

1960s 1970s 1980s

Art, Society and Politics

The Postmodern Condition

Performance Art

Feminist Art

Background

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s was a struggle of African Americans to achieve civil rights equal to those of whites in America. Equal opportunity in employment, housing, education, voting, use of public facilities and right to be free of racial discrimination.

It altered the relations between the federal government and the states as the federal government was forced many times to protect the rights of African American citizens.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made civil rights a law thus outlawing discrimination in all public places.



The civil rights movement forever changed the face of U.S. law and politics.

It led to legislation that gave greater protection to the rights of minorities.

It also greatly changed the role of the judiciary in U.S. government, as the Supreme Court had become more active in its defense of individual rights, often in response to litigation and demonstrations initiated by those in the movement.

Feminism 1960s and 70s

Known as second wave feminism, the women's liberation movement **learned from the Civil Rights Movement.**

Organizing and protesting for women's rights, the movement brought attention to issues such as discrimination in the workplace, rape, lesbian issues and sisterhood.

Often dismissed by male journalists as not very serious, the movement did lead to the Equal Rights amendment, abortion rights, equality and Title 9.

The feminist movement provided a framework for protests for gay rights.



March for equal rights for women in 1970 and Gay Liberation march in Times Square, 1969

Postmodernism

Events since World War II (like the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War and Feminism), and the perception of those events, gave rise to the notion that the Western Humanist tradition was flawed and corrupt, even oppressive.

People began to realize how racist and misogynistic ideas gave some people power over others. Art and cultural ideas began to change.

The name given this new period is **Postmodernism.**

Postmodernism embraces everything... high art, popular culture, past art styles, social and political issues, everything.



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

"Pluralism and diversity" are other defining features of postmodernism. Questions of identity and embracing all forms as equally valid, even advertising images.

Female artists, artists of color and others previously outside the mainstream of art, addressed issues of identity and social critique.

POSTMODERNISM

One compact definition is that **postmodernism rejects modernism's grand stories** about 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.

ALSO:

"Pluralism and diversity" are other defining features. Questions of **identity** and **embracing all forms** as equally valid.

Pluralism and Diversity growing out of Civil Rights, Feminism and Gay Rights 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.

These are important ideas that fuel ideas about art in the 1960’s and beyond.

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.

March for equal rights for women in 1970 and Gay Liberation march in Times Square, 1969



Context: we see a culture of public bodily demonstration. These two photos changed the way people thought about Vietnam, civil rights and protest.

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.

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. Movements like: **Pop, Minimalism, Conceptual Art, and Land Art** all evolved during these same decades.



However, the next two: **Performance Art and Feminist Art** continue the trends building on both the social realities and previous artistic ones solidly become part of the Postmodern era.

In the fall of 1971, the Feminist Art Program started at California Institute of the Arts with faculty, Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro 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.*



We will start with Performance Art, though both Performance and Feminist art developed together.

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 its 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.



Jackson Pollock, Number 1
(Lavender Mist)

