

# Understanding New Media Art

# UNDERSTANDING NEW MEDIA ART

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# CONTENTS

Preface	1
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## Part I. Main Body

1. Introduction to New Media Art	8
2. Visual Analysis and New Media Art	40
3. Printmaking	58
4. Photography	89
5. Digital Photography	137
6. Early Film and Animation	147
7. Early Video Art	169
8. Digital Video Art and Video Installation	183
9. Light Art, Installation, and Land Art	215
10. Institutional Critique	231
11. Social Practice	256
12. Performance Art	280
13. The Digital Revolution	326

# PREFACE

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## Ideas for using *Understanding New Media Arts*, version 1.0

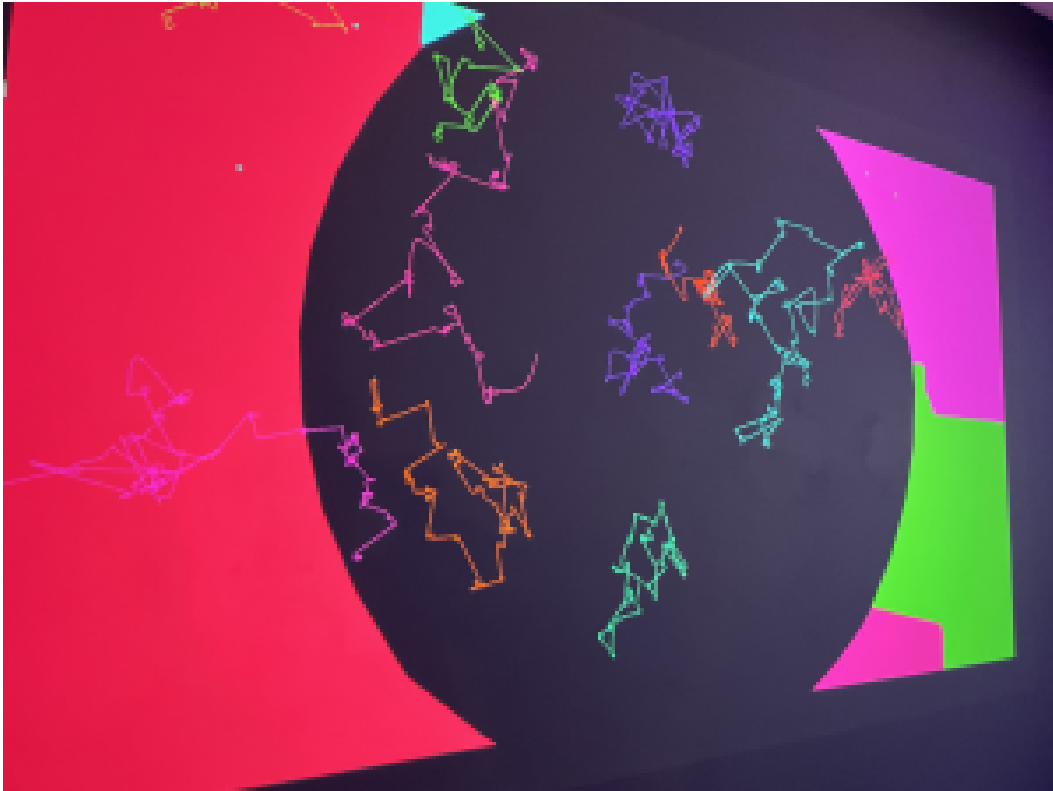
### What is this resource?

A beginning.

A proposal.

A work in progress.

This Open Educational Resource (OER) was initiated by four art history instructors at Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon (U.S.A.). We teach a variety of art history courses including introductory classes that engage students in looking at, thinking about, talking about, and writing about global art and architecture. We collaborated to create this resource to support a 100-level class we teach called "Understanding New Media Arts". Our goal was to reduce textbook costs for students and provide resources that could be used in a variety of ways in multiple formats. Our intention is to update and expand this book periodically as technologies change, new creative approaches and voices develop, and new historical and theoretical frameworks are proposed in this evolving field of New Media Art.



Cover art by a student from the Creative Coding capstone in the Music and Sonic Arts Program at Portland Community College, 2022, installation at the Paragon Arts Center, PCC Cascade Campus. Photo: Christine Weber, License: [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

## Organization

This book is divided into chapters based on different processes and approaches in New Media Art. Most chapters begin by defining the medium and/or approach and presenting an introduction to the history of artistic engagement with the featured technology or approach.

Stop & ...

Throughout the chapters, the teal-colored boxes labeled "Stop & Reflect" or "Watch & Consider" offer

readers a chance to stop and contemplate specific works of art and broader concepts related to New Media Art. Questions in these boxes are designed to encourage looking closely and communicating about the chapter topic. All questions are numbered so instructors can pick and choose what to assign. Most chapters have multiple “Stop & Reflect” boxes, so an instructor may decide to select one “Stop & Reflect” box from each chapter for students to write about on a discussion board. Conversely, an instructor could select multiple boxes and use them to structure in-class synchronous discussions.

## Key Terms & Concepts

The orange boxes present key terms and key concepts related to New Media Art and the chapter topic. Key terms are often linked to outside resources, like the [Glossary of Art Terms](#) by the Tate Gallery.

In some Key Terms boxes, readers will be directed back to the first chapter “Introduction to New Media Art” where a provisional list of the [Elements of New Media Art](#) are presented. These Elements of New Media Art are meant to provide ways of thinking about and talking about New Media Art that go beyond the visual elements of art often used as a starting point for discussing more traditional art forms.

Chapter Two “Visual Analysis and New Media Art” provides an explanation of these visual elements that have traditionally been used when discussing and critiquing art. In this chapter, we focus on those visual and experiential elements that arise when looking at and experiencing time-based and technology-driven art works like those in this book.

## Focus

Each chapter has areas of focus on specific artists and works of art that we often discuss in our classes. We've selected certain works because we feel they can help grow an understanding of the chapter topic and challenge readers to find meaning in New Media Art through dialogue and critique. Subheadings labeled "Focus" draw attention to deeper discussions about specific works of art. Some chapters include multiple "Focus" boxes so that instructors have more artists to draw from and can potentially ask students to each select a different artist for an assignment. "Focus" boxes often have "Stop & Consider" boxes embedded within them, to provide discussion questions for in-class or online discussions exploring artists featured in the chapters.

## Key Takeaways

The green box labeled "Key Takeaways" at the end of each chapter lists the learning outcomes we hope readers will achieve while working through the material.

## About Our Writing Styles

We aimed for a conversational approach in writing this book and purposefully did not try to write in a unified voice. We recognize that our approach is unusual for a textbook and we have embraced the reality of a resource that is multi-vocal and glitchy. As this book continues to be revised, we hope to add even more voices to better align with the collaborative ethos of many approaches to New Media Art.

Here is a list of authors who developed each OER chapter:

Introduction to New Media Art – Christine Weber

Visual Analysis and New Media Art – Elizabeth Bilyeu

Printmaking – Kelsey Ferriera

Photography – Elizabeth Bilyeu

Digital Photography – Christine Weber

Early Film and Animation – Christine Weber

Early Video Art – Luke Peterson

Digital Video Art and Video Installation – Kelsey Ferriera

Light Art, Installation Art and Land Art – Luke Peterson

Institutional Critique – Elizabeth Bilyeu

Social Practice – Elizabeth Bilyeu

Performance Art – Kelsey Ferriera

The Digital Revolution – Christine Weber

Special thanks to PCC students Julio Escarce, Jack Alister and Jordan Vadnais for their editing, feedback and interview work for this book. Some of their work is still in progress and will be published in future editions.

## Copyright Information and Adopting, Adapting, or Expanding the Resource

New Media Art continues to challenge us as technologies change and creative approaches and voices develop, including the historicization of the discipline and related cultural theories. Our goal is that future students and colleagues will adopt, adapt and expand this OER, and we will continue to develop it as the field evolves.

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### Educational Fair Use

Due to the nature of the field of art history and New Media Art, some of the works of art covered in this resource are protected by copyright. Images of these works are included with a note in the image



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Some of the images presented in this OER are marked with a Creative Commons license and include a note in the image caption for Educational Fair Use, especially works of art that have been photographed in museums. The photographs of these art works are licensed by the photographer but the works of art are protected under copyright. The images are therefore meant only for the purpose of education and are included in this resource in low resolution.

## Additional Art History Open Educational Resources

[UbuWeb](#) is a massive and growing collection of video, sound, animation, performance works, along with writings and other resources created by avant-garde artists and those working in the field of New Media Art. As the creators themselves explain, "UbuWeb is a pirate shadow library consisting of hundreds of thousands of freely downloadable avant-garde artifacts."

[Smarthistory](#) is an extensive OER that is constantly expanding to address new developments in the field of art history.

[MoMA Learning](#) provides a wonderful selection of essays on works of modern art and also has assignment suggestions at the bottom of each section.

[Art Appreciation Open Educational Resource](#) provides Powerpoint presentations and thematic lessons in art appreciation and art history. Written by Marie Porterfield Barry (Fall 2019), it is part of East Tennessee State's Digital Commons.

[Introduction to Art: Design, Context, and Meaning](#) is an OER designed as a textbook introducing art, history, and analysis for art appreciation courses. Written by Pamela Sachant, Peggy Blood, Jeffery LeMieux, and Rita Tekippe in Fall 2016, it has strong explanations of art processes and techniques.

[Obelisk](#) is a free, online art history book with clean design and approachable descriptions of works of art, periods of art history, and fun artist biographies.

## Creative Commons Images

If you are utilizing the materials in this OER and would like to add new images that are public domain or licensed under Creative Commons, here are several useful tips for finding images:

[The Met Museum](#): The Met has an option to search for Open Access images within the collection here. Make sure that the "Open Access" box is checked. The image license is [CC0 1.0](#), and will be marked OA Public Domain at the lower left of the image.

[Google Images](#): Google Images has an option under "Settings" > "Advanced Search" to search by "Usage Rights". Choosing "Free to use share or modify" will allow a search for images suitable for expanding our OER.

[Wikimedia Commons](#): With a strong collection of works of art, Wikimedia Commons is an outstanding resource for finding open source images.

[Flickr](#): Flickr allows users to specify image licenses on uploaded photographs. Click "Some rights reserved" at the lower right of the image to check the licensing. Some images will say "Public Domain" or will be licensed under a Creative Commons (CC) license, allowing for the use in an OER.

[Smarthistory Flickr](#): The Smarthistory Flickr account is an expansive archive of photographed art works with images licensed for educational purposes.

## Acknowledgements

*Understanding New Media Arts* is an OER adapted from existing resources. We honor and appreciate makers and scholars of art and art history, and we have tried to link to and acknowledge this scholarship and art criticism throughout this text. We also know that we present you with a text that is a work in progress, one that can always be edited and improved, adapted and updated. As instructors, we are learning alongside our students who introduce us to new ways of thinking about art and show us how to become better teachers. Likewise, we hope you learn from this book, and we encourage you, the reader, to reach out to us to suggest edits and new content as you adopt, adapt, and expand this OER in your teaching and learning.

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*Understanding New Media Arts*, version 1.0, June 2022

# INTRODUCTION TO NEW MEDIA ART

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## What is New Media Art?

Is New Media Art truly “new”? How is New Media Art both different from traditional art forms and informed by art history? What is the distinction between New Media Art and new media? How does New Media Art employ and respond to emerging technologies? In what ways does New Media Art blur the boundaries between the sciences and the arts? How does New Media Art challenge other strict categories, including the supposed separation between art and life and the division between online and “irl” challenged by writer [Nathan Jurgenson](#)? Why is New Media Art so difficult to define?

This book explores these questions in multiple ways by proposing a long historical context for the technologies and ideas related to New Media Art in the twenty-first century. In this first chapter, we introduce Elements of New Media Art, which are woven throughout the rest of the book and propose a framework through which we can consider the long history of New Media Art.

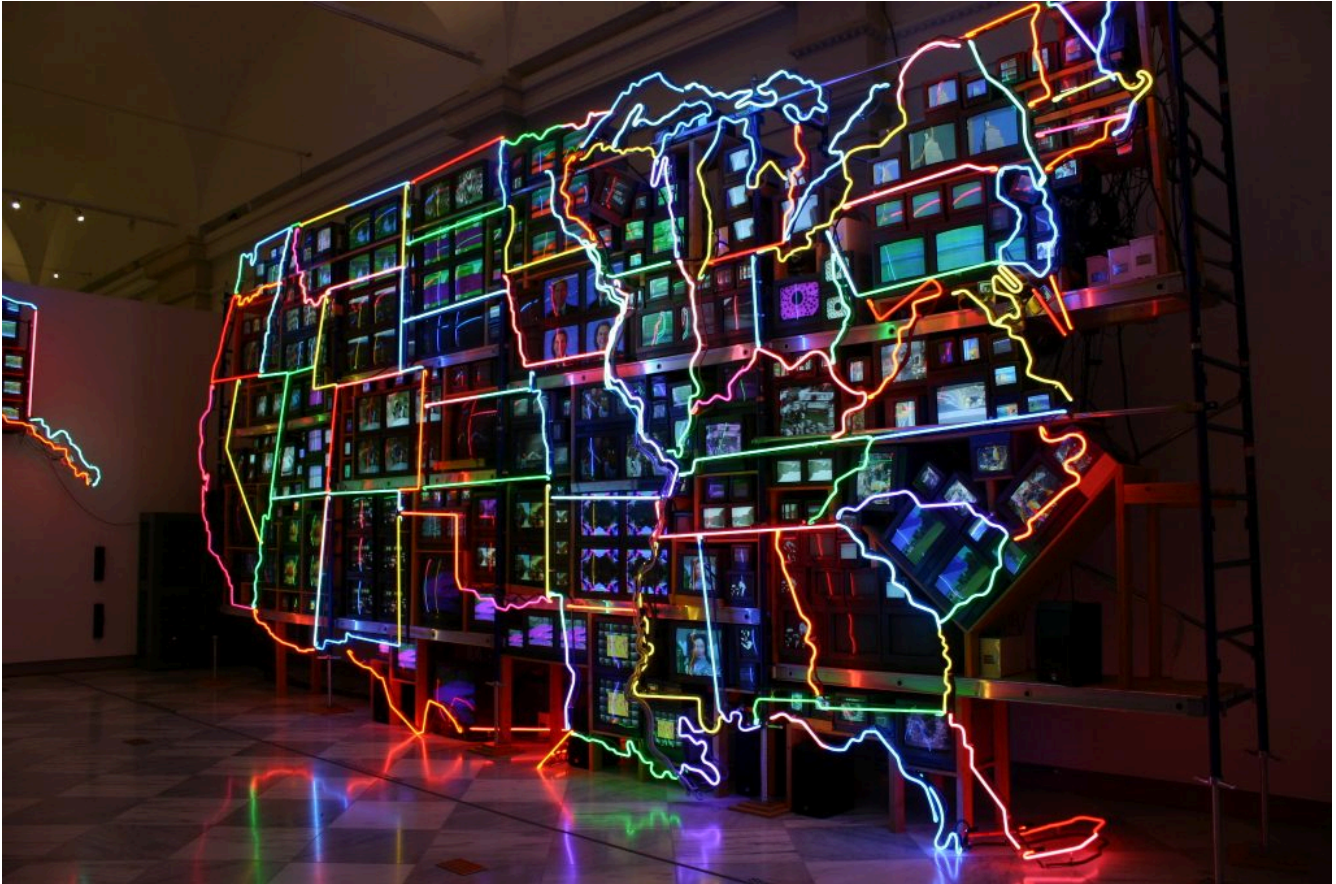
### Stop & Reflect: New Media Art

Take 5 minutes and write down words, ideas or images that arise for you when you hear the term “New Media Art”.

(Keep in mind that the term combines the concept of [New Media](#) with the concept of [Art](#). What do you already know about those two concepts?)

Early New Media artists like Nam June Paik (1932-2006), saw liberatory potential in the many new technologies being introduced in the late twentieth century. Paik and others felt that technology could radically open up the world and give more people a chance to make and share art. Paik even predicted many developments that have shaped the trajectory of New Media Art, including the Internet and video conferencing (à la Zoom).

Others saw potential in digital connection, but Paik identified the communication possibilities of these new technologies. Paik also foresaw the development of video as an artistic medium, the innovation of smart phones and apps, and the rise of global media, arguing that global communication could help unite the world. This last prediction seems heartbreaking in the early 21st century, when the world feels deeply fractured, in large part thanks to the very technologies Paik predicted.



Nam June Paik, *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*, 1995, fifty-one channel video installation (including one closed-circuit television feed), custom electronics, neon lighting, steel and wood; color, sound, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist, 2002.23, © Nam June Paik Estate. Photo: Ryan Somma, Source: [Flickr](#), License: [CC BY 2.0](#)

The revolutionary potential of the Internet and other digital technologies that Paik and so many others hoped for throughout the 80s and 90s, might feel lost to us in the early twenty-first century. However, scholar and curator [Legacy Russell](#) argues that, despite the fact that the Digital Revolution did not result in the radical social and cultural transformation promised, New Media artists today continue to effectively mobilize via social media and other digital platforms to glitch systems of oppression, challenge the status quo and open new possibilities for interaction and new ways of thinking about what it means to be an artist and a human in this strange, complicated world.

While this textbook is not comprehensive, we aim to explore many artists who have done and are still

doing this work. We also plan to continue expanding our exploration in future editions. We have not tried to create a definitive art history of New Media Art because we don't think that definitive histories are possible or desirable. We have instead tried to create a book in motion, because the field of New Media Art is constantly being constructed. This also means that the Elements of New Media Art that frame this book should not be considered a comprehensive list, but a set of propositions or ways of thinking about approaches to New Media Art.

## Elements of New Media Art

- Expands the definition of art
- Democratizes access to art
- Exploits new technology for artistic purposes
- Merges new media with old media
- Readymade – uses objects or material from everyday life
- Remixing – uses images or things made by others in new ways
- Chance – removes the artist's total control
- Time – unfolds over time
- Ephemeral – isn't meant to or can't last forever
- Intangible – not an object, without physical form
- Liveness – happens in real time, the artist is there
- Variable – always different, changing
- Interactive – viewers are involved and can change and manipulate the work
- Collaborative – the artist is a facilitator and viewers make the art with them
- Replicable – can be copied multiple times and exist in different states
- Connectivity – made possible because of new global connections
- Glitch – Challenges the status quo
- (Adapted from work by Lev Manovich, Legacy Russell, Mark Tribe and Susan Morris.)

## Stop & Reflect: Elements of New Media Art

1. Examine the Elements of New Media Art listed above. Are there examples of art that you're already familiar with that relate to any of these elements?
2. What examples from your own life can you connect to any of these elements?
3. What's a good example of something you have encountered that is **ephemeral** (not lasting forever)?
4. What have you encountered (or enacted) in your life that **challenges the status quo**? Consider these questions for each one of the Elements of New Media Art and be prepared to share your thoughts with your colleagues if you're reading this book in preparation for a class discussion.

## New Media Art is not new

So, what is New Media Art? By now you know that this question has multiple answers. Some contradict each other and some have yet to be proposed. The word "new" suggests novelty, but many elements of New Media Art were first explored by artists more than a century ago, and some even earlier. So many elements of New Media Art are not really new at all. (See the chapters on [Printmaking](#), [Photography](#) and [Early Film](#) for some great examples.)

A better way of thinking about the "new" is that New Media Art is labelled such because it is different from more traditional art media like painting and sculpture, which have their origins in Prehistory, more than 30,000 years ago. Painting and sculpture were also the primary art mediums privileged in the concept of "[Fine Art](#)" that Europeans invented during [The Enlightenment](#). In developing the concept of Fine Art and the [Art Academies](#) that trained artistic professionals, European thinkers misunderstood and marginalized many forms of creative making across the globe. Distinctions between what is art and what is not art were also used to support colonizing expansion and exploitation. The European Art Academies created a hierarchy of artistic mediums and paved the way for the modernist idea of art as an object that is looked at, made by one individual, existing in one space, with only one form and valued for its uniqueness and originality. As we will see, New Media Art offers entirely new ways of thinking about and experiencing art.



## Elements of New Media Art: Exploits new technology



Stephanie Dinkins, *Conversations with Bina48*, 2014-ongoing. Digital video installation. (Installation view from [Disjecta now Oregon Contemporary](#)). Photo: Christine Weber. All rights reserved to the artist.

New Media Art encompasses many different approaches to art making, but it is probably most closely associated with art made possible by the new technologies of the Digital Age such as computer-based art, electronic music, social media, digital photography, net art, video games, interactive installation art, and projects employing virtual or augmented reality. One example is the project *Conversations with Bina48*, initiated in 2014 by the artist Stephanie Dinkins (born 1964). The project involves Dinkins filming conversations she conducts with an intelligent computer named Bina48 (Breakthrough Intelligence via Neural Architecture, 48 exaflops per second). Throughout the conversations covering family, love, race, religion, and robot ethics, Dinkins and Bina48 explore many of the same questions examined by philosophers and artists for millennia. [Conversations with Bina48](#) also considers the complexities of artificial intelligence, algorithmic power and data mining in a racialized and racist world. What happens when the future is being primarily built by white men? In order to address gender and racial

inequities in the tech world, the world that is building our future through algorithms, Dinkins has advocated for more access in BIPOC communities to technology and tools for shaping the technological future. In interviews, Dinkins has situated her work in a context prepared by Civil Rights leaders who explained that what we have is not a technology problem, but a race problem. Some New Media Art, like Dinkins' work, engages critically and meaningfully with this problem.

## Elements of New Media Art: Time and Liveness



Lorraine O'Grady, *Performance as Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* at the New Museum in New York City, 1981. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), License: [CC BY SA 4.0](#)

New Media Art also encompasses art that uses actual time and actual space as design elements, instead of trying to create an illusion of time and space as more traditional art media like painting and sculpture do. This approach includes some of the digital approaches listed above, like Nam June Paik's work which often blurs the boundaries between sculpture and video art. New Media Art also encompasses the time-based arts of video art, land art, social practices and performance art. Of these approaches, performance art is the only one that usually requires the presence of the artist. Performance art is often ephemeral. A performance happens once and if it is ever reperformed, it is a different work of art because the context and thus the meaning of the work has changed. For example, the artist Lorraine O'Grady (born 1934) started performing her piece, [Mlle Bourgeoise Noire in 1980](#) by attending art openings in New York City unannounced and performing actions including reading poems to the art world attendees. The photograph above is from Mlle Bourgeoise

Noire's invasion at the opening of the *Persona* exhibition at the New Museum in 1981. O'Grady titled this exhibition *The Nine White Personae Show* and exclaimed the following poem to the audience assembled at the opening:

WAIT wait in your alternate/alternative spaces

spitted

on fish hooks of hope

be polite



wait to be discovered

be proud

be independent

tongues cauterized

at openings no one attends

stay in your place

after all

art is only for art's sake

THAT'S ENOUGH

don't you know sleeping beauty needs more than a kiss to awake

now is the time for an INVASION!

O'Grady's performances are good examples of New Media Art that challenges the status quo, in this case, the marginalization of Black women and artists of color in major museums and New York art galleries. O'Grady herself has explained that she engaged in this performance led by the firm belief that art has the power to change the world. In this sense, O'Grady's work is an ancestor of the glitch feminist approaches to New Media Art articulated by Legacy Russell.

The *Mlle Bourgoise Noire* performances also provide a clear example of how ephemeral and context specific performance art can be. O'Grady has noted that after the performances, throughout the 80s and 90s, two iconic photographs were often reprinted and distributed without context and sometimes even without a description of the project. The lack of context contributed to misunderstandings of the work in O'Grady's view and points to the complexities of trying to write about, study and analyze ephemeral and context specific works of New Media Art.

In the same way that some New Media Art is decontextualized and thus misunderstood, [anthropologist David Harvey has argued that technology is often removed from its broader context](#), its longer history and its cultural impact when it is discussed in the 21st century. This book aims to challenge that mystification of technology, by presenting the long history of New Media Art concepts and engaging with artists who have explored the cultural impacts and the potentials of new technology with their work for centuries.

## Elements of New Media Art: Expands the definition of Art

### All media were once new media

Because this book is meant as an introduction to New Media Art, we will examine projects that make use of emerging technologies with a focus on projects that are concerned with the cultural, political and aesthetic possibilities of those tools. But we will also examine New Media Art in the broader context of more traditional art media, drawing on the work of New Media theorists like Lev Manovich and others.

The first half of this book introduces a history of technologies that impacted the world of art before the Digital Revolution of the 1990s. We look back this far in order to explore how New Media strategies are part of a much longer history of image making and storytelling. As Lev Manovich has explained, "All media were once new media" and most of the elements of New Media Art we'll examine in this textbook have precedents in technological innovations of the past. Since the Renaissance in the fifteenth century, artists have been using new intellectual, scientific and technological developments in ways that radically extend the conventional art media of sculpture and painting. So we will examine the convergence of technology, science, art, design and culture since the introduction of movable type printing to Europe in the 15th century, which is where this exploration of New Media Art begins.

## Elements of New Media Art: Replicable

In the [Printmaking chapter](#) of this textbook, we explore how artists have used new technologies in the past to challenge the status quo and encourage people to see the world around them in exciting new ways. Printing challenged the logic of the traditional art world, by providing the first reliable method for making multiple copies of images and words. Traditional art media assumes a one-of-a-kind art object, made by a single artistic genius and distributed through a set of exclusive galleries, museums or auction houses. In contrast, the logic of New Media Art embraces the existence of numerous copies and many different states of the same work. Moreover, the distribution of New Media Art often bypasses the gallery system. Printing paved the way for these new approaches to artistic media. When the [first printing and experiments with movable type were developed in China more than a thousand years ago](#), average people began to have more exposure to images and

words, through objects like playing cards and printed money. So printing is a technology that had an early impact on how people access and think about visual culture.

## Elements of New Media Art: Democratizes access to art

In the chapter on [Early Photography](#), we continue our historical exploration with a look at the impactful new technology of photography, invented in the nineteenth century. Like printing, photography is a powerful precedent to New Media Art because it democratized image making around the world and increased the amount of images that average people had access to in the twentieth century. In the 1850s, few people had access to a camera, but a short 100 years later, it would have been unusual to meet someone who didn't own a camera. By the 1950s, photographic images had become the daily visual diet of people living in urban centers across the world. Photography is part of the lineage of New Media Art because it gave power to average people, allowing them to make their own images and tell their own stories. Additionally, photographic manipulation is as old as the development of photography, allowing artists to invent new realities, another strategy of New Media Art.

## Elements of New Media Art: Merges old media with new media

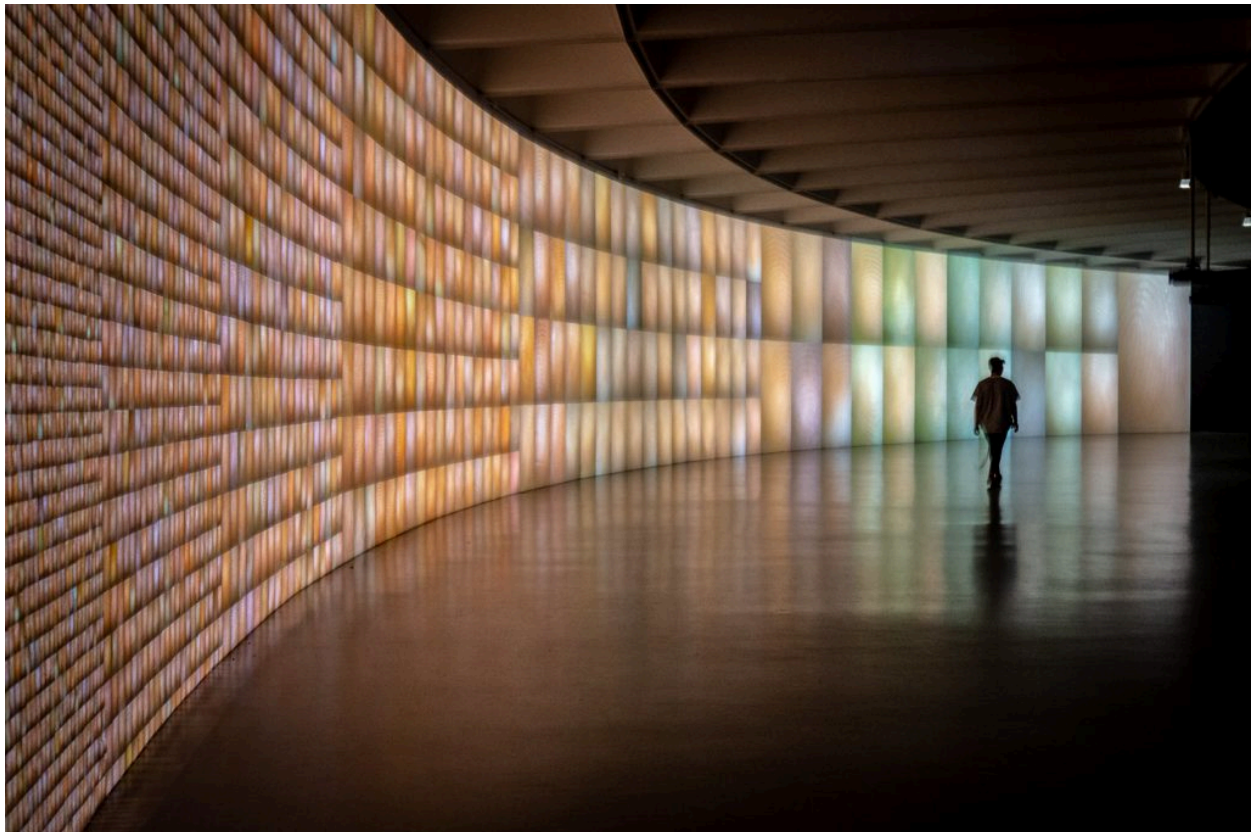
In the chapter on [Early Film and Animation](#) we examine the earliest gifs and movies from the late nineteenth century and discusses their impacts on later developments in New Media Art. Just like photographers experimented with new technology, artists working in early film and early animation used strategies from traditional art media like painting to experiment with the technology of film. Some early film artists were also interested in thinking about what motion pictures could do that painting and photography could not, so they proposed new directions for image making in this infant medium.

Additionally, in the [Early Video Art](#) chapter we examine the impact of television and portable video cameras on artists, like Nam June Paik, who linked his interests in electronics, music, performance, chance, Buddhism, and Korean shamanism, to create innovative work merging the traditional art media of sculpture with the new media of video. In the chapter covering [Digital Video Art](#) we examine the shift to digital video and the merging of video sculpture with installation art in the new cavernous museum spaces of the postmodern era. In these chapters, we also draw a distinction between art that uses digital technologies as tools for creating more traditional art objects and

digital-born art that is created, stored and distributed via digital technologies, using digital tools as a medium.

## Elements of New Media Art: Variable

The artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (born 1967) employs digital technologies to create immersive installations that are dependent on viewer engagement and are therefore variable, meaning that the installations change as each new person engages with the work. In [Pulse Index, first created in 2010 and reinstalled at the Hirschhorn Museum in Washington DC in 2019](#) as part of a larger exhibition of the artist's Pulse series, Lozano-Hemmer collected the fingerprints and heartbeats of every person who visited the show. The biometric data of the last 10,000 users was then projected onto the curved walls of the Hirschhorn gallery in an ever growing grid that changed with the electrical pulses of each new human who entered the space.



Rafel Lozano-Hemmer, *Pulse Index* (2010), interactive installation at the Hirschhorn Museum, Washington DC, 2019, Author: Phil Roeder, Source: [Flickr](#), License: [CC BY 2.0](#)

## Art and Technology in the Late Industrial Age

We can find the conceptual roots of New Media Art in early twentieth-century Europe, because artists in this time of turmoil invented entirely new artistic languages and techniques that form the foundation of New Media strategies and are still used by artists today. In the 1900s when the first motion pictures were made, there were many other radical shifts in technology. Inventions like the airplane, automobiles, skyscrapers, light bulbs, radios, phonographs, portable typewriters, electric elevators, telephones, and even aerial bombing, were all introduced for the first time. Historians have argued that any one of these new technologies would have caused a serious revolution in human behavior, but people experienced many of these new technologies all at once. And some artists began to look for ways to explore and express the strange, exciting, and terrifying world they saw unfolding around them. Artists began to seek new ways of representing space, time, and movement in order to open people's eyes and ears to the beauty and horrors of the modern machine age.

One technique some artists used to reference the chaos of the machine age was simultaneity, often by showing [multiple viewpoints in one painting](#) as Georges Braque (1882-1963) and Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) explored in Cubism or [multiple camera angles in one film sequence](#) as visible in the experiments of Fernand Léger (1881-1951). Prior to the twentieth-century, life had seemed more static, but science and technology were forcing people to experience time, motion, and space more dynamically. Reality was in a constant state of flux in the early twentieth-century and some artists began to highlight the uncertainty and ambiguity that permeated their world.

This period, called the [Machine Age](#) by [some](#), began more than 100 years after the first wave of the Industrial Revolution. By the 1920s, artists, designers and architects had finally developed a set of aesthetic forms and principles that spoke more dynamically and effectively to the new realities of the industrial world. So it took artists about 150 years to build new artistic languages out of the impacts of industrialism. And the world has only been living through the Digital Revolution for a few decades at this point. What kind of new languages are New Media artists currently inventing? What will they be proposing 100 years from now? What new aesthetic forms and principles will ultimately speak more effectively to the new realities of our global and digital world? What is the role of New Media Art in engaging with some of the most pressing concerns of the twenty-first century?

## The Dada Precedent

Many historians link the history of New Media Art to the early twentieth-century, when the [Dada movement](#) emerged in Zurich, then Berlin, Cologne, Paris, and New York. Dada artists were highly critical of traditional institutions and the [bourgeois culture](#) that they felt led Europe into the First World War. They were horrified by the industrialization of warfare and became interested in engaging with the world of technology (including mechanically reproduced images and objects) in critical ways. They began to radically challenge traditional ideas about art and propose new ways of engaging with the modern world. As artist Mark Tribe has argued, New Media Art is similarly a



response to the revolution of information technology. Dada artists critically engaged with the mechanization of cultural forms, and New Media artists critically engage with the digitization of cultural forms.



Dada artist Raoul Hausmann, *Mechanical Head (Spirit of Our Times)*, 1919, hairdresser's dummy, pocket watch and camera parts, tape measure, telescopic tumbler, leather case, cardboard bearing the number 22, and other materials, 32.5 x 21 x 20 cm (Center Pompidou, Paris). Photo: Steven Zucker, Source: [Smart History Flickr](#), License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

## Elements of New Media Art: The Readymade

Lev Manovich has noted that many Dada strategies reappear in New Media Art. For example, Dada artists were among the first to use their body and time as artistic mediums leading to the development in New Media Art known as [Performance Art](#). Another significant example is the Readymade, which involved the artist introducing objects from life into art by choosing something that has already been made and calling it art. The artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) coined the

term [Readymade](#) to explain his process of taking something that was already made, particularly something mass produced by a machine and removing it from its usual context by inserting it into an art context. This approach emphasized the importance of context in how people interpret, understand, utilize and appreciate things in their daily lives. Many New Media artists also explore the importance of context and how one's ideas and understandings can change depending on the position(s) from which one is experiencing something.



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917/1964, glazed ceramic urinal with black paint, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Steven Zucker, Source: [Smarthistory Flickr](#), License: [CC BY-NA-SA 2.0](#)

The most famous (or infamous) Readymade is a piece called [Fountain](#). Today there is [debate](#) about whether or not *Fountain* is a work by Marcel Duchamp or Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (1874-1927), but what we do know is that the piece was a machine-made urinal, dated and signed "R. Mutt" and submitted to an art exhibition in 1917. This work, while rejected from the exhibition by the jury, ended up demonstrating how the context of fine art can often impact the way we value and understand an object. A urinal is a plumbing fixture people pee in until an artist signs it and enters it into an art show, where it's placed on a pedestal to be aesthetically appreciated. *Fountain* and the many other Readymades by Duchamp, suggest that the way art is identified and interpreted is not natural, but cultural. Some things are considered "art" and others considered "not art" based on cultural context and the word "art" itself has a variety of different meanings depending on the language and cultural

context in which it is being used. For example many creative works were never made to be exhibited in a museum and don't fit into the specific definition of art maintained by Euro-American art history. Readymades highlight this complexity and some New Media Artists use this strategy to further question traditional definitions of art. (Here is an [explanation of R. Mutt's \*Fountain\* written by Marcel Duchamp in 1917.](#))

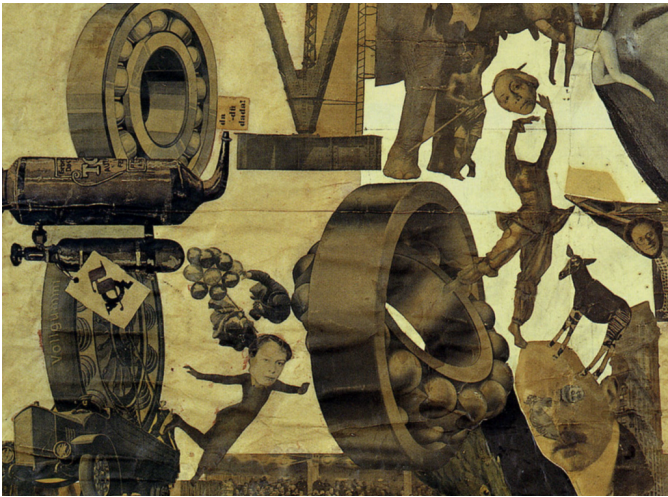
## Elements of New Media Art: The Glitch

Readymades opened the doors for New Media Art by posing questions that future generations of artists continue to explore. Does art have to be about technique or skill? Does art have to be about

an individual artist and their expression? What if a work of art just makes the person engaging with it think or feel? Do works of art have to look certain ways or be made with certain techniques to contrast with "real things"? How do we know if something is art or not? Who gets to decide what is art and what isn't? And why should we make this distinction at all? Humans have been making beautiful and complicated things for millennia with a variety of goals in mind. Readymades show that the aesthetic function of traditional European art has a very specific (and very recent) context.

The idea of "Fine Art" being a single object, made by one artist, that you look at in a museum and appreciate for its beauty with no other purpose, was invented in the 18th century, and solidified when the first public museums opened in Europe. It is this model that New Media Art challenges. And Dada artists paved the way for this new direction by shifting focus from the eye to the mind. Dada suggests that art doesn't have to be about skill, materials or form. Instead art can be about process. Art can be about what is being said. And this shift from the art object to the idea or concept has had a major influence on New Media Art. (For another look at the development of art as an idea rather than an object, see this [short history of Conceptual Art from the Tate Gallery](#).)

