201 Public Images

For many artists, the media culture of the late 1970s and 1980s—the ever-increasing overload of movies, magazines, and television—prompted questions about how images shape our perceptions of ourselves and our experiences of the world. Some, such as Dara Birnbaum, Louise Lawler, and Cindy Sherman, began to examine how pictures and film stills circulate within the art market and the entertainment industry, often using the same tools of production and distribution. Seizing control of the camera or broadcasting on cable and public-access television was, according to Birnbaum, "a way of talking back to the media." In quoting and reframing familiar images, and staging their own versions, these artists exposed the ways in which gender and power relations are constructed.

202   Downtown New York

During the 1980s, Manhattan below Fourteenth Street was a vibrant and affordable place to live and make art, a flourishing scene for creative expression. With the city as their stage, artists working there engaged with graffiti culture and street art, photographed their communities of friends and lovers, and produced collaborative forms of sculpture, painting, design, and performance.

The rough-hewn streets still bore the traces of New York's economic collapse in the 1970s, and downtown was fertile ground for art responding to urban blight, Reaganomics, gentrification, and the first wave of the AIDS pandemic. Producing art for public spaces as well as exhibitions in galleries, studios, and nightclubs scattered across the neighborhood, these artists turned their environment into a hub for the integration of art and life.

203   Hardware/Software

By the early 1980s, the feminist, civil rights, and gay rights movements had drawn attention to the ways that bodies are represented. For many artists, the body became a critical as well as a vexed point of focus. Some imbued their work with a sense of action, drawing on experimental performance and dance practices. Others made use of images from media and advertising or utilized easily available products. This gallery includes many works in which the body merges with inanimate objects, forming a psychologically charged hybrid symbolic of a pervasive consumer culture.

204 Gretchen Bender's *Dumping Core*

In *Dumping Core*, a frenzy of images appears across thirteen video monitors, creating an information overload set to a proto-techno soundtrack. The installation mimics and exaggerates the pervasive media culture prompted by then-new television networks like CNN and MTV. As Bender said, "I quickly got caught up in the way in which TV moves, the current. . . . From that equivalent flow I tried to force some kind of consciousness of underlying patterns of social control." By rapidly intercutting computer-generated logos, graphics, and other clips from TV and movies, the artist sought to subvert corporate agendas and expose the rampant use of new image-making technologies for commercial gain.

The work's title refers to a computer error called a "core dump" and also alludes to the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island, capturing fears of technological dystopia and nuclear annihilation. Conceived and staged as a work of "electronic theater"—and originally performed during a single evening—*Dumping Core* demanded a close look at the power of televisual media at a nascent moment of the rapidly accelerating digital age.

205   Print, Fold, Send

In the 1970s and 1980s, while new technologies aided the unprecedented global circulation of goods and information, artists and activists across Latin America turned to do-it-yourself and "lo-fi" means to disseminate their own work. They sent art by mail, produced 'zines and pamphlets, and founded small presses. These systems and platforms allowed them to produce works that could be distributed easily, avoiding the commercial structures of the art world and the policing of repressive political regimes.

Interested in communications technologies, many of these artists also explored the new potential of video and other electronic media, whether through art made for cable networks, interventions in TV programs, or works for Minitel technology. They helped form a burgeoning global community of artists whose work took place outside the protocols of formal institutions and traditional media. However, the results of these alternative approaches entered established art institutions in unexpected ways: for example, by being mailed directly to MoMA's library, as was the case with many of the print works in this gallery.

206   Transfigurations

The works brought together in this gallery suggest a dialogue between artists across nations and generations who have reimagined how women might be represented. Believing that art has transformative power, these artists have looked to mythology, folklore, art history, and media culture—both ancient and current—to reconsider the past. They imagine new worlds that are liberated from long-standing conventions or perceptions. They often choose unusual materials for artmaking, from sand and fiber to their own bodies. Together these artists explore how the female form—through both defiant and poetic means—inhabits the world.

207 Before and After Tiananmen

During the period marked by the 1989 student protests in Tiananmen Square, many artists in China produced works that captured the insurgent spirit of the time. Artists used a range of new techniques and staged provocative, sometimes absurdist actions, like firing a gun at their own installation, lathering a chicken with soap, or lighting fireworks sewn into their jeans. These defiant artworks marked a new sense of agency and international dialogue, and challenged the Chinese government's censorship of cultural production. With an increasing interest in mediums like performance and video, artists reflected on the tension between individualism and collectivism. Others, responding to radical socioeconomic shifts and rampant urbanization, produced art that explored nature, land, territory, and conditions of impermanence.

In the 1990s, as the culture wars raged, many artists turned to representing themselves and their communities through alternative modes of portraiture, asserting their identities and presence. Photography and video allowed for a diaristic approach, capturing change over time, and life as an ongoing performance. In painting, artists suffused art-historical images with a sense of their own selfhood, making the past startlingly current. Sculpture became a means of exploring the body under pressure. With the rise of the internet, cable television, and the twenty-four-hour news cycle, national and international traumas—such as the Los Angeles riots, the rampant global spread of the AIDS epidemic, and the first Iraq war— became public theater. In this context, the self became both a reflection of and a defense against the culture in which it was produced, prompting artists to collage public and private concerns. Epitomizing the spirit of the time, Chris Ofili stated, "I try to bring all that I am to my work."

