

# 400      **New Monuments**

These works bundle, droop, and ooze: they appear to be malleable forms that have been made permanent. Beginning in the 1960s, the artists seen here embraced a hands-on approach to sculpting and traditional metalwork techniques such as welding and casting. They responded to the specific properties of each material and the unpredictable effects of the process, creating works that show the trace of their making. Through the use of organic forms, the recording of movement, and a preference for human scale, their work alluded to the political climate of their time: the Vietnam War, feminism, and the Civil Rights Movement.

# 401      **Out of War**

The devastation of World War II caused a mass exodus from Europe to locations around the globe. Among the refugees who flooded into New York were artists and art dealers whose presence transformed the city's cultural scene. These figures exchanged ideas with their American counterparts, mutually influencing each other's work. The search for safety took artists to other places, such as Cuba, that inspired the work they made upon arriving. Those who remained in Europe—whether by choice or not—made art marked by the legacy of a shattered, war-torn continent.

Surrealism was a touchstone for many artists who sought inspiration in the realm of the fantastic, and they incorporated a vocabulary of totemic forms, lunar landscapes, and swirling organic shapes into their work. Their cosmic imagery evokes far-off galaxies but also, as Cuban artist Wifredo Lam said, “communicates a psychic state.”

Most of these artists found inspiration in the streets and homes of Harlem. Helen Levitt, who spent her career photographing lively activity in different parts of the city, captured the upper-Manhattan neighborhood, a center of African American culture. In 1941, resident Jacob Lawrence made a series of paintings about the Great Migration—the multi-decade mass exodus of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North that dramatically increased Harlem’s population. The series was a key example of the way that artists reimagined history painting in the modern era.

William H. Johnson, another Southern migrant to Harlem who had returned to the neighborhood after working in Europe, created scenes of everyday African American life in Harlem and in the South with flat compositions and vibrant colors. Alice Neel made portraits of the people of nearby Spanish Harlem, a community that had rarely been represented in such a way. The fusion of art and politics defines these artists’ contributions to the traditions of figurative art in the twentieth century.

# 403      **Action Painting I**

In the aftermath of World War II, a host of American artists with greatly varying styles and approaches were united by a belief in the power of abstract art to express personal convictions and profound human values. These artists, the Abstract Expressionists, were the first to push New York City to the forefront of modern art. Many of them sought to make the bodily gestures involved in the painting process visible in the resulting work. Jackson Pollock created all-over compositions by dipping sticks and hardened brushes into paint and moving his body above and around an unstretched canvas spread on the floor, allowing the paint to drip in skeins, splatters, and puddles that traced his movements. Willem de Kooning, on the other hand, maintained references to the surrounding world. He took forms from life—like the human figure—as points of departure for abstraction and experimentation. Hedda Sterne, meanwhile, used spray paint to suggest the motion and speed of the New York highways that captivated her throughout the 1950s.



# 404 Planes of Color

In response to unthinkable atrocities—the Holocaust, vast casualties on the battlefields of World War II, the atomic bomb—many artists felt a grave responsibility to make art that reasserted the highest ideals of humankind. For painters Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko, this meant rejecting the easel-sized canvas to work at a larger scale, the size of the works reflecting their grand ambitions. Newman said, “I hope that my own painting has the impact of giving someone as it did me the feeling of his own totality, of his own separateness, of his own individuality, and at the same time his connection to others.” Louise Nevelson’s work is connected to place: she drew materials from New York’s streets and assembled them into totemic structures of varying scale that she painted in monochrome palettes of black, white, or gold. For all these artists, color was an essential expressive tool, capable of evoking a range of responses.

In the mid-1950s, when Abstract Expressionism continued to enjoy great success, many of the movement's participants—some well-established, some newly so—began to push its premises in innovative directions, experimenting with a variety of materials and techniques. Helen Frankenthaler started staining her unprimed canvases with paints thinned with turpentine, allowing the color to soak into rather than rest on top of the surface. Jackson Pollock departed from his signature “drip” technique, which entailed flinging colored paints onto canvas, in favor of applying black enamel deliberately, with a turkey baster, across an unprimed surface.

