

## Resistance and Resolution

The nineties began with a sudden and irrevocable fusion of art and politics. In Tienanmen Square, Beijing, the aspirations of thousands of protesters were summed up in a sculpture, a painting, and a performance. A model of the Statue of Liberty stood in the crowd; a portrait of Mao spattered with red paint hung before it; and as the protest ended a lone demonstrator stood in front of a military tank. In Europe, the unification of East and West Germany transformed the Berlin Wall from a military structure into a symbolic form as evocative in form and content as Christo's *Running Fence* or Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (see figs. 21.71, 24.61). In an iconic gesture of defiance, thousands of Germans from East and West celebrated the destruction of the wall by gathering at the Brandenburg Gate. In the US, art punctuated politics in a different fashion. The arts community, already mourning the death by AIDS of a growing number of artists, curators, and writers, was now being attacked by the government. Rightwing politicians appeared at museum openings to declare wars on indecency and struck out at what they considered to be degenerate art.

### Contested Visions: Art and Politics circa 1990

The most dramatic cultural battle of the period was pitched around the 1990 retrospective of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–89). The exhibition, scheduled to finish its tour at the Corcoran Museum, Washington DC, had been partially funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), a public fund administered by the federal government. From the floor of the US Senate, South Carolina Congressman Jesse Helms pronounced Mapplethorpe's work a danger to American values and the NEA support of the exhibition a theft of public funds. Though the NEA represents a minute fraction of the federal budget, at a time of economic recession, and of public fear and confusion over AIDS, art proved an effective subterfuge.

Mapplethorpe's work, as seen in 1981's graceful *Ajitto (Back)* (fig. 27.1) reveals the artist's consummate technical control, unerring eye for balance, and facility with chiaroscuro of luminescent whites and velvety blacks. Though his primary subject was the human body, male and female, nude and dressed, Mapplethorpe also produced portraits including a whimsical image of sculptor Louise Bourgeois and a series of flower still-lives that allude to the work of American modernist Georgia O'Keeffe (see fig. 18.20).

What piqued politicians in 1990 was a group of images in which Mapplethorpe had lavished his formidable aesthetic attention on the activities of homosexual and sadomasochistic subcultures. In these photographs, men embrace each other in activities ranging from a simple kiss to extreme examples of sexual exploration. Though the actions depicted and Mapplethorpe's obvious encouragement of them were decried, what seemed most threatening about the art was its beauty. Using traditional conventions of beauty and classical compositions, Mapplethorpe's work elicited the disinterested, even spiritual, pleasure associated with modernist art. Aesthetic pleasure led most viewers of the 1990 exhibition into social disorientation.

Mapplethorpe upset politicians for conveying the activities of those on the outskirts of society; Sally Mann (b. 1951) faced censure from critics who took her work to be a vulgarization of the American family. Mann's 1992 *Immediate Family*, a portfolio of prints equal in their sensual command of surface and depth to any of Mapplethorpe's work, presented, in Mann's own words, "ordinary things every mother has seen: a wet bed, a bloody nose, candy cigarettes." Although only a fraction of the scenes in *Immediate Family* featured Mann's children in states of undress, to many the volume represented the threatening proximity of sexuality and childhood in contemporary American life.

The presentation of even the most ordinary moments of childhood, suspended in time and transformed into aesthetic objects takes on an uncanny quality. Though



**27.1** Robert Mapplethorpe, *Ajitto (Back)*, 1981. Gelatin-silver print, 16 × 20" (40.6 × 50.8 cm).

inspired by the fleeting glimpses of daily life, Mann's portraits were the result of often-laborious reenactments. Moreover, Mann's style, with its the narrow depth of field, softened misty backgrounds, and rich details, belies a technique more deliberate than a snapshot.

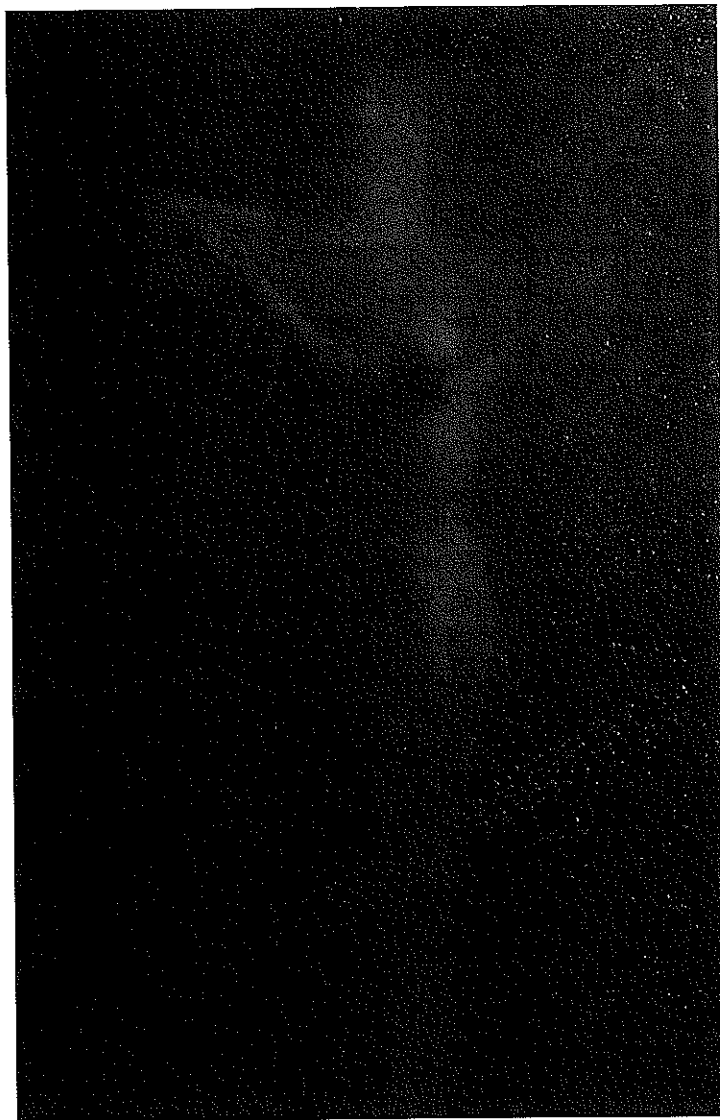
The photograph *The New Mothers* (fig. 27.2), an image of Mann's two daughters playing at motherhood, appears to juxtapose the demands placed by contemporary society on girls to become both sexual and nurturing. The elder daughter casually holds a candy cigarette between her fingers and squints aggressively at the camera, while the younger girl peers through heart-shaped sunglasses and petulantly places her fist on her hip. Depictions of children playing house have shown how girls are socialized into mothers since at least the seventeenth century. Mann's work of the time presented the psychological and moral dimensions of growing up in the twentieth century.

The photography of Mapplethorpe and Mann unsettled those who wished to believe that America was untouched by sexual difference and unaffected by the ambiguities of childhood. While issues of artists' rights of self-expression tended to obscure more penetrating discussion of Mapplethorpe and Mann's work, appeals to the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of speech greatly benefited discussion of the controversial work of photographer **Andres Serrano** (b. 1950). The most infamous of Serrano's photographs was *Piss Christ* (1987) (fig. 27.3), a photograph of a crucifix submerged in a basin of urine. Neatly calculated to offend, the "piss" is only recognizable



**27.2** Sally Mann, *The New Mothers*, 1989. Gelatin-silver print, 20 × 24" (50.8 × 60.9 cm).

**27.3** Andres Serrano, *Piss Christ*, 1987. Cibachrome, silicone, Plexiglas, wood frame, 65 × 45½ × ¾" (165 × 115 × 1.9 cm) framed; 60 × 40" (152.4 × 101.6 cm) unframed. Edition of four.



as such once the title has been read. *Piss Christ* became a magnet for accusations of the indulgence and insolence of contemporary artists. That Serrano had received NEA money further fueled the controversy. A Catholic with an attraction to the mystical correlation between body and soul, Serrano was building on a traditional conversation between physical and spiritual existence. It is a subject with precedents in the work of the Caravaggio and Manet. In the late eighties, Martin Scorsese's film *Last Temptation of Christ* was picketed for addressing the same issue.

Characteristic of art exploring the spiritual and physical, *Piss Christ* is an aesthetically exquisite image that reveals the imagination and audacity of the artist. Photographed in a tank against a red background and dramatically illuminated, the image glows with an evocative warmth. The bath of liquid and the bubbles that rise around the crucifix soften the appearance of the sculpture, while the urine itself recalls bodily fluids central to the life of Christ, from wine and water to tears and blood. The few viewers who got past the aggressive title and the political controversy were treated to a thought-provoking, beautiful, and very personal statement.

## Mining the Museum: Art and Institutions

Mapplethorpe, Mann, and Serrano were only a few of the artists affected by the interactions of politics and arts in the early nineties. By the time the controversy had eased, the NEA budget had been cut and it no longer made grants to individual artists. But the artworld still had to deal with the damaging effects of the intrusion of political campaigning on curatorial practice. In the wake of the Mapplethorpe case, museums were forced to second-guess their critics and became reluctant to exhibit potentially controversial work. Politicians had become a threat to alternative art spaces that relied on public funding and major institutions that could ill-afford the fallout of controversy. To artists and critics who had struggled for decades to challenge formalism, the early nineties provided grim satisfaction. Art was now indisputably political.

Many artists championed personal expression, writing letters, making speeches, signing petitions and donating art to benefits. Others took from the congressional outrage a renewed appreciation for the political power of the

museum. The nineties witnessed a concerted attempt to expose the mechanisms by which art is produced, displayed, and discussed.

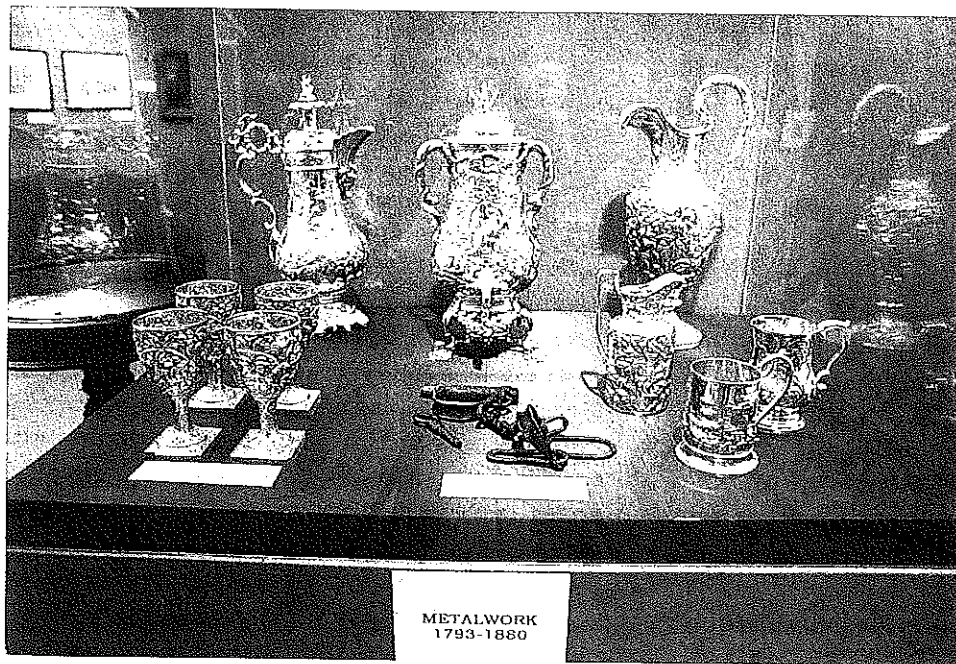
By the end of the twentieth century, the intertwined legacy of collecting and conquest was well appreciated. From Napoleon's Louvre in Paris to Alfred Barr's Museum of Modern Art in New York, the museum has expressed ideological positions through the selection and display of objects. The installations of Fred Wilson (b. 1954) expose the power and priorities of museums. In 1987, after working as a museum educator at several museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Wilson curated a show called *Rooms with a View: The Struggle between Culture, Content, and the Context of Art*. The exhibition presented contemporary art in rooms designed after historic exhibition types: the ethnographic museum; the nineteenth-century salon; and the modernist gallery. The results were what one might have expected: in the first room, one looked into glass vitrines that gave the impression that the art inside was evidence in some scientific hypothesis; in the second room, salon-style hanging and sumptuous décor conveyed the weight of history and taste; while in the white-walled space of the last room works took on the assertive posture expected of modernist art. The context defined the objects.

For the 1992 exhibition *Mining the Museum* (fig. 27.4), Wilson changed the character of his intervention in the museum. The work consisted of juxtaposing objects belonging to the Baltimore Historical Society to demonstrate that, as Wilson noted, "in an environment that supposedly has *the* history of [a place], it's possible that there's another history that's not being talked about." *U.S. Metalwork 1723–1880* presents Wilson at his most poetic and precise. In glass cases that recalled the ethnographic display of *Rooms with a View*, Wilson presented exquisite polished silver alongside worn slave shackles. Instead of

relating to one another primarily aesthetically, as do most objects in a museum, the silver and the shackles occupy relative positions in the history of America's slave economy. The slave trade is usually the invisible history behind the economic situation that supported decorative arts in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America. *U. S. Metalwork 1723–1880*, with its emotionally and formally evocative juxtaposition of objects, brings the politics of art to the foreground with an aesthetic intuition rivaling René Magritte or Meret Oppenheim (see figs. 15.33, 15.36).

Lothar Baumgarten (b. 1944) began examining the relationship between institutional power and representation in the seventies. Particularly concerned with how images became part of the process of colonization, Baumgarten scoured history and anthropology texts to investigate the renaming of the Americas. In instances like Venezuela, meaning "little Venice," the territory forcibly annexed was given a name that elicited romantic visions of Europe. Such labeling of the non-Western world is the linguistic complement to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tradition of landscape painting and photography that fit foreign landscapes into familiar frameworks for assigning meaning to the world. In 1979, Baumgarten spent eighteen months living and photographing the indigenous Amazonian Yanomami people. Subsequently, his work has integrated text and image to create deconstructive critiques of colonial exploration and constructive attempts at what might be called Postmodern anthropology.

A site-specific installation proposed by Baumgarten serves to clarify his critical use of text and image. He planned that the work should have the indigenous place names of Venezuelan cities engraved, with the letters reversed, in a public square in the capital, Caracas. This format would have politicized the text because it mimicked oppositional political slogans spray painted in reverse



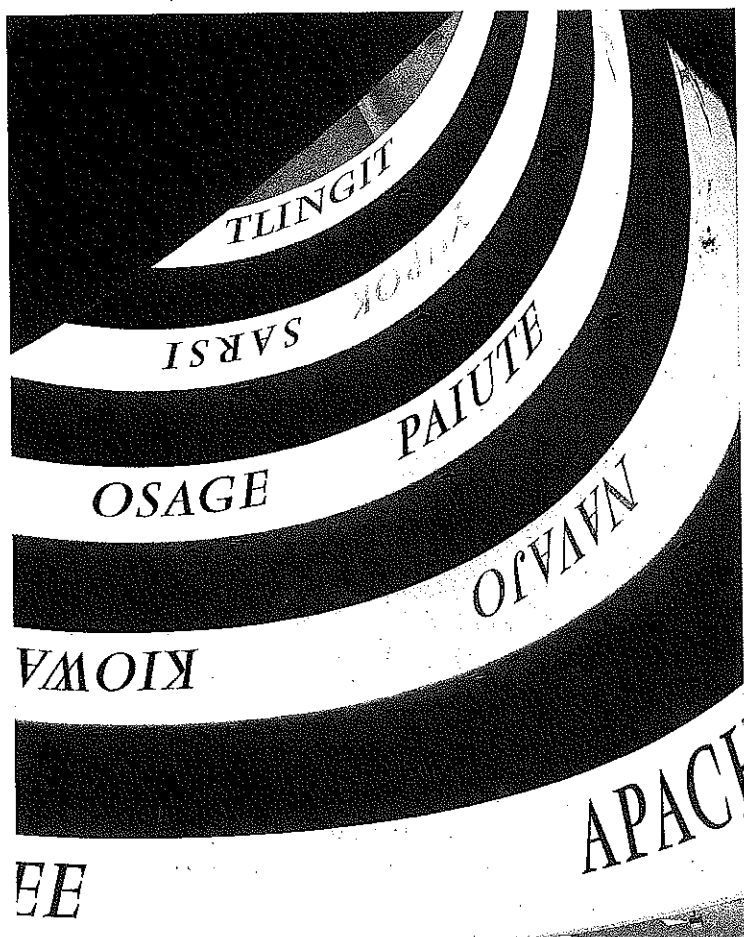
**27.4** Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum*, 1992. Installation view, Baltimore.

throughout the city. To accompany the exhibition, Baumgarten designed a volume of the *Guggenheim Magazine*, inviting art historians, anthropologists, and a poet to discuss issues raised by the work. At its center lay the heart of Baumgarten's project, a collection of photographs of objects on display at an ethnographic museum framed with words such as "questioned," "evaluated," "claimed," "obfuscated," and "fetishized," that to the artist, in his own words, "describe the unsettled psyche of objects transported from one culture to another." Baumgarten's presentation, called *AMERICA Invention* (1988–93) (fig. 27.5), joined together political and museum history by filling the rotunda of the Guggenheim museum with the names of Native American tribes, some upside down in gray, some in bright red, which appear to ascend the spiral of the museum. In the outer galleries, written in arcs that recall longitude lines on an atlas, are words by historians from the US and Europe describing the treatment of those tribes. The floor of the museum reads, "Borrowed land for sale." The viewer stands in an art museum surrounded by the interwoven text of American history and its philosophical and moral dilemmas. Baumgarten's presentation suggests both the complicity and responsibility that cultural institutions have in the writing of history.

Several contemporary photographers have drawn on the practice of Bernd and Hilla Becher (see fig. 22.69) to create images of museums that are as penetrating as any installations that might appear in a museum. Two Becher students, **Candida Hofer** (b. 1944) and **Thomas Struth** (b. 1954) turned their professors' typological method to the institutions of learning and art history that developed them, using the camera to interrogate the forms and consequences of various types of artistic display.

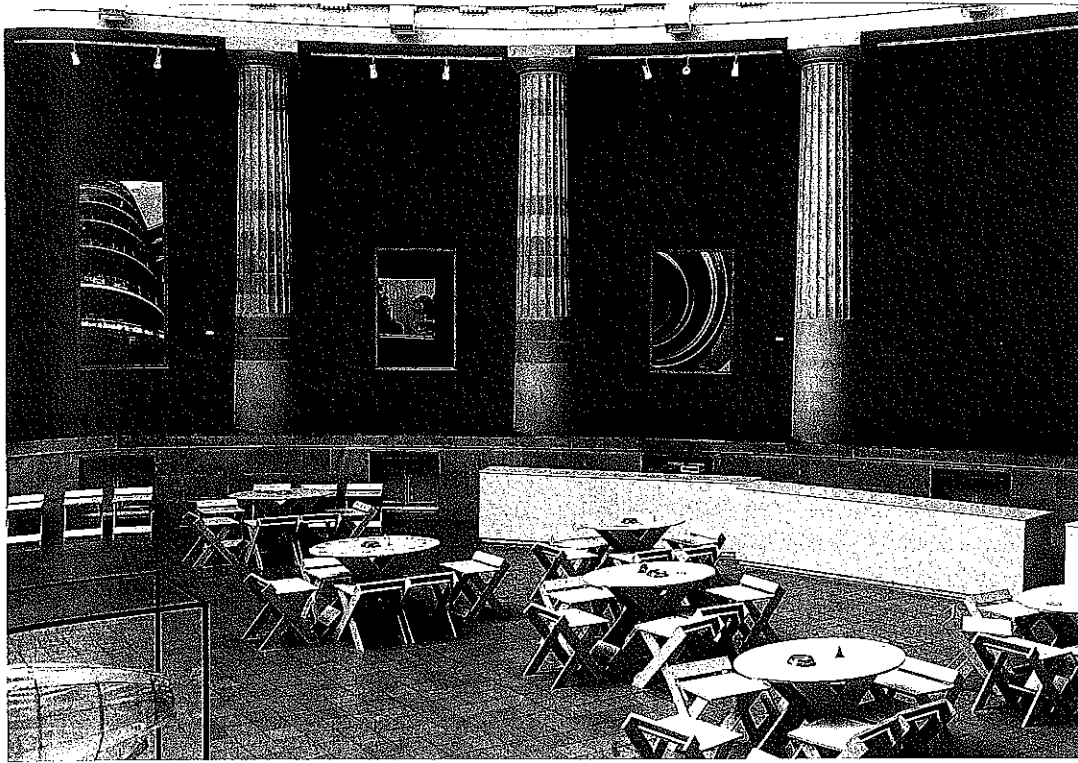
Hofer has documented the empty interiors of museums, libraries, and schools that shape the semi-private, semi-public experiences of viewing art and internalizing culture. *Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Gent III* (1995) (fig. 27.6) presents the integration of the art, the exhibition space, and the dining room—all essential parts of a functioning museum. The curving atrium echoes the photography and furniture in it. Struth's series of museum interiors also presents the collusion between art and museum to shape the physical, intellectual, and emotional experiences of the viewer, who Struth includes in his photographs. *Museum of Modern Art I* (1994) (fig. 27.7) presents seven or eight figures before Jackson Pollock's *One: Number 31 1950*. An elegant image of the institutionalization of modern art, the photograph captures Pollock's painting in detailed unmoving focus, while viewers move around and shift restlessly out of focus. Struth documents the transference of energy and behavior from the painting to the viewer. His image of *Caillebotte's Rainy Day, Paris* presents viewers judiciously positioning themselves before the painting. One woman begins to move her stroller from the streetside of Caillebotte's picture toward its vanishing point as a second woman stands securely by the sidewalk. Paintings, it seems, provide legible and convincing instructions about how to act in their presence. Hofer and Struth's museum images provide visually stunning evidence of the care with which we display art while posing vexing questions about who is in control as we look at it. Both artists participated in the 1999 exhibition, *Museum as Muse*, held at the Museum of Modern Art that celebrated the museum as a source of inspiration for artists.

The museological analyses discussed thus far examine the relationship between the authority of the museum and the subjectivity of the viewer. *The Tracey Emin Museum* (1995) by British sculptor, photographer, and performance and conceptual artist Tracey Emin highlights the expectations and role of the artist in the equation. Emin produces an excess of information in a style integrating apparent carelessness and colloquial text ("At age 13 why the hell should I trust anyone?" stitched on a quilt, "You forgot to kiss my soul" in neon.) The sheer volume of personal information threatens to eliminate the sense of a private world revealed and turn modernist introspection into Postmodern spectacle. Reversing Warhol's strategy of erasing the distinction between public and private lives by effacing his private life, Emin has merged the two realms by eliminating a censored public persona.

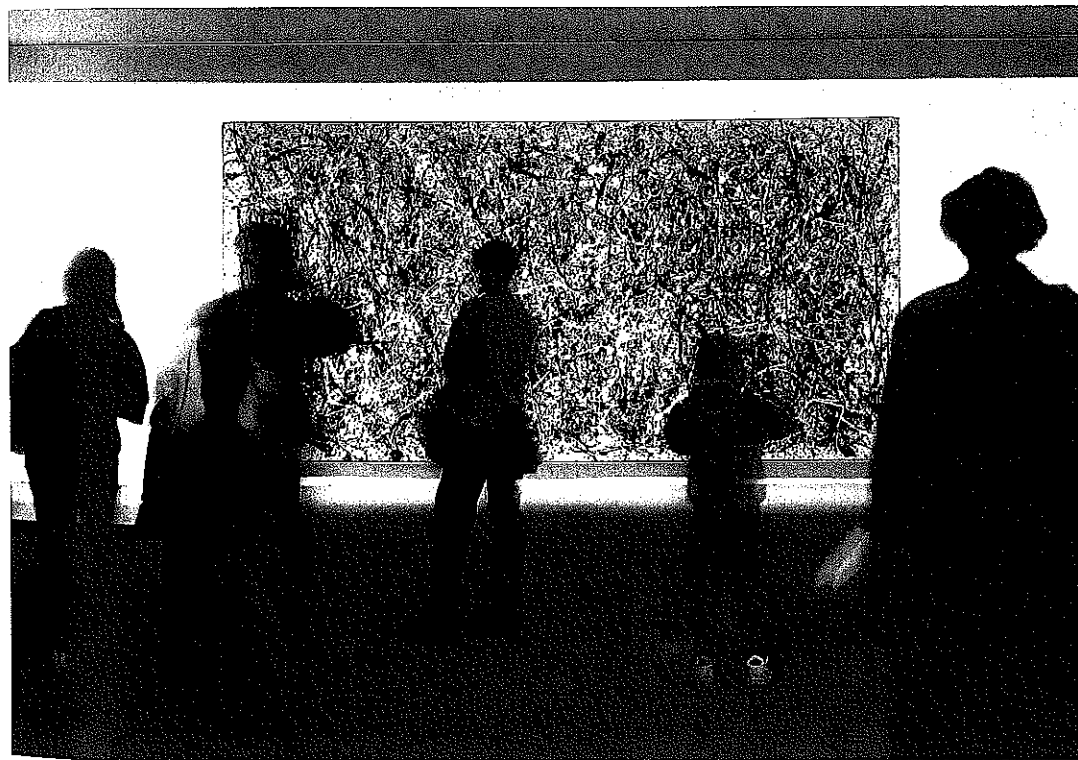


27.5 Lothar Baumgarten, *America, Invention I* (detail), 1988–93. Installation at the Guggenheim Museum.





**27.6** Candida Hofer, *Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Gent III*, 1995. Colour photograph, 15½ × 23¼" (39 × 59 cm).



**27.7** Thomas Struth, *Museum of Modern Art I*, 1994. C-Print, edition of 10, 70% × 93 ¾" (180 × 238 cm).

On the occasion of her nomination for the Turner Prize, Britain's most prestigious award for promising young artists, Emin displayed her unmade bed, complete with underwear, KY Jelly, and a carton of Marlboros. Upon not winning the prize, Emin stormed off the stage drunk, creating a bit of reality TV for BBC Television to match the reality sculpture *Bed*. Like her yBa peers, ("young British artists" who came of age quickly and visibly in

Britain in the early nineties, spurred by the high-profile patronage of collector and advertising tycoon, Charles Saatchi), Emin has made use of tabloids and TV even more than museums to forward her identity as a significant contemporary artist. Implicit in a work like *Bed* or *The Tracey Emin Museum* is the idea that effective art must communicate through a variety of mouthpieces and traditional museums are not necessarily the most important ones.