## Elements of New Media Art: Remixing



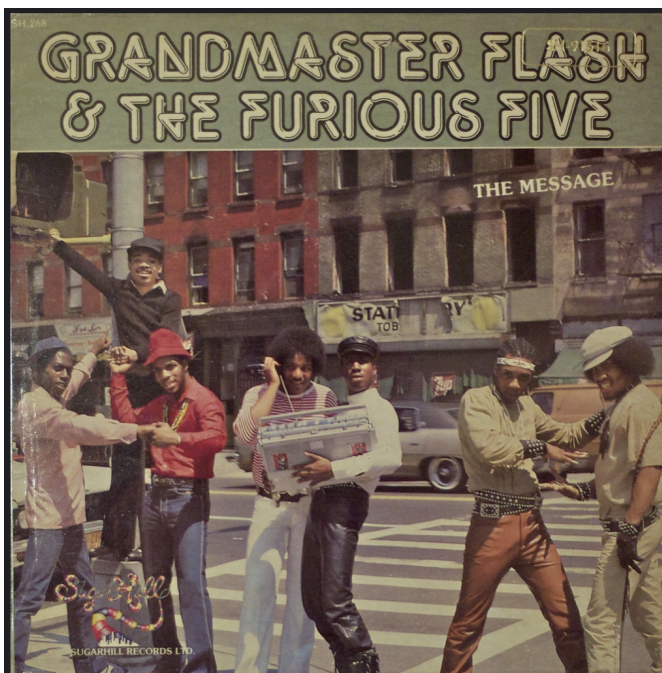
Dada artist Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (*Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands*) (detail), 1919-1920, Photomontage and collage with watercolor, 44 7/8 x 35 7/16 in. (114 x 90 cm), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie. Photo: Juliana, Source: [Smarthistory Flickr](#), License: [CC BY-NA-SA 2.0](#)

Most art made in Europe in the early twentieth-century privileged evidence of the artist's originality and mastery. However, Dada art, including Readymades, tried to show that art making doesn't have to be about mastery. Dada proposed that creativity could be about remixing. Dada artists like Marcel Duchamp and [Hannah Höch](#) (1889-1978), often appropriated objects from mass culture or borrowed images from the mass media and manipulated them to create new meaning. Of course, artists have always influenced each other and imitated each other, but the concept of remixing (or [appropriation](#)) was truly born in the early twentieth-century when mechanical reproduction enabled new forms of copying and repurposing images made by others to communicate in new ways. In the 1920s, Höch repurposed images she cut from German



women's fashion magazines to expose the objectification and commodification of gender in the post-war era.

Dada photomontage was only one critical approach to popular culture in the twentieth-century. In the 1960s, [Pop artists in the US and UK remixed popular advertising, pulp fiction and comics](#) to explore the realities of capitalism, consumerism and celebrity in the mid-century. The Situationists International, also developed a concept called [détournement](#), which involves appropriating familiar images from the mass media or ubiquitous political slogans, and using them in ways that subvert their original message and expose their embedded ideology. This strategy was used on graffiti and posters during the 1968 Paris uprising and it later influenced [Punk](#) and [Riot Grrrl](#) design and groups like the [Billboard Liberation Front](#), which used images from the spectacle to disrupt its seamless flow.



Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five, *The Message*, 1982, Sugar Hill Records. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#). License: All Rights Reserved. [Educational Fair Use](#).

Perhaps most closely connected to the [intermedia](#) elements of New Media Art, [Hip Hop](#) DJs in the 1970s and 1980s started sampling beats, phrases and lines of music from older records, remixing works of art by earlier artists into new dynamic work that existed in dialogue with the poems written by MCs, the movements created by B-Boys and B-Girls and the painted images and words created by graffiti artists. The debut album *The Message* by hip hop giants Grandmaster Flash (born 1958) and the Furious Five provides an early, though certainly not the first, example of hip hop remixing. Songs on the album include samples of funk beats by the Jimmy Castor Band, fragments of disco songs by Chic and new wave riffs by the Tom Tom Club. The first single from the album, also titled "[The Message](#)" [provides an early example of critical social](#)

[commentary](#) that has remained a significant element of hip hop music, continued by later groups like Public Enemy, KRS-One and Black Star. Hip Hop sampling and remixing has had a major influence on New Media artists today and provides an early example of the elements of New Media Art permeating all aspects of life.

The development of the World Wide Web in the 1990s provided artists with even easier access to found images, found sounds and found texts, and many artists became interested in engaging with this new abundant source material that was always growing as new sources were constantly being added. Digital technologies made it much easier to copy and paste so by the 1990s, borrowing

and remixing had become a significant creative act. Of course, at the same time that remixing became an increasingly important artistic strategy, intellectual property laws were also becoming more restrictive. The recording industry, movie studios and other corporate content owners were increasingly concerned about unauthorized copying and distribution of their assets. Copyright terms were extended and violations were aggressively policed. This book explores the ways that some New Media artists and New Media theorists have responded and continue to embrace remixing in the twenty-first century as our digital environment continues to evolve.

One powerful example of a recent work of remixing informed by both the joyous sampling of hip hop and the critical appropriation of Dada is Arthur Jafa's (born 1960) [\*Love is the Message, The Message is Death\*](#). (Content warning: police violence) This is a video epic that appropriates archival film, videos with "Getty images" watermarks, and grainy smart phone videos posted online to tell a complicated story of contemporary visual culture. Writer and *Rhizome* editor [Aria Dean](#), has situated this work within the Black Radical Tradition, as a video that explores the way American culture views Blackness and Black people, and exposes how those views are deeply informed by white supremacist visual culture. Jafa's video also alternates images of Black excellence and joy with violence and suffering, which Dean has connected with the call and response structure of Black church gatherings. Jafa's remixing also brings moments together that have never been juxtaposed before, to propose new ways of thinking critically about the visual world we carry around in our pockets.



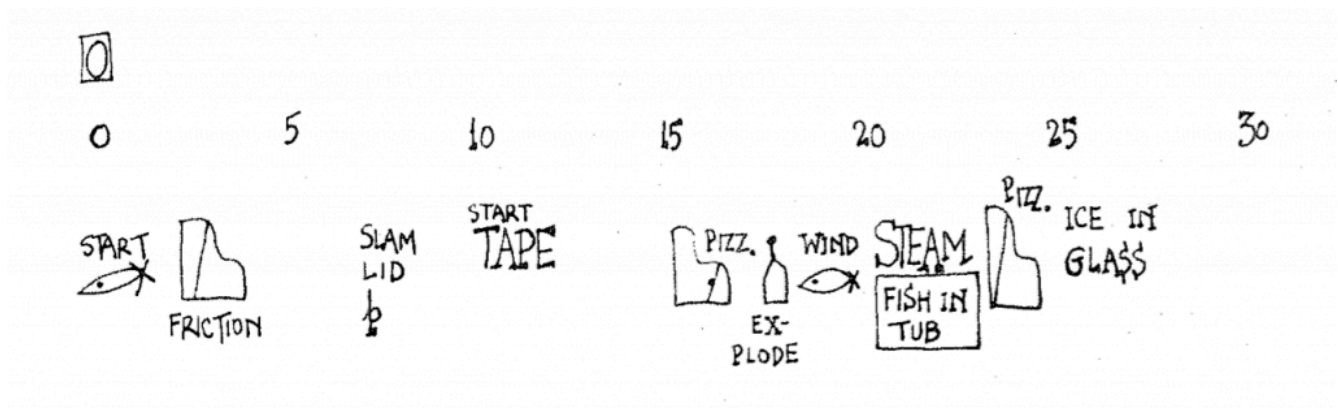
Arthur Jafa, *Love is the Message, The Message is Death*, 2016, video; color and black and white; 7:30 mins. Screenshot: Christine Weber, Source: [YouTube](#), License: Copyright Arthur Jafa. All rights reserved.

## Elements of New Media Art: Chance

Dada artists, along with the later [Surrealists, also used chance](#) as an art making strategy to jar audiences out of their complacency and encourage them to see the world around them with new eyes. Some artists saw chance as a way of rejecting the focus on the individual, genius artist. Chance shows up through audience involvement in early Dada performance work, where the artists could not control the outcome. Additionally, [Dada poets developed rules](#) for their process of creation and scholars like Lev Manovich have connected those rules to algorithms that form the basis of all software and computer operations. In his article "Avant-Garde as Software" Manovich proposes that the 1920s [avant-garde](#) is one of the most significant predecessors to contemporary New Media Art. Because avant-garde artists and designers in the early twentieth-century invented an entirely new set of visual and spatial languages and communication techniques that we still use today. These techniques became embedded in the commands and interface metaphors of computer software according to Manovich.

Dada artists (and the [Italian Futurists](#)) were also interested in opening people's ears to the noises and sounds of everyday life in the Machine Age. They can therefore be considered precursors to later experimental musicians like [John Cage](#) (1912-1992), whose approach to art making is deeply engaged with New Media strategies. Cage was very interested in opening people's ears to the sounds of the world around them. Additionally, Cage employed algorithmic precedents and chance to compose his music, including basing instructions for musical compositions on the [I-ching](#). Cage had a major influence on [Fluxus](#) and [Neo-Dada](#) artists and his own compositions from the 1950s and 60s anticipated numerous experiments in interactive New Media Art.

Cage's work proposes that the distinction traditional art history tries to draw between art and the rest of the world is in fact, a false distinction. Cage and the artists he inspired attempted to embrace the art in daily life. Cage even famously explained that "There is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound." His 1959 composition, *Water Walk*, provides a good example of this approach with sounds made by "instruments" drawn from a variety of items related to water and found in most homes.



John Cage, *Water Walk*, Composed in 1959. Premiered on "Lascia o Raddoppia," a TV program televised in Milan, Feb 5, 1959. Subsequently performed on "I've Got a Secret," the popular American game show, Feb 24, 1960. Image Author: Chrisfred3, Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), License: [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

## Elements of New Media Art: Interactive

### The Fluxus and Neo-Dada Precedent

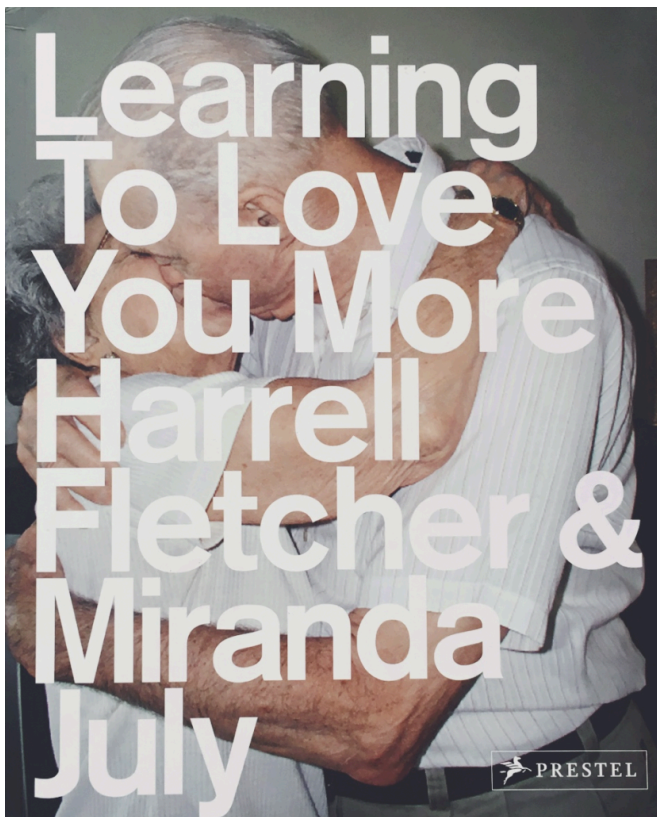
In this book, we also consider approaches that engage the Elements of New Media Art and were influenced by Dada, John Cage, and the groups he influenced, including the development of Social Practice Art. Social Practice Art fully engages the New Media strategy of active viewer participation by trying to erase the notion of a viewer and proposing that everyone can be a creator. As you'll read in the chapter on [Social Practice Art](#), it's a development that was influenced by artists like the Fluxus artists working internationally after WWII. Many artists started to feel that their social bonds were becoming fragmented in the modern world and they wanted to challenge this fragmentation by providing open-ended alternatives to people's disconnected lives.

Some artists began to think that the best way to revitalize culture and forge stronger social bonds was to creatively integrate art into everyday life. These artists in the 1960s and 1970s tried to challenge traditional relationships between the viewer, the artist and the art work by inventing new ways of making and experiencing art. Many of these artists argued that art could encompass actions and ideas as well as objects, influenced by Dada. For example, the group that called itself Fluxus, designed open-ended events based on the creative execution of instructions or event scores. Fluxus event scores blur the boundaries between art and life and between the viewer and the artist. They can be realized in a variety of ways and by anyone. They require full engagement and presence in order to be made real.



## Elements of New Media Art: Collaborative

Fluxus events and other experimental developments in the 1960s initiated a shift from passive audience reception to active participation, that earlier twentieth-century artists proposed. Traditional art mediums result in works of art that are objects viewers gaze at, but New Media Art is more interactive. In fact, one of the hallmarks of New Media Art is participation, viewer engagement and sometimes even creation. This is in part because the Digital Revolution has fundamentally reshaped the way cultures are created, experienced and understood. New Media Art also provides the public more opportunities to be active producers of art or participants in the production, instead of passive observers.



Harrell Fletcher & Miranda July, *Learning To Love You More* book cover, 2007. [Documenting a project that lasted from 2002-2010. SFMoMA](#). Photo of book cover: Christine Weber. License: [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

However, there are different levels of interactivity and some New Media Art projects allow viewers to themselves become artists, leaving traces on the work or dramatically altering it, whereas other New Media Art projects respond to audience input, but are not altered by that input. In both cases, the presence of the viewer is vital. Without the viewer, many New Media Art projects would not be activated. Yet some projects provide space for more intense interaction than others.

One example is the collaborative project initiated by Miranda July (born 1974) and Harrell Fletcher (born 1967), titled [Learning to Love You More](#). Starting in 2002, July and Fletcher began sharing assignments online. Anyone who wanted could complete the assignment instructions and submit documentation of their work to be posted on their website. Assignments like "Make a Neighborhood Field Recording" and "Take a Picture of Your Parents Kissing" were completed by thousands of participants and

shared online as well as eventually in museum exhibitions and a published book. These assignments recall Fluxus event scores and provided a recipe or framework within which anyone could

meaningfully explore aspects of what it means to be human and to meaningfully relate to other humans in the digital age.

## The Feminist Art Precedent

For a generation of artists in the 1950s and 1960s who had witnessed the destruction of the Holocaust and the atomic bomb, the body and specifically their own body, offered a powerful medium to communicate shared physical and emotional experiences. In the politicized environment of the 1960s, many artists used performance art specifically to address emerging social concerns. And in this period, feminist artists became major innovators. Feminist artists in the 1970s, began to use their own bodies in live performances, realizing that it was an effective way to expose the context of art history and challenge historical representations of women. Additionally, unlike traditional art forms such as painting and sculpture, performance art forced viewers to engage with a real person and their real emotional and physical states. The critical challenges lodged by feminist artists against the status quo of the art world, the argument that the personal can be political and the embrace of creative forms of making that had been marginalized in Western art history, all provided a framework for thinking about how New Media Art could challenge traditional narratives and oppressive structures.

### Elements of New Media Art: Connectivity

## The Industrial Age becomes the Information Age

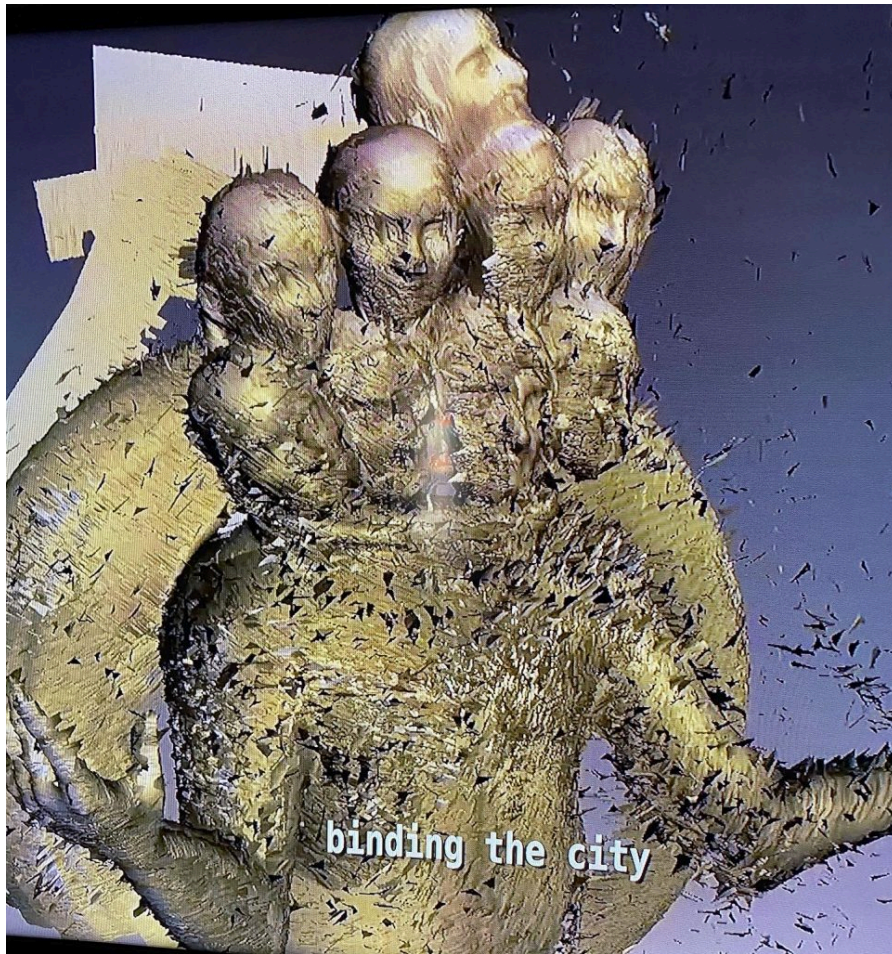
The formative years of New Media Art followed the end of the Cold War, when many artists were critical of capitalism and the victory of free-market ideology symbolized by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Many left-leaning artists saw the Internet as an opportunity to realize progressive, anti-capitalist ideals, including embracing a "gift economy" with works of New Media Art circulated for free or exchanged via websites and listservs. Artists leaned into the roles of mediators or facilitators rather than sole creator. Works of art began to engage viewers in new ways. They began to rely on a constant flow of information and many became open structures in the process. Digital technologies even further challenged traditional notions of the what an artist, audience member and work of art even is.

## How is New Media Art different from Traditional Art?

New Media Art reflects dramatic changes in traditional ideas about how and why art should be made. New Media Art is often made by artists who aspire to question traditional notions of what art is, what art can be about, who makes art and why. As we will see in this book, these are questions that many artists were beginning to ask long before the Digital Age. As early as the nineteenth century, artists were beginning to contradict what had previously passed for art and to make work that challenged people's expectations about what they should be able to see in an art gallery or exhibition space. For example in nineteenth century France, people rejected Gustave Courbet's (1819-1877) [The Stonebreakers](#), because it looked different than traditional Academic painting and it introduced an image of hard, back breaking labor to an art audience that wanted to escape and to be entertained when they looked at art. French viewers had a similar reaction to [French Impressionism](#) in the 1870s, deeming it not art because the painting style didn't look finished enough compared to the so-called "[licked finish](#)" of Academic paintings.

According to the [musician Brian Eno](#) (born 1948), "Nearly all of the history of art history is about trying to identify the source value in cultural objects. Color theories, and dimension theories, golden means, all of those sort of ideas, assume that some objects are intrinsically more beautiful and meaningful than others. New cultural thinking [or New Media thinking] isn't like that. It says that we confer value on things. We create the value in things. It's the act of conferring that makes things valuable."

New Media artist Morehshin Allahyari (born 1985) uses digital tools to raise questions about how the value conferred on cultural artifacts and narratives is informed by historical power imbalances and the colonizing framework of art history. In [She Who Sees the Unknown](#), Allahyari uses 3-D modeling to re-figure female goddesses and Jinn figures from Persian and Arabic narratives that have often been misrepresented and under-valued in Western culture. Allahyari's work thus examines the past and explodes gender, cultural and social norms through the medium of emerging technologies.



Morehshin Allahyari, *She Who Sees the Unknown*, 2016, 3-D modeling and video. View from [exhibition at Disjecta \(now Oregon Contemporary\)](#) Photo: Christine Weber. License: [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

Artists have been challenging expectations and expanding the boundaries of art for centuries. In this book, you will encounter work by many New Media artists who have made things or proposed things that would not have been defined as art in the past. Many New Media artists deliberately challenge viewers' expectations about what a work of art should look like and how a work of art can function. However, all of the works introduced in this textbook have redefined the concept of art in powerful ways, and the best way of engaging with this book is to approach each work of art with curiosity, by asking questions and trying to discover meanings. The goal is not to find one answer, but to participate in a dialogue, to examine how each work of art is situated within the broader framework of New Media Art and to consider what each work of art contributes to the global human dialogue that we all participate in thanks to the Digital Revolution.

## New Media and 4-D Art

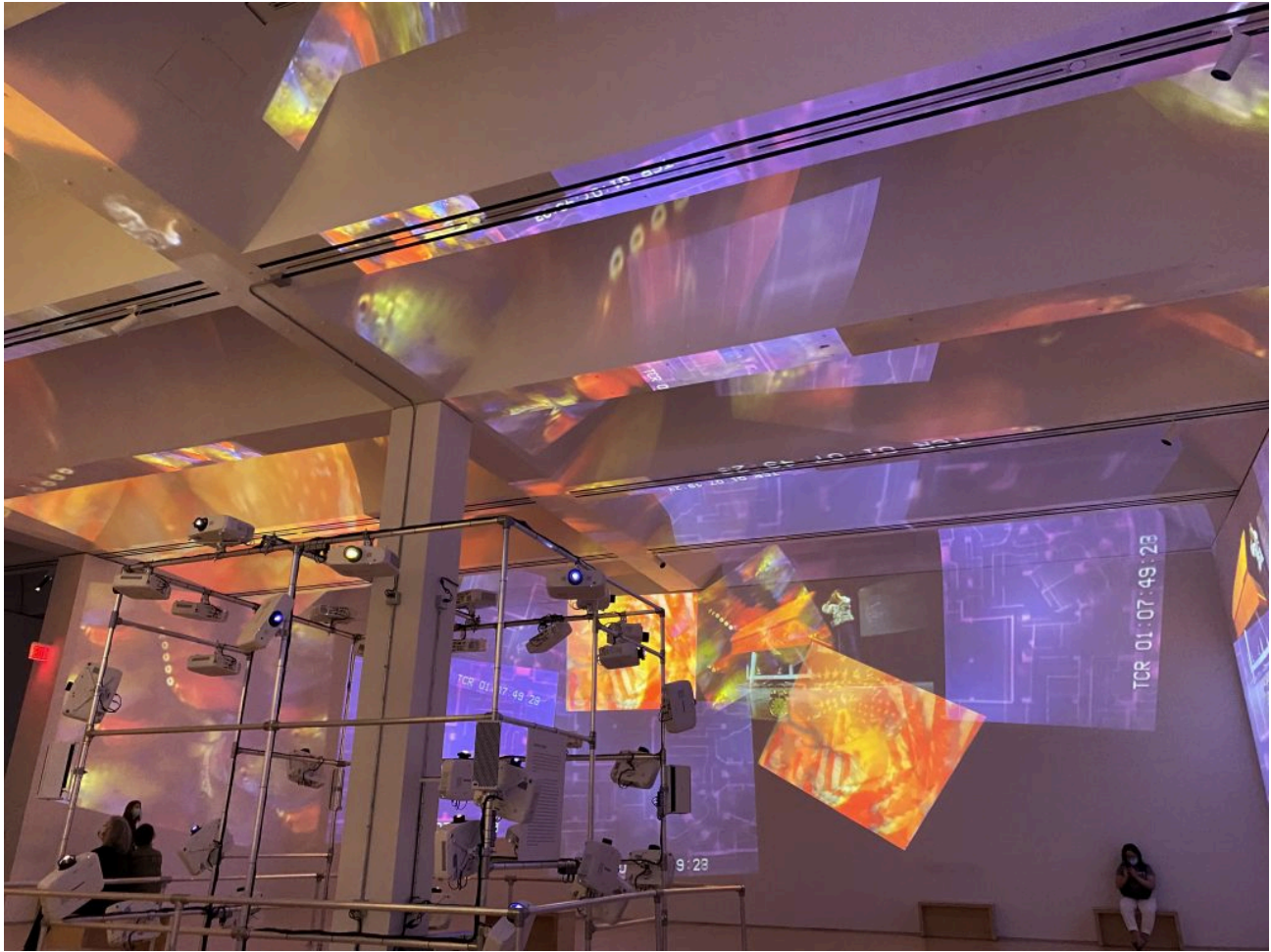
Before the twentieth-century, art history used to focus on two-dimensional and three-dimensional



art. Two-dimensional art like painting and drawing has a flat surface, with shapes that are given an illusion of mass and an illusion of space and movement by an artist using value, line and color. (See the [Visual Analysis chapter](#) for more information on the visual elements and principles of design as they relate to New Media Art too.) Three-dimensional art like sculpture has actual mass, not an illusion of mass. It also employs space as a design element.

Before the twentieth-century, 2-D and 3-D art were the only two categories of art that were collected, exhibited and considered Fine Art in Europe. Many forms of New Media Art, including film and video art are instead four-dimensional, or Time-Based Art. These works of art go beyond the flat surface of two-dimensional art and they go beyond the static nature of most three-dimensional art. Four-dimensional art incorporates actual motion and actual elapsed time as part of its design. (Check out this [description of 4-D Art from Medium](#) and look at the [4-D Design Program at Cranbrook](#) for more ideas about how 4-D art is defined today.)

For example, the artist Nam June Paik paid homage to an iconic work of 2-D art by the Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo (1475-1564), by creating a new 4-D Sistine Chapel. [Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling](#) is a series of static paintings featuring stories from the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. Michelangelo painted these stories on the ceiling of a chapel in Vatican City at the request of the Pope. You have to travel to Rome to see these paintings, and you are meant to view them in reverent silence. In 1993, Paik created a new Sistine Chapel for the Digital Age. His chapel can be reinstalled in many locations. It was first shown at the Venice Biennale and most recently has been on view in San Francisco at the Museum of Modern Art. It consists of multiple video screens playing loops of videos made by Paik himself and mixed with appropriated videos from commercial television. The installation juxtaposes moments of silence and calm, with rapidly moving images and loud sounds, creating an immersive experience that perhaps seemed strange and new in the early 1990s, but today feels as if the installation honors or exposes most people's day-to-day experience with visual culture.



Nam June Paik, *Sistine Chapel*, 1993/2021 (Installation view, [SFMOMA](#)); Courtesy the Estate of Nam June Paik; © Estate of Nam June Paik. Photo: Christine Weber. License: All Rights Reserved.

When considering the differences between traditional art media and New Media Art, consider why some artists began to shift away from traditional modes of expression and how the Digital Revolution created new ways of valuing, evaluating and engaging with art. How can we understand projects that employ emerging technologies but don't engage with the Elements of New Media Art? What are some of the differences between Nam June Paik's 1990s *Sistine Chapel* video installation and the [commercial digital recreation of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel](#) that toured the US in 2022? Does the traveling Sistine Chapel exhibition engage with the Elements of New Media Art or is it more related to elements of Traditional Art Media?

## Differences between Traditional Media and New Media in Art:

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TRADITIONAL ART MEDIA	NEW MEDIA ART
A one of a kind object.	Work in multiple states or copies.
Made by a single artist.	Collaborative authorship with other artists and/or the viewer.
Geographically limited.	Can be accessed anywhere.
Work has an end or is finite.	Work is in a state of flux; the viewer can change or "complete" the work.
One way communication; the viewer is passive.	Two way communication; the viewer is an active participant in the work's creation and completion.
Art is something you look at.	Art is something you interact with.
The artist has control over what the viewer sees.	The artist has limited control.
The content and presentation cannot be separated.	The content and presentation can be separated; the viewer provides the medium.
Artwork is distributed by galleries and official institutions, like museums.	Artwork bypasses gallery and museum systems.

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## Look & Consider: Traditional Art Media



Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, oil on wood panel, c. 1503–19; The Louvre, Paris. Photo: C2RMF. Source: [Wikimedia](#). License: [Public Domain](#).

To explore the differences between Traditional and New Art Media let's consider another famous Italian Renaissance painting, the *Mona Lisa*. The painting was completed between 1503 and 1519 by the artist, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). To the left is a digital image of the original oil on wood panel painting. If you've never seen the [Mona Lisa before, you can read more about its history in this detailed Wikipedia entry](#).

Review the table above and consider which qualities of Traditional Art Media you think apply to Leonardo's painting and why.

Explain how the painting is geographically limited, a one of a kind object, one way communication, something you look at.

What other elements of "Traditional Art Media" resonate as you examine this painting?



Crowd looking at the *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre. Photo by Victor Grigas. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

## Watch & Consider: Cao Fei

You've considered the *Mona Lisa* as a good example of Traditional Art Media. Now watch this [interview with the artist Cao Fei on Art:21](#) (13:43 minutes). Cao Fei's (born 1978) work is another good example of New Media Art so consider some of the ways her work relates to the qualities of New Media in the table above while listening to this interview.

Take notes in response to the following questions after watching the video:

1. What makes Cao Fei's work a good example of New Media Art? (Which of the Elements of New Media Art does her work engage with?)
2. What are some examples of role-playing and avatar creation in Cao Fei's work? What kinds of characters and avatars does she create and allow viewers to create? Why do you think this approach is of interest to Cao Fei?
3. Why does Cao Fei support the ability to fantasize in her art? In what ways can imagination contribute to building new worlds? How might fantasy be a strategy to cope with something that is overwhelming or seems beyond one's reach?
4. Cao Fei says that she thinks it is common in the nature of human beings to dream of establishing one's own rules of the game. How does Cao Fei's work in Second Life or in her videos provide a platform to experiment with dreaming and imagining new futures?
5. What are some major differences between Cao Fei's work and more traditional art media like painting or sculpture?





Cao Fei and all community members, *RMB City* a virtual community in Second Life, 2008-2010, Screenshot: Ina Centaur, Source: [Flickr](#), License: [CC BY 2.0](#)

## Comparison: Traditional Media + New Media



Cao Fei, China Tracy (artist Cao Fei) and Uli Sigg Cisse (collector Uli Sigg) in *RMB City*. 2008. Virtual project in Second Life. Image source: [Artforum](#). Courtesy of RMB City. License: [Educational Fair Use](#).



Leonardo da Vinci,  
*Mona Lisa*, oil on  
wood panel, c.  
1503–19; The Louvre,  
Paris.  
Photo: C2RMF. Source: [Wikimedia](#).  
License: [Public Domain](#).

### Questions to Consider:

1. What are some of the most significant differences between the *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci and *RMB City* by Cao Fei?
2. Why is Cao Fei's *RMB City* NOT geographically limited?
3. Why is *RMB City* NOT a one of a kind object?
4. Why is *RMB City* NOT one way communication?
5. What are some of the major differences between the ways these two works of art engage the audience?
6. What kind of meanings are generated by both works of art? What are some differences in the meanings you can draw from each one?
7. Are there other differences that mark the *Mona Lisa* as traditional art media and mark *RMB City* as New Media Art? If so, explain what you're seeing.

## Conclusion

We will continue to consider the various ways that New Media Art both differs from and is building on traditional art media throughout the rest of this textbook. As you explore the other chapters in this resource, you'll also have many opportunities to consider how the works of art you're examining

relate to the proposed Elements of New Media Art and other concepts presented in this chapter. Remember that this entire textbook is a preliminary and exploratory look at a field that is constantly evolving, so your engagement with New Media Art while using this textbook is only a starting point. Our ideas about and understanding of this field will continue to grow as we move through the rest of our lives encountering experiences proposed by artists who work in New Media.

## Key Takeaways

By working through this chapter, you will begin to:

1. Identify the central issues we'll explore throughout this textbook.
2. Explain why the study of New Media Art is important today.
3. Recognize that there are many different definitions of words like “art” and “artist” and that those varying definitions are representative of particular historical moments and cultures by considering the differences between New Media in art and Traditional Art Media.
4. Identify and explain some of the many elements, definitions and categories of New Media Art.

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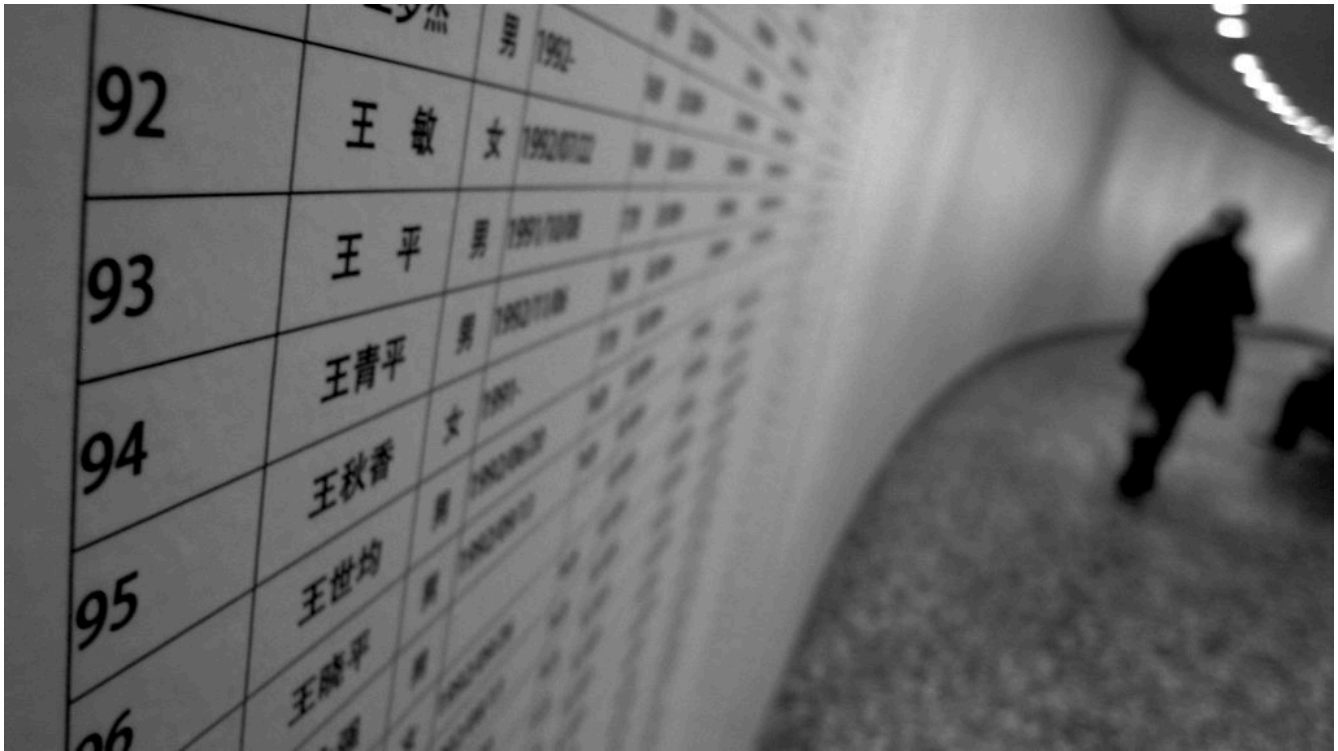
## VISUAL ANALYSIS AND NEW MEDIA ART

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### What is Visual Analysis?



Ai Weiwei, *Names of the Student Earthquake Victims Found by the Citizens' Investigation*, 2008 – 2011, inkjet print (installation view at the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C. in 2012). Photo © [Arts Observer](#). License: [Educational Fair Use](#).



Ai Weiwei, *Names of the Student Earthquake Victims Found by the Citizens' Investigation*, 2008 – 2011, inkjet print (installation view at the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C. in 2012). Photo by camera\_obscura. Source: [Flickr](#). License: [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

*Names of the Student Earthquake Victims Found by the Citizens' Investigation (2008 – 2011) is a large-scale inkjet print by artist and activist Ai Weiwei (born 1957) mounted to the walls of the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C. in 2012 for the exhibition "Ai Weiwei: According to What?" The print has been exhibited similarly in other art exhibitions around the world since then as a work comprising 21 scrolls measuring in total 10 ½ feet tall and over 42 feet long. The print depicts the names, ages, and birthdays of over 5000 children killed in sub-standard, government-built schools in the earthquake that hit the Sichuan Province in China in 2008. The names were collected by a group of volunteers organized by Ai Weiwei who were angry that the government did not acknowledge the deaths, destruction, loss, and grief of its citizens. The print is accompanied by [Remembrance](#) (2010, 3:41:25 run time), voice recording of the names read by thousands of participants. Participants shared in the work by recording their voices, delivering them via the internet to the project. In this installation, qualities of scale, line, and repetition impact viewers' experiences and add to meaning in the work.*

*The viewer is immediately struck by the [scale](#) of the work. Stretching floor to ceiling in height, a scroll unfurled along the length of a long wall, the print forces the viewer to step back to take in the magnitude of the work, then move forward and along the wall to view the small characters and numbers transcribed into a grid covering the print.*

*The [actual lines](#) of the grid, thin black lines repeated over and over, stretch the length and height*

of the wall and give the viewer visual cues for reading and moving through the work. The [implied lines](#) of the names and birthdates listed in Chinese characters translated into English alphabet and numbers in graph format emphasize the [vertical](#) height and the [horizontal](#) sweep of the wall. These implied lines add to the impactful scale and allow viewers to visualize in names the thousands of children killed.

The visual [repetition](#) of name after name in the inkjet print is emphasized in *Remembrance* by the audio repetition of thousands of readers speaking, one after the other, the names on the wall. Repetition of name after name of children killed in the earthquake creates a poignancy that reflects the tragedy and stirs urgency for justice and respect for the grieving families impacted.

This [nonrepresentational](#) work, grounded in the traditions of Chinese writing and calligraphy, is produced and presented in materials, methods, and genres of New Media Art. Ai Weiwei used the strategies of Social Practice in art to bring together volunteers in China to research and collect names, interview families, and compile names. He recruited other participants around the world to speak the names. Ai prints the grid of names using the contemporary technology of an inkjet printer, and he employs the internet, platforms like Twitter, and digital technology of audio recording as tools for his work. The scale and scope contribute to a memorial work of art that addresses collective trauma and collective grief.

The introductory paragraphs here visually analyze *Names of the Student Earthquake Victims Found by the Citizens* and *Remembrance* by Ai Weiwei. The works are firstly introduced and described. A close look at visual elements of line and principles of design of scale and repetition show the impact on the viewer and ways that the work creates meaning, including the ties to materials and genres of New Media Art here. Looking at and experiencing what is traditionally called “formal” elements of art is like learning the key words of a new language. Using these “key words” in visual and experiential analysis is speaking the language of art.

In this chapter, you will be introduced to the vocabulary of art in order to help you look at, talk about, write about, and even make art. The focus will be practicing analysis of art made with materials and processes specific to New Media Art. When you develop this analysis with the Elements of New Media Art explained in the [Introduction](#) to this resource, you can offer rich interpretations of works of art.