For many Abstract Expressionist artists, content, in some form or another, returned as a guiding force. Lee Krasner drew from sources such as ancient Greek mythology. Joan Mitchell, who at this time divided her time between New York and Paris, looked to the French countryside as a starting point—attempting not to depict it, but, as she explained, “to paint what it leaves me with.”

After the ravages of World War II, Paris once again became the place where young artists gathered and picked up conversations about what art should be. Through contact with an older generation of avant-garde practitioners, they were exposed to the use of chance composition, primary color palettes, and geometric abstraction, which they applied in increasingly radical experiments. As artist Ellsworth Kelly remembered: “At the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, I noticed the large windows between the paintings interested me more than the art exhibited. . . . From then on, painting as I had known it was finished for me.” By the end of the 1940s, these vocabularies had opened up new spaces for abstract painting. The contacts made in Paris between artists from places as far afield as the United States, Latin America, and Eastern Europe became an ongoing network of exchange, crossing ideological divides and the boundaries created by Cold War politics.



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## **Henri Matisse's *Swimming Pool***

One summer morning in 1952, Matisse told his studio assistant and secretary Lydia Delectorskaya that “he wanted to see divers,” so they went to a favorite pool in Cannes. Suffering under the blazing sun, they returned home, and Matisse declared, “I will make myself my own pool.” He asked Delectorskaya to ring the walls of his dining room at the Hôtel Régina in Nice with a white paper band just above the level of his head, breaking only at window and doors at opposite ends of the room. Matisse cut divers, swimmers, and sea creatures out of paper painted ultramarine blue and pinned them onto the white paper.

The result was Matisse's first and only self-contained, site-specific cut-out. Matisse saw in paper's pliability an ideal match for the fluidity of water, making the piece a perfect synthesis of subject and means. With its simplification of forms, dynamic use of positives and negatives, and expansion across the walls, *The Swimming Pool* was the culmination of Matisse's cut-paper work up to that point.





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## **Frank O'Hara, Lunchtime Poet**

Lunch was Frank O'Hara's favorite meal—his 1964 book *Lunch Poems* is full of poetry he wrote during his breaks while he worked at The Museum of Modern Art, where he became a curator after starting at the front desk.

Vivid and conversational, his poems lyrically document his sensory love affair with New York City. In addition to being a dynamic voice in American postwar literature, O'Hara was part of a community of contemporary artists, a “poet among painters” who were his friends, lovers, and inspirations for his work.

After his sudden death in 1966, when he was only forty years old, the Museum published a memorial volume of his poetry paired with commissioned drawings by the artists closest to him. Titled *In Memory of My Feelings* after his 1956 poem, the book was described by director René D'Harnoncourt as “a homage to the sheer poetry—in all guises and roles—of the man.” The project reflects the diverse styles and interests of a group of artists who generated much of the creative energy in New York in the 1950s and '60s.

# 408

## Stamp, Scavenge, Crush

A bedsheet hand-printed with a rubber laundry stamp, a taxidermied bald eagle affixed to a canvas, a car compacted by a hydraulic press—these are just some of the repurposed materials used by international artists working from the mid-1950s to early 1960s. Sculptors, choreographers, composers, and painters blended their practices and challenged categorization by incorporating readymade goods, symbols, and even trash into their works. Collaboration reigned as friends and lovers from various fields worked with one another to expand the meaning of art to include the world around it.

Playing with light, chemicals, exposures, and framing, the artists in this gallery investigated the experimental qualities of photography and film during the period following World War II. Many of them featured in international publications and shows—including at MoMA—that celebrated photography’s capacity for abstraction and expressive innovation. One such platform was *Subjektive Fotografie* (Subjective Photography), an influential touring exhibition series initiated by self-taught photographer Otto Steinert in Germany in the 1950s. The artists represented hailed from Germany, Brazil, Japan, Sweden, and the United States, among other places. Aiming to capture what Steinert called “the visual experience of [the] times,” these artists rejected “commonplace and merely ‘beautiful’ pictures . . . in favor of experiments and fresh solutions,” and explored a wide range of photographic approaches and processes.



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## **At the Border of Art and Life**

In the late 1950s, a young generation of artists began producing short instructions for actions, called “event scores,” meant to be interpreted in the most open-ended way. Often grouped together under the moniker “Fluxus”—coined by George Maciunas, the movement’s self-proclaimed chairman—this new art championed experimentation over form and embraced simple materials and actions. In Maciunas’s words, Fluxus sought to “promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY, to be grasped by all people, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals.”