## The Postmodern "I": The Artist as Individual

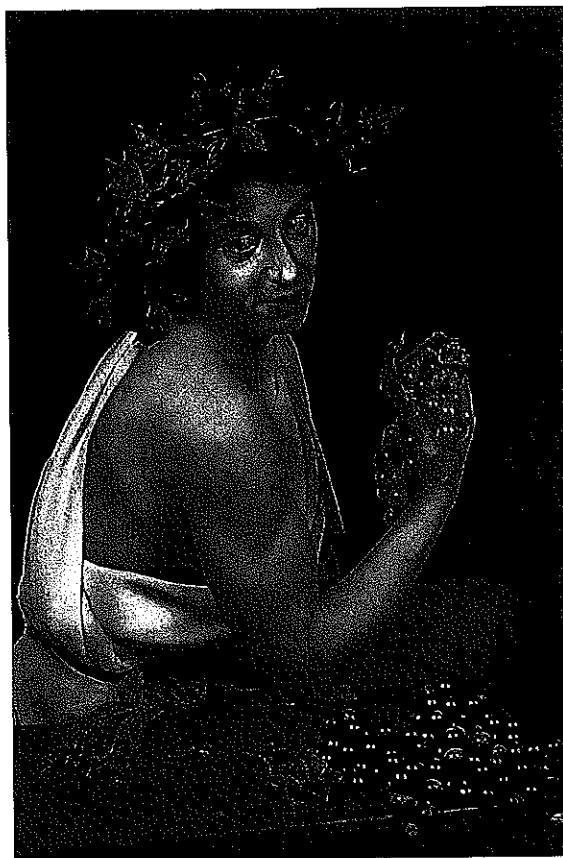
Tracey Emin's audience becomes almost embarrassingly aware that a trip to a museum might be like overhearing a stranger's therapy session. Struth's viewer might sense that it was he who made the appointment. In both cases, the individual experience is central. The self had always been a key to the modernist understanding of how art and society were linked. The viewer was compelled to travel with Pollock or Picasso into the world of the artist's mind and from there discover what fragments of insight proved universally relevant to humanity. After Pollock, the confidence in expressing universals faltered and more defined and local subjects took precedence. Shifting priority away from universals made the individual, as an end in itself rather than a conduit to something greater, a vital component in contemporary art.

### Body Art

Since the late seventies, when she had been one of the most visible Appropriation artists (see chapter 26), **Cindy Sherman** (b. 1954) has created photographs that are a remarkable indicator of contemporary intellectual and artistic currents. In the late eighties, her work shifted from the focussed study of contemporary identity to an exploration of abjection. Abjection, the state of revulsion, was being theorized as the physical expression of marginality and historicized as fundamental to a surrealist tradition favoring the uncanny over the unconscious. Images of abjection presented human activities, from laughter and sex to bleeding and nausea, which civilization seeks to control. *Untitled 175* (1987) (fig. 27.8) presents the artist reflected in sunglasses dropped amongst the residue of incredible gluttony. It is no longer the violence of the gaze that is featured but the desire to look upon violence that Sherman explores in all the baroque luxuriance that photographic technology allows.

By 1990, Sherman had turned her aesthetic of entropy to unsettling the refined territory of art history: *Untitled*

**27.8** Cindy Sherman, *Untitled 175*, 1987. Colour photograph 47½ × 41½" (120 × 105 cm).



**27.9** Cindy Sherman, *Untitled No. 224 (after Caravaggio's Bacchus)*, 1990. Photograph, 48 × 38" (121.9 × 96.5 cm).

*No. 224 (after Caravaggio's Bacchus)* (fig. 27.9) presents the artist in the guise of a Caravaggio's canonical figure, who straddles the boundaries between realism and fantasies of arcadia and homoerotic. By dressing herself as Bacchus, god of wine, and her photography as seventeenth-century Baroque naturalism, Sherman collapses the history of realism. Her picture alludes to the collision of sensuality and reality at the roots of realism and photography just as her abjection pictures suggested the same collision as the basis for Surrealism. By drawing our attention to the physical attraction of realist art, be it painting or photography,

Sherman's work of the late eighties and nineties explored the physical lives of the fragmented and multivalent identities depicted in her earlier work.

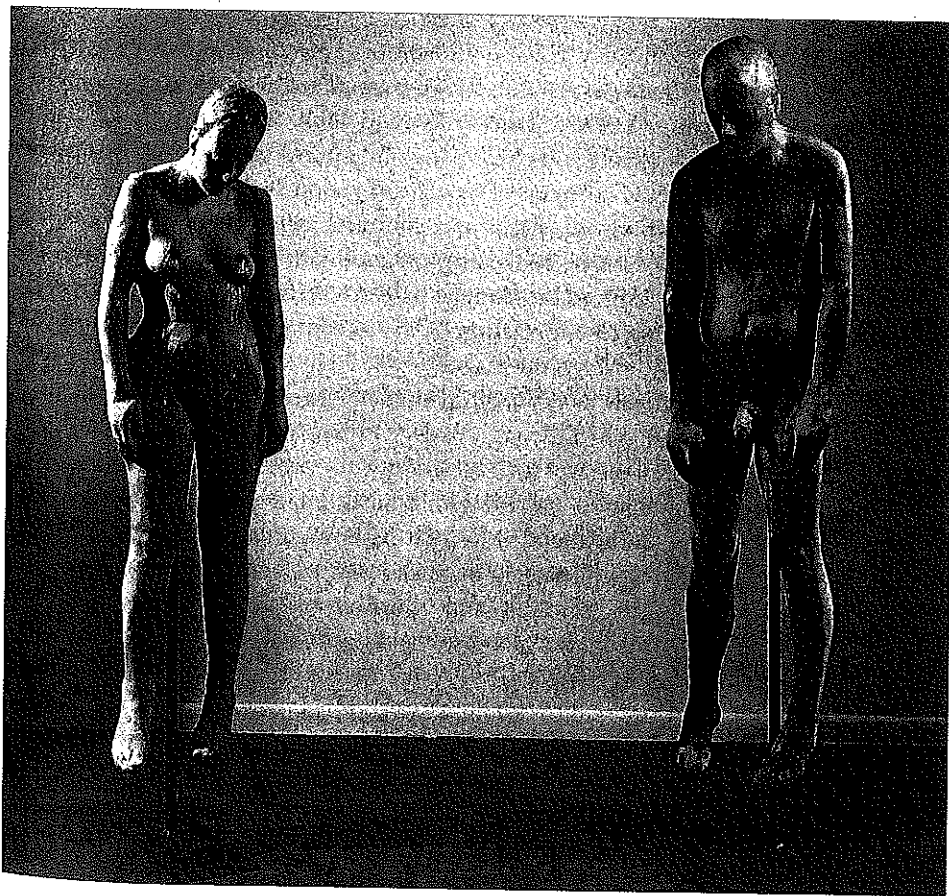
Sherman and Serrano (see fig. 27.3) used the seductive quality of photography to lure viewers into their subjects. The sculpture of **Kiki Smith** (b. 1954) appeals to sympathy rather than desire. To negotiate the social and physical experience of the body, Smith uses materials that convey malleability and fragility as well as power and strength. Wax, bronze, paper, glass, plaster, and photography all figure in her work. *Untitled* (1990) (fig. 27.10) presents two figures, male and female, both naked, made of bees' wax and raised above the floor on metal poles. The bodies, soft and limp, seem overcome by gravity. White traces of fluid describe milk leaking from the woman's breasts over her torso and semen drying on the man's leg. Any sense of maternal nurturing or sexual catharsis is undermined by the figures' positions of collapse and display. These are bodies in a moment of physical exhaustion failing to contain themselves, and the spectacle is pathetic and embarrassing.

Smith is the daughter of Tony Smith, whose work marked a pivotal change from the physical process of the Abstract Expressionist to the intellectual geometry of Minimalism. Though there are no formal similarities in the appearance of the work by father and daughter, both artists share a common attitude toward the audience. Consider the dialog between a viewer and Tony Smith's *Die* (see fig. 22.46), with its physical and connotative references to the scale of the human body. Both artists rely on the viewer

to encounter their sculptures while being fully aware of the strangeness of physical existence. Representative of her generation, Kiki Smith, a veteran of the CoLab collective (see chapter 26), directs the physical unease that her work generates toward a social understanding of ourselves as well as the more physical and mystical experience that had interested her father.

The Lebanese-born and London-resident artist **Mona Hatoum** (b. 1952) began her career by staging intricate performances that placed her body in situations as extreme as some of Sherman's photographs. In one, Hatoum struggled for seven hours in a closet-sized Plexiglass box half full of mud. The performances, and much of her later work, comment on the history of the Middle East and the artist's life as a double émigré. Hatoum's parents had left Palestine in 1948 for Lebanon and in 1975, when war broke out in Beirut, Hatoum was studying in London and found herself stranded there. By the nineties, she turned from performances that presented physical experiences to sculptures that created them.

*Corps Etranger* (1994) uses architecture and video to stimulate the awkward, almost painful, disjunctions in being human: Enlisting the predilection of Surrealist photography, described by Susan Sontag, to transform the everyday into art by deeming it important enough to record and display, Hatoum's presents her own body as both horrifying and ordinary. On the floor of a small round room, she projected a film of the interior of her body taken with endoscopic and colonoscopic cameras. To the beating



**27.10** Kiki Smith, *Untitled*, 1990. Beeswax and microcrystalline wax figures on metal stand. Installed height of female figure: 6'1½" (1.9 m). Installed height of male figure: 6'4½" (2 m). Female figure: 64½" × 17½" × 15½" (163.8 × 44.1 × 38.7 cm). Male figure: 69½" × 20½" × 17" (176.4 × 52.1 × 43.2 cm). Stand for female figure: 61½" × 13½" × 19½" (157.2 × 35.2 × 50 cm). Stand for male figure: 61½" × 14½" × 19½" (156.8 × 37 × 50 cm). Collection Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



of a heart and the rumbling of a stomach, we peer into the artist's body while carefully trying not to step on it. Unlike equally graphic work of the seventies, Carolee Schneeman's *Interior Scroll* for instance (see fig. 24.25), the body in *Corps Etranger* is so removed from its context that it remains foreign even as it is scrupulously examined. Rather, *Corps Etranger* is a situation of discomfort and alienation, resonant with themes of displacement and homelessness.

The body had been central to video art since the work of Bruce Nauman or Nam Jun Paik in the sixties (see figs. 24.13, 24.10). More recently, video, divorced from the television monitor, has had particular relevance to contemporary ideas about identity. The work of Gary Hill (b. 1951) has been central to the application of increasingly flexible video technology to address intersections of the body with social, physical, intellectual, and spiritual worlds.

Upon first encountering *Tall Ships* (1992) (fig. 27.11), it seems to be only an empty corridor. As the viewer enters the passage, however, figures appear in the distance, come close enough to make eye contact, seem to initiate conversation, and then turn abruptly away. The figures are male and female and different ages, races, and states of mind. Though the viewer initiates the interactions, the experience of deferred contact is defined by the projected figures. Hill's work addresses the insufficiency of language to translate the thought, emotion, and sensations that make up consciousness.

The taunting role that language plays in *Tall Ships* is typical of Hill's work. In *Inasmuch As It is Always Already Taking Place* (1990) challenges both our understanding of

the body as a unified entity and any confidence we might have in comprehending fragmentation. Hill figuratively tears a body into individual parts, each presented on a television tube the size of the part described. The screens displaying film loops of a back, ear, or neck are collected randomly in a boxed cavity in the wall, evoking the austerity of a still life or a grave. Hill's work insists that the complexity of both video and the body extends far beyond any boundaries that either has been expected to respect.

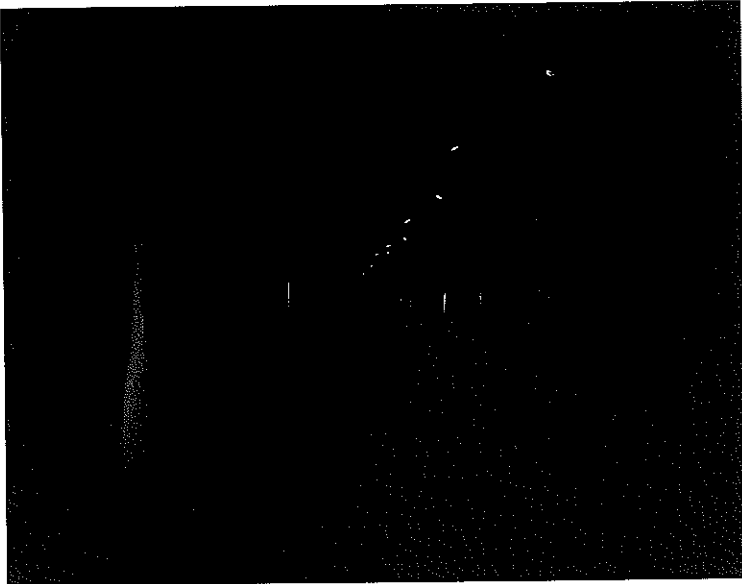
Tony Oursler (b. 1957) has also pulled video from the confines of the monitor. Using miniature LCD projectors prominently displayed in his installations, Oursler has projected onto stuffed bodies, isolated heads, and floating orbs, videos of crying, shouting, pleading, bullying, directing, and questioning faces, mouths, and eyes. Oursler's work examines the process by which human beings take on the attributes of the people and things around them, most importantly television.

Much of Oursler's work has explored Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), which to the artist, casts light on the Postmodern persona and the changing oeuvres of artists from Cindy Sherman to David Bowie. Works such as *Gateway 2* (1994), in which a female figure, her head stuck under a mattress, shouts out "Hey, you, get out of here, What are you looking at, I'll kick your ass," present, if not MPD, the radical separation of the conflicting qualities of impotence and aggression in a single character.

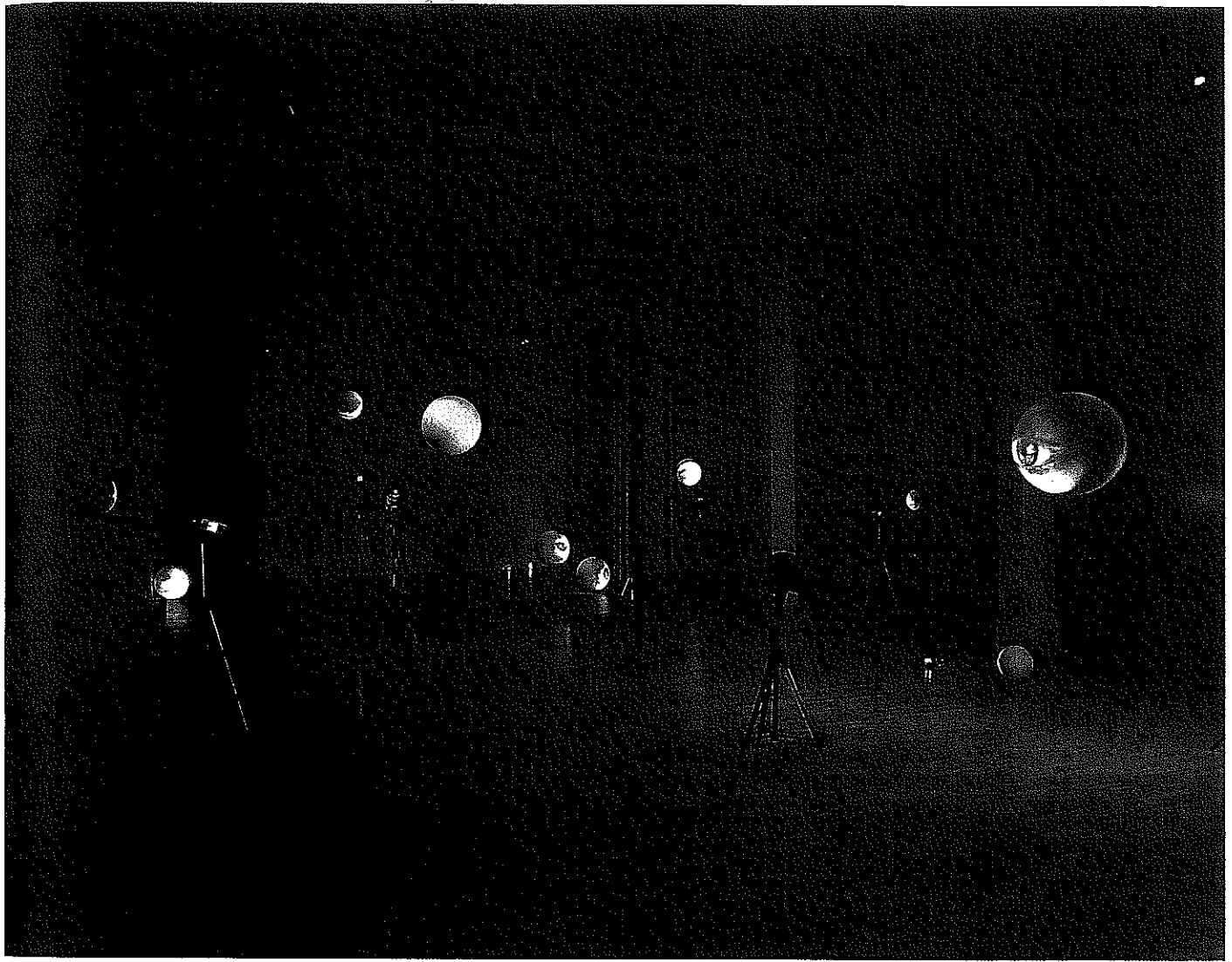
In 1996, Oursler reduced his sculptures from talking heads to watching eyes. In *Untitled (Eyes)* (fig. 27.12), thirteen fiberglass balls support projections of a single eye. One cries, one is red and swollen, one appears to look quickly around the room, and all reflect what they are watching, TV. Two eyes watch the classic films on MPD, *The Three Faces of Eve* and *Sybil*. Another watches pornography, one MTV, and one a home video game. *Eyes* depicts the moment of media absorption as the eye, the window to the soul, swells and contracts as if, to quote Oursler, it is "reflexively feeding on the light" of the TV. Oursler has reduced the body to its visual receptors, to demonstrate the psychic formation of the human by the television.

Matthew Barney (b. 1967) has used video and sculpture in his examination of "the kind of intuition that is learned through understanding a physical process." Barney associates such intuition with sports and sex, and its examination has led him from human development to myths and American history. Barney's interest in physical knowledge is present in gallery performances of sado-masochistic rock-climbing and in a body of surrealist exercise equipment that fuses sex and sport with more concision than commercial TV. Unlike Oursler and Hill, Barney confines the body to the conventional spaces of video, the TV monitor and movie theater.

Barney has developed the relevance of the body to the psyche and history in his five *Cremaster* films. The films are named after the muscle that raises and lowers the testicles. Barney has explained that the films are about the



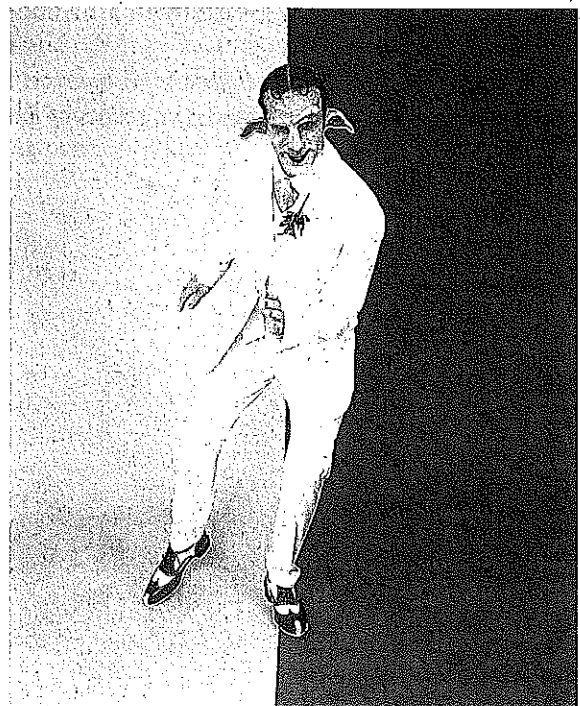
**27.11** Gary Hill, *Tall Ships*, 1992. 16 channel video installation; 16 modified 4-inch black and white monitors with projection lenses, 16 laserdisc players, 16 laserdiscs, 1 computer with 16 RS-232 control ports and pressure-sensitive switching runners, black or dark gray carpet and controlling software. Dimensions of corridor: 10 × 10 × 90' (3.05 × 3.05 × 27.43 m). Editions of two and one artist's proof.



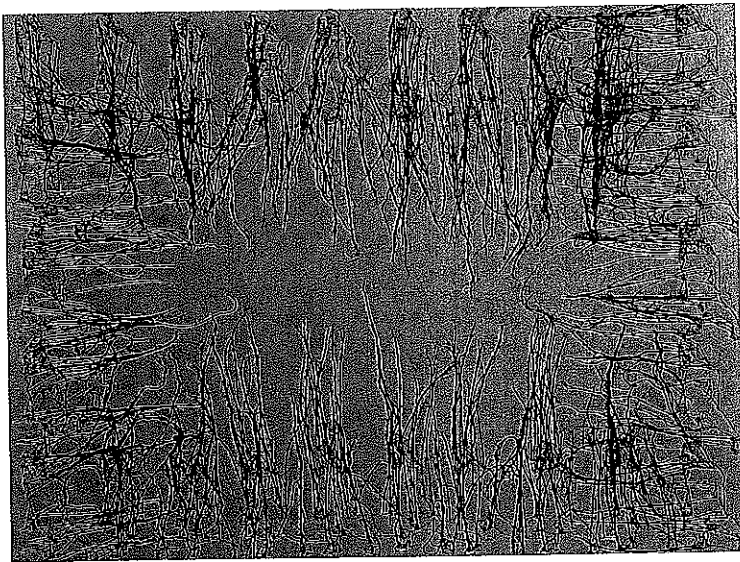
**27.12** Tony Oursler, *Untitled (Eyes)*, 1996. Installation view at Metro Pictures, New York, 1996. Video projection of eyes on thirteen painted fiberglass globes with soundtracks, dimensions variable.

physical and psychological development of masculinity. The series explores its subject within the context of myths of American life. Athletes, cowboys, sex symbols, and Barney's universe of symbolic characters including Harry Houdini, satyrs, and Mormon saint and murderer Gary Gilmore, populate the films. *Cremaster 4* (1994) (fig. 27.13) stars Barney as a human/goat hybrid intended to suggest the potential for transcending categories of being. The prevalence of abstracted athletic equipment, elaborate cross-dressing, and filmic sequences of such length as to test the endurance and patience of the viewer has suggested to critics that Barney's work is a studied resistance to the maturation it describes. The social and historical depth of Barney's imagination circles back through the presence of the artist, the sensuality of the films, and the title to the importance of the body to contemporary selfhood.

Sensuality and selfhood has inspired a very different body of work by **Ghada Amer** (b. 1963), who was born in Egypt, raised in France, and now lives in New York.



**27.13** Matthew Barney, Production still from *Cremaster 4*, 1994.



**27.14** Ghada Amer, *Untitled (Vert Kaki Figures en Bougainvilliers)*, 1998. Acrylic, embroidery, and gel medium on canvas, 30 × 40" (76 × 101 cm).

Explaining the character of her feminism, Amer has said, "I speak about women's pleasure. ... Women should use this power [of seduction] if necessary without being called frivolous snakes, witches, or prostitutes. ... I just wanted to take a typically feminine craft (sewing) and make of it a language with which to compete within the very masculine arena of painting." Amer transforms images taken from pornographic magazines into a form of feminism through a commitment to craft. Like the Pattern and Decoration movement of the late seventies (see chapter 24), Amer recognized that the gendered and domestic history of textile production would necessarily politicize imagery drawing on its tradition. And, like P & D, Amer works on a scale and in styles that place her work clearly in a tradition of postwar abstract painting.

In 1998's *Untitled (Vert Kaki Figures on Bougainvilliers)* (fig. 27.14), Amer embroiders line-drawn scenes of female

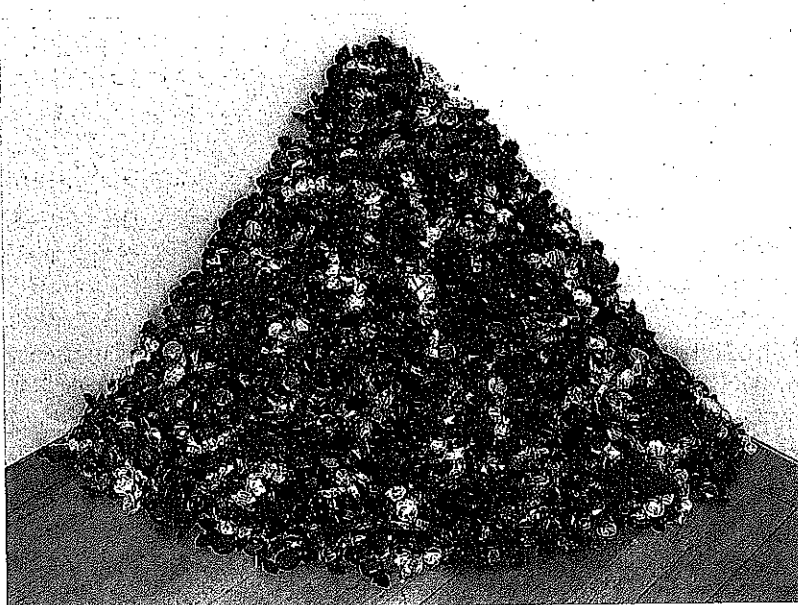
autogratication. Her source is pornography. Throughout her imagery, Amer embellishes simple poses by repeating and overlapping them and allowing the ends of the threads to fall loosely over the surface of the canvas. Like many feminist artists of the nineties, Amer sees herself taking back sensuality, in a sense stealing the image of the stereotypical sexualized woman to use as a source of empowerment and pleasure. Amer's reclamation of "the female body [and] its power of seduction" does not always derive from compromised sources. In a project titled *The Encyclopedia of Pleasure* (2001), named for a collection of Muslim texts on sexual pleasure compiled in the eleventh or twelfth century, Amer stitched Islamic sources for expressing a liberated female sexuality.

