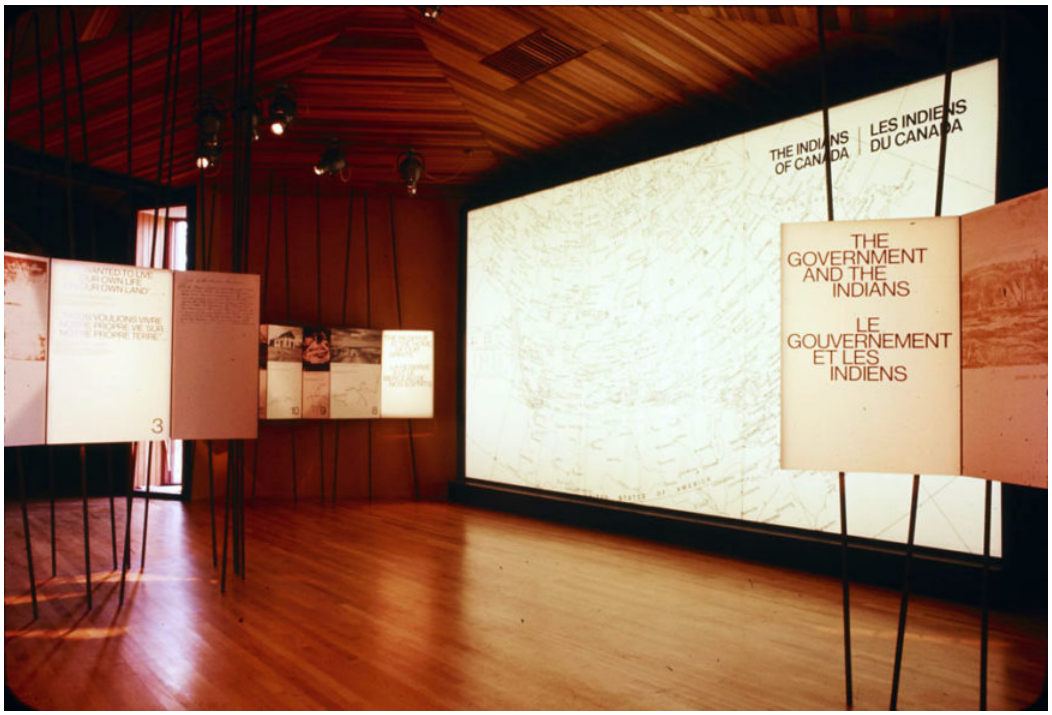


Figure **8.8.13**: The section on "The Government and the Indians," interior of Indians of Canada Pavilion, 1967 (Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition)

These dealt with First Nations life under settler colonialism, including pointed critiques about broken treaties, Christianity, reserves, poverty, and the residential and day school systems.



Figure **8.8.14**: Nathan Monture, *Celestial Bear*, 1.2 meters tall, interior of Indians of Canada Pavilion, 1967 (Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition)

At the center of the exhibit on religion stood Celestial Bear, carved by Delaware artist Nathan Monture. The four-foot-tall (roughly 1.2 meter) bear had an open mouth with a forked tongue, and its body bore various clan symbols. In some photographs, a cross-shaped spotlight can be seen shining on the bear, suggesting the imposition of Christianity upon Indigenous spiritualities. These

exhibits formed some of the most controversial aspects of the pavilion due to their condemnation of the government and settler society more generally. Some visitors were shocked and resistant to the critical messaging, while others appreciated the opportunity to learn about the struggles of First Nations from their perspective. Visitors went through these exhibits in a counter-clockwise direction, then descended a flight of stairs back to ground level, where an artificial fire representing "the future" burned under the ceiling of the tipi, illuminated with skylights.

After Expo

World's fairs are by nature ephemeral. The Indians of Canada Pavilion was designed to be dismantled and rebuilt elsewhere as a community or arts facility. Unfortunately, the site was demolished in 1981. Although it no longer exists, the pavilion remains widely regarded as a prototype for Indigenous curatorial practices, a significant early exhibition of contemporary Indigenous art, and a project that galvanized Indigenous leadership and political activism across the country. It was one of the first opportunities for artists and leaders from diverse communities to come together and present contemporary First Nations art and political issues on the world stage.

Although not free from government interference and gender inequality, the pavilion was a significant moment in Indigenous political activism and artistic production at the end of the 1960s. Considering its architecture, art, and exhibits in tandem, the pavilion represents the tensions and contradictions of First Nations life under settler colonialism as well as the continuity of Indigenous ways of being and knowing, particularly through art practices. As a heterogenous site, the pavilion registered various forms of power and resistance that continue to be relevant today.

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Notes:

[1] Quoted in Ruth B. Phillips and Sherry Brydon, "'Arrow of Truth': The Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67," in Ruth B. Phillips, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), p. 322

[2] Quoted in Richard Gordon Kicksee, "'Scaled Down to Size': Contested Liberal Commonsense and the Negotiation of 'Indian Participation' in the Canadian Centennial Celebrations and Expo '67, 1963–1967," Master's thesis, Queen's University (1995), Appendix B.

Additional resources

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Linda Grussani, and Ruth B. Phillips, "'For We Have Waited a Hundred Thousand Years': The Indians of Canada Pavilion and Indigenous Curatorial Practices," in *Expo 67 and Its World: Staging the Nation in the Crucible of Globalization*, edited by Craig Moyes and Steven Paul Palmer (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022).

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Myra Rutherdale and Jim Miller, "'It's Our Country': First Nations' Participation in the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association, vol.* 17, no. 2 (2006): 148–73

"Totem Kwakiutl," Bureau d'Art Publique – Ville de Montréal, n.d.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

8.9: Late Modernism/Post-Modernism

As the International Style spread across the globe, architects looked to break free of the "glass box."

c. 1960 - present

8.9.1: Running in sneakers, the Judson Dance Theater

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8.9.1: Running in sneakers, the Judson Dance Theater

by JACK CRAWFORD

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194781



Figure **8.9.1.1**:

Yvonne Rainer, *We Shall Run*, 1963 performed March 7, 1965 at the Wadsworth Atheneum (photo: Peter Moore, © Barbara Moore); left to right: Robert Rauschenberg (obscured), Sally Gross, Joseph Schlichter (obscured), Tony Holder, Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, Alex Hay, Robert Morris (obscured), and Lucinda Childs



Figure **8.9.1.2**:

Robert Morris, “A Concert of Dance Nos. 14, 15, 16,” Judson Memorial Church, 1964, offset on paper (Getty Research Institute, © Robert Morris)

We Shall Run

Twelve performers stand still onstage. A minute passes, then another. You sit there watching, waiting for the dancing to begin. After what feels like an interminable period of stillness, the performers take off at a brisk jog. They form packs, crisscross the stage, peel off, and then rejoin the group. You make out the sound of sneakers squeaking on the floor under the booming, dramatic climax of

Hector Berlioz's *Requiem* played on the loudspeaker. If there is a pattern here, it evades you. But you watch as the joggers, like synchronized swimmers, merge, swerve, and break off from the group. Occasionally, you will zero in on a single performer. One woman jogs assuredly, her straight spine and intense gaze hint at her dance background. Meanwhile, another performer is getting visibly tired; they have been running for a while. This brisk jogging is the centerpiece of Yvonne Rainer's *We Shall Run* (1963), the opening piece of the Judson Dance Theater's "A Concert of Dance #3."

