1960s 1970s 1980s

Society and Politics

The Postmodern Condition

Performance Art
Feminist Art
POSTMODERN CONDITION

It became apparent to many that the worldview fostered through Modernism (and by the Western humanist tradition) was flawed, corrupt, and oppressive. Events since World War Two (like the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War and Feminism), and the perception of those events, gave rise to the notion that Modernism has played itself out and is now floundering and directionless.

If Modernism was at an end, what is this new period? The name given this new period is Postmodernism.

This seemingly anti-modern stance involves a basic rejection of the tenets of Modernism; that is to say, a rejection of the doctrine of the supremacy of reason, the notion of truth, the belief in the perfectability of man, and the idea that we could create a better, if not perfect, society. This view has been termed deconstructive postmodernism.
POSTMODERNISM

One compact definition is that postmodernism rejects modernism's grand narratives of artistic direction, eradicating the boundaries between high and low forms of art, and disrupting artistic conventions with collision, collage, and fragmentation. We’ve seen this already—right?

Postmodern art holds that all positions are unstable and insincere, and therefore irony, parody, and humor are the only ones that are viable. These are positions held by Duchamp and have been playing out ever since in art.

"Pluralism and diversity" are other defining features. Questions of identity and embracing all forms as equally valid. Pluralism and Diversity are social developments that we see playing out in art as well.
This period in art was highly affected by influential writers:

Jean Francois Lyotard—*The Postmodern Condition*, 1970—the ‘grand narratives’ that had informed Western Civilization since the Enlightenment were no longer credible.

Michel Foucault—began with history then moved on to explore various aspects of culture which had become naturalized (thought to be normal and natural aspects of human nature), and exposed them as all being determined by human ideas rather than having any essential aspects. **Within this exploration, he showed the relationship between structures of power and cultural ideology.**

Fredric Jameson—*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1984—argued that a cultures destiny was inextricably bound to capitalism’s. He asserted that aesthetic and commodity production had become indistinguishable. Technologies of reproduction (TV) had replace technologies of production. Art was increasingly sponsored by commercial companies creating an interdependence between art and advertising.
However, even before these important writers, ordinary people were taking to the streets in public protest of social issues they felt were unjust. In particular, an interest in equal rights for all brought attention to issues around diversity and identity.

The Civil Rights Movement provided a model for protests against the Vietnam War, and then Feminist and Gay Rights protests.

This is the 1960s.

Civil Rights protestors in Washington D.C. 1963 and marching in the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965
A crowd of demonstrators protest in NYC (top) and at the Washington Monument for a rally to protest the Vietnam War, 1969.

Quang Duc, a seventy-three-year-old Buddhist monk, soaked himself in gasoline and set himself on fire, burning to death in front of thousands of onlookers at a main highway intersection in Saigon, Vietnam on June 11, 1963. A group of nuns and Buddhist monks circled the burning martyr with banners that read “A Buddhist Priest Burns Himself For Five Requests.” He was protesting the persecution of Buddhist by the South Vietnamese government.

Context: Culture of public bodily demonstration. These are two photos changed the way people thought about civil rights.

And *Civil Rights Demonstration*, 1964. This iconic image helped changed public opinion about Civil Rights.
These social realities have been influencing the artwork we’ve already looked at this semester.

Pop, Minimalism, Conceptual Art, and Land Art all evolved during these same decades.

The next two: **Performance Art and Feminist Art** continue the trends building on both the social realities and previous artistic ones.

In the fall of 1971, the Feminist Art Program started at California Institute of the Arts with faculty, Judy Chicago and Miriam Shiparo and many students took over an abandoned Mansion, calling it **Womenhouse.** They transformed the entire space into an ironic statement of female domestication and expected gender norms in society. The living room of the house was the theater where various performance works related to traditional female roles were played out.
You might remember these images of Jackson Pollock taken in the early 1950s.

We talked about many influences on Pollock as he moved toward creating these abstract, complexly layered paintings.

What the work, and it’s process of making, set in motion was a conversation about process. You might remember that discussion was important for minimalist artists as well.

But the recognition that the painting was merely the evidence of Pollock’s movement across the canvas (it was the artifact) provided inspiration for Performance as Art.
So, this week we are examining artists working with performance as their art and female artists whose work brings attention to Feminist issues.

I’ve titled this lecture “Society and Politics” because both of these directions in art are growing out of social protests, social constructs, cultural expectations and using art as a way of examining and/or bringing attention to these issues.

Judy Chicago, Suzanne Lacy, Sandra Orgel, Aviva Rahmani, *ablutions*, 1972

*ablutions* is a collaborative work about rape. the soundtrack of the performance was recordings of women recounting these acts of violation. it was performed in Guy Dill’s studio in Los Angeles in 1972.
Performance art usually consists of four elements: time, space, the performer’s body, and a relationship between audience and performer.

Traditionally, the work is interdisciplinary, employing some other kind of visual art, video, sound, or props. Although performance art takes the form of live action, it has reached a large public audience through documentation of the performance—usually photos.