### The Absent Body

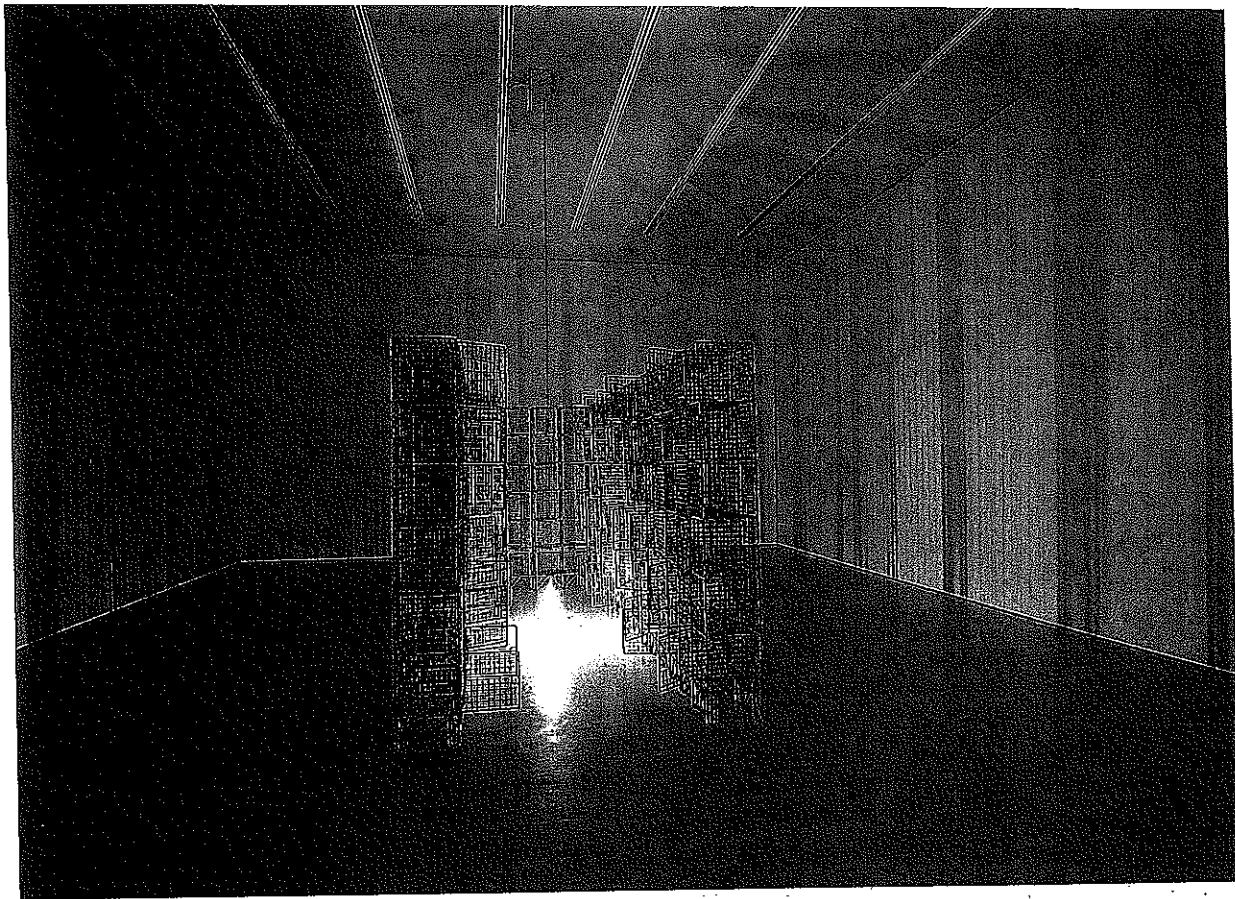
As every good modernist knows, one needn't be talking about the body to be talking about the body. Postmodern artists used the metaphoric possibilities of the material world to address states of a consciousness typical of contemporary life. For some, this meant viewing the material world as the depository for our feelings about being human. In a real sense, the body had gone missing and the artist discovered its memory in the world that once contained it. For others, the material world provided surrogates for the body, accessing insights that the body itself might not have revealed.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957–96) created a poetic oeuvre in which a pile of candy, or a string of light bulbs, could interweave physicality, memory, biography, politics, and history. Deeply influenced by Minimalism and Conceptual art (see chapter 24), he found that the clarity and luxury of Minimalist art could be fashioned to push his audience from sixties aesthetics to nineties politics.

Unlike the autonomy of Minimalist work, Gonzalez-Torres's sculpture directed attention to its creator and its audience. *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991)



**27.15** Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, 1991. Multicolored candies, individually wrapped in cellophane, endless supply. Ideal weight, 175 lbs (79.3 kg), dimensions vary with installation. Collection Howard and Donna Stone.



**27.16** Mona Hatoum, *Light Sentence*, 1992. Wire-mesh lockers and motorized light bulb, 6'6" × 6'1" × 16'1" (2 × 1.9 × 4.9 m); installation space variable, minimum 15'11" × 25'11" (4.9 × 7.9 m); maximum 19'2" × 28'10" (5.8 × 8.8 m). Collection National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

(fig. 27.15), for instance, appears to be a collection of elegant metallic units, a sculpture in the tradition of Donald Judd or Sol LeWitt (see figs. 22.47, 22.52). Its form, however, is the result of amassing the weight of Gonzalez-Torres's lover Ross in candy. *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, executed as its subject was dying of AIDS, is a meditation on the physical and emotional changes that occurred as the artist lost his lover. Viewers are invited to follow instructions and take a candy from the heap, the dwindling physical mass of the sculpture echoing the wasting away of Ross's body. *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, like all of Gonzalez-Torres's work, is dependant on physical interaction with an audience. There are no viewers of the work, only participants, and taking part in Gonzalez-Torres's art demands that we alter it. Change is integral to both its form and its content. Gonzalez-Torres's technique also suggests a shift in the political landscape as AIDS took its toll on American lives. Working, as he described it, "within the contradictions of the system" Gonzalez-Torres examines both the public qualities of private experiences of love and death and the private consequences of such public events as viewing art or providing healthcare.

Mona Hatoum, whose visceral *Corps Etranger* placed the body literally and figuratively at the foundation of her work, has also addressed the political history of the body.

In the early nineties, Hatoum began to create an increasingly abstract, geometric, and violent body of work, including 1992's *Light Sentence* (fig. 27.16), which employed utilitarian objects such as bed frames, animal cages, and lightbulbs. The artist has explained that the sculptural works address the disjunction of her past while examining the structures of institutional power that she has observed in the West. *Light Sentence* is a U-shaped chamber made from walls of stacked chicken cages. In its center, a bare lightbulb slowly descends to the floor and rises again. The bulb, a surrogate for both the object and agent of interrogation, shines through the cages, casting unsettling shadows on the gallery walls beyond. With simple means, Hatoum is able to create a physically demanding space that catches the human frame in a continually shifting mesh of metal and shadow. With the political clarity of her performances and the emotional suggestiveness of *Corps Etranger*, *Light Sentence* illustrates and effects the collision of bodily sensation and political history.

Approaching issues of self and society through the things that we embrace and the materials that cover us, sculptor and photographer **Yinka Shonibare** (b. 1962) has created a humorous and historically exacting body of work. Shonibare's sculpture is based on a simple and historically implausible confusion of African and British



**27.17** Yinka Shonibare, *Girl/Boy*, 1998. Wax-printed cotton textile, mannequin 71 × 59 × 27½" (180 × 150 × 70 cm), plinth size 79 × 5½ × 79" (200 × 14 × 200 cm). The Speyer Family Collection, New York.

fashion. *Girl/Boy* (1998) (fig. 27.17) presents a mannequin dressed in Victorian costume tailored from fabrics associated with Africa. The juxtaposition is funny, providing an invitation to disruptive considerations of post-colonial consciousness.

While the fashion confusion itself draws attention to intercultural mixing, the history of the fabric complicates what appears to be a clear statement about the impossibility of sustaining an African identity in a British life. In interviews and statements, Shonibare makes an issue of relaying the history of the "Dutch print" fabric that he uses. Developed by the Dutch as a simulation of the batik textiles of colonial Indonesia, "Dutch prints" were copied a second time by British textile manufacturers in Manchester.

The English then exported the fabrics to West Africa where, in the sixties, they became symbols of anticolonial patriotism. In London in the nineties, these materials were again being adopted by the Afro-British as signs of African cultural and political solidarity. Shonibare, himself raised in Lagos and London, has pinned notions of identity to a sign of Africa with roots on several continents, in colonizing and colonized nations, and in colonial, postcolonial, continental, and diasporic African history. Shonibare's sculptures mock notions of authenticity and singularity by insisting on the heterogeneous and international nature of both British and African identity. Following the material clues of Shonibare's fashion, the answer to a question posed in the title of another work by Shonibare, *How Does a Girl Like You Get to be a Girl Like You?* (1995), is found in an international and polyglot heritage.

**Gabriel Orozco** (b. 1962), an artist of startling formal and poetic facility, has taken the emotional and political content of mobility as a theme in his work. Orozco was born and educated in Mexico, spending his summers in Cuba and the Soviet Union. In the late eighties, in Mexico City, he participated in the collective General Workshop, which rejected traditional object-making in its attempts to explore the consequences of transformation in individuals, groups, ideas, and things.

Orozco considers his work "a byproduct or a leftover of specific situations." A poetic example is a photograph of bicycle tracks through a puddle called *Extension of Reflection* (1992). In the early nineties, Orozco began a series of *Yielding Stones*, plasticine balls of the artist's weight that were rolled through city streets and deposited in a gallery. Cigarette butts, bottle caps, and scratches mark the *Stone's* surface, leaving the imprint of the world on the surrogate for the artist.

*The DS* (1993) (fig. 27.18) explores transformation within the context of automobile culture. Orozco removed twenty-four inches (61 cm) from the center of a Citroen DS and rejoined the sides of the classic auto-body, slightly disrupting the familiar shape to accent its sleek and phallic appearance. The work recalls some of the more subtle transformations of the surrealists as well as the poignant distortions created by memory and nostalgia. Ironically, the increased elegance results in the impotence of the vehicle, now without a working engine. Made for an exhibition in Paris, Orozco chose the Citroen DS because it symbolized nostalgic elegance to a French driver. Reiterating Orozco's interest in change, the meaning of the DS and its emotional impact changes dramatically as it leaves the French gallery and enters an American, German, Japanese, or Mexican one.

The surrealism of memory and the confluence of the body and its environment have been of interest to artists far less peripatetic than Orozco. Since 1982, when he was sixteen, Gregor Schneider has been transforming the interior of his house in the small town of Rheydt, Germany into a modified version of the original. Walls have been built





**27.18** Gabriel Orozco, *The DS*, 1993. Sutured car, leather, coated fabric, 4'7" × 15'9" × 3'9" (1.4 × 4.8 × 1.14 m).

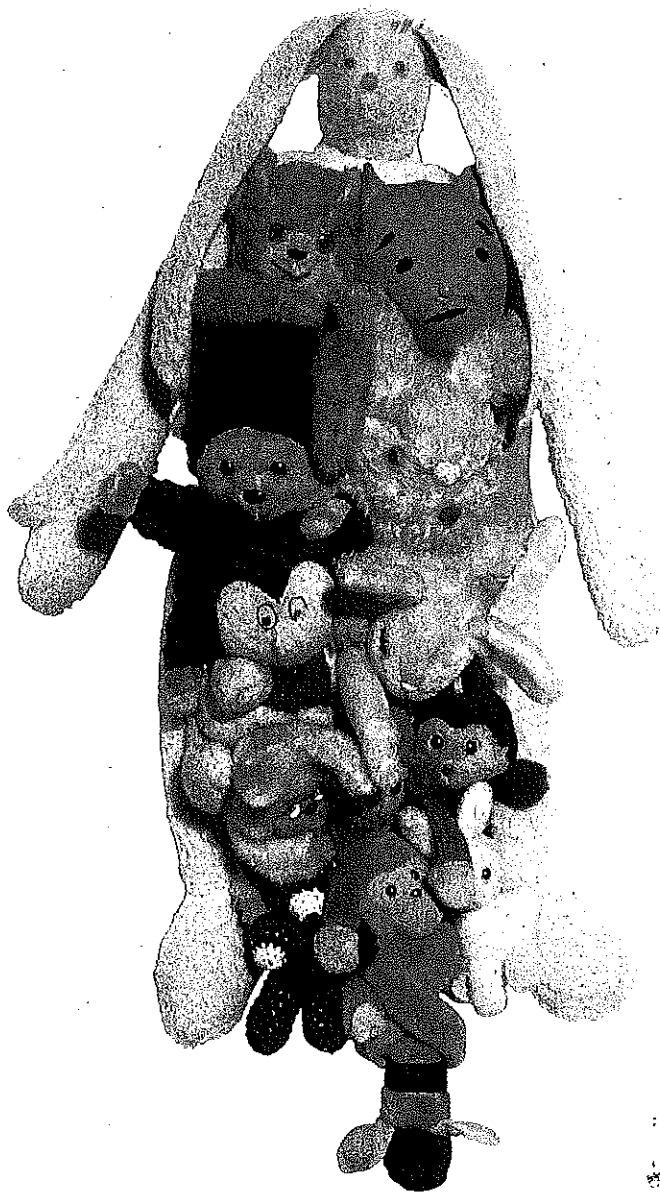
over windows, windows put in front of walls, rooms slowly shrunk and expanded as corridors appeared between floors, and plumbing shifted from room to room. Schneider's *Haus Ur* distorts the sensations of space without radically challenging one's expectation for the appearance of a middle-class German home. Something is off-kilter, but because viewers are not necessarily aware of the in-between spaces, what that is not clear.

As Schneider's work is his home, the artist has relied on a variety of methods of display. Films and photographs have been most important for conveying the appearance and concept of the work. The combined physical and intellectual effect of the house has also been transmitted through reconstructing rooms from the house within the rooms of a gallery. In his installations, Schneider provides no views of the work. Rather than see a middle-class cityscape, we enter the door to the gallery as if it were a portal to the home in Germany. The doubling of Schneider's formal strategies creates the uncanny presentation of the familiar that does to the home something akin to what Hatoum's *Corps Etranger* does to the body. At once so like its model

and yet fundamentally divorced from it, the transformed interior of Schneider's home suggests that the relationship between the spaces we inhabit, affect, and transform, and the character of the lives spent within them, is one of alienated intimacy.

Eschewing the elegance that lends moral dignity to work invoking the absent body discussed thus far, **Mike Kelley** (b. 1954) has used stuffed toys as surrogates for the body to embrace abjection with an affection that is both puerile and astute. Trained in Los Angeles at CalArts (The California Institute of the Arts) in a conceptual milieu, Kelley prioritizes the idea of the work over the pleasure of its craft. Constructed from secondhand stuffed animals, folding tables, note cards, aluminum foil, and miscellaneous ephemera, Kelley's work is built for effect rather than posterity. *Fruit of Thy Loins* (1990) (fig. 27.19) is a typical early nineties Kelley, with its thrift store materials, relentlessly adolescent obsession and confusion over the body, and its black humor.

*Fruit of Thy Loins* is a collection of toys joined to look as if a mother bunny has just given birth to twelve small



**27.19** Mike Kelley, *Fruit of Thy Loins*, 1990. Stuffed animals, 39 × 21 × 12" (99.1 × 53.3 × 30.5 cm).

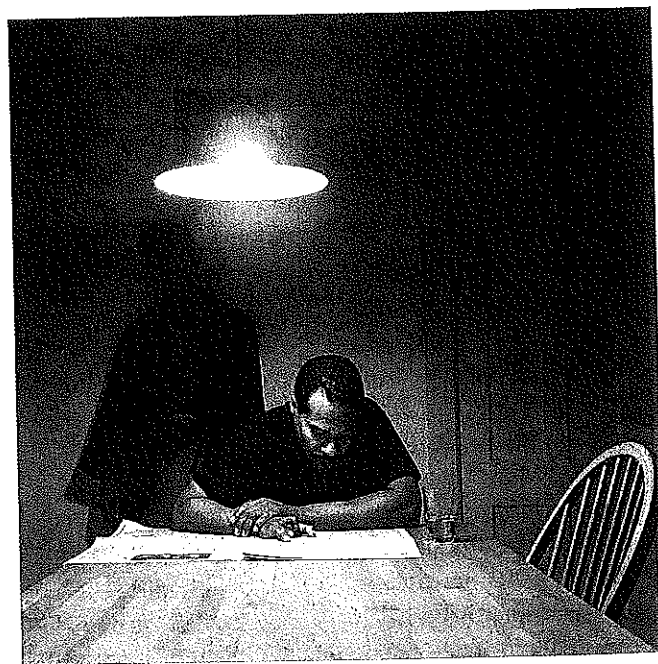
stuffed animals. Like Kelley's many stuffed toy sculptures, *Fruit of Thy Loins* transforms what might be cute into something rather ugly. The toys are worn and cast away and laden with the signs of class implicit in secondhand goods. The acts they perform are closer to the amorphous sexuality of Sherman's or Smith's contemporary work than the playful romps of Keith Haring or Kenny Scharf (see figs. 26.35, 26.37).

Typical of his generation, Kelley has explored both our attitudes toward physical intimacy and the institutional processes that shape them. In 1991, he presented the multiroom installation, *Morphology Flow Chart*, consisting of dozens of thrift store animals laid out on folding tables with charts behind them. The work suggested the science of a genealogical document and the history of a morgue. The ironic application of science and history to rather ratty relics of childhood presents an oppressive counterpart to the humor of *Fruit of Thy Loins*.

## The Art of Biography

Translating the experiences of one's life into a cogent story that responds to the needs of the teller and the demands of the audience has proved an acute challenge to contemporary artists. Some, like Tracey Emin, have attempted to push as much of their life into their art as possible, creating in a sense a real-time presentation of self. Others have sought to keep tighter control over the nature and content of personal revelation. Complicating the personal with the political, the majority of work discussed below addresses the specific problem of telling biographies of nonmajority citizens in a language that is necessarily shaped by the majority. Using text, film, photography, and painting, this art interrogates the act of writing or picturing biography even as it attempts to achieve it.

Before becoming an artist, **Carrie Mae Weems** (b. 1958) studied folklore at the University of California, Berkeley. Her photographic work has focussed her folkloristic convictions in the importance of narrative in the construction of identity and history. Weems attempts to tell stories faithful to the African-American experience in forms distinct from those of colonizing cultures. She has chronicled her family's migration from the deep South to Portland, Oregon, where she was born; written fictional stories of contemporary life; and traced the migrations of Africans from West Africa to the US. Taken together, Weems's work weaves the biography, autobiography, fiction, and history of Africans and African-Americans into intricate photo, text, and sculpture installations. Weems uses photography and texts as pieces in conceptual projects aimed at constructing alternative means of discussing society. She is a storyteller, choosing to follow narratives through to their ending and filling them with a wealth of local detail.



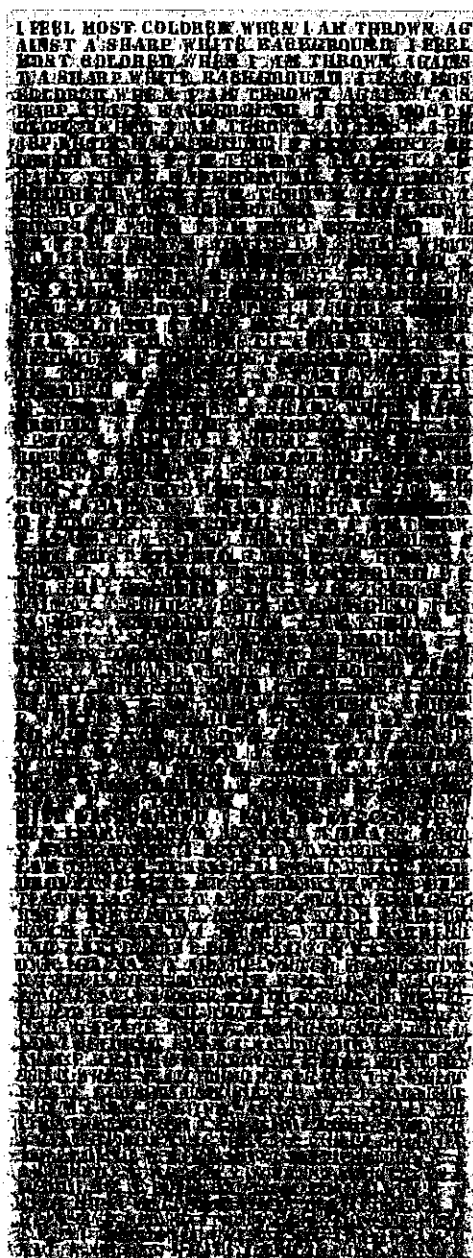
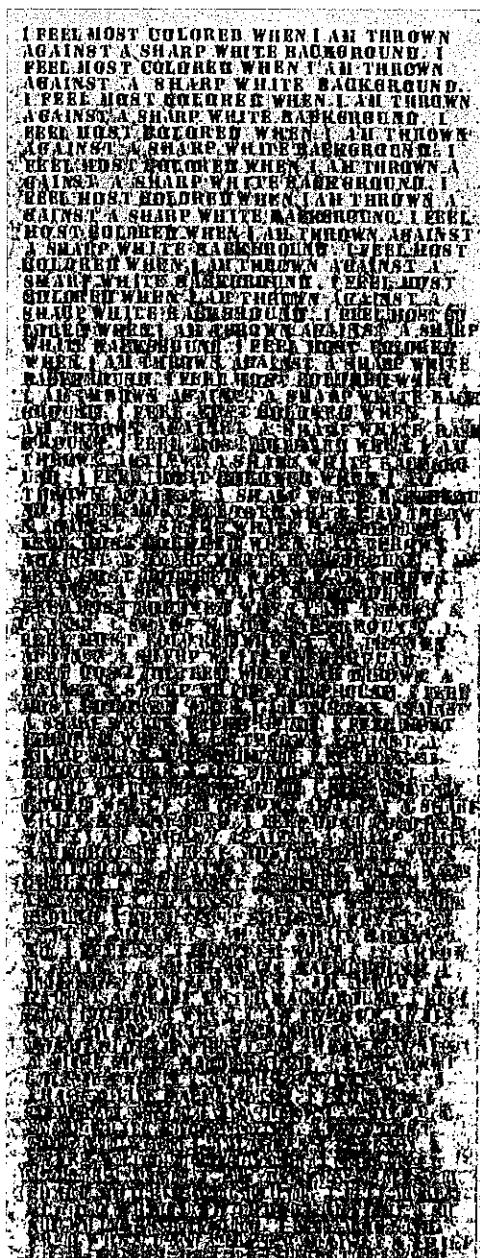
**27.20** Carrie Mae Weems, *Untitled* (Outtake from the *Kitchen Table* series), 1990–99. Gelatin silver print, 29¼ × 28¼" (74 × 72 cm).

*Untitled (Kitchen Table Series)* (1990–99) (fig. 27.20) is a four-part tableau presenting characters in a domestic drama. Focusing on the spousal relationship of an educated working-class black woman and the space of the kitchen, the series addresses the themes of marriage, friendship, children, and loneliness. The images are accompanied by texts, told in different voices, about the perils of domestic life. By rewriting the drama of domestic life in a consciously scripted fashion, Weems directs the viewer to those aspects of African-American life that she deems important. Traditional documentary photography had been directive too, but it had hidden its agenda in the apparent realism of its imagery. Artifice, as well as the complicated arrangements of texts, images, and objects throughout her oeuvre, serves Weems's desire to be clear and present in her work.

Glenn Ligon (b. 1960) works, in large part, by formally manipulating text to explore the disjunction between lives lived and the words we use to talk about them. Using

quotations, many of which describe the realities of growing up black in America, Ligon associates speaking of African-American experience with the Dada and Surrealist practice of the readymade and the objet-trouvé. The texts of others, from James Baldwin to Mary Shelley, become the objects with which Ligon attempts to bypass the traps of institutionalized language, thereby conjuring up the experience of African-American people.

Combining the textual abstraction of Jasper Johns (see fig. 21.17) with a distinctly pictorial impulse, works like *Untitled (I Feel Most Colored When I am Thrown Against a Sharp White Background)* (1990) (fig. 27.21) illustrate Ligon's understanding of race in America in surprising ways. Ligon paints the words as though they were on a page from a book. Starting off in sharp focus on the white field, the words begin to bleed onto the panel around them, fading into the obscurity of a darker background. The painting reverses the increasing clarity described in the text.



**27.21** Glenn Ligon, *Untitled (I Feel Most Colored When I am Thrown Against a Sharp White Background)*, 1990. Diptych. Oilstick and gesso on wood, each panel 6'6" × 2'6" (2 × 7.6 m). Collection the artist.

Ligon has not translated the metaphor of the text directly, but has used it to illustrate the deceptive clarity that race presents. In effect, Ligon is writing his own biography by making images with, not of, the writings of others.

**Lorna Simpson** (b. 1960), like Glenn Ligon, uses conceptual and pictorial devices to articulate and at least impart the difficulty of speaking about one's life as an African-American. Initially working in the tradition of documentary photography, Simpson, like many artists, began to question the assumed objectivity of the genre. Informed by Minimalist, Conceptualist, Feminist, and Identity art of the previous decades, Simpson questioned how the most fundamental properties of photography—repetition and framing—might complement her intentions as an African-American photographer.

