

Note for this week: 11-8

I decided to depart from the syllabus to organize the artists more clearly into groups that make sense to me.

Our author divided them a bit differently as you will see if you are reading the book.

We don't have much more of the book left so we'll have plenty of time.

Plus, in a few weeks, we are done with the book and all readings will be posted to the website.

Hope you like some of these artists.

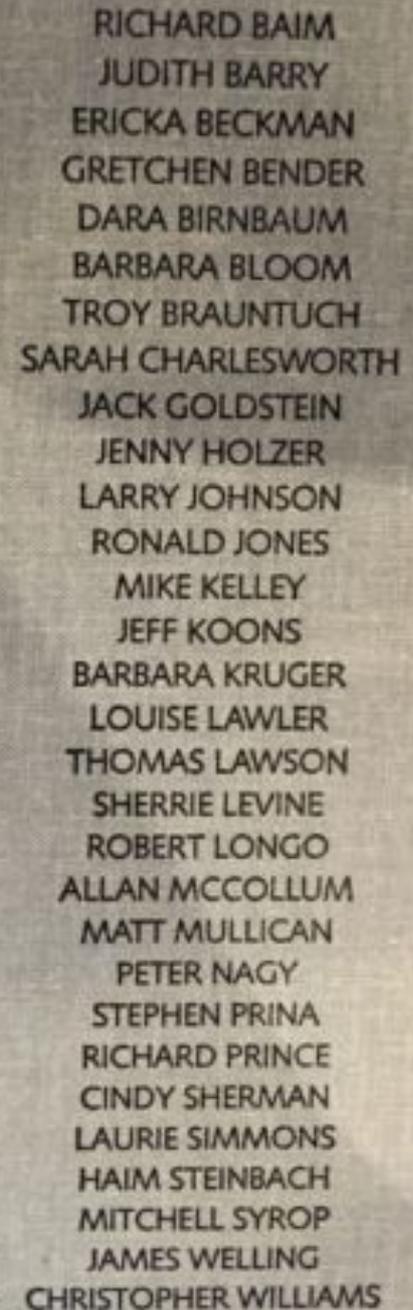
Forest of Signs

‘Forest of Signs’ was an exhibition that brought together many **American neo-conceptualists** and was subtitled by its curator, ‘Art in the ‘Age of Reagan’.

According to our author, a better description might have been, ‘Art in the Age of Andy.’

The exhibit marked a change in the art world where 30 artists, working with issues such as allegory, appropriation, and commodification, the role of the artist, and the functions of authorship and originality in vesting meaning in art were included.

Names of artists are at the right.



RICHARD BAIM
JUDITH BARRY
ERICKA BECKMAN
GRETCHEN BENDER
DARA BIRNBAUM
BARBARA BLOOM
TROY BRAUNTUCH
SARAH CHARLESWORTH
JACK GOLDSTEIN
JENNY HOLZER
LARRY JOHNSON
RONALD JONES
MIKE KELLEY
JEFF KOONS
BARBARA KRUGER
LOUISE LAWLER
THOMAS LAWSON
SHERRIE LEVINE
ROBERT LONGO
ALLAN MCCOLLUM
MATT MULLICAN
PETER NAGY
STEPHEN PRINA
RICHARD PRINCE
CINDY SHERMAN
LAURIE SIMMONS
HAIM STEINBACH
MITCHELL SYROP
JAMES WELLING
CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS

Forest of Signs

Much of the work was provocative, challenging the way we look at art, the way we talk about it, where we see it, and how we buy it.

Another big trend was toward the 'installation' -- arranging objects to fill a space.

You may notice that we have already been discussing artist working with many of these issues. But this show brought some of these artists into the mainstream.

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Barbara Bloom, *The Reign of Narcissism*, 1988– the ‘arrangement’ of a mock neoclassical interior. Bloom created a personal museum devoted to her own likeness, which is emblazoned on all of the objects in the collection, including Greek-style sculptures and bas-reliefs, tea sets and chocolates displayed in vitrines, a tombstone, and even a published series of books entitled *The Complete Works of Barbara Bloom* (1989). Displayed in a hexagonal parlor-style room that evokes a private museum, the piece parodies the narcissistic aspects of “artmaking and collecting.”