The group was so-named for their primary performance space located across the street from Washington Square Park in the historically progressive Judson Memorial Church. Here, the Judson Dance Theater redefined dance as movement and formed a link between the worlds of visual art, music, theater, and film beginning in the early 1960s.



Figure 8.9.1.3:

Stanford White, Judson Memorial Church, 1888–96 (photo: Rachel Moore, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

What is post-modern dance?

The choreographers and performers associated with Judson participated in a series of concerts and workshops between 1962 and 1964 and defined the criteria for what is typically called post-modern dance. Post-modern dance, like postmodernism in architecture or visual art, refers to a period of avant-garde activity responding to, and reacting against, the orthodoxies of modernism. This means that in order to understand post-modern dance, we must turn briefly to modern dance.



Figure 8.9.1.4:

Isadora Duncan, Long Beach, California, 1917 (photo: Arnold Genthe)

The earlier generations associated with modern dance (Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and others) had moved away from ballet, or classical dance, and its precise, disciplined vocabulary towards an understanding of dance as authentic, spiritual expression. By the 1960s, however, this expressive version of dance no longer seemed relevant. The Judson Dance Theater emerged as a group of artists seeking to challenge the status quo and re-imagine avant-garde dance for a new generation. In the place of the spiritual and psychological, they celebrated improvisation, the unidealized physical body, and everyday movements.



Figure 8.9.1.5:

Promotional photo for dance performance at Judson Memorial Church, 1967, James Waring (top), Charles Stanley (with beard), Peter Hartman, and Deborah Lee (photo: © James Gossage, The New York Public Library)

The Judson Dance Theater began with a series of composition workshops led by Robert Dunn in Merce Cunningham's studio space at 530 Sixth Avenue in Manhattan (Merce Cunningham was one of the leading avant-garde choreographers of the 20th century). Many of the Judson Dance Theater participants were members of the Cunningham Company. Through these workshops, Dunn translated and tested the relevance of composer John Cage's use of chance but in a choreographic context.

Cage innovated the use of chance in musical composition in the United States. Unlike the Surrealist automatic drawing or other versions of chance *composition*, Cage's version of chance, termed indeterminacy, involves carefully scored compositions that invited chance to impact performance in unexpected ways. Cage used indeterminacy to disrupt the artist's control over musical performance and to re-imagine noise as music. In the Dunn workshops, indeterminacy and ambient noise was translated into improvised and everyday movement.

Cage, via Dunn, was one of the three primary influences for the Judson group. Many of the workshop participants had also studied with the postmodern dance pioneer, Anna Halprin on the West Coast. Halprin's teaching emphasized the physicality of the body and improvisation. A number of the choreographers who attended the Dunn workshops also studied and danced with James Waring, whose interdisciplinary approach to composition synthesized movement drawn from classical, modern, and even popular dance (just as a visual artist might gather found images together in a collage). Drawing on these influences, the Judson choreographers explored methods like improvisation and choreographic scoring techniques that, like Dada collage, privileged chance.

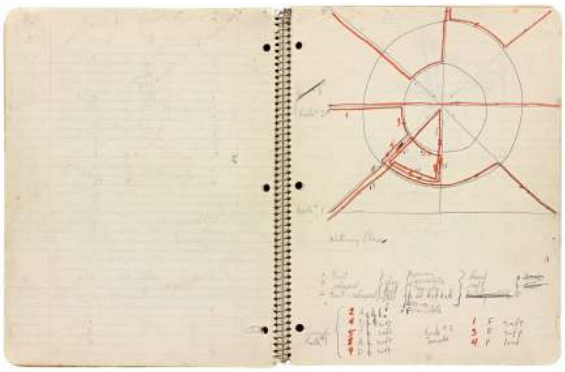


Figure **8.9.1.6**:

Yvonne Rainer, Notebook, 1960–62, ink on paper (The Getty Research Institute, © Yvonne Rainer)

Judson and Minimalism

Yvonne Rainer wrote simple instructions for making Minimalist work which she titled "A Quasi-Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A." Want to make a Minimalist object? Follow the chart and simply substitute "illusionism" for what she calls "literalness." Are you making a dance? Replace the narrative arc of "development and climax" with "repetition." Minimalist artists often used repetition to create logic and structure within a work of art.

Minimalism was also called "Primary Structures" and "ABC art" in its earlier years because it was so matter-of-fact. Minimalism sought to present forms in space that were simply expressive of themselves without reliance on any external reference or meaning. This art wasn't meant to draw on literary references or cultural symbolism. Its own internal logic was enough.

In the Robert Morris sculpture, *Untitled L-Beams*, each of the three L-beams are identical, repeating the same form in space though at such differing angles they make us doubt their uniformity. Like Morris, Rainer offers a simple enough formula, but her document's verbose title renders the purported procedure tongue-in-cheek. Rainer has a sense of humor. As the booming Berlioz sound track for the somewhat comic *We Shall Run*, assures us, there is room for both grandeur and levity in post-modern dance.



Figure 8.9.1.7:

Robert Morris inside *Box for Standing*, 1961 (photo: © Grant Delin)

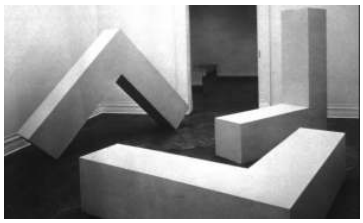


Figure 8.9.1.8:

Robert Morris, *Untitled (L-Beams)*, 1965, originally plywood, later versions made in fiberglass and stainless steel, 8 x 8 x 2′

Rainer's "Quasi-Survey," points to the strong relationship between Minimalism in the visual arts and the choreography coming out of Judson. Like the Minimalist sculptors, the Judson group avoided psychological depth, narrative convention, and illusionism in favor of Minimalism's interest in literal presence. Sculptor **Robert Morris** first began to make the simple geometric forms that he became for known for, as props for the dances created by his partner Simone Forti.

Through the influence of Forti and Rainer and his attendance of the Halprin and Dunn workshops, Morris developed his reduced geometric vocabulary as a part of his dance-based explorations of the physicality and the dimensional form of the human body.