## Stop & Reflect: What is Visual Analysis?

1. Consider the analysis above. What are the challenges of analyzing the form of a work of art that you can't see in person? How do the two photographs and the writing provide slightly different ways of engaging with the work?
2. Some New Media Art by nature of its medium (materials), processes and techniques, or conceptual approaches are challenging to analyze visually. What are some of the challenges when trying to describe and analyze a work of art when all you have is photographic documentation and you weren't there? You will experience this challenge throughout this text, for example in the chapter on [Performance Art](#).
3. Ai Weiwei's work touches on a number of genres explored in this book. Look at the chapters listed in the [Contents](#) of this book. Anticipating your read and what you already know about New Media Art, how would Ai Weiwei's work fit into some of these chapters? For example, how do you think his work is a good example of [Social Practice in Art](#)?

The three main ways to tackle a work of art are (and best in this order)

1. Describe the work of art.
2. Analyze the work of art using the terminology of form and design.
3. Interpret the work of art.

Viewers have a tendency to jump right into interpretation when analyzing art. Stepping back and describing and analyzing for your reader or audience (before interpreting) will lend validity to your reading of the work of art.

## Firstly, describe the work of art

Imagine that your reader is not able to see the work of art you wish to analyze. Start by describing as if you are telling them over the telephone (rather than showing them over video!).

## Introducing the basics

Introduce the work of art with the basic archival information that you know. For example, in this text and in other books, you can often find this information in the caption below the image. In a museum,



you may find it in the wall text on a plaque next to the work of art. In an art gallery, the information may be available at the front desk.

- name of the artist
- title of the work
- date it was created
- size – you can describe the relative or approximate size or give the exact measurements of the art object. Measurements should be listed in this order: height x width x depth. If you are not writing about an object, you can express size in other ways, like the length in time of a film.
- media or materials used to make the work
- location of the work

## Note stylistic aspects

Study the work and think about a general way to describe it to someone who can't see it. Is this work representational or nonrepresentational? Is it expressive or not so emotive? What is the subject matter? Address the basic stylistic aspects of the work:

- **Representational art** attempts to depict the external, natural world in a visually understandable way. The following can describe representational art:
  - **realistic** — depicted as in actual, visible (often social and political) reality
  - **naturalistic** — resembling physical appearance
  - **idealized** — shown in perfection as in prevailing ideals of the culture
  - **stylized** — conforming to an intellectual or artistic idea rather than to naturalistic appearances; stylized images may consist of shapes that would symbolize or suggest a represented object.
  - **abstract** — natural forms are not rendered in a naturalistic way but are simplified or distorted to some extent, often to convey the essence of the object or idea. Abstract art can contain some elements of representation or can be nonobjective
- **Nonrepresentational or nonobjective art** does not reproduce the appearance of objects, figures, or scenes in the natural world. Nonrepresentational art can be composed of lines, shapes, and colors, all chosen for their expressive potential.
- **Expressionistic art** – containing exaggeration of form and expression; appealing to subjective response. Both representational and nonrepresentational art can have expressive qualities defined by visual elements. Expressionism is often a characteristic in different styles and art movements of Western Art History, like Romanticism, German Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, and Neo-Expressionism.

## Stop & Reflect: Stylistic aspects

1. As you explore other chapters in this book, ask yourself how you might apply these terms to different examples of New Media Art. For example, how is the [early experimental film](#) by Hans Richter (*Rhythmus 21*, 1921/1923) a good example of nonrepresentational art?
2. Expressionism is often a characteristic in different styles and art movements of Western Art History, like Romanticism, German Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, and Neo-Expressionism. In these, paintings may have loose, textured brushstrokes or bold, unexpected colors. How can genres of New Media Art, especially those that rely heavily on new technologies, show qualities of expressionistic art? Try this example of Internet Art (or Net Art) – <https://www.jacksonpollock.org>

## Organize your description

You may describe from foreground to background, outside to inside, left to right, or beginning to end. Use the work of art to help guide your description. Your description could become quite complex and detailed. Try to tackle it in a few sentences and then move into analysis.

## Secondly, analyze the work of art

The essence of analysis is your next step:

- identifying visual elements and principles of design and
- explaining the impact of those elements on the viewer or on the work itself.

This takes quite a bit of practice. You will want to return to this chapter as you explore the different genres of New Media Art throughout this text.

A written visual analysis of an artwork contains some, but NOT all, of the following elements. The analysis should contain the elements most pertinent to the art object.

## Visual Elements and Form

Formal elements are the purely visual aspects of art. As they impact the viewer, principles of design (below) can be expressed.

For example, read the analysis of this photograph, and see if you can recognize

- introduction and description,
- visual analysis, and
- interpretation.



William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Open Door*, 1844, photograph from his book *The Pencil of Nature*. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

*This early photograph The Open Door (1844) by William Henry Fox Talbot was made from a calotype negative for his book The Pencil of Nature. It depicts a straw or twig broom leaning on the doorframe in the doorway of an open door. A lantern hangs on the outside wall to the right of the door. The door is cropped, and inside you can see a faceted window. **Line** and **light** are important visual elements in this photograph.*

*The vertical lines of the carved stone door facing frame the broom and the dark interior space. These lines are echoed in the vertical wooden slats of the door and in the frame of the interior window. The vertical lines create a calm mood and unify the image. The diagonal line of the broom repeated in the edge of the shadow on the door adds energy and interest to the composition. The energetic lines draw our attention to the space in the middle of the composition.*

*It's here in the doorway that we see a contrast between the very brightly lit exterior and the dark interior. This contrast also creates interest and piques curiosity about the faint faceted light deeper inside the door.*

*Both line and light create a focal point and add mystery to this photograph.*

## Line

You may notice actual (rendered) lines in the work of art and you may also notice implied lines. Line is important in most all discussions of visual elements. Both types of line show movement and direction in the work.

**Actual lines** can be contour or outlines and/or more expressive lines of force within the object that define the shape and lead the viewer's eye.

**Implied line** often relates to overall composition. This is an important element to look for when you analyze. Notice the ways that shapes and figures are arranged in order to direct our reactions. For example,

- HORIZONTAL lines and horizontally arranged compositions are usually very calm.
- VERTICAL lines create the same effect and also exude power (like a skyscraper).
- DIAGONAL lines and compositions arranged along diagonals are much more energetic.
- CURVED lines often express energy as well.

## Color

Here are basic color properties that you can consider when analyzing:

- **hue** – the name of the color (dark red, pale blue, buttery yellow,...)
- **value** – refers to the degree of lightness or darkness (on the scale from white to black) often created by light source
- **intensity** or **saturation** – the degree of brightness or dullness; the purity of the color

Colors can have emotional effects on viewers. Imagine yourself in a red room; now imagine yourself in a blue room. What emotions do the colors evoke?

## Light

Since light is a function of New Media Art processes like photography and filmmaking, it is often important to explain the impact of light in the art work. Analyses of architecture should always comment on the use of light.

Light is used in other art to create a sense of perspective and depth and/or emphasis within a composition.

**Chiaroscuro** is the use of light and dark to depict the volume of a figure on a two-dimensional picture plane. An artist uses chiaroscuro to represent light falling across a curved surface ultimately showing the illusion of three-dimensionality of that surface. Chiaroscuro is often pointed out in drawing and painting, though you may see examples of it in [Printmaking](#).

## Spatial qualities

**Mass** and **volume** is expressed in three-dimensional art objects.

Mass is three-dimensional form, often implying bulk, density and weight.

Volume is similar to mass, but volume can also be void or empty or suggest an enclosed space.

**Three-dimensional space** is the space that our bodies occupy. Sculpture and architecture and other objects with mass exist in space.

- When analyzing architecture, always think about space: interior spaces, exterior spaces, and how you might experience or be directed through a space.
- When analyzing sculpture, consider the space which it occupies.
- With New Media Art, consider the architectural or sculptural qualities and how they may construct and define space.

**Implied** or **represented space** explains how a three-dimensional world is represented on a two-dimensional picture plane

**Pictorial depth (spatial recession)** often relates to the foreground, middle ground, and background represented in a picture. There are several devices for showing pictorial depth:

- overlapping
- diminution
- vertical perspective and diagonal perspective
- atmospheric perspective
- divergent perspective, isometric perspective, and intuitive perspective
- linear perspective (one-point & two-point)
- foreshortening

**Positive** and **negative space** are often discussed together.

- negative space (unfilled) – Negative space is often as much a part of the work as its positive space, especially in sculpture.
- positive space (solids)

## Texture and pattern

When discussing surface quality, draw on those adjectives related to texture: for example, *smooth*, *polished*, *rough*, *coarse*, *oily*.

- texture of the actual surface of artwork

- texture of object represented
- Pattern is a repetitive motif or design that may add a visual texture.

## Time and motion

Artists use visual elements and principles of design to depict time and motion in art. Pay attention to the ways that time and motion are expressed. **Film-** and **video-based** media are founded on qualities of time and motion. Time is an underlying quality in many of the [Elements of New Media Art](#). You will want to circle back to expressions of time as you look at art in this book.

### Stop & Reflect: Visual Elements and Form

1. Chiaroscuro is often pointed out in drawing and painting, though you may see examples of it in printmaking. In the Printmaking chapter, look at the etching by Rembrandt van Rijn, [Self-Portrait with Saskia](#), 1636. How does he express chiaroscuro using hatching and cross-hatching? Point to details of light and dark in the print, and explain how chiaroscuro makes the figures in this two-dimensional work appear three dimensional.
2. Jump to the section of this book that discusses [3D printing](#). How do the sculptures by Morehshin Allahyari both express and challenge your sense of mass in the works? Point to details in one of the sculptures to help explain.
3. Think about three-dimensional space when you look at [Installation Art](#). Choose one example of Installation Art, and explain how the work uses or directs space to create meaning.
4. How do artists making [Light Art](#) use light to create a sense of three-dimensional space? Point to an example, and imagine your perception and misperception of space.
5. Look at Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) in the section of the book called [Earthworks](#). Discuss the contrasts of textures in this work, and their impact on the viewer or visitor who walks the spiral in the actual landscape. Point to details and use adjectives to describe different textures.
6. Return to the Introduction and the explanations of the [Elements of New Media Art](#). What are the nuances of time in different types of New Media Art? You will be able to answer this question more deeply as you read further in this text.

## Principles of Design

### Balance

- **Symmetry** – two halves of a composition correspond to one another in terms of size, shape,



and placement of forms. The implied center of gravity is the vertical axis (an imaginary line drawn down the center of the composition). Symmetrical balance often lends a sense of stability to the work asymmetrical balance – balance achieved in a composition when neither side reflects or mirrors the other. This is usually achieved by a balance of the visual weights of forms and spaces represented.

- **Asymmetrical balance** often lends a sense of dynamism to the work.

## Emphasis and focal point

Artists manipulate line, color, scale, placement, and light among other elements to create a focal point in a work. Note the focal point in works of art. Often, though, there is no single point that is emphasized.

## Scale and proportion

- **scale** – size in relation to a standard or “normal” size and/or in relation to the objects around it
- **proportion** – relationship between the parts of an object; or the relationship of the whole object to its environment

## Rhythm and repetition

Think about the way repetition might create a rhythm and the way that these elements contribute to your experience of the work of art.

## Unity and variety

Visual elements and principles of design contribute to a sense of oneness (unity) or difference (variety) in works of art.

### Stop and Reflect: Principles of Design

1. Return to the discussion in the Introduction about Stephanie Dinkins, [Conversations with Bina48](#) (2014-ongoing). How does Dinkins use symmetry in the video presentation of her conversations with Bina48, an intelligent computer? Point to some examples of her play with visual symmetry, and explain how it adds meaning to the work.
2. Return to the discussion in the Introduction about Raoul Hausmann, [Mechanical Head \(Spirit of Our](#)

- [Times](#)), 1919, and the Dada precedent in New Media Art. Explain asymmetry in this sculpture and the impact on meaning and your experience of this work.
3. Return to William Henry Fox Talbot's photograph [The Open Door](#) (1844) discussed above. What is the focal point, and what visual elements contribute to this? Point to examples, and discuss how your eye moves through the composition.
  4. Now, look again at Nam June Paik's video installation [Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii](#) (1995), discussed in the Introduction. Is focal point more difficult to find in this work? Explain the different ways that this work grabs your attention. Why would an artist emphasize focal point in a work? Why would an artist intentionally avoid emphasis in a work?
  5. Look at Krzysztof Wodiczko's [projection on the Hirshhorn Museum](#) (in the chapter on Institutional Critique). How is scale an important visual element in his work? What meaning(s) does scale create in this work?
  6. Watch Dara Birnbaum's video [Technology/Transformation/Wonder Woman](#) (1978-1979) in the chapter on Digital Video Art and Video Installation. Point to examples of repetition, and explain how this impacts the work and the viewer. What meanings from the work are made from repetition?
  7. Artists constantly use unity of a particular visual element to tie the composition or installation space together – to create a sense of oneness. Can you locate a work of art in this text and explain how the artists creates unity in their work? How does unity add to meaning?
  8. Artists constantly use variety of approaches to a visual element in their work to show a sense of difference or to create interest. Can you locate a work of art in this text and explain how the artist creates variety in their work? How does variety add to meaning?

## Medium (media in the plural) and process

As you analyze, it's also important to think about MEDIUM (material from which an art object is made) and PROCESS.

### Questions to Consider before reading further

1. How do people make art? List all of the media or processes used to make art that you can think of.
2. The medium – or media in the plural – is/are the materials with which the work of art is made. The art processes or techniques are the ways in which the works of art are made, considering the tools and how they are used. Which media and processes that you listed are tied to traditional art practices?

3. Which media and processes that you listed are examples of New Media Art? When is it ambiguous or contradictory?
4. What connections can you draw between some of these media and processes?
5. Look at the lists below, and see how many different media you identified.
6. Return to the discussion [Traditional Media and New Media](#) in the Introduction. How does this discussion add to your exploration of visual analysis in this chapter? What themes are significant?

These lists name the different media and processes tied to categories of two-dimensional, three-dimensional, and four-dimensional or time-based arts, the New Media Art of this text.

### **Two-dimensional arts** – painting, drawing, printmaking, photography

- Painting – wall painting, illumination (decoration of books with paintings), miniature painting, scroll painting, easel painting
  - encaustic, fresco, tempera, oil, watercolor, gouache, acrylic and synthetic media
  - painting related techniques – collage, mosaic
- Drawing – sketches (quick notes), studies (carefully drawn analyses), drawings as artworks, cartoons (full-scale preparatory drawings)
  - dry media – pencil, metalpoint, charcoal, chalk and crayon
  - liquid media – pen and ink, brush and ink
- Printmaking (graphic arts) – images printed or reproduced
  - relief printmaking processes – woodcut, wood engraving, linocut
  - intaglio printmaking processes – engraving, drypoint, mezzotint, etching, aquatint
  - lithography
  - screenprinting (silkscreen printing)
- Photographs

### **Three-dimensional arts** – sculpture (cast, modeled or assembled), architecture, ornamental and practical arts

- Sculpture – three-dimensional,
  - methods of sculpting – carved (reductive, material is taken away), modeled (additive, built up from material), assembled
  - types of sculpture
    - Sculpture-in-the-round (freestanding)
    - relief sculpture – image projects from surface of which it is a part
    - high relief — projecting far off background
    - low relief — projections slightly raised

- sunken relief — image carved into surface, highest part of relief is flat

**Four-dimensional arts or New Media arts** – art that uses or is impacted by aspects of time and/or technology

- ephemeral arts – work changes, disappears, in state of constant change, or must be re-experienced
  - performance art, earthworks, social interaction
- film, video art, computer art, digital photography, virtual reality, augmented reality

As you continue to explore this textbook, focusing on New Media Art and processes, you will want to include the experiential [Elements of New Media Art](#) that are explained in the Introduction.

## Thirdly, interpret the work

### Content and Context

As you interpret and add content and context to your visual analysis by researching aspects of the work of art, you may go in a number of directions:

- Subject matter – What is represented in the art; or is the subject matter lines and colors if you are analyzing a non-representational work of art?
- Ideas and concepts within work – This is a good time to consider the [Elements of New Media Art](#) (in the Introduction) if you haven't already.
- Social, political, economic contexts – This comes with research and knowledge of art history.
- Intention of the artist – However, we cannot always know this.
- Reception of viewer – Think about the way you as a viewer might experience the art.
- Meaning of the work of art.

Using the language of visual art outlined in this chapter, you need no research or knowledge of art history to discuss art immediately. Think about how much you can do by just [describing](#) (firstly) and [analyzing](#) (secondly) a work of art! With research, however, you can create a deeper context for the work of art. You can determine styles and explore content. You can learn about the history and time and place in which the work was initially created. You can consider the current context of contemporary viewers and how this changes or enhances meaning. All of this leads to interpretation and contributes to your own thoughts about the work. Don't feel pressure to interpret works of art immediately. Give yourself time to feel comfortable describing and visually analyzing using this language, the terminology in this chapter, that is very specific to art.

## Stop & Reflect: Content, Context, and Interpretation

1. Return to the [visual analysis](#) of Ai Weiwei's *Names of the Student Earthquake Victims Found by the Citizens' Investigation* (2008 – 2011) at the beginning of this chapter.
  - Point to examples of description in the writing.
  - Point to examples of visual analysis.
  - Point to moments in which the author is making interpretation by adding context and explanations of content.
2. Return to the description and analysis of William Henry Fox Talbot's photograph [The Open Door](#) (1844) discussed above.
  - What interpretations can you make based on the analysis of line and light?
  - What other information could you use to interpret more deeply this photograph? What questions would you try to answer in your research?
3. Return to the discussion of the Elements of New Media Art in the Introduction, in particular the [Readymade](#). How does Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917/1964) resist visual analysis? Why does Conceptual Art often resist visual analysis?

## Key Takeaways

By working through this chapter, you will begin to:

1. Learn how to describe a works of art.
2. Identify visual elements in art.
3. Practice the vocabulary of visual analysis to show the impact of visual qualities.
4. Recognize the difference between describing, analyzing, and interpreting works of art.
5. Find description, analysis, and interpretation in writing about art.
6. Analyze works of New Media Art using both the elements of visual analysis and the Elements of New

Media Art presented in the introduction to this text.

## Optional: Lesson Extensions

Below you will find more resources about Visual Analysis.

### Visual Analysis – general resources

"The Skill of Describing." *Smarthistory*. Source: [YouTube](#). (3:43 minutes)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=5#oembed-1>

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker, "[Art historical analysis: an introduction](#)," in *Smarthistory*, August 9, 2015, accessed September 10, 2021 (10:39 minutes).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=5#oembed-2>

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker, "[How to do visual \(formal\) analysis](#)," in *Smarthistory*, September 18, 2017, accessed September 25, 2017 (9:52 minutes).







One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=5#oembed-3>

## Resources for Elements of Art and Principles of Design

Use the [Getty Museum website](#) to help define the “elements of art” and “principles of design” in visual (or formal) analysis of works of art. The Getty Museum also has a good YouTube channel.

- The Getty Museum. “[Introducing Formal Analysis: Landscape](#).” Published 4/30/15. (4:51 minutes) Watch this video that analyzes landscape painting.
- The Getty Museum. “[Introducing Formal Analysis: Still Life](#).” Published 4/30/15. (4:23 minutes) Watch this video that analyzes still life painting.

“Analyzing the Elements of Art.” This “learning blog” from the *New York Times* gives some good help on analyzing elements of art. They are working to build this, but for now, you can explore

- “[Five Ways to Think about Line](#)”
- “[Five Ways to Think about Color](#)”
- “[Four Ways to Think about Value](#)”
- “[Six Ways to Think about Shape](#)”
- “[Four Ways to Think about Form](#)”
- “[Five Ways to Think about Space](#)”
- “[Seven Ways to Think about Texture](#)”

For a more detailed explanation of “color,” see this [handout](#) from the National Gallery of Art website.

## Visual Analysis specific to Photography

The Getty Museum and Khan Academy. “[Exploring photographs through description, formal analysis \(visual analysis\), and reflection \(meaning and interpretation\)](#).” Adapted from *Exploring Photographs: A Curriculum for Middle and High School Teachers*, a curricular publication of the Education Department at the J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007.

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Stokstad, Marilyn. *Art History*. Second edition. Prentice Hall, 2001. Pages 18-23 give a good overview of visual analysis.

3.

## PRINTMAKING

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### A Revolution of Process & Technology

This chapter outlines key moments in the development of printmaking, introduces several printmaking processes, and connects printmaking to New Media art. After reading a definition of each process and viewing a video demonstration, you are asked to examine both historic and contemporary examples. Throughout the chapter, we will reflect on how printmaking applies to the [elements of New Media Art](#) discussed in the Introduction.

#### Watch & Consider: Introduction to Printmaking

Watch “Pressure + Ink: Introduction to Printmaking” by MoMA (2011). Source: [YouTube](#) (1:49 minutes).

This video is from a series that introduces various printmaking methods. You will watch additional videos from this series throughout the chapter. Please note: this chapter will introduce *four* types of printmaking processes.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=22#oembed-1>*

#### Questions to Consider:

1. Remember, our chapter introduces *four* types of printmaking processes, but what are the three introduced in the video? What are some key differences you noted between the three processes outlined in the video?
2. What do all printmaking processes have in common?
3. How would you define “fine art” printmaking?

## Read & Reflect: History of Printmaking

The reading linked below complements the information presented in this chapter. “History of Printmaking” is a short essay from Tribeca Printworks summarizing the history of printmaking from the Han Dynasty China, to the 21st century. This is a recommended resource for further background on the history of the print.

- [History of Printmaking](#) (Tribeca Printworks)

## The Basics: What is a Print?

The process of making a print starts with a **matrix**. A matrix is a template or the base from which the print is pulled. In printmaking, the matrix is often made of wood, metal, or stone, but it can also be made of wax paper, linoleum, or even a potato!

An artist creates an image to print by drawing or carving onto the matrix's surface using tools or chemicals. The matrix is then inked, and the image is transferred to paper, or another material such as fabric, through pressure, creating a reverse impression.

Prints differ from paintings or drawings in that they usually exist in multiples created from the same inked matrix (the exception would be a [monoprint](#)). Around the late 19th century, artists began to sign and number each impression, though this did not become common in the United States until the 1960s. A set of identical impressions made from an individual plate or group of plates is called an **edition**.

The four standard printmaking methods you'll explore in this chapter are **relief**, **intaglio**, **planographic**, and **stencil**.

## Why is Printmaking Revolutionary?

The advent of printmaking technologies contributed to shifts in how media is both produced and consumed. While in the 21st century, we are accustomed to the ubiquity and accessibility of printed and digital imagery (think of billboards, magazines, social media, etc.), prior to the 11th century in East Asia, and the 15th century in Western Europe, unique images were reproduced by hand, making them rare, expensive, and available only to an elite few.

In eleventh-century China, the artisan Bi Sheng created a clay collection of individual Chinese letterforms that could be freely assembled in any desired combination, a process called **movable type**. A thirteenth-century Korean inventor named Chwe Yoon Eyee created the first metal movable type, made of cast bronze, which was more durable than the previous known iterations made of wood or clay. Later, in 15th century Europe, a German goldsmith named Johannes Gutenberg developed a mechanical printing press that built on knowledge of printmaking processes gained through centuries of trade along the Silk Road, between East Asia and Europe.

These developments in movable type led to greater **access** to printed media, such as books, since printing was less expensive than creating a painting or drawing, and prints could be reproduced in multiples. In Europe, wealthy patrons still drove demand for paintings, sculptures, and altarpieces, but printmakers could create for a more diverse audience of collectors. This aided in the **democratization** of art and connects printmaking to later forms of New Media.

Both analog and digital printmaking methods share qualities with New Media Art. As you read in the [Introduction](#), many works of New Media Art share several common characteristics including: **fluidity**, **intangibility**, **"liveness,"** **variability**, **replicability**, **connectivity**, **interactivity**, **computability**, and **chance** (revisit Elements of New Media Art in the Introduction to review the whole list). Let's try applying some of these qualities of New Media to printmaking.

## Elements of New Media Art: Replicability

Except for monoprints, prints exist in multiple impressions pulled from the same matrix. This ability to produce multiples differs from a more traditional medium, like painting, which creates a unique object. **Replicability** de-centralizes the importance of the singular art object by reconsidering how artworks are valued. Take a moment to consider, for example, how the existence of more than one impression of an artist's work affects the art object's perceived commercial value? Does having more than one copy of an artwork affect how it is collected?

## Elements of New Media Art: Chance

What role does **chance** play in printmaking? Watch the video, embedded below, to see the contemporary artist Kiki Smith (born 1954) working on a print in the studio. Watch as Smith, whose work is discussed later in this chapter, pulls multiple impressions of an image, retouching the plate

between each one, refining the composition she wants to create. Chance is an important principle to Smith's process because she doesn't know the exact effect each alteration to the plate will have on the finished product until she pulls the print from the press.



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"[Kiki Smith: Printmaking, Art21 Extended Play](#)" (Art21, 4:56 minutes)

## Elements of New Media Art: Variability

Closely related to the role of chance in printmaking, **variability** can refer to the slight differences between each proof of a print. We could also consider the different technologies that go into producing a print, such as the press or the type of paper used, and how these can affect the outcome of the finished artwork.

In his 2001 book, *The Language of New Media*, author Lev Manovich writes: "The principle of variability, exemplifies how, historically, changes in media technologies are correlated with social change." If we apply Manovich's description of variability to printmaking, we can see that even historic examples of the medium allowed artists to experiment and innovate with new technologies designed to democratize art by using lower cost materials, creating multiples, and de-centering the unique art object in favor of mass distribution.

Replicability, chance, and variability also reveal the importance of **process** not only to New Media art, but to twentieth and twenty-first-century artistic practices more broadly. An emphasis on process returns focus to how works of art are made, highlighting the primacy of creating in a conceptual and even performative way, rather than as a means to a completed object.

Though printmaking has been around since at least the fifth-century, in this chapter you will learn about several artists, such as Elizabeth Catlett (1915–2012), Corita Kent (1918–1986), and Mickalene Thomas (born 1971), who've intentionally incorporated printmaking into their revolutionary practices. We'll also examine the work of a digital artist, Morehshin Allahyari (born 1985), who uses a 3D printer to create models of artifacts destroyed by ISIS fighters.



## Focus: Defining Printmaking Processes

The section below reviews the different printmaking processes in greater detail. There are several additional resources listed below the explanation of each process, to help give a full overview of each method. You don't have to visit every resource, but focus on at least one option for each process, more if there are techniques you'd like to learn more about.

*All printmaking definitions are reproduced here with permission from Crown Point Press' (San Francisco, CA) [Magical Secrets](#) website.*

After reviewing the processes outlined below and watching some printmaking techniques in action, we'll explore some specific examples. As we review each print in detail, we'll practice some of the [visual analysis strategies reviewed earlier in our text](#).

### Relief

One of the four basic printmaking methods, which also include intaglio, stencil, and planographic. Relief printing, the oldest print process, encompasses woodcut, linocut, hand-set type, rubber stamps, and related processes like potato prints. The plate or block is incised, but the ink is applied to the top surface rather than to the incisions as in intaglio. Intaglio plates can be printed in relief, and sometimes relief and intaglio inkings are combined.

- Watch a video demonstrating the relief process from [MoMA's Pressure + Ink series](#) (embedded below, 6:52 minutes).
- *Optional:* [watch a short demonstration of the woodcut process](#) from the British Museum (3:38 minutes).
- *Optional:* read about the [woodcut process on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's website](#).



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## Relief Processes

Relief printing is one of the four basic printmaking methods, which also include intaglio, stencil, and planographic. Relief printing is the oldest print process and we'll examine woodcut and linocut below. For any relief process, the matrix is cut so that the design is *raised above* the surface of the plate or block. Ink is then applied directly to the raised surface of the design, rather than pressed into the grooves, or incisions. One common type of relief printing you may have used is a rubber stamp. The first relief process detailed below is woodcut.

### Woodcut

As mentioned above, woodcut was developed in China in the 8th century and is the earliest printmaking method. Woodcuts are printed in relief, which means the image is carved into a wooden block, and the ink is applied to the top surface of the design. Woodcuts, such as Katsushika Hokusai's (1760-1849) *The Great Wave*, pictured below, are printed using multiple blocks to achieve a **polychrome**, or multi-color, effect.



Katsushika Hokusai, *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (*Kanagawa oki nami ura*), also known as *The Great Wave*, from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-32, polychrome woodblock print, ink and color on paper. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

*The Great Wave* is an example of an [ukiyo-e](#) print. **Ukiyo-e** means “floating world” and refers to prints made during the Edo cultural period during the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1867) in Japan. Ukiyo-e prints emphasize line, shape, and areas of flat color. Each color is printed with a separate block, with the black outline being the last block printed. The subject matter is often the **ephemeral** (fleeting) and sensual qualities of city life. For a deeper dive into this print, please view the video embedded below:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=22#oembed-4>

["Better Know: the Great Wave"](#) (The Art Assignment, 8:35 minutes).

Another example of a woodcut print is the American artist Amanda Snyder's (1894-1980), [Ageless Woman](#) (20th century, woodcut on paper). This print is in the collection of the Portland Art Museum, and while a high resolution image of it cannot be reproduced here, [you may examine it through the Portland Art Museum's online collections database](#).





Amanda Snyder, *Ageless Woman*, 1894/1980, woodcut on paper, Gift of Eugene E. Snyder, [Portland Art Museum](#). No

known copyright restrictions. [Educational Fair Use](#).

In Snyder's print, we see a woman, in profile, her hair piled in a bun on top of her head. This is another example of a woodblock print, but unlike Hokusai's work you looked at earlier, Snyder's work is **monochromatic**. Remember, all the white areas in the print are where Snyder has removed wood from the block. Notice how she's scraped away long linear areas around the woman's head to emphasize her face. A combination of curved and **cross-hatched lines** define the figure's hair, face, and ears.

### Stop & Reflect: Amanda Snyder

1. How would you describe the different lines Snyder creates? Think about both their direction and width. How do these lines move your eyes around the composition?
2. How has Snyder created different textures in her print? Compare, for example, the texture of the woman's hair with the texture of her garment.
3. What do you think this woman is feeling? What parts of the composition led you to this conclusion?

## Linoleum Cut (Linocut)

A linoleum, or **linocut**, is another type of relief process, which was popular with artists in the 20th-century. Linocuts are created like woodcuts, but use linoleum instead of wood as the matrix. Linoleum blocks usually have a wood base with a thin layer of linoleum on top. Linoleum is very soft, compared to wood, and can be cut away more easily in any direction, since there is no wood grain to contend with, creating more fluid, soft, and rounded lines. They also hold ink evenly on the surface and create smooth areas of light and dark. Below, you'll examine a work by Elizabeth Catlett that highlights the qualities of this printmaking method. You can [read about Catlett's work on the Museum of Modern Art's website](#) for more information about this print.





Elizabeth Catlett, *Sharecropper*, 1952, published 1968-70, linoleum cut on paper, 47 x 48.1 cm (Museum of Modern Art). Image: Karl Steel Source: [Flickr](#). License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#).

As mentioned above, compared to a block of wood, linoleum is easier to carve and creates a smoother line because there is no woodgrain to scrape against. This difference is evident by comparing the lines in Amanda Snyder's *Ageless Woman* with those produced by Elizabeth Catlett



in *Sharecropper*. Examine the lines in Catlett's work carefully; how would you describe them? Since there is less resistance when carving into linoleum, you might have noticed how fluid and curvilinear Catlett's lines appear.

As you read on the [Museum of Modern Art's website](#), Catlett's work as a printmaker reflects her interest in creating socially engaged art. Since prints exist in multiples and can be more widely distributed than paintings or drawings, printmaking is an ideal medium for disseminating works to a large audience. Printmaking, especially linocut, is also a more affordable medium. Additionally, the subject matter of the print reflects Catlett's socially engaged approach. After the Civil War in the United States (1861-1865), many former slaves became sharecroppers, meaning they were forced to give up the vast majority of their crops to the owner of the land they worked. This led to generations of poverty and kept many Black Americans bound to slavery by a new name.

Catlett produced this print while at the Taller de Gráfica Popular (The Workshop for Popular Graphic Art) in Mexico City, Mexico. There, she worked collaboratively with other artists and with labor groups, who would comment on works in progress. Artists at the Taller de Gráfica Popular would often adjust their compositions according to the critiques they received. This environment of collaboration and connection to the people their art would serve reveals the revolutionary nature of printmaking.

## Stop & Reflect: Elizabeth Catlett

1. How would you describe the figure in *Sharecropper*? How has the artist drawn the viewer's attention to the figure? What is the person's expression?
2. Notice the use of light and shadow in Catlett's black and white print. How has Catlett used black and white to create contrast? What aspects of the composition are highlighted? What areas are pushed into shadow?
3. Where do you notice different textures in the print? What techniques does Catlett use to distinguish between different textures?
4. How is the woman's labor as a sharecropper alluded to in her dress and expression?
5. Catlett also [created a color linocut of this image](#). How does the addition of color impact your experience of the work?
6. Finally, try to imagine what might be outside the picture's frame. Where is the sharecropper? Is she alone or with others? Is she at rest? Can you imagine what she's thinking?

## Intaglio

A method of printing in which the image is printed from below the surface of the plate. Intaglio platemaking normally involves using etching, drypoint, aquatint, or engraving processes. Intaglio is the only way of printing that can print ink in varying thicknesses. All other methods deposit ink in a uniform layer from the surface of a plate to the surface of the paper or other material.

- Watch a video demonstrating the **intaglio** process from [MoMA's Pressure + Ink series](#) (embedded below, 5:04 minutes).
- We'll focus on examples of **etching** and **engraving** in this chapter.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=22#oembed-5>*

## Intaglio Processes

### Etching



Lucian Freud, *Girl with a Fig Leaf*, 1947, etching on paper. © [The Lucian Freud Archive / Bridgeman Images](#). Source: [Tate Gallery](#). License: [Educational Fair Use](#).



Please visit the Tate Museum website to examine a higher resolution of Lucian Freud's etching on paper, [\*Girl with a Fig Leaf\*](#), 1947 (298 x 238 mm, Tate Museum, London, England), and then continue reading to learn more about Lucian Freud etching and practice some close visual analysis.

Lucian Freud (1922-2011) was a British painter, draughtsman, and printmaker, known for his figurative work. *Girl with a Fig Leaf* shows a figure, her face partially obscured by a fig leaf she holds in her left hand. This print clearly demonstrates the etching process through its use of contrast and line weight. As you learned earlier, etching is when an image is printed from a metal plate incised by acid. The plate is first fully coated with an acid-resistant ground. The image is created as the artist removes parts of the ground. Next, the plate is submerged in acid and the areas without ground are bitten into by the acid, creating the image. Then, the whole plate is inked; as the artist wipes the plate, ink is left in the grooves created by the acid bath. Finally, paper is laid over the plate and the whole thing goes through the press. The press pushes the paper into the inked lines, producing the image.

Look closely at the lines in Freud's print. Do you notice where he's created darker areas using hatching and cross-hatching? You can see hatching in the contours of the leaf in the middle of the composition and cross-hatching under the figure's left hand, as well as in the darker areas of the fig leaf. The bright white areas are actually the white of the paper, which were covered in the acid-resistant ground during the plate's acid bath. Do you see how this creates contrast in the work?



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait with Saskia*, 1636, etching, 10.4 x 9.5 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#). You can [access a zoomable image](#) at Google Arts & Culture.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) was a Dutch painter and printmaker, particularly known for his



etchings. Much of the subject matter from his work came from life and was prolific in his portraiture, creating almost 80 self-portraits!

In *Self-Portrait with Saskia*, pictured above, we see the artist, Rembrandt, posing with his wife, Saskia. Examine this print closely by using the zoom tools on the Google Arts & Culture website. As you look at the work up close, notice how Rembrandt used lines to define the image. Imagine Rembrandt moving his etching needle around the plate, adding more lines, and using hatching or cross-hatching to create darker areas. He would then blot out areas of the plate with an acid-resistant ground, so they'd remain lighter, before placing it in an acid bath. Darker areas would remain in the acid longer, allowing the chemical to bite away at the exposed plate.

For an excellent example of cross-hatching, zoom in on Rembrandt's face. Notice the intersecting diagonal lines that create an almost woven pattern on his forehead, under both eyes, and his left cheek. For an example of hatching, look at the more-or-less parallel diagonal lines that make up Saskia's sleeve in top in the middle left of the composition. To learn more about Rembrandt and this work, please read the Smarthistory essay, "[Rembrandt, Self-Portrait with Saskia](#)."



Kiki Smith, *Ginzer*, 2000, etching, aquatint, and drypoint on paper. © Kiki Smith, courtesy of Pace Gallery, N.Y. Source: [Whitney Museum](#). License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

For a contemporary look at the intaglio process, let's next examine Kiki Smith's, [Ginzer](#), 2000, which uses etching, aquatint, and drypoint (45.4 × 60.6 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art). You can also hear the artist discuss her interest in printmaking and see her work in a series of prints, including *Ginzer* by [watching a video interview with Smith embedded earlier in this chapter from Art21](#) (4:56).

Kiki Smith's print is a good example of how artists can combine different intaglio methods, in this case etching, aquatint, and drypoint, to create different textural effects. Etching and aquatint both use acid to bite into the plate, while drypoint lines are created by drawing directly on the plate with a tool called a needle. As little bits of the metal are scraped away, they end up crowding along the line's edges, forming a burr. If left on the edges of the line and inked, this burr can create the soft, fuzzy line often associated with drypoint.

Look at the texture of the cat, Ginzer's fur, for example. How would you describe it? You might have noticed its softness, which Smith achieves by combining drypoint with etching and aquatint. The aquatint provides areas of tonal variation on the cat's fur and lend additional texture to the form.

## Engraving

Engraving is a printmaking process where grooves are made in the plate directly, without the use of acid, like in etching. The technique of engraving involves the use of a specialized tool called a burin. The burin has a v-shaped blade, and the artist pushes it through the metal, removing the material on both sides of the cut. To recognize an engraved line, look for a slight swell towards the middle of a line and for a tapering "v" shape where the burin entered and then left the plate.

### Stop & Reflect: Engraving

Select one of the examples of engraving below to examine further. See if you can recognize some of the identifying features of an engraved line.

1. Martin Schongauer, [\*Saint Anthony Tormented by Demons\*](#), ca. 1470-1475, engraving, 30 x 21.8 cm (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY).
2. Evan Lindquist, [\*Pull the String\*](#), 1998, engraving, 11 15/16 x 18 in. (Portland Art Museum)
3. Beth van Hoesen, [\*Celery Stalks\*](#), ca. 1960, engraving 8 3/4 x 5 1/8 in. (Portland Art Museum)

## Planographic

Planographic printing is one of the four basic methods of printmaking, which also include relief, intaglio, and stencil. In planographic printmaking, mainly lithography, the image is not incised but is printed from a single plane that has been treated chemically so some areas hold ink and others refuse it.

- Watch the video on **lithography** from MoMA [Pressure + Ink: Lithography Process](#) (7:05 minutes).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=22#oembed-6>

## Planographic

In the planographic process, the image is not incised into the surface of the matrix. Instead, the design is printed from a single plane that has been treated chemically so some areas hold ink and others refuse it.