This piece, *Altar to Chajes High School*, was made in 1987

Christian Boltanski-- began creating mixed media/materials installations with light as essential concept. Tin boxes, altar-like construction of framed photographs, photographs of Jewish schoolchildren, were used as a forceful reminder of mass murder of Jews by the Nazis, all the elements and materials are used in order to **represent deep contemplation regarding reconstruction of past.**



His works focus the theme of death, the uniqueness of each human being, the transience of life and the absence. In opposition to the notion of individual identity, he addresses the ways we strive to create and maintain it, exploring the loss of it as a collective experience in which we become numbers.

Beginning his career during Minimalism, his work insists on an act of interpolation from the viewer and maintains the distance of the artist by obscuring his identity.

Christian Boltanski

"What drives me as an artist is that I think everyone is unique, yet everyone disappears so quickly"

One of the most recent works from the artist is called "Personnes" was made for Monumenta, in Paris, 2010. The artist filled Paris's Grand Palais with a 50-ton mountain of clothes, and the sound of heartbeats.

This work evokes the idea of a space where life doesn't exist, there is only the absence of it and of the persons to whom those clothes might belong.





Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (House)*, 1993

She came to public attention in 1993 with her sculpture, "House," a life-sized cast of the interior of a condemned terraced house in London's East End which provoked intense public debate until it was eventually demolished in 1994.



- 1. elicited contemplation of the former life of the house.**
- 2. set in a public situation**



Many of Whiteread's works are casts of ordinary domestic objects or the space the objects *do not* inhabit (often termed the "negative space") — instead producing a solid cast of where the space within a container would be; particular parts of rooms, the area underneath furniture.

This piece is the space left behind the books on a shelf. Done for the Holocaust memorial in Vienna, it serves as a reminder of and record of a human situation.





Mike Kelley

In the 1990s stuffed animals played an integral role in Kelley's work. In this series of sculptures, made of found handmade and machine fabricated afghans and blankets with stuffed animals displayed on the floor, the assembly of stuffed animals becomes an "arena" for anthropomorphic observation.

In the *Arena* #7, for example, four sides of a machine made blanket are surrounded with teddy bears and monkeys. One can imagine them holding a meeting or even attending a picnic.



Mike Kelley--Kelley's work ranges from highly symbolic and ritualistic performance pieces to arrangements of stuffed-animal sculptures, to wall-size drawings, to multi-room installations that restage institutional environments (schools, offices, zoos).

He has appropriated popular culture to highlight relationships, sexuality, meanings. The use of discarded stuffed animals have environmental meanings but also a psychological conflict as they all belonged to someone and most all of us had our own at one time.

Kelley's non-art objects exemplify aspects of nostalgia, the grotesque, and the uncanny.

Featuring repurposed thrift store toys, blankets, and worn stuffed animals, this series addressed Kelley's career-long investigation of memory, trauma, and repression, predicated on what he described as a "shared culture of abuse."

We're living in the post-modern age, the death of the avant-garde. So all I can really do now is work with this dominant culture and flay it, rip it apart, reconfigure it, expose it.

—Mike Kelley





His work also questions the legitimacy of “normative” values and attacks the sanctity of cultural attitudes toward family, religion, sexuality, art history, and education.

Mike Kelley. *Deodorized Central Mass with Satellites*. 1991/1999. Plush toys sewn over wood and wire frames with styrofoam packing material, nylon rope, pulleys, steel hardware and hanging plates, fiberglass, car paint, and disinfectant.