Artists in places as far-flung as New York, Germany, Latin America, and Japan expressed similar attitudes to art making, and took their actions directly to the street, frequently producing work barely distinguishable from its environment. The spirit of Fluxus has sparked a long tradition of irreverence and provocation, and some have claimed that Fluxus not only is not over, it has not even begun.

## 411      **Andy Warhol's *Kiss*, *Blow Job*, and *Sleep***

In 1963, the filmmaker Jonas Mekas enthusiastically reported in the *Village Voice* that Andy Warhol was working on “the longest and simplest movie ever made”—of a man sleeping. Warhol had recently acquired a movie camera and would embrace film as a primary pursuit for the next half decade, attracted to its unique ability to explore time. The portraits that make up this loose trilogy, some of Warhol's earliest films, range from forty minutes to over five hours and reflect his impulse to observe human behavior and sexuality. Shifting from the celebrities and consumer goods depicted in his silkscreens, Warhol chose more personal subject matter, filming members of New York's vibrant underground cultural scene, many of whom congregated at his newly opened studio, the Factory. Warhol's gaze—on the couples he paired up in *Kiss*, the golden-haired scenester filmed from the waist up in *Blow Job*, and the artist's lover John Giorno in *Sleep*—is simultaneously detached and erotic. With its extended takes, rhythmic editing, and fixed camera angles, Warhol's cinema abstracts the body as much as it studies it.

# 412

## From Soup Cans to Flying Saucers

A decade after World War II, a new culture was emerging, one in which waves of products targeted at a growing class of consumers were advertised on TV, in magazines and newspapers, and on larger-than-life billboards. Artists around the world were inspired by this explosion of mass media and began to use it as source material, repurposing commercial images and depicting familiar subjects, from everyday objects to the stars and stories that populated the front page. Yet there was no single approach: artists both celebrated and criticized the era's surge of consumerism. In 1957, the British artist Richard Hamilton tried to summarize these new tendencies by coining the term "Pop Art," describing it to friends as "Popular (designed for a mass audience), Transient (short-term solution), Expendable (easily forgotten), Low cost, Mass produced, Young (aimed at youth), Witty, Sexy, Gimmicky, Glamorous, Big Business."



# 413

## Breaking the Mold

Searching for a new creative vocabulary, the artists in this gallery used simplified forms and unconventional materials. They tended to reject metaphor and personal expression in favor of an emphasis on process and spatial relationships. Attracted by standardized industrial products—fluorescent lights, concrete, and fiberglass—many of these artists explored fabrication away from the studio, shifting the focus from individual authorship to collaboration. Through the use of casts, repetitive physical actions, and a preference for human scale, others incorporated the body itself as a tool. Whether by using gravity and light to engage a viewer’s physical presence or by suggesting anthropomorphic associations through the use of organic materials, the works in this gallery reflect a broader desire for a direct connection with the viewer.

In the 1960s, artists increasingly made work to be seen on the street and on public transportation, in shopping malls and in restaurants. Their collaborations took the form of collectives, periodicals, and businesses that bypassed the need for museums and commercial galleries to display and promote their work. Artists aimed to reenvision performance by using unusual venues, writing instructions they promised to enact, and involving audience members as active participants. Some of their projects were meant to be short-lived or never intended to be realized. Brought together by city living, these artists embraced process, creative relationships, and ideas put into action.

Many of the works in this gallery are drawn from the recent gift of eight hundred works on paper the Museum received from the Gilbert B. and Lila Silverman Instruction Drawing Collection.

# 415      Idea Art

“The idea becomes the machine that makes the art,” wrote Sol LeWitt in 1967. This metaphor describes a concept shared among many international artists, filmmakers, performers, and composers: that the idea was the work of art. Sometimes, the artists in this gallery realized their theories by creating objects. At other times, they documented ephemeral actions in photographs or on video. In still other instances, they made language their subject, producing multiples, publications, posters, and postcards intended to circulate to a mass audience. By emphasizing the context surrounding the creation of the work, these artists addressed various social issues, such as inequality, and race and gender politics.