### Lithography

The term lithography comes from the Greek *lithos*, meaning "stone" and *graphein* for "writing" and it is a planographic printmaking process based on the principles that oil and water don't mix. Lithography is known for the stylistic diversity of its drawn and painterly marks, and is still one of the most common methods of commercial printing. The process of lithography involves a grease pencil or tusche, which is a greasy watercolor, that is applied to a limestone slab. A chemical mixture is used on the stone to make the negative space of the design more receptive to water, so the oil-based ink is attracted only to those areas that have been marked by the artist. When the ink is rolled over the stone, it adheres to these greasy areas and is repelled by the treated open areas of stone. Finally, a sheet of damp paper is laid on the surface of the stone, and the paper and stone are run through a press together, transferring ink from the surface.

Both Honoré Daumier's (1808-1879), *Rue Transnonain, 15 April 1834* and Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's (b. 1940), *Sticky Mouth*, are excellent examples of lithography. In Daumier's print, pictured below, we can see how the soft, textured lines create contrast between the light and dark areas of the

composition. We can also see areas of tusche used to shade the top of the striped pillows that seem about to fall off the bed.



Honoré Daumier, *Rue Transnonain*, 15 April 1834, 1834, lithograph, 295 x 442 mm, Rosenwald Collection, National Gallery of Art, London, England. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

Daumier's work shows the brutal aftermath of a massacre at a Paris apartment building. On April 13, 1834, French civil guard soldiers went from apartment to apartment looking for workers who had protested against the treatment of silk workers in the French city of Lyon. The soldiers shot indiscriminately into peoples' homes, killing 19 people, including a four year old child. In his print, Daumier creates a crowded space, filled with four lifeless bodies, framed by areas of extreme light and darkness, effectively commenting on the violence that night.

For additional context, watch this [video of art historian James Romaine discussing Daumier's lithograph](#) and his use of the "moral gaze" to counter injustice in 19th century France (6:00 minutes).



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And for a glimpse at how a contemporary artist reflects on historical works, please see this video from [the MET's The Artist Project series with the artist Swoon \(b. 1977\) discussing Daumier's painting, \*Third Class Carriage\*](#) (2:56 minutes):



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=22#oembed-8>

In Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's print, *Sticky Mouth*, pictured below, we can see the effect of the lithographic line, which resembles both drawing and painting. Quick-to-See Smith is an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and is of Métis and Shoshone descent. The title of the print, *Sticky Mouth*, is a translation of the Blackfeet word for bear. Notice, for example, the image of a human-bear transfiguration at the center of the composition. What other animals and insects can you find in the print? How do these forms interact with the human figures and faces? Consider the effect of color, as well as how Quick-to-See Smith plays with positive and negative shapes (note, for example, how some figures are outlined, while others are filled in). Thinking back to our discussion of the [visual elements and principles of design](#) how would you describe the use of line here?





Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Sticky Mouth*, 1993, color lithograph on paper, Topeka Library, Kansas. Image: Topeka Library. Source: [Flickr](#). License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

Figures of animals, insects, and humans overlap and intersect, reflecting the artist's traditional



Salish beliefs of human-animal transformations, as well as the juxtaposition between traditional Native American symbolism and different drawing styles. Compare, for example, the trickster coyote, outlined and facing out towards the viewer, in the top left of the composition, and the figure seen in profile view, feather in his hair, walking towards the lower right, which resembles 19th century [Plains American Indian ledger art](#).

For additional context, please view the video below, "[Meet Jaune Quick-to-See Smith](#)," which features the artist discussing her working inspiration and methods, from the Smithsonian American Art Museum (2:32 minutes).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=22#oembed-9>

## Stencil

A method of printmaking in which ink is forced through a matrix. Its main use is in screenprinting and pochoir. In screenprinting, also called silkscreen or serigraphy, the stencil is attached to a fabric or wire mesh screen and the ink is pushed through with a squeegee. In pochoir the ink is hand-painted on paper or fabric through a stencil. Stencil printing is one of the four basic printmaking methods, which also include relief, intaglio, and planographic.

- This chapter will focus specifically on **screenprints**.
- Watch a demonstration of **screenprinting** from the Tate Museum, "[How to Print Like Warhol](#)" (5:29 minutes).



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## Stencil

In the stencil printmaking process, ink is pushed through an opening or cutout design on a matrix; negative space around the image is blocked out. You might have used stencil letters to make a sign or a poster, for example.

## Screenprint

One common form of the stencil printmaking process is screenprinting, which is also called silkscreen or serigraphy. You've likely seen a screenprinted t-shirt or poster. In screenprinting, silk or nylon is stretched over a frame, and the ink is pushed through the screen with a squeegee. Negative space is blocked out with a photosensitive emulsion, while the areas to be printed are left open. Screenprinting is a very flexible printmaking method because it can be printed onto a variety of surfaces and allows the artist to control the ink's opacity. As we'll see in the examples below, screenprints can also be layered to create greater surface depth.



Corita Kent, *Yellow Submarine*, 1964, screenprint, 25" x 35". Image: Frank Grießhammer. Source: [Flickr](#). License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

Corita Kent (1918–1986) was an artist, teacher, social justice advocate, and a Roman Catholic religious

sister known for her vibrant, revolutionary screenprints, producing nearly 700 over the course of her career. She left the Immaculate Heart order in 1968, moving from Los Angeles to Boston, to live a secular life.

Kent's art expresses her belief in reforming the Catholic Church, society, and politics, as well as her radical message to viewers of hope and love. Known for combining text and image, Kent mined advertising logos and slogans, appropriating these pop cultural references in her works. Working concurrently with the Pop Art movement, her work focused on the intersection of activism and the everyday. She also prioritized access by pricing her work affordably and refusing to number her prints in order to avoid any hierarchy.

In the print above, you can see Kent's layering of text and image, as well as her use of strong, vibrant color. To the left of the print, the phrase "Make Love Not War" is shown adjacent to "Vietnam," which is printed upside down and reversed. The question, "What has it done to the home of the brave?" is placed above "Vietnam," while a line from the Beatles' song, "Yellow Submarine" is printed vertically on the right. Behind the text, the shape of a submarine floats surmounted by abstract flowers; a peace sign can be partially seen on the submarine's vertical fin.

### Stop & Reflect: Corita Kent

1. As you learned above, Corita Kent appropriated signs, images, and slogans from the world around her into her art. How does the meaning of these words change when they are incorporated into her art?
2. In using lyrics from a Beatles' song, Kent also demonstrates her interest in using sources from popular culture in her work. [Listen to the Beatles' song](#). How do you interpret the meaning of "Yellow Submarine?" Why do you think Kent would use this specific line in her work? How do the song lyrics interact with the other text Kent used?

Select another example of screenprinting below to examine further. See if you can recognize some of the identifying features of this printmaking method and consider why you think the artist featured in this section selected screenprinting, specifically, to communicate their ideas.

1. Barbara Jones-Hogu (1938-2017), [Unite](#), 1971, color screenprint, 22 ½ x 30 in. (Brooklyn Museum)
  - Read more about Barbara Jones-Hogu and her print Unite [on the Smithsonian Museum of American Art's website](#).

2. Mickalene Thomas (born 1971), [Can't We Just Sit Down and Talk It Over?](#), 2006-2007, color screenprint on white wove paper, 495 x 762 mm (New York Public Library Digital Collections)
  - Optional: [watch this video from the Smithsonian American Art Museum's "Meet the Artist" series with Mickalene Thomas](#) (3:16 minutes).

## Focus: Contemporary Practice, 3D Printing



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=22#oembed-11>

["How 3D Printing Can Preserve History"](#) (National Geographic, 4:06 minutes)

So far in this chapter, you have seen historic and contemporary examples of traditional printmaking techniques. You've also been able to connect these artists and processes to New Media more broadly through printmaking's qualities of replicability, variability, and chance.

In the 21st century, as technologies have continued to advance, so have printmaking strategies, integrating computer technologies with fine art practices. Digital and 3D printing, for example, push the viewer to rethink conventional art historical categories and methods. One artist who is revolutionizing 3D printing is Iranian artist, writer, and activist Morehshin Allahyari (b. 1985), whose work, *Material Speculations: ISIS*, is pictured below.



Morehshin Allahyari, detail of *Material Speculations: ISIS*, 2015-2016, digital fabrication and 3D printing, dimensions variable. Image: Ars Electronica. Source: [Flickr](#). License: [CC BY NC ND 2.0](#)

*Material Speculation: ISIS* is a series of small 3D-printed replicas of a set of twelve larger than life-size artifacts from the ancient cities of Hatra and Nineveh in Iraq that were destroyed by ISIS in 2015. To create accurate CAD representations of these destroyed objects, Allahyari researched each piece extensively and ensured she located images of them from every angle.

In 2016, she made all of her research on the first model, which is the sculpture of King Uthal seen above, public on the website Rhizome, as part of their series [The Download](#). This allowed anyone with access to 3D printing technology to print their own version of the object. The original 3D printed sculpture, created by Allahyari, includes a flash drive and a memory card inside its body, containing maps, images, and information about the object, its original site, and how it was destroyed, creating a kind of digital time capsule to be accessed by future generations.





Morehshin Allahyari, *Material Speculations: ISIS, Priest with an Eagle*, 2015-2016, digital fabrication and 3D printing, dimensions variable. Image: Penn State. Source: [Flickr](#). License: [CC BY-NC-ND-2.0](#).

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have learned about various printmaking processes and practiced recognizing them in both historical and contemporary examples. We have considered how printmaking democratized the process of making and collecting art, and how modern and contemporary printmakers explore the medium by devising new ways to connect the past with the present. There are different extension activities in the sections below that will help you reflect on what you've learned.

### Key Takeaways

At the end of this chapter you will begin to:

1. Explain the history of the printmaking medium.
2. Describe and compare significant printmaking processes, explaining how each process contributes to meaning in a work of art.
3. Recognize developments in the field of printmaking today, including considering how 3-D printing is connected to earlier developments in printmaking.
4. Explain how printmaking exhibits some of the elements of New Media Art.

### Optional: Lesson Extensions

Below are some lesson extension activities to encourage learners to engage more deeply with the material presented in this chapter.

### Creative Interpretation Ideas

1. Write a postcard from the point of view of one of the people featured in a print from this chapter.



2. Try your hand at relief printmaking using an apple or a potato to create a stamp.
3. Write a short story, journal entry, or poem based on one of the works featured in this chapter.
4. Pick an artwork from this chapter and make a list of the top ten things you notice or think about the piece.
5. Try writing for seven minutes about one of the works featured in this chapter.

## Further Questions to Consider

Below are some additional questions to consider that ask learners to reflect on specific themes and examples presented in this chapter.

1. For figural works, such as those by Mickalene Thomas, Barbara Jones-Hogu, and [Honoré Daumier](#), think about the position of the figures in the composition. Are they gesturing or still? How do you interpret their movements, poses, or gestures?
2. In prints that combine text and image, such as *Unite* and *Pull the String*, can you see what the words say? How do these words relate to what's happening in the print? How do text and image combine to affect your interpretation and understanding of the print?
3. Select an example of a lithograph or a screenprint featured above that uses shape and color. Take a few minutes to examine the artist's use of shape and color. Which shapes are repeated? Would you describe them as organic (more curvy) or geometric (more straight edges) shapes? Which colors are repeated? Why? What effect does color have on the composition? What about shape?

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# PHOTOGRAPHY

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## Foundations of Photography

As we move through the world today, snapping cell phone photos left and right, a look at the history of photography and visual characteristics of the medium will open doors for your exploration. In this chapter, you will have a chance to think about early photographic processes, to practice [visual analysis introduced in an earlier chapter](#), and to make connections to [elements of New Media Art](#) (from the Introduction) and to other genres of New Media Arts.

## Analog and then Digital Photography

As you sort through the variety of ways of making photographs, recognize the larger and more traditional category of **analog photography**, photographs made from film negatives, for example; and the newer category of **digital photography**, photographs made from your cell phone, for example. Analog photographs are expressed through physical materials, like paper, glass, metal, and chemical combinations. Digital photographs are expressed through binary code, that is the combinations of 1's and 0's that a computer needs to display the image as a .jpg or other type of image file.

The chapter on [digital photography](#) explores ways that analog photography has maintained a place in our digital world. Here, you can look closely at the origins of analog photography. First, consider visual analysis and the elements of New Media Art that are tightly tied to photography.

## Visual Analysis and Photography

In the chapter [Visual Analysis and New Media Arts](#), you looked at the vocabulary of visual analysis. Since photographs are made with light, the qualities of **light** that you see in the work is a good place to start when analyzing.

Also, traditional photography made use of one aperture (or eye of the camera). Looking at the world with one eye gives the viewer the sense of one-point perspective (like looking in a tunnel), so **space** is another visual element to explore.

When considering the composition of a photograph, look to see how the photographer has arranged the photograph to produce **implied line**.

**Visual textures** also add to the ways that you read photographs.

As you analyze light, line, space, and texture in photographs, ask yourself, "What impact do these qualities have on the work or on the way that I read and interpret it? As a foundational medium of time-based arts, how does it challenge my understanding of **time**?"

## Elements of New Media Art in Photography

As you explore the foundations of photography, notice when you recognize these elements of New Media Art.

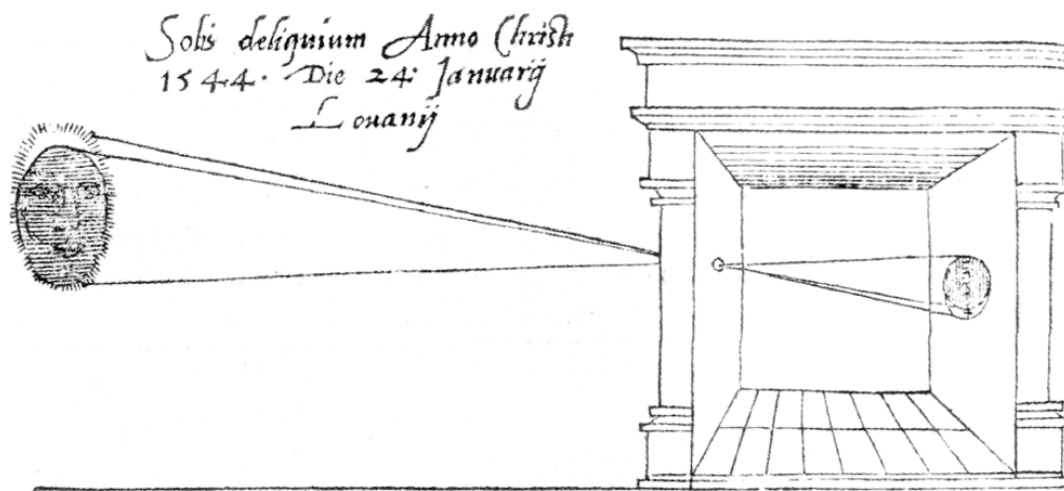
1. How does photography expand the definition of art?
2. How does photography democratize access to art?
3. How do photographers exploit new technology for artistic purposes?
4. How does photography merge new media with old media?
5. How does photography capture a moment in time, or expresses time in other ways?
6. How are photographs replicable? How can images be copied multiple times and exist in different states?
7. What other elements of New Media Art are found in photography?

## A Brief History of Photography

### Camera Obscura

Long before experiments in printmaking led to a fixed image created by light in the early 1800s, the **camera obscura** was being used by scientists for observation and by artists as a tool to draw and paint. A camera obscura is literally a chamber that is dark; a dark room.

Look at these images and think carefully about how the camera obscura works.



A [diagram of a camera obscura](#) from Gemma Frisius' book *De Radio Astronomica et Geometrica*, 1545. Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

Scientists have used the camera obscura as a way to view celestial bodies and astronomical occurrences. In this diagram from 1545, the image of the solar eclipse on the left is projected through the hole in the wall of the dark room on the right. You can see that the image of the eclipse is upside down and reversed on the opposite wall.

Astronomy fans in North America also used special versions of the camera obscura to view safely the solar eclipse on August 21, 2017.

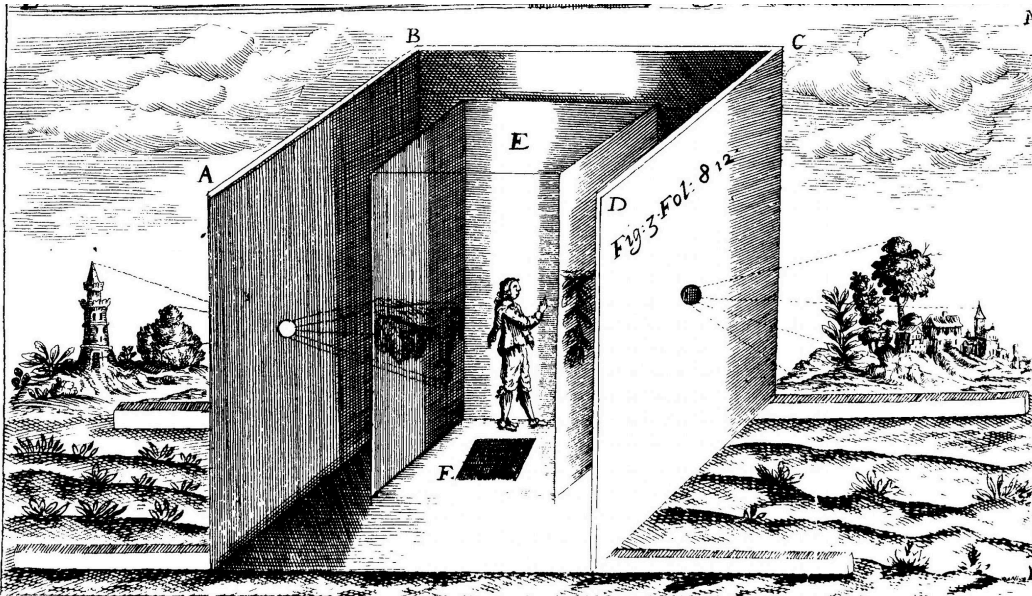


[Pinhole projection colander](#), photograph by Hat4Rain, taken in Cascade, ID during the total eclipse, 21 August 2017. The partially eclipsed sun is projected by a colander. Source: Flickr, License: [CC by 2.0](#).





Photograph of partial eclipse, multiple crescent shapes depicting slivers of the sun blocked by the moon and viewed from earth. These shapes are projected through tree leaves onto the pavement as in a camera obscura. Photograph taken in Molalla, Oregon on 21 August 2017 by Elizabeth Bilyeu, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



A diagram of a camera obscura in Athanasius Kircher's book *Ars Magna Lucis Et Umbra*, 1646. Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

The camera obscura has been used by artists as a way to sketch and plot out composition in drawings and paintings. In this cutaway diagram of a camera obscura from 1646, two images are projected into this camera obscura. The scene with the tower on the left is projected through the hole in the wall upside down and reversed onto the transparent surface in the room behind the artist. The scene with the trees and village on the right is projected through the hole in the other wall onto

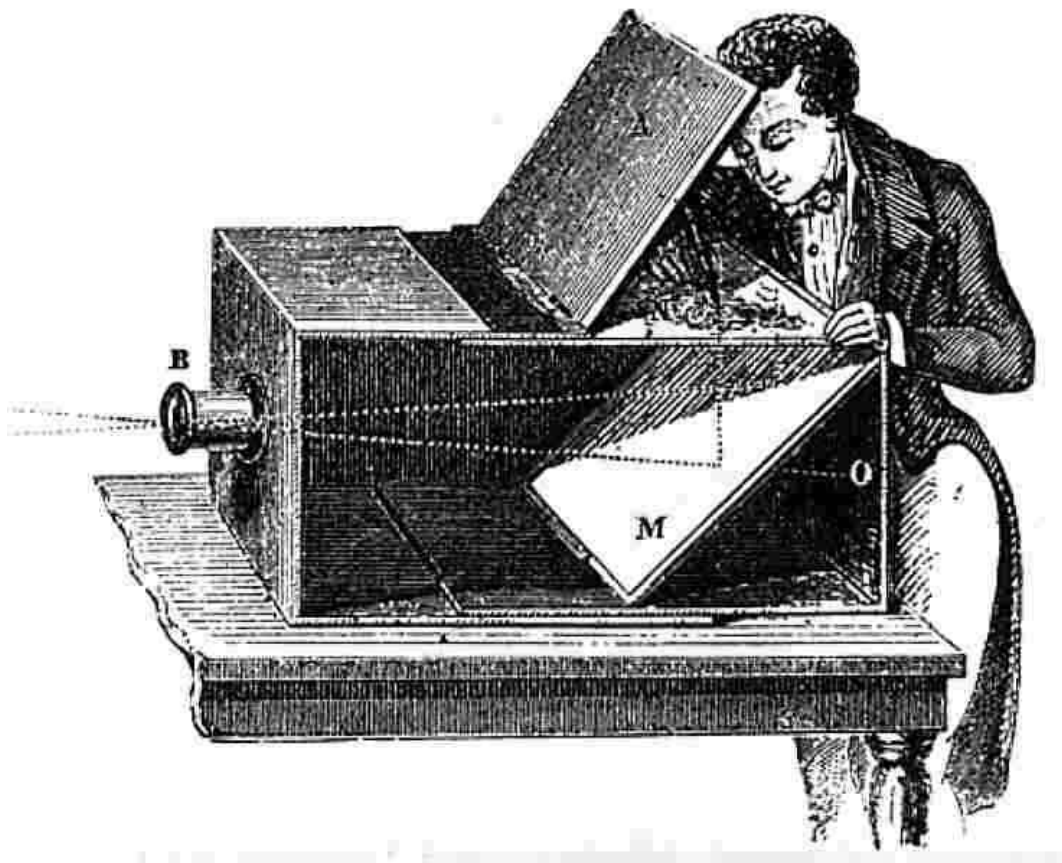


the transparent surface upside down and reversed. The artist is using the projected image to help sketch the scene.



Abelardo Morell,  
*Camera Obscura:  
View of the Eiffel  
Tower in the Hotel  
Frantour*, 1999,  
photograph. Source:  
Artist's Website,  
License: Educational  
Fair Use. Permission  
requested, August  
2021.

Contemporary photographer Abelardo Morell (born 1948) has been making camera obscura photographs since the early 1990s. He turns a room into a camera obscura, a dark box, and using another camera, he photographs the dark room with the outside image projected upside down and backwards into the room. Explore the images on [his website](#) and see if you can make the connections to the historical process of the camera obscura.

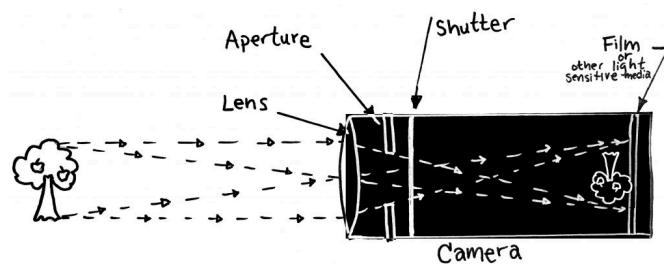


An illustration of an artist using a portable camera obscura to draw, 19th century (possibly from an 1883 physics book). An artist drawing from life with an 19th century camera obscura, labeled: B (lens), M (mirror), O (line of light if mirror not in way). The artist used thin tracing paper to capture the outlines, transferred those to canvas, board or paper and finished the drawing. Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

As the camera develops from these practices in art and science, we see the "dark room" becoming more portable and, eventually, the image is fixed using chemicals that react to the light rather than drawing. In the illustration above, the image is projected through the lens ("B") onto a mirror ("M") from which the artist can trace onto thin paper and then transfer to canvas or another surface. Note the door ("A") of the box. The door blocks the outside light so that the projected image remains visible for the artist.

In all of the examples of camera obscuras above, none of them involve a fixed image or images in multiple. It is the development of photography that brings about changes including fixed images and images that could be reproduced.

## Basic Parts of a Camera



Luke Peterson, *Camera Diagram*, 2021, pencil and ink.  
License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Use the diagram above to think about the parts of the basic, traditional camera.

- Camera – the dark box
- Aperture – the hole through which light and the image is projected. The aperture can be controlled to allow more light in (for example, at night) or less light in in order to impact the exposure. The aperture works like the pupil of the eye.

- Lens – the lens, often shaped glass, like eyeglasses, focuses the image on the back wall of the camera
- Shutter – the shutter opens and closes to control the amount of time that light enters the camera. The shutter is like the eyelid blinking.
- Film or other light sensitive material – as the camera obscura advances, light sensitive material, often containing silver, is used to capture the image that is then fixed and permanent. Think about the way that silver jewelry or silver eating utensils tarnish in the light. Similar basic principles apply in the camera.

## The Niépce Heliograph

By the 19th century experimenting often by printmakers and scientists around the world led to simultaneous photographic inventions founded on:

- Fixing the image permanently as a photograph
- Improving the quality of focus and detail in photograph
- Shortening the exposure time, the time it takes to snap a photograph
- Reproducing the photographic image





Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, *Untitled 'point de vue,'* 1827, heliograph on pewter, 16.7 cm x 20.3 cm x .15 cm. Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. Source: Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, License: Intent to publish form submitted, August 2021.

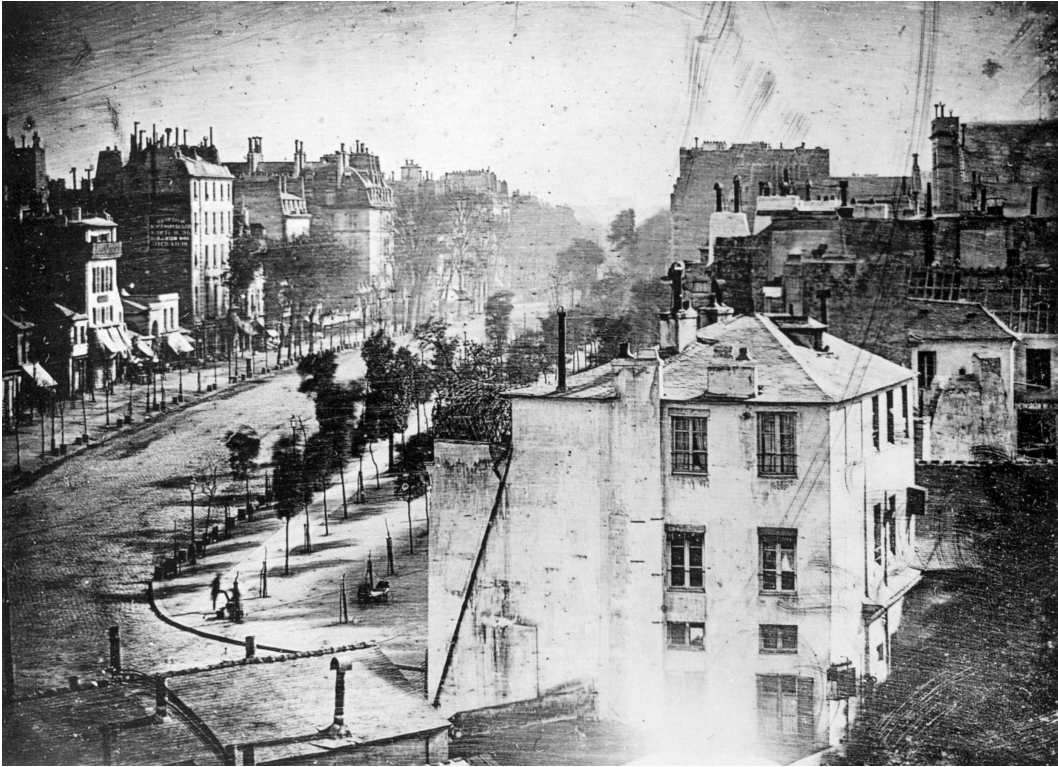
Joseph-Nicephore Niépce (1765–1833) gets the historical credit for the first fixed photographic image in 1827 (or 1826). He called this a **heliograph**, or “sun writing.” Niépce set his camera on the windowsill of his studio, pointing it at a tree and the rooftops of neighboring buildings. Inside the camera was a pewter plate coated with light-sensitive bitumen (a type of asphalt). After exposing this plate for a few days (and other plates for a few hours) by leaving the aperture open and keeping the camera still, this image (above) was produced on the surface of the plate. Notice how the sun hits the building walls on both sides of the plate showing that the sunlight is captured as it moves throughout the day, hitting one wall early and the other later.

This heliograph had a very, very long exposure time, and it is a single image. The image is not very clear. As photography develops, you will see improvements like:

- Exposure time decreases
- Lenses that increase the clarity of the image
- The invention of the photographic negative from which multiple photographs can be made of the same image



## The Daguerreotype



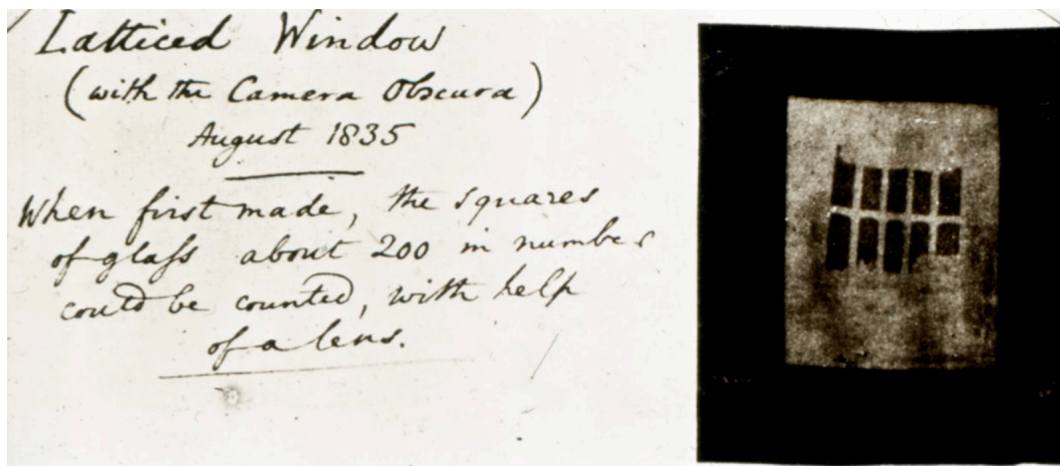
Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, [\*Boulevard du Temple, Paris\*](#), 1838, daguerreotype photograph. Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1787-1851) continued improvements to photography with his developments that he called the **daguerreotype**. Like the heliograph, the daguerreotype is a single image, but the exposure time is much less, about 10-15 minutes.

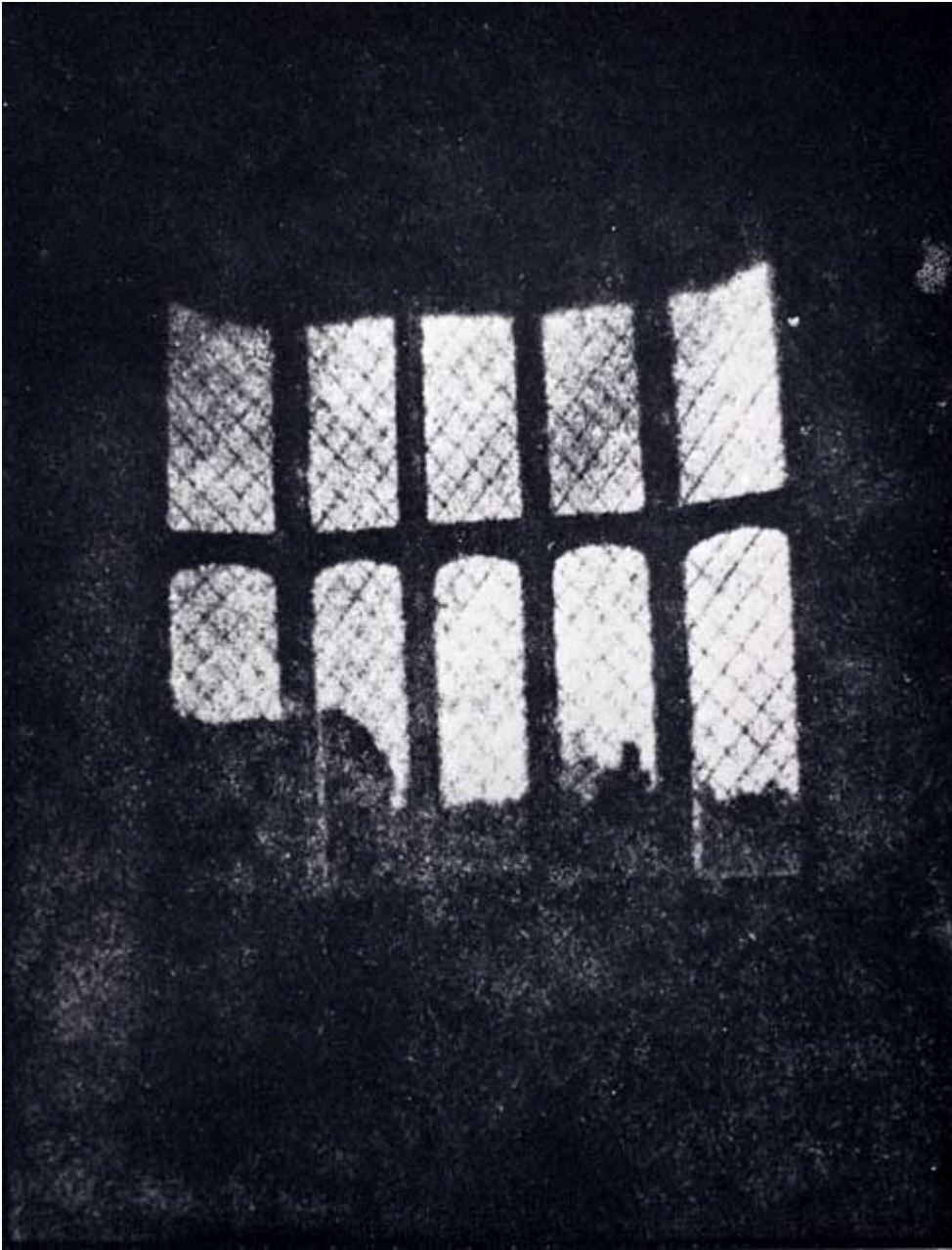
Daguerre coated a copper plate with a silver substance that reacted to the light projected inside the dark box of the camera. He fixed the image with a salt solution so that the plate would not continue to react to light and to fade. This and improvements to the camera lens produce a crisper image.

The image of a Paris street was taken during the day. Where are all of the people, horses, and carts? The answer is related to the development of photography.

## The Calotype (Negative)



Oldest photographic negative made by William Henry Fox Talbot, a latticed window in the South Gallery of Lacock Abbey, 1835. Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



[Photographic print of a latticed window](#) in the South Gallery of Lacock Abbey made from the oldest photographic negative in existence, 1935. Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

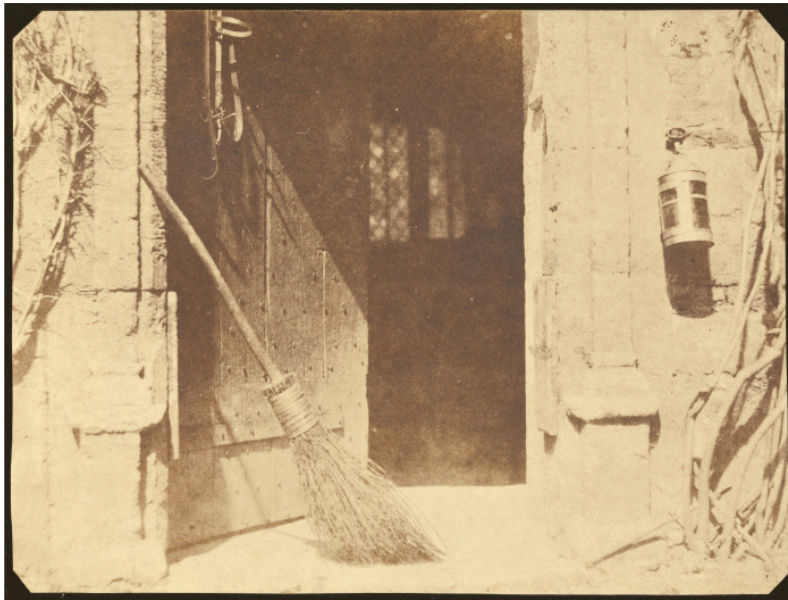
In England, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877) experimented with photographic processes simultaneously with Daguerre. Talbot is credited for inventing the negative and contributed by using paper treated with light sensitive substances for negatives and for prints made from paper. The significance of the calotype negative is that **multiple images** could be made from a single snap of the camera. Multiple images could then be shared widely.

As you continue to think about the development of photography, compare and contrast this to how photographic images are made and shared digitally today. The [Digital Photography chapter](#) explores these processes and photographic possibilities.

Between 1944 and 1946, Talbot published one of the first books containing photographs as



illustrations. The photographs were tipped-in prints attached to the pages of text that were made with the printing press. It would take more photographic experimentation by Talbot and others and further developments of the printing press before photographic images could be printed at the same time as text for posters, newspapers, and books. If you would like to explore this, read more about the halftone process, a method of printing photographic images by relying on different densities of dots to express values of light and dark. The Getty Conservation Institute has produced a deep dive into the [halftone process](#).



William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Open Door*, late April 1844, salted paper print from a paper negative, 14.9 cm. x 16.8 cm. (5 7/8" x 6 5/8"), The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Source: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. License: [Open Content Program](#).

## Stop & Reflect

1. Now that you have learned about the invention of the photographic negative, what Elements of New Media Art are expressed by photography and why? Point to qualities of photographs that you have read about so far to help answer this question.
2. Before you read further, what other types of image making are tied to photography and why?
3. Think about visual analysis and William Henry Fox Talbot's photographic print *The Open Door* shown above. After describing the image to your audience, analyze by pointing to details of **light** and explaining the impact on the work and on the viewer.

## Focus: Photography as a Business Tool

### Photographs for sale, especially portraits

As photographs became easier, faster, and less expensive to make, the demand grew for photographs and for photographic equipment. Portrait studios sprung up in different parts of the world in the 19th century.

In the United States, Augustus Washington (1820-1875) established a studio to make daguerreotypes in the 1840s in Hartford, Connecticut. As a black man and abolitionist, Washington took advantage of the times to photograph a number of prominent African Americans and abolitionists, a decade later taking his trade and emigrating to Liberia.

In this daguerreotype, Washington poses abolitionist John Brown (1800-1859) with his hand raised in pledge to his cause. The flag in his other hand is thought to be a symbol of his plans to support fugitive slaves as they came north. Here, and in other daguerreotypes with color, the blue-green and red are hand painted after the daguerreotype is made.