PERFORMANCE ART

FEMINIST ART: SOCIETY AND POLITICS

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/Body ART

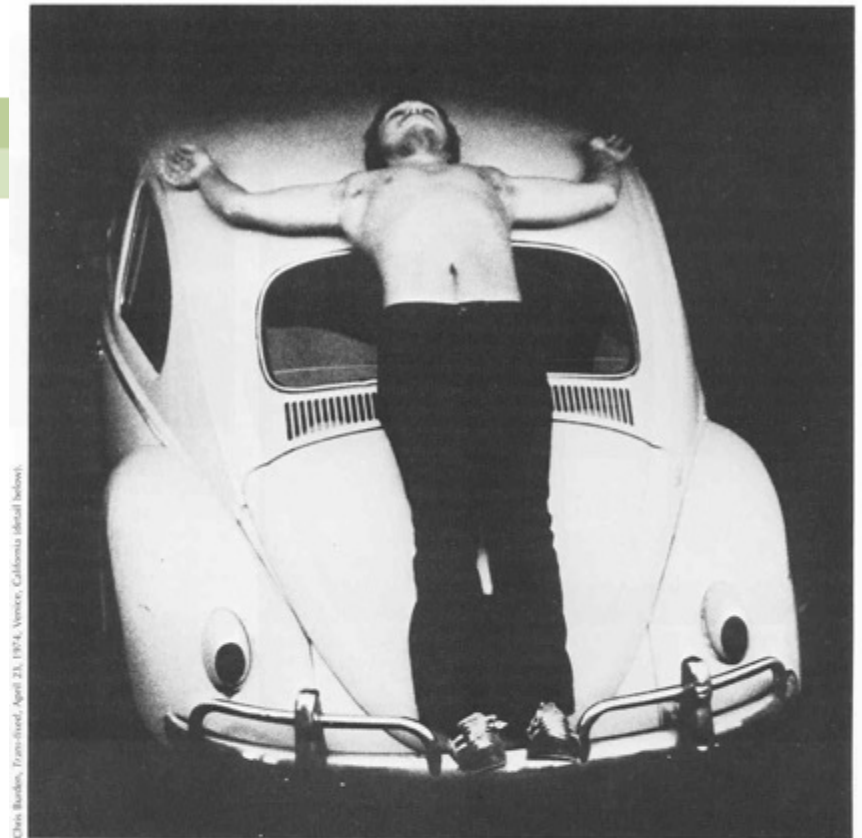
Performance art usually consists of four elements: time, space, the performer's body, and a relationship between audience and performer.

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.

CHRIS BURDEN, *Trans-fixed*, 1974

In this piece, Burden had himself crucified to the hood of a Volkswagen beetle.



Chris Burden, *Trans-fixed*, April 23, 1974, Venice, California (detail below).



PERFORMANCE/Body ART

Chris Burden was an American sculptor and performance artist. He is known for several works known as 'extreme body art.'

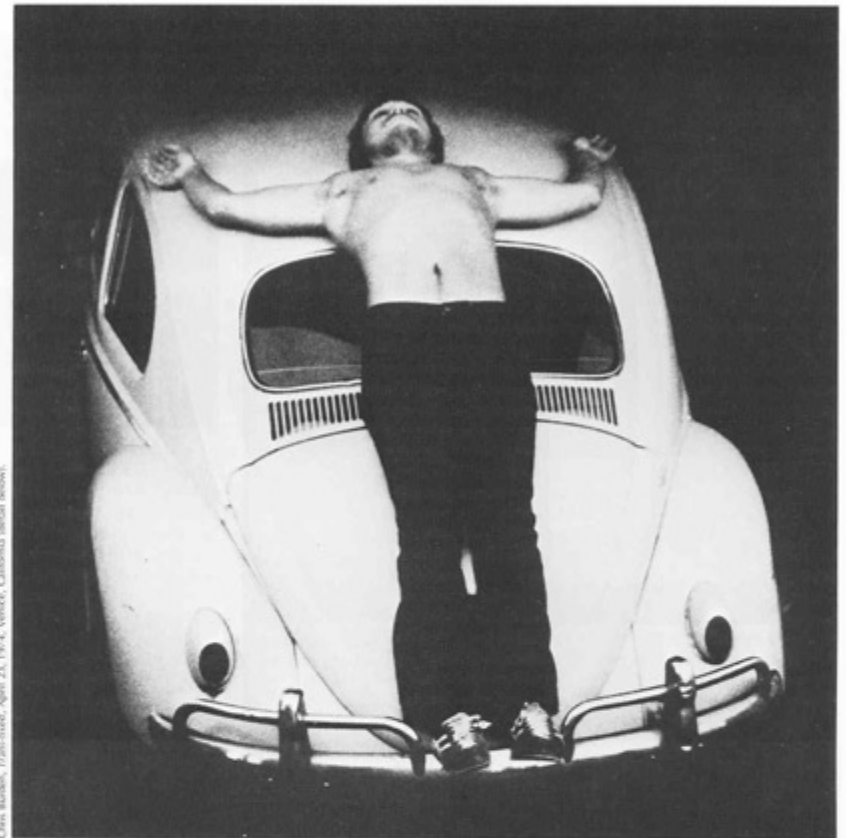
He created several 'shocking' pieces of art including having himself shot, having push pins inserted into his body, crawling on broken glass and this piece, where he had himself crucified to the back of a Volkswagen bug.