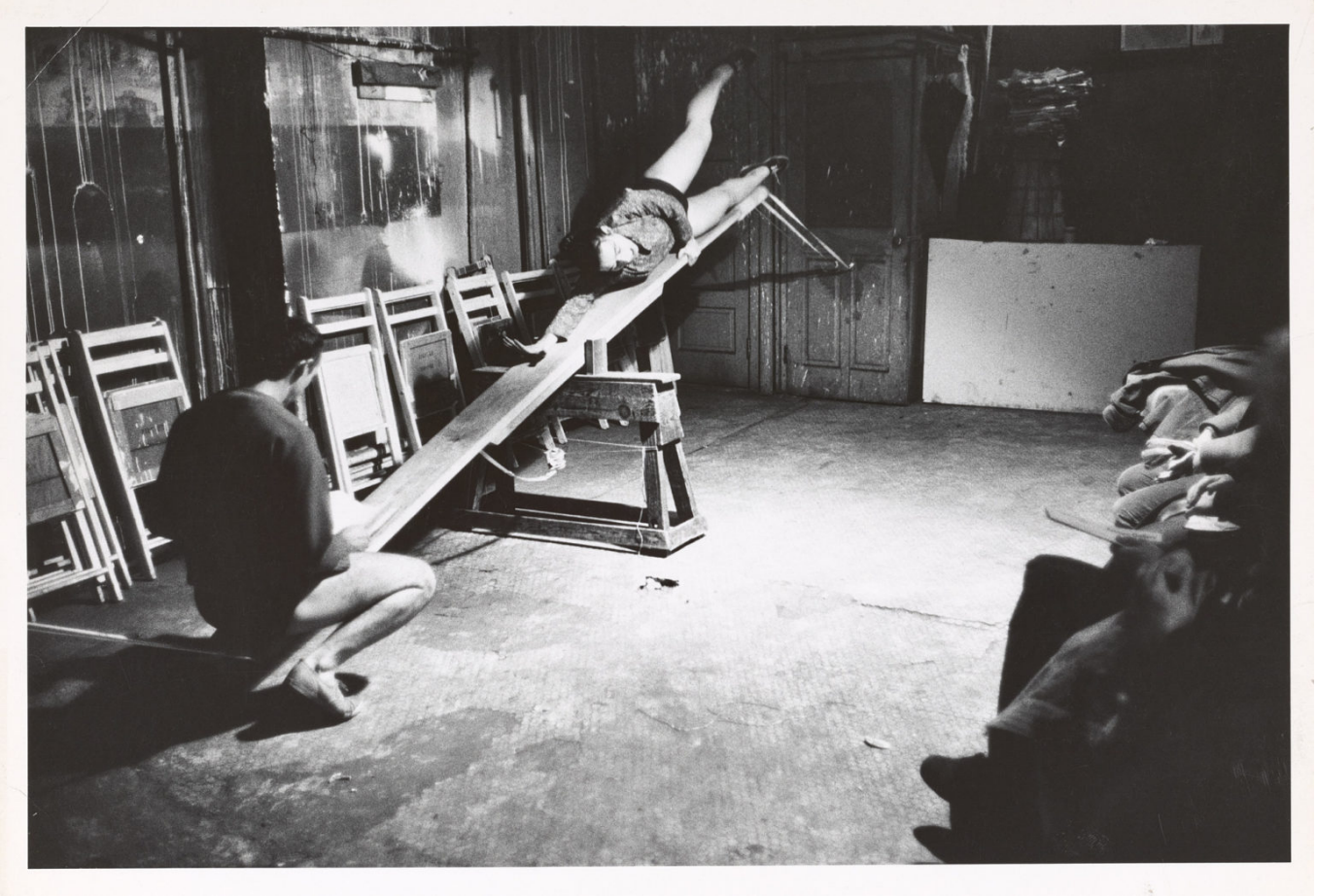


Figure 8.9.1.9:

Simone Forti, “See Saw” 1960 with Yvonne Rainer and Robert Morris (photo: © Robert R. McElroy, Getty Research Institute)

Just as the investigation of objects in space propelled Morris’s early Minimalist installations, similarly, other Judson performers were propelled by the analytic investigation of movement. As Rainer’s flair for grandeur suggests, the Judson group was not all about reductive Minimalism. Rather, the members of the Judson Dance Theater fall loosely into three camps: reductive, theatrical, and multimedia. The theatrical strand of the Judson project is best represented by the work of two other dancers, David Gordon and Fred Herko.

Judson in Greenwich Village

More than a series of concerts and workshops, the Judson Dance Theater was a dense web of individuals, social interactions, and interdisciplinary collaborations that touched many of the most influential facets of artistic activity in 1960s Greenwich Village. Just as Judson members danced with Merce Cunningham, acted in productions by the American Poets Theater, and starred in Warhol films, so they called on poets, artists, and musicians to collaborate in their concerts of dance.

Greenwich Village in the early sixties was animated by a deeply shared sense of the potential of avant-garde innovation and efforts to erase boundaries between disciplines. In this milieu, artists like Morris or Rauschenberg could become not just sculptors and painters but performers, choreographers, and filmmakers. The experimental spirit of the concerts at Judson Memorial Church offered sites for interdisciplinary collaboration. As one of his contributions to the first Concert of Dance, Judson choreographer Fred Herko collaborated with legendary jazz musician Cecil Taylor; the two simultaneously improvised, riffing on each other in their chosen media.

The Judson Dance Theater was a collaborative, interdisciplinary constellation of workshops, concerts, and individuals that radically expanded our understanding of what dance could be. Dance, the Judson work argues, is not only a ballerina’s *grand jetés* and *fouetté* turns or Martha Graham’s angst-ridden contractions but also, running in sneakers.

Additional resources:

Judson Dance Theater: The Work is Never Done. New York: MoMA, 2018

Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962 – 1964 (*Durham: Duke University Press, 1993)

Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces (*London and New York: Routledge, 2006)

Merce Cunningham Trust

John Cage Trust

Anna Halprin website



Video **8.9.1.1**: Judson Dance Theater: The work is never done

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8.9.2: The Berlin Wall as a political symbol

by DR. NARAELLE HOHENSEE

Page ID
194782



Figure **8.9.2.1**: President Reagan giving a speech at the Berlin Wall, June 12, 1987 (photo: **Reagan White House Photographs**, CC0)

> ***"Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"***
>
> ***— U.S. President Ronald Reagan***

When Ronald Reagan addressed these words to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in June of 1987, few believed that just two years later the Berlin Wall would actually be dismantled. It seemed like a permanent fixture, symbolizing the irreparable divide between the Cold War powers. But by 1990, all but a few traces of the wall were gone.



Figure 8.9.2.2: Map of post-WWII Germany divided between the Allied Powers (adapted by Dr. Naraelle Hohensee from WikiNight2, GNU Free Documentation License)

Dividing a nation and a city

After Germany's defeat in World War II, the Allied Powers each took control of a section of the country. By 1949, two Germanys emerged from this occupation. The Federal Republic of Germany (commonly known as West Germany) was an independent, democratic nation formed out of the British, French, and American zones. The German Democratic Republic (or GDR, commonly known as East Germany), was a socialist state under the leadership of the Soviet Union.

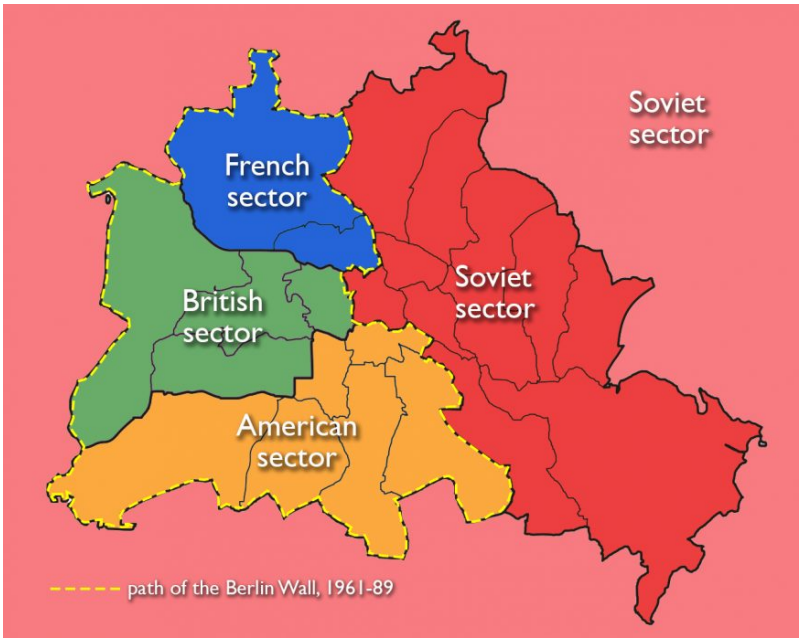


Figure 8.9.2.3: Map of the four post-WWII sectors of Berlin and the future path of the Berlin Wall (map adapted by Dr. Naraelle Hohensee from Paasikivi, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Berlin lay deep within what became East Germany, but as the former capital of Hitler's empire, it received special treatment. The city itself was divided between the four Allied powers after the war, and so it, too, was divided into two parts once East and West

Germany were created. East Berlin remained the capital of the GDR, while a new West German capital was established far to the west, in Bonn. West Berlin, formed from the British, French, and American sectors of the city, effectively became a tiny West German outpost in the midst of East Germany.