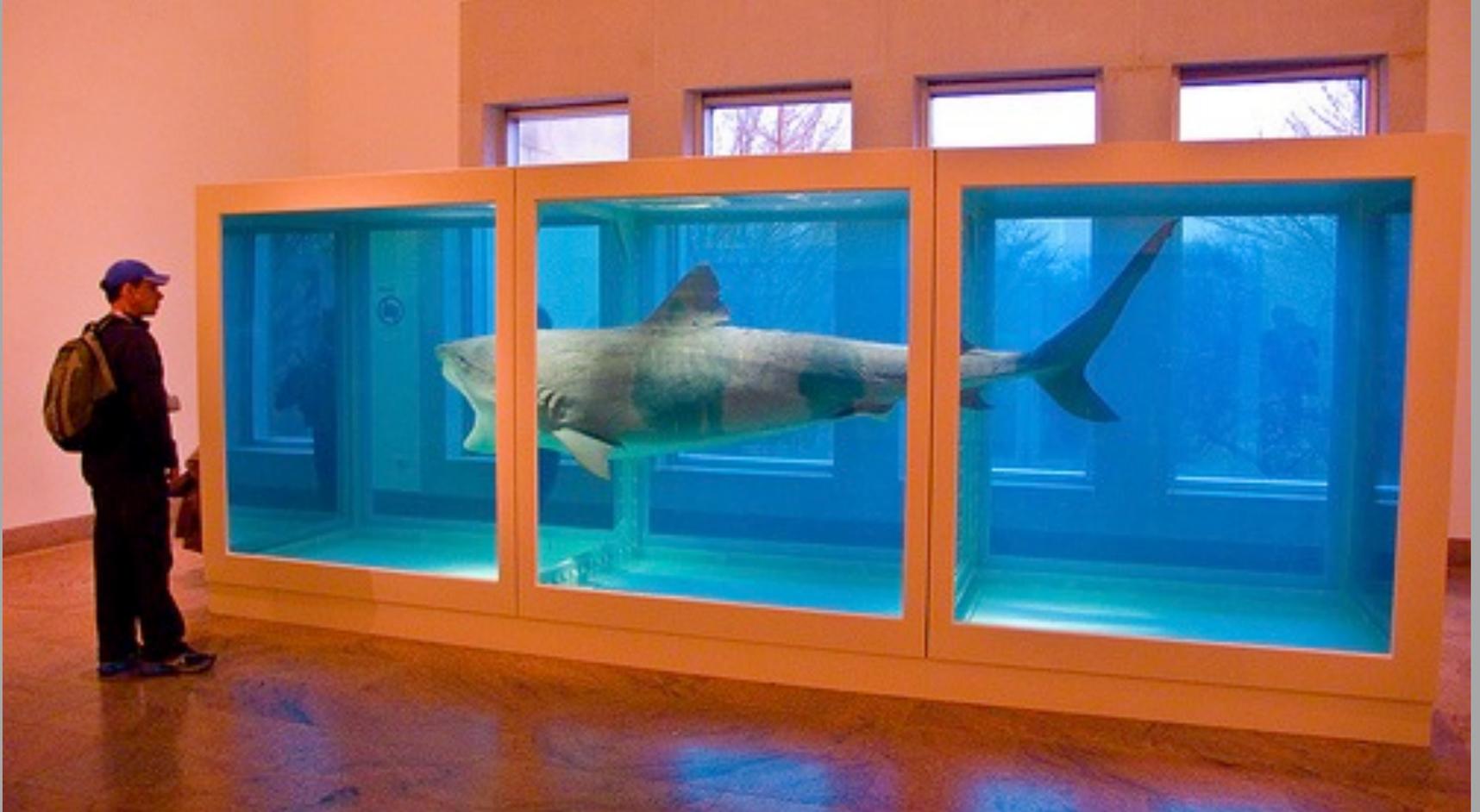
Damien Hirst

A British artist, Hirst takes a direct approach to ideas about existence. His work calls into question our awareness and convictions about the boundaries that separate desire and fear, life and death, reason and faith, love and hate.

Hirst uses the tools and symbols of science and religion, to create artwork that transcends our familiar understanding of those domains.

In this early work, he presented real animals suspended in formaldehyde, some having been dissected as if some strange science project.





Damien Hirst— *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, 1989*

This work consists of a thirteen-foot tiger shark preserved in a tank of formaldehyde, weighing a total of 23 tons. The shark is contained within a steel and glass vitrine three times longer than high and divided into three cubes.



Damien Hirst— *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, 1989

Explaining “I didn’t just want a lightbox, or a painting of a shark”
He wanted the real thing.