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)

CHRIS 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.



Chris Burden, *Trans-fixed*, April 23, 1974, Venice, California (detail below)



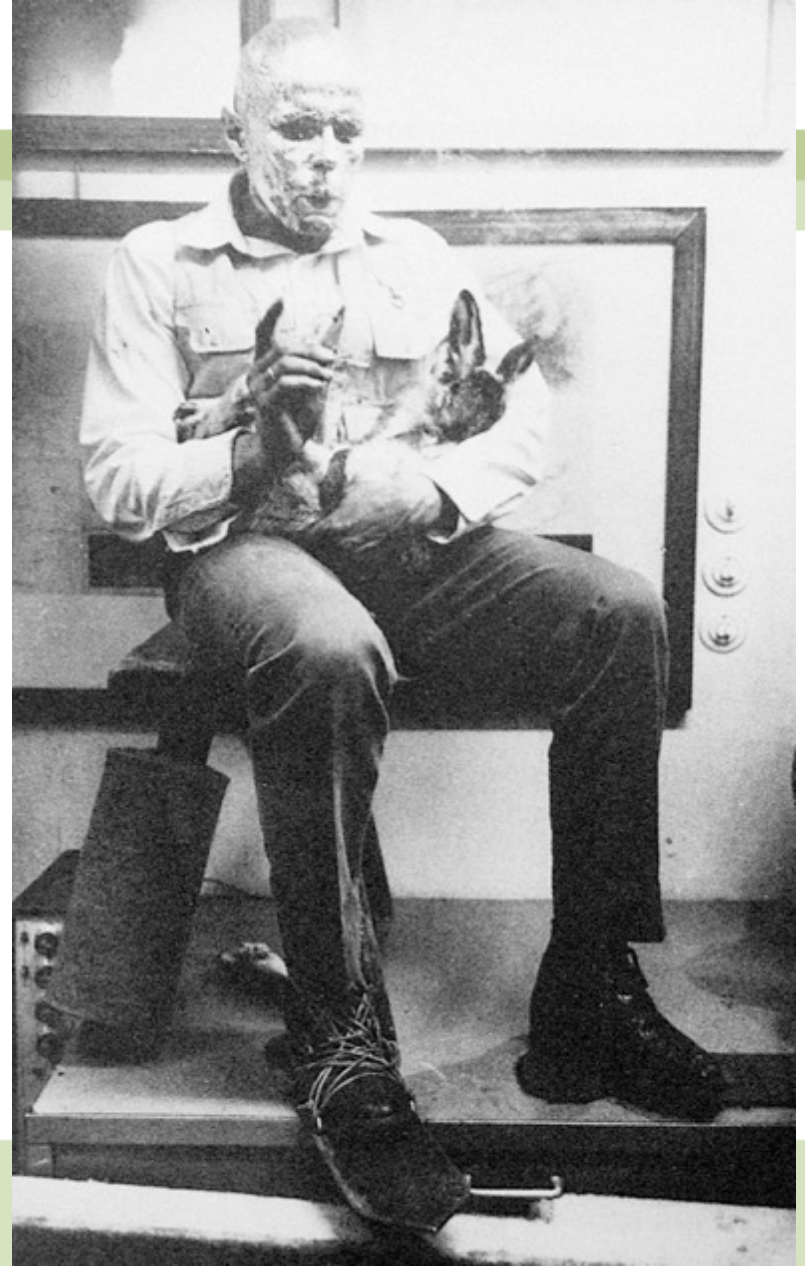
PERFORMANCE ART

FEMINIST ART: SOCIETY AND POLITICS

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.

Again, 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.

<http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/190/1972>



Marina Abramovic

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.



<http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/190/1972>

Marina Abramovic

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

She began the process as a kind of religious rejuvenating ritual but 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.