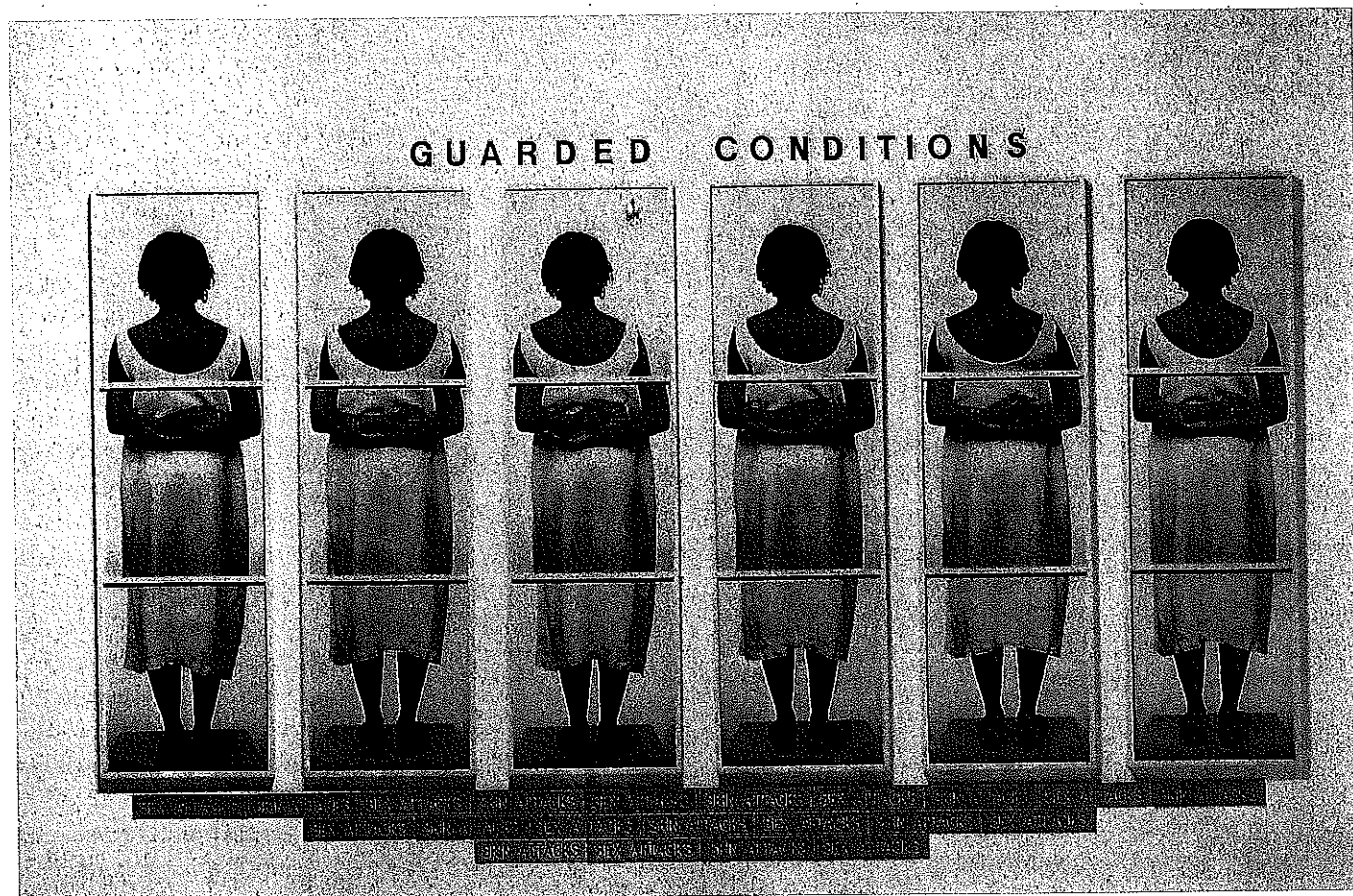
Simpson's *Guarded Conditions* (1989) (fig. 27.22) addresses racially and sexually directed violence, but uses none of the devices, expressive representation, and dramatic prose or poetry traditionally used to address such violence. In the work, the body of a standing black woman, her back turned to the viewer, is displayed in three framed photographs and repeated six times across the wall. Repeated below the figures are the phrases, "SEX ATTACKS" and "SKIN ATTACKS."

Like Gonzalez-Torres or Hatoum, Simpson uses the history of Minimalism and Conceptual art to provide and infiltrate metaphors for the regulated nature of social space.

Sentence fragments and cropped photographs of backs and turned heads become signs of social oppression and the coded means by which Simpson's subjects navigate and challenge it. Withholding as much if not more information than it provides, *Guarded Conditions* suggests both a generalized state of affairs and an intimation of specific events in a person's life. Though not an optimistic image, there is a sense in Simpson's art, as there was in Hatoum's and Gonzalez-Torres's, of options within the "contradictions in the system."

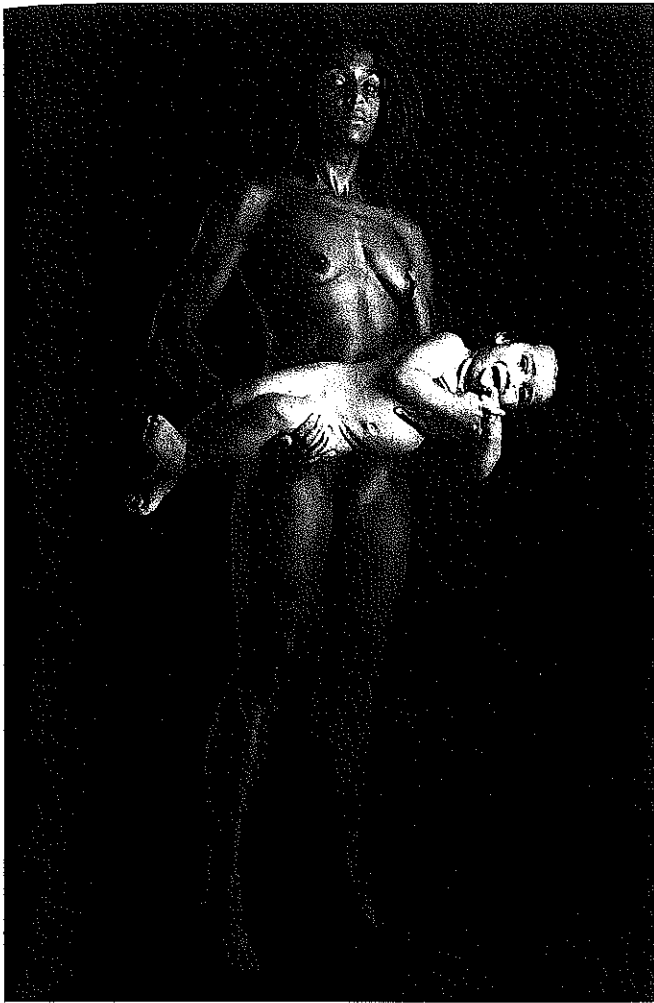
Skepticism toward the documentary value of photography as well as an anxiety toward its tendency to turn complex human subjects into objects of beauty has made the camera a difficult tool for telling personal histories. Adopting forms from conceptual photography has been one solution. **Renee Cox** (b. 1960), however, like Robert Mapplethorpe (see fig. 27.1), has chosen to work from within the history of her medium to transform the message that it tells.

Incorporating visual references to high modernism, erotica, and family snapshots while reconsidering canonical "masterpieces", Cox has used photography as a resource for reimagining the American Family. Fully realized in the 2001 exhibition *American Family*, Cox's intervention into the stereotype of the African-American family can be seen as early as the 1993 *The Yo Mama* (fig. 27.23). This is no traditional nativity, nor is it one of the restricted choices that the mass media provides for understanding the



**27.22** Lorna Simpson, *Guarded Conditions*, 1989. Eighteen color Polaroid prints, twenty-one plastic plaques, plastic letters, overall dimensions 7'7" × 12'11" (2.3 × 3.9 m). Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego.





**27.23** Renee Cox, *The Yo Mama*, 1993. Gelatin silver print, 82 × 47" (208.28 × 119.38 cm).

African-American single-parent home. Instead of either desperate images of drug addicts or romantic single-mother-beating-the-odds, Cox presents a strong, sexy individual with her two sons. This family, Cox's family, like any that is closely examined, will not collapse into stereotypes. Interracial and affluent, rife with sexuality and power, Cox's portraits of her family are about defying expectations and producing strength.

The American Family exhibition divides the elements of familial strength, racial pride, and sexuality that inform *The Yo Mama* into different types of photographs. Family snapshots are collected beside images featuring Cox (and in several cases her husband) in erotic poses and photographic reworkings of

**27.24** Nan Goldin, *C Putting on Her Make-up at the Second Tip, Bangkok*, 1992. Cibachrome print, 30 × 40" (76.2 × 101.6 cm).



nineteenth-century odalisques, also featuring Cox. Decidedly shocking, the ensemble forces together records of personal history, public imagery, and private desire to convey the nearly confounding effect of coming of age in America and communicate the complexity of individual identity and adult life.

In the introduction to her 1993 book *The Other Side*, a photographic celebration of cross-dressing, drag queens, and a spectrum of transgendered activity, Nan Goldin (b. 1953) wrote "The pictures in this book are not about people suffering gender dysphoria but rather expressing gender euphoria. This book is about new possibilities and transcendence." Goldin's work presents the intimate lives of people who make up her family of choice. *C Putting on Her Make-up at the Second Tip, Bangkok* (1992) (fig. 27.24), from *The Other Side*, is one of Goldin's many presentations of alternative lives. Before the mirror, in bathrooms, dressing rooms, and bedrooms, Goldin's subjects work on their faces, their bodies, and their clothes, transforming themselves into who they want to be. Goldin presents a world in which sexual, familial, social, and economic differences are impossible to define.

Goldin's earliest work employed the theatrics of glamor and possibilities of fashion to the lives of her friends. She has continued to use the high-gloss printing that mimics the seductive brilliancy of fashion photography even if her subjects, denizens of sexual, social, and chemical subcultures, would seem to have little in common with supermodels and fashion designers. In 1981, she presented her signature work, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, an ever-changing slide show documenting the people around her. *Ballad* depicts private scenes of men and women dressing, sleeping, or just bored, as well as showing an array of sexual activity, illicit drug use, and violent behavior.

In the late eighties, Goldin became heavily addicted to drugs and documented her own descent and recovery. Though the themes of exclusion and brutality that infused



*Ballad* remain strong in Goldin's work of the nineties, the focus on personal transformation in *The Other Side* suggests the greater potential of its "new possibilities."

William Kentridge (b. 1955), like Weems (see fig. 27.20), has used biography as a lens to view the relationship between history and the present. To do so he has essentially created his own medium—animation in which the traditional cells are replaced with charcoal drawings filmed at given moments of being drawn, erased, and altered. The results document images that seem to carry themselves across the surface of a single page of paper. Born, raised, and trained in Johannesburg, Kentridge considers all his art to be in one way or another about the city, and he uses his innovative medium to explore the conflation of his own biography as a white South African living through the end of apartheid with the fictionalized lives of two characters, Soho Eckstein and Felix Teitlebaum. Soho is an industrialist in the mode of George Grosz's ruthless caricatures of the thirties and Felix is a nude everyman whose fragility seems to speak of a universal human condition. Throughout the films, the capitalist's cruelty becomes a foil for Felix's personal indiscretions, including an affair with Soho's wife and a flood of melancholy that in *Felix in Exile* (1994) (fig. 27.25) threatens to drown him.

Kentridge displays the drawings from which each film was made together with the film itself. There are thus always two objects that make up Kentridge's movies: an image frozen at the point where Kentridge decided to pause the history of erasures and additions; and the unstoping film. On a metaphoric level, the drawings are, like individuals and nations, marked by the passages of time and history. The contrast of the two combined media, between the intimacy of charcoal and the distance of film, further accents the difficult combination of biography and history. Like many works of the nineties, Kentridge's films of Felix



27.25 William Kentridge, drawing from *Felix in Exile*, 1994.

and Soho argue that history, in this case that of apartheid in South Africa, is only visible as it is filtered through the biographies of its witnesses.

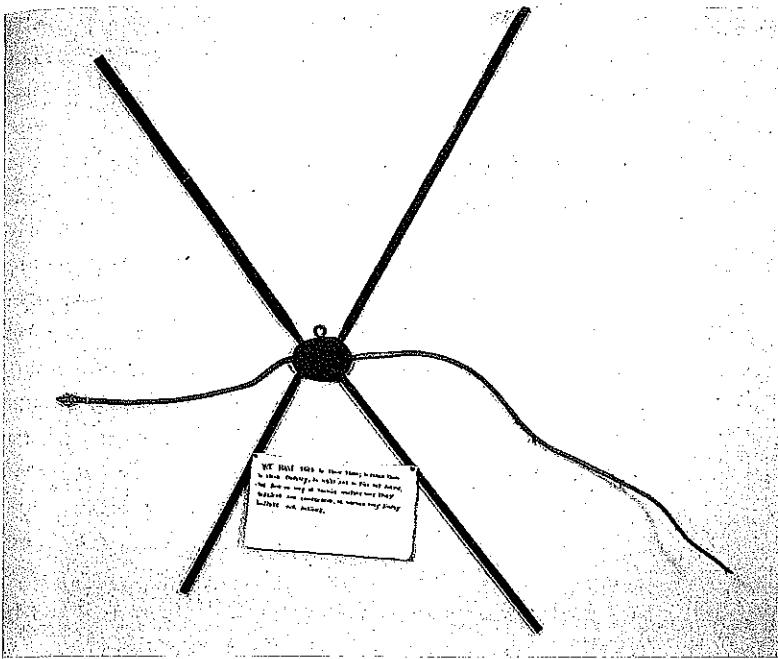
## The Postmodern "We": The Artist and Society

While exploring the nature of individuality in the nineties, it remained for artists to explore the context of contemporary life. As in earlier decades, artists often looked beyond the self to the issues of culture, history, and nature. Many artists rooted their art in an identifiable social group and then proceeded to demonstrate how permeable the boundaries that contain subcultures in contemporary society actually are. Engaging individual cultural identities in a multicultural environment has posed acute challenges. Resisting the claims to purity that through religious persecution and sectarian violence scarred the history of the twentieth century, these artists capture the interwoven strands of national and international culture. In many ways, these visions of society and its relationship to the past and the environment fulfill the theories of fragmentation and interrelation that defined Postmodernism.

### Art and the Expression of Culture

The social analysis present in the work of Jimmie Durham (b. 1940) grew out of his commitment to political activism. Born to the Wolf Clan of the Cherokee nation, Durham committed himself to challenging the government policies that were devastating the Native American community. Striving to "direct my rage at proper targets," Durham was active in the American Indian Movement and in 1973 was present at the Siege of Wounded Knee, an armed confrontation between US federal forces and Oglala Sioux activists seeking rights established in treaties signed and broken by the US government. The confrontation lasted for seventy-one days. Art making is, for Durham, a part of a life defined by an eclectic mix of activities and commitments. "I was raised as a political activist and carver and a good fisherman and blacksmith. I label myself an artist for convenience." Though in many ways playing into the idea of the Native American living his or her art, Durham's response also locates the Postmodern conviction in multivalent identities in his personal experience of a life spent battling the stereotypes of the Native American in and out of his art.

Durham's sculpture questions the notion that there is an authentic Native American art shaped by a natural connection to the land and sold from the pottery and rug stalls of Taos and Santa Fe. An ironic display of 1984 called *On Loan from the Museum of the American Indian* featured Durham's "neo-primitive neo-conceptualism." His "Museum" lent out fake artifacts, prototypes for *Red Turtle* (1991) (fig. 27.26), that challenged the authority of Western anthropology to define Native American culture. *Red Turtle*, handmade from a turtle shell, painted



**27.26** Jimmie Durham, *Red Turtle*, 1991. Turtle shell, painted wood, paper, 61½ × 67½" (156.2 × 171.5 cm). Collection Dr. and Mrs. Robert Abel, Jr., Delaware.

produced, they present sweeping panoramas of desert and sea, textured scenes of old cities, and moving bodies often abstracted and identified by long veils. The sensuality of her films is enhanced by multiscreen projections and the addition of music by composers including Iranian Sussan Deyhim for *Rapture* (1999) and American Philip Glass for *Passage* (2001).

*Rapture* (fig. 27.27) explores the separation of men and women in fundamentalist Islamic culture. Presented on facing screens, men occupy a fortress while women move across a desert landscape to the sea. As the white-shirted

sticks, and paper, is a pastiche of the expected naturalism of Native American art and an assemblage of the detritus of daily life. Durham's work is a biting and humorous challenge to the teaching of history in schools, museums, and the marketplace, which requires that Native Americans remain frozen in a romantic and precolonial existence that obscures their far from Edenic reality in modern America.

Iranian filmmaker Shirin Neshat (b. 1957) creates from a position between two societies; in her case, Islamic and Western society. Though Neshat has lived and worked in the west since 1974, her films are highly choreographed events that explore the relationship between female identity and culture in an explicitly Islamic context. Richly

men aggressively define the boundaries of their space, the women, veiled, watch. They shout once and the men look. Later, as several of the women board a boat, the men wave in an ambiguous gesture of farewell and warning. *Rapture* presents cultural divisions in choreographed movements in clearly articulated spaces. As one watches, alternating between screens mediating between the two sexes, we find our understanding of the film guided by similarly defined movements and spaces. Though tradition, culture, gender, and language may all appear threatening in Neshat's work, they do not overcome her female protagonists. Her work, she explains, is not about submission but rather the complexity of Islamic femininity that, to the



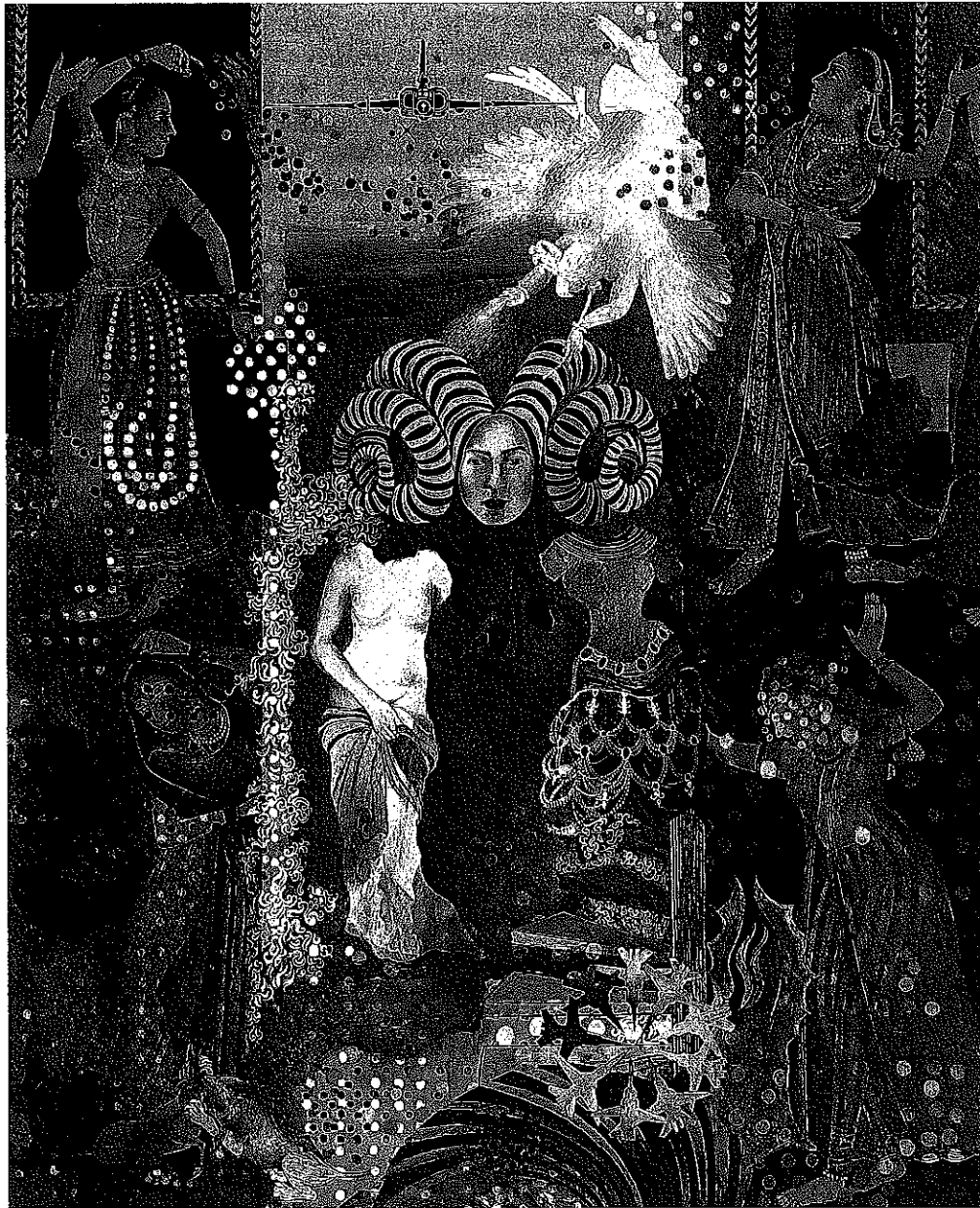
**27.27** Shirin Neshat, *Untitled (Rapture)*, 1998. Production still.

artist, contains strength that is greater than men's because of its repeated suppression.

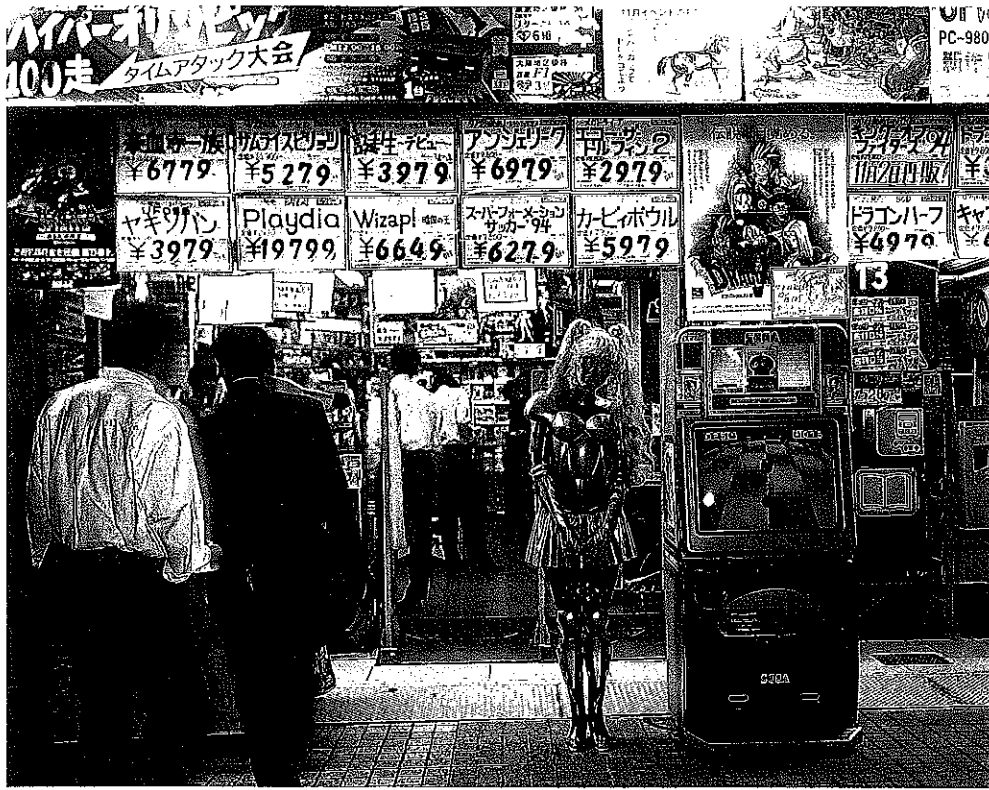
Born in Lahore, Pakistan, **Shazia Sikander** (b. 1969) began her career learning the Pakistani and Indian tradition of miniature painting rather than the Western-style painting that was more popular among her peers. Her thesis project, however, turned the tables on expectations of Eastern and Western traditions. Demonstrating what Sikander calls the "vulnerability" of the miniature tradition to being inflected by the present even as it connotes the past, her work *The Scroll* (1992) was an illumination of the artist's daily life. Upon moving to the United States in 1993, Sikander continued enlisting ancient techniques to respond to details of her life and her interest in post-colonial artistic and theoretical currents.

*Pleasure Pillars* (2001) (fig. 27.28) is an illuminated page on which Sikander has layered decorative and figural imagery rooted in Eastern and Western art historical traditions and popular culture. The image is meticulously

crafted from sources including, but not limited to: twelfth-century Indian sculpture and sixteenth-century Italian Mannerist painting in the central figures; Modernist abstraction in the circles repeated throughout the image (a motif also intended to suggest bombs falling from the warplanes that enter at the top); hunting imagery taken from miniature traditions; and popular arts, particularly sculpture, in the assorted animals and deities that populate the picture. Each formal element becomes part of a network of meanings that take the viewer in often surprising directions. The manuscript format alone, for instance, suggests how Sikander's art functions. In the most general Western context it reads simply as Indian, while to an informed, particularly South Asian, viewer it alludes to traditions preexisting Pakistani independence in 1947. When the biography of the artist is considered, the form takes on a political tenor and an image such as *Pleasure Pillars*, created in response to life in New York in 2001, participates in a dialogue with another history.



**27.28** Shazia Sikander, *Pleasure Pillars*, 2001. Watercolor, dry pigment, vegetable colour, tea, and ink on hand-prepared wasli paper, 12 × 10" (30 × 25 cm). Collection of Purninder and Amita Chatterjee, New York.



27.29 Mariko Mori, *Play with Me*, 1994. Fuji super-gloss print, wood pewter, 10 × 12 × 3' (3.05 × 3.66 × 0.91 m).

Sikander has explained that she selects and manipulates her sources in an effort less to articulate a specific political position than to make her viewers aware that the “physical, emotional, geographical, cultural, and psychological boundaries” by which we define ourselves are flexible and porous. More recently, Sikander has worked with short digital films presented in the format of an illuminated page. The work amplifies the visual effect of Sikander’s layered aesthetic by revealing the process and setting the elements in motion, while maintaining the dialogue between arts and culture of the past and present.

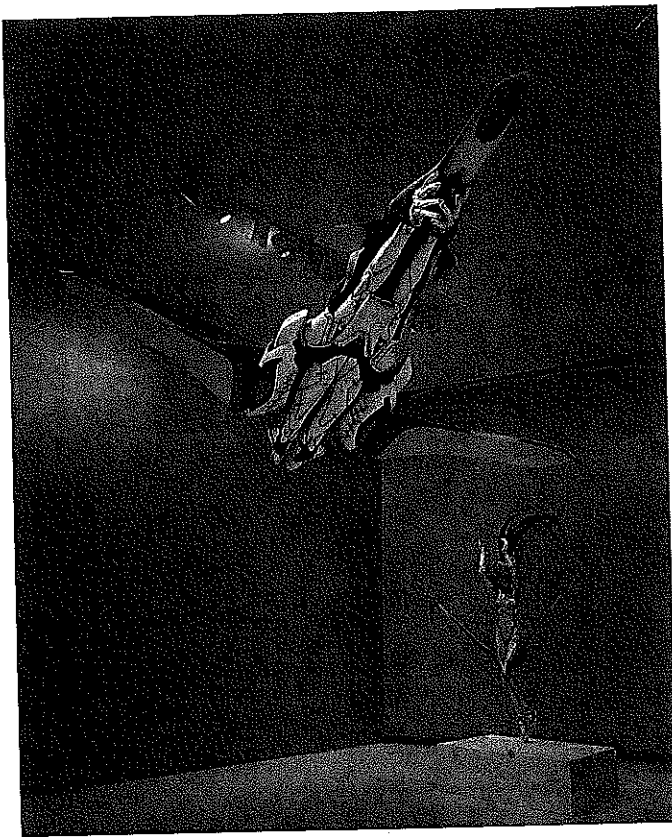
Seduced by the transformative potential of costume, Japanese artist **Mariko Mori** (b. 1967) began her career as a model. She has continued to feature herself in attire of all kinds as she explores issues of desire and fantasy in performance, photography, and video. In a series of performance/photographs from the early nineties, Mori became an incarnation of the ideal woman in the increasingly influential *anime* culture. *Anime*, Japanese animation, is a cross-cultural mixture of the Disney cartoons that were exported to Japan during and after World War II, and the Japanese animation industry, which has matured in the last few decades. Mori is one of several artists exploring the intersection of *anime* fantasy and Japanese reality.