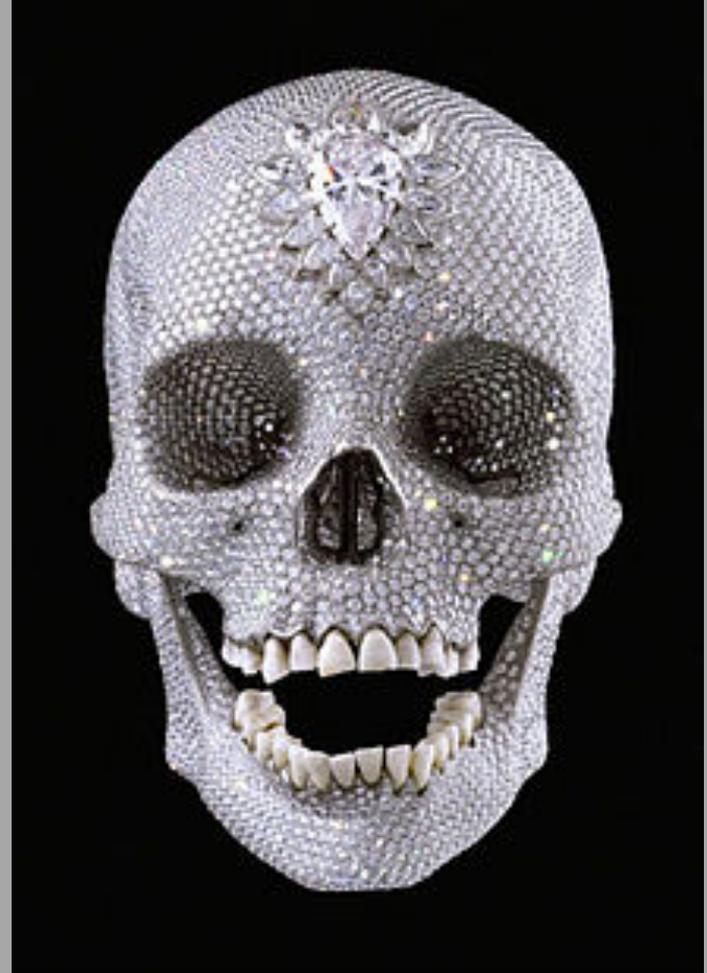
Hirst’s intention was to force the viewer out of their element by introducing into a gallery setting, a shark that was “real enough to frighten you”, while serving as a reminder of our own avoidance of death.



Damien Hirst, *Lullaby Spring*, various real pills on shelves and LSD.

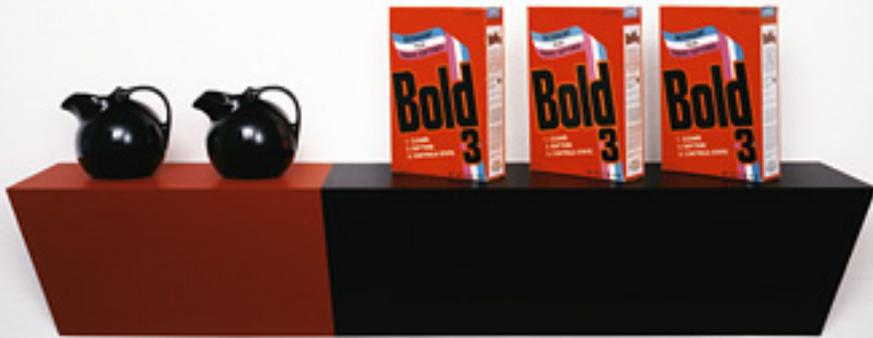
Continuing Warhol's exploration of the market as an art form, Hirst's later work addresses issues that force the art public to think about our preoccupation with drugs, wealth, medical imagery, etc.

Notice all the colors and shapes of the different pills. Needed? Or Marketing?



Damien Hirst, *For the Love of God*– 2007, Platinum, diamonds and human teeth.

‘For the Love of God’ acts as a reminder that our existence on earth is transient. Hirst combined the imagery of classic *memento mori* with inspiration drawn from Aztec skulls and the Mexican love of decoration and attitude towards death. He explains of death: “You don’t like it, so you disguise it or you decorate it to make it look like something bearable – to such an extent that it becomes something else.” From a conversation with Gordon Burn.



