

# 1980s ART TAKING IT TO THE STREET

**Power--Graffiti**

**Identity Politics**

## REVIEW

We have been talking about how art and life have been integrating since the beginning of the semester with Marcel Duchamp but, particularly since the 1960s.

Pop, Minimalism, Performance, Land Art and Public Art can all be contextualized this way.

We have already seen that Postmodernism embraces everything. common culture, past art styles, everything.

This week we continue this direction.



# HISTORIC CONTEXT

By the end of Jimmy Carter's presidency, inflation, crime and foreign policy turmoil created a conservative response in social, economic and political life.

Often referred to as a 'backlash' against social issues, this time is remembered for its enhanced materialism and consumerism, yuppies, cable TV, MTV, blockbuster movies, as we also witness the growth of The New Right, a populist conservative movement.

Many people derided yuppies for being self-centered and materialistic, and surveys of young urban professionals across the country showed that they were, more concerned with making money and buying consumer goods than their parents and grandparents had been.

<http://www.history.com/topics/1980s>



**Graffiti** was made possible because many buildings in inner city America, in particular NYC, were being abandoned.

Street artists rushed in to make art that would resist the flood of advertising, the unreality of the art market and a way of taking their creative activities to the street.

We have already discussed how the events of the 1960s and 70s deflated the idealist dreams of post WWII Americans and how artists were trying to work outside the market system. Graffiti continues these ideas.

**While Civil Rights, Women and Gay rights were championed in the 1960s and 70s, the 1980s witnesses a backlash with conservatism, materialism and consumerism moving into popular society.**







**This is early Christian graffiti from 300 AD**



Graffiti was not new. It has long appeared on railroad boxcars and subways and even shows up in Roman times.

During World War II and for decades after, the phrase "Kilroy was here" with accompanying illustration was widespread throughout the world, due to its use by American troops and its filtering into American popular culture.

Shortly after the death of Charlie Parker (nicknamed "Yardbird" or "Bird"), graffiti began appearing around New York with the words "Bird Lives". Contemporary Graffiti art begins in New York in the 1970s.



# KEITH HARING

Keith Haring found a thriving alternative art community in New York that was developing outside the gallery and museum system, in the downtown streets, the subways and spaces in clubs and former dance halls.

His first works were chalk drawings in the NY subway.



**Keith Haring in NY Subway station**



# KEITH HARING

Throughout his career, Haring devoted much of his time to public works, which often carried social messages.

He produced more than 50 public artworks between 1982 and 1989, in dozens of cities around the world, many of which were created for charities, hospitals, children's day care centers and orphanages.

The now famous *Crack is Wack* mural of 1986 has become a landmark along New York's FDR Drive.



Keith Haring, CRACK IS WACK, FDR Drive in Manhattan.