It may be surprising to learn that during the first decade after the country's division, the border between East and West Berlin remained completely open. Aside from using different currencies, East and West Berlin were relatively indistinguishable—city trams still ran between the two halves, and people could visit friends and relatives on the other side of the city.



Figure **8.9.2.4**: Traffic between West and East Berlin passes through the Brandenburg Gate, 1959 (photo: **German Federal Archives**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Outside of Berlin, though, the differences between the two countries were becoming increasingly stark. West Germany experienced an "economic miracle" or "*Wirtschaftswunder*" thanks to subsidies from the Western powers, while East Germany struggled economically. Over the course of the 1950s, several million people chose to leave for West Germany to seek jobs and a better quality of life. In response, the East German government—afraid of losing its labor force, but also ashamed of the increasing tide of emigration—imposed continuously stricter limits on travel.

As leaving East Germany became increasingly difficult, West Berlin, with its open internal border to East Berlin, remained one of the only exit routes for those who wished to emigrate. It also operated as a "show-window for the West" (that is, a beacon of Western consumerism and liberal democracy placed prominently alongside the capital of communist East Germany). Most importantly, Berlin was a major site of political confrontation between the United States and Soviet Union, whose leaders were threatening one another with nuclear war. The city became a heated microcosm of Cold War politics.



Figure 8.9.2.5: The border that would become the Berlin Wall, constructed with barbed wire, in August, 1961 (photo: Helmut J. Wolf, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Constructed overnight

On the morning of August 13, 1961, Berliners awoke to find that overnight, soldiers had used barbed wire to completely close the border between the two halves of the city—catching almost everyone by surprise. No warning had been given: trams stopped in their tracks, people headed to shop or visit friends on the other side of the city were turned back, and deadly force was employed to keep people from crossing. Over the next 25 years, the GDR fortified this border by erecting a series of solid walls and barbed-wire barriers, as well as a "death strip" of cleared land with tripwires and mines, all to prevent people from escaping. Over the next four decades, more than 140 people were killed in connection with the Berlin Wall.



Figure 8.9.2.6: Looking into West Berlin over the Berlin Wall, 1987 (photo: Gerd Danigel, CC BY-SA 3.0)

The Berlin Wall not only prevented people from moving across the city—it also fundamentally changed how the two halves of the city functioned. Systems like water, electricity, sewer, and public transportation had to be separated. [1] Because the Berlin Wall went through the center of the city, urban development on each side began to focus elsewhere. What had been the city's glittering, historic baroque city center was now located on the western outskirts of East Berlin, along the wall. It became virtually a forgotten wasteland, as new centers sprang up to the east and west.



Figure 8.9.2.7: The sign at Checkpoint Charlie announcing the border between the American and Soviet sectors (East and West Berlin), now preserved as a memorial (photo: Henry Robbert, CC0)

A political symbol

Over time, particular points along the Berlin Wall became well-known symbols of the division. Checkpoint Charlie, a border crossing between the former American and Soviet regions of the city, was famous for its sign that boldly stated, "You are leaving the American sector." The section of wall in front of the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin's monumental baroque triumphal arch, was also often photographed. Potsdamer Platz, which had been a busy commercial center during the Weimar years but was left barren and desolate after heavy bombing in World War II, was one of the largest open areas next to the Berlin Wall. The viewing platform that was installed there on the western side became a popular destination for tourists.



Figure 8.9.2.8: Left: the viewing platform on the West Berlin side of Potsdamer Platz, 1977, with a billboard displaying a photo of the site in 1929 (photo: **BeenAroundAWhile**, CC BY-SA 3.0); right: the view over the Berlin Wall, with West Berlin tourists in the foreground, 1986 (photo: **Nancy Wong**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

These often-photographed sites functioned as both objects of curiosity for Westerners, and symbols of the cruelty and repression imposed by the GDR and the Soviet Union. Their nearness to democratic West Berlin brought the Cold War conflict home: as opposed to wars happening "elsewhere" (such as the proxy wars that the United States and USSR were fighting in Vietnam and Afghanistan), this one was taking place on the doorstep of Western Europe.

The Berlin Wall also became a potent symbol through the art that appeared on its western side. As a political outpost, West Berlin became a place that many social radicals and artists called home. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the East German government replaced the hodge-podge of barriers that had been constructed over the years with a single, more defensible, 12-foot-high wall. The western side of this new enclosure provided the perfect surface for graffiti, and street artists from around the world flocked to Berlin to make their mark on it.



Figure 8.9.2.9: Thierry Noir murals, left: Berlin Wall, 1985 (photo: **Thierry Noir**, CC BY-SA 3.0); right: section of the Berlin Wall displayed in New York City (photo: **Ronny-Bonny**, CC BY 3.0)

Thierry Noir is one of the best-known artists to have painted the Berlin Wall in the 1980s. Today he continues to produce murals in his signature style, often featuring cartoonish, elongated heads with enlarged lips, on the remaining pieces of the Wall and elsewhere. Well-known international artists like Keith Haring also created murals on the Berlin Wall during this time.

Graffiti on the Berlin Wall was only visible to those on the West Berlin side. In East Germany, it was officially called an "*Antifaschistischer Schutzwall*," or "anti-fascist protection barrier." Despite the fact that those who tried to cross this border were killed or imprisoned and tortured, GDR propaganda claimed that the Berlin Wall was not a way to keep East Germans in, but a way to keep the forces of fascism out. Because even approaching the wall was dangerous, most East Berliners chose to ignore its existence in their daily lives.



Figure **8.9.2.10**: People atop the Berlin Wall near the Brandenburg Gate on 9 November 1989. The text on the sign "*Achtung! Sie verlassen jetzt West-Berlin*" ("Attention! You are now leaving West Berlin") has been modified with the additional handwritten "*Wie denn?*" ("How?") (photo: **Sue Ream**, CC BY 3.0)

The fall of the wall

Throughout the 1980s, the Soviet Union gradually loosened many of its policies as well as its control over the countries behind the Iron Curtain. By 1989, Hungary (also a Soviet satellite state, like East Germany) had opened its border, allowing a path for thousands of East Germans to leave for the West. Protests against the Communist government began to take place throughout East Germany. Finally, on November 9th, officials rather abruptly announced that the border between East and West was open—effective immediately.



Figure 8.9.2.10: East Germans drive through Checkpoint Charlie after the fall of the Berlin Wall, 1989 (photo: **Staff Sergeant F. Lee Cockran**, CC0)

The news was broadcast across Germany and the world, and with a combination of euphoria and bewilderment, East Berliners streamed through the checkpoints, greeted by jubilant West Berliners. Soon, people began hacking away at the wall, and its "fall" became yet another Cold War symbol: this time of the fall of the Iron Curtain.