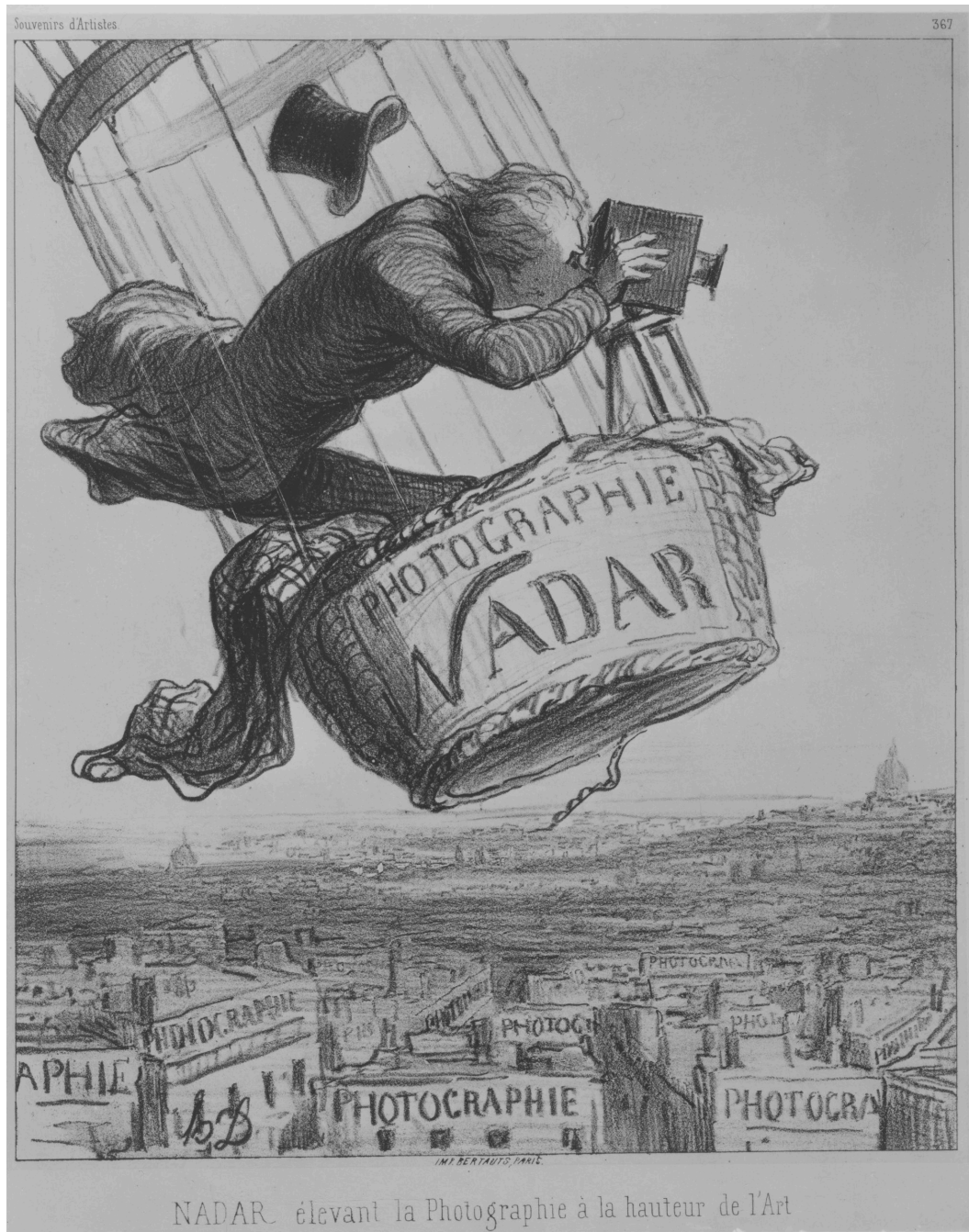


Augustus Washington, [John Brown](#), c. 1846 or 1847, daguerreotype, 7.7" x 4.4" (National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.). Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#) and Google Arts and Culture, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

In France, in the mid-1800s and on into the Belle Époque (1871-1914), photographs in many different forms were popular. The photographic **portrait** was extremely popular, especially considering the time-consuming and expensive tradition of painted portraits.

(Gaspard-Félix Tournachon) Nadar (1820-1910) was notable in Paris for his creative uses of the photograph. Here in this [lithographic cartoon lampooning Nadar](#), the photographer takes his camera for a hot air balloon ride to make unique aerial images of the city. The precariousness of his pose shows the risk that photographers would take for their images. Looking below, it seems that the entire city of Paris is made up of photography studios. Not only does this lithograph show the significance of photography as a business in Paris at this time, it also is a response to the debate about the position of photography as a form of art.





Honoré Daumier, *Nadar Élevant la Photographie à la Hauteur de l'Art*, May 25, 1862, lithograph, image without text: 10 1/2" x 8 11/16", plate: 17 1/2" x 12 5/16", The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, License: [CCO 1.0 Universal Public Domain](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Nadar and his son Paul Nadar (1856-1939) built a successful business in a portrait studio and beyond. They photographed notable figures of the time including Selika Lazevski, a black horsewoman who rode and performed in the Nouveau Cirque in Paris.



Studio of Paul Nadar, [Selika Laveski](#), 1891, photograph. Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

In Paris and in other parts of the world, small portrait photographs were produced in multiple, glued onto individual cardboard backings making [cartes de visite](#), "visiting cards" or calling cards. **Cartes de visite** were traded and collected in albums, and photographic calling cards of celebrities and important figures in society were highly desired.

## Stop & Reflect: Portrait Photography

As you view early portrait photography, think about the desire to have portraits in the 19th century and the continued obsession today.

1. Can you trace the popularity of nineteenth century portrait photography to our love of portraits today?
2. How does the cartes-de-visite compare to the way we use portrait photography today?
3. The [Seattle Selfie Museum](#) opened in Seattle, Washington in 2020 as a place with creative studio sets in which to photograph yourself using your phone camera. Imagine the experience visiting this museum. How does the phenomenon of this new type of museum relate to portrait photography as a business? How does it relate to the development of photography, from analog to digital?

## Marketing cameras and photographic equipment

In 1888, the George Eastman Kodak Company was founded to produce and sell analog cameras and equipment. A look at their marketing campaign over the decades is a telling reflection of social history and the popularity of photography.





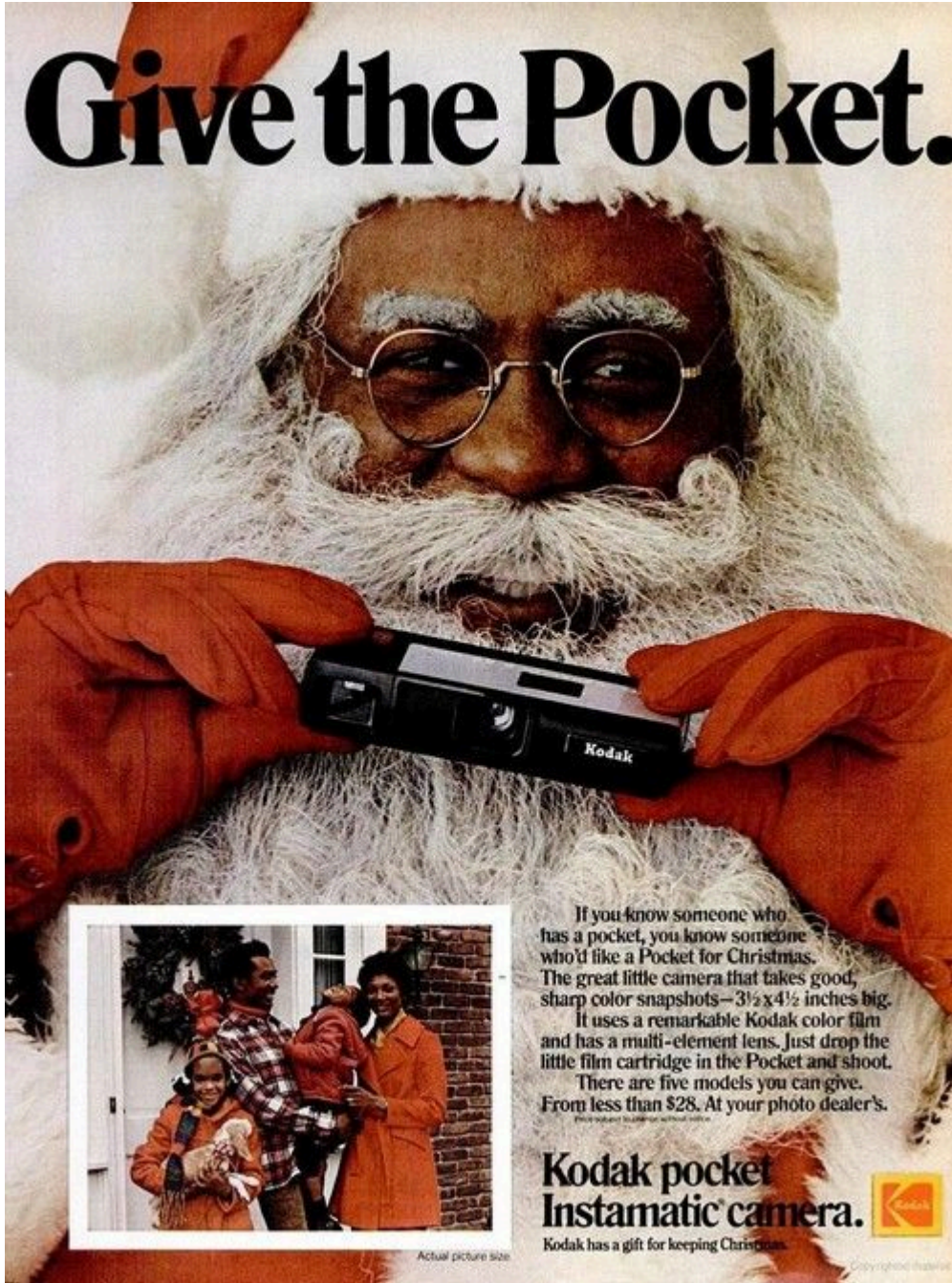
Alf Cooke Ltd., Leeds and London, Eastman Kodak Company, [Advertisement](#) for Folding Pocket Kodak Camera featuring the Kodak Girl, c. 1913, lithograph, 29 1/2" x 19", George Eastman Museum. Source: [George Eastman Museum](#). Used with permission.

The Kodak Girl became a symbol for the company associating photography with freedom and ease. These were also simultaneously themes of the suffrage movements and the phenomenon of the




**New Woman.** The [New Woman](#) was the name given to the Modern woman of the early 20th century who challenged roles of women by breaking stereotypical gender barriers and working for women's rights.

# Give the Pocket.




If you know someone who has a pocket, you know someone who'd like a Pocket for Christmas. The great little camera that takes good, sharp color snapshots—3½ x 4½ inches big. It uses a remarkable Kodak color film and has a multi-element lens. Just drop the little film cartridge in the Pocket and shoot. There are five models you can give. From less than \$28. At your photo dealer's.

Price subject to change without notice.



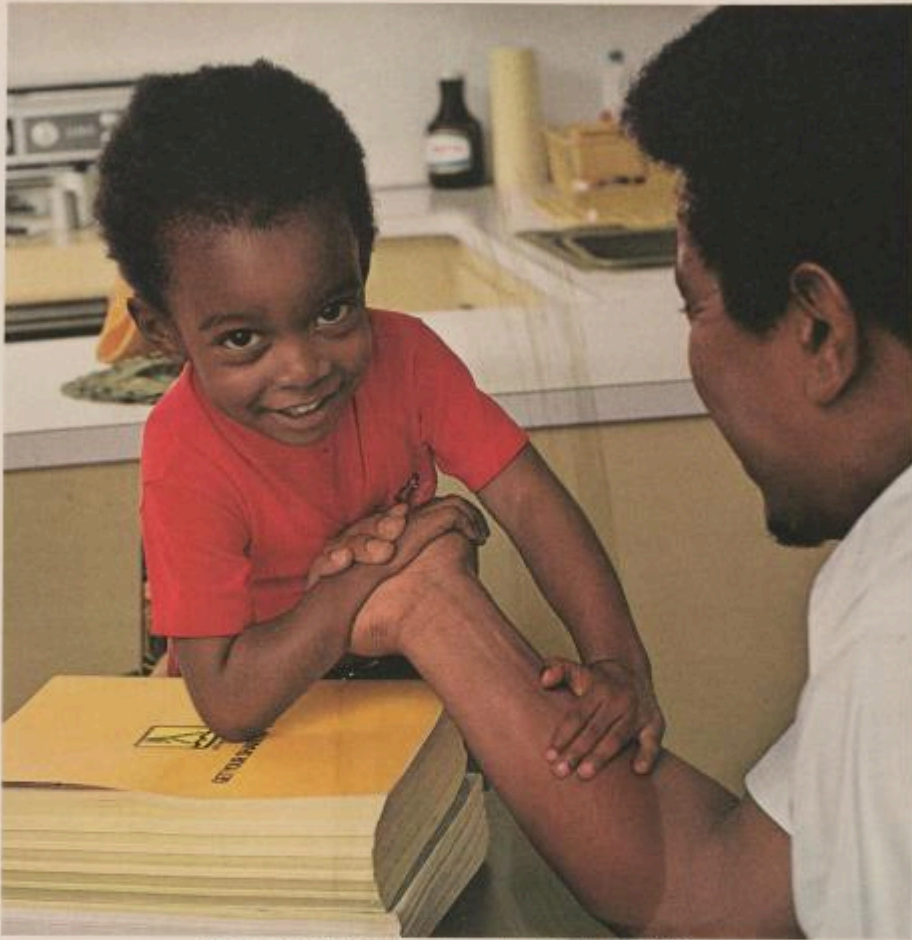
Actual picture size.

**Kodak pocket Instamatic camera.** 



Kodak has a gift for keeping Christmas.

Copyright © 1972

Magazine  
Advertisement for  
Kodak Pocket  
Instamatic Camera,  
in Ebony Magazine  
(Johnson Publishing),  
vol. 28, no. 2,  
December 1972, p.  
141. Source: [Google  
Books](#), License:  
Permission  
requested.



I know my dad's letting me win. But, don't tell him.  
I wouldn't want to hurt his feelings.

Kodak film. For the times of your life.

M-7249 (1977)  
This advertisement appears in  
Ebony - June  
Essence - July  
Sunset - July  
People - August 6  
(170105)

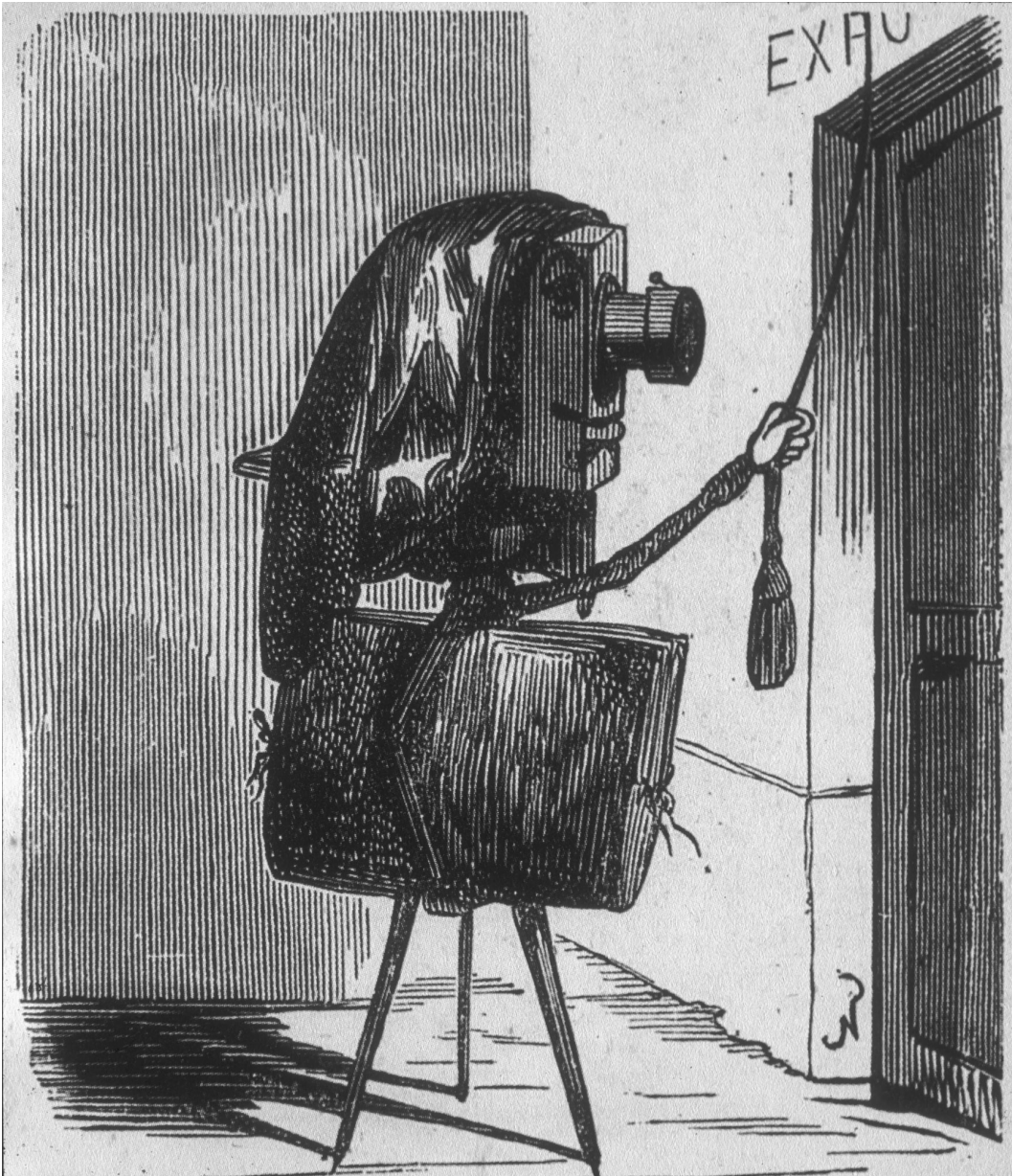
Eastman Kodak Company, Magazine Advertisement for Kodak Film, July 1977, advertisement printed on a magazine page, 13" x 9", George Eastman Museum. Source: [George Eastman Museum](https://www.georgeeastmanmuseum.org/). Used with permission.

By the 1960s, responding to the Civil Rights movement and the power of the Black consumer, Kodak began advertising to a Black audience in the U.S. through magazines like *Ebony* and *Jet*. It wasn't until the 1990s that the technology behind color recognition of skin pigments was prioritized culturally. For more a brief look at the history of race and camera film in America, check out [Vox's look at the racial bias in photography](https://www.vox.com/2018/10/11/17710512/racial-bias-in-photography).

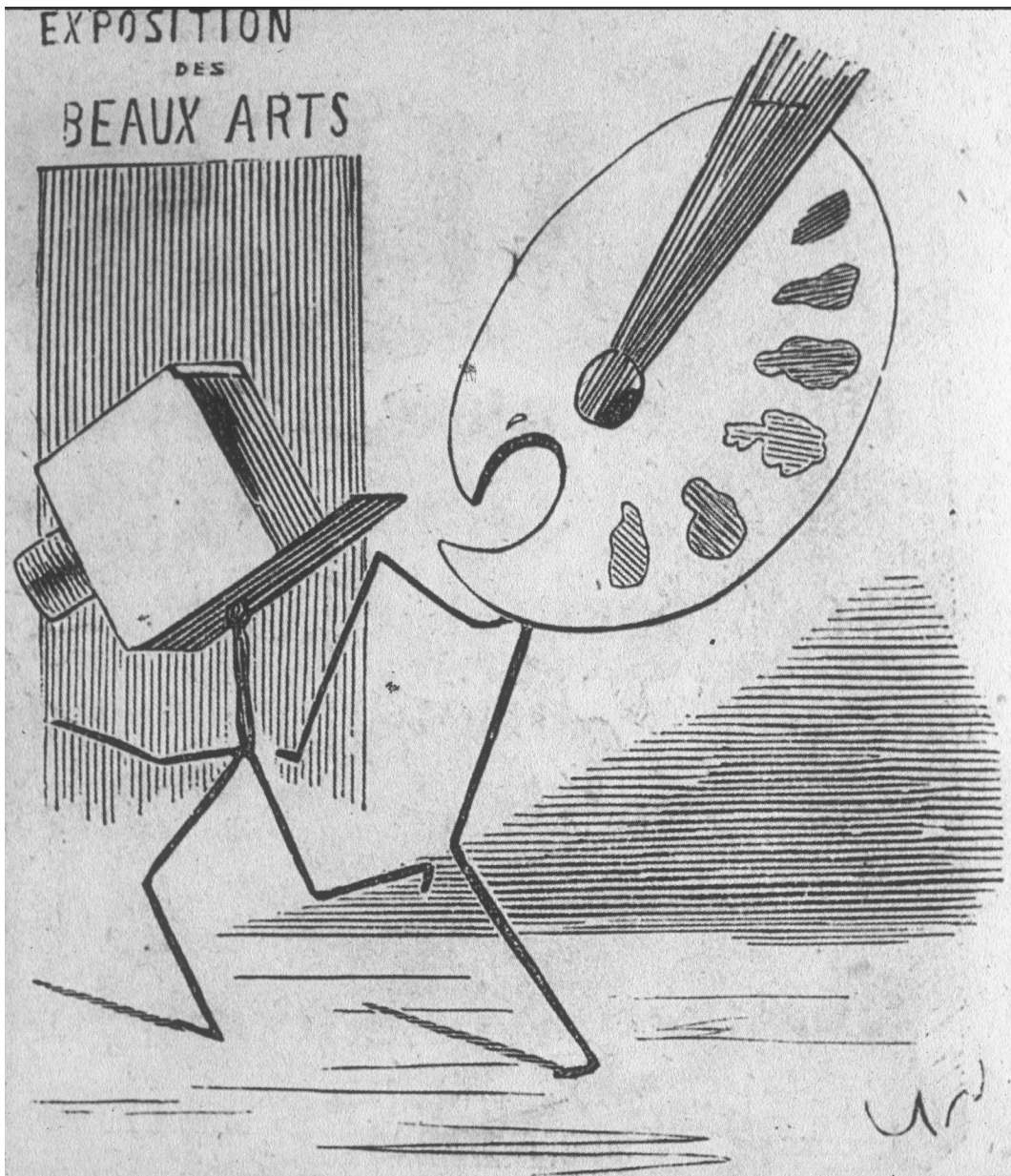
## Focus: Women and Photography

The invention of photography was a major innovation in the 19th century that allowed women a “place” in the arts. Even though photography grew and improved by leaps and bounds, the art Academy had no place for photography. [Art Academies](#), or official art schools, were grounded in traditional media of drawing, painting, and sculpture. At its inception, photography was considered a scientific process and not creative like the fine arts of painting and sculpture. Academicians were threatened by the cheapness and ease of the photograph in producing portraits, for instance. Nadar commented on these biases in humorous cartoons published in Parisian newspapers and magazines in the 1850s.





Nadar, "Photography asking for just a little place in the exhibition of fine arts," 1855, cartoon from *Petit journal pour vivre*. Paris: Bibliotheque Nationale. Source: [Fine Arts Library Image Collection](#), University of Pennsylvania, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

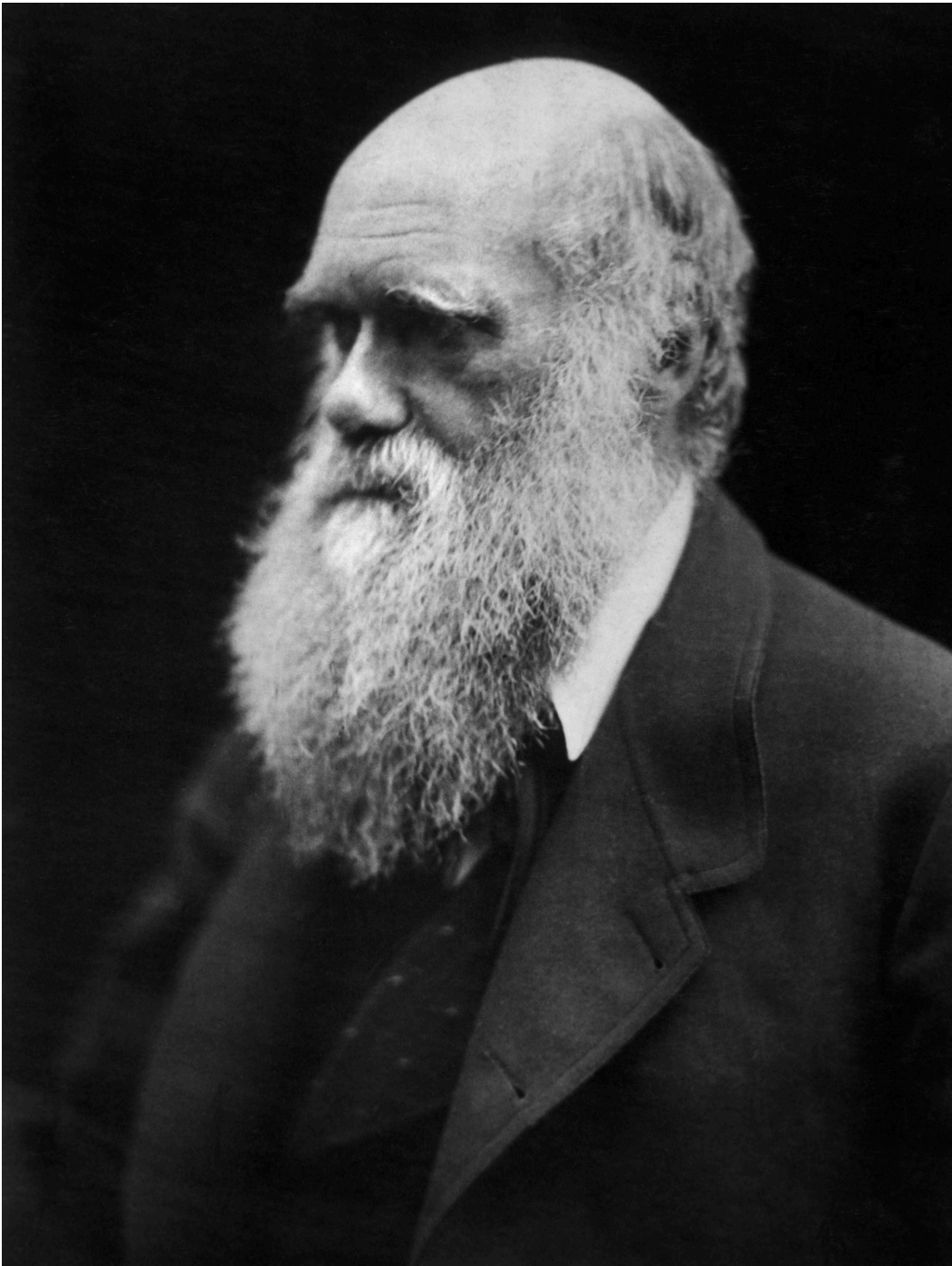


Nadar, "The ingratitude of painting refusing the smallest place in its exhibition to photography to whom it owes so much," 1857, cartoon from *Le Journal Amusant*. Paris: Bibliotheque Nationale. Source: [Fine Arts Library Image Collection](#), University of Pennsylvania, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

As a result of photography's exclusion from the realm of "high art" and the academies, it was a field that women could more easily enter, and they did.



## Julia Margaret Cameron



Julia Margaret Cameron, *Charles Darwin*, 1868, photograph. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).



Julia Margaret Cameron, *Sir John Frederick William Herschel, 1st Bt*, 1867, albumen print photograph, 13 3/8" x 10 3/8". Source: [copyright National Portrait Gallery, London](#). Used with permission.

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879) received a camera for her 48th birthday and began taking pictures. Her photographs were inspired by Biblical stories, Greek myth, literature, and Renaissance painting, and she saw photography as high art. Cameron moved in upper-class circles in England, and she photographed friends and intellectuals of the day like the scientists Charles Darwin and Sir John Herschel, a fellow photographer.

Compare and contrast the formal portraits from Nadar's studio, like that of Selika Laveski above

or [others](#), with those of Julia Margaret Cameron. Cameron deliberately blurred the edges of her photographs and emphasized light in order to portray the inner character of the scholars. At the time, she was criticized for the blurriness in her photographs.

Women working in photography in the 19th century usually worked in studios of men. Jobs included breaking and separating eggs for albumen paper (using egg white to give paper a sheen). Women would hand color photographs, work as lab assistants, print cutters, and print mounters for studios producing cartes de visite (calling cards). For women, these jobs were easier to attain because photography was less burdened with social traditions tied to gender roles. In the 19th century, women were still limited in the ways that they were allowed to travel and access public spaces available to men, so their photography was often portraiture.

### Stop & Reflect: Women and Photography

1. How do social justice movements like the [early Women's Rights Movement](#) (including the campaign for women's suffrage) and the [Civil Rights Movement](#) impact the production and marketing of photography?
2. How does photography play a part in the way we understand these movements?
3. As you read further here about the significance of documentary photography, continue to consider these questions about the impact of photography on the ways we interpret history.

### Focus: Documentary Photography

In addition to portraiture, **documentary photography** grew as a genre and as a profession. [Documentary photography](#) is a straightforward representation chronicling an event or place, person or object. Documentary photography is usually meant to be published and disseminated often with social and political implications.



## Frances Benjamin Johnston



Frances Benjamin Johnston, *A class in mathematical geography studying earth's rotation around the sun, Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia, 1899*, photograph. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).





Frances Benjamin Johnston, *History. Class in American History*, 1899-1900, platinum print, 7 1/2" × 9 1/2", Museum of Modern Art. Source: [Museum of Modern Art](#), License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

One of the first women documentary photographers in the U.S., Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864-1952) made inroads by running her own photography studio in Washington, D.C. She made portraits, and she took on documentary projects and other media-focused work. In 1899, she was commissioned by Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia to document the school for the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900. Hampton University, as it's known today, was founded after the Civil War to provide education for freedmen and freedwomen. By the time that Johnston documented the college, it was offering education to Native Americans and African Americans.



Frances Benjamin Johnston, *Self-Portrait (as "New Woman")*, 1896, gelatin silver print mounted on paper, photograph 19.7 cm x 15.7 cm. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. Source: [Library of Congress](#), License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

## Stop & Reflect: Frances Benjamin Johnston

In this self-portrait above, Frances Benjamin Johnston embraces the definition of the New Woman.

1. How is Johnston challenging gender roles in the ways that she composes this portrait?
2. How does visual analysis direct the way you experience this photograph? Use the key terms introduced in the [chapter on visual analysis](#).
3. Compare and contrast Johnston's self-portrait photograph to the lithographic [advertisement](#) for Kodak depicting the "Kodak Girl." Is one more impactful to you than the other? Explain why.

## Matthew Brady, Alexander Gardner and Timothy O'Sullivan

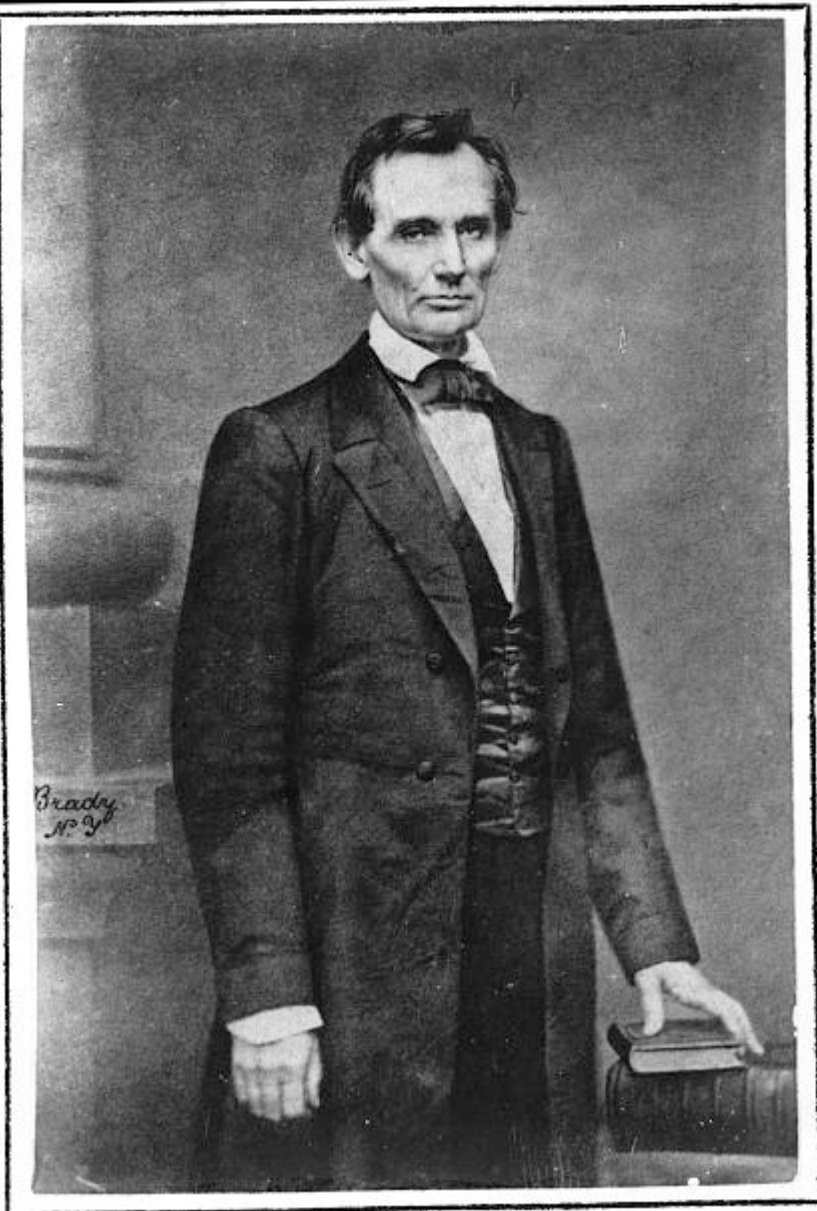
Photographic documentation of the Civil War (1860-65) created the most comprehensive visual record of war in history and included images of battlefields and individuals. The compositions continued to be stiff and formal due to the limitations of the camera, like exposure time. However, photographers could process the negatives in the field and send them to be more easily printed and reproduced in cities. Alexander Gardner (1821-1882) worked for Matthew Brady (1822-1896) and went to Civil War battlefields to photograph. He made photographs after the battle at Antietam, Maryland in 1862, photographs very shocking to the public at the time and images that continue to disturb. Photographers on the battlefield sometimes arranged the bodies for a better compositional image as in the image below. The arrangement of bodies creates an **implied line** that leads your eye back into the landscape. Photographs were often republished as engravings because photographs could not yet be printed at the same time as the text using a printing press.





Alexander Gardner,  
*Bodies of  
Confederate dead  
gathered for burial  
after the Battle of  
Antietam*, 1862,  
photograph.  
[Negative and  
photographs](#), Library  
of Congress Prints  
and Photographs  
Division  
Washington, D.C.  
Source: Wikimedia  
Commons, License:  
[CC0 1.0 Universal  
Public Domain](#).





Matthew Brady,  
*Abraham Lincoln*,  
February 27, 1860,  
gelatin silver print,  
Library of Congress  
Prints and  
Photographs  
Division  
Washington, D.C.  
Source: [Library of Congress](#), License:  
[CC0 1.0 Universal](#)  
[Public Domain](#).

Matthew Brady ran a number of portrait studios on the East Coast and established his reputation by photographing celebrities, including Abraham Lincoln who was running for President. Brady photographed Lincoln on the day of his Cooper Union address. Notice how Brady distracted the viewer from Lincoln's gangliness by directing him to curve his fingers and by focusing the light on his face. Lincoln credited Brady and this photograph with helping him to win the election.

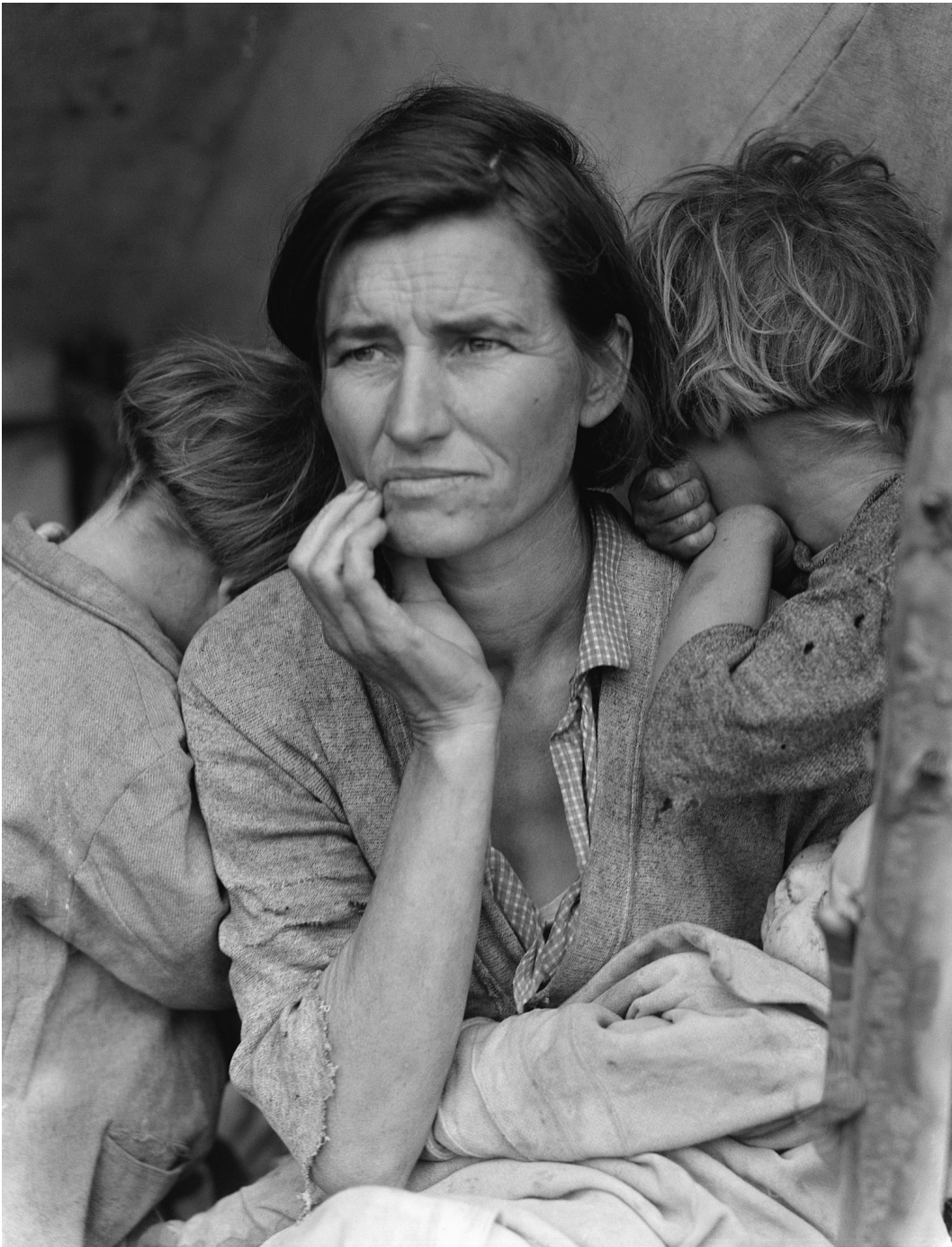


Timothy O'Sullivan,  
*Sand Dunes, Carson  
Desert, Nevada*,  
1867, albumen print,  
7.87" x 10.62", The  
NelsonAtkins  
Museum of Art,  
Kansas City, KS.  
Source: [Wikimedia  
Commons](#),  
License: [CC0 1.0  
Universal Public  
Domain](#).