*Play with Me* (1994) (fig. 27.29) and the related *Tea Ceremony* from the same year featured Mori, dressed as a cyborg, attempting to interact with a Japanese audience. In *Tea Ceremony* she combined the ancient Japanese tradition with the sexualized yet anodyne feminine cyborg of the contemporary imagination. Mori’s attempts at forcing the interaction of the ideal and the real met with awkward indifference. In *Tea Ceremony*, she served tea to business-

men on a city street, and they avoided her; in *Play with Me* her “real” cyborg was similarly overlooked.

Akin to the feminist analysis of the seventies, Mori’s work explores the ambivalence of cultural ideals. Her critique, though often barbed with a certain pleasure in revealing the inability of contemporary culture to locate its desires anywhere near reality, relishes aspects of the fantasy. Mori always seems to be enjoying herself. Her practice of shooting fantastic scenes in real locations, including Kansai International Airport, Osaka (see fig. 25.31), or La Defense, Paris, suggests the ironic possibility that our fantasies might not be so far removed as they seem.

*Anime* has also influenced the painting and sculpture of Japanese artist **Takashi Murakami** (b. 1962). His work, like Mori’s photography, takes history and popular culture as a means to examine the difficulty of satisfying one’s desire with the facts in real life. Murakami sees the relevance of popular culture in terms distinct from the categories of high and low culture set in the West by either the Cubist, Expressionist, or Surrealist avant-garde or their Postmodern variations. In the 2000 essay *Superflat*, Murakami asserted that there were two observations about Japanese art history that informed his work. The first was the idea of art as a category of cultural production distinct from popular culture is Western, imported to Japan during the Meiji era at the end of the nineteenth century. The force with which Western and now international culture (which is heavily influenced by the Western capitalist worldview) instituted a binary fine/popular or high/low structure onto Japan’s tradition of unified cultural production has caused, in Murakami’s view, a crisis in Japanese culture. The way out of the crisis lay not in recombination



**27.30** Takashi Murakami, *Second Mission Project ko2*, 1999. Oil paint, acrylic, synthetic resin, fiberglass, and iron. Human type 108 × 99 × 55" (275 × 252 × 140 cm); jet airplane type 21 × 76 × 73" (55 × 193 × 186 cm).

of high and low after the model of Western avant-gardes such as Cubism, Dada, or Pop, but in Murakami's second observation; that Japanese visual artists have historically been interested in the movement of objects across a flat surface, whether on screen, page, or film. *Anime* thus provides a means to revitalize Japanese visual culture, not as a source for "real" artists but as a legitimate point of departure for formal experimentation and intellectual content.

In a Japanese context, *Second Mission Project KO2* (*SMP KO2*) (1999) (fig. 27.30) agitates against what the artist sees as deep inconsistencies in Japanese culture. With the help of professional model-builders who specialize in three-dimensional *anime* figurines, Murakami created an anathema to the *otaku* (devotees of *anime*): a life-size, three-dimensional *anime* heroine. Once the object of *otaku* fantasy became too large, the physical, and—if one accepts even a modicum of feminist awareness—moral and political, impossibility of realizing the *otaku* ideal became painfully apparent. Like Mori's *Play with Me*, the *SMP KO2*, a sexually provocative female superhero who transforms into a high-tech military spacecraft, reveals the distance between Japanese fantasy and reality. Murakami's figures mock human desire by confronting the fantasy narrative with the real world. Currin used the language of realism, Murakami the scale of reality. Murakami considers his sculptures to be warnings of the alienation felt by thousands of people within Japan who have chosen, for the

moment, to migrate from social reality into the realm of an emasculating fantasy.

In the context of Western traditions, the *anime*-influenced art from Japan, of which Murakami's is the most visible example, poses challenges to Western divisions of high and low art that echo those of Pop art and the work of Jeff Koons (see figs. 26.47, 26.48). Murakami also has marketing savvy worthy of Warhol, though his studios in Tokyo and New York recall Rubens's workshop more than the Factory. Murakami and his staff have developed a creative and financial team that manufactures and products from paintings to T-shirts and promotes them in all media and venues from the internet to museums, ultimately branding Murakami's work in the fashion of Warhol and Hirst, or Pepsi and Coca-Cola.

The American social context has elicited artistic responses less concerned with the role of fantasy than misunderstanding and prejudice. In an effort to challenge stereotypes about African-American life, Kerry James Marshall (b. 1955) has created a representational language incorporating expressive handling to match the Neo-Expressionists, generalized figural types akin to comics or caricature, and the local details demanded of realism. Marshall, exceptional in his generation of African-American artists for his commitment to painting, has followed artists like Robert Colescott and Leon Golub (see fig. 24.84, 26.31) to take painting into the political arenas more often debated in photography and performance. Like Colescott, Marshall is well-versed in the Western canon, often citing artists from Botticelli to Gauguin (see chapter 3), claiming their talents for his subjects.

Marshall's *Garden Series*, which includes *Better Homes Better Gardens* (1994) (fig. 27.31), depicts scenes of life in public housing projects. Capitalizing on the myths and ironies that surround public housing, *Better Homes Better Gardens* appears to depict the project as an urban war zone: paint splashes evoke the spray of bullets. These signs of violence and the red HUD (the US department of Housing and Urban Development) identification codes that abruptly label the surface of the canvas represent the dismal expectations most Americans have toward the projects despite the bucolic names they have. The violence, however, is conventional, and the irony is easy, and neither is the endpoint of Marshall's work.

The *Garden series* pushes past the competing clichés of tragedy and comedy that frame discussions of poverty in the United States. Marshall was raised in a project like that depicted in *Better Homes*. The scene he paints is of ordinary pleasure. Unwilling to typecast the black experience as one of gritty desperation, Marshall adopts a stylistic eclecticism to express the complexity of experience. Figures detailed enough to suggest individuals, yet abstracted enough to stand as signs of African-American experience, are depicted going through both the trials and pleasures of life.

Robert Gober (b. 1954) has made a career of handcrafting fragments of the American environment to





**27.31** Kerry James Marshall, *Better Homes Better Gardens*, 1994. Acrylic and collage on unstretched canvas, 8'4" × 11'10" (2.54 × 3.61 m). Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Collection of Denver Art Museum.

suggest the complex intersection of psychic and social identity. Since the late seventies, Gober has been isolating elements of the domestic realm that mark the initiation of individuals into society. He has crafted dollhouses, cribs, beds, doors, wedding dresses, and newspapers. He has also embellished objects suggesting more ambiguous

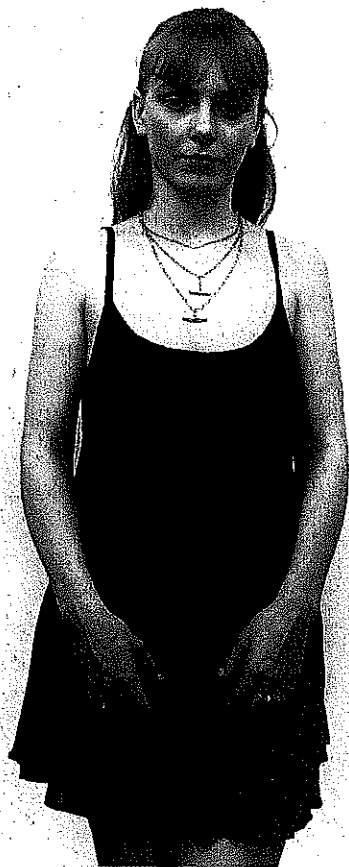
transitions like sinks, drains, tissues, and, starting in 1990, legs and torsos. His practice, with its attention to mimetic detail, can be likened to the Appropriation art of Cindy Sherman, Jenny Holzer, Sherrie Levine, and Barbara Kruger (see chapter 26), all of whom influenced Gober directly.



**27.32** Robert Gober, Site-specific installation at the Dia Center for the Arts, New York, September 24, 1992–June 20, 1993.

Since his earliest dollhouses, Gober has created environments. Even a single sculpture, a leg protruding from a wall for instance, transforms the gallery into an environment defined by the piece. His 1992 installation at the Dia Center for the Arts, New York City (fig. 27.32), serves as a transitional work that addresses the internal conflicts and external pressures of Western society. Stacks of handcrafted newspapers, tied up like recycling, lie about the room. Sinks drip water to the recorded sounds of a babbling brook. The room is wallpapered with an artificial panorama of New England woods punctured by barred windows. These elements tell an ironic story about the transformation of nature into culture. Reading the newspapers reveals an even more upsetting story. Gober has arranged the headlines “NOT GUILTY,” “VATICAN CONDONES DISCRIMINATION AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS, CONCERN THAT GAY RIGHTS THREATEN MARRIAGE,” and an ad featuring Gober in a wedding dress. The presence of the artist, a gay Catholic, cross-dressed for the forbidden ceremony, reiterates the repressive power of society at definitive moments in a person’s life. Once in the installation, the viewer can walk behind the papered walls and see that they are temporary constructions, a hopeful metaphor for the artificial social constructions that the piece critiques.

**Rineke Dijkstra** (b. 1959) has also committed herself to exploring the socially difficult terrain of personal trans-



**27.33** Rineke Dijkstra, *The Buzz Club, Liverpool, England/Mysteryworld, Zaandam, Netherlands*, 1996–97. Double projection, 35mm film with sound transferred to video or DVD.

formation. Dijkstra’s portraits capture ordinary people with their flawed physiques and dated clothes, in states of flux— notably adolescence, although she has also captured the transitional moments of pregnant women, young mothers, and soldiers. Despite photographing subjects with whom she identifies for their often desperate failure to “have everything under control,” Dijkstra makes them look like scientifically recorded specimens, evenly lit and isolated from their context. The work updates the integration of typographical and documentary traditions of photography that was begun earlier in the twentieth century in Germany with Sander and the Bechers (see figs. 13.38, 22.69).

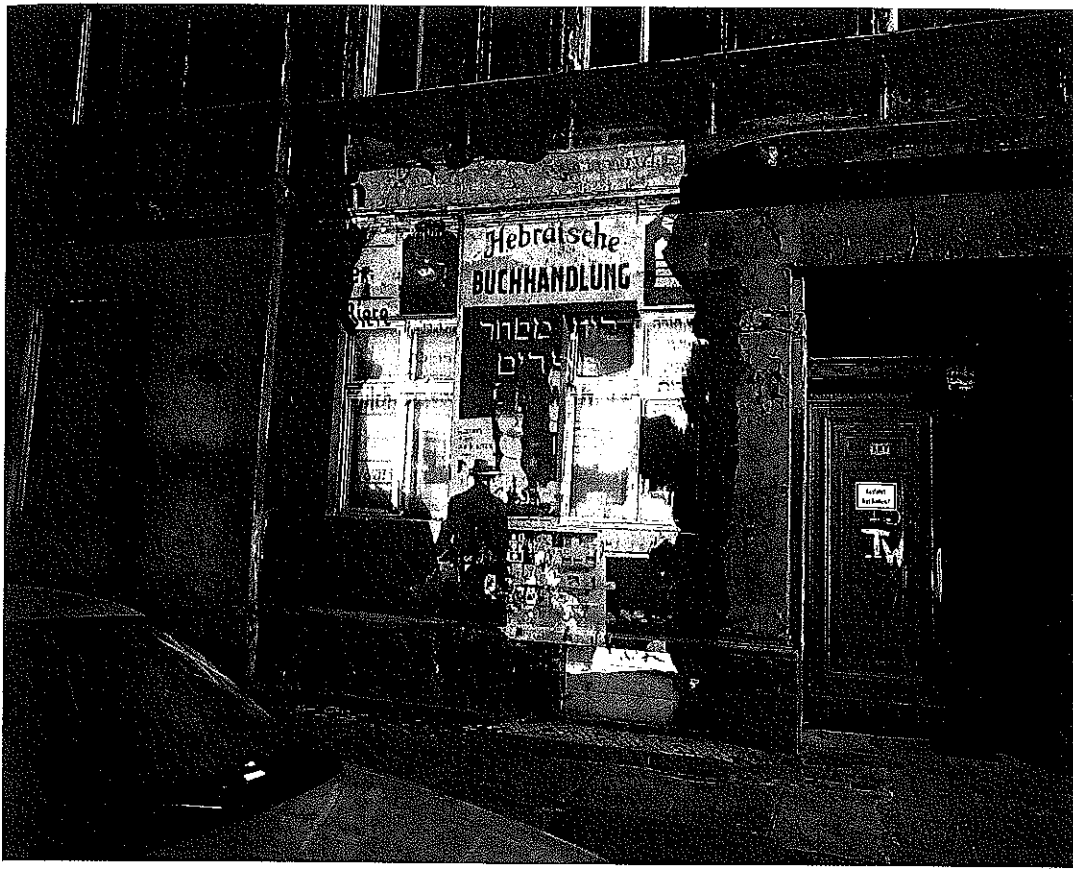
Dijkstra built her reputation on an extended series recording teenagers at the beach. “More or less self-portraits,” according to the artist, the images capture the often painful combination of boldness and insecurity of adolescence. Taken in The Netherlands, Poland, Coney Island in New York, and Hilton Head in North Carolina, the series has an added anthropological element as it demonstrated how the character and class of the location affected the presentation of the subjects. Discussing Dijkstra’s decision to address the passage from childhood to adulthood, critic Katy Siegel wrote: “This is a generation for whom the paradigm of adolescence (frustration, awkwardness, self-discovery) resonates louder than that of childhood (happiness, wonder, play) or adulthood (sophistication, responsibility, gravity).”

*The Buzz Club, Liverpool, England/Mysteryworld, Zaandam, Netherlands* (1996–97) (fig. 27.33) extends Dijkstra’s interest in the socially weighted transitions of adolescence to film. Presented in a side-by-side dual projection, *Buzz Club* presents images of kids at two nightclubs standing, dancing, and waiting. *Buzz Club* was filmed in storage rooms, thus keeping the subjects in the mood of the evening but far enough away to accent the awkwardness that Dijkstra felt dominated the environment. The results range from poignant and funny to awkward and boring.

### Re-presenting History

Navigating the present has directly informed our understanding of the past. The work of Marshall (see fig. 27.31) or Mori (see fig. 27.29), for instance, has much to say about the traditions and histories of American and Japanese cultures. In the case of those works, the past is relevant for its relationship to the present. The nineties saw a large body of work that engaged the past for reasons independent of what it can illuminate about the present.

In 1991, Californian artist **Shimon Attie** (b. 1957) began a five-year stay in Berlin where, among other things, he researched the Scheuenenviertel, a neighborhood that from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s was home to Eastern European Jewish immigrants. In response to photographs that he found of prewar Jewish life, Attie developed a technique similar to the projections of Krystof Wodiczko (see fig. 25.40) to explore the intersections of memory and history.



**27.34** Shimon Attie, *Almstadtstrasse 43* (formerly Grenadierstrasse 7): slide projection of former Hebrew bookstore, 1930, Berlin, 1992, from the series *The Writing on the Wall* 1991–93. 33 × 40" (84 × 102 cm) chromogenic photograph and on-location installation.

*Writing on the Wall* (1994) (fig. 27.34) consists of site-specific events for which Attie matched archival photographs of the Scheuenenviertel with the locations as they existed in the nineties. He then projected the photographs onto the existing buildings, many delapidated from the war and years of neglect. The effect momentarily mixed pre- and post-World War II histories of Berlin. The images were primarily domestic scenes, although some were of populated exteriors. Viewing the projection, we seem to look through the ruins of the present to the activities of the past. Attie's work mediates the nostalgia of memory and old photographs by conflating three forms of destruction: the Jewish people by the Germans, the neighborhood by neglect, and the photograph by time. Intellectually layered, and visually rich, Attie's work created a forum for confronting an inhuman history with a living present.

The German work provided Attie with means to examine memory and history in other contexts. The most striking of his American projects has been *Between Dreams and History* (1998), in which the personal narratives of residents from Manhattan's Lower East Side were projected onto the buildings of this historical immigrant neighborhood. Known as a site from which immigrants, first Jewish and then Latin American, arrived and moved on, *Between Dreams and History* made that history specific and personal: not a romantic vision of the past but a current reality.

Archival material and projected visions of the past onto objects of the present also provide the foundation for the work of Whitfield Lovell (b. 1959). Like Attie, Lovell strives to balance the nostalgia of old pictures with material,

including architecture, that has historic bonds to the past and physical connections to the present. In a series of installations, Lovell has recreated the homes and insinuated the presence of African-Americans lost to the occlusions and embarrassments of American history. *Whispers From the Walls* (1999) (fig. 27.35), for example, was created at the invitation of the University of North Texas, Denton, Texas. Lovell learned that Denton had been home to a flourishing African-American neighborhood called Quakertown.



**27.35** Whitfield Lovell, *Whispers From the Walls*, 1999. Installation view.

In the early twenties, a white women's college opened nearby and the Quakertown community was dispersed. Lovell's installation, a single room decorated in the style of the period, becomes home to portraits of Quakertown citizens. Lovell found photographs of these people in local archives and transcribed them onto the walls in black oilstick. His drawing is sensitive and in places abbreviated so as to leave large areas of wood uncovered by line. The material of the room thus forms the bodies of its former residents. Completing the installation are two soundtracks, one playing old blues tunes and the other barely audible voices, bits of conversation and shouts of children that become the whispers of the walls. Through similar methods Lovell has retold histories of a variety of figures in the history of African-American life, from railroad workers in Houston to slave traders in Italy.

History, memory, and domestic life are also at the center of the work of British artist **Rachel Whiteread** (b. 1963). As compelled as Lovell by the physical pressure of the artist's hand against the walls around her, Whiteread applies materials as different as plaster, rubber, resin, plastic, and concrete to the surfaces of objects rich in domestic

allusions. The resulting sculptures reveal the form of the negative space around objects as small and prosaic as bathtubs and mattresses and as large as a house itself. Evoking the geometric abstraction of both funereal sculpture and Minimalist art, Whiteread's work, she says, "has to do with the way our culture treats death; other cultures celebrate it and we try to brush it under the carpet."

Whiteread creates plastercasts of the absences that surround her. After several years of preparation, which included taking detailed measurements and estimates of equipment and materials, she created *Ghost* in 1990, a cast of the interior walls of a sitting room. Done in square panels of plaster, the sheets were assembled to become the positive form of the negative space of the room. Moldings and a mantelpiece forced shallow recessions into the form, while the fireplace left a slow spill of plaster. The structure conveys a palpable sense of loss and suggests a tomb, both in its size and in its emotional resonance.

In 1993, Whiteread was commissioned to create *House* (fig. 27.36), the casting of the interior of an entire home in London's East End. Created from sprayed concrete, *House* stood in a low-income neighborhood that was being



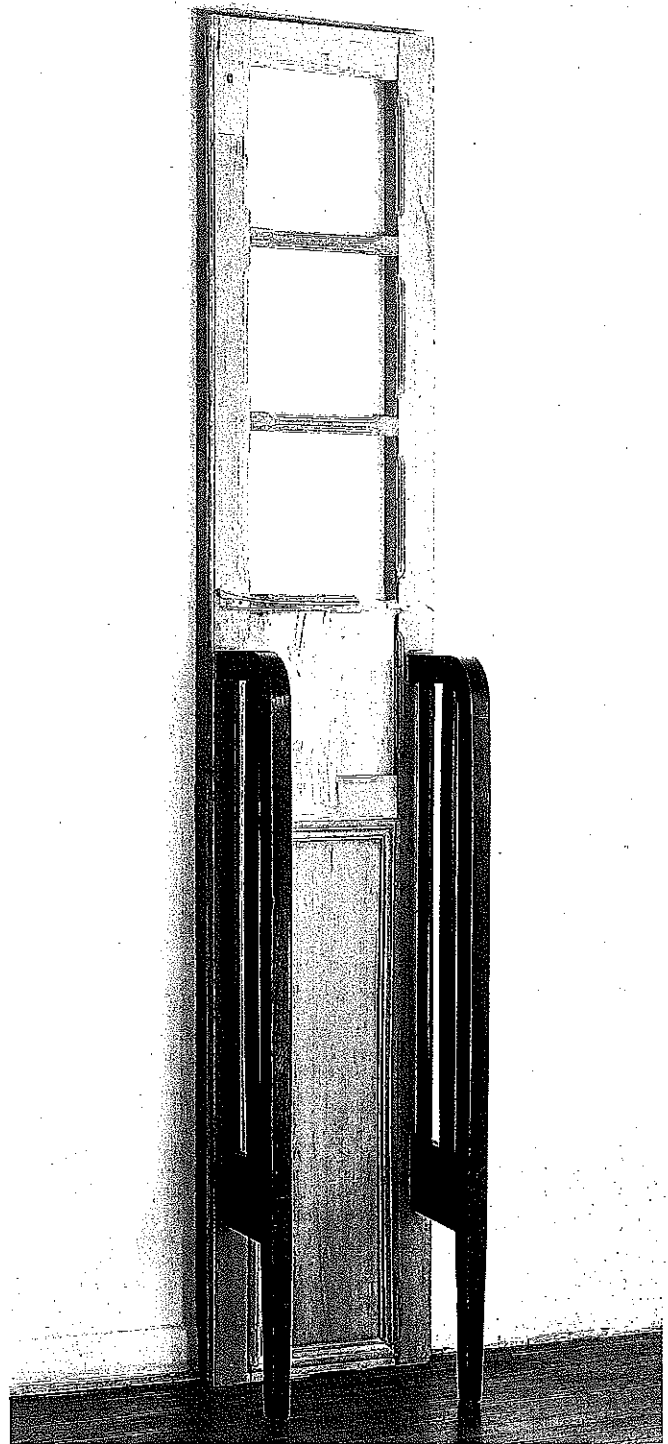
**27.36** Rachel Whiteread, *House*, 1993, destroyed 1994. Concrete. Commissioned by Artangel.

gentrified. Trading Victorian flourishes for concrete geometry produced an aggressive analogy for demographic changes that were occurring in London. An aesthetically intrusive commentary on urban planning, *House* spurred immediate controversy. Though conceived as a temporary monument, plans for postponing its removal were stymied due to the uproar.

Like Whiteread, Colombian sculptor **Doris Salcedo** (b. 1958) develops the expressive tradition of Minimalism while transforming its concern with universal experience to address local history. Salcedo clarifies her intentions by incorporating into her work materials, from clothing to furniture, that resonate with our daily life. *Casa Viuda (Widowed House) IV* (1994) (fig. 27.37) is one of a group of works in which bedframes, doors, chairs, fabric, zippers, bone, and wire, are forced into geometric structures defined by the now illogical compression of once-useful furniture. Conceived for spaces such as hallways, entrances, and exits, *Widowed House* reiterates these transitional spaces in architecture, surrounding the viewer with a sense of physical and emotional change. Through her materials and compositions, Salcedo conveys confinement and occlusion in the physical experience of her work and, by extension, comments on the political landscape of Colombia.

Though she did graduate work in New York in the eighties, Salcedo has remained in Colombia. Her practice has included interviewing those who have suffered through the civil unrest of a country notable for its history of kidnappings and political murders, which are known as “disappearances.” The disappearances inflicted an abstract brutality on the lives of victims’ families. Salcedo incorporated materials given to her by the people she interviewed in her work, thus bringing into it the material presence of their lives, characterized in the artist’s perception by their fragility and precariousness. The sculpture echoes the emotional rhythms of people whose understanding of their own past is scarred with great absences in their memory, as in their nation’s history. The clarity of Salcedo’s objects, carefully stitched seams and juxtapositions of cement, wood, hair, and lace for instance, when integrated into soft concrete and simple compositions, serves as an analogue for the poignancy of loss and the incomplete integration of death into the lives of those still living. In contrast to the work of William Kentridge (see fig. 27.25), Salcedo’s sculpture articulates the distance between human lives and national histories and the absence of even the difficult resolutions that South Africa faced in the nineties.

The exploration by American artist **Kara Walker** (b. 1969) of the brutalities of the past has led her to join together racial stereotypes and decorative arts in her work. Walker creates sadomasochistic variations of Romance novel plots, dramatizing sexualized violence among slaves and between slaves and slave-owners. Walker’s medium is cut paper shaped with a rococo lyricism that gives scenes of humiliation and violence elegant grace. Her decorative facility helps express her conviction that American identity,



**27.37** Doris Salcedo, *La Casa Viuda IV*, 1994. Wood, fabric, and bones, 102½ × 18½ × 13" [260 × 47 × 33 cm]. Private collection.

black as well as white, is rooted in finding pleasure in racist brutality. Walker’s appeal to racist visual traditions and her pointed statements put her at the center of discussions of race and art in the nineties.

Walker’s characters have the physiognomy of “Black memorabilia,” the pickaninnies and sambos that Henry Louis Gates Jr., literary critic and director of the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University, has called the “peculiarly American repertoire of debased racist imagery.” African-American artists since





**27.38** Kara Walker, *Insurrection! (Our Tools Were Rudimentary, Yet We Pressed On)*, 2000. Cut paper and projection on wall, 11% × 21 × 32% × 10% (3.6 × 6.4 × 10 × 3.28 m). Installation view. Collection of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

the twenties have incorporated stereotypes into their work. Harlem Renaissance painters Aaron Douglas and Palmer Hayden exaggerated the lips, brows, and hair to insist on the racial identity of their subjects. More recently, Robert Colescott has presented the black body as inseparable from the stereotypes that have described it (see fig. 24.87). To critics, Walker's imagery has none of the pride or critique of its predecessors and is a naïve presentation of racist imagery for the delectation of racists. To defenders like Gates, Walker's hyperbole severs the affinity between the representation and reality on which its racist sources relied. So divorced from issues of realism, Walker's art, Gates argues, is a quintessentially Postmodern engagement with the powers of representation.

Work such as *Insurrection! (Our Tools Were Rudimentary, Yet We Pressed On)* (2000) (fig. 27.38) applies Walker's elegant debasement to liberation scenes. *Insurrection* sacrifices the moral clarity of such tales by describing the revolt as a sexualized melee. Walker's exquisitely detailed outlines trace slaves and whites in states of uncompromised physical pleasure, apparently oblivious to the larger issues of liberty and justice. Typical of her generation, Walker exhibits a readiness to complicate history with insights drawn from challenging the presumptions of the present.