Figure 8.9.2.11: "*Mauerspechte*" chip off pieces of the Berlin Wall, December 1989 (photo: **Aad van der Drift**, CC BY 2.0)

Within a year, most of the Berlin Wall had been dismantled and sold—either unofficially, by "*Mauerspechte*" ("wall-peckers"), who chipped off pieces as souvenirs, or by the bulldozers and cranes of the East German government. The two halves of the nation and its capital city were legally reunified the following year, on October 3, 1990. [2]



Figure 8.9.2.12: A double row of cobblestones now marks the former route of the Berlin Wall in front of the Brandenburg Gate (photo: **Wici**, CC0)

Where is the Berlin Wall?

Thirty years after its fall, the Berlin Wall is still the landmark most visitors look for when they come to Berlin. Most of the barrier has been erased from the urban landscape, but a few remaining sites pay tribute to its existence. The city of Berlin installed a line of double cobblestones in the ground to mark the wall's former route.

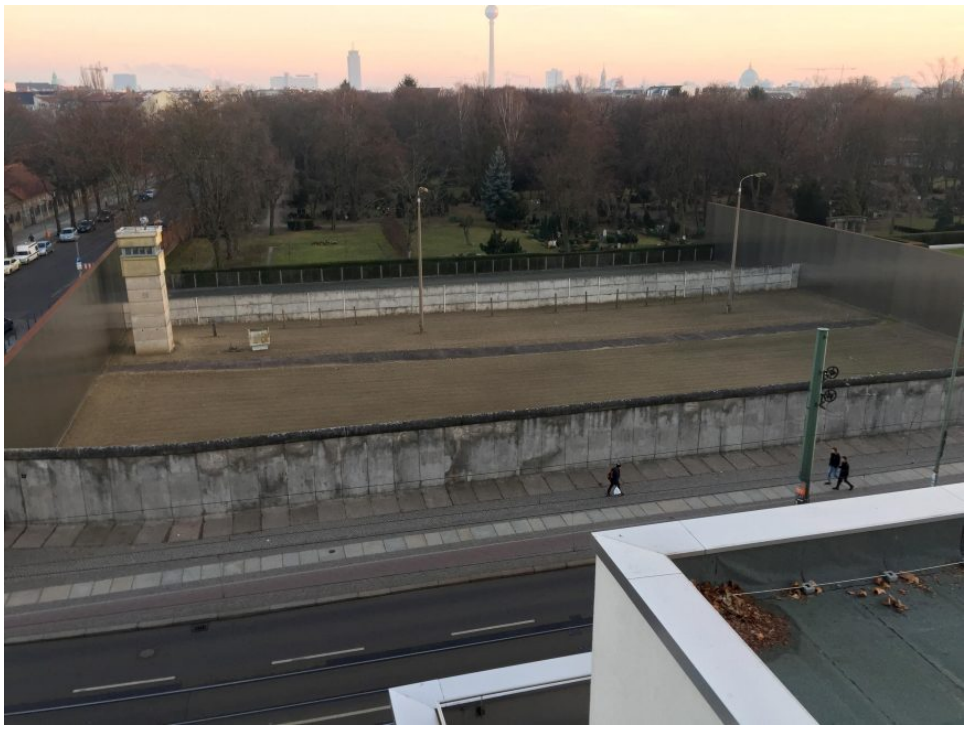


Figure 8.9.2.13: A preserved Berlin Wall border strip at the Berlin Wall Memorial on Bernauer Straße, Berlin, photographed from the viewing tower in the memorial documentation center (photo: **Domaine public**, CC0)

Informational boards and memorial markers have been installed throughout the city center to explain the history of the wall and honor those who died trying to cross it. Just north of the city center, one strip of the border system has been carefully preserved, including a guard tower and a "death strip," accompanied by a small museum and information center.



Figure **8.9.2.14**: East Side Gallery, Berlin (photo: **Freepenguin**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

By far the most visible and most frequently visited piece of the wall in Berlin today is the East Side Gallery, a long strip of the wall covered in murals. Located at the end of the former East Berlin neighborhood of Friedrichshain, it stretches along the Spree River for over 1.3 km (0.8 miles). It was painted by a collaborative of international artists in 1990 on its eastern side (hence the name "East Side Gallery") shortly after the opening of the border. (Painting on this side would not have been allowed when the GDR existed.) This section of the Berlin Wall was landmarked in 1991, though vandalism and development have had an impact. [3]



Figure **8.9.2.15**: Dmiti Vrubel, *Mein Gott, hilf mir, diese tödliche Liebe zu überleben (My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love)*, original created 1990, East Side Gallery, Berlin (photo: **Pelorucho**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Several of the East Side murals (there are currently 101) have become especially famous. *My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love* by Russian artist Dmitri Vrubel is based on a photograph of USSR and GDR leaders Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker kissing each other on the lips. The mural at first shocks many viewers with its large-scale portrayal of two older men locked in a seemingly romantic embrace. This "fraternal kiss" had taken place in 1979, on the 30th anniversary of the GDR. The image alludes directly to the political intimacy between East Germany and the Soviet Union, while the title of the painting, appearing above and below the figures in Russian and German, adds a critical or satirical tone to the piece: who is hoping to "survive," and why is this love "deadly"? One might surmise that the words are the voice of East Germany, for whom a relationship with the Soviet Union was ultimately both politically and economically destructive.



Figure 8.9.2.16: Birgit Kinder, *Test the Best*, 2009 version (detail), originally created 1990, East Side Gallery, Berlin (photo: **Lorena a.k.a. Loretahur**, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Another famous East Side Gallery mural is Birgit Kinder's *Test the Best*, which depicts an East German Trabant (virtually the only brand of car available in the GDR) breaking through the Berlin Wall. Kinder painted a companion mural depicting the back of the car on another section of the Wall, which is now preserved in the State Ministry for the Environment.

Perhaps the most lasting, and problematic, legacy of the Berlin Wall is not physical at all, however. It is the so-called "Wall in the Head" that still separates former East Germans ("*Ossis*") from West Germans ("*Wessis*"). The former East is still plagued by high unemployment and poverty today. Though Berlin has been put back together, the ongoing social and economic division between the two halves of the country has yet to be healed, and the Berlin Wall remains an important symbol for both the history and future of the nation, Europe, and the world.

Notes:

1. The two cities had been gradually separating their systems of governance as well as services (like police departments) and infrastructure (phone lines and transportation) since the end of the war, but the construction of the Wall in 1961 required that this process be swiftly and thoroughly completed.
2. After East and West Germany reunited, it was still not clear whether the capital of the nation would be located in Bonn or Berlin. The parliament voted to locate the new capital in Berlin in 1991.
3. The artists of the murals that make up the East Side Gallery have had to make numerous requests for additional funds from the city to clean and restore the murals because of frequent vandalism, and nearby development has resulted in the demolition of a few parts of the wall.