From MoMA website.

CHRISS BURDEN, *Trans-fixed*, 1974
In this piece, Burden had himself crucified to the hood of a Volkswagen beetle.
Chris Burden was an American sculptor and performance artist. He is known for several works known as ‘extreme body art.’ He created several ‘shocking’ pieces of art including having himself shot, having push pins inserted into his body, crawling on broken glass and this piece, where he had himself crucified to the back of a Volkswagen bug.

Continuing the ideas of art and action outside the marketplace, this work also addresses pain and what it means to be human.

“Burden took the audience out of their comfort zone. An image of the crucified Christ is commonplace in society and no one puts much thought into the fact that many people were crucified in Roman times and it was an agonizing and lengthy way to die. However, Burden reminded the audience of the reality of pain that we so often dismiss or do not even notice.” (artstory.org)

CHRISS BURDEN, Trans-fixed, 1974
In this piece, Burden had himself crucified to the hood of a Volkswagen beetle. The piece exists now in photos and memory.
In performance art, the artist’s medium is the body, and the live actions he or she performs are the work of art. The term, used loosely at first, arose in the early 1960s as American practitioners sought a way to refer to and describe the many live events taking place at that time.

Performance art usually consists of four elements: time, space, the performer’s body, and a relationship between audience and performer.

From MoMA website.

JOSEPH BEUYS, How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare, 1965. Photograph of Performance art. Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf.
Many artists were pushing their bodies to trials of endurance for different reasons. Body Art or Extreme Body Art depended on the empathic response from viewers bringing attention to personal, social and political issues.

One of these artists is: **Marina Abramovic**

Abramović's work explores the relationship between performer and audience, the limits of the body, and the possibilities of the mind.

**Rhythm 10, 1973**, lined up twenty sharp knives, spread her fingers out and stabbed between her fingers one after the other as quickly as possible.

Each time she cut herself she changed knives until she had used them all.

Taped the rhythm and played the tape back then following the rhythm tried to do it again.

Marina Abromovic

Marina Abramović was one of the first artists to engineer the use of performance as a visual art form, using her body as her primary subject and medium to explore her physical and emotional limits.

**Rhythm 0, 1973,**

In *Rhythm 0,* 72 objects are placed on a table and the audience is encouraged to use these items as they desire on Abramović.

The performance lasted 6 hours. At first people were timid but as time went on, they became more and more aggressive and violent.

When Abramović and Ulay began their collaboration, the main concepts they explored were the ego and artistic identity. This was the beginning of a decade of influential collaborative work. Each performer was interested in the traditions of their cultural heritages and the individual’s desire for ritual.
Marina Abromovic

Abramovic scrubbing cow bones, removing grit and blood with a large scrubbing brush dipped regularly into a pail of water.

She began the process as a kind of religious rejuvenating ritual…was soon overwhelmed by the horror of her task.

The piece is a metaphor for ethnic cleansing in Bosnia was clear to those who witnessed this ritual as the artists would sink uncontrollably into deep sadness as the work progressed. Weeping and exhausted, she created an unforgettable image of grief for her times.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyBTrVNVxfk&feature=related

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUrwqdqwzqMU&feature=related
Marina Abromovic

The Artist is Present

This performance retrospective at MoMA several years ago traced the career of Marina Abramović (Yugoslav, b. 1946) with approximately fifty works spanning over four decades of her early interventions and sound pieces, video works, installations, photographs, solo performances, and collaborative performances made with Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen).

This link shows photos from this performance: http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/marinaabramovic/

This link is an art 21 video on Abromovic: http://www.pbs.org/art21/watch-now/segment-marina-abramovic-in-history

In this particular piece that was set up in the atrium at the Museum of Modern Art, Abramović performed in the Atrium every day (all day with no breaks) the Museum was open between March 14 and May 31, 2010. Visitors were encouraged to sit silently across from the artist for a duration of their choosing, becoming participants in the artwork.
Art as Political Weapon

It is in this context we can understand the work of Joseph Beuys.

In 1967 Beuys started a student political party at the Dusseldorf Academy where he taught, his earliest manifestation of his belief in the connections between learning, creativity, and the social process of change or revolution.

By 1972, Beuys had been fired for insisting his classes be open to unrestricted numbers. The following year he formed the Free International University, aimed at stimulating discussion across academic disciplines.

"In places like universities, where everyone talks too rationally, it is necessary for a kind of enchanter to appear."

Joseph Beuys

The problem for Beuys was not to find an art practice appropriate to the changing world but in communicating to an audience just what art was about.
At the beginning of the performance Beuys locked the gallery doors from the inside, leaving the gallery-goers outside. They could observe the scene within only through the windows. With his head entirely coated in honey and gold leaf, he began to explain pictures to a dead hare. Whispering to the dead animal on his arm in an apparent dialog, he processed through the exhibit from artwork to artwork. Occasionally he would stop and return to the center of the gallery, where he stepped over a dead fir tree that lay on the floor. After three hours the public was let into the room. Beuys sat upon a stool in the entrance area with the hare on his arm and his back to the onlookers.