Most performance is documented in photographs and/or video. Otherwise, the only people who would ever see it are the ones who were there at the time. See some video below.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyBTrVNxvfk&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUrwdqwzqMU&feature=related>



Marina Abramovic

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 Abramovic:

<http://www.pbs.org/art21/watch-now/segment-marina-abramovic-in-history>



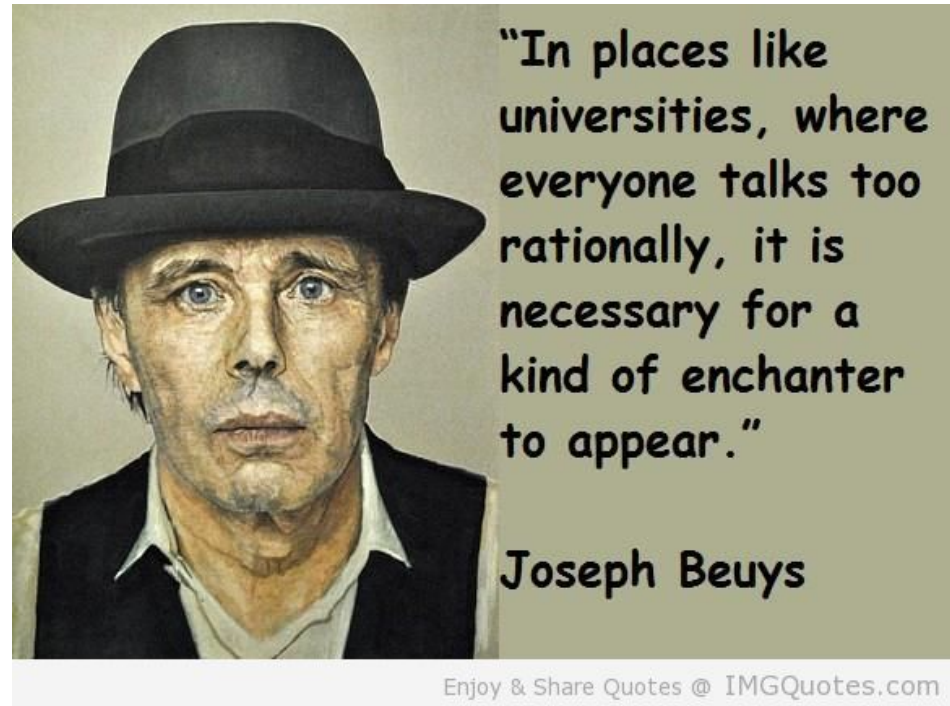
In this particular piece that was set up in the atrium at the Museum of Modern Art, Abramović performed in the Atrium every day (all day with no breaks) the Museum was open between March 14 and May 31, 2010. Visitors were encouraged to sit silently across from the artist for a duration of their choosing,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



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.



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.'



Joseph Beuys, *Like America and America Likes Me* 1974

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.



Feminist Art and Art History

In 1971, the art historian, Linda Nochlin, wrote a pivotal essay in the history of art--*Why Have There Been No Women Artists?*

In this essay, Nochlin explores the **institutional** – as opposed to the individual – obstacles that have prevented women in the West from succeeding in the arts.

This essay changed the way art historians viewed the past, in particular as related to gender.

Before her article, no women artists were present in art history books.

Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays



Linda Nochlin

Thanks to Nochlin's article and the Feminist Movement, we are now discussing women artists and issues related to gender in art.

Her early article is published in this book. It's in our library.

Feminist Art Movement

The Feminist art movement emerged in the 1960s amid anti-war demonstrations and civil rights and queer rights movements.

Feminist artists wanted to rewrite a male-dominated art history as well as change the contemporary art world to make a place for women's art.

Women sought to expand the definition of fine art, and to incorporate a wider variety of artistic perspectives.

Sometimes this had to do with subject matter. Sometimes by using materials previously considered 'women's work' like sewing, embroidery, fabric, etc.



Harmony Hammond, *Bag XI*, 1971, Brooklyn Museum

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.