## Reprise and Reinterpretation: The Art of Art History

As is evident in the discussion thus far, art history has concerned nearly every artist in the modern era. Édouard Manet, perhaps the most art historically conscious artist of the modern period, has been a particularly fertile subject for those seeking to understand their relationship to the Western tradition. Japanese photographer **Yasumasa Morimura** (b. 1951) has explored the history of art and the place that history holds today by putting himself into recreations of canonical masterpieces. Associating himself with Cindy Sherman (he even recreated a Sherman work from the early eighties), Morimura announces that his intentions are critical.

For *Portrait (Twins)* (1988) (fig. 27.39), his commentary on *Olympia* (see fig. 2.20), Morimura constructed an elaborate set of Olympia's boudoir in which he posed both as the infamous courtesan and as her maid. In apparently gleeful modifications to the Manet painting, one can see serious intrusions into modern art history. As we know from recent scholarship on *Olympia*, Manet's painting was about class. Morimura's addition of a bridal kimono casts Morimura/Olympia as a Japanese bride,

and his transformation of the mysterious black cat into a figurine symbolizing commerce reiterates the class issues while adding those of race. Casting himself in the role of Olympia fuses the sexualized role of the prostitute with both the feminized and eroticized vision of the East still evident in Western discussions of Asian cultures. Moreover, as Norman Bryson has noted of *Portrait (Twins)*, raising the issue of race draws attention to the maid, the racial "other" already present but rarely discussed.

Morimura/Olympia takes on the observer's gaze and directs it, controlling those things one is able to see. If artists of the seventies and eighties examined the disturbing consequences of being the object of beauty, desire, and examination, in the nineties Morimura and artists including Nan Goldin and Lisa Yuskavage (see figs. 27.24, 27.54) explored the potential for agency and power from the same position. Morimura has updated his exploration to include taking on the personae and appearances of stars including Greta Garbo, Marilyn Monroe, Jodie Foster, and Madonna.

As for Morimura, nineteenth-century painting provided the starting point for Canadian photographer Jeff Wall (b. 1946). Wall is part of a community of photographers in Vancouver whose interests coincide around the play of artifice and observation in narrative photography. As an art

history student, Wall was interested in the transformation of history painting from a genre restricted to depicting the greatness of the past to one that, in the hands of painters like Delacroix, Goya, or Manet, conveyed the gravity of contemporary life. In large light boxes meant to mimic the propagandistic quality of history painting with the boldness of advertising, Wall presents scenarios of human activity including domestic quarrels, war, or just random accidents. To approach the scale and declarative quality of history paintings, Wall carefully designs his settings, sometimes in a studio, but often outside, and directs actors to play out the scenes. Wall's process consists of digitalizing the negatives of numerous photographs and then combining them in a final transparency. The results give Wall even more compositional command and, as in *A Sudden Gust of Wind (After Hokusai)* (fig. 27.40), impart gravity to the ambiguous activities depicted.

The narrative and appearance of *A Sudden Gust of Wind (After Hokusai)* (1993) was inspired by a woodblock print from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji* (1823–33) by Katsushika Hokusai. Taking the Japanese woodblock as his model for contemporary history photography, Wall alludes to both Eastern and Western nineteenth-century artistic traditions and the nineteenth-century European fascination in Asian visual culture. Using photography to transform



27.39 Yasumasa Morimura, *Portrait (Futago)*, 1988. Colour photograph, 6'10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub>" × 9'10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub>" (2.1 × 3 m).



**27.40** Jeff Wall; *A Sudden Gust of Wind (After Hokusai)*, 1993. Fluorescent light, color transparency, and display case, 7'6 $\frac{3}{8}$ "  $\times$  12'4 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (2.3  $\times$  3.8 m). Tate Gallery, London.

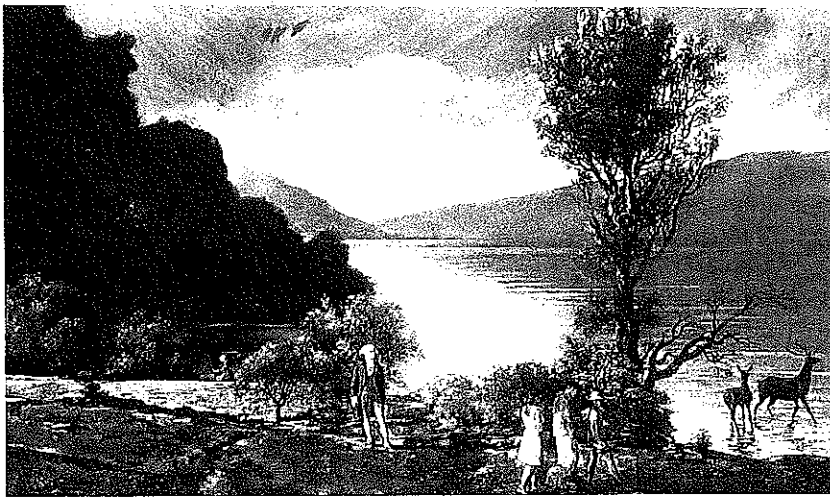
the woodblock into a salon-style image of Canadian businessmen projects a certain irony onto the multicultural aspects of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## Considering Nature: New Visions of Landscape

Since the beginning of the modern era, whether one dates that beginning to the seventeenth or the nineteenth century, landscape art has been understood to be part of social discourse and full of political and ideological content. Whether painted by Ruysdael, Delacroix, Courbet, or Cole or photographed by Muybridge or Brady, depictions of nature were used as a vehicle for social content. By the late twentieth century, the understanding of nature was changing. Throughout the history of the West, there has been a conviction that the natural world and the landscape genre were two separate things, one a work of God, the other a construction of humanity. Just as the idea of the body as a direct means of access to knowledge was no longer

followed, artists concluded that perhaps there was nothing to correspond to the historical idea of pure nature. Nature was becoming just a landscape, an entity dependant on our abilities to discuss and describe it rather than any innate quality it might possess.

In an exercise that illuminates the confluence of nature and culture, the Russian émigré duo of **Vitaly Komar** (b. 1943) and **Aleksandr Melamid** (b. 1945) created a series of most and least wanted paintings. They surveyed the public of several countries to determine what they liked and disliked in their art. In the United States, small angular abstractions in shades of brown and orange were the least appealing and historical landscapes in cool tones were ideal. *United States: Most Wanted Painting* (1993) (fig. 27.41) was roughly the size of a dishwasher. A combination of populism and irony, the *Most Wanted Paintings* series serves as a reminder that art historical genres are a way in which cultural demands define personal expression. Komar and Melamid's association of national and natural history makes it clear that even before the environment is



**27.41** Vitally Komar and Aleksandr Melamid, *America's Most Wanted*, 1994. Oil and acrylic on canvas, dishwasher size.

experienced, its meaning has been defined in the realm of national, historical, and cultural expectations.

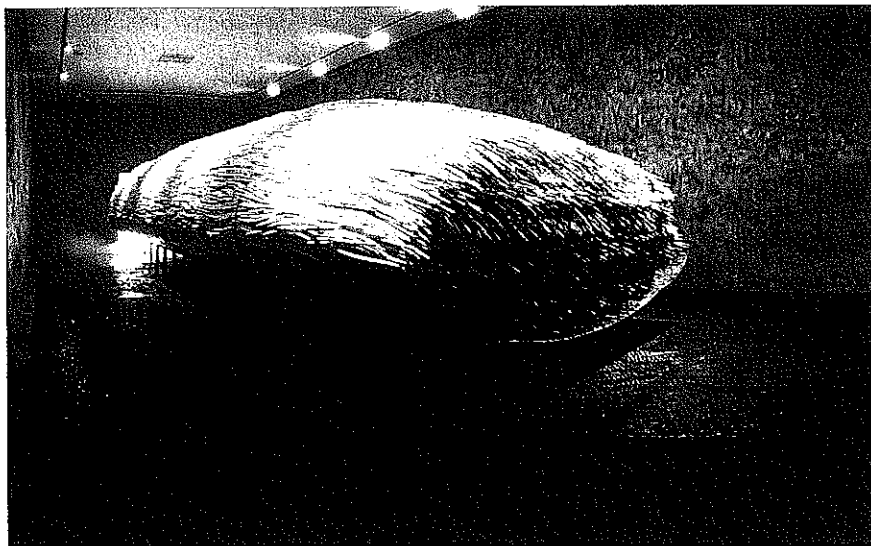
American **Ann Hamilton** (b. 1956), like all the artists discussed in this chapter, makes work that intersects with many issues. Her 1996 traveling exhibition was titled *The Body and the Object*, while her 1997 European show, *Present-Past*, invoked the context of history. Her juxtapositions of materials and history occur in installations that conjure magical-realist landscapes. Vistas with waterfalls, flowers, and people working are infused with smells of farmyards and orchards, and the activities of insects and birds. A student of Judy Pfaff (see fig. 26.62), Hamilton exerts control over large spaces and heterogeneous materials of natural as well as clearly manufactured origin.

*Parallel Lines* (1991) (fig. 27.42), a key work of the early nineties, was created as a historical landscape that responded to the artist's travels in Brazil. Invited to participate in the 1991 São Paulo Biennial, Hamilton began work by researching the area from the rainforest to urban industrial zones. Hamilton covered walls with copper tags and "painted" others with the carbon of burning candles, the remains of which were piled high on a cart in the room. In an annex she left a turkey carcass to be eaten by bugs. Hamilton presented the installation with a descriptive poem beginning:

the entrance, a road encrusted  
with numbered copper tokens, emblems of exchange  
marred, marked, touched, tarnished, placed  
a cradle of freight, piled, mounded, stacked  
the laid sinew of candles  
burned and extinguished ...

In presence and description, *Parallel Lines* evokes the intersection between rural and urban life, the same scenery that politicized landscape painting in the nineteenth century. Work and trade is a central theme in much of Hamilton's art. Often her pieces include people knitting, wrapping objects, or engaged in similarly simple tasks. Likewise, the quantities of materials that she uses (*Parallel Lines* used 20,000 candles and 999 copper tags) connote the dour repetition of menial labor.

The sculptures of British artist **Andy Goldsworthy** (b. 1956), site-specific installations of materials as transitory as ice and as lasting as stone, poetically acknowledge the role of humanity in the shaping of nature, yet respond to our desires for the restorative otherness of the natural world. Goldsworthy draws from the details of the local environment—stone walls in New England or sheepfolds in Cumbria—to bring the viewer into a relationship with



**27.42** Ann Hamilton, *Parallel Lines*, 1991. Candles (lengths variable, 1 to 6' each, or 30 to 183 cm), steel basin, table, candle soot, glass and steel vitrines, turkey carcasses, Dermastid beetles, copper tags.

the environment. In locations from Southern France to South Australia, Goldsworthy has assembled stone cairns, monumental variations on traditional trail markers, joining the history of exploration to the organic elegance of Brancusi or Arp (see chapter 9). Though often romantic in his reminders of our smallness within the sweeping vistas of nature, Goldsworthy consistently forces our attention to the landscape as a site of interaction between humanity and the environment.

Goldsworthy's *Storm King Wall* (1997–98) (fig. 27.43), a site-specific installation for the Storm King Art Center sculpture park in Mountainville, New York, combines the themes of travel and integration of self and environment by transforming a fixture in the New England countryside, the old stone wall, into an anthropomorphic reminder of a walk in the woods. Built from local stones, the wall rises up from the ground, winds around trees, dips into a lake, climbs out and continues to a nearby road. Stone walls of the region are physical evidence of the transformation of the American wilderness into a political landscape. In Goldsworthy's work this sign of power and possession becomes the expression of a journey that moves into and beyond our distinctions of private property.

American **Diana Thater** (b. 1962) populates her landscapes with animals for whom, in her own words, “[the]

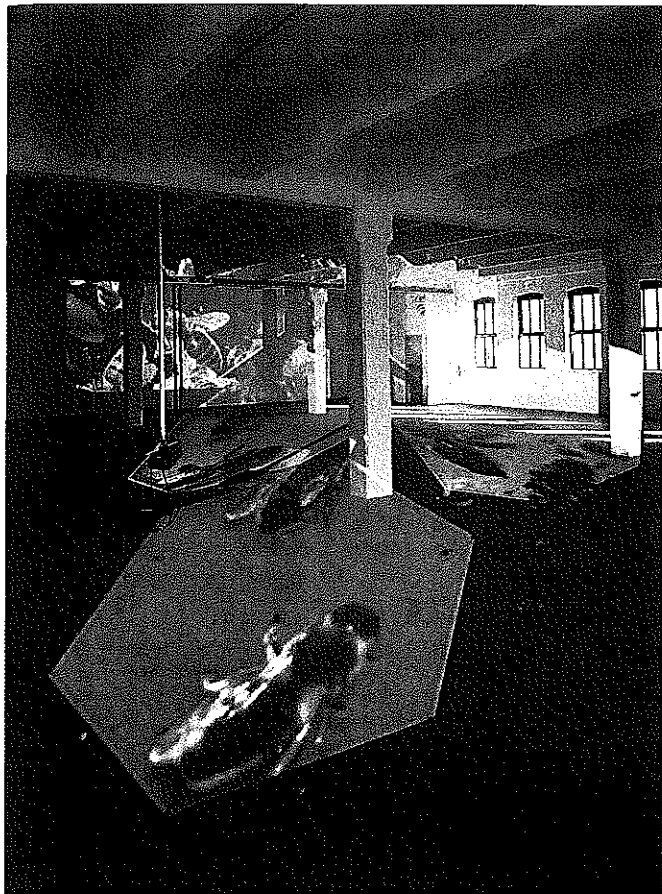
experience of time and space never seems ... to be singular and who express their experience of ‘present-ness’ with their whole beings.” Such similarities between the animal world and the Postmodern one become the foundation for seeing nature as a body of cultural knowledge that is still profoundly foreign to human civilization. Thater's work in the nineties featured the vibrant blues, reds, and greens of video monitors and a menagerie of socialized animals from trained wolves to honey bees to explore the myth of untamed wilderness and the reality of human intrusion.

*Knots + Surfaces* (2001) (fig. 27.44) argues that some parts of nature still hold liberating possibilities for human life. The film presents the dance of the honeybee mapped onto numbered hexagons of color and projected onto the floor, walls, and ceiling of a gallery. A wall of video monitors present brightly colored flowers. Thater drew inspiration for the work from mathematical models of six-dimensional space based on the dance of bees. The potential for the expansive understanding of space gleaned from the animal world, both as a reality and a metaphor, accents the aspects of Thater's art concerned with creating alternatives to existing relationships between human beings and between the human and the animal world. *Knots + Surfaces* also practices the deconstructive project of drawing awareness to the viewer's presence while picturing nature. As in



**27.43** Andy Goldsworthy, *Storm King Wall*, 1997–98. Field stone, approx. 5' × 2,278'6" (1.52 × 694.5 m) overall.



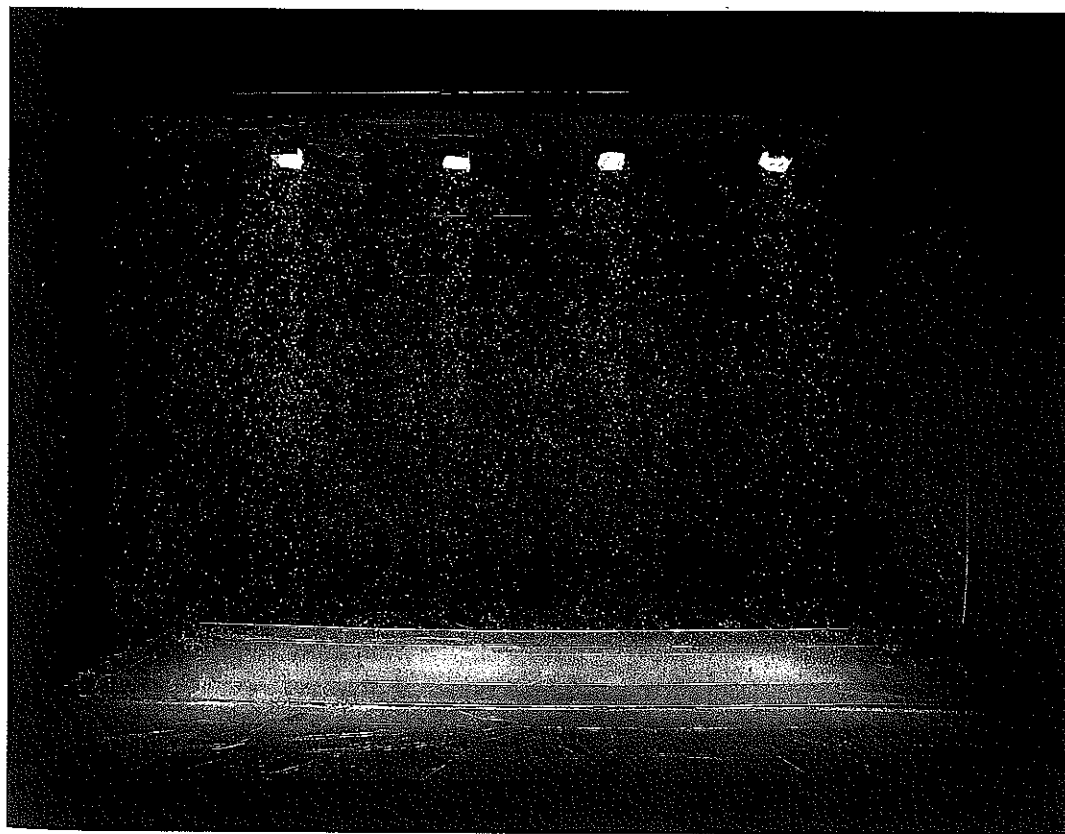


**27.44** Diana Thater, *Knots + Surfaces*, 2001. Installation for 5 LCD video projectors, 16 video monitors, 6 DVD players, 1 VCR-1000 synchronizer, 6 DVDs unique, and 1 AP.

many of Thater's pieces, the projectors and monitors of *Knots + Surfaces* are located high on the walls and low on the floor so that one must walk through the light, becoming a screen for the image and a shadow on the wall. To see *Knots + Surfaces* is to intrude on its form and complete the cast of characters. Thater intends to include the performers, creator, and audience in the work.

Thater's strategic placement of her equipment makes us aware that, to use the phrase of Icelandic sculptor **Olafur Eliasson** (b. 1967), we are seeing ourselves seeing. Unlike the romanticism of the past, we are not invited to lose ourselves in nature but to reflect on our relationship with it. Eliasson's work, typical of much art in the late twentieth century, invites a sublime loss of self, but never permits us to remain untroubled by the reality of our surroundings.

*Your Strange Certainty Still Kept* (1996) (fig. 27.45) is a room-sized electrical storm. Water falls to the floor from parallel strips on the ceiling as strobe lights flash in a darkened room. The sound of water and the explosions of light have the sensual resonance of being in a storm, yet, like actors on a soundstage or visitors to a museum, we don't get wet. In fact the strobes are timed to create the illusion that the water is not even falling. Suspended in air, Eliasson's sublime vision is both immediate and distant. In a similarly synaesthetic installation for the 1999 Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Eliasson rerouted steam from museum heating ducts to surround a cluster of trees placed in its lobby. The centerpiece effectively illustrated the intertwined histories of romanticism and industrialism—a fitting statement for a historic center of the American industrial Midwest such as Pittsburgh. A highly



**27.45** Olafur Eliasson, *Your Strange Certainty Still Kept*, 1996. Water, light, plexiglass, plastic, recirculating pump, and woodbase: 1'8" × 17'7¼" × 10" (0.5 × 5.2 × 0.25 m), top: 14'5¼" (4.39 m) long.

visual artist, Eliasson connects the long tradition of romantic landscape painting to the brief history of conceptual art. His critical voice, in work such as *Your Strange Certainty Still Kept*, relies on keeping the history and experience of art in close proximity. Works such as these use the museum as a guide to our understanding of nature.

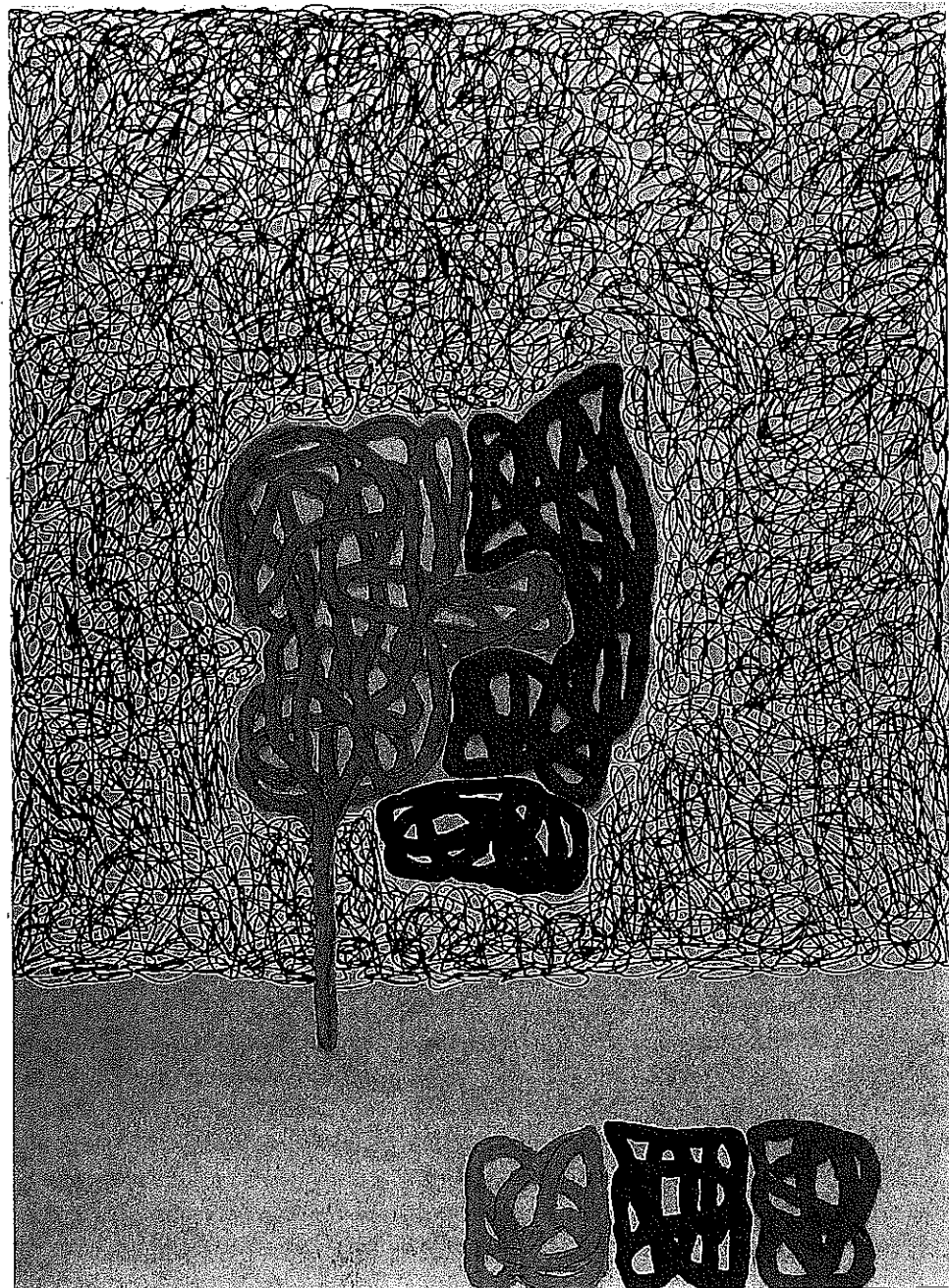
## Painting and Sculpture as Social (ized) Spaces

### Meeting Points: Exploring a Postmodern Abstraction

In abstraction, as in representation, the deconstructive lessons that began in the late sixties were, by the nineties, bearing reconstructive fruit. That all artistic languages are compromised by the myths and politics out of which they

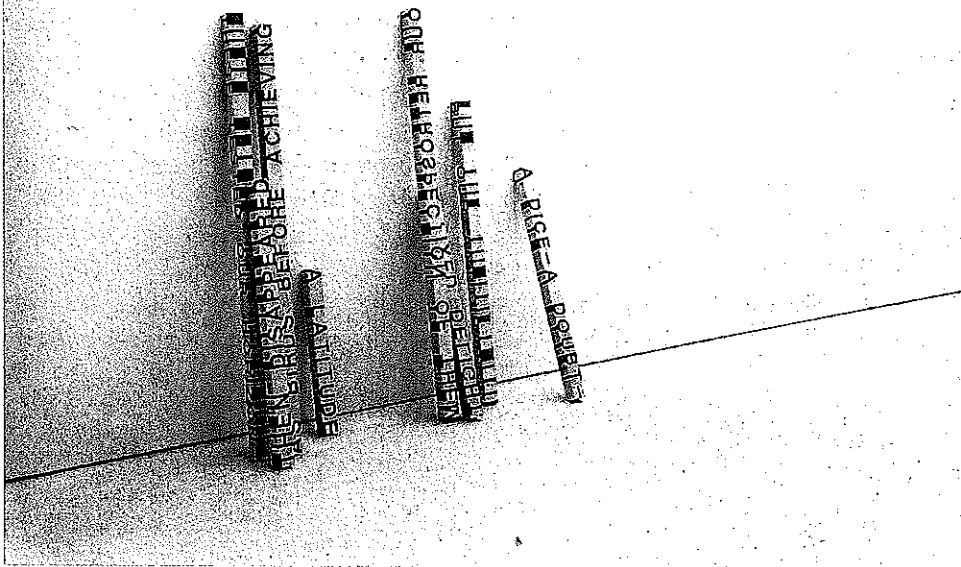
were created is no longer viewed as an impenetrable barrier to speech or art. Years of analysis seemed to have left many artists confident in their ability to communicate without the kind of mastery desired by a Pollock or a Van Gogh, or the kind of resistance of a Warhol or a Kruger.

American artist Jonathan Lasker (b. 1948) titled a 1989 painting *Euphoric Routine*, neatly expressing the irony that even as abstract art strives toward emotional immediacy, it is based on learned and repeated procedures. Lasker's paintings, which are rhythmic and visually engaging, but also oddly distant and mute, draw on a history of postwar painting that concluded that, if abstraction communicated at all, it was because artists and viewers agreed that marks meant something. It was this linguistic quality of abstraction that Johns and Twombly examined (see figs. 21.17, 22.13) and the consequences of disregarding it that



**27.46** Jonathan Lasker,  
*To Believe in Food*,  
1991. Oil on linen, 8'4"  
× 6'3" (2.5 × 1.9 m).  
Private collection.

**27.47** Roni Horn, *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes—For Felix; No. 886*, 1993. Plastic and aluminum, dimensions variable.



concerned Halley and Bleckner (see figs. 26.45, 26.46). Lasker's work demonstrates that one can respect the contrivance of abstraction while maintaining confidence in its expressive potential.