209   Inner and Outer Space

What constitutes a border? The artists presented here wrestle with this question in multiple ways. They consider the margins that separate nations from one another, the personal from the public, and the past from the present. While borders can define spaces and offer security, they can also generate forms of displacement and incite violence. And as societies have become more connected than ever, such arbitrary limits have in contrast grown more rigid and confining.

These artists explore the social and political landscapes that shape our understanding of each other. Some depict fantasies of escape from crises created by geopolitical and environmental degradation; others evoke new worlds to imagine how rapid urbanization and technologies expand connectivities. Still others play with the shifts of scale from vast public structures to intimate domestic and psychic interiors. Together they help us understand that the built environment, like the histories, memories, and imaginaries it contains, is in constant flux.

210 Richard Serra's *Equal*

Since the 1960s, the sculptor Richard Serra has explored the basic properties of his medium through the most straightforward yet extraordinary means. Rather than concern himself with images, Serra studies form, including its mass, weight, ability to delineate space, and the ways it behaves under the pressures of gravity. As a result, his sculptures produce in us a heightened awareness of our surroundings.

Equal consists of eight forged steel boxes stacked in pairs. Each box measures five by five and a half by six feet and weighs forty tons in a rectangular cube. To differentiate one stack from another, Serra has rotated the position of the shorter and longer sides of the boxes. Despite the varying orientation of the individual components, each stack measures eleven feet tall. This simple construction—one block sitting atop another— yields a variety of experiences; the massive sculpture may overwhelm the viewer and, in this sublimity, invite contemplation.

211 JODI's *My%Desktop*

"You are very close to a person when you are on his desktop," said Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans, who have worked together since the mid-1990s under the moniker JODI. Among the first artists to make art for the internet, they created cacophonous, browser-based work on their website http://wwwwwww.jodi.org/.

JODI recorded various versions of *My%Desktop* in front of live audiences, connecting their Macintosh to a camcorder and capturing their interactions with the user-friendly OS 9 operating system. The resulting "desktop performances," as the artists call them, look at ways that seemingly rational computer systems may provoke irrational behavior in people, whether because they are overwhelmed by an onslaught of online data, or inspired by possibilities for play. What appear to be computer glitches are actually the chaotic actions of a user. "The computer is a device to get into someone's mind," JODI explained, adding, "We put our own personality there."

212   Sheela Gowda's
Of All People

To make *Of All People*, Gowda built an environment out of recycled architectural elements—doorjambs, window frames, and a wooden table—from houses that were torn down as a result of modernization in her native Bangalore. She painted these components bright yellows, pinks, and turquoises, colors characteristic of homes there, and then populated this setting with thousands of small wooden votive figurines, which are used in certain communal rituals.

Once intricately hand-carved, these figurines are now quickly and cheaply produced by craftspeople, who make three small incisions into the wood to signify a face. Gowda photographed a selection of these "people" and hung them high on the wall, which is where a picture of an elder or a deity might go in an Indian home. Gowda's staged environment and the phantom bodies that inhabit it speak to systems of power that dictate how people live within structures—whether physical, economic, or ideological.

Wu Tsang's *We hold where study*

"The feeling of communication is very elusive," Tsang has said. "In being seen by another, there's always an incompleteness to that understanding." Often working collaboratively, she combines text, image, dance, music, and activism to create hybrid artforms that question traditional concepts of representation. This installation draws inspiration from an essay by poets and critical theorists Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, which explores how ideas of black, queer, and trans identities are intertwined and constantly in formation. Two videos intermittently overlap, creating an entanglement of images and living bodies. In each video, two performers move through a series of duets. The choreography is a form of contact improvisation, a collaborative practice in which participants use touch instead of sight to generate movement together. As the performers are pushed and pulled, they shift between gestures of tenderness and violence, elation and grief, or degeneration and rebirth. In overlaying the projections and employing movement as language, Tsang has sought to create "impossible" images—those that capture the fluidity and ambiguity of lived experience.

214   Surface Tension

On the walls and streets of the city, layers of pictures, signage, and graffiti build up over time, creating a palimpsest that preserves traces of the past in an otherwise changing environment. That flux is captured in painting using erasure and collage, often aided by digital tools. In sculpture, dents and folds distort ordinary objects and expected forms, speaking to the malleability of our surroundings. Made in the first decades of this century, these works reflect the fragmentation of the physical and digital worlds we inhabit, admitting the impossibility of a cohesive image.

215   Worlds to Come

How do we find potential in a conflicted present informed by legacies of oppression? Made within the last ten years, the work gathered here suggests that despite divergent backgrounds and approaches, these artists share a strong affinity in daring to reimagine history. Employing a range of forms and materials, some of these works address historical traumas and their present-day echoes, while others imagine a more hopeful future rooted in multiplicity and diversity. Purposefully open-ended, this grouping of works refuses a tidy summation of the art of our time.

Is it possible to design a house, a neighborhood, or even an entire nation that creates a sense of belonging for all its inhabitants? From the design of a single-family home to the development of large-scale public housing, architects have long sought to address the needs of diverse sets of individuals—generating new ideas about the ways spaces are occupied, how buildings are visualized, and the materials with which they are fabricated.

Architecture is one way of expressing complex—and at times controversial—civic values. During the societal upheavals of the 1960s, architects and urban planners had a profound role in shaping how populations lived. Yet friction between architects' visions and their clients' needs at times resulted in the construction of buildings that, while initially critically acclaimed, ultimately failed. Spanning the 1970s to the present, the works in this gallery consider architecture's capacity to give shape to the social, political, and cultural dimensions of our communities and the worlds they inhabit.