# KEITH HARING



Photo: Charles Dolfi-Michels

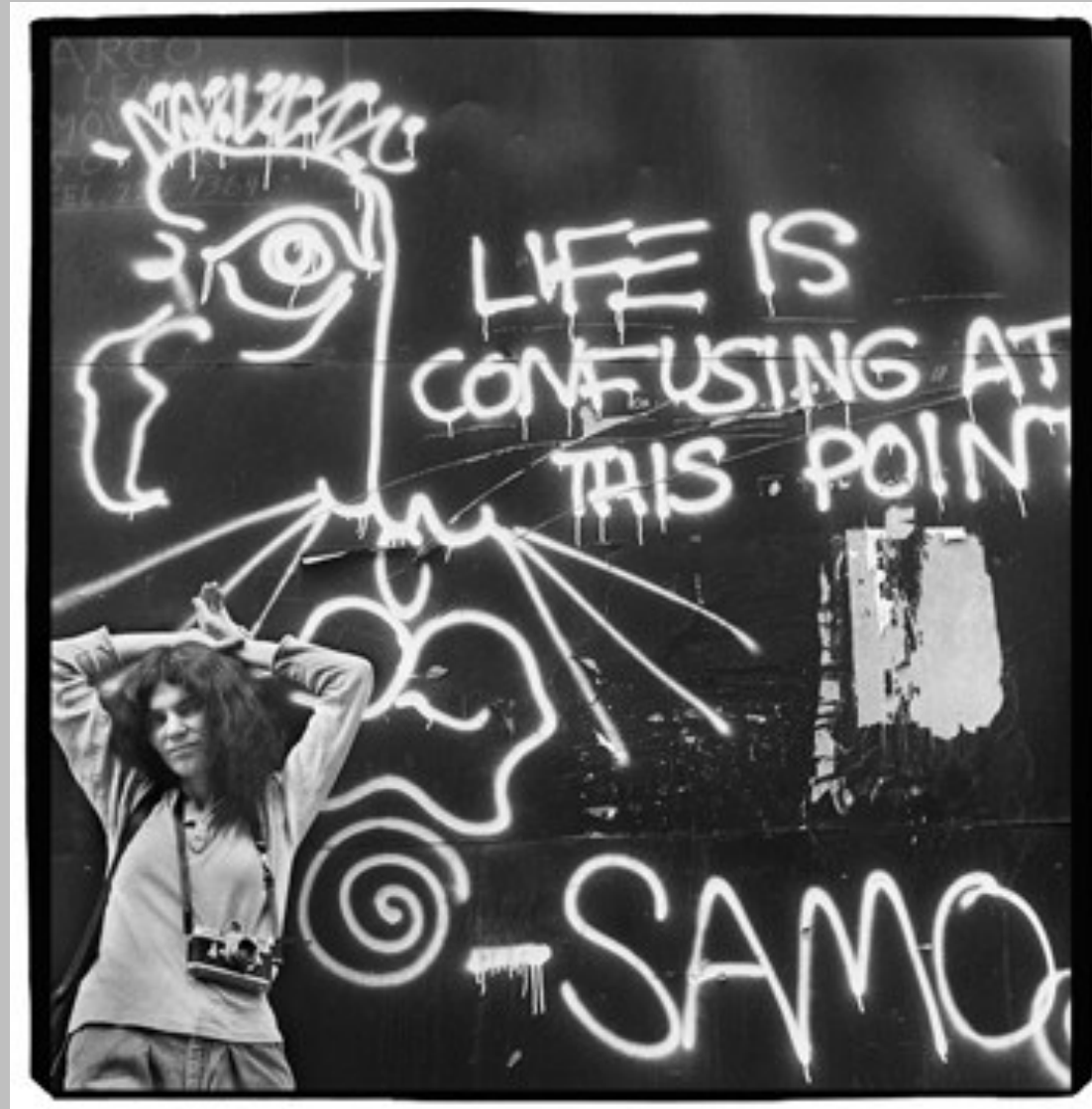
In April 1986, Haring opened the Pop Shop, a retail store in Soho selling T-shirts, toys, posters, buttons and magnets bearing his images. Haring considered the shop to be an extension of his work and painted the entire interior of the store in an abstract black on white mural.



# Jean-Michael Basquiat



In 1976, Jean-Michael Basquiat and friend Al Diaz began spray-painting graffiti on buildings in Lower Manhattan, working under the pseudonym SAMO.



# Jean-Michael Basquiat

Continuing his activities as a graffiti artist, Basquiat often incorporated words into his paintings.

Themes of social justice involving issues of racism, materialism, and exploitation, recur in the paintings.

In this painting Basquiat honors one of his heroes, Dizzy Gillespie, the jazz trumpet player.





Other major sources were Henry Dreyfuss Symbol Sourcebook, Leonardo Da Vinci's notebooks, and Brentjes African Rock Art.







Basquiat used text and symbols to make comments about life in America. Some think the boxer symbolizes strength against odds. Other, discuss its relation to the Statue of Liberty, and even the iconic black boxer. The phrase “per capita” relates to how much income a person earns in a year. He lists the average income in different states to emphasize the inequity between rich and poor. E Pluribus refers to the the statement on the great seal of the United States referring to ‘out of many one.’



His work is usually pretty big. See this installation shot.





Other graffiti artists like Kenny Sharf made work based on popular culture. Here Sharf's work at Bowery and Houston has cartoon faces with science-related backgrounds.





Scharf came to prominence in the 80s interdisciplinary art scene making sparkly, pop-ed and monstrous paintings and installations.