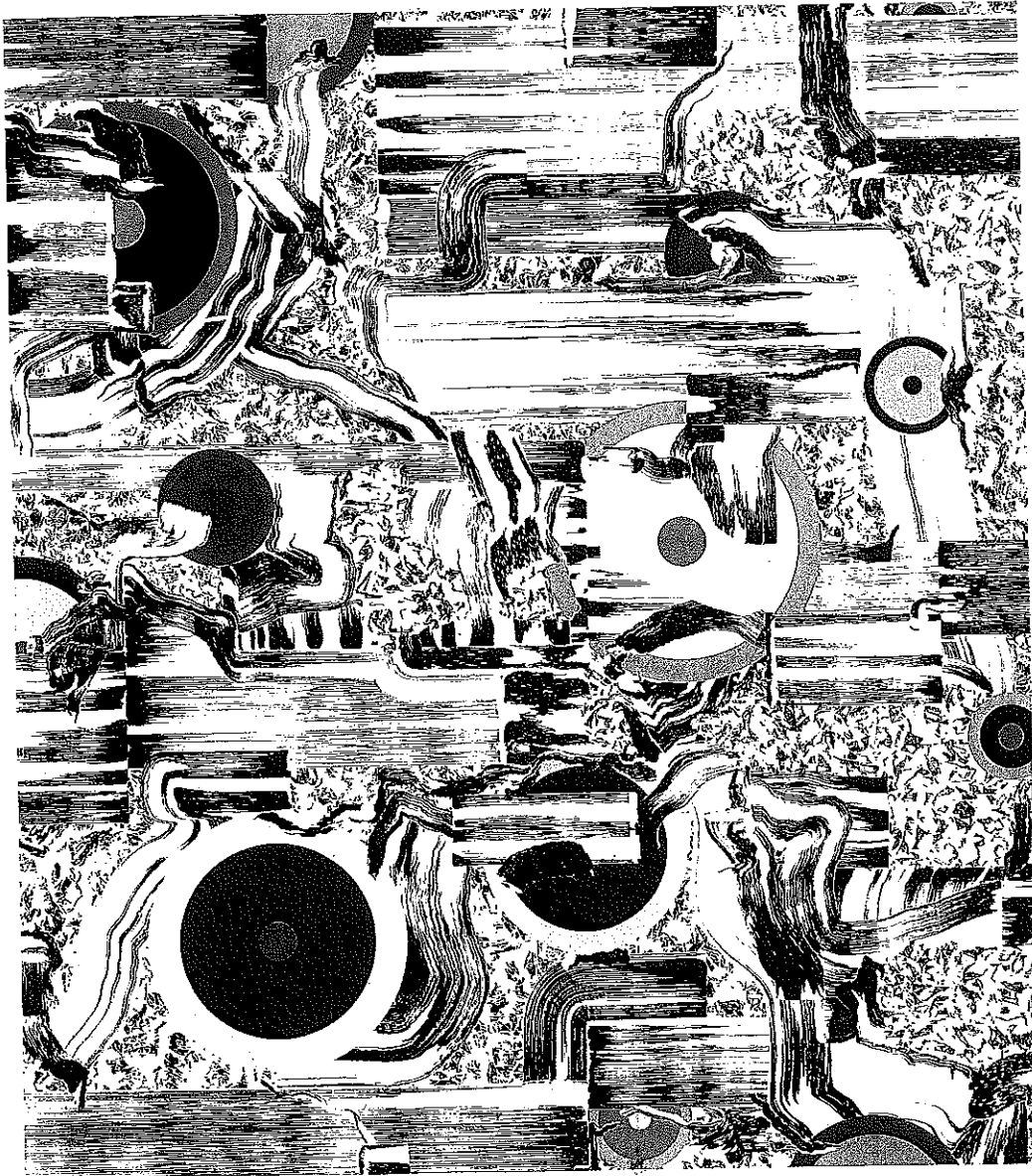
Lasker was particularly influenced by Brice Marden's calligraphic paintings (see fig. 22.64), but was troubled by the ease with which the viewer's mind is taken from canvas to the soul. To slow this process, Lasker devised studio practices that give a Postmodernist twist to modernist conventions. Lasker began with automatic drawings on paper in the Surrealist mode. He then enlarged the drawings, carefully preserving both the shape of the mark and the quality of the pen that made them. These copied marks became the individual elements of a painting. In *To Believe in Food* (1991) (fig. 27.46), they are the neutral scribbles and monotonous black lines that adorn the acid yellow field. By referring to the process as "editing my own subconscious," Lasker suggests that, in addition to critiquing conventional faith in abstraction, his work contains a plea to accept the emotional responses that such painting elicits. Self-consciously made with a compromised language, *To Believe in Food* argues that the impulses to edit, copy, quote, falsify, mislead, critique, assemble, travesty, mock, and honor that are all evident in this painting reveal much about personality and contemporary life as well as the history of art.

The explorations into the phenomenology of sculpture proposed by American artist **Roni Horn** (b. 1955) can be likened to Lasker's dissection of abstract painting. Her earliest works, carefully crafted structures of a single material such as rubber or gold foil, highlight the specific properties of the different media. The title of her retrospective,

*Making Being Here Enough*, captures the essence of her desire to "make sensible experience more present." "Sensible" can be understood as relating both to the senses and to finding meaning. In *Gold Mats, Paired—for Ross and Felix* (1994–95), a stack of two gold mats seems to cling together and the floor even as the corners curl up from the ground, turning the consequences of layering sheets of gold into a memorial for Felix Gonzalez-Torres and his lover (see fig. 27.15).

✦ Horn's sculpture resists our impulse to see sculptures as chiefly representations of or visual analogs for things or emotions. Seen in a photograph, the ambitious 1982–83 *Cobbled Lead(s)*, in which Horn replaced a 225-square-foot (20.9 m<sup>2</sup>) area of cobblestones in a museum courtyard with lead replicas, is an uneventful triangle. To understand the work demands that one pass over it and sense the changes in surface as one might physically register the walking from sidewalk to street. Horn's work suggests the rather thrilling variety of experience that can be initiated by the slightest change in our surroundings. In the nineties, Horn created several geometric aluminum sculptures imbedded with fragments of poetry. The sculptures, including *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes—For Felix; No. 886* (1993) (fig. 27.47), reveal their poetry only if one moves around them. Again appealing to our sense and our senses, Horn's sculpture reveals poetic facets of the physical world.

**Fiona Rae** (b. 1963), a member of the yBas, and Ellen Gallagher, an African-American painter of the same generation, have created two very different oeuvres based on the conviction that abstraction has rich communicative potential despite, or because of, its compromised position. Rae's canvases posit a play between the gridded structure



**27.48** Fiona Rae, *Untitled (Sky Shout)*, 1997. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 108 × 96" (274.3 × 243.8 cm). Private collection.

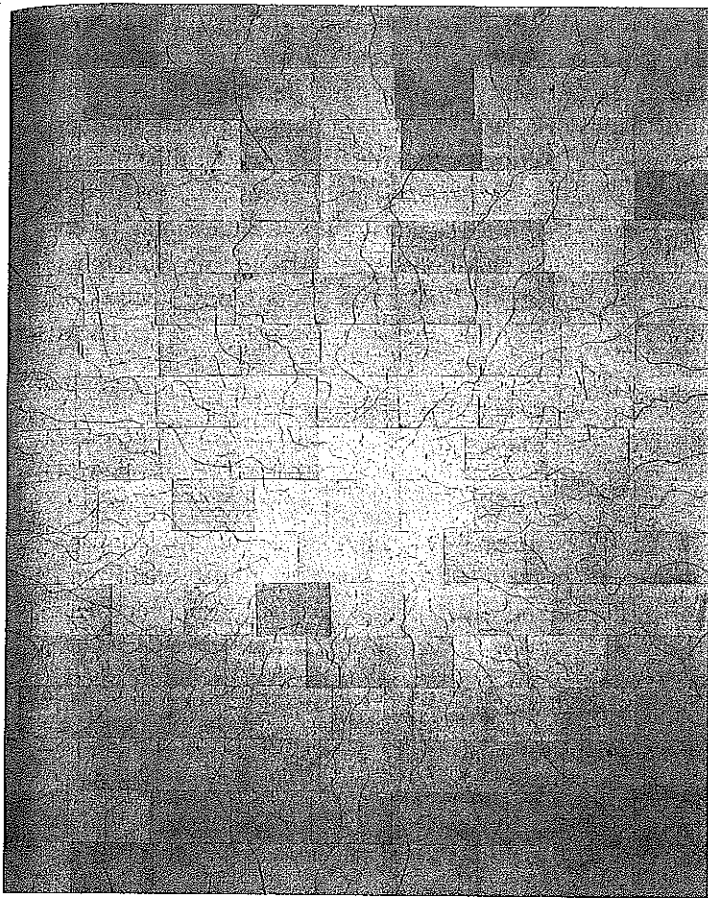
of Minimalist control and the expressive mark-making of Expressionist desire to signify competing aspects in a single personality. A work like *Untitled (Sky Shout)* (1997) (fig. 27.48) gives the impression of a collage of brushstrokes stolen from the history of art. A Richter smear is repeated to build a geometric ground interrupted every few feet by a Ken Noland circle or a Kline-like stroke. Rae's archival aesthetics, as well as her own striking means of assembly, use the juxtaposition and connotations of past styles to convey content. In addition, Rae's work has a sense of humor and contains passages in which the cathartic energy of the expressive marks is only just contained by the grids, reminding one of the sublime content that her predecessors swore they could reach.

Rae's paintings manipulate the connotations of historical styles. She uses the public meaning of abstraction to communicate private expressions. Ellen Gallagher (b. 1965) engages abstraction as a code bearing private content and resisting public interpretation. Abstract art has had a long and ambivalent relationship with the idea of

code. Picasso's *Ma Jolie*, Malevich's *Black Square*, and Johns's targets all incorporated the idea that making modern art requires building a private cosmology and viewing it demands an act of deciphering. In 1992, Gallagher was at the Skowhegan School of Art, Maine, where Peter Halley, Kiki Smith and Ann Hamilton (see figs. 26.45, 27.10, 27.42) were all teaching. Though differing in their output, each of these artists has integrated symbolic pictorial elements and abstract form in their work. Gallagher's inclusion of even the smallest bit of representation into the abstract fields of her compositions infiltrates the coded structure of abstraction, placing the history of art in a very different context.

A close look at *They Could Still Serve* (2001) (fig. 27.49) and a quick review of the artist's statements reveals a surprising source for the tiny biomorphic forms that dance across Gallagher's work: they are eyes from caricatures of African-Americans. In explaining her process Gallagher reveals "a willingness to play with something that is ugly. Making a cosmology out of these things that





**27.49** Ellen Gallagher, *They Could Still Serve*, 2000. Pigment, paper, and glue on linen, 10' × 8' (3.05 × 2.44 m).

are so awful ... ." Unlike Kara Walker (see fig. 27.38), Gallagher nearly hides her iconography in vast canvases, suggesting a different commentary on race. What rises to the surface as one loses one's self in the delicate tracery of gentle washes, rouge grids, and fragmented blackface, is a pertinent reminder of the persistence of racism.

### Reinventing Representation

The renewed faith in the communicative power of abstraction was accompanied by a similar reclamation of the figure. The political history of figure painting revealed in feminist analyses had made the genre suspect ever since the late sixties. In the eighties, the presence of figural motifs in Neo-Expressionism alerted some critics to what was theorized as a return to oppressive models of art history. The work in the seventies of Wilke, Schneeman, Acconci, and Burden (see figs. 24.26, 24.25, 24.16) had enlisted the presumed potential of physical experience to overcome alienation from the self to give the body the artistic priority that was formally given to the figure. By the nineties, however, the direct route between the body and knowledge had been questioned, and the contrived nature of the figure appeared useful. Figurative artists already discussed include Murakami, Mori, Sikander, and Cox.

**Raymond Pettibon** (b. 1957) is one of a number of Californian artists whose work has been challenging

modernism since the late seventies from positions less strictly theoretical than their east-coast counterparts. Pettibon has done so through a focused examination of the relationship between figural subjects, text, and time in narrative images. Narrative, of course, has been the implicit foundation of such archetypal Postmodern work as Cindy Sherman's untitled film stills (see fig. 26.4). However, in Sherman's case, as in that of Simpson or Weems (see figs. 27.22, 27.20), the story is secondary to the consequences that the telling has on the identity of the speaker. Artists like Pettibon maintained allegiance to the more traditional pleasures of narrative tension and resolve while transforming our ideas about the relationship of text and image. The passage on *No Title (The Translator's Have)* (1996) (fig. 27.50) continues "attempted to satisfy themselves first as to the author's exact meaning ..." thereby drawing attention to the impossible challenge of Pettibon's art.

Pettibon's first work was illustrations that were aimed at Californian youth culture. In the eighties, he produced his own illustrated magazine *Tripping Corpse* (1981–86) and did graphics for hardcore bands Black Flag, the Minutemen, and, later, Sonic Youth. By the nineties, he was citing Henry James while appropriating figures such as Batman. Reiterating the disjunction between text and image, Pettibon's drawing style is formally eclectic.



**27.50** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (The Translator's Have)*, 1996. Pen and ink on paper, 29 3/4" × 22" (75.6 × 55.9 cm).



Critics have found in his stylistic variation the kind of formal self-consciousness of Johns, Polke, and Twombly. Pettibon's decision to locate this heady research in the tradition of Comix—the genre of highly stylized cartoons usually focused on subcultural fascinations with sex and drugs and circulated in “zines” such as *Tripping Corpse*—rather than painting demonstrates how, where, and with whom art issues are being discussed. The irony that Pettibon's imagery was as at home in art history departments as it was at SST Records (the LA punk label of Pettibon's brother) is indicative of the cross-cultural migrations that art encouraged in the nineties.

**Marlene Dumas** (b. 1953) began painting the figure in the mid-eighties while studying psychology in her adopted home of Amsterdam. Raised in South Africa under apartheid, Dumas has spoken of the painful awareness that her self-image as a “sweet young girl” was inseparable from her power and privilege as a white South African. The threatening dichotomy of innocence and power informs Dumas's series on children, sexuality, and South Africa.

The unsettling convergence of endearing childhood charm and the knowing power of a young girl is at the heart of *The Painter* (1994) (fig. 27.51). Composed like a



**27.51** Marlene Dumas, *The Painter*, 1994. Oil on canvas, 6'6" × 3'3" (1.98 × 0.99 m).

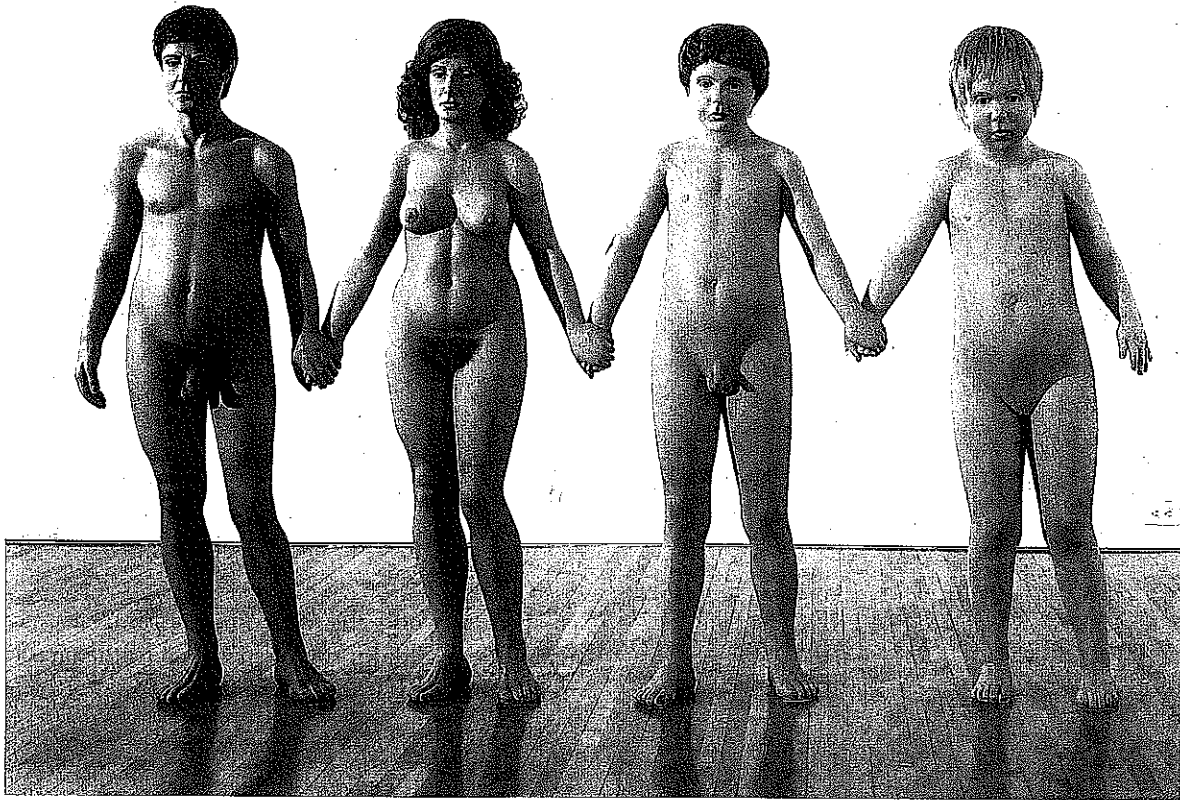
family snapshot, and perhaps based on one as well, *The Painter* shares with Sally Mann's *Immediate Family* (see fig. 27.2) a tendency to make details of childhood, such as dirty hands or a casual look, into signs of threat. Though the title and picture suggest that this girl was just making art on the floor, *The Painter* is often discussed as the record of a crime scene. Red paint can be seen to resemble blood and the charm of childhood is layered with fear. Dumas has used the format of *The Painter* to juxtapose themes of death and childhood and even describes the incipient aggression in her method.

Dumas uses found and photographed images as sources for her work. Translating the photograph into watercolor slows the speed of the camera to match the sensual flow of the painting medium. As intellectual in her appropriation as Richard Prince or Sherrie Levine (see chapter 26), Dumas's style reveals concern with the “trace of human touch” and the conflicts of human, particularly female, experience. Her method also poses a certain aggression, revealed in her explanation that “My people were all shot by a camera, framed before I painted them. They didn't know that I'd do this to them.”

*Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, 1993 snapshots taken by American sculptor **Charles Ray** (b. 1953) that in their mundane settings attempt to make a supermodel look ordinary, further articulates the ambivalent relationship between artists and models in the nineties. Branded a Conceptual Realist, Ray has used the figure to address the ironic relationship between our ideals and the realities of the psychic and material worlds. Characterized by immaculate craftsmanship and a surrealistic combination of the hyperreal and the fake, Ray's work relies on simple modifications of the ordinary or expected to suggest emotional, psychological, even pathological states. *Self-Portrait* (1990) shows a mannequin dressed in casual boating attire with a generalized portrait of the artist as its head. The portrait has an uncanny suggestion of a human personality even as it projects the vapid look of a department store window display.

*Family Romance* (1993) (fig. 27.52) relies on a sight gag as simple as *Self-Portrait*. In this family of four, the parents are scaled down by fifty percent and the children up by fifty percent. The resulting group is of approximately equal height but disparate build. The family looks distracted and a bit distressed, but there is no sense that they are responding to the physical transformation of their bodies. This family registers as figures whose reference is the artwork itself; their bodies are kept at a distance from the world. Though inspired by Ray's appreciation of Anthony Caro's command of scale (see fig. 22.40), the generalized antiseptic quality of Ray's distortions has led critics to see the work as addressing the idea of the nuclear family and its troubling late-century inconsistencies.

In the nineties, not only was the figure reassessed, but artists challenged the idea that before one painted or

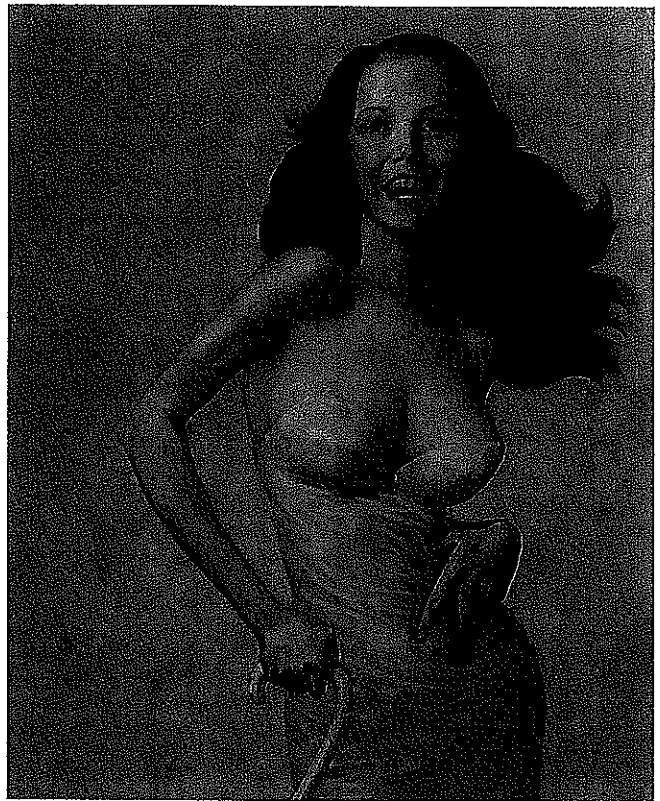


**27.52** Charles Ray, *Family Romance*, 1993. Mixed media, 4'6" × 8' × 2' (1.37 × 2.44 × 0.61 m).

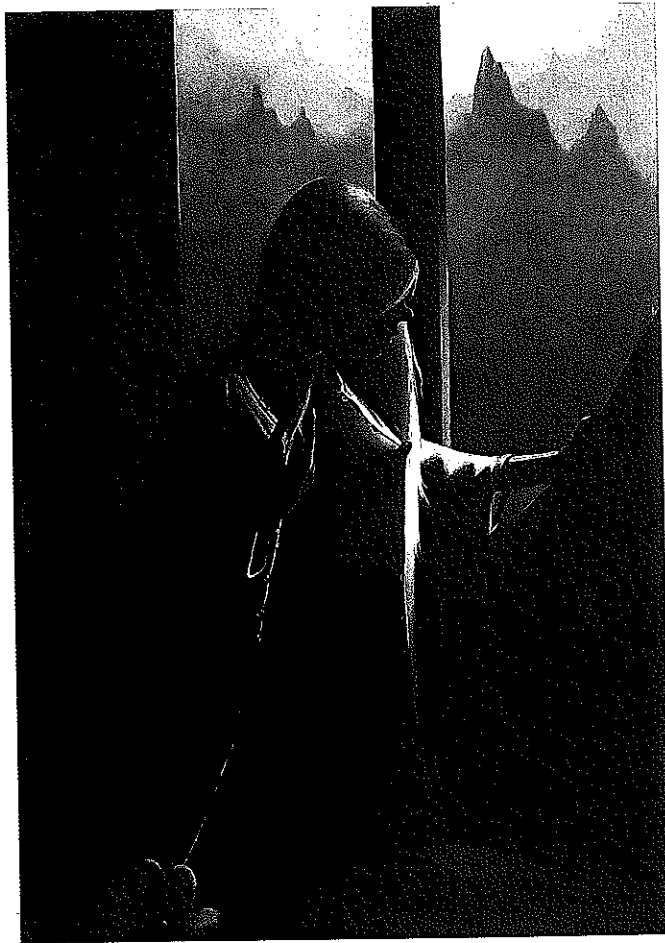
sculpted she or he had to interrogate the history and power of her or his chosen medium. Self-consciousness toward one's medium had been part of the legacy of modernism that artists from Jasper Johns and Gerhard Richter to Peter Halley and Barbara Kruger had turned into a critical tool of Postmodernism. By the end of the twentieth century, it was being taken for granted that the properties of painting, formal or political, had been exposed. A group of painters, Americans John Currin and Lisa Yuskavage among them, began generating imagery by using the old tools of realism in the new context of Postmodernism.

Developing realism in the nineties was, to **John Currin** (b. 1962) a form of "drag" in which figures, purely artificial in the contemporary mind, dressed as if they were mimetic representations of the real. Emphasizing the fact that bypassing the history of art since Courbet (see fig. 2.16) is a willful project, Currin fills his illusionistic spaces with exaggerated fantasies of middle-class white male America. Everything is sexualized.

*The Cripple* (1997) (fig. 27.53), a politically incorrect title for an image of a suggestive if somewhat disturbing young waif with a cane, exemplifies Currin's understanding of the male imagination. Other works are populated by young blondes with impossibly large breasts coddling a cast of helpless men. Discussed as representing the masochism of hyperbolic male fantasy, Currin defends himself against



**27.53** John Currin, *The Cripple*, 1997. Oil on canvas, 3'8" × 3' (1.12 × 0.91 m).



**27.54** Lisa Yuskavage, *Honeymoon*, 1998. Oil on linen, 6'5½" × 4'7" (1.97 × 1.4 m). Private Collection.

charges of misogyny by asserting that though he uses the tools of realism, “the subject of painting is always the artist,” never the objects that he or she paints. The reality being painted is a personal and psychological one.

Heightening the irony of realism by representing illogical figures with the logical devices of illusionism is also part of the art of Lisa Yuskavage (b. 1962), as is the use of exaggerated female anatomies. Unlike Currin’s however, Yuskavage’s figures direct their attentions inward. Violets, pinks, and blues dominate scenes of erotic self-absorption. In *Honeymoon* (1998) (fig. 27.54), Yuskavage rhymes the sensuous surfaces of flesh and nightgown with a view of mountains that look like a Chinese landscape seen through rose-colored glasses.