Haim Steinbach has been an influential exponent of art based on already existing objects. Since the late 1970's Steinbach's art has been focused on the selection and arrangement of objects, above all everyday objects.

In order to enhance their interplay and resonance, he has been conceiving structures and framing devices for them.



Jeff Koons - "Michael Jackson and Bubbles" (1988), Porcelain/ceramic blend - 42 x 70.5 x 32.5 inches



Jeff Koons too, plucks images and objects from popular culture, framing questions about taste and pleasure.



Transforming banal items from popular into sumptuous icons, Koon's work takes on a psychological dimension through dramatic shifts in scale, spectacularly engineered surfaces, and subliminal allegories of animals, humans, and anthropomorphized objects.

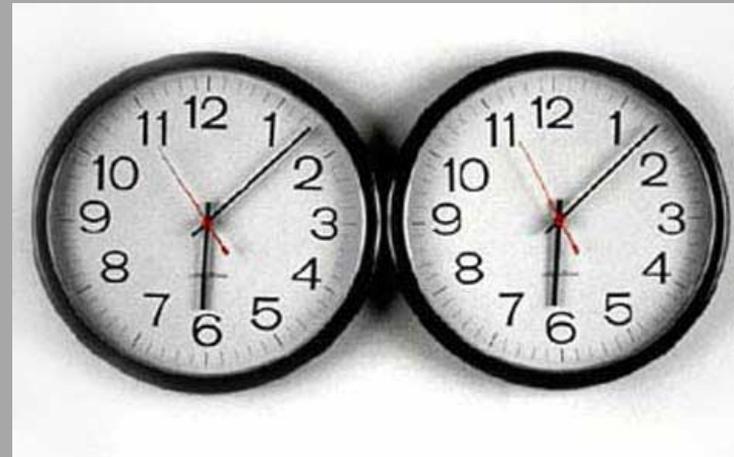
Also at issue with all these artists is the reality that their work is not made by them.

Concepts driving the artists work takes a bit of a shift here.

You may have noticed many of the artists we've looked at this week are using materials and objects found in popular culture. Some are merely arranging them to change or expand their intended meaning and/or purpose. Many are working with a team to produce the works, or (as is the case with Koons) hiring professionals to make the work for him.

Of course this brings us back to Duchamp as his questioning of what is art? And who is the artist? continues.

While the next few artists are also using 'found' or already existing materials, their meanings are somewhat different.