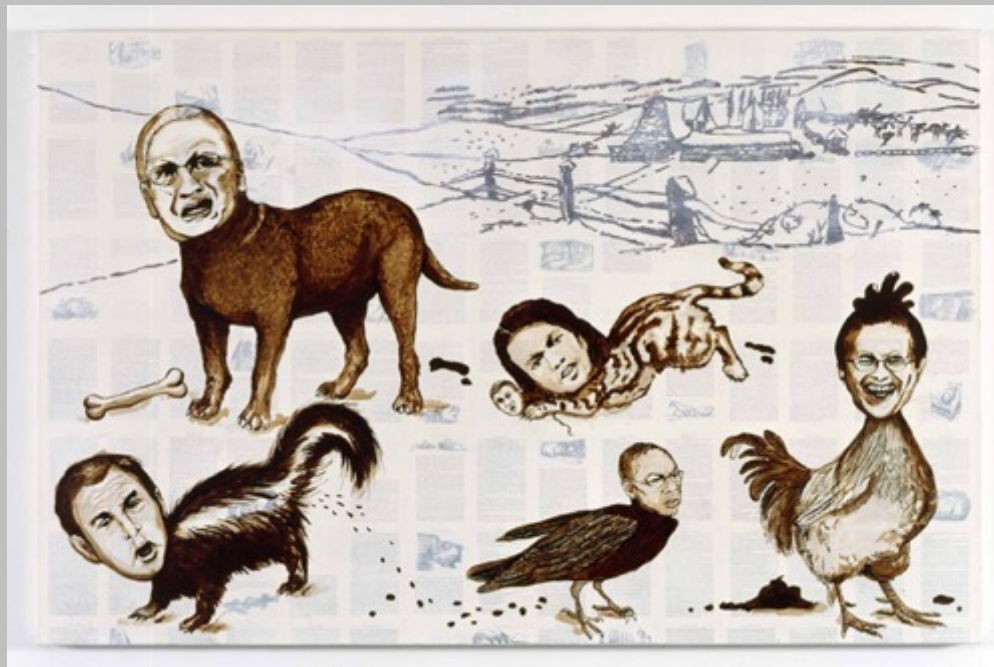
Scharf uses images from the animated cartoons popular during his childhood, such as The Flintstones and The Jetsons bringing elements from popular culture into the work.







Another artist, **Tim Rollins**, discovered that his inner city high school students responded to art - art taught his way, not the way it is usually taught in public schools. Some of Rollins' students became a group of regulars who participated in an after-school and weekend program called the 'Art of Knowledge Workshop'<sub>16</sub>



**Tim Rollins and his collaborators,** the high school students from the South Bronx, NY, typically made works based on classic literature.

This one is based on, *Animal Farm*.

This way Rollins used art to help students learn about other subjects, like English or philosophy.







The students named themselves **K.O.S.** which stands for "Kids of Survival. They said, "What we're doing changes people's conception about who can make art, how art is made, who can learn and what's possible, because a lot of these kids had been written off by the school system. This is our revenge."

<https://fryemuseum.org/exhibition/3315/>

# Aids Crisis

On June 5, 1981 the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report describing cases of a rare lung infection, *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia, in five young, previously healthy, gay men in Los Angeles.

All the men have other unusual infections as well, indicating that their immune systems are not working: two have already died by the time the report is published. This edition of the MMWR marks the first official reporting of what will become known as the AIDS epidemic.



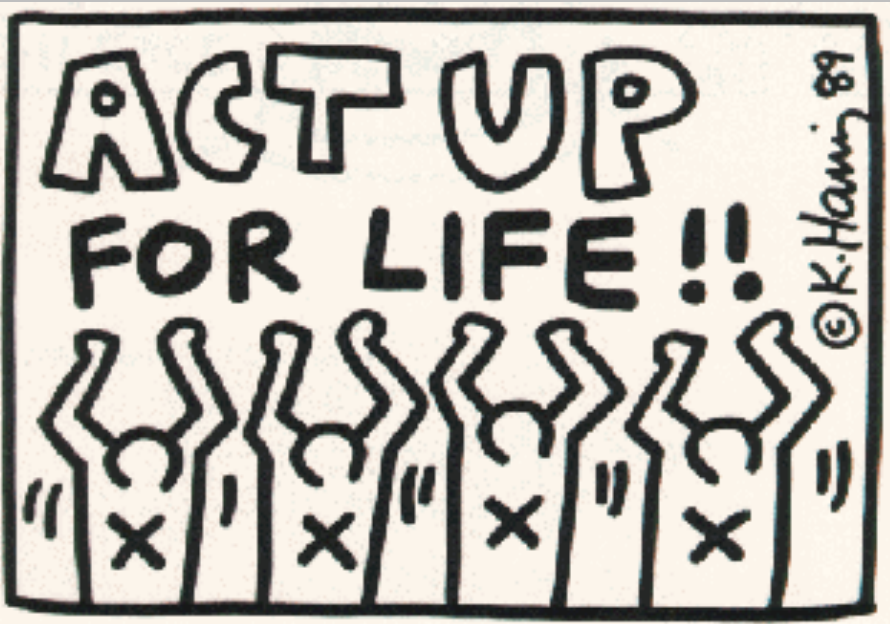
A poster with the names and faces of some men who died of aids in the 1980s.