After the Civil War, the U.S. government sent vast surveys west to document the land. Timothy O'Sullivan (1840-1882) traveled with survey crews of mapmakers and photographed landscapes like the Nevada desert. In contrast to the light sand, the dark cart in this photograph carried water for photographic processing en route.



## Dorothea Lange



Dorothea Lange, [\*Migrant Mother\*](#), 1936, photograph from the original negative held by Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. Source: [Library of Congress](#), License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

*Migrant Mother* by Dorothea Lange (1895-1965) is one of the most iconic documentary photographs. Lange was hired by the Farm Security Administration of the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression to document migrant workers in California.

By cropping out any recognizable background and focusing on the tired woman and three children, Lange pulls the viewer into the composition. The triangular arrangement of the figures gives solidity

to the composition that is very reminiscent of historical and biblical images, mostly paintings, of the Madonna and Child.

## Focus: Photography and Science

Photography was founded by printmakers and by scientists experimenting with chemicals and their reactions to light. So, it follows that photography early on became a tool for scientific observation and exploration.





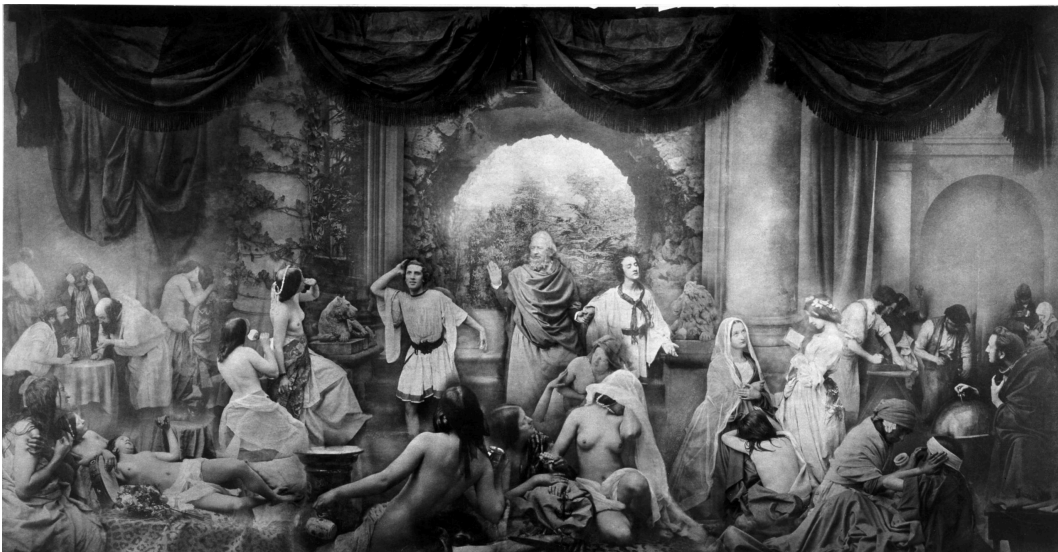
Anna Atkins, *Dictyota dichotoma, in the young state; and in fruit*, 1843, cyanotype photogram in her book *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Source: Wikimedia and New York Public Library Digital Collections, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

Botanist and photographer Anna Atkins (1799-1871) published **photograms** of algae in her book *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* in 1843, the first book of photographic images. A photogram is produced by placing objects on light-sensitive paper and exposing it to light.

## Focus: Photography and Art

A number of photographers tied their work tightly to fine art and its traditions especially in regards to compositional arrangement and references to historical works of art. Photographers inspired by Modern Art explored and emphasized visual qualities over content or narrative.

### Oscar Rejlander



Oscar Rejlander, [\*Two Ways of Life\*](#), 1857, combination print, 31" wide. Image source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

Oscar Rejlander (1813-1875), who began as a painter copying old masters like Raphael (1483-1520), used photographic processes to produce genre scenes reminiscent of moral, didactic art of the past like Raphael's Renaissance painting [\*School of Athens\*](#).

*Two Paths of Life* is a "[combination print](#)" 31 inches wide and made from over 30 negatives. Rejlander photographed each model individually, and then combined the negatives to produce this composition. Rejlander mostly made portrait photographs, but he saw his works like this to be aligned with painting.

Think about how *Two Ways of Life* anticipates photo editing of today (like Photoshop).



## Alfred Stieglitz and Man Ray

At the turn of the 20th century, Pictorialism was the style in fine art photography. Photographers chose peaceful or sentimental subject matter and photographed with a soft focus, often hand painting the negative or the photograph. In opposition, Alfred Steiglitz (1864-1946) launched the Photo-Secession and called for "straight photography" – a more straightforward depiction of subject matter.

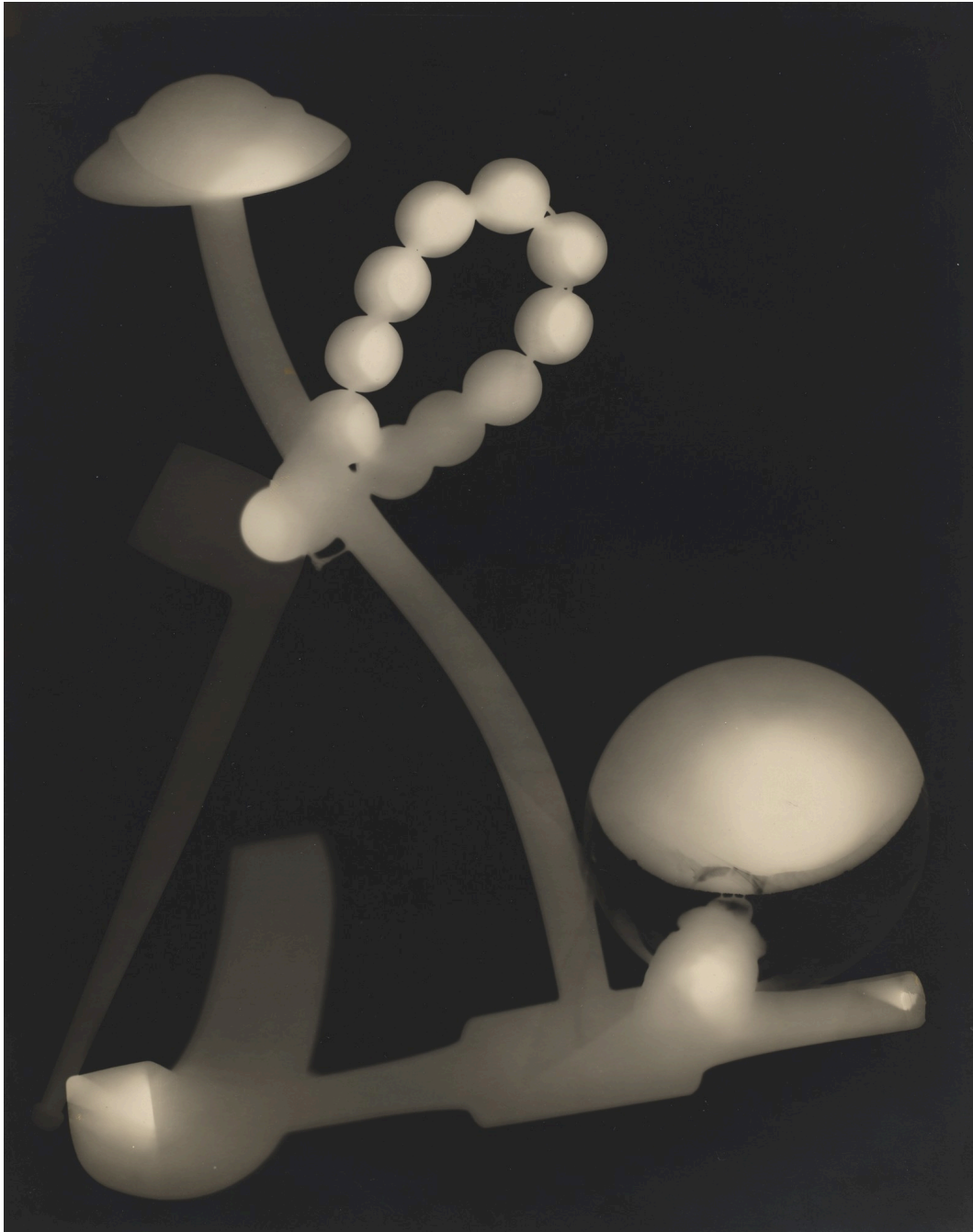


Alfred Steiglitz,  
[\*Steerage\*](#), 1907,  
photogravure, 13 1/8"  
× 10 1/2", Museum of  
Modern Art. Source:  
Museum of Modern  
Art, License:  
[Educational Fair Use](#).

Steiglitz used urban realism as his subject matter and emphasized visual elements in his compositions. In *Steerage*, he pushed beyond the image of immigrants returning to Europe and

considers the shapes (like circles in the hat, the mast), lines (of the gangplank and chains), and the way light draws the viewer's eyes to the different levels of the ship.

Stieglitz's contributions include *Camera Work*, a limited edition magazine on fine paper with photogravure reproductions that was published between 1903 and 1917. He hosted many photography exhibitions at his 291 Gallery in New York City. 291 Gallery was one of the first spaces to exhibit avant garde Modern Art in other media by European and American Modernists.



Man Ray (Emmanuel Radnitzky),  
[Rayograph](#), 1923,  
gelatin silver print,  
photogram, 11 9/16" ×  
9 1/8", Museum of  
Modern Art. Source:  
Museum of Modern  
Art, License:  
[Educational Fair Use](#).



Man Ray (1890-1976) frequented 291 Gallery and was influenced by the Modern Art exhibitions. Man Ray's photographic work included experiments with photographic processes like [solarization](#). He often cropped and captured his subject matter at unexpected angles. In addition, Man Ray's cryptic photograms called "rayographs" are associated with themes in Modern Art movements like Dada and Surrealism.

### Stop & Reflect: Solarization

1. Compare and contrast the photograms of Man Ray and Anna Atkins shown above. Use these works to think about how photography contributes to the disciplines of science and of art.
2. Return to the explanation of "the Dada precedent" in the [Introduction to New Media Arts](#). How does photography and Man Ray's "rayographs" contribute to your understanding of Dada art? How does it reflect qualities of [Surrealism](#)?

### Focus: Challenging the Flatness of Photography

#### Stereoscope and Stereographs

At the same time as early developments in improving photography, experiments were underway to challenge the two-dimensionality of images. The stereoscope, a viewing device, expanded a viewer's depth perception and produced a three-dimensional image with receding space by directing each eye to view separate images of the same scene on a stereographic card.



Stereoscope  
manufactured by  
Underwood &  
Underwood, New  
York. Patented June  
11, 1901. Photo by  
Elizabeth Bilyeu.  
License: [CC0](#).



Stereoscope  
manufactured by  
Underwood &  
Underwood, New  
York. Patented June  
11, 1901. Photo by  
Elizabeth Bilyeu.  
License: [CC0](#).



Stereoscopic cameras photographed the same scene with two different lenses about 2 inches apart (about the same distance between the pupils of human eyes).



Stereograph packaging typical of mail orders. Photo: Elizabeth Bilyeu. License: [CCO](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Stereographs were popular forms of photography from the 1850s to the turn of the 20th century, and they really took off in popularity facilitated by the reproducibility of images with negatives. Millions of stereographs were produced and marketed through mail order catalogues. The subject matter varied from humorous scenes to landscapes to tourist destinations and major monuments, but rarely were portraits published as stereographs. Stereographs were used by painters, for education and for entertainment.



De Luxe View-Master Stereoscope with picture-change shutter, slot loading for interchangeable seven-scene reels, c. 1940s. View-Master brochures with reel lists in the background, 1947, color lithograph. All made in Portland, Oregon. Photo: Elizabeth Bilyeu. License: [CCO](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



De Luxe View-Master Stereoscope with picture-change shutter, slot loading for interchangeable seven-scene reels, c. 1940s. View-Master brochures with reel lists in the background, 1947, color lithograph. All made in Portland, Oregon. Photo: Elizabeth Bilyeu. License: [CCO](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

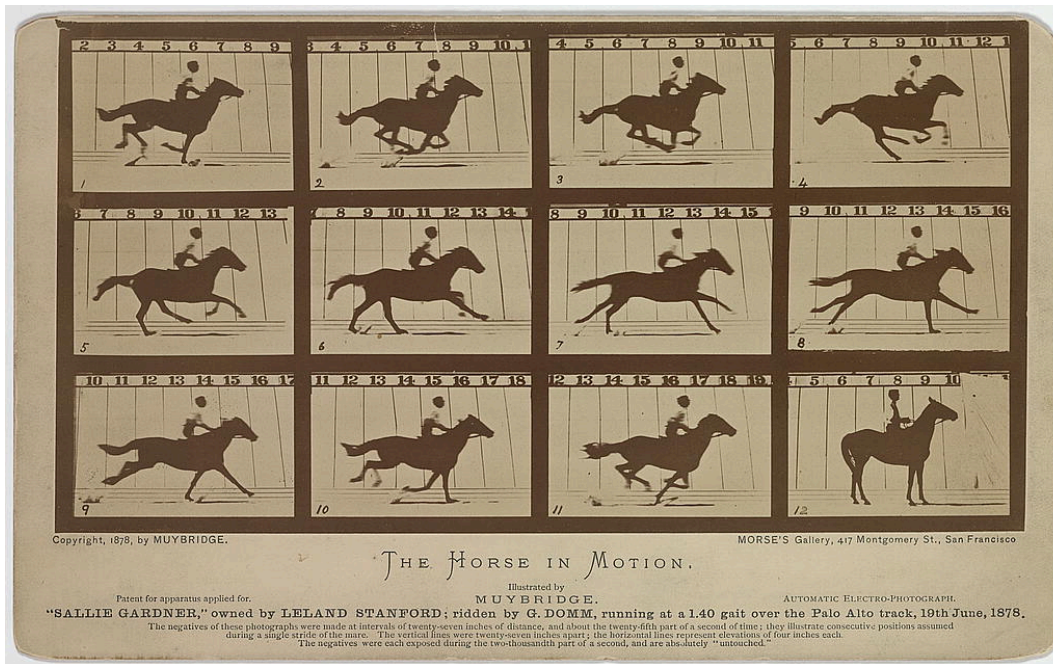
The View-Master is a version of the stereoscope that was introduced in the 1930s and became popular as a child's toy. These developments in making photographic images in 3D with depth perception anticipate Virtual Reality (VR) of the 21st century. Read about VR in the chapter on [Interactivity and Immersive Technology](#). What connections can you make between VR and the traditions of the stereoscope?

## Focus: Challenging the Static Nature of Photography

In the late 19th century, photographers experimented with devices and processes to explore **motion**. Rather than suggesting movement with a gesture of the figure, they depicted it. You'll learn more about these experiments in the [chapter that focuses on the development of motion pictures and animation](#).

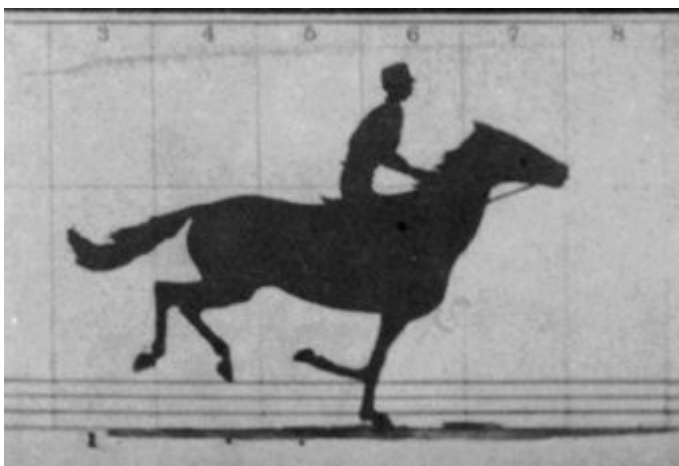


## Eadweard Muybridge



Eadweard Muybridge, *The Horse in Motion*, 1878, albumen photographic print on card, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. Image source: [Library of Congress](#), License: [CCO 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904), studying motion through the use of photography, resolved questions of what we can't see with the human eye. Muybridge was asked to settle a bet about whether or not all of a horse's hooves came off the ground while galloping. He lined up multiple cameras along a track and silhouetted the rider against a light background for good contrast in the photographs. The cameras were triggered by strings that stretched across the track. The resulting photographs show some moments in which all hooves are off the ground. What other New Media Art genres do these studies lead to? Look at this animation of the first 11 images of a [similar version](#) of this photographic print for a hint.

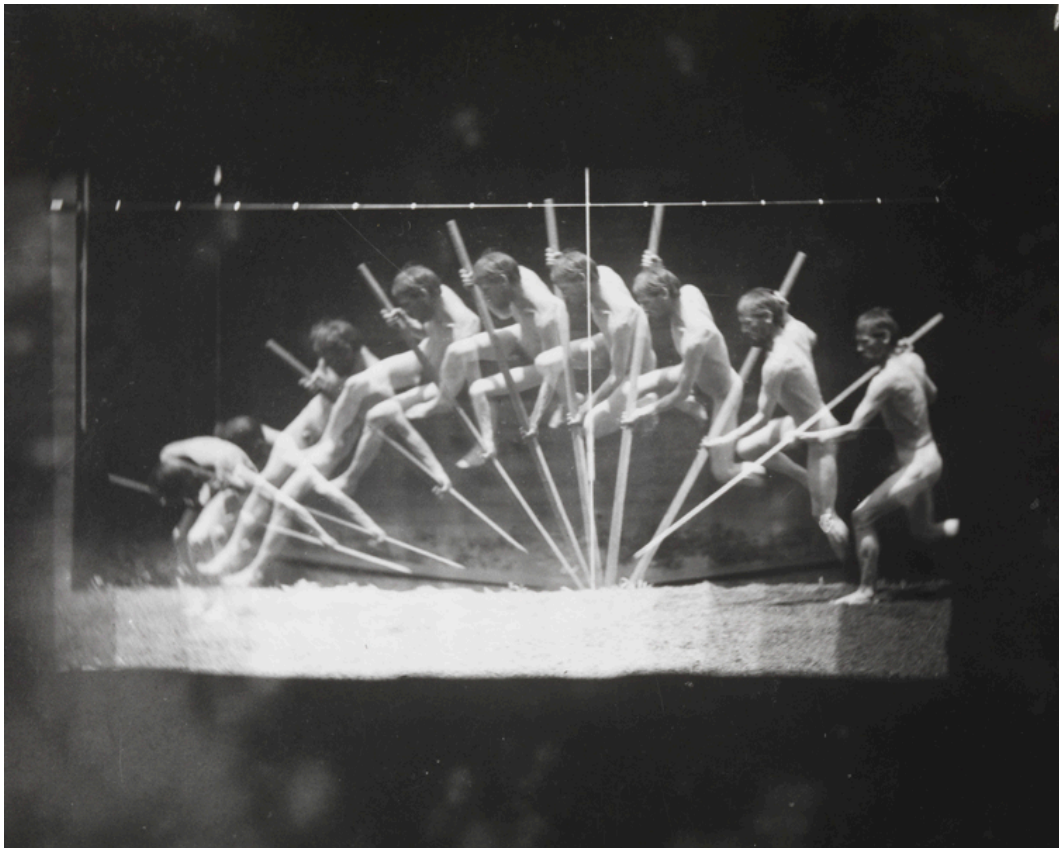


An animated gif of Eadweard Muybridge, *The Horse in Motion*, 1878. Image source: [Wikimedia Commons](#). Animation by Nevit Dilman, License: [CCO 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

Muybridge's studies in human and animal locomotion impacted the history of photography and film and influenced art movements like [Futurism](#) in Italy and artists like Duchamp to paint [Nude Descending a Staircase](#), 1912. For further discussion of film, refer to the chapter [Early Film and Animation](#) and for further discussion of Modernist art movements also exploring time and motion, please refer to Smarthistory's [Beginner's Guide to Modernisms](#).

## Thomas Eakins

Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), most noted for his paintings and fascination with the human body and biology, also experimented with photography to explore motion. In the motion study of a pole vaulter he used a rotating disc on a single camera to expose a single frame (or plate) multiple times. This process was known as [chronophotography](#). Count how many times you see the figure here, and that is how many times the image was exposed by the rotating disc.



Thomas Eakins, *Motion Study Taken with Marey Wheel Camera*, 1885, dry plate negative made by chronophotography, 3 7/8" x 4 5/8", Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, purchased with the partial support of the Pew Memorial Trust. Source: [Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts \(PAFA\)](#), License: [Public Domain](#).

## Questions to Consider

1. As you continue to read the chapters of this textbook, think about the historical connections to photography through

- processes and techniques,
- visual and experiential qualities, and
- elements of New Media Art.

For example, explain the threads to photography that you find in

- [Early Film and New Media Art](#) and
- [Interactivity and Immersive Technologies](#).

2. Read about the Modern Art movements of Dada and Futurism in

- the [Introduction to New Media Arts](#)
- [Smarthistory](#)

How has photography impacted these Modern Art movements? Think about changes in processes and techniques, subject matter, and visual and experiential qualities. Tie this to Elements of New Media Art.

## Conclusion: Beyond Analog

This chapter has introduced you to the foundations of photography in the 19th century and early 20th century. It isn't until the early 20th century that we see digital photography explode with the ubiquity of mobile phones with cameras. See what historical threads are continued (and are broken) as you read about contemporary photography and explorations with digital cameras and processes in the next chapter, [Digital Photography](#).

## Key Takeaways

At the end of this chapter you will begin to:

1. Explain the history of photography.
2. Consider how photography impacted global cultures when it was introduced.
3. Describe and compare significant photographic processes.
4. Explain how photography relates to the elements of New Media Art.

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5.

## DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

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### Digital Photography

Similar to an analog camera, a digital camera is activated by light. However, a digital camera electronically records the image as a computer file. Digital photography was invented in the 1950s, but digital cameras were not widely marketed until the 1990s. Digital cameras are ubiquitous today in smart phones, but smart phones are only a 21st century phenomenon. Like analog photography, developments are related to improvements in focal quality and shutter speed among other functions. And just as analog photography transformed the amount of images people had access to and the way they thought about and experienced the world around them, digital photography also transformed the way that people experience themselves and understand the visual world.

Stop & Reflect: What did you learn?

Review what you learned in the previous chapter, the [Foundations of Photography](#).

What are some of the ways that analog photography changed the way that people saw and experienced the world?

### Photography and New Media Art

As you learned in the [previous chapter](#), [Photography](#) is connected to the elements of New Media Art because it allows artists to invent new realities, to make multiple copies of an image and to manipulate the images they create. It increased the number of images people saw in a lifetime. Photography changed the way people thought about time. It impacted memory, and shifted the way people thought about space, allowing people to see images of places they would never be able to visit on their own and events that they weren't able to see in person. Photography also allowed average people to create their own images and tell their own stories through the images they made. Imagine how our knowledge of history would be different if average people were able

to tell their own stories in medieval [illuminated manuscripts](#). The public began to gain more access to images when printmaking was introduced to China and later Europe, but how much more would we know about life in the past if everyone had been able to use images to tell their own stories? When photography was first invented, few people owned a camera, but by the 1950s, photographic images had become the daily visual diet of everyone living in urban centers of the world. And of course, thanks to digital technologies, everyone's daily visual diet of images has changed even more dramatically.

By the turn of the 21st century, digital photography was rapidly displacing traditional analog cameras. Chemical film and light sensitive photo papers were being used less, and the computer and printer had begun to replace the darkroom. In this chapter, we'll consider how digital technology further transformed the ways people engage with images and understand the world around them.

Photographers in the early 21st century began to use digital technology in many different ways. Some scanned photographic negatives or prints and digitized them into data that could be manipulated with software and printed with inkjet printers. Other started creating images directly with digital cameras that automatically create a raw data file. In both cases, the resulting images could be easily altered using programs like Adobe Photoshop and other digital image editing software.

## Read & Reflect: What is Digital Photography?

Read the short encyclopedia entry about digital photography from Grove Art Online. You should be able to log in to Grove Art Online through your institution's library.

[“Digital Photography” by Jonathan Lipkin](#). *Grove Art Online*. Oxford Art Online. Oxford University Press. (2013-2020).

1. What are the two most significant ways that digital technology transformed photography according to the encyclopedia article by Lipkin?
2. In what way do these two transformations of photography show up in images that you see and/or create on a daily basis?
3. What are some of the issues surrounding image manipulation explained in this article?
4. This article proposes the web as an external shared memory comprised of all of the images ever uploaded and shared online. What do you think that means?
5. The article also provides specific examples of the way that image sharing online has resulted in people gaining more access to art, ideas and each other. During the pandemic, that increased access is

particularly powerful. Consider some specific examples of how access to images, ideas and people through the Internet has benefitted you during the pandemic. Also consider some examples of how this abundant access to image, ideas and people has been a burden to you during the pandemic, if it has.

6. The end of this article includes a summary of some of the theories of digital photography. It includes a mention of the concept of Web 2.0. Web 2.0 flips the relationship between creator and viewer, allowing the viewer's to become creators, which we have seen is an important tenant of New Media Art. What are some of your favorite online resources that provide space for user-generated content? Are they dominated by individual users or is there a mix of users and corporate entities posting on the site? Are they subscription based or free? What do you like about the resources you use often? In what ways do you feel constrained by the resources you use?

## Watch & Consider: Why We Still Love Film

Watch "Why We Still Love Film: Analog Photography in the Digital Age," NBC Left Field, 2020. Source: [YouTube](#). (10:23 minutes)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=102#oembed-1>

### Questions to Consider:

1. Digital photography is a much easier medium to use in the 21st century, so why are some photographers embracing analog photography today according to the YouTubers interviewed in this video?
2. What impact has social media (like YouTube and Instagram) had on film (or analog) photography?
3. Wesley Ham, who teaches at the International School of Photography, explains why he thinks his students are drawn to the slower process of photography in the darkroom. What does he have to say about this?
4. What are some environmental impacts of film or analog photography?



5. What are your thoughts on the way that this video presents the “younger generation” or millennials and Gen Z? (There are no right or wrong answers here. Just be curious about how the presentation of the “younger generation” hits you.)

## Remixing, Borrowing, Copying, Appropriation

### Watch & Consider: Creativity is a Remix

Watch “Creativity is a remix” by Kirby Ferguson, TED Talk, 2012. Source: [YouTube](#) (9:42 minutes)



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=102#oembed-2>*

### Questions to Consider:

1. Kirby Ferguson starts his talk with a discussion of remixing and sampling in music, but the talk is very much related to our topic of digital photography and how digital technologies have impacted image making. In what ways does Ferguson’s talk relate to what you’ve learned about digital photography?
2. Why does Ferguson argue that everything being a remix is a better way of thinking about creativity?
3. What are some of the implications of Ferguson’s talk for artists working in the field of New Media?

## Watch & Consider: The Case for Copying

Watch “The Case for Copying” by Joanna Fiduccia. The Art Assignment. PBS Digital Studios. 2017. Source: [YouTube](#). (10:52 minutes)

Note: This video moves very quickly, so don’t hesitate to pause if you need to, write notes, and jot down any questions you have while watching.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=102#oembed-3>

### Questions to Consider:

1. How is appropriation and copying in the visual arts related to Hip Hop sampling?
2. How is appropriation and copying in the visual arts related to meme culture?
3. What are some of the reasons that artists make copies according to this video?
4. What does it mean to say that images aren’t just neutral representations of the world? How can appropriation demonstrate this lack of neutrality?
5. How is the way people look at pictures in newspapers and magazines different than the way people look at paintings in a museum? How is the way that people look at images on their phones different than the way they look at images in newspapers and magazines?
6. The artist Richard Prince (born 1949) said that advertising images look like they have no history and have shown up all at once in magazines or now in our devices. What does he mean by this? Why do some artists think it’s important to challenge this aspect of visual culture in the digital age?

## Focus: Contemporary Photography

### Carrie Mae Weems

Carrie Mae Weems (born 1953) is an artist who is best known for her digital photography, but who, like many of the other artists in this book, also works in film, digital video, installation and performance

art. Her works tell complicated stories about history, along with race and identity in the US. In some of her projects, Weems has been interested in how visual culture, including photographic images, impact people's understandings of history. While watching the interview with the artist linked below, consider how her project [\*Constructing History: A Requiem to Mark the Moment \(2008\)\*](#), engages with this question by restaging iconic mass media photographs from the 1960s and 70s. This project was a collaboration with students from the Savannah College of Art and Design where Weems was teaching and in the video you'll hear some of the students talk about their experiences working with Weems. Consider this approach to learning about history that Weems shared with her students. What are some of the questions that you think she wanted her students to wrestle with? What are some of the ideas this project proposes about the historical record and history classes?

In the same video, Weems begins the interview by discussing an earlier project titled [\*From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried \(1995-96\)\*](#). To create this project, Weems selected original daguerreotypes from the nineteenth century. You can read more about daguerreotypes in the previous chapter about Nineteenth Century Photography. The daguerreotypes she selected were small images printed on tin or silver. They were originally made in 1850 by J.T. Zealy (1812-1893), commissioned by a man named Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) to "prove" his racist ideas about Black people, during a time when slavery was still legal in the US. As you learn in the interview linked below, Weems made copies of the daguerreotypes she selected and enlarged them. She then printed them in red and added words, etched into glass covering the prints. These creative interventions not only changed the look of these racist daguerreotypes, but they subverted the images and exposed the violence of slavery and racism, hidden beneath the supposed objectivity of the camera's lens. What are some of the differences between the way this project involves remixing and the way Weems remixed historical images in *Constructing History*?

## Watch & Consider: Carrie Mae Weems

Start by watching this [interview with the artist Carrie Mae Weems from Art:21](#). (14:47 minutes)

You can also explore all of the projects Weems has worked on throughout her career, including projects directly related to COVID during the pandemic by visiting [Carrie Mae Weems' official website](#).



Carrie Mae Weems in her studio. 2009. Source: Screenshot from [Art:21 segment "Compassion"](#). License: Educational Fair Use.

### Questions to Consider:

1. What kind of questions is Carrie Mae Weems raising about history?
2. What does Weems suggest about the way photographs impact memory?
3. What does it mean to say that images aren't just neutral representations of the world? How did Weems use appropriation to demonstrate this lack of neutrality?
4. What are some ways that Weems takes advantage of digital technologies to explore her own personal stories and broader historical narratives?

After spending time consider Weem's early work, watch this short Art:21 video about a performance Weems created in 2016 titled "Grace Notes". Weems created this piece to commemorate the deaths



of young Black men like Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown and reflect on what the violence towards them means for the US as a community of humans. While Weems is primarily known as a photographer, in this piece, she employed projected video, dance, music and spoken word to explore the Black Lives Matter movement, a new US Civil Rights movement that began to grow in the early 21st century.



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## Focus : Tools and Platforms

### Watch & Consider: Instagram

Watch “Is Instagram Changing Art?” by *The Art Assignment*, 2019. Source: [YouTube](#). (11:40 minutes).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=102#oembed-5>

#### Questions to Consider:

1. What are some of the ways that Instagram (and other social media services) are changing art according this video?
2. What are some of the benefits to Instagram?
3. What are some of the downsides to the type of art that Instagram privileges?
4. Are there other benefits to or downsides of Instagram not presented in this video? If so, consider sharing your thoughts on the discussion board this week.
5. What are some of the ways that Digital Photography today is related to the elements and concepts of

New Media Art we've been exploring in class?

## Key Takeaways

At the end of this chapter you will begin to:

1. Explain the history of digital photography.
2. Consider the differences between analog and digital photographic processes.
3. Recognize new developments in the field of digital photography
4. Explore how digital photography is connected to the broader history of visual culture.

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6.

## EARLY FILM AND ANIMATION

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### Early Film and New Media Art

New Media Art provides new ways for artists and non-artists to communicate and engage with the changing world around them. We've discussed [printmaking as art that embraced the principles of New Media as early as the 15th century](#). We've also seen the ways that [photography made art more accessible](#) to many people in the nineteenth century, while it also struggled to gain acceptance as an art form and inspired visual artists to experiment with the new technology. Photography was and is New Media Art because it allowed artists to invent new realities, to make multiple copies of an image and eventually empowered the broader population, changing their experiences with the world around them by allowing them to create their own images, preserving the past, freezing moments and developing new understandings of time along the way.

As new technologies were introduced and the world around them began to change dramatically modern artists, including photographers like Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) began to argue that art can invent new realities instead of trying to create an imitation of reality that is deeply indebted to the past, to antiquated technologies. In this chapter we'll consider a major influence on New Media Art that allowed artists to explore the excitement, tensions and complexities of modern life in ways that would have been impossible using more traditional approaches to traditional art forms like painting. This chapter builds on our discussion of still photography, to discuss the development of photographs that move, one of the most important aesthetic strategies of New Media Art. In the following unit, we'll dive into the history of early film and animation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

#### Watch & Consider: The Invention of Cinema

Watch *The Invention of Cinema (1888-1914)* video embedded below. Creator: One Hundred Years of Cinema, Source: [YouTube.com](#) (2016) (5:40 minutes.)(Select CC for Closed Captions.)





One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-2>

### Questions to Consider:

1. How does early film fit into the history of New Media Art?
2. Why can film be described as Time Based Art?
3. How was early film responding to the changing technological world of the Machine Age in the early twentieth century?
4. What are some major differences between film and painting? What are some similarities?
5. How did early filmmakers use the visual elements and principles of design to convey ideas?
6. In what ways did early film influence the visual arts?

Optional viewing:

"[The History of the Movie Camera in Four Minutes: From the Lumière Brothers to Google Glass](#)" by the Society for Camera Operators. (4 minutes) Openculture.com (2014)

## Elements of New Media Art

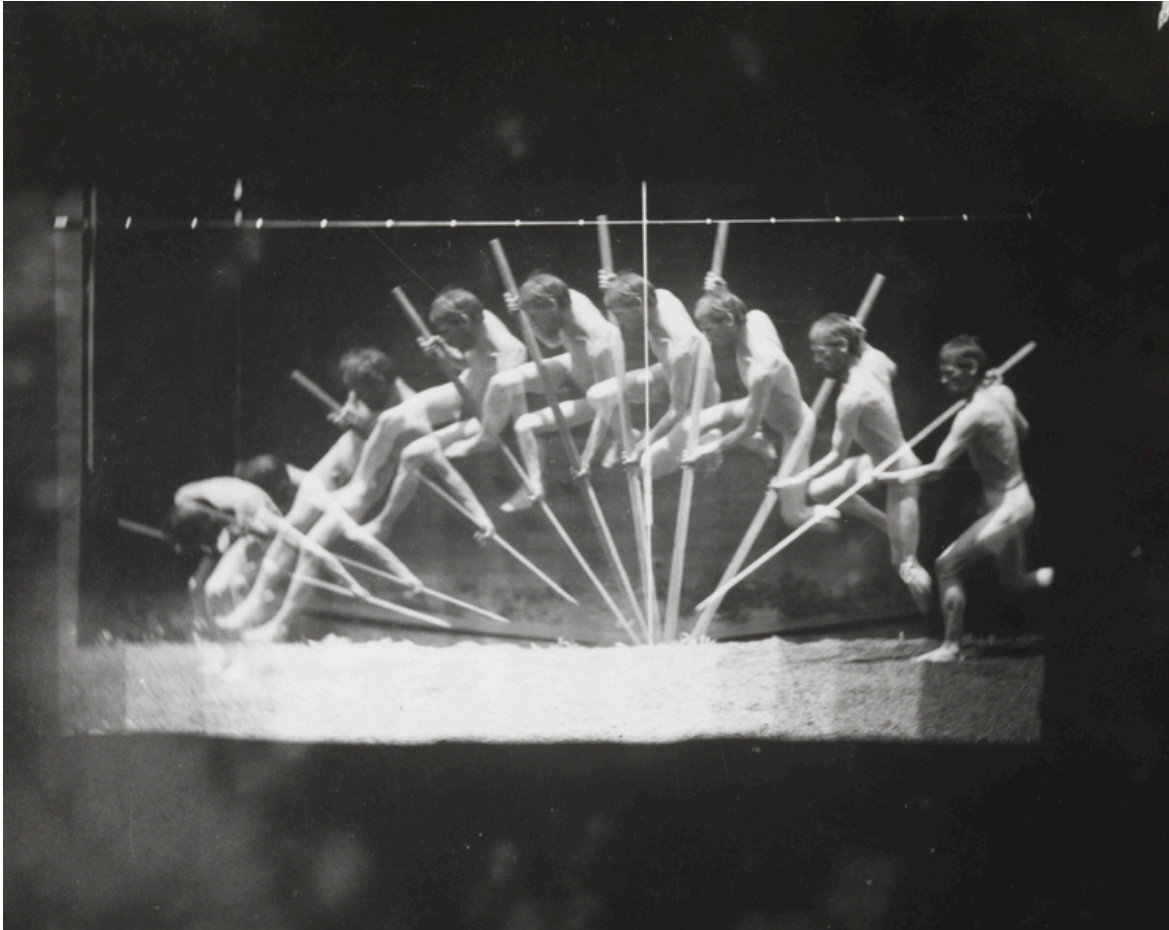
While reading the rest of this chapter, consider how the Elements of New Media Art listed below relate to the works of film and animation discussed in this chapter.

- Expands the definition of art
- Exploits new technology for artistic purposes
- Merges new media with old media
- Time – unfolds over time, uses time as a design element

## Experiments with Photography

Long before the first motion pictures were shown to the public in the 1890s, artists were already

using photography to explore time, manipulate perception and make static images move. Artists like the American painter Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) started using a camera to study sequential movement in the 1870s because he wanted to inform his painting with more knowledge about how the human body moves. He used a single camera and a perforated rotating disc behind the lens to capture a series of exposures on one negative. Eakins was inspired by a French scientist named Étienne Jules Marey (1830-1904), who was the first to record a series of movements on a single photographic surface.



Thomas Eakins, *Motion Study Taken with Marey Wheel Camera*, 1885, dry plate negative, Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, purchased with the partial support of the Pew Memorial Trust. Source: [Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts \(PAFA\)](#). License: [Public Domain](#).

Marey captured movement by attaching white stripes to people dressed in black in order to highlight the changes in their body positions as they performed certain actions. With his technique, called Chronophotography, Marey captured a series of exposures on one negative. He also made early short motion pictures, which were about 60 frames per second, placing him in the family of early influencers of modern film.



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*Marey: Motion Capture.* Montage of Marey's work by Sylvie-Jeanne Gander. Music by Gréco Casadesus. Creator: Gréco Casadesus, Source: [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) (2013) (2:10 minutes)

Marey's work and that of an American inventor and photographer named Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904) both argue that photography is not just painting in another medium. They both saw that photography had the potential to do and show things that no other art medium could. Like Marey, Muybridge also tried to develop a method for capturing movement on a typically static photographic surface in the 19th century. But unlike Marey and Eakins, Muybridge used multiple cameras and created a sequence of photographs that when shown in rapid succession created the look of motion.