Multiples—prints and objects produced in large, affordable editions—became an international phenomenon in the 1960s and 1970s. Artists who questioned the status of art as a luxury commodity embraced multiples as a more democratic art form. Joseph Beuys, for example, described his multiples as the “vehicles” through which his ideas could circulate among a broader public, beyond elite art networks. A multiple, he said, “is like an antenna which is standing somewhere and with which one stays in touch.”

Many of the multiples on view here mimic the appearance of popular products and packaging in order to comment on postwar consumerism. Some artists took advantage of new industrial materials, such as plastics, to fabricate objects that replicate the sleek look of contemporary housewares, while others used readymade products, food, or trash to address the culture of consumption and waste.

In the decades following World War II, rather than focusing on the design of individual buildings or objects, architects and designers became increasingly preoccupied with the concept of systems. Architectural projects were conceived of as interactions of variable components that would allow for change over time. Every aspect of the built environment—from furniture to load-bearing structures, living spaces, and even whole cities—was reimagined as a combination of rule-based systems, each with their own logic.

For corporate architectural practices of the 1950s and '60s, such systems allowed for the design of work spaces that could easily adapt to fluctuations in personnel and internal structures. At the same time, systems appealed to radical architecture groups with very different objectives. They imagined that the flexibility of systems would empower inhabitants to reshape their living environments according to their own needs and desires. In like manner, painters, sculptors, and filmmakers of the same period experimented with iterative and instruction-based protocols to challenge the concept of an artwork as a finished product.

*Mirage* began in 1976 as a performance at New York's Anthology Film Archives, in which Jonas used film, video, drawing, and props to evoke new—yet obscure—rituals. In 1994, the artist reimagined the work as an installation—of sculptural elements, chalkboard drawings, videos, and documentation of the performance—which she reconfigured again in 2005, as you see here.

At the heart of *Mirage* is the concept of transformation. In one video, Jonas draws again and again, erasing part of a sun to create a new moon; she calls this an “endless drawing,” after a funerary rite of a New Guinean tribe, believed to help the deceased transition to the afterlife. The artist's emphasis on turning one thing into another can also be seen in the use of positive and negative images and in the recurrence of forms, as with the towering cones that echo nearby imagery of an erupting volcano. Such play with symbols, including a hopscotch grid, reflects Jonas's ongoing interest in the repetition and ritualism of games.



# 419      **Four Photographers, Four Places**

In the midst of social change and political turbulence around the world in the 1960s and 1970s, artists brought their cameras onto the streets, finding photography to be an immediate and accessible means of responding to their surroundings. The four artists featured here all used handheld, portable cameras to capture the everyday theater of distinct environments: Graciela Iturbide's photographs depict the vitality of Mexico's cities as well as the indigenous cultures of the Sonoran Desert—and the exchange between them. Daido Moriyama's images of urban Japan feature soldiers, avant-garde performers, and anonymous passersby. Miguel Rio Branco turned his camera toward the sidewalks and subways of downtown New York, where he briefly lived before returning to Brazil. And Garry Winogrand, though often associated with his native New York, here captured the showmanship and pageantry of another unmistakably American locale, Texas. These pictures reflect the personal perspectives of their makers as well as the dynamic social shifts playing out around them. As Rio Branco later noted, "My subject was my life around me."

## War Within, War Without

“I am talking about the inherent human need to survive, ethnically, culturally, morally. This is what I need to put on canvas,” explained Benny Andrews, one of many artists who chose to confront hardship, both personal and global, in their work in the 1970s. The war in Vietnam, political violence in Chile and the Sudan, and other world events and conflicts provided subject matter for many. The internal struggles necessary to cope with such a world led others to focus on more intimate topics.

In some of these works, thickly applied or oozing materials suggest violence, while elsewhere dark undercurrents emerge through the transformation of familiar symbols and forms like flags, crosses, and flowers. All of these artists shared the view that art was critical to survival, both for themselves and for their audiences.

**421**

## **Rosemarie Trockel's *Book Drafts***

Since the 1970s, Trockel has produced more than 150 “book drafts.” Never intended to be realized, these design sketches have become central to her practice as exercises for working through creative impasses. The act of designing a book cover appeals to her in these moments; its standardized design and structure allows Trockel to forgo certain compositional decisions and proceed directly to the playful juxtaposition of text and image. The results vary in tone, but often reflect the artist’s irreverent sense of humor.