## ACT UP

ACT UP is a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis. We advise and inform. We demonstrate. WE ARE NOT SILENT

*Notice the poster with Keith Haring Art.*





# Aids and Art

Haring was diagnosed with AIDS in 1988. In 1989, he established the Keith Haring Foundation, to provide funding and imagery to AIDS organizations and children's programs.

Haring enlisted his imagery during the last years of his life to speak about his own illness and generate activism and awareness about AIDS.



Keith Haring died in  
February, 1990.

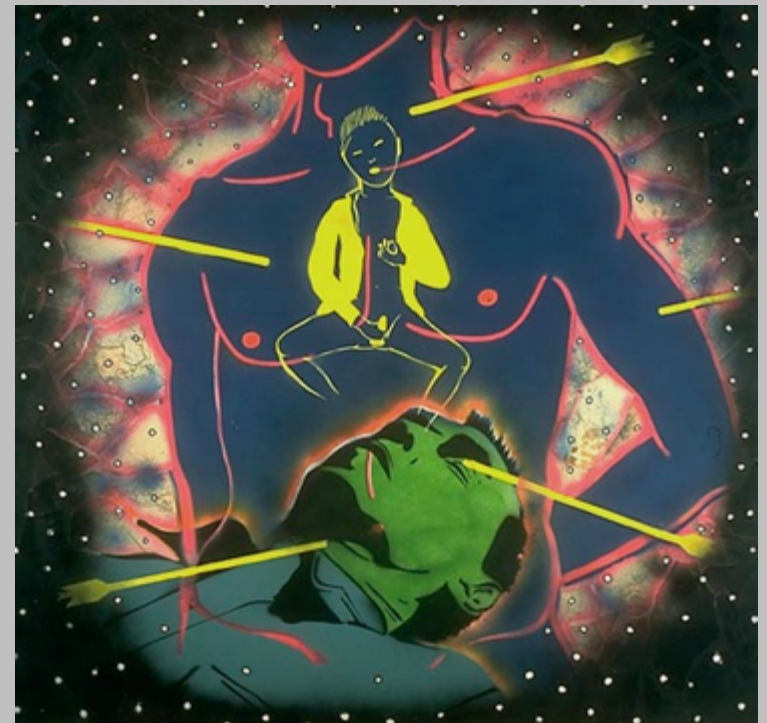
# David Wojnarowicz

It is in this context we talk about David Wojnarowicz. Wojnarowicz was a painter, photographer, filmmaker, performance artist and activist. He was also gay.

Beginning as a graffiti artist his early work incorporated outsider experiences from personal history and stories he heard from others he met in bus stations and while hitchhiking.

He wanted to show a more 'authentic' version of history that included people outside the mainstream.

In the 1980s he was diagnosed with AIDS and became more activist in commenting on the social reality of sexuality, life and death.



Often overlapping text, paint, collaged elements, and photography, and sometimes organizing them in quadrants or comic strip-like frames, Wojnarowicz created provocative narratives and historical allegories dealing with themes of order and disorder, birth and death.