## Listen & Consider: Capturing Time

Listen to [this segment from the podcast Radiolab about Muybridge's early experiments with motion](#). You'll also hear about major changes experienced by Americans in the nineteenth century, including the way that railroads changed people's understanding of time. While you're listening, make a list of the major aspects of life that began to change in the nineteenth century and consider some of the ways that people's understanding of time began to change as a result of new technology.

Start the podcast at 10:30. The section on Muybridge starts at 15:00. End at 19:48.

(9:18 minutes total) (You can listen to the entire podcast if you have the interest.)

1. What are some of the ways that people's understanding of time changed as a result of new technology in the nineteenth century?
2. What are some significant aspects of life that changed as a result of new industrial technologies and this new understanding of time?



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-1>

What it would look like if [Eadweard Muybridge's photographs of a race horse were shown in succession](#). Photographs from 1878. Creator of video: silentfilmhouse. Source: YouTube.

## A Paradigm Shift

In the nineteenth century, people's understanding of time became less local and more standardized. The idiosyncratic understanding of time in various regions and towns became more unified, more corporate. The new technologies that required this shift, of which the most significant example is the railroad, also resulted in people being able to communicate more over longer distances and in people being able to travel faster and farther than ever before. Imagine how dramatically people's understanding of space, community and their world began to change as a result of these new technologies. We'll continue to see the impact of technologies from the Industrial Revolution on early 20th century throughout this chapter, including the way that structured time and photographic technology allowed manufacturers to track and record the movement of workers, to further the goals of capitalism by increasing efficiency and productivity. The impact of this oppressive structured time on average workers is explored in an early film by Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977) titled *Modern Times*.



*Modern Times*, film still. 1936. USA. Produced, written, directed, edited, and scored by Charles Chaplin. License: [Public Domain](#).



## Early Motion Pictures

Muybridge and other early inventors were instrumental in allowing humans to see things they hadn't previously been able to see prior to the invention of photography. Being able to see frozen moments, to see movement stopped and to see time captured, held forever, like water frozen in time, would have been an exciting and perhaps paradigm shifting experience for people looking at images in the nineteenth century.



Thanks to the invention of photography, people were trying to find new ways of sharing images with the public in exciting, innovative ways. Some inventors used photography to create Magic Lantern slide presentations.

But static Magic Lantern shows were only the first step. As early as 1834, people had access to a small device called a Zoetrope which allowed them to see images in motion. A zoetrope is a rotating cylinder with images on the inside. The viewer looks through holes cut in the side and gets a visual impression of a single image in continuous motion. In fact, while Muybridge did not originally create his iconic horse photographs to be seen in motion, the series was eventually published in *Scientific American*, with instructions on how to cut the images out and put them into a zoetrope.

Magic Lantern. Photo: Andrei Niemimäki.  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons via Flickr](#).  
License: [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)



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[Zoetrope with animation of Muybridge galloping horse images](#). Creator: Zoetrope Praxinoscope Animations. Source: YouTube. (2012) (1:15 minutes)

Forty-three years after people had been using the zoetrope, in 1877, Charles-Emile Reynaud (1844-1918) designed a new device called a praxinoscope. The praxinoscope has less image distortion than the zoetrope because viewers look down on top of the device and not through holes on the side. But both of these early moving image viewing devices relied on a principle called the persistence of vision, which is the reality that the visual sensations we see, persist even after the image is no longer in front of our eyes. Our mind connects all of the images seen separately to create

the visual effect of seamlessly flowing movement. This illusion of movement is the basis of modern analog film.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-5>*

[Praxinoscope with multiple animations](#). Music by Bill Frankeberger. Creator: Bill Frankeberger. Source: YouTube. (2017) (1:48 minutes)

In the earliest films, you can notice a visible “blink” between image frames because there are only a few frames per second. The more frames per second used, the fewer blinks happen between images. However, even with the blinks, it must have been mind blowing to walk into a dark room to view a short motion picture for the first time in the 1890s and to have an experience where it seemed like space and time as you knew it were annihilated. Now the very first films were not shown in dark rooms, but in Kinetoscope parlors. These rooms featured peep-hole machines designed by the American inventor Thomas Edison (1847-1931), where people crouched to look through a viewing lens and watch tiny moving photographs arranged in short loops.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-6>*

[Short video showing the insides of an early kinetoscope](#). Creator: thekinolibrary. Source: YouTube. (2013) (25 seconds)

The earliest motion pictures shown in Kinetoscope parlors were short clips like this one created by Thomas Edison, recording a man sneezing. By 1893, Edison's kinetoscope was an international sensation.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-7>*

[Record of a man sneezing on Thomas Edison's kinetoscope](#). (Original 1894) Creator: W.K.L. Dickson. Source: Library of Congress via YouTube. (22 seconds)

In 1895, the French brothers August Lumière (1862-1954) and Louis Lumière (1864-1948) advanced

Edison's technology and started showing longer series of moving images to the public in larger rooms. Their first paid public screen consisted of 10 short films, each about 50 seconds, and was held at the Grand Café on the Boulevard de Capuchines in Paris. Early films by the Lumières were shown in cafes, department stores and circuses, but by 1896, the brothers were opening Cinématographe theaters and showing their films in major cities across the world including New York, London, Cairo, Alexandria, and Brussels. By 1900, a cinema culture had developed in many parts of the world and cinema became a new social environment where classes and genders mixed often. It may be challenging for us today to imagine how surprising and awe-inspiring these early films were and this new social experience was for viewing audiences. There are reports of early viewers watching *Arrival of a Train at a Station* (*L'Arrivée d'un Train en Gare de la Ciotat*) and jumping out of the way, as the train approached the foreground of the screen, surprised by the illusion of motion displayed by this dramatic new technology.

## Watch & Consider: Watching Early Films

Watch *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, 1895, by August and Louis Lumière (The Lumière Brothers) embedded below. The music on this video is not original. Uploaded by raphaeldpm. Source: [YouTube](#). (49 seconds)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-8>

### Questions to Consider:

1. Imagine you are looking at short films by Thomas Edison in a kinetoscope parlor and then watching the Lumière Brothers *Arrival of a Train* in a large, dark room full of people.
2. What are some of the differences between the experience of looking at moving images in the personal kinetoscope vs. being in a room looking at the wall?
3. Consider size of image, atmosphere in the room, sounds, smells, other factors that might impact your experience.
4. What connections can you draw between the images people saw in kinetoscope parlors and gifs you use to communicate today? What are some differences between those two forms of moving images?
5. What other connections can you draw between the way you access (and make?) moving images today and the way average people accessed moving images in the early 1900s?

Another iconic early film made by the Lumière Brothers was a film of the American dancer Loïe Fuller (1862-1928), who moved to Paris in 1893 and developed innovative choreography including a dance called the serpentine dance, which she performed with a costume of moving, billowing cloth. She employed stagehands to use different colored gels to project colors onto the fabric, creating a dynamic visual experience for the viewers. In order to recreate the impact of her performance and before the invention of color film, the Lumière's hand painted film cells to suggest the multi-colored experience of watching Fuller perform in person.

## Watch & Consider: Intermedia and Early Film

[Watch Loïe Fuller filmed dancing the Danse Serpentine](#) filmed in 1896 by the Lumière Brothers. Hand colored film stock. Source: UbuWeb. License: [Public Domain](#). (42 seconds)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#video-28-1>

### Questions to Consider:

1. Watch this film and use it to explain how early film captured motion in ways that are different than still photography.
2. In what ways do you think this film opened up new ways of seeing for young artists in the early 20th century?
3. What are some ways that this film uses multiple art mediums (sound, film, dance, painting, set design)? You'll learn the term intermedia later in this text, but this film is a good example of intermedia art.

## Focus: Early Global Filmmakers

The new medium of film spread rapidly with artists and inventors all over the world adopting the new



technology to their own needs and ideas. The first Latin American filmmaker, Manuel Trujillo Durán (1871-1933), got his start in film by organizing the first showing of films in Venezuela on an Edison Vitascope in 1897. Shortly after, he began to make and show his own films like *Un celebre especialista sacando muelas en el gran hotel Europa* (A Famous Puller of Teeth at the Grand Hotel Europa).



Manuel Trujillo Durán. *Un celebre especialista sacando muelas en el gran hotel Europa* (A Famous Puller of Teeth at the Grand Hotel Europa). 1897. film still. Creator: Zulia Photographic Archive. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [Public Domain](#).

Shibata Tsunekichi (1850-1929), made his first films, also the first made by a Japanese filmmaker for the Lumière brothers in 1898. He then went on to make films for Japanese producers, including most famously, *Momiji-gari* (Maple Leaf Hunters) which was an historic account of Danjuro IX and Kikugoro V, two Kabuki theatre actors.



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Shibata Tsunekichi, *Momijigari* (Maple Leaf Viewing) (1899) Music not original to the film. Print preserved at the National Film Center of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. Uploaded by Canal del Elvira. Source: [YouTube](#). License: [Public Domain](#). (2:24 minutes.)

Mexico's first film, *Don Juan Tenorio* was created in 1898 by Salvador Toscano Barragan (1872-1947),

who continued to make local Mexican film in the early 20th century and screen foreign films like Méliès's *Voyage to the Moon* for audiences in Mexico City.

In Bombay, India, Harischchandra Sakharam Bhatvadekar (Save Dada) (1868-1958) decided to make films after viewing a screening of Lumière brothers cinema. He made his first film in 1899 by recording a wrestling match at the Hanging Gardens in Bombay. In the early 1900s, Tunisian filmmaker Albert Samama Chikly (1872-1934) made the first North African films, including the first fiction film, *Zohra* (1922) which stars his daughter, actress Haydée Samama Chikly.



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Albert Samama-Chikly, *Zohra*. (1922) Print preserved at Les Archives du Film du Centre National de la Cinématographie. Uploaded by Silent movies. Source: [YouTube](#). License: [Public Domain](#). (9:11 minutes)

Finally, the court photographer of the Shah of Iran, Mirza Ebrahim Khan Akkas Bashi (1874-1915), was asked to purchase filmmaking equipment after the Shah visited the Paris World's Fair in 1900 and toured the Lumière film exhibit there.

## Focus: Film and the Machine Age

At the [1900 Paris World's Fair](#), new media art, new technology, and movement all came together to shock and impress. This particular world's fair even featured a moving sidewalk, so viewers moved and had a view of each exhibition space they passed, as if everything was in motion. In many ways, this is a powerful metaphor for the impact film had on early 20th century art. Film's ability to capture motion and preserve time, opened up new ways of seeing for young, avant-garde artists.

Artists began to experiment with film, to see what it could do. The French artist Georges Méliès (1861-1938), one of the celebrated heroes of Martin Scorsese's film *Hugo*, became the first filmmaker to use multiple cuts and repeated scenes to establish time moving forward, in his 1902 silent film, *A Trip to the Moon* (*Le Voyage dans la Lune*). This film, the first sci-fi adventures in film history, tells the story of six astronauts launched from a cannon to explore the moon. It also features one of the most unforgettable moments in film history, the man in the moon, being poked in the eye by a rocket ship.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-11>

Georges Méliès, *Le voyage dans la lune* (*A Trip to the Moon*). 1902. Music by Erich Wolfgang Korngold & Laurence Rosenthal not original to the film. Uploaded by Ckdexterhaven. Source: [YouTube](#). License: [Public Domain](#). (10:28 minutes) (Start at 4:00 minutes for the iconic moonshot.)

The invention of motion pictures was probably one of the most significant developments of the early 20th century. But, just like photography, many in the early 1900s, felt that film was just a machine, just a scientific tool and couldn't be considered fine art. However, as often happens when new technologies or approaches are introduced, it was freeing to be marginalized in the art world or not considered art at all. In the context of film, this marginalization allowed many artists to begin experimenting and manipulating this new time based art. Artists like the Spanish filmmaker Segundo de Chomón (1871-1929) began to experiment on films like *Symphonie Bizarre* (1909) with slowing the film down, making it run backwards and drawing directly on the film to create his desired effects.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-12>

Segundo de Chomón, *Symphonie bizarre*, 1909. Produced by Pathé Brothers. Music by Toscano Filho, José Menezes and Neusa Rodrigues. Edited and music added by Antônio Nóbrega. (2005) Source: [Rádio Educativa Mensagem \(REM\) via YouTube](#). License: [Public Domain](#). (3:06 minutes)

## Watch & Consider: Méliès and Chomón

After watching George Méliès' *A Voyage to the Moon* (1902) and Segundo de Chomón's *Symphonie Bizarre* (1909) consider the following questions:

1. Imagine yourself as a painter, watching this film for the first time in a dark room with other people in 1900 Paris.
2. What are you thinking?

3. How do you think these two films and the other moving pictures you've seen in this unit might impact your work as a painter?

Along with the many popular films of the early twentieth century, some avant-garde painters started to make their own abstract films, using moving images to explore time, technology and modernity. Some artists were quite excited about the possibilities of this new media and wanted to use film to show how space and time as it was known in the past had been transformed in the modern era thanks to industrialization and Machine Age technology. The turn of the century in Europe was dominated by major thinkers challenging traditions of Western thought, including the scientist Albert Einstein (1879-1955), who published his paper "Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies" in 1905, which outlined his theory of relativity, explaining that space and time are not absolute, but are relative to the observer. So Europeans were slowly introduced to the reality of living in a world of shifting perspectives, where the appearance of an object is in a constant state of flux depending on the point of view from which it is seen. The Spanish painter Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), was among many painters who were awed while watching films by the Lumière Brothers on a large screen, 15 by 27 meters high at the 1900 Paris World's Fair. He'd actually seen his first film four years earlier on a smaller screen. And the Cubist painting style that he later developed was greatly influenced by the time based arts of film and dance that he was exposed to in the early 20th century.

The Cubist painter and designer Fernand Léger (1881-1955) made his own film in 1924 called *The Mechanical Ballet* (*La Ballet Mécanique*). As a work of proto-New Media Art, this film is significant because it was the first film collage, with no narrative and no linear structure. Léger employed one technique that many modern artists used to expose the chaos of the Machine Age, simultaneity. He did this by showing multiple viewpoints and multiple moments in time in the Mechanical Ballet, along with rejecting linear plots and timelines, playing with the viewers perception of time and space. In this film, Léger juxtaposes the dynamic motion of kitchen utensils, machine gears, rotating disks and dancing bottles with human body parts, giving the mechanical universe a human face in moments throughout the film, both demonstrating and maybe challenging the dehumanization of the machine age. Léger was impacted by his experiences with new technology as a soldier during World War I, and the year he spent in the hospital after being gassed on the front lines in 1917. His ambivalence about the wonders of the Machine Age permeates this experimental film.



## Watch & Consider: Mechanical Ballet

Watch this excerpt of *Ballet mécanique*, 1924 by Fernand Léger. 35mm film (black and white, silent), full film is 12 min. Music by George Antheil added later. Original source for this video clip “The Original Ballet Mechanique – George Antheil’s Carnegie Hall” Uploaded by Andy-80. Source: [YouTube](#). (8:30 minutes)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-13>

### Questions to Consider:

1. Identify one machine part or mechanical device you recognize in the film.
2. Describe that part of the film.
3. How has Leger presented that machine part?
4. Use some adjectives to describe it.
5. Choose one place in the film with part of a human body (lips, legs, hands, torso, etc.). Describe it.
6. How is the part you’ve just described different from or similar to segments of the film that present mechanical devices or machines?
7. Identify some moments of fragmentation in this film. What effect do they have on you as a viewer? How do they add to the mood of the film?
8. Identify moments of repetition in this film. (Keep in mind you are only viewing a clip.) What effect do they have on you?
9. What do you think Leger is saying about new technology and life during the Machine Age given the aesthetic choices he has made?

## Focus: Early Experimental Film

In the past, life had been more static, but science and technology forced modern humans to experience time, space and motion much more dynamically. Reality was in a constant state of flux

and that complexity is explored in Léger's film. Uncertainty and ambiguity became a way of life in the early 20th century and Léger's film highlights this new modern reality through the manipulation of the relatively new medium of film. Human perception was constantly being altered by the pace of modernity and early experimental films like Léger's attempted to respond to this new reality. The old world was gone and artists were beginning to search for ways to explore and express the new, strange and terrifying world they were surrounded by. They wanted to use the new technology of new media to open people's eyes and ears to the beauties and horrors of the modern machine age. Some modern artists turned to film because they wanted to engage viewers in ways that traditional art of the past did not. Film engages the viewer in meaningful ways because the total film doesn't in fact exist anywhere other than in the viewer's mind.

Along with Léger, other visual artists who were trained as painters and photographers, began to make experimental film in the 1920s, including Hans Richter (1888-1976), who made the very first purely abstract film in 1921, titled *Rhythmus 21*.



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Hans Richter, *Rhythmus 21*, 1921/23, black and white silent film. Music not original. Uploaded by pablojmurphy. Source: [YouTube](#). License: [Public Domain](#). (3:08 minutes)

Photographer Man Ray (1890-1976) also began making poetry with film by splicing, editing and manipulating the film stock to create abstract compositions in films like *Emak Bakia (Leave me Alone)* from 1926.



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Man Ray, *Emak-Bakia (Leave me Alone)*, 1926, black and white film, 16 min. Music by Anthony Paul Mercer not original. Uploaded by lapetitemelancolie. Source: [YouTube](#). License: [Public Domain](#). (16:08 minutes)

Artists associated with the [Surrealist movement](#), found film a particularly rich new medium, for attempting to access The Unconscious, through non-linear time frames and bizarre juxtapositions achieved through film editing, as seen in iconic Surrealist films like *Un Chien Andalou (The Andalusian Dog)* (1929) by Luis Buñuel (1900-1983) and Salvador Dalí (1904-1989).



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Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. *Un Chien Andalou (An Andalusian Dog)*. 1929. Black and white film. Original score by Richard Wagner from *Tristan and Isolde*. Uploaded by Storia del Cinema. Source: [YouTube](#). (15:49 minutes) (The film was originally shown with French intertitles. [For English translations of the intertitles see this version of the film](#). Note that this version has had a new score added by Mordant Music.)

Some of these visual artists felt that film could do things that painting couldn't, while others saw a clear relationship between traditional art forms like painting and the new media of film. This relationship is explained by painter Hans Richter in the following way:

*"I conceive of the film as a modern art form particularly interesting to the sense of sight. Painting has its own peculiar problems and specific sensations, and so has film. But there are also problems in which the dividing line is obliterated, or where the two infringe upon each other. More especially, the cinema can fulfill certain promises made by the ancient arts, in the realization of which painting and film become close neighbors and work together."*

## Watch & Consider: Early Experimental Film

Choose one of the avant-garde films embedded above to watch. Consider the questions below while viewing.

1. What do you think Richter meant by the statement quoted above?
2. What relationship does he draw between painting and film?
3. What are some similarities you can draw between the film you watched and painting? (If you are familiar with modern painting from the early 20th century, you can specifically reference that, but if not, connect the film to other aspects of painting you're familiar with.)
4. What are some ways that these experimental films are pushing the medium of film beyond its original function?

## Focus: The Birth and Rebirths of a Nation

While some artists took experimental approaches to film that did not involve linear narratives, other pioneering filmmakers purposefully wove linear narratives and used the medium of film in effective ways, to engage in a dialogue about American history. D.W. Griffith's (1875-1948) *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) is considered a landmark film because it was the first 12-reel, 3-hour long film ever made and because the innovative camera work heralded a new approach to telling stories using moving pictures. It was also the first blockbuster film and the first film ever screened at the White House. This is significant because the film was originally titled *The Clansman* and as that title demonstrates, it is a deeply racist film. So the history of new media is infused with and engaged to the history of racism in America. In 2015, contemporary artist DJ Spooky, aka Paul D. Miller (born 1970), reimagined the film from the perspective of DJ culture, creating *Rebirth of a Nation*, described by Spooky as a "DJ booth applied to cinema".

## Elements of New Media Art

While reading about the project by DJ Spooky discussed in this section, consider how it engages with these two Elements of New Media Art.

- Remixing – using images or things made by others in new ways
- Challenges the status quo

In this remixing of a racist icon of film history, Spooky manipulates moments from the 1915 film, juxtaposing them with historical footage, and new sounds from the 21st century, to expose the way that this film demonized Black Americans and shaped race relations throughout the modern era. DJ Spooky's remixing of original art made by someone else, is an integral component of New Media Art, which is philosophically related to Hip Hop strategies of appropriation and remixing. Spooky's work is also engaged with New Media Art concepts through the critical look at a work of film from the American past. New Media Art often engages with and deconstructs dominant narratives and that is precisely what DJ Spooky does in his *Rebirth*.





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Trailer for Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky's *Rebirth of a Nation*. 2007. (1 hour 40 minutes) Uploaded by International Film Festival Rotterdam. Source: [YouTube](#). (2:34 minutes) The full film can be found in your local library or purchased through multiple sources. [See DJ Spooky's website for more details.](#)

Spooky's critical approach is related to a much earlier responses to D.W. Griffith's film, pioneered by Lincoln Motion Picture Company, which formed in 1916 to produce films for a Black audience. They produced five films by 1920, including *Within Our Gates* (1920) by Black director Oscar Micheaux (1884-1951), starring celebrated actress Evelyn Preer (1896-1932). (You can find the full film *Within Our Gates* streaming on YouTube from various uploaders.) Micheaux wanted to provide a different perspective on what it meant to be Black in America in the early 20th century. Micheaux argued that he created the film in response to the social instability present in America after World War I, but many continue to see it as a critical response to Griffith's film. All of Micheaux's films including *Within Our Gates*, focus on contemporary Black life in America and attempt to counteract the negative, racist stereotypes drawn from the history of minstrel shows, that continued to prevail in American culture after the Civil War and are supported in films like *Birth of a Nation*. Another significant film made by Lincoln is *By Right of Birth* (1921) directed by Clarence Brooks (1896-1969).



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Clarence Brooks, *By Right of Birth*, 1921. Black and White film. Lincoln Motion Picture Company. Uploaded by Department of Afro-American Research Arts Culture. Source: [YouTube](#). License: [Fair Use](#). (See also YouTube video description for more information about Fair Use.) (4:10 minutes)

## Watch & Consider: Rebirth of a Nation

Watch the trailer for DJ Spooky's Rebirth of a Nation embedded above and if possible to find, watch the entire film.

[DJ Spooky's Rebirth of a Nation at Chicago's Millennium Park](#) (6/20/16)(Full video 1 hour 31 minutes)

Read "[Why Remix Birth of a Nation?](#)" by Kriston Capps. *The Atlantic* (2017).

1. How does DJ Spooky have a dialogue with D.W. Griffith's iconic film?
2. DJ Spooky is using a New Media strategy of remixing (or appropriation) here, by borrowing parts of Griffith's film and recontextualizing the entire work. In what way does Spooky challenge the racist narrative laid out in Griffith's film?

About this project DJ Spooky has said:

*"In a certain sense what I'm doing is portraying the film as he intended it," DJ Spooky says of his remix. "This is a film glorifying a horrible situation. And I think a modern sensibility is something where people will look at this and go like 'Oh, I can't believe this, I don't relate to it, I don't think this is right, what does he mean?' So it's not letting him off the hook so much as presenting the film and actually having it fall in on itself."*

3. What do you think DJ Spooky means? After watching parts of Spooky's work (or the entire piece) do you think he effectively makes Birth of a Nation "fall in on itself"? If so, explain using one example from Spooky's remix.

## Focus: Early Animation

We've been discussing the history of moving images as early New Media Art and another significant part of that history is the history of animation. Animation is also Time Based Art and is also related to more traditional art media like drawing and painting in interesting ways.

**Note: A stand alone chapter on Animation is in the works! In the meantime, watch these two great introductory videos from PBS.**

Watch *Frame by Frame: The Art of Animation and Motion Graphics* from Off Book PBS Digital Studios. 2012. Source: [YouTube](#). (6:45 minutes)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-19>

Watch *Frame by Frame: The Art of Stop Motion Animation*. PBS Digital Studios. 2013. Source: [YouTube](#). (8:07 minutes)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-20>

## Watch & Consider: Early Animation

Watch the following examples of early animation:



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Émile Cohl, *Fantasmagorie*, 1908, hand drawn animation. Uploaded by silentfilmhouse. Source: [YouTube](#). (1:16 minutes)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-22>

Winsor McCay, *Gertie the Dinosaur*, hand drawn animation, 1914. Uploaded by Open Culture. Source: [YouTube](#). (13:51 minutes)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=28#oembed-23>

BBC Ideas. Lotte Reiniger: The Genius Before Disney. Short Documentary about the animation artist, Lotte Reiniger. 2018. Source: [YouTube](#). (2:15 mutes)

### Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways does this early animation relate to the zoetrope and other devices that relied on persistence of vision?
2. Some of the animations you watched involve cycling, which is repeating an animation or reusing a sequence multiple times in a film. Identify one film where you see cycling and explain how cycling is used.
3. Do you think the animation you watched is a good example of narrative animation (animation designed with a storyboard) or non-narrative animation (designed without a storyboard, perhaps even non-linear)?
4. What makes animation a good example of Time-Based Art? How does animation use time as a design element?
5. What are some of the differences between the hand drawn animation of Émile Cohl (1857-1938) and Winsor McKay (1869-1934) and the silhouette animation of Lotte Reiniger (1899-1981)?

## Key Takeaways

At the end of this chapter you will begin to:

1. Explain the history of early film.
2. Describe and compare significant innovations in early film technology.
3. Recognize developments in the field of motion pictures and consider how early film is connected to the broader history of visual culture.
4. Explain how early film relates to the elements of New Media Art.



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## EARLY VIDEO ART

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### Video Transforms Art

Very similar to how the introduction of photography and film challenged the definition of what is called art, the advent of video begged not the question of "Is this art?", but rather "How will video transform art?" The technology of photography received its first artistic recognition for its application to existing art forms, a reason why many of the first photographs are still life images, such as Louis Daguerre's (1787-1851) *Still Life with Plaster Casts* (1837).

#### Elements of New Media Art in Video Art

As you explore the early history of video art in this chapter, notice when you recognize these elements of New Media Art.

- Expanding the definition of art
- Exploiting new technology for artistic purposes
- Democratizing access to art
- Merging new media with old media
- Time – unfolding over time
- Liveness – happening in real time, the artist is there
- Variable – always different, changing
- Interactive – viewers are involved and can change and manipulate the work



Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, *The Artist's Studio / Still Life with Plaster Casts*, 1837, daguerreotype, 6.5 x 8.5 inches, J. Paul Getty Museum. Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

However, as video entered the visual arts, there were many other forms of visual expression, such as Minimalism, Abstract Expressionism, Dada, found object sculpture, Fluxus, film, performance art, feminist art, Situationist International, and many other movements. Video, like an objective tool, was used to extend expression in diverse fields, which were by no means mutually exclusive. For this reason, it becomes difficult to follow the developments in early video simply chronologically or only by its application in various movements. A delineated analysis may seem chaotic, but there is no clean and simple manner of representing postwar cultures. The use of video art came naturally in artists in the postwar landscape with not only consumer level affordability and access, but its language was familiar

to most households.

As [Pop Art](#) made it abundantly clear, mass culture came to define America in the 1960s and the television was one of the more the ideal forms of media to hijack. Many artists in diverse backgrounds and goals tasked themselves during this time with deconstructing images and imbuing them with new, subversive meaning and having video in their toolkit opened a whole new world of possibilities. Video was taken up as a rich source of content ripe for appropriation and it proved itself useful for image manipulation, documenting happenings and performances, and even instrumental in installations.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Fluxus artists seemed particularly drawn to the medium. One of the first, significant works to emerge under the umbrella of the video art was [TV Dé-collage](#), a series of events produced by the German artist Wolf Vostell (1932-1998) under the umbrella of installation art. The sculptural space in this case was the window of a Parisian department store, where he placed television sets on desks and furniture, displaying warped images. Since the late 1950s Vostell began experimenting with various forms of manipulation and, to some degree, disruption of visual messages in mass media from mass produced publications to billboards displayed for the masses.



Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*, 1919-20, Photomontage and collage with watercolor, 44 7/8 x 35 7/16 in. (114 x 90 cm). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie. Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#).

The leap then to integrate television sets into his works came naturally, which found powerful functional and symbolic expression in images, assemblages, installations, and sculpture.

Another direction that some video artists were taking their installations was to activate spectators into participating in the artwork. In [Slipcover \(1966\)](#) by artist Les Levine (born 1935) used a series of monitors to present spectators with recorded footage of themselves, which, for many, was an unsettling and exhilarating experience. The ability to shape spaces for and depend on the viewer to elicit a specific feeling was a powerful prospect and one that artist Bruce Nauman (born 1941) seized in his 1968 work [Video Corridor](#).



Bruce Nauman, *Video Corridor*, 1968, screenshot of live tape. Source: YouTube, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). Click image for link.

This installation consisted of two parallel, floor-to-ceiling walls that created a narrow tunnel with two monitors at the end. As the viewer walked through the claustrophobic corridor that arrived at the screens only to find them streaming surveillance video of the viewer. The confines of the space paired with the displaced perspective aims to disorient and even instill fear into the viewer.

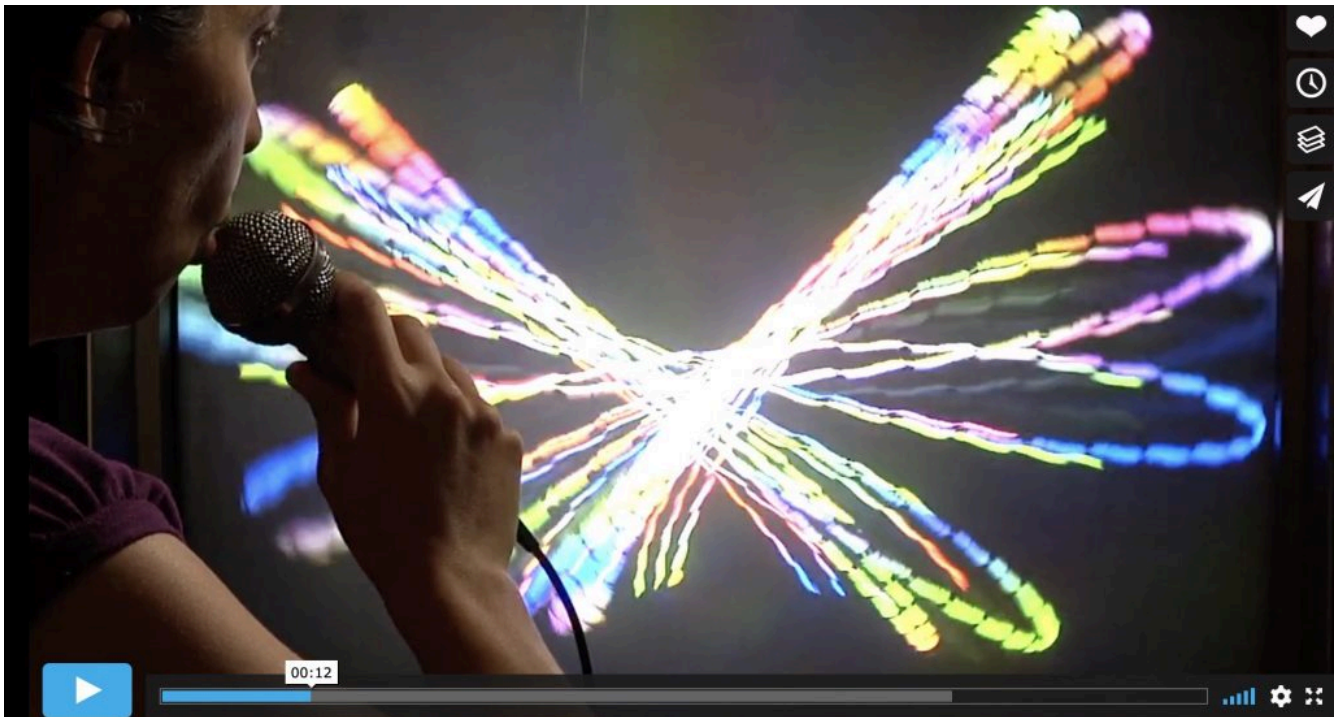
## Expanding Video into the Arts

Initially, the television served Fluxus artists across the world throughout the 1960s like a prop in installations and mixed media sculpture to critique the new, vapid culture surrounding television. However, the use of video quickly expanded into other fields, like [performance art](#), and gained recognition as a medium in its own right. Artists and critics alike were already questioning whether artworks need be limited to physical objects in the first place and video assumed an important role in this transition. An early adopter of video, US artist Bruce Nauman linked video media with performance art and sculpture. His work [Wall/Floor Positions](#) (1968) Nauman turns his own body into the sculptural work in poses throughout his studio. This work was a natural progression that arose from his explorations in integrating new media, as was clear in the photographs of his [Fountain \(1967\)](#) a year earlier.

Korean artist Nam June Paik (1932-2006) began to utilize the television set and other video devices for their inherent qualities for formal expression. Influenced by his time studying with American artist John Cage (1912-1992) in Germany, Paik took an approach akin to that of a mad scientist with a touch of Eastern zen philosophy. Like a curious inventor he deconstructed the appliances to experiment with the distortion of images with magnets and the sync pulses of the displays. Taking it further, the televisions were disassembled and collaged around rooms randomly, in shapes, in seemingly non-



sequitur contexts. In the video performance *Participation TV* (1969) Paik invited spectators to take on an active role in manipulating the performance with microphones.



Nam June Paik, *Participation TV*, 1969, Screenshot of video. Source: Vimeo, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). Click for image link.

With this momentum Paik followed these performances by a collaborative performance series with musician [Charlotte Moorman](#) (1933-1991) that utilized inventive applications of televisions, which attempt to both reconcile man/machine and also address contemporary social issues, such as mainstream feminism. In *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1968-69), for example two cameras are focused on Moorman's face, which were reflected into two circular mirrors over her breasts. The simultaneous eroticization of technology and objectification of women is further explored in *Concerto for TV, Cello, and Videotapes* (1971). For this piece three monitors – playing pre-recorded performances by the Moorman – are stacked in the general shape of a cello, which is then played so-to-speak by Moorman, seated behind with a bow. It is difficult to single out one aspect for analysis in the work.



Charlotte Moorman, *Concerto for TV Cello wearing TV Glasses*, 1971, Image courtesy the Block Museum of Art and the Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections. Source: ArtsJournal, License: [CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0](#).

Clearly, there are departures from sculpture and performance art, as well as messages regarding gender and sexuality, harking back to a previous collaboration with Moorman, *Opera Sextronique* (1967), but the dislocation and layering of time was perhaps most important to Paik: "It must be stressed, that my work is not painting, sculpture, " noted Paik "but rather Time art: I love no particular genre." Although that statement was given as early as 1962, it holds true through most of his career as Paik navigated through movements, playing often in the spaces between.

Paralleling the advancement of consumer level technologies, artists like Paik continued to push on the boundaries of artistic applications of video. In 1965 Sony introduced the Portapak, one of the first portable video cameras and within weeks artists were using them for video art. Recognizing the potential, Andy Warhol (1928-1987) became one of the first US artists to work almost exclusively with portable cameras. Several of his early tapes became content in his first double-projection film *Outer and Inner Space* (1965). Later in 1965, Paik and Warhol both became essentially the first spokesmen for video art with screenings. On September 29, Warhol screened

his famous "underground tapes" in underground railroad space under the Waldorf-Astoria in New York. On October 4th, Paik presented [Electric Video Recorder](#) (1965) at Cafe au Go Go.

Video was able to transition from simply a means of documenting performance art to an essential medium to better connect with the audience and communicate. Vito Acconci (1940-2017) was using single-channel, black and white video for his performances throughout the 1970s. In [Filler](#) (1971) Acconci creates a very close physical space between himself and the camera on the floor inside of a cardboard box. This and many of his works to follow, like [Theme Song](#) (1973) are framed in very close quarters in order to engage with the viewer in a closer psychological connection and to enhance the feeling of voyeurism. In 1974 artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) released her collected series *Body Tracks* and her film *Burial Pyramid*, all works where her body becomes the focal point to elucidate feminist critique. In another vein of exploring intimacy with their own body, artist Chris Burden (1946-2015) sought to shock audiences at the expense of his own body. In the performance *Shoot* (1971) a bullet is shot into his arm; in *Through the Night Softly* (1973) he lies on his bare stomach with



Andy Warhol, *Outer and Inner Space*, 1965, Screenshot of video. Source: YouTube, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). Click image for link.

his hands and feet bound behind his back and drags himself through a street of broken glass. The intense, personal connection that video offered was picked up by many artists looking to communicate a visceral experience. You can find a more detailed discussion of Mendieta's and Burden's work in the [Performance Art](#) chapter.



Chris Burden, *Through the Night Softly*, 1974, Screenshot of video. Source: YouTube, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). Click image for link.

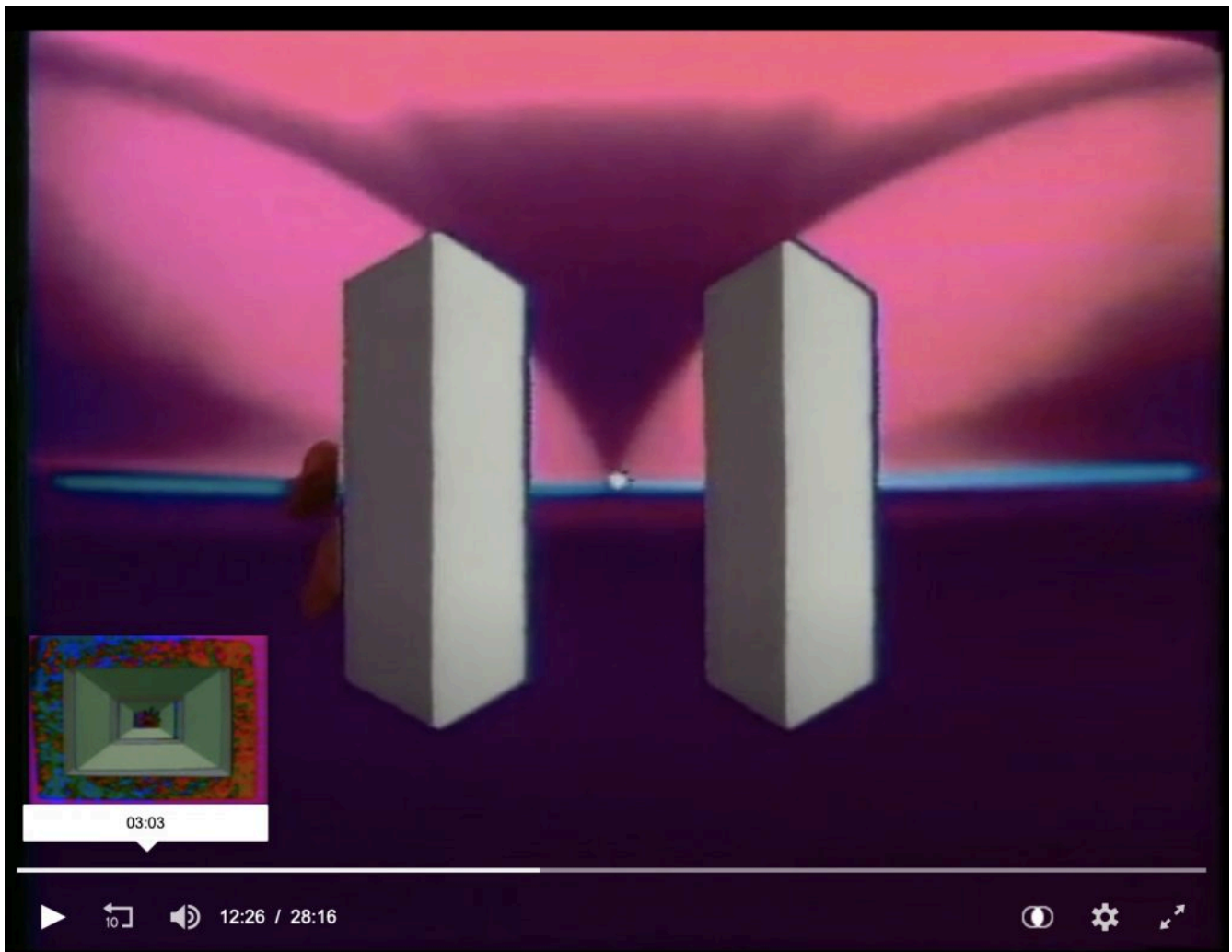
In *Third Tape* (1976), artist Peter Campus (born 1937) presented the story of a man that transpires in three parts. First, a man's face is presented with clear fishing line bound across his face, effectively cutting him into cross sections. Then in the second segment the viewer sees a hand place mirrored tiles across a black surface, as it slowly becomes clear from the reflections that a man's face is looking down from above. Finally, in the last part, a man's face looks up through a tank of water at the camera above. Slowly his face recedes into the waters.