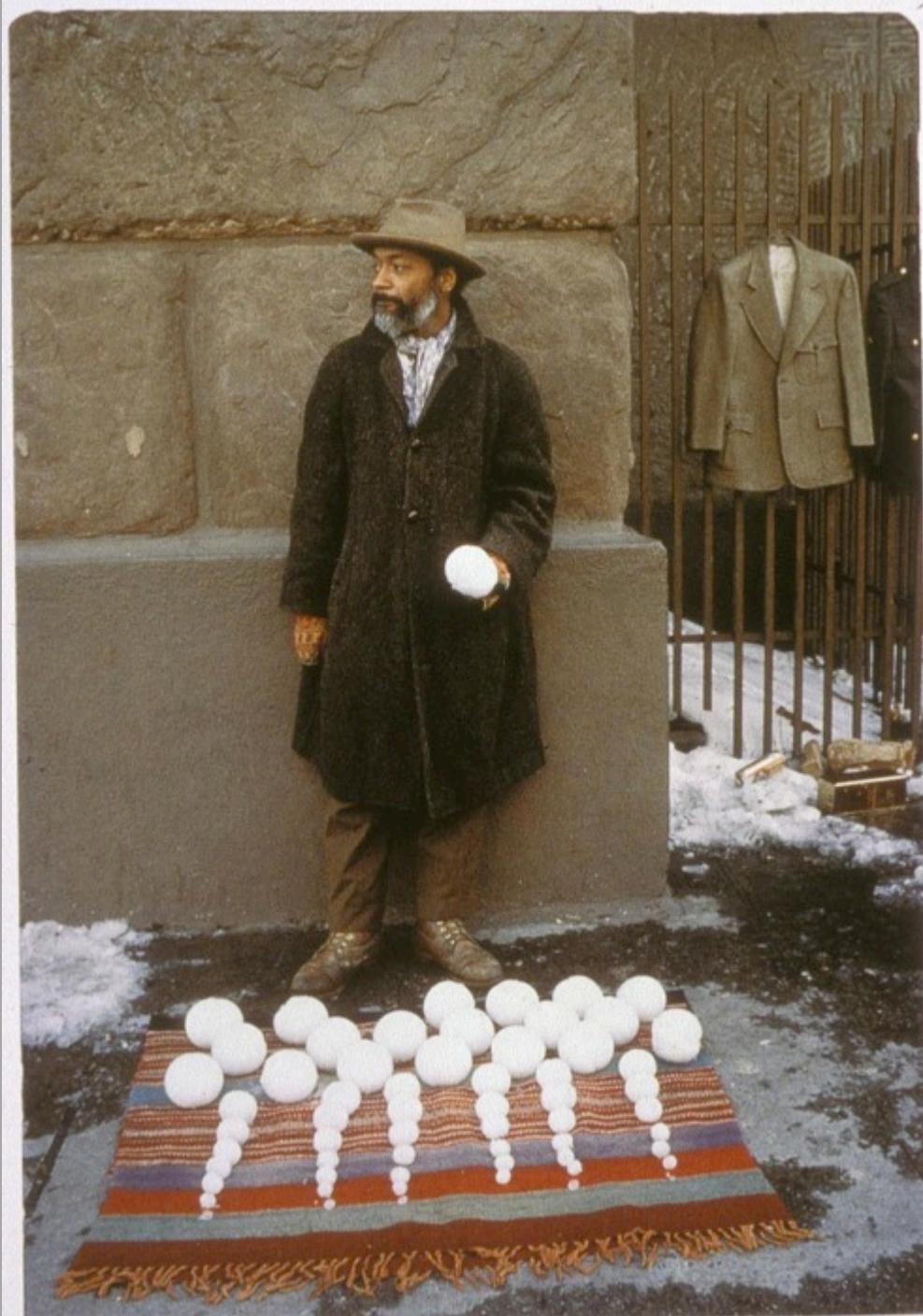
David Hammons is an African American artist who integrates traditional African tribal, African American stereotypes.

Using items found on the street and other unwanted debris, he assembles them in new combinations addressing issues related to poverty and hope.



Higher Goals, 1982, temporary sculpture installed in Brooklyn's Cadman Plaza Park.





David Hammons performing 'Bliz-aard Ball Sale' (1983), Cooper Square, New York City. He is selling snowballs of different sizes for different prices to point to the absurdity and arbitrary nature of commodity.

Quote: "DOING THINGS IN THE STREET IS MORE POWERFUL THAN ART I THINK. BECAUSE ART HAS GOTTEN SO...I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE FUCK ART IS ABOUT NOW. IT DOESN'T DO ANYTHING. LIKE MALCOLM X SAID, IT'S LIKE NOVOCAIN. IT USED TO WAKE YOU UP BUT NOW IT PUTS YOU TO SLEEP. I THINK THAT ART NOW IS PUTTING PEOPLE TO SLEEP. THERE'S SO MUCH OF IT AROUND IN THIS TOWN THAT IT DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING. THAT'S WHY THE ARTIST HAS TO BE VERY CAREFUL WHAT HE SHOWS AND WHEN HE SHOWS NOW. BECAUSE THE PEOPLE AREN'T REALLY LOOKING AT ART, THEY'RE LOOKING AT EACH OTHER AND EACH OTHER'S CLOTHES AND EACH OTHER'S HAIRCUTS."



High Falutin', one of his several works based on the basketball hoop, is a battered wood window frame atop a pole, crowned and fringed by ruffles of rubber tire, a subtly figural ensemble incongruously glamorized by fussy glass candelabra, which are wired to light up.

David Hammons, *High Falutin'*. 1990, Found objects, steel. H 77, W 87, D 25 in.