# David Wojnarowicz



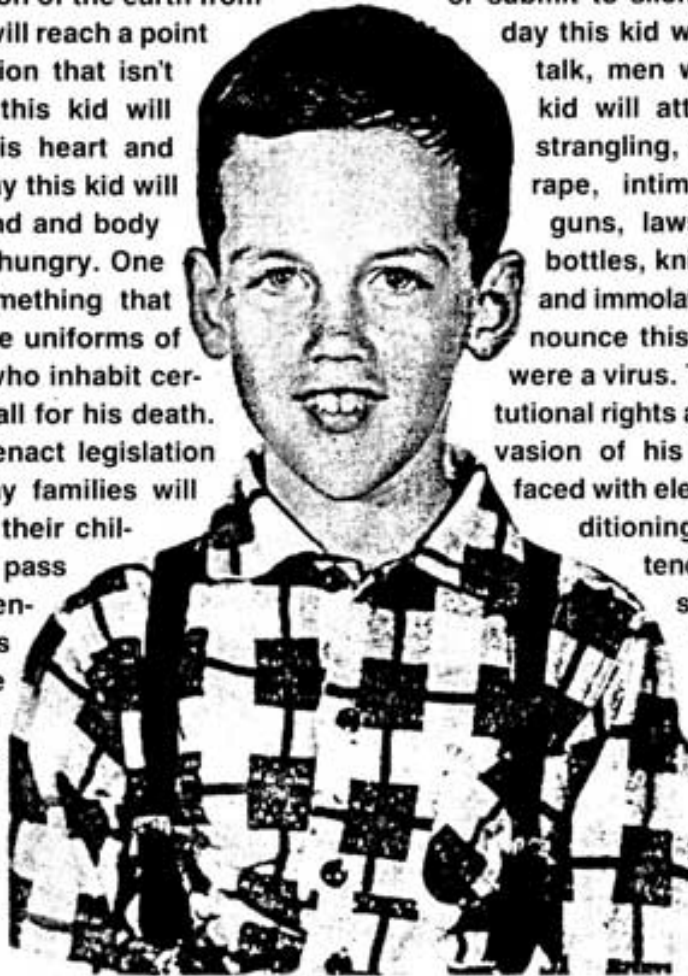
In *The Death of American Spirituality* (1987), Wojnarowicz depicts a cowboy riding a bull, collaged from newspaper articles referring to gangsters, Oliver North, AIDS and advertisements for cars and electronics.

Images of a kachina doll, a snake charmer, and Jesus fade into a background of factories and exploding rocks.

The work suggests many layers of meaning, but the implication of the loss of belief in myth, religion and history is clear.

# David Wojnarowicz

One day this kid will get larger. One day this kid will come to know something that causes a sensation equivalent to the separation of the earth from its axis. One day this kid will reach a point where he senses a division that isn't mathematical. One day this kid will feel something stir in his heart and throat and mouth. One day this kid will find something in his mind and body and soul that makes him hungry. One day this kid will do something that causes men who wear the uniforms of priests and rabbis, men who inhabit certain stone buildings, to call for his death. One day politicians will enact legislation against this kid. One day families will give false information to their children and each child will pass that information down generationally to their families and that information will be designed to make existence intolerable for this kid. One day this kid will begin to experience all this activity in his environment and that activi-