Right, Marina Abramovic, re-performing, *How to Explain Art to a Dead Hare*. In 2005, Abramovic re-performed Beuys’ famous piece.

Left, JOSEPH BEUYS, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, 1965. Photograph of Performance art. Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf.
Joseph Beuys, *Like America and America Likes Me* 1974

Beuys’s most famous Action took place in May 1974, when he spent three days in a room with a coyote. After flying into New York, he was swathed in felt and loaded into an ambulance, then driven to the gallery where the Action took place, without having once touched American soil. As Beuys later explained: ‘I wanted to isolate myself, insulate myself, see nothing of America other than the coyote.’
The title of the work is filled with irony. Beuys opposed American military actions in Vietnam, and his work as an artist was a challenge to the hegemony of American art.

Felt blankets, walking stick and gloves, fifty new copies of the Wall Street Journal were introduced each day, which the coyote urinated on. Beuys regularly performed the same series of actions with his eyes continuously fixed on the coyote. At other times he would rest or gather the felt around him to suggest the figure of a shepherd with his crook.
Like America and America Likes Me 1974

The coyote’s behavior shifted throughout the three days, becoming cautious, detached, aggressive and sometimes companionable. At the end of the Action, Beuys was again wrapped in felt and returned to the airport. Few people actually saw the piece but Beuys was a popular lecturer who influenced many young artists in America.

Every aspect of Beuys’ work had meaning for him, the felt, coyote, the Wall Street Journal, everything.
Postmodern Feminist Art as Political Weapon

We investigate the social content and political statements of performance and feminist art along with innovative and expressive use of materials and the body.

How can art be used to express gender and cultural heritage issues, as well as the experimental forms and innovative use of materials?

Hammond asserts that traditionally feminine qualities are worthwhile artistic subjects and means for artistic creation. To this end, for example, she created sculptures in the early 1970s featuring swaths of fabric, a traditionally feminine material, as a primary material.
Widely regarded as the first feminist artwork, *The Dinner Party*, functions as a symbolic history of women in Western civilization.

Made of mostly clay and fabric. Plates are human scale.

Judy Chicago—the Dinner Party, 1979—Designed to commemorate the achievements of women in history such as O’Keefee, Virginia Wolfe and Queen Hatshepsut, the plates are decorated with vaginal references because it is common to all women.

39 place settings are dedicated to a particular women and on the floor there are 999 more names.

Made with traditional female crafts such as china painting embroidery, needle point, etc.
The piece was made by many different people, even though Chicago is given credit. This collaboration was made in 1979 but it was just recently permanently installed in the Brooklyn Museum. Go see it.

See all the plates here:  
www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/5167/The_Dinner_Party
Mary Kelly—*Post-Partum Document*—1973-79—recording her relationship with her son during his weaning….135 framed items such as diagrams, texts, and traces from the body (fecal smears on nappy liners).

Kelly’s work tracked gender’s linguistic basis. One of the six sections records early conversations between mother and child. Shown his reflection in the mirror, the child days da/da/da/da…the work raises questions about the relation between creativity and procreativity.

Mary Kelly’s work examined the process of socialization of boys and girls through her new born son.
Issues related to gender expanded to those of identity in general in particular--Race.

Adrian Piper—African-American artist addressed interpersonal social assumptions from a different angle.

Racial stereotyping—Self Portrait Exaggerating My Negroid Features, 1981. Stuffed a rag in her mouth and covered herself with vinegar and other items that smelled and walked around New York.

Dressing up as a man in, Mythic Being performances 1975, she walked New York’s streets to see how black males were made into objects of racism.
THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST:

Working without the pressure of success.
Not having to be in shows with men.
Having an escape from the art world in your 4 free-lance jobs.
Knowing your career might pick up after you’re eighty.
Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine.
Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position.
Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others.
Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood.
Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits.
Having more time to work when your mate dumps you for someone younger.
Being included in revised versions of art history.
Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius.
Getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit.


Guerrilla Girls are an anonymous group of feminist, female artists devoted to fighting sexism and racism within the art world. The group formed in New York City in 1985 with the mission of bringing gender and racial inequality within the fine arts to light. Members are known for the gorilla masks they wear to remain anonymous.

Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?

Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.

GUERRILLA GIRLS conscience of the art world
www.guerrillagirls.com
We have been talking about how art and life have been integrating since the beginning of the semester. Dada set that in motion and then Pop, Minimalism, Earth Art & Performance, all can be discussed this way.

Postmodernism embraces everything… common culture, past art styles, everything.

As we continue through the class, through the decades, we will see artists continuing to be interested in working outside the art market, ones working with racial, gender and cultural identity, ones working in the community and on the street.

You may have noticed that there has been very little ‘painting for a while. It comes back.