Andrew Page says, “the work is an outstanding example of Hammons' ongoing exploration of the shimmering promise of escape from poverty that athletic pursuit dangles before lower-income youth, African Americans in particular, and he has been making work that points up the mirage of basketball as an escape route for decades, including building unattainably high hoops decorated with colorful bottle-caps and other urban detritus on city streets”.

David Hammons, *Untitled*, 2000. Crystal, brass, frosted glass, light fixtures, hardware and steel. H 77, W 87, D 25 in.

FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES, was a Cuban artist who died of AIDS-related complications in 1996. But before he died his extensive body of work commented on the fragility of life and the belief that everything does, and should change.

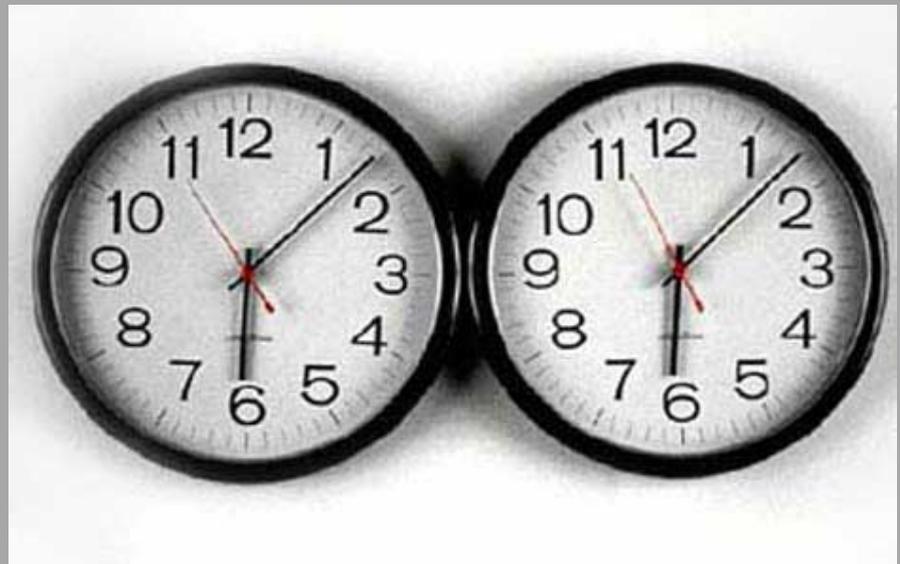
He was interested in how the public and private are intertwined and uses everyday objects as complex metaphor for human experience.

Employing simple, everyday materials like, stacks of paper, puzzles, candy, strings of lights, beads, and a reduced aesthetic reminiscent of both Minimalism and Conceptual art he addresses themes such as love and loss, sickness and rejuvenation, gender and sexuality.

Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled*, 1992, strings of light bulbs.



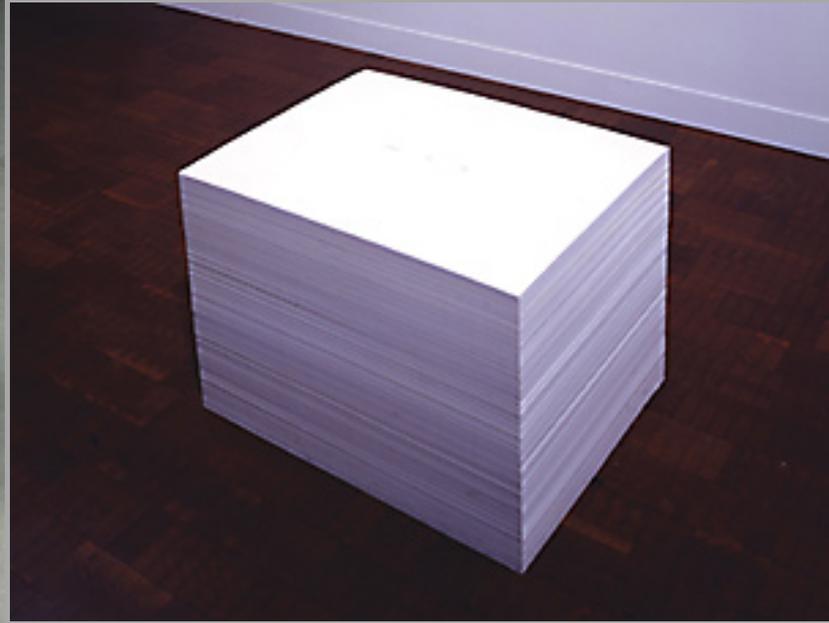
FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES,
Untitled, (lovers), 1987-91



Using common, everyday materials, there are several of these pieces using wall clocks originally set to the same time.