Additional resources:

The Berlin Wall Memorial

Information on the Berlin Wall and its memorials from the city of Berlin

Keith Haring's mural on the Berlin Wall

Thierry Noir's account of painting the Berlin Wall

Photographs of the Berlin Wall in the 1980s by Edward Murray

Website of the East Side Gallery

Website of Birgit Kinder

An overview of Berlin history from Berlin.de

Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014)

Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin* (University of Chicago Press, 1998)

Janet Ward, *Post-Wall Berlin: Borders, Space and Identity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

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- **10.17: Architecture and design** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

8.9.3: Breuer, The Whitney Museum of American Art (then The Met Breuer, and now the Frick Madison)

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. NARAELLE HOHENSEE

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194783



Video 8.9.3.1: Marcel Breuer, The Whitney Museum of American Art (now The Met Breuer), 1963-66, Madison Avenue at East 75th Street, New York City

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8.9.4: Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial

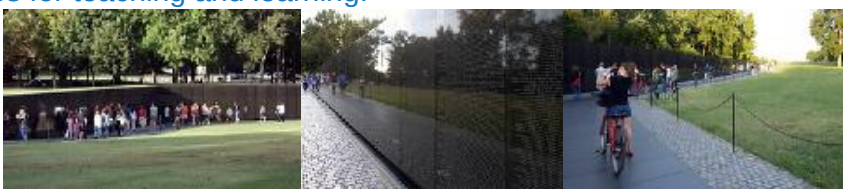
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Video **8.9.4.1**: Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, 1982, granite, 2 acres within Constitution Gardens, (National Mall, Washington, D.C.)

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8.9.5: Robert Venturi, House in New Castle County, Delaware

by DR. MATTHEW A. POSTAL

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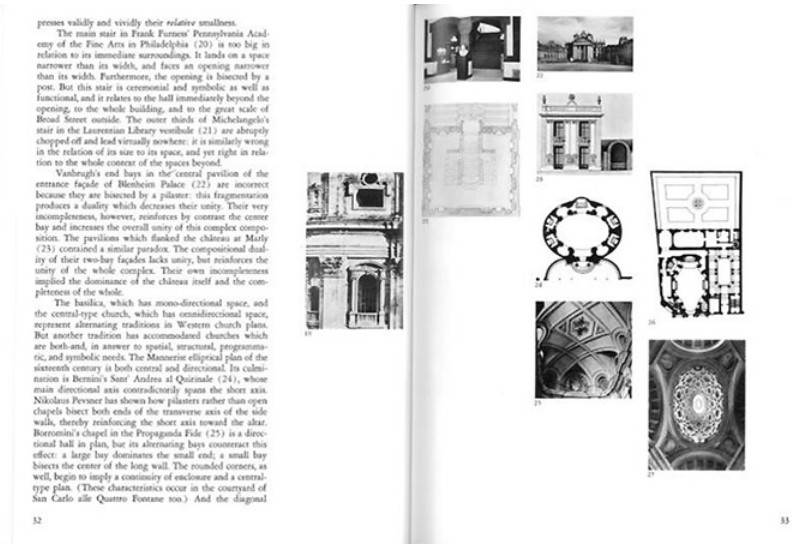


Figure 8.9.5.1: Robert Venturi, John Rauch, and Denise Scott Brown, House in New Castle County, Delaware, 1978-83 (photo: © Venturi, Scott Brown Collection/The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania/Detail of photo by Matt Wargo)

That Post-Modern moment

Robert Venturi's New Castle County House offers a modest but instructive example of the Post-Modern style set in rural north Delaware. An influential teacher and theorist, Venturi studied architecture at Princeton University and attended the American Academy in Rome during the mid-1950s, where he developed a "partiality" towards post- Renaissance architecture, particularly works built during the Mannerist and Baroque periods in Italy.

In 1966, The Museum of Modern Art in New York published his first book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. Written while he was teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, it contains dozens of small black-and-white photographs of Western architecture from ancient times to the present day, as well as examples of the architect's early work.


presses validly and vividly their *relative* smallness.

The main stair in Frank Furness' Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia (20) is too big in relation to its immediate surroundings. It lands on a space narrower than its width, and faces an opening narrower than its width. Furthermore, the opening is bisected by a post. But this stair is ceremonial and symbolic as well as functional, and it relates to the hall immediately beyond the opening, to the whole building, and to the great scale of Broad Street outside. The outer thirds of Michelangelo's stair in the Laurentian Library vestibule (21) are abruptly chopped off and lead virtually nowhere: it is similarly wrong in the relation of its size to its space, and yet right in relation to the whole context of the spaces beyond.

Vanbrugh's end bays in the central pavilion of the entrance façade of Blenheim Palace (22) are incorrect because they are bisected by a pilaster: this fragmentation produces a duality which decreases their unity. Their very incompleteness, however, reinforces by contrast the center bay and increases the overall unity of this complex composition. The pavilions which flanked the château at Marly (23) contained a similar paradox. The compositional duality of their two-bay façades lacks unity, but reinforces the unity of the whole complex. Their own incompleteness implied the dominance of the château itself and the completeness of the whole.

The basilica, which has mono-directional space, and the central-type church, which has omnidirectional space, represent alternating traditions in Western church plans. But another tradition has accommodated churches which are both-and, in answer to spatial, structural, programmatic, and symbolic needs. The Mannerist elliptical plan of the sixteenth century is both central and directional. Its culmination is Bernini's Sant' Andrea al Quirinale (24), whose main directional axis contradictorily spans the short axis. Nikolaus Pevsner has shown how pilasters rather than open chapels bisect both ends of the transverse axis of the side walls, thereby reinforcing the short axis toward the altar. Borromini's chapel in the Propaganda Fide (25) is a directional hall in plan, but its alternating bays counteract this effect: a large bay dominates the small end; a small bay bisects the center of the long wall. The rounded corners, as well, begin to imply a continuity of enclosure and a central-type plan. (These characteristics occur in the courtyard of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane too.) And the diagonal

32

33

Figure 8.9.5.2: Pages 32 and 33 from Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, The Museum of Modern Art, 1966

A gentle manifesto



Figure **8.9.5.3**: Engaged capital, Isidore of Miletus & Anthemius of Tralles for Emperor Justinian, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532-37

Venturi used the first chapter, sub-titled "A Gentle Manifesto," to express his strongly held belief that orthodox Modern architecture and city planning had run its course. Rather than continue in the disciplined, austere footsteps of European architects Le Corbusier (below) and **Mies van der Rohe**, he highlighted historic structures that exhibit a "messy vitality over obvious unity"—seen, for example, in his inclusion of a "contradictory" Byzantine capital from Hagia Sophia in Istanbul.

Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture was well-received by contemporary critics, particularly Yale University professor Vincent Scully, who wrote in the introduction that Venturi presented a fresh approach to looking at architecture, preferring complexity and contradiction over abstraction and what Venturi called the "fairy stories" of modernist purity. His follow-up, the marvelously-titled *Learning From Las Vegas*, co-authored in 1972 with his wife and partner Denise Scott Brown and partner Steven Izenour, highlighted the way buildings are experienced from a distance while traveling along the gaudy Sunset Strip. For Venturi, how buildings look, and are perceived, was far more important than the techniques, systems, and theories used to plan and construct them.

Vanna Venturi House

The New Castle County House dates to an important period in Venturi's career and Post Modernism. Though some of his peers designed buildings that respectfully imitate the past, he was no mere revivalist.