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Kickalene Thomas, *A Little Taste Outside of Love*, 2007

Sylvia Sleigh, *Imperial Nude Paul Roaano*,



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*, 1974-79. Multimedia, including ceramics and stitchery, 48' x 48' x 48' installed.

Feminist Art Movement

It may be difficult to understand this piece. It's a large triangle shaped sculpture that is designed as a dinner table.

The triangle shape means there is no head of the table but you may also remember the triangle in prehistoric times was a symbol for the female.

Judy Chicago used ceramic and embroidery because they were considered 'women's work' not high art like painting and sculpture.

She also made the plates with the female vagina to refer to earlier art and bring attention to the importance and role of the female body.



This place setting, dedicated to the primordial goddess .

Chicago was celebrating women who up until that time, had been eliminated from history.

The goddess was one of these.

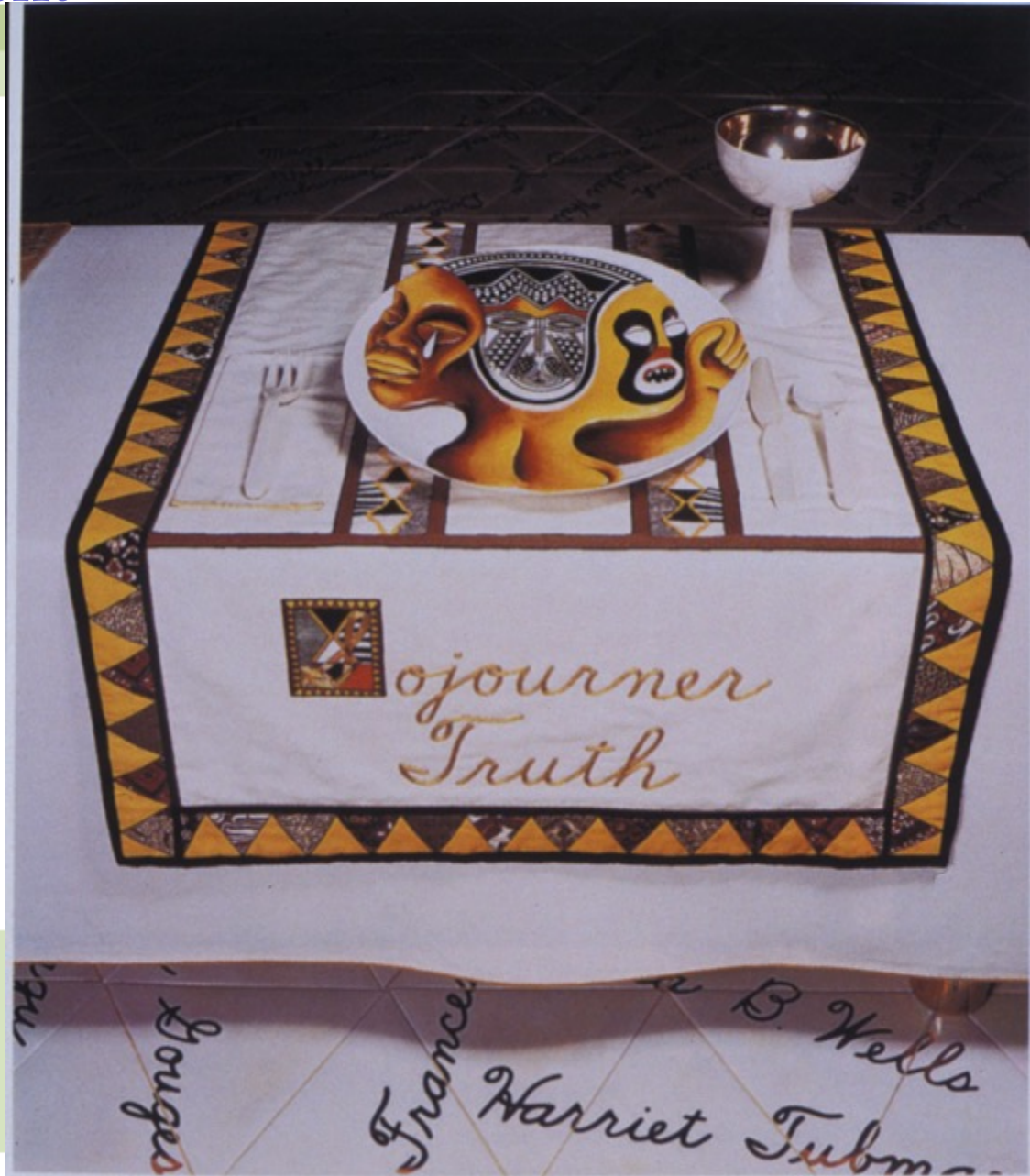
Feminist Art Movement

Judy Chicago- the Dinner Party, 1979—

Designed to commemorate the achievements of women in history such as O'Keeffe, 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.





See all the plates here:

[www.brooklynmuseum.org/
opencollection/objects/5167/
The_Dinner_Party](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/5167/The_Dinner_Party)

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.

Feminist Art and Race

The Feminist Art movement only lasted until the 1980s when a backlash in both culture and art diminished its role.

However, the movement set the stage for questioning the art world, art history and why women and women's issues, and then people of color, have been left out.

Issues related to gender expanded to those of identity in general in particular--Race.

Artists like Adrien Piper, a black female artist, made artworks related to her reality.



Issues related to gender expanded to those of identity in general in particular--Race.

Adrian Piper—African-American artist who addressed interpersonal social assumptions from a different angle. She used performance in real-life situations to bring attention to racial stereotyping.

In this piece, *Self Portrait Exaggerating My Negroid Features*, 1981.

She stuffed a rag in her mouth and covered herself with vinegar and other items that smelled and walked around New York, including riding the subway. She wanted to bring attention to ways white people avoided those of color.