However, because they are inexpensive, over time they do not synch with each other and eventually, a battery runs dead--usually, not at the same time. The clocks serve as metaphor for relationships, love and loss.





González-Torres was often considered to be a process artist due to the nature of his 'removable' installations by which the process of viewer's choice to remove pieces is an important aspect of the work.

Many of his installations invite the viewer to take a piece of the work with them. In 1989 González-Torres presented *Untitled (Memorial Day Weekend)* and *Untitled (Veterans Day Sale)*, exhibited together as *Untitled (Monuments)*: block-like stacks of paper printed with content related to his private life. Rather than constituting a solid, immovable monument, the stacks can be dispersed and depleted as viewers take the sheets. And then the gallery or museum renews them over time.

Anyone who has been in my office has seen my *Untitled*, piece by Gonzalez-Torres.



"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.), 1991
Candies individually wrapped in multicolor cellophane,
endless supply
Dimensions vary with installation; ideal weight 175 lbs.



"Untitled" (USA Today), 1990
Candies individually wrapped in red, white and blue
cellophane, endless supply
Dimensions vary with installation; ideal weight 300 lbs.

His sculptures of wrapped candies spilled in corners or spread on floors like carpets, such as *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, defy the convention of art's otherworldly preciousness, as viewers are asked to touch and consume the work.

Many of his installations invite the viewer to take a piece of the work with them: this series invites viewers to take packaged candies from a pile in the corner of an exhibition space and, in so doing, contribute to the slow disappearance of the sculpture over the course of the exhibition.



Untitled (Placebo) (1991), in one installation, consisted of a six-by-twelve-foot carpet of shiny silver wrapped candies.



Gonzalez-Torres conceived of the works but it's the borrower (museum or gallery) that buys and replaces the candy.

The candy pieces may also be installed in any formation the borrower desires.



A borrower may also choose to install the work at a weight different than the "ideal weight". But must continually replace the candies to the weight chosen.

Felix Gonzalez Torres, *Billboards*, 1991

The billboard project was designed to address issues of public versus private, identity, and participation in contemporary art.

One of his most recognizable works, *Untitled* (1991), was a billboard installed in twenty-four locations throughout New York City. It of a monochrome photograph of an unoccupied bed (presumably his), made after the death of his long-time partner, Ross Laycock, from AIDS.





Most critics believe González-Torres's work is a metaphor for dying because elements like light bulbs expire and piles of candies are dispersed.

However, many have seen the works also representing the continuation of life with the possibility of regeneration (replacing bulbs, replenishing stacks or candies).

What do you think?

We have already seen how television dominated cultural entertainment after the war. But in 1967 Sony introduced the first battery powered, self-contained, hand-held recording system.

Andy Warhol and artists like Nam June Paik, shot experimental videos in the early 1960s.

By the 1980s, artists used video as a medium to address various different issues that had previously used more traditional media.



Nam June Paik, *TV Garden*, 1974

Nam June Paik transformed video into an artist's medium with his media-based art that challenged and changed our understanding of visual culture. As Paik wrote in 1969, he wanted "to shape the TV screen canvas as precisely as Leonardo, as freely as Picasso, as colorfully as Renoir, as profoundly as Mondrian, as violently as Pollock and as lyrically as Jasper Johns." -

I've decided to depart from the syllabus a bit and stop here for this week.

Next week I will talk more about the emerging video artists, so this week was more about Installation.

I hope this week you can see this group of artists expanding the ideas of Duchamp, Minimalism, Conceptualism even as they have their own interests.

Did you notice some themes in the work this week? Some of you are already beginning to make connections between contemporary culture and the art. Some are already seeing connections between ideas of the artists. This is the critical thinking part. See what you think.