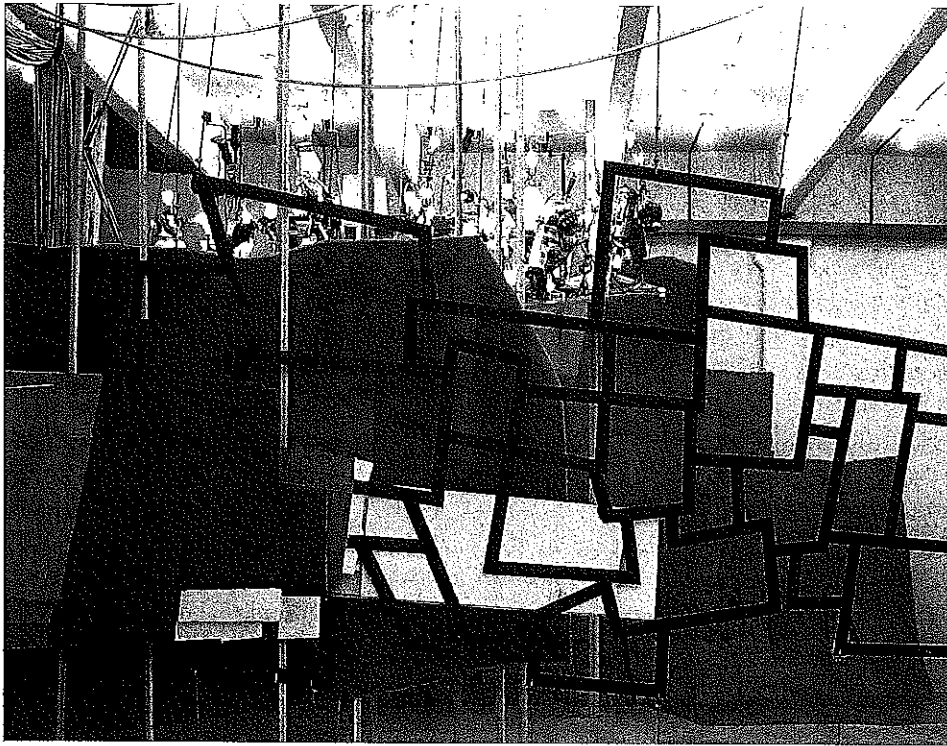
Yuskavage creates work that flirts with being insipid but is saved by flagrant exaggerations of both cliché and anatomy as well as creative painterly technique. In the context of decades of resistance, the creation of such oversexed female types painted in a style that seems to encourage objectification has been a confusing statement about art in the late nineties. Figures have completely replaced bodies in this art and provide access to the suggestive and cathartic power of traditional tools such as perspective, chiaroscuro, illusionism, and paint.

## The Consequences of Tradition: Pictorialism and Sculpture

One of the lessons of Minimalism was that attention to one’s medium often led to a breakdown of traditional categories of art. Jasper Johns’s and Frank Stella’s paintings executed in the fifties asserted themselves in the language of sculpture. *Flag*, by Johns (see fig. 21.14), and Stella’s black paintings (see chapter 22) are objects in the room far more than they are representations of something in the world. Eschewing the illusionism that had invited the three-dimensional world onto the canvas, Johns and Stella forced their paintings into the space of sculpture. Painters and sculptors in the nineties took the material quality of both painting and sculpture as given and turned back to the illusionistic devices of representation to arrive at new mixtures of painting and sculpture. In painting, such a practice is present in works of the Neo-Geo movement. In 1983–84, Frank Stella pinpointed the present state of such formalist heresy in his series of Elliot Norton Lectures, given at Harvard University and published as *Working Space*. The thesis of *Working Space* was that the artworld was witnessing a crisis in abstraction that could be resolved through an appeal to the pictorial. After a long career asserting the material presence of his paintings, their character as objects in the real world, Stella was suggesting that artists turn back to Caravaggio and add to a painting’s materiality its power of depicting immaterial space as well. As evident in the return to figuration, illusionism was on many artists’ minds. Though Stella was addressing painters, the mixing of pictorialism with formalism was also something that sculptors adopted with particular energy. Art was pushing into and off the wall, stretching the history of art by intruding its activities into the spaces of reality.

*Your Skin in this Weather Bourne Eye-Threads & Swollen Perfume* (1995) (fig. 27.55), by American artist Jessica Stockholder (b. 1959) invades the space of the gallery, welcoming the viewer into a painterly terrain that evades the architecture to open up spectacular visual and physical encounters. Stockholder aims to stimulate a “struggle between viewing a static *fait accompli* and feeling as if [you] are participating in a series of contradictions and narratives that come to no settled conclusion.” Stockholder’s ideas, generated first as color exercises, find expression in a dizzying array of materials that demand the viewer frames his or her own visual experience and select what connotative roads to go down. *Your Skin* creates this struggle with vast fields of paint, a brilliant blue swimming pool liner, a bright yellow canopy of rope, dress shirts, bed pillows, pink shag, and gold Buddhas all suggesting meanings as diverse as their visual flourishes.

Though there are places within *Your Skin* where one can see substantial portions of the installation, you never see all of it. Trying to emulate the process of thinking rather than the character of an idea, Stockholder maintains a tension between discovery and analysis. *Your Skin* included online



**27.55** Jessica Stockholder, *Your Skin in the Weather Bourne Eye-Threads & Swollen Perfume*, 1995. Mixed media, 3,600 sq ft × 18' (334.44 m<sup>2</sup> × 5.49 m). Installation view at the DIA Center for the Arts, New York.

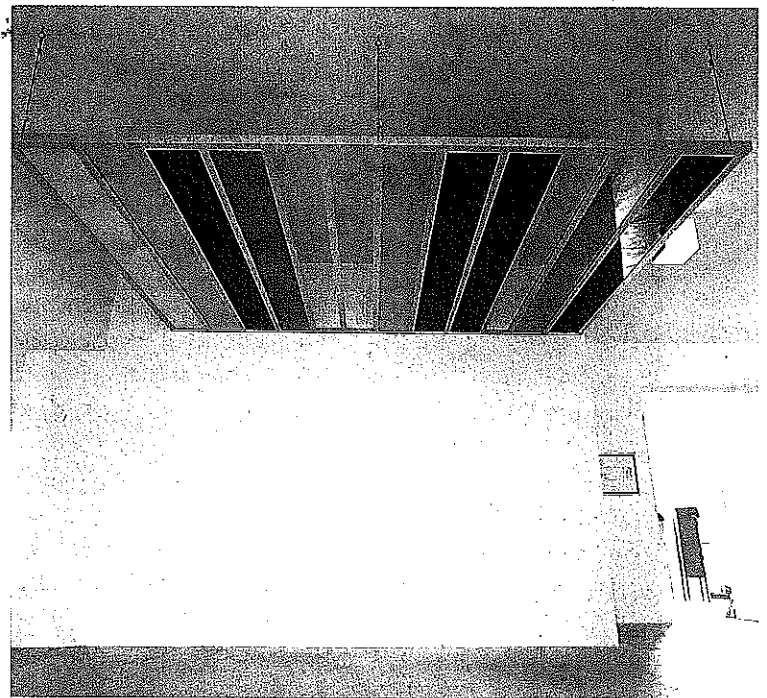
complements to the work. One could read a short story inspired by the installation titled *Thrilled to Death*, which was about travel and storytelling; view several working drawings for the piece; read artist statements; and speculate on the importance of what looked like travel photos. Never dictating how to prioritize the information that she provides, Stockholder created a situation in which painting, sculpture, travel, fiction, experience, and vision all intertwined in multidimensional abstractions.

British artist **Liam Gillick** (b. 1964) creates variations on Minimalist forms that make up the architectural dimension of a project that includes speculative philosophy, narrative fiction, social criticism, and an almost tentative utopianism. Alone, the sculptures themselves, like the 1997 *Resignation Platform* (fig. 27.56), enlist relatively ordinary materials, such as plexiglass, aluminum, and plywood, in straightforward geometric sculptures. Compared to the forceful singularity of Donald Judd's work (see fig. 22.47), with its clear sense of space and authoritative presentation of spatial and coloristic ideas, Gillick's *Resignation Platform* seems unfinished and tentative. Panels seem to be missing, leaving openings that allow the eye and mind to wander through and around the translucent bands of colors that themselves look as if they were lifted from office decorating manuals. Nothing about the work demands that the mind of the viewer be contained by the object.

Gillick writes of his work in terms similar to Stockholder's:

There is a provisional quality to things and that is important to me. I invite people to be involved in the intellectual reframing of the idea, I don't present something and then invite everyone to try and work out the solution to the visual puzzle I have left in the gallery.

Gillick is concerned with involving the viewer in designing a satisfying social space to contain daily activities. A rough guide to his intentions can be found in the scenarios described in his books. In a particularly resonant passage in *Literally No Place*, the artist discusses a place where people "can be controlled and free simultaneously ... a place that can be communal without being communist." Gillick does not attempt to create this space through the construction of homes, offices, or work spaces but rather in what he



**27.56** Liam Gillick, *Discussion Island Resignation Platform*, 1997. Aluminum angle, plexiglass, cables, fittings, 94 × 141" (240 × 360 cm).

calls “parallel spaces,” models in which the experiments of living and working can be played out.

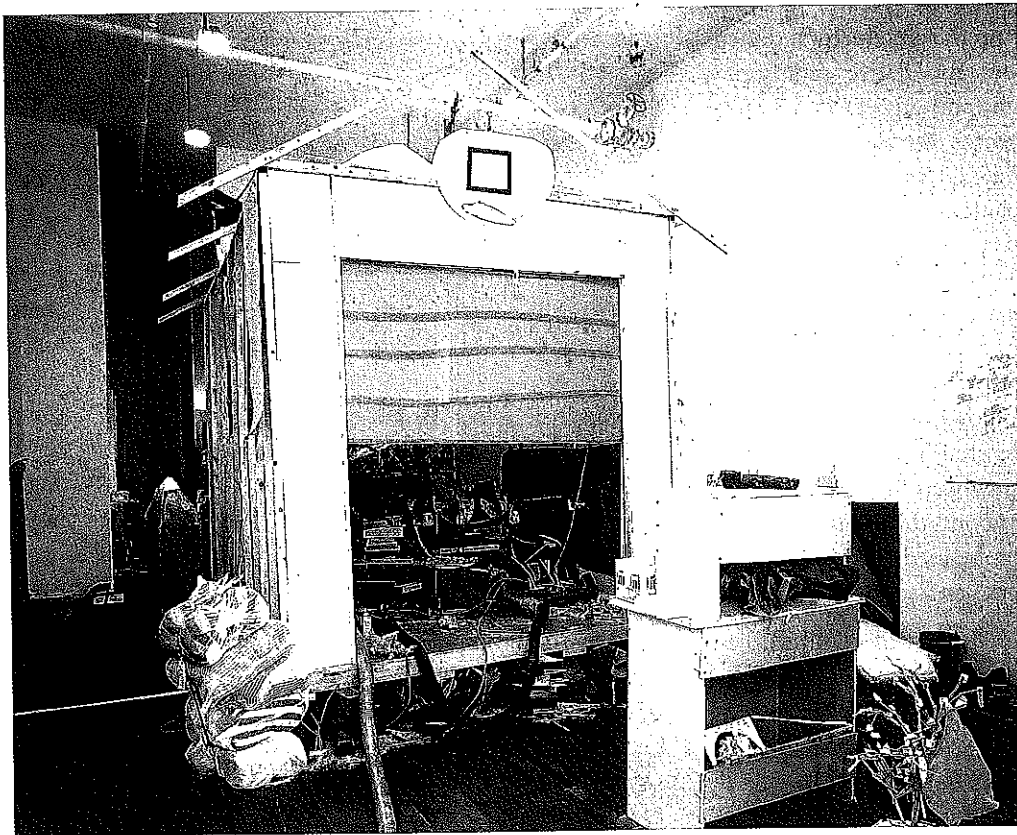
Rirkrit Tiravanija also speaks of creating models for thinking about daily life. His “parallel positions” involve producing events in a museum or gallery setting that address work, service, sociability, and community in a surprisingly direct way. *Untitled (Still)* of 1995 is one of Tiravanija’s food pieces in which he makes curry for gallery visitors, filling the commercial art space with the service and product of a restaurant and the conviviality of a home. Catering-size bags of ingredients lay around, as do dishes and pans in various states of use, making a display of the creating and eating of the meal. Tiravanija is careful to point out that performances such as these do not bring the home experience into the gallery for examination. This is not a form of realism. *Untitled (Still)* is an event that generates certain forms of sociability that, though they are fundamental to our understanding of civilized society, are in fact rare in daily experience.

Tiravanija is a model of the global artist. Born in Buenos Aires, and raised in Bangkok and Canada, he attended art schools in Canada and the United States and produced art around the globe. The shifting nature of identity as one moves in and out of familiar and foreign environments is integrated into Tiravanija’s food pieces through his use of Thai curry. It is nearly impossible to make “authentic” Thai curry due to the absence of appropriate ingredients in most locations. The dish becomes a metaphor for the transformations of individuals and cultures and the resilience of human desire for communal activity despite such change.

*Untitled (Still)* is a stridently hopeful work that draws attention to the best of late twentieth-century globalism.

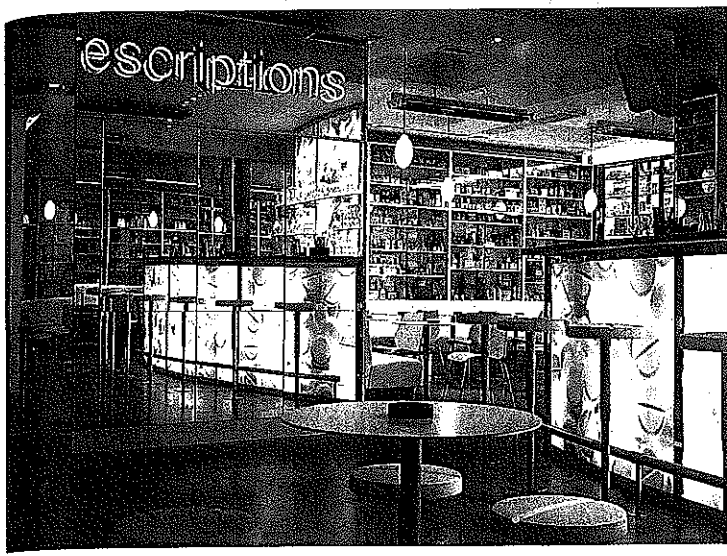
Jason Rhoades (b. 1965) provides a different commentary on globalism and the expansive possibilities of art. His installations enlist the formal properties of abstract painting and sculpture to explore the spaces of vision and experience with a particularly American perspective. His sculptures often illustrate myths of America and include narrative performances. *Cherry Makita—Honest Engine Work* (1993) (fig. 27.57), an early work, is a tableau that explodes the traditional male space of the garage with a makeshift aesthetic of found objects, ephemeral materials, and overwhelming clutter only just unified by spatial containment and coloristic harmonies. *Cherry Makita* provided the set for a performance in which Rhoades worked in the garage with a Makita cordless drill that he had hooked up to a car engine. As in his later pieces, which included elements of gun play and sexual bravado, *Cherry Makita* provided a phallic hyperbole at the centerpiece of the chaos.

Despite the expansive themes of mythic America, and the overflowing installations, Rhoades is intent on creating an intimate and contemplative environment. Built “for literally two or three people,” Rhoades’s work achieves a balance between grandiosity and intimacy. The spaceball that features in one installation is regularly cited as a metaphor for Rhoades’s intentions. In the center of the installation, the spinning viewer finds himself weightless, at a physical loss in the face of overwhelming material display. In 2000 Rhoades shipped his car to Europe, reproducing



**27.57** Jason Rhoades, *Cherry Makita—Honest Engine Work*, 1993. Garage renovation, New York, various materials; size varies according to installation, 141 × 130 × 180" (358.1 × 330.2 × 457.2 cm).





**27.58** Damien Hirst, *Pharmacy* (detail of restaurant windows with medicine), 1998.

the quint-essential Los Angeles space, a large American car built to travel the endless LA highways, for himself and a passenger. The car, *Impala* (*International Museum Project About Leaving and Arriving*), like Rhoades's work in general, takes individual experience and confuses its limits, pushing past the confines of ego, exhibition space, national borders, and sometimes even gravity.

The work of British artist **Damien Hirst** (b. 1965) is excessive in many directions as well. Like many of his generation, Hirst has found the Minimalist vocabulary useful for creating a "clean, minimal, kind of acceptable look, with an intellectual splatter." The most notorious of Hirst's works is a Minimalist glass tank containing a shark in formaldehyde. In this work, titled *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, Hirst's morbidity and philosophical inclinations come neatly packaged in Minimalist pedigree.

*Pharmacy*, the final work in a series of installations addressing medicine, takes the sculptural dialogue with life and death to a high-class restaurant in London in 1998. Travestyng such restaurants as the Hard Rock Café, *Pharmacy* (fig. 27.58) takes the current faith in pharmaceuticals as its theme. Cabinets with aesthetically elegant displays of drugs filter the light as it falls on tables decorated with tablets and pills. A giant model of DNA adorns the dining room, while detailing suggests the hygiene of an operating room. An artist whose earlier work included bisected sheep, rotting carcasses, and oversized ashtrays, Hirst here plays out his interest in the nature of sickness and death on the stage of London's social life.

*Pharmacy* is both an artistic confrontation with social space and a marketing strategy on a par with those of Andy Warhol or Keith Haring. Unlike such market-savvy artists before him, however, Hirst maintains a surprisingly high level of violence in his art. Speaking sentiments that could apply to Kara Walker (see fig. 27.38) and Raymond Pettibon (see fig. 27.50) or filmmakers such as Quentin

Tarantino and Peter Greenaway, Hirst explained, "I am an artist. I use violence as a way to communicate." The success of *Pharmacy* reveals a certain comfort that we have in keeping company with death.

## Think Before You Buy: Art and Cultural History

No artist of the modern or Postmodern era has worked without an awareness of the pressures of the exhibition and sale of their art. The relationship between artists, museums, and markets is a central dynamic in the history of art. Realists and Impressionists painted in relation to the salons and independent exhibitions (see chapter 2). The group exhibitions of the Fauves or Expressionists responded to and in turn defined the nature of the art they showed (see chapters 7 and 8). As the twentieth century wore on, new forums for exhibition and distribution met the needs and shaped the understanding of new art. The nineties began with a clear understanding that current exhibition practices were being compromised by politics and, as the bubble of the eighties burst, that current methods of sale and distribution were in dire need of change. In the eighties, the stratospheric careers of Neo-Expressionists like Julian Schnabel or David Salle (see figs. 26.25, 26.26) were fueled by the expert promotional skills of galleries and private collectors. The market of the eighties, however, inflated the value of its biggest names, and collectors and dealers had to diversify their collections. The most visible mechanism to fill this need has been the international art fairs, which brought art critics and cultural tourists to locations around the world. The spectacle of the events created significant energy and interest in a group of international artists, many of whom would not have had access to the more centralized art market of the eighties.

Diversification had, of course, been a goal of artists for the previous few decades. It was an irony of the nineties that as a host of international biennials and triennials as well as virtual artistic communities in cyberspace began providing increasingly diverse alternatives to the traditional museums and markets, financial advisors, art dealers, and auction houses were selling clients on the greater financial security provided by the dissolution of local art markets and improved international resaleability. Moreover, as the individual collectors and donors became pressed and government spending on culture, especially in the United States, declined, private corporations became more important to the artworld. The increased importance of corporate sponsorship has meant that private corporations might finance an array of events in different museums creating, in effect, private art networks within public institutions. Artists and curators recognized that, just as art was central to notions of self and society, it was also becoming a key facet of corporate power, financial management, and global relations. In this environment, it seemed that the museum would have to find a new identity for itself.

Two challenges presented themselves to the traditional museum: how to keep pace with the globally diverse market, and how to write the history of art to coincide with the less linear form of contemporary artistic awareness. Conceptualizing a new mission for the museum and a new form for displaying the history of art became a chief concern of those in the culture industry. Neither the international dispersal of art and commerce, nor the rehangings of major museums, came without sharp criticism.

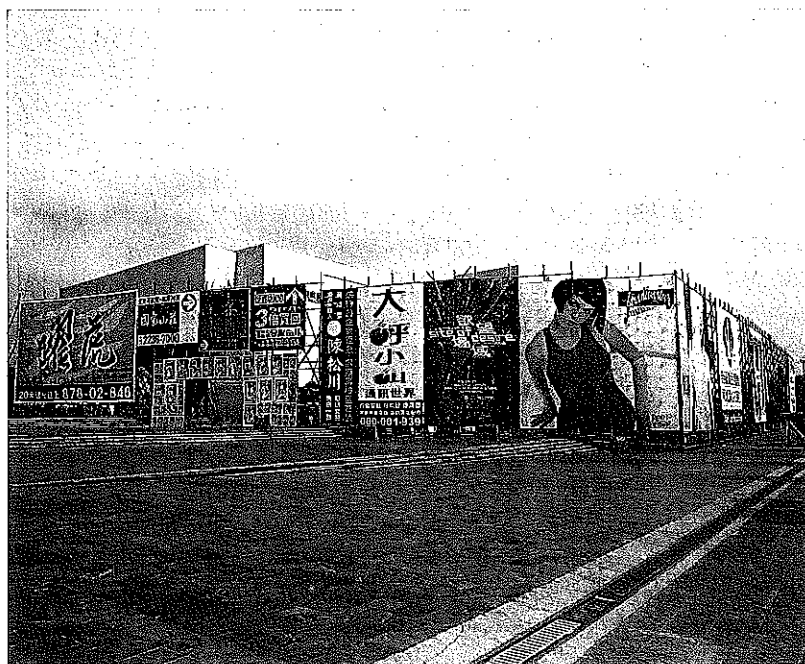
In the nineties, international biennials multiplied, providing artistic and political opportunities for exhibiting national culture to international audiences. The Venice Biennale is the model for the international art fair, with venues for national displays, while the Whitney Biennial, hosted by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, is the typical national model. Such events serve as a gathering of culture and commerce but also have distinct political advantages for the host countries. Creating a cultural variation on the United Nations, host countries can enter into global economy through art when diplomatic options are not always available. South Africa used the Johannesburg Biennial to present its post-apartheid face, and countries including Taiwan, Cuba, Lithuania, Korea, and Australia have found it expedient to present themselves as suitable hosts and patrons for international art. Though embroiled in the politics of nationalism and globalism, such events also provide visibility to an internally produced art that has challenged any homogeneous view of contemporary art.

The *Advertising Castle* (fig. 27.59) of Cai Guoqiang (b. 1957) is a clear statement of what was at stake in the potentially liberating world of the global art market. Raised in China and based first in Japan and then New York, Cai's personal experience put him in a good position to examine the global economies of culture and finance. Cai took the occasion of the 1998 Taipei Biennial, which, like all the biennials, aimed to inspire intellectual analysis, encourage

cultural tourism and boost nationalism, to raise the issue of complicity between art and politics. In the political gamesmanship between China and Taiwan in the late nineties, as well as in the cultural and economic competition that existed in Southeast Asia, Taiwanese nationalism was a volatile issue. Cai sheathed the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, host of the biennial, in a bamboo scaffold covered in advertisements. He highlighted the corporate interest in culture to such a degree that visitors had trouble finding the entrance to the show. In a double entendre leveled at the title of the biennial, *Sites of Desire*, the *Advertising Castle* proclaimed the exhibition a desirable site to display corporate sponsorship and the advertisements sites where desire was generated in the citizen consumers who were attending the show. The *Advertising Castle* became a magnet for political debate drawing complaints from the city council that it was serving commercial rather than artistic aims. The consequence of Cai hitting his mark so directly was that the council demanded that the work be removed or the Taipei Fine Arts Museum would lose its public funding. Such political grandstanding and real economic threat to the curatorial licensee would occur the following year in New York, as the mayor threatened to close the Brooklyn Museum for exhibiting work deemed offensive. The Brooklyn Museum remained financially intact, while the Taipei Fine Arts Museum lost NT\$1 million.

The most dramatic museum response to the international culture market has been that of the Guggenheim. The museum has metamorphosed itself along corporate lines, branding itself with the ingenuity of any of the market-conscious artists of the century, diversifying its interests from Minimalism to motorcycles, and opening branches worldwide.

In 1979, twenty years after Frank Lloyd Wright completed the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Guggenheim Foundation opened the Venetian home of Peggy Guggenheim as its first international outpost. By the nineties, the museum was expanding in size and mission. In New York there was a new addition to the Wright building; a Soho museum; and plans for an enormous downtown complex. In 1997, branches were opened in Bilbao and Berlin. By 2001, Las Vegas was home to a Guggenheim exhibition space and a collaboration with the Russian Hermitage. Cyberspace had, of course, been occupied and there were plans for a new location in Brazil. The Guggenheim was also injecting its exhibition schedule with shows on fashion designers and motorcycles. Though criticized heavily for favoring marketing over curating and choosing to be



27.59 Cai Guoqiang, *Advertising Castle*, 1998. In situ at 1998 Taipei Biennial Sites of Desire.



popular instead of smart, the Guggenheim was crossing boundaries and welcoming audiences unapproached by traditional institutions.

The Frank Gehry (b. 1929) structure in Bilbao (fig. 27.60) (see chapter 26) captures the politics of the new museum as well as its traditional understanding of architecture and public image. Located in the Basque region of Spain and built by the Basque government, the museum was a centerpiece in a dramatic urban renewal campaign. Major infrastructure development, including a refurbished port, a new airport, and a riverfront complex designed by Cesar Pelli, have been planned for Bilbao. The Guggenheim traded on its cultural capital, providing the Basque government with access to an international stage. The museum building, as much sculpture as architecture, is a destination for cultural tourism that facilitates the political and cultural ambitions of its host.

Within traditional institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York, or the Tate galleries in London, curators have felt the pressure of contemporary theory and practice. These and other museums have revamped their strategies for telling history in ways as dramatic as the Guggenheim's metamorphosis. It has long been a critique of museums that their commitment to the preservation of masterpieces and the progression of history resists the intentions of artists and the experience of viewers. *Documenta*, a longstanding international event, was notable in 2002 for its inclusion of urban studies, political analysis, and philosophical debate. It introduced its 1964 version with the declaration that museums were guilty of isolating and

humiliating art. It has been a recent strategy to shape museum collections along the lines of thematic exhibitions like many of the international fairs.

Following the lead of those challenging the conventional divisions of art making, modern museums are finding flexibility in thematic shows that let viewers appreciate aspects of past art that often go unnoticed when grouped with similar items. Themes may be as general as time or place, or may focus on more specific issues. Critics have leveled several complaints at such reorganizations. One is that without great care, historical context and artistic content are being obscured in favor of sometimes facile comparisons that aim at the lowest common denominator in the work and the audiences. Thematic shows can be too permissive, allowing nearly all comparisons to appear valid. Reminding an audience that there are moments when certain statements could never be spoken is an unsavory task that must be made if thematic shows are to work. As so much art of the nineties makes clear, history is the essential ingredient in understanding how art works. Without some sense of context, art like any image can be made into anything. Striking a balance between historical presentation and thematic organization has demanded that curators and viewers be attentive to the ideological nature of the museum, and the politics of representation, and the history of art. Any trip to a museum today involves seeing ourselves seeing. Artists, critics, and curators demand that even at the moment we fall in love with the blue of a painted sky, the delicate outline of a shoulder, or the impenetrable surface of polished stone, we think.