In this other piece she dressed 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.



Feminist Art Movement

As a result of the movement, writings and awareness of patriarchal history, female artists and artists of color began making work that pushed back.

You are all aware of the image of the reclining female nude in history made by men of women. Here are a few made by female artists in response. How are they different to their sources?

Yasumasa Morimura, *Reclining Nude*, 1988



Yasumasa Morimura, *Portrait (Futago)*, 1988, photograph.

Jan Banning, *Danae Olympia*, from National Identities series, 2012.



Feminist Art Movement

Guerrilla Girls are an anonymous group of feminist, female artists devoted to fighting sexism and racism within the art world. They created posters that were posted guerrilla style around the city of NY. 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.



GUERRILLA GIRLS, The Advantages of Being A Woman Artist, 1988. Poster. Using humor and irony they brought attention to the disparity between male and female artists.



Feminist Art Movement

originally interested in bringing attention to women in the art world, their efforts moved to social issues and those of women of color.

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.

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM **GUERRILLA GIRLS** CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD
532 LA GUARDIA PLACE, #237, N.Y., N.Y. 10012
www.guerrillagirls.com

GUERRILLA GIRLS' POP QUIZ.

Q. If February is Black History Month and March is Women's History Month, what happens the rest of the year?

A. Discrimination.

BOX 1054 Cooper St., NY, NY 10078 **GUERRILLA GIRLS** CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

GUERRILLA GIRLS, *The Advantages of Being A Woman Artist*, 1988. Poster.

An ironic statement that brings attention to the reality of being a female artist.

Pop Quiz, 1987

Postmodern/Feminist

Contemporary Artists realize the history of Western art is mostly a history of art by white men. Some make work to bring attention to the realities of representation and power.

Female artists recognize how art and advertising present women who represent the 'ideal' as defined by men.

Many contemporary female artists address this reality in their work.

This method of analyzing art falls within the 'Feminist Method' of evaluating art.