Figure **8.9.5.5**: Robert Venturi, Vanna Venturi House, 1959-64, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia

Rather than copy a specific style, he borrowed freely, juxtaposing, collaging, and reinterpreting forms from distinct periods and places. This was particularly true in the Vanna Venturi House (above). Built in the Philadelphia suburbs, this famous house is located at the end of a driveway and resembles a child's drawing. Viewed through the lens of classicism and 1960s Pop Art, his witty design incorporates a large gable, recessed porch, and noticeably off-center chimney.



Figure 8.9.5.6: Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, France, 1929 (photo: Renato Saboya, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

American vernacular

The New Castle County House was built for a family of three and sits comfortably in nature. In contrast to Andrea Palladio's Villa Rotonda or Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (above), it neither crowns a hilltop nor hovers above a well-trimmed lawn. Instead, the house sits surrounded by rolling fields, beside a thickly-wooded forest. Like many traditional American farmhouses and barns, the painted siding is white and the intersecting gables are clad with unstained wood shingles. It may look conventional and familiar but on closer inspection the exterior is enlivened by a diverse array of mischievous and sometimes perplexing architectural features.

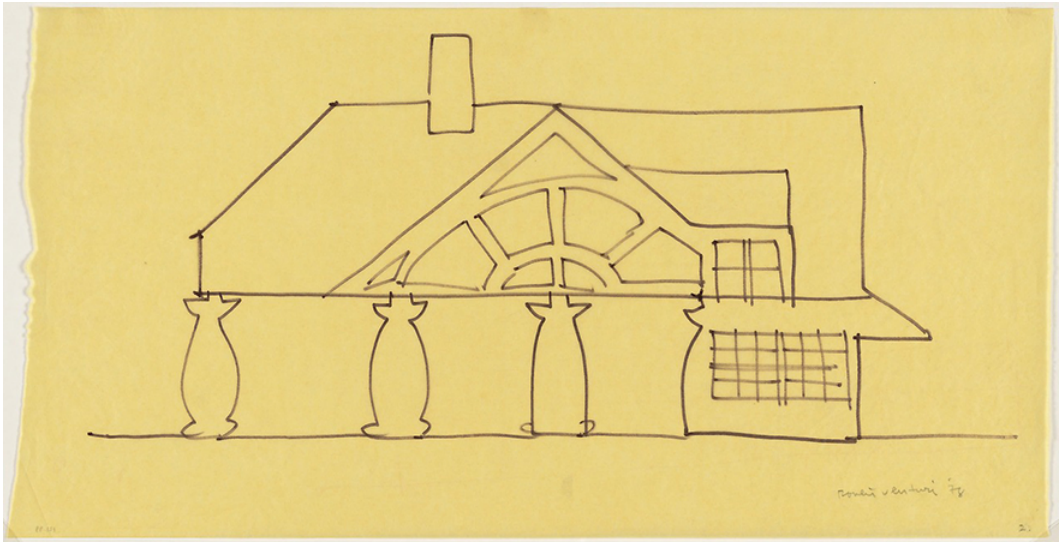


Figure 8.9.5.7: Venturi and Rauch, Robert Venturi, John Rauch, Denise Scott Brown House, Delaware, Preliminary study of west elevation, 1978, felt-tipped pen on tracing paper, 30.5 x 59.7 cm © 2015 Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Form as sign

Of particular interest is how Venturi treated the "front" and "rear" facades. In *Learning from Las Vegas*, the authors celebrated the concept of the "decorated shed"– buildings that exploit easily recognizable two-dimensional elements to generate visual interest

and meaning. The “front” façade of the New Castle County House incorporates a floating arched screen that, like a highway billboard, rises somewhat awkwardly from the lower edge of the gable (below). Though Venturi claimed this curved feature had Austrian Baroque origins, like a garden gate or eyebrow dormers found on some Victorian houses, it functions as a sign, identifying the structure as a residence. Furthermore, since the owners enjoyed bird watching it may also have doubled as a blind, camouflaging the large windows behind it.



Figure 8.9.5.8: Robert Venturi, John Rauch, and Denise Scott Brown, gable detail, House in New Castle County, Delaware, 1978-83 (photo: © Venturi, Scott Brown Collection/The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania/detail of photo by Matt Wargo)



Figure 8.9.5.9: Robert Venturi, John Rauch, and Denise Scott Brown, House in New Castle County (rear view), Delaware, 1978-83 (photo: © Venturi, Scott Brown Collection/The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania/Photo by Matt Wargo)

The “rear” facade is even more curious and complex (left). While it, too, is dominated by a prominent arched screen, this screen is framed by the edges of the gabled roof. Supported by what appears to be a Doric colonnade, the four stubby columns are, in fact, almost flat. Thin as the outer walls, these cut-outs carry little weight and enclose the recessed porch. While the column on the far right grows seamlessly out of the adjoining wall, the left column appears split in half by the addition of an aluminum drain pipe. Classical in derivation yet slightly cartoonish, this somewhat awkward assemblage gives the house a simultaneously grand and whimsical appearance.

Playfully challenging

In photographs dating from the time of the building’s completion the spacious interiors appear simple and comfortable, with wood decorations inspired by various 19th century design traditions. The painted arches in the vaulted music room (below), the quirky chandeliers, and perforated wall patterns exhibit a straight-forward craftsman-like quality, as if cut by hand or jigsaw. Conspicuously two dimensional, their fanciful silhouettes evoke the Carpenter Gothic and Queen Anne styles.



Figure 8.9.5.10: Robert Venturi, John Rauch, and Denise Scott Brown, Music Room, House in New Castle County, Delaware, 1978-83 (photo: © Venturi, Scott Brown Collection/The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania/detail of photo by Matt Wargo)

Venturi never liked the stylistic term Post Modern, but his buildings and critical writings helped propel late 20th-century architecture in a new direction. This private residence remains a playfully challenging work expressing a refreshingly pluralistic view of architecture and design.

Additional resources:

Website of Venturi, Scott, Brown

Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art Press, 1966)

Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (The MIT Press, 1972)

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8.9.6: Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Bilbao

by DR. MATTHEW A. POSTAL

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Figure **8.9.6.1**: Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (exterior detail), 1993-97, titanium, limestone, glass, steel (photo: **josu.orbe**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Gehry's Guggenheim

Prior to the mid-20th century, art museums in Europe and the United States were mostly designed in variants of the neo-classical style. From the Louvre in Paris to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (below left), large and small cultural institutions commissioned stately stone structures, distinguished by pedimented fronts, long colonnades, and lofty rotundas. Axial and processional, exhibition galleries were traditionally arranged in rows, with understated decorative treatments that complement the artworks.

What is a pediment, colonnade, and rotunda



Figure **8.9.6.2**: John Russell Pope, National Gallery of Art (left), 1941, Washington (photo: **AgnosticPreachersKid**, CC BY-SA 3.0)
Frank Lloyd Wright, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (right), New York City, 1942-59

The 1959 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (originally the Museum of Non-Objective Art), with its spiraling concrete ramps, was one of the first museums to challenge this tradition. By the 1980s it had outgrown its Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Fifth Avenue home in New York (above right) and Thomas Krens, the museum's director, began developing plans to expand the museum's reach though the establishment of satellite branches funded by foreign governments.