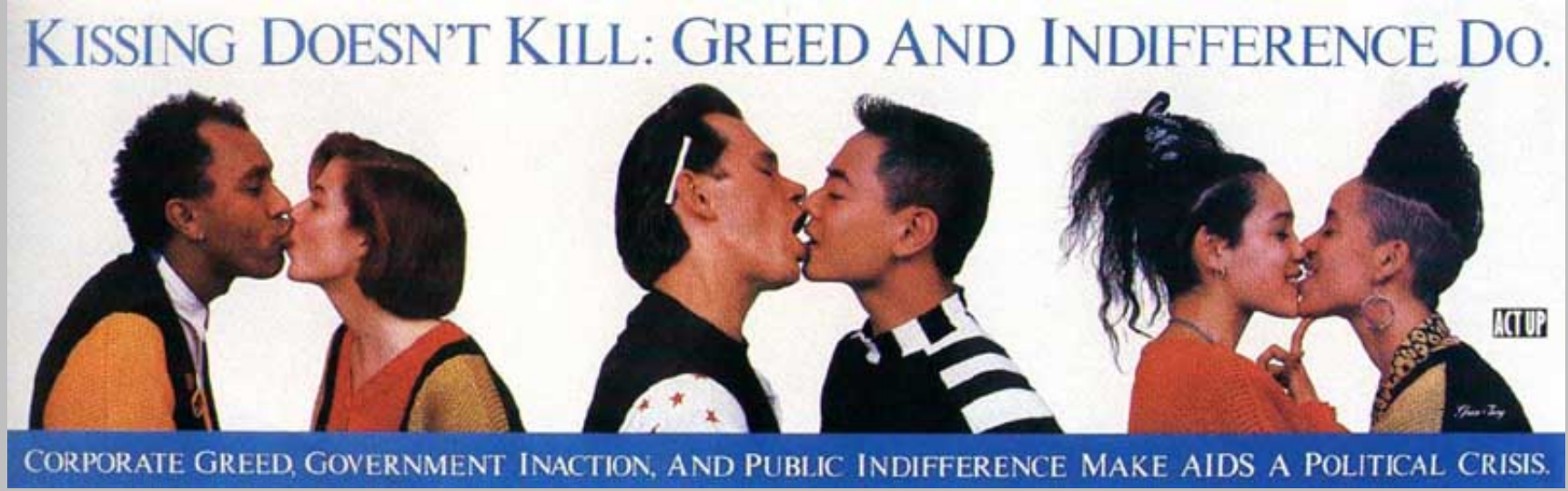


ty and information will compel him to commit suicide or submit to danger in hopes of being murdered or submit to silence and invisibility. Or one day this kid will talk. When he begins to talk, men who develop a fear of this kid will attempt to silence him with strangling, fists, prison, suffocation, rape, intimidation, drugging, ropes, guns, laws, menace, roving gangs, bottles, knives, religion, decapitation, and immolation by fire. Doctors will pronounce this kid curable as if his brain were a virus. This kid will lose his constitutional rights against the government's invasion of his privacy. This kid will be faced with electro-shock, drugs, and conditioning therapies in laboratories tended by psychologists and research scientists. He will be subject to loss of home, civil rights, jobs, and all conceivable freedoms. All this will begin to happen in one or two years when he discovers he desires to place his naked body on the naked body of another boy.

David Wojnarowicz 1990/91

In this piece Wojnarowicz, using a photograph of himself as a boy, addressed his realities of growing up gay. *Untitled, One Day this Kid...*





Gran Fury, *Kissing Doesn't Kill: Greed and Indifference Do*, printed on postcards and displayed as billboards and bus posters, 1989.

Contemporary artists and designers use visual representation (images) to reflect the ideas of our time.

Graffiti was another way to bring art to the street. We have seen others.

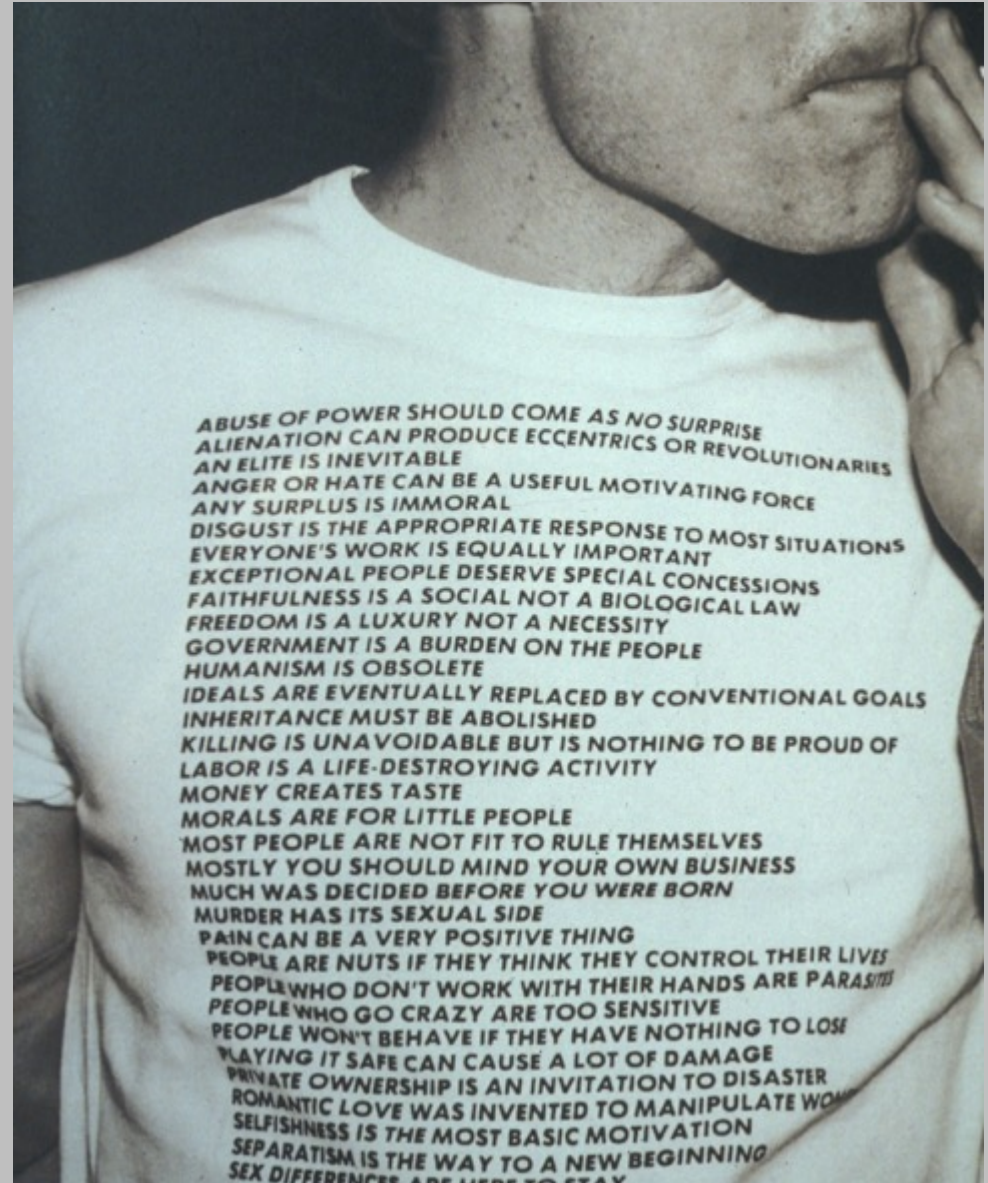
Aids brought attention to gay rights and especially artists felt the need to speak out in various ways.