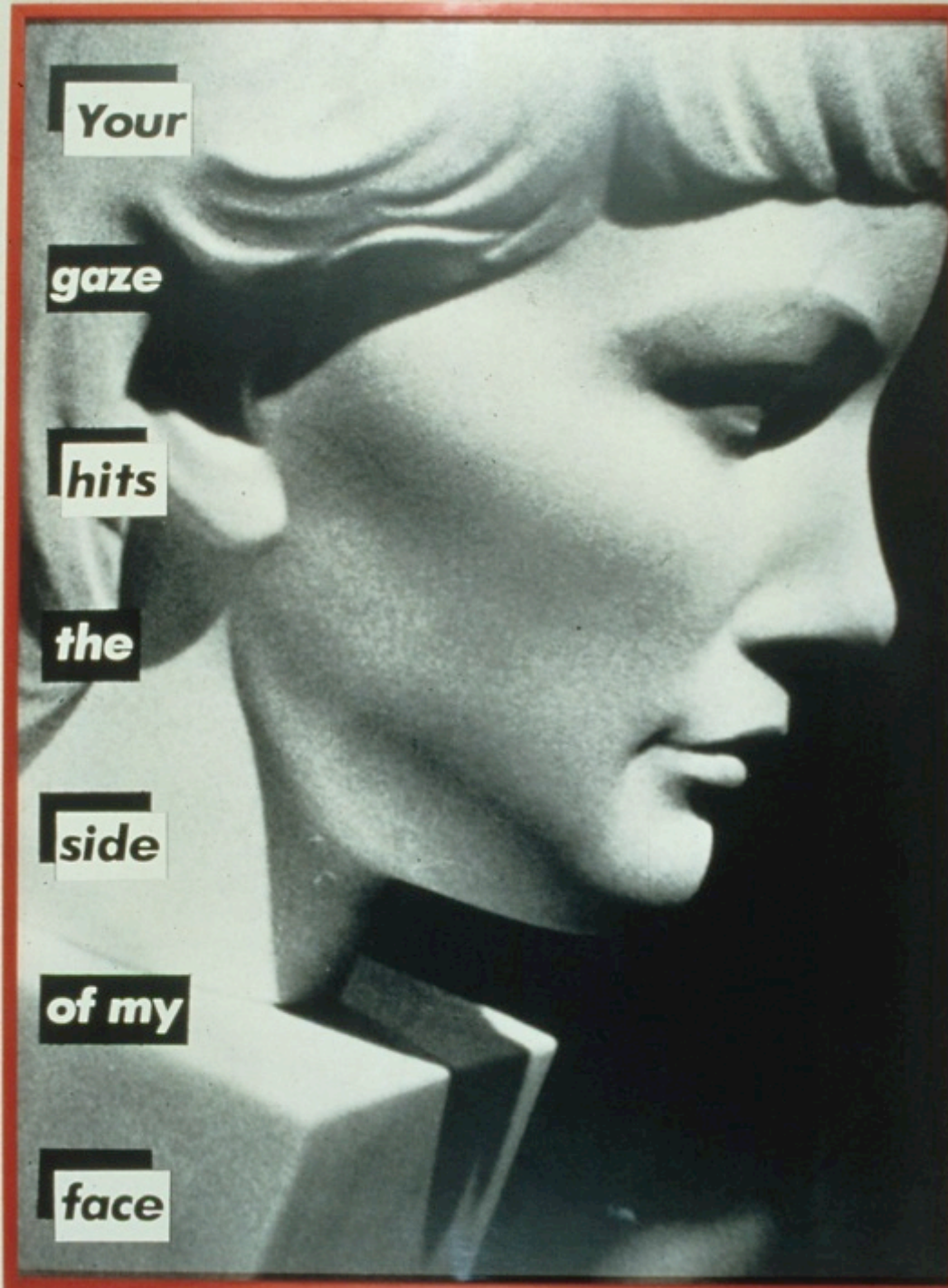


Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)*, 1989



Using images and tactics from advertising, **Barbara Kruger** created bold statements about female stereotypes and marketing techniques, based on art and cultural history.

BARBARA KRUGER, *Untitled (Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face)*, 1983. Photostat, red painted frame, 6' 1" x 4' 1". Courtesy of Mary Boone Gallery, New York.



These are just a few Performance and Feminist Artists. Both will continue as we move through the class.

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-- popular culture, past art styles, identity, social issues, everything and in any way.

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

Next class we continue with Postmodernism in painting and discuss Public Art.