Figure 8.9.6.3: Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 1993-97, (photo: Emilio I. Panizo, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Among these projects, the 1997 branch in Bilbao, Spain, has been the most highly regarded. Not only did it provide the Guggenheim with a large exhibition venue for 20th century and contemporary art but it shifted the direction of museum design. At this point in his prolific career, Frank Gehry had a number of cultural institutions to his credit and was developing an international reputation for producing consistently innovative work. Born in Toronto, Canada, in 1929, this Los Angeles-based architect received the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize in 1989. Important early projects by Gehry include his remodeled bungalow (begun 1977) in Santa Monica, California, the Vitra Design Museum (1989) in Germany (below) and the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum (1990-93) at the University of Minnesota, which was under construction when he received the Guggenheim commission.



Figure 8.9.6.4: East façade, Frank Gehry, Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein von Osten, 1989 (photo: Wladyslaw CC BY-SA 3.0)

The Guggenheim Bilbao was also part of an ambitious urban renewal program conceived by the Basque regional government. An aging port and industrial center, the city had entered a period of significant economic decline during the 1980s. Various well-known architects were invited to design new structures, including Santiago Calatrava from Spain and Norman Foster from England. Though initial discussions focused on converting an existing industrial structure into an art museum, Krens convinced local officials to provide a more central and flexible location, a site on the banks of the Nerviron River.

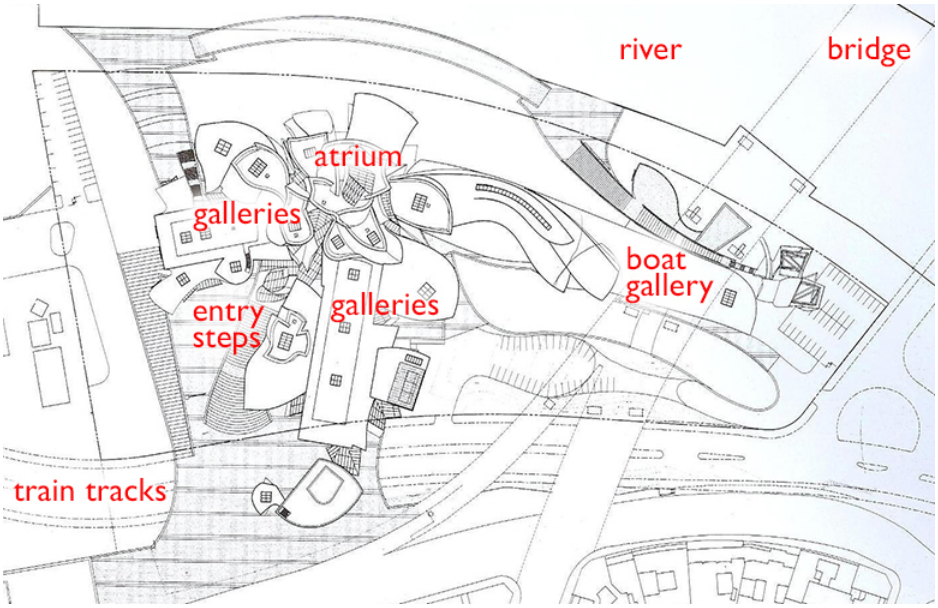


Figure 8.9.6.5: Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao plan

Comparisons to the Guggenheim Museum in New York would be inevitable. Krens urged Gehry to “make it better than Wright” and the Bilbao museum recalls the earlier building in various subtle ways. From the absence of historical references to the focus on a central rotunda or atrium—albeit in Bilbao on a much larger scale—both architects produced unrestrained modern spaces of great architectural force and energy.



Figure 8.9.6.6: View from Iparraguirre Kalea toward the main entrance, (photo: Mariordo (Emilio I. Panizo), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

A personal aesthetic

Gehry, who started his career in the 1960s, developed a personal aesthetic gradually, discovering exhilarating ways to shatter and re-assemble architectural forms. As most architects do, he began with the structure’s most basic program. After determining the size and shape of the interiors, he melded the forms together, arranging them into a lively sculptural whole.

Though his earlier work, sometimes categorized as Deconstructivism, featured everyday building materials like chain link, corrugated metal and plywood, by the late 1980s Gehry had refined his vision, using more costly surfaces to produce unexpectedly sensuous designs. Aided by sophisticated computer software, his most daring projects evoke aspects of the Italian Baroque style. Like the drapery folds that animate some pieces of 17th century figurative sculpture, Gehry’s more striking works juxtapose elements that bend, ripple and unfurl.

Most photographs depict the Guggenheim Bilbao from across the river. Although this view is arguably the most dramatic and satisfying, the main entrance is on the opposite side of the building, at the foot of a narrow residential street, the Iparraguirre Kalea (above left). Arriving visitors cross over concealed railroad tracks and descend through a broad stepped limestone plaza passing from a slender notch into a soaring 165-foot atrium. A complex and somewhat chaotic interior, this twisting glass-and-steel volume combines irregularly-shaped limestone and plaster walls, glazed elevator shafts, and vertigo-inducing catwalks.



Figure **8.9.6.7**: Richard Serra, Snake, 2005, "The Matter of Time" sculptures in the "boat gallery," Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (photo: **Ardfern**, CC BY-SA 3.0)



Figure **8.9.6.8**: Atrium, Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 1993-97 (photo: **Ardfern**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

The central atrium (left) serves as a circulation hub and orientation gallery, providing access to approximately 20 galleries on three levels. While the sequence of "classic" galleries are predictably rectangular, other exhibition spaces have surprising shapes, with

angled or curving walls and occasional balconies. Particularly memorable is the so-called “boat gallery.” Though Gehry compares the shape to a fish (a reoccurring motif in his work), this enormous column-free space (above) extends more than 400 feet along the river-front promenade and beneath the adjoining bridge. Ideal for large works of sculpture, this vast space contains an installation by Richard Serra.

A “miracle” in Bilbao

The Guggenheim Bilbao opened to the public in 1997. The reception to Gehry’s unorthodox design was nothing less than ecstatic, drawing international acclaim from fellow architects and critics, as well as from tourists who throng here from throughout the world. Herbert Muschamp, *The New York Timesn* architecture critic called the undulating structure a “miracle.”[1] The benefit to the city’s local economy was immediate and substantial and numerous cities have tried (but not always succeeded) to match its success, commissioning similarly dynamic structures from high-profile “starchitects.”



Figure **8.9.6.9**: Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 1993-97, (photo: **Ardfern**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

[1] Herbert Muschamp, “The Miracle in Bilbao,” *The New York Times*, September 7, 1997.

Additional resources:

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Richard Copans and Julien Donada, *Architectures : Le Musée Guggenheim de Bilbao*, Melbourne: EnhanceTV, 2009 (video)

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8.9.7: Zaha Hadid, MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts

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Video **8.9.7.1**: Zaha Hadid, MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts, 1998-2009 (opened 2010), Via Guido Reni, Rome

Additional resources

The MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts website

More about the MAXXI Museum architecture from the Danish Architecture Center

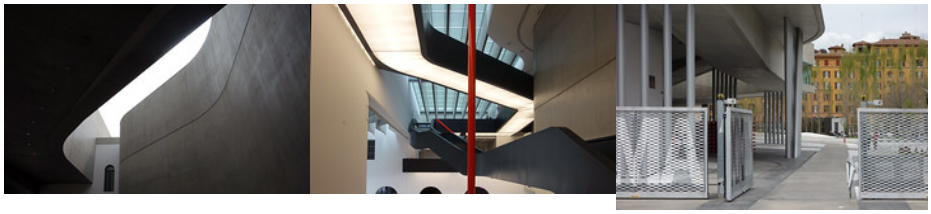
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