Other artists at this time used words and images to bring attention to contemporary issues.



Robert Mapplethorpe, *Self-Portrait*, 1980

# Jenny Holzer



Referencing the advertising 'sound bite' Holzer's Truisms were lines of text that were designed to be as meaningless as they were true. Originally, written on paper and posted to windows in Manhattan, in the 1970s, she then moved to cards, T-shirts and benches (as in the previous slide).



*DON'T TALK DOWN TO ME. DON'T  
BE POLITE TO ME. DON'T  
TRY TO MAKE ME FEEL NICE.  
DON'T RELAX. I'LL CUT THE  
SMILE OFF YOUR FACE. YOU  
THINK I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S  
GOING ON. YOU THINK I'M  
AFRAID TO REACT. THE JOKE'S  
ON YOU. I'M BIDDING MY TIME,  
LOOKING FOR THE SPOT. YOU  
THINK NO ONE CAN REACH YOU,  
NO ONE CAN HAVE WHAT YOU  
HAVE. I'VE BEEN PLANNING  
WHILE YOU'RE PLAYING. I'VE  
BEEN SAVING WHILE YOU'RE  
SPENDING. THE GAME IS  
ALMOST OVER SO IT'S  
TIME YOU ACKNOWLEDGE ME.  
DO YOU WANT TO FALL NOT  
EVER KNOWING WHO TOOK YOU?*



Jenny Holzer is one who found different ways of addressing realities of life using text. Jenny Holzer found text both a way of communicating and a way of disrupting communication. Her Text Drawings and benches with text were put in public places. The work was shown in galleries but also in windows, parks and other public areas.

**Jenny Holzer—** she developed text work she called, ‘truisms’.



**Holzer**—continued her appropriation of mass media processes with her move to LED electronic signs most commonly seen in advertising.

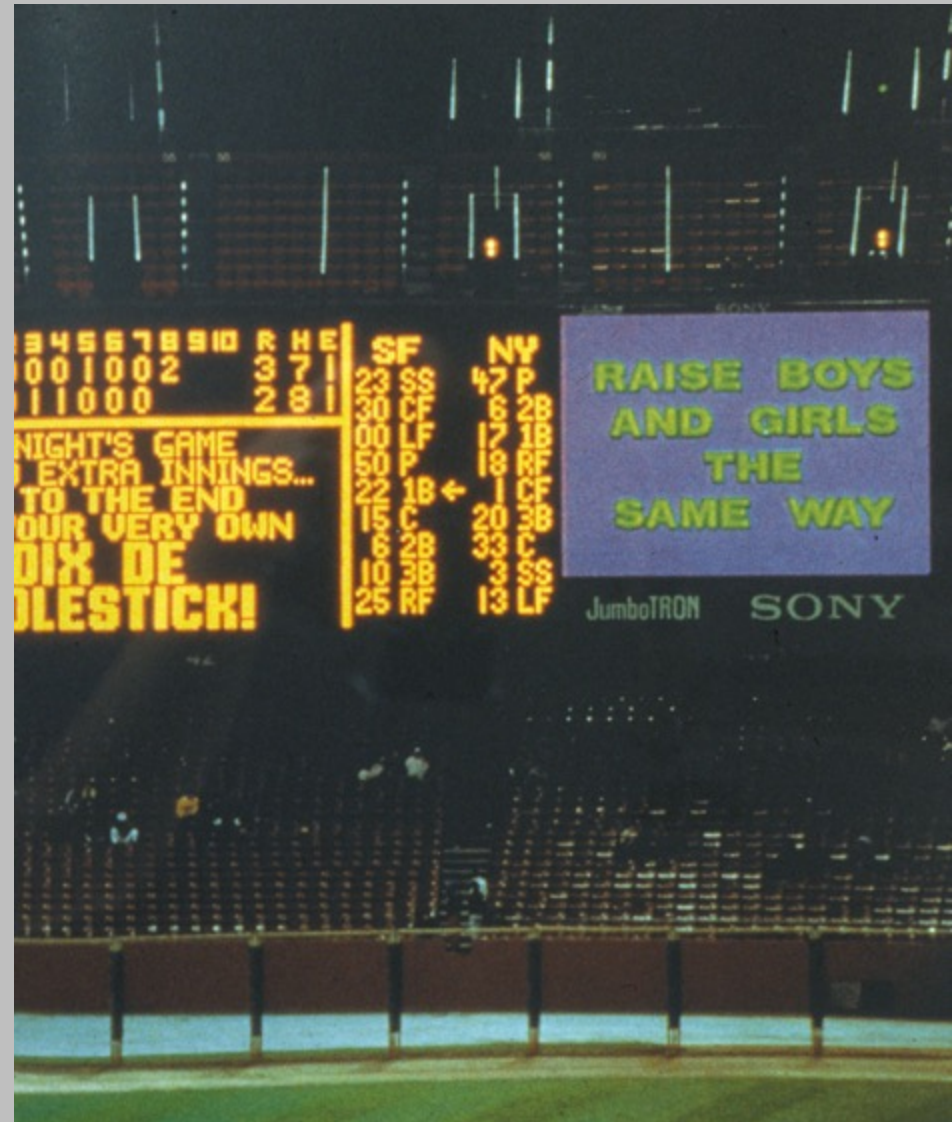
Her ‘truisms’ sound almost familiar, but are highly impersonal, underscoring the isolation of individuals in mass-media culture.

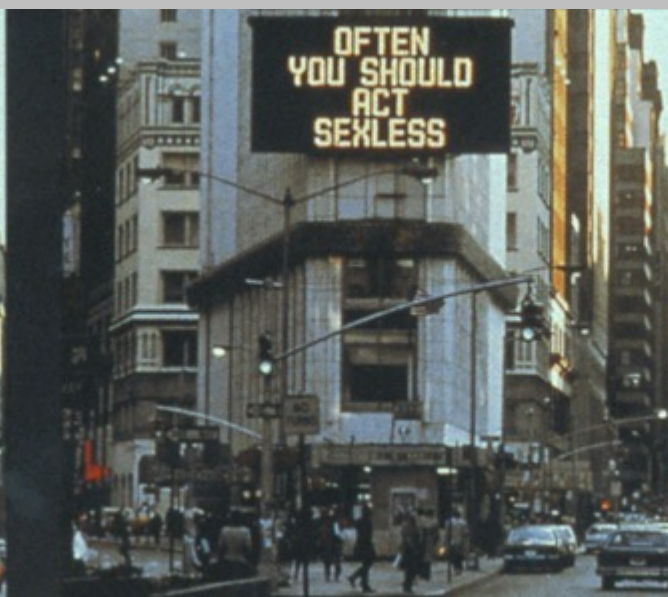
**These are two images from her ‘truisms’ in LED at the Guggenheim Museum. Benches with ‘truisms’ are on the ground floor below.**





Various installations of LED 'truisms' have appeared in museums, galleries and even baseball stadiums.





Her interest was in bringing art into the public sphere. In 1982, her 'truisms' were installed as part of a Public Art Project in Times Square.

Issues of consumerism, gender, power and media are all addressed.





Next Week:

As we move into the 1980s and 90s, a different social and political reality evolves.

As America becomes more conservative, art pushes back.

The ideas of **Feminism, the Civil Rights Movement, Counter-Culture wars, Gay Rights**, along with the ideas of **multiculturalism, colonialism, dualism, postmodernism** and the historic reality **that many** individuals outside the 'mainstream' **were marginalized** or invisible in both art and society brought a new wave in art.

Postmodernist ideas continue to influence art and life.



Barbara Kruger,  
*Untitled: I shop therefore I am*, 1987



And  
*Untitled: We have received orders not to move*, 1982