## Unfolding the Digital Landscape

The technology of the portable camera quickly evolved from the half-inch reel-to-reel in 1968 to the more compact three-quarter-inch, color video cassettes available in 1972. In these formative years some artists were actually involved in the research and development. At its heart, the video camera is a complicated machine, a device that converts moving images into electronic signals that are transmitted to a monitor, which decodes them and reassembles them into an image to display. There are many points in that process open for manipulation. In 1970, Nam June Paik partnered with electrical engineer Shuya Abe (born 1932) to create a digital synthesizer capable of image manipulation instead of sound. Similar to revolutionary shifts in other fields of art, such as Modernist architecture or photography, the trailblazers of the art world move into areas dominated by technicians and engineers.

### Elements of New Media Art

- Expands the definition of art
- Exploits new technology for artistic purposes



Ed Emshwiller, *Scape-Mates*, 1972, Screenshot of video. Source: Vimeo, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/). Click image for link.

American painter, filmmaker, and teacher Ed Emshwiller (1925-1990) saw incredible potential in video synthesizers and computers for creating original artwork. In *Scape-mates* (1972) computer animation is used to render a dance of figurative and abstract visual elements in video. Indeed, the digital innovations of the 1970s ushered in a new era of image rendering. In 1973 Dan Sandin developed an image processor that is now known as the Sandin Image Processor, which accepted basic video input signals and manipulated them in a similar way that the [Moog synthesizer](#) did with audio. The device made real time modifications, making it ideal for live performances and "Electronic Visualization Events". Another revolutionary advancement came from artist Keith Sonnier (1941-2020), who developed a forerunner to the modern computer image scanner, the Scanimate. With this he created aesthetic collages of images, like [Color Wipe](#) (1973).

In the 1980s video art took on a new dimension of real-time visualization in the form of stream-of-consciousness performance, which resonated best with Conceptual artists. Gary Hill (born 1951), for example, centered his work in linguistics, instead of music, in video art. In [Electronic Linguistics](#) (1977) the image is treated as a language that evolves. This is achieved through computer generated



shapes on a screen that correlate to sound inputs. Even Nam June Paik continued to further video editing devices beyond the synthesizer that he developed with Shuya Abe. With more resources at hand Paik excelled at these creating stream-of-consciousness visual and conceptual techniques with vibrant image/music compositions such as [Butterfly](#) (1986). Works like these continued the modern and postmodern experiments in formal compositions of light and color in the digital field. Most artists working in the foundations of video art, were already members of an existing movement that did not shy away from technological change, who saw a new mode of expression and saw themselves as active participants in that change.

## Consuming Video

In subsequent artworks Paik also seems to personally grapple with the classic [Situationist paradox](#) of balancing an attack on television — or at least video as a medium for passive **spectatorship** — with weaponizing it for critique. Beyond the typical passive consumption of the television, many artists recognized that video provides a uniquely creative forum for the artist and the spectator with its ability to receive and transmit. Television, much like a radio, is capable of reciprocal communication, receiving and transmitting information. Consumers have only been sold on the idea that information can flow in one direction. A number of works in the 1970s were centered around this mythology. For one example, look at artist Richard Serra's (born 1939) video essay [Television Delivers People](#) (1973). The video presents a scrolling text that criticizes television programming as merely corporate sponsored entertainment, a message that is underscored by a soundtrack of muzak, a bland genre of music traditionally played in elevators and malls. Also consider the video performance [Media Burn](#) (1975) by Ant Farm, an San Francisco-based artist collective. *Media Burn* offered a particularly interesting counter to consumer culture by stacking televisions, setting them aflame, and then driving through the stack with a 1959 Cadillac at high speed.



Richard Serra, *Television Delivers People*, 1973, Screenshot of video. Source: YouTube, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). Click image for link.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=30#oembed-1>

Many early video artists like those from Ant Farm and the New York-based collective [Paper Tiger Television](#) recognized that a new consumer society that was growing out of television and offered

critique using the same medium. Often these artist activists countered mainstream television programming with their own documentaries and news reports. One collective, Top Value Television, recorded their own coverage of the U.S. Democratic and Republican conventions in 1972. Artist activists sneaked onto the main floors with their Sony Portapaks and began interviewing everyone. The resulting report was an entertaining and scything glimpse into American politics and journalism. Paper Tiger Television continued to produce a guerrilla style media counter attack on the mainstream media by producing alternative news reports for cable television well into the 1980s.

## Focus: Immediacy

## Elements of New Media Art

As you continue learning about the early history of video art try to identify these elements of New Media Art in the work you're exploring:

- Variable – always different, changing
- Interactive – viewers are involved and can change and manipulate the work
- Collaborative – the artist is a facilitator and viewers make the art with them
- Time – unfolds over time
- Connectivity – made possible because of new global connections

The psychological space between the spectator became of increased interest to artists and the more it was explored, the more it proved to be an innate, powerful quality of video that artists leaned into even more, giving video more autonomy as its own art form. While exhibition space in institutions was initially given to television sets for its proximity to sculpture, the field of video art expanded quickly to fill and utilize physical space in ways that sculpture and painting could not, spilling into the realms of performance and installation art. In his live performance [\*The Last Nine Minutes\*](#) (1977) American artist Douglas Davis (1933-2014) took part in one of the first international satellite telecasts at the opening of documenta vi alongside Paik and artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986). In this telecast to over 25 countries Davis confronted viewers with the disparity in space/time between them. One

of the most significant qualities that video embodied over film was its immediacy. Films have to be treated, processed, and edited.



Dan Graham, *Performance/Audience/Mirror*, 1975.  
Screenshot from video. Source: YouTube, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). Click image for link.

To create a more immersive experience, artists like Dan Graham (born 1942) were led to create multifaceted systems for specific environments, sometimes using mirrors and often employing closed circuit video setups. Graham uses these elements to surround the viewer in *Performance/Audience/Mirror* (1975), where he stood facing the audience, but with a mirror to his back and proceeded to describe and infer meaning from the movements of those looking on. Then he turned around and renewed the dialogue but through the filter of the mirror.

Video and mirrors work together to manipulate the relationship to the viewer in Graham's 1983 piece *Performance and Stage Set Utilizing Two Way Mirror and Video Time Delay*. In this work the audience is seated facing a group of musicians with a two-way mirror between them. The musicians began to play and then a six second delayed video feed of the act was projected onto the mirror, creating a phenomenological visual and auditory kaleidoscope. The experience for the audience was effectively watching themselves and listening to the performance in real time, but having the superimposition of delayed performance all through the mediator of the mirror.

## Stop & Reflect: Active or Passive Participant

The 1960s and 70s witnessed a significant reconsideration of the relationships between viewer, artwork and artist. Moving forward in this text it is important to be able to understand these relationships and, moreover, this understanding will ultimately shape how you personally navigate art in museums, galleries, in the streets, and at home. Ask yourself the following:

- How would you define an active and a passive participant in viewing art?
- Do you think that viewing a painting is an active or passive experience? Why?

For further reading: [The Emancipated Spectator](#) (2009) by Jacques Rancière. [PDF via Brown University]

## Focus: Subverting the Gaze

As also discussed earlier with Vito Acconci, performance artists during the 1970s were taking advantage of video to control the level of intimacy with the audience. It was precisely this intimacy that many feminist artists seized upon for critique and video suddenly became one of the staples of the feminist toolkit. The larger theme of visual consumption was narrowed notably by film critic Laura Mulvey to analyze and critique the historical and contemporary presence of the “male gaze” in her essay “[Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema](#)” (1975). Briefly put, spectators are commonly put in a masculine subject position with the figure of the woman on screen as the object of desire, a relationship that is referred to as “the male gaze”. The essay proved to have far reaching influence on practicing artists regarding the representation of women, far beyond the scope of mainstream cinema.



Joan Jonas, *Left Side Right Side*, 1972, Screenshot of video. Source: Vimeo, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). [Click image for link](#).

Issues of gender roles and non-binary sexuality were commonplace in art of this time and the differences in approaching these themes were vast. The technique of manipulating images (such as [décollage](#)) continued to be popular for critique of female images and the psychological intimacy between spectator and art continued with loaded sexuality. Many feminist performance artist, such as Ulrike Rosenbach (born 1943), Ana Mendieta, and Joan Jonas (born 1936), leaned early and heavily into video as a medium. One of Jonas' most notable works

*Left Side, Right Side* (1972) synthesized several of the aforementioned stratagems of other video artists. Her performance aimed to disorient the viewer and manipulate perspective using a camera and a mirror. Introducing a linguistic component, Jonas repeats the statements “This is my left side, this is my right side” throughout the performance. On one hand, the inversion of conventional perspective through optics reflected the artistic, mechanical interest of video. On the other hand, the use of the female body and the disruption of visual consumption clearly fit into the landscape of feminist art. The challenging mainstream portrayal of the female body preoccupied many female artists. Focusing on facial close ups, artist Hannah Wilke (1940-1993) practiced sexual gestures with her fingers and her tongue in [Gestures](#) (1973). Through the course of the act Wilke makes the gestures more and more grotesque until all eroticism has fled.

Video has been celebrated as an intensely personal medium. Explorations of the body and of the



self were, as demonstrated here, not limited to women. Artist Bill Viola (born 1951) has made a career out of a life-long introspection of his spiritual and physical self. Viola started as a young artist experimenting with a young medium, a partnership suited to metaphysical self exploration. Beginning with [Information](#) (1973) Viola experimented with the introduction of an interrupting signal in his video recorder in order to produce a sequence of images that could be externally manipulated, a technique similar to that of Nam June Paik. In [A Non-Dairy Creamer](#) (1975) the viewer gazes at Viola, but through the reflection in a cup of coffee, which slowly disappears as he drinks it, a similar concept to Dan Graham's *Performance/Audience/Mirror* mentioned earlier, but on a more personal level. Using the reflection and filtering of himself to represent and reconcile his self/non-self, became—in many ways—the leitmotif of his metaphysical journey in video and continues to inform even his contemporary work.



Bill Viola, *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like*, 1986, Image from film. 89 min, color, sound. Source: Flickr, License: [CC-BY-NC-ND](#).

It was in his work [I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like](#) (1986) that yielded a reflection of himself in the eye of an owl, an image so powerful to him that he made it his signature mark.

If the question of video began as "Is this art?", it certainly established itself as not only art, but an independent media. Ultimately, video offered a new, alternative media to render meaning and new ideas in space and time that was unavailable in its predecessors, like film and performance art. Time, perhaps, was the most significant characteristic of video that drew artists to it, artists seeking to identify, communicate, or simply explore art in this

dimension. The ephemeral quality of video, artists would find, would make it possible to unify and dissect, to focus and obscure, to represent, to be [signifier and signified](#).

## Watch & Consider: Electronic Superhighway

As society began to approach the turn of the twenty first century, Americans were looking ahead, thinking about what kind of future awaited them. Paik predicted a new paradigm for communication, something that he called a "broadband communication network" or "electronic super highway" connecting us all. By the 1990s, his concept of electric information exchanges seemed prophetic in light of the emerging "world wide

web”. Watch this video from Smarthistory about the perservation of Nam June Paik’s Electronic Superhighway.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=30#oembed-2>

After watching the video, consider the following questions:

1. To what extent is this object purely a functional piece, communicating information, or does it have sculptural value?
2. As the screens are replaced with newer technology, does the piece change in value, experience, or meaning?
3. In what what does this work depend on the spectator?

## Key Takeaways

At the end of this chapter you will begin to:

1. Explain the historical divergences of video art from photography, collage, performance art, and sculpture.
2. Identify video art as time-based, interactive and replicable.
3. Discuss the employment of video art as discourse in socio-political critiques, such as Feminism.
4. Analyze the techniques and characteristics unique to video art that innovatively utilize space and time.

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# DIGITAL VIDEO ART AND VIDEO INSTALLATION

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## Creating an Immersive Space

You've been previously introduced to [early film](#) and [early video art](#). In this chapter, we'll turn to digital video and digital video installation. The artists and artworks in this chapter are presented as individual case studies. Each demonstrates a different aspect of digital video and installation and, together, their works show the medium's aesthetic and conceptual variation.

### Watch & Consider: The Case for Video Art

To give some background on video art using both analog and digital tools, watch a primer on video art from PBS Studio's The Art Assignment called "[The Case for Video Art](#)" (embedded below, 10:01 minutes).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-1>

### Questions to Consider:

1. What makes video art distinct from other forms of moving images?
2. How have art and film been intertwined, historically?
3. How did the invention of the Sony Portapak affect artists?
4. Where do you notice the **intermedia** qualities of video art? How do these compare to [Land Art](#), [Performance](#), and [Social Practice](#) discussed in other chapters?
5. According to the video, what does the term **expanded cinema** mean?
6. How does video examine its own existence and creation (think about the focus on exposing the means of production, for example)?
7. How does video integrate into life?
8. What are examples of public versus private videos?

9. Consider the T.V. as a means of both expression and opposition.
10. In what ways does video art aid in addressing and exploring identity?
11. How has the internet affected video art?
12. How is **appropriation** used in the works by some of the artists in this unit?

## Read & Reflect: What is Digital Art?

The readings linked to below will help us further contextualize and define digital art. The concise definition from the Tate Museum focuses on the importance of interaction between the artwork and the viewer, as well as the **intermedia** qualities of digital video and installation. The essays by Marie Chatel and Kate Horsfield will help us frame digital video and installation within the broader context of video art history. Finally, there are questions to consider at the end of this chapter that specifically address Horsfield's "Busting the Tube," which can help guide your reading.

- [Tate Terms: Digital Art](#)
- Marie Chatel, "[What is Digital Art? Definition and Scope of the New Media](#)" (Medium)
- Kate Horsfield, "[Busting the Tube: A Brief History of Video Art](#)" (Video Art Databank)

## The Basics: What is Digital Video Art & Installation?

The term **digital art**, coined in the 1980s, refers to art made, stored, and viewed using digital technology. However, the history of digital art predates the term. Digital art has its roots in **Conceptual Art** and **Fluxus**, which you reviewed in the Introduction and artists began experimenting with computer art in the 1960s and 1970s. Pioneers in digital art include the animator John Whitney, Sr. (1917-1995), the organization [Experiments in Art and Technology](#) (established in 1967), and the artist [Harold Cohen](#) (1928-2016). Practitioners of digital art are interested in the interplay between art and technology.



## Stop & Consider: Digital Video

**Digital Video** defines when digital data is used to create a video, which can be edited by a computer; as opposed to analog video (like the examples you read about in our chapter on [Early Video Art](#)), which uses tape to capture each frame.

- Be prepared to compare the analog examples of video art discussed in this chapter with those discussed earlier.
- Also prepare to compare the digital video examples in this chapter to the examples of analog video art you've been learning about.

Digital video technology became more accessible in 1986 with the invention of the [Sony D1](#). By the 1990s, digital technologies had improved, and artists could reproduce high-resolution videos, creating an interactive and dynamically changing space. Digital video art and installation are also closely connected to the New Media principle of [computability](#) (among others discussed in this chapter) and a desire to manifest an immersive experience for the viewer.

## Elements of New Media Art and other Key Terms

As you move through the material keep the following qualities, which characterize digital video and installation, in mind: **adaptable, collaborative, computability, and participatory**. We'll apply these qualities, defined below, to the specific examples outlined in the chapter.

- **Adaptable:** This refers to the flexibility of digital video; video can be projected on the side of a building or on the walls of a gallery space, for example.
- **Collaborative:** A quality of New Media; as you'll see, many examples in this chapter rely on collaboration from the viewer/participant. This term also describes works, like Zina Saro-Wiwa's series that involved participants, in this case people from her home state, in their creation.
- **Computability:** Some examples in this chapter will show the use of computer algorithms to help create the work of art.

- **Participatory:** In art, this refers to the viewer becoming an active participant in the work of art; the work is considered unfinished without the viewer's participation. Participatory and collaborative are very close in their definitions. While both participatory and collaborative art are interactive, the difference is that collaborative art removes control of the work's outcome from the artist.

**Additional Key Terms** listed and defined below are used throughout this chapter. Specific examples of artworks from the chapter are indicated when applicable to help illustrate the term.

- **Fragmentation:** In digital video, this could be a non-linear presentation; the information and/or images are broken up. Think of fragmentation as a digital strategy that breaks apart information/images to explore how visual information is conventionally conveyed.
- **Hyperkinetic:** When talking about art, this term refers to quick, often abrupt, movements that create a frenzied energy.
- **Hypermedia:** The Internet is a perfect example of [hypermedia](#); simply defined, hypermedia usually refers to "link media" or "interactive media" and could be a software that connects elements (video, plain text or hyperlink) of a computer system, for example. Information is explored in a non-linear manner (meaning you can click around and don't have to follow a set path). The opposite of hypermedia would be a linear media, such as a novel. (Hypermedia is an extension of hypertext. See also the discussion of Hypertext in [The Digital Revolution chapter](#).)
- **Installation:** This term used to describe immersive, large-scale, mixed-media constructions; installations are typically site-specific and often temporary.
- **Multimedia:** Multimedia describes artworks made from a range of materials and include an electronic element such as audio or video; this is different from intermedia, which refers to an interdisciplinary approach to making art (combining one or more disciplines, like painting and dance).

## Setting the Stage: Postmodern Video Art

Before we move on to our examples of digital video and installation, it's important to take a moment to review the work of Dara Birnbaum (born 1946) and Howardena Pindell (born 1943), two video artists working on the cusp of a changing technology. While Birnbaum and Pindell both create video using analog techniques, their early experiments with video sets an importance precedent for the artists discussed in this chapter. Both artists can be examined through the lens of [Postmodernism](#) and their works serve as a bridge between the digital experiments of artists featured later in this chapter, and the artists discussed in our previous chapter, [Early Video Art](#).

## Key Term

**Postmodern:** Beginning in the 1970s, Postmodernism in art follows on the heels of Modernism and can be seen as a reaction against Modernism. Postmodern artists use strategies such as irony, humor, and appropriation to critique and question dominant culture.

## Dara Birnbaum

Dara Birnbaum is an American video and installation artist and she was one of the first video artists to explore the use of **appropriated** imagery in her work. Her video, *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* borrows and re-contextualizes scenes from the popular 1970s TV series *Wonder Woman*, isolating and repeating moments of transformation (when the “ordinary” woman, Diana Prince, becomes Wonder Woman).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-2>

Dara Birnbaum, *Technology/Transformation/Wonder Woman*, 1978-1979, color video with sound (5:50 minutes). As you watch, pay attention to Birnbaum's use of **appropriation**, **fragmentation**, and **repetition**.

**Fragmentation** and **repetition** are vital strategies Birnbaum uses to disrupt the viewer's understanding of the images' sequence. For example, the video begins with a series of repeated explosions, then moves to a shot of Diana Prince, arms stretched out to her sides, spinning around until a fireball explodes. Birnbaum withholds the final act of transformation from the viewer until after several spins in. Later, Prince is shown running, caught in mid stride, over and over again, while the soundtrack to the sequences stutters in the background.

Dara Birnbaum's work *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*, can also be described as **dynamic** because of the use of repetition. Dynamic refers to movement and in video art, you can think about how quick the cuts, for example, or how fast (or slow) subjects move or talk on the screen. As you continue to read through this chapter, pay attention to the sense of movement on the screen in each video and how it engages you.

According to the artist: "The stutter-step progression of 'extended moments' of transformation from Wonder Woman, the abbreviated narrative — running, spinning, saving a man — allows the underlying theme to surface: psychological transformation versus television product. Real becomes Wonder in order to "do good" (be moral) in an (a) or (im)moral society." (Dara Birnbaum quoted in [Electronic Arts Intermix](#)).

## Stop & Reflect: Dara Birnbaum

1. What is your reaction to the isolation of explosion images mixed with Wonder Woman's repetitive actions?
2. By remixing a popular television program, Birnbaum sought to turn the TV on itself. As she puts it, in her work, television "is manipulated before it manipulates us." How does Birnbaum's video reflect this deconstruction and manipulation?
3. Birnbaum originally showed her video in the window of a retail space. How does this display strategy align her work with other examples of New Media you've learned about?
4. Based on the definition provided in the Key Term box above and what you learned about [Early Video Art](#), can you describe the **Postmodern** qualities of Birnbaum's work?

## Howardena Pindell

The American multimedia artist Howardena Pindell created *Free, White and 21* in 1980 when she was 37 years old; just 8 months after being in a near fatal car crash that left her with trauma and partial memory loss.

*Free, White and 21* is part of Pindell's *Autobiography* series, which she began in 1980. This series frequently incorporated the artist's own body as well as personal items, and directly reflects her experiences as a Black woman in America. Pindell credits the creation of this video series with helping her heal from her accident; it also marked a turning point in her subject matter and she has continued to explore the autobiographical in her artwork.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-3>

Howardena Pindell, *Free, White, and 21*, 1980, video (12:15 minutes). Please watch this video in its entirety to see the interactions between Pindell's two roles.

Pindell's work is a good example of the term **expanded cinema** because she faces the camera and speaks directly to the viewer, creating a space for more active participation and engagement. Her work confronts the viewer by implicating us in her trauma, involving us in both her suffering and her healing.

The twelve-minute video features Pindell in two roles—as herself, detailing experiences growing up as a Black woman in America, and as an anonymous white female character (wearing a blonde wig, white powder, and sunglasses) responding to those accounts.

The format is part confessional, with scenes of Pindell speaking plainly to the camera as she recounts subtle and overt instances of racism she, and her mother, experienced from childhood to the present, in all areas of daily life—at school, work, and leisure. These segments then cut to the white woman, who is dismissive of these events, calling Pindell “paranoid” and “ungrateful” while asserting her privilege of being “free, white, and 21,” removed from the racism and inequity Black women constantly face. The figure of the white woman continually discounts Pindell's traumatic experiences with statements like, “you won't exist until we validate you.”

Interwoven through these exchanges are views of Pindell wrapping and then unwrapping her head with white bandages and peeling off a facial mask, perhaps both a reference to Pindell's accident and how racism exists in both overt and covert ways.

The work also references the tensions between Black and white feminists in the 1970s, when feminism oriented around the idea of “woman” as white, cis-gendered, and middle class. As a Black artist, Pindell struggled to find venues who would exhibit her work. She recalls in [The Howardena Pindell Papers](#) (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago):

*I decided to make Free, White and 21 after yet another run-in with racism in the art world and the White feminists. I was feeling very isolated as a token artist. I found that White women wanted me to be limited to their agenda.... I was told I was jealous because I noticed and talked about it. Racism, as a constant assault in the daily lives of all people of color, was not a high priority for them.... It was about domination and the erasure of experience, canceling and rewriting history in a way that made one group feel safe and not threatened.... In the tape, I was bristling at the women's movement as well as at the art world and some of the usual offensive encounters that were heaped on top of the racism of my profession.*

Video is only a minor part of Pindell's artistic output. She also paints, writes, and produces collages and prints. She's known for her labor-intensive processes, such as gluing tiny bits of hole-punched paper onto canvases. She also worked for 12 years at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), after graduating from Yale with an MFA; she left MoMA when her efforts to draw attention to and push against institutional racism in the museum field were discouraged and ignored. [You can read more about Pindell's experiences in her own words by visiting her digitized papers at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago](#) (optional, but a fantastic resource).



## Stop & Reflect: Howardena Pindell

1. After viewing *Free, White, and 21*, how does Pindell merge her roles as narrator, actor, and artist? Do these roles ever intersect or overlap in the video?
2. What is the power of testimony in *Free, White, and 21*? How do words and moving images connect in Pindell's work to engage and even implicate the viewer in the artist's testimony?
3. Based on the definition provided in the Key Term box above and what you learned about [Early Video Art](#), can you describe the **Postmodern** qualities of Pindell's work?

## Case Studies: Digital Video Artists & Artworks

A reminder that the examples in this chapter are presented as case studies. They are organized chronologically and demonstrate the variety of approaches to digital video. As you review these case studies, keep in mind the Postmodern approach of Dara Birnbaum and Howardena Pindell, as well as the key terms outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Wherever possible, a video excerpt of the work is embedded so you can see it in action; additional optional resources are also provided under each video for further learning.

### Focus: Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, *A-Volve*

Christa Sommerer (born 1964) and Laurent Mignonneau (born 1967) are two artists who have collaborated since 1992 on digital projects, such as custom coded interactive artworks. Their work often explores the interaction of biology and technology.

## Read & Listen: Sommerer and Mignonneau

- Read about Sommerer and Mignonneau's work at the [Digital Art Archive website](#).
- You can also [read their artist statement](#) to better understand their approach to the work and the ideas they wanted to explore.
- [Listen to the artists discuss their work at Media Art Net](#) (2:59 minutes). Here, you can also view a brief slideshow of the piece.

In *A-Volve*, participants design their own organism using a touchscreen in the gallery space. This invented organism is then “released” into a pool of water where it moves around and interacts with creatures created by other viewers. Visitors can reach into the water to try to touch and catch the moving virtual creatures as they move around; the creatures, in turn, react to the visitors’ movements in real time. *A-Volve* plays on the concept of “survival of the fittest” as organisms die if they aren’t interacted with regularly ([Digital Art Archive](#)).

Thinking back to our key terms, *A-Volve* is **dynamic** because it moves and changes in real time; it is also **interactive**, **participatory**, and **collaborative** because the viewers can “touch” the organisms they design and they also contribute to the actual creation of the work of art.

## Stop & Reflect: *A-Volve*

Watch this short video of Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau’s, *A-Volve*, 1994-1995, an interactive computer installation (3:13 minutes)



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-4>*

### Questions to Consider:

1. Consider how the work explores real and “unreal” environments. For example, the organisms are virtual, but the interactions visitors have with them in the water, and with each other, are real.
2. What is the effect on the viewer as the worlds of biology and technology collide and interact in *A-Volve*?
3. Can you form an interpretation of the artwork based on what you’ve learned about it?

### Focus: Camille Utterback, *Text Rain* and *Entangled*

American artist Camille Utterback (born 1970) uses digital technologies to create interactive installations, such as *Text Rain*, that rethink how viewers experience and interact with art. An innovator in digital and interactive video art, Utterback actually began her studies in art as a painter. Her work is very interactive and she creates projects that track viewers' movements, transforming this information into evolving projections. She is interested in blurring the boundaries between physical and virtual worlds, as well as in exploring the interactions of the body and digital systems. Utterback writes her own code, or computer algorithms (a series of rules) that dictate the changes in her artwork.

In *Text Rain*, the animated type the participants interact with is a poem called “Talk, You” by the poet Evan Zimroth. By combining poetry and an interactive digital installation, Utterback creates an intermedia experience for the viewer and alters the way a reader typically approaches a poem.



Camille Utterback, *Text Rain*, 1999, interactive digital installation. Photo by [Sascha Pohflepp](#). License: CC BY-2.0.



Camille Utterback, *Text Rain*, 1999, interactive digital installation, 1999. Photo by [Tony Gonzalez](#) License: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

## Watch & Consider: *Text Rain*

[Watch a brief interview with Utterback on the MacArthur Foundation website](#) (she was a 2009 MacArthur Grant recipient). (2:28 minutes)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-5>

### Questions to Consider:

1. Utterback refers to her work as reactive sculptures, implying that they respond to participants' actions. After viewing her work, how would you describe the "reactive" qualities of *Text Rain*? What does the work react to?
2. Can you imagine yourself experiencing *Text Rain*?
3. What do you think it would feel like to be immersed in this digital installation?
4. How do text and body interact in Utterback's piece? An artist we'll examine later in this chapter, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (born 1967), also uses text in his digital installations. How would you compare and contrast their strategies?

This next example we'll examine is Utterback's work, *Entangled*. (Featured in the video below installed at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in 2015). In this installation, participants interact with imagery projected onto two sides of a set of translucent scrims – a scrim is a thin screen used a lot in theater – which hang in the center of the space. Movements in the interaction areas on each side of the scrims cause imagery to appear, move, and disappear on the corresponding side's projection.

When participants' motions are traced onto both sides of the scrims, a shifting visual apparition emerges. The imagery projected from each side of the installation bleeds through the scrims, merging into a shared visual surface. The light catching on both sides of each layer of fabric creates a tangible perceptual depth and volumetric complexity, not typical of projection surfaces.



## Watch & Consider: *Entangled*

Watch 58 seconds of Camille Utterback's, *Entangled*, 2015, dual channel interactive installation on scrims; custom software, computer, two cameras, two projectors, two theatre lights, three fabric scrims.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-6>

Please watch the video below, which shows Utterback explaining her work, *Entangled*, and shows it in action at Emerson College Urban Arts Gallery (2:47 minutes).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-7>

### Questions to Consider:

1. How might designing a two-sided piece, like *Entangled*, be different from designing a similar artwork on a flat, one-sided screen? How does this impact the depth, texture, and use of positive and negative space in the painting?
2. As you watch the artwork, think about how it changes? Note any patterns of cause and effect that you notice.
3. What do you notice about the colors, marks, and positive and negative space that is being created by movements?
4. How do *Text Rain* and *Entangled* compare? How are they alike? How are they different?

Utterback's digital video installations connect to several of the key terms identified at the beginning of this reading. Her work is **adaptable**, **collaborative**, and programmed through the use of algorithms (**computability**). Its presentation is also **dynamic**, **fragmented**, **collaborative**, and **participatory**. Through her digital installations, Utterback creates a social space, designed to encourage interaction and engagement with the piece, the surroundings, and each other.

## Key Terms

- **Expanded Cinema:** Artists working in digital video and installation often explore how to create an active, rather than passive, space between the screen and the viewer. This can be achieved through the use of multiple screens, as we see in Camille Utterback's work, as well as through the presentation of film in nontraditional venues, which you read about in the chapter on [Early Film and Animation](#).
- **Reactive Sculpture:** This term is used specifically by Camille Utterback to differentiate her installations from static sculpture; instead, her work reacts to visitors in the gallery or museum space. (We can also use this term to describe *A-Volve* by Sommerer and Mignonneau.)

## Focus: George Legrady, *Pockets Full of Memories*

George Legrady's (born 1950) *Pockets Full of Memories* maps the relationships between objects. The viewer digitally scans a personal object and describes it by answering a set of questions. An algorithm then classifies that object based on similar descriptions. What you see on the screen is the data the work collects and the possible ways objects relate.

This user-generated archive had an accompanying website when the work was first produced in 2001. This website is no longer accessible, demonstrating one of the difficulties maintaining digital art.

## Stop & Reflect: *Pockets Full of Memories*

[Read about Legrady's work at Media Art Net](#)

Then watch this video showing Legrady's, *Pockets Full of Memories*, 2001, digitized image data. (2:57 minutes).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-8>

- Optional: In addition to the video embedded above, you can [watch the piece in action on Media Art Tube](#) (no sound, 2:50 minutes).

### Questions to Consider:

1. Looking over the qualities of digital art outlined at the beginning of this chapter, which would you apply to *Pockets Full of Memories* and why?
2. Compare and contrast this work with *A-Volve*. Think about how each work is adaptive. Do the works interact differently with the viewer?

## Focus: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Subtitled Public*

### Stop & Reflect: *Subtitled Public*

1. [Read about \*Subtitled Public\* on the Digital Art Archive](#), where you can also view still images of the installation.
2. [Read about the work on the Tate Museum's website](#), where there is an excerpt from an interview with the artist and analysis from curators and art historians.
3. Read more about Rafael Lozano-Hemmer in the Immersive Technologies Chapter. (Coming Soon.)

Watch this short video of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's, *Subtitled Public*, 2005, interactive computerized projection, installed at Bitforms Gallery, 2005. (4:24 minutes)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-9>

Questions to Consider:

1. How do text and body interact in Lozano-Hemmer's digital installation?
2. What role do tracking and surveillance play in Lozano-Hemmer's work?
3. How would you feel entering this digital installation? How do you imagine your experience of this space to be?
4. Try to connect Lozano-Hemmer's work to the vocabulary presented at the beginning of this reading. What terms can you apply to his digital video installation?
5. Compare and contrast this work with *Text Rain*. How is text central to the overall experience of each artwork? What is the effect of each work's ability to adapt and interact to the visitor's presence?

## Focus: Paul Pfeiffer, *Fragment of a Crucifixion* and *Caryatids*

Paul Pfeiffer (born 1966) is an American artist whose work investigates how mass media shapes our perceptions of events. A key term to understand with Pfeiffer's work is **appropriation** or the strategic borrowing and re-contextualization of found media into a work of art. In *Fragment of a Crucifixion* (*After Francis Bacon*), Pfeiffer uses appropriated video footage of a moment of mid-game triumph for the Knicks forward Larry Johnson, which he loops so you see it over and over again.



Paul Pfeiffer,  
*Fragment of a  
Crucifixion (After  
Francis Bacon)*, 1999,  
color video  
installation with  
projector and metal  
mounting arm.  
[Educational Fair Use.](#)  
See additional higher  
resolution images at  
the [MCA Chicago  
website](#).

## Listen & Watch: Paul Pfeiffer

- [Listen to the artist discuss](#) *Fragment of a Crucifixion (After Francis Bacon)* via the Whitney Museum of American art.
- Watch the Art21 video, embedded below via Vimeo, “[Paul Pfeiffer in Time](#)” (12:14 minutes)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-10>

Pfeiffer is especially interested in sporting events because of the spectacle of the game. He digitally manipulates footage, often by isolating, or even erasing the athletes, to comment on a culture obsessed with sports figures and celebrity. What happens, like in *Fragment of a Crucifixion (After Francis Bacon)*, when the player is left alone on the court? His teammates and opponents have all been erased and the viewer only sees Larry Johnson moving, stutter-step, back and forth on the court, flashbulbs blinking sporadically in the stands surrounding him. There is also an audio



component as the viewer hears the roar of the crowd, expressing their collective adulation that Johnson has just landed the shot. The repetitive roaring transforms the excitement of the crowd into a sound of alarm or horror.



Francis Bacon (Irish, 1909-1992), *Fragment of a Crucifixion*, 1950, oil on canvas. Image is from [Wikipedia](#) CC BY Fair Use.

*Fragment of a Crucifixion*, pictured above, by Francis Bacon is an unfinished painting from 1950, showing an animal (?) engaged in a struggle with an unformed monster (some historians say this is a chimera) on what looks to be a wooded cross. There is a sketchy scene with cars and people in the distance, right below the blue line.

Through his editing process, Pfeiffer creates seemingly endless moments that direct the viewer's attention to singular details rather than the original contexts of the images. If we compare Pfeiffer's digital video work to Bacon's painting, a sense of tension is revealed between a feeling of triumph and one of misery.



Paul Pfeiffer, *Caryatid*, 2003, digital video loop, chromed nine-inch color television, DVD player, Plexiglas case on pedestal. Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Copyright: Paul Pfeiffer. License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

A second work by Pfeiffer that we'll take a look at is called *Caryatid (Hockey)*. In this version of the *Caryatid* series, Pfeiffer presents video footage of the Stanley Cup (hockey's biggest prize), as it is held up above the heads of the winning players. By erasing the players, Pfeiffer alters our perception of hockey's highest symbol of achievement. Here, the massive cup floats alone above the crowd, unmoored. Inscribed each year with the names of winning players, coaches, managers, and club staff, winning the Stanley Cup is a dream of every aspiring hockey player. Pfeiffer's manipulation of this footage not only illustrates the Cup's status as a symbol of a spiritual quest but also meditates on the complicated ways in which faith and desire unfold in contemporary culture.

## Watch & Consider: *Caryatid*

To gain an understanding of this work in context, please click on the link below to a New York Time's video resource:

- [Paul Pfeiffer's \*Caryatid\*](#) (New York Times, 0:32 seconds)
- As you watch the clip, notice how the work is displayed and the small scale of the television monitor.



Paul Pfeiffer,  
*Caryatid (Wrestling)*,  
2009. Image by  
[C-Monster](#) via  
[Flicker](#) License: CC  
BY NC 2.0.

Above is an installation view of *Caryatid (Wrestling)*, 2009 at Carlier Gebauer, Art Basel. Notice how the television set is placed directly on the floor, instead of elevated to the viewer's eye level. By forcing the viewer to crouch down to view the work, Pfeiffer creates a more intimate relationship between artwork and audience. He also prefers to use smaller projection mechanisms, such as the television set pictured, to foster this sense of intimacy. Paul Pfeiffer uses the term **Video Sculpture** to describe the sculpturally-based digital videos he creates; the idea of sculpture is more in the presentation of Pfeiffer's work, since he often places technology, like a television set, up on a plinth or support typically reserved for sculpture in the museum setting.



In ancient Greek architecture, a caryatid is an architectural support where the figure of a woman takes the place of a column (seen, for example, on the Porch of the Maidens from the Erechtheion Temple on the Acropolis in Athens, which is pictured below). As you can see from the ancient Greek example, the figure looks to be holding up the temple's entablature with her head. According to Greek mythology, caryatids carried sacred objects on their heads to be used by the gods during feasts.



The image above shows the Porch of the Maidens, part of the Erechtheion Temple on the Acropolis in Athens, Greece. Photo is by [Psy Guy](#) via Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY 3.0](#)

If you examine the installation view of *Caryatid*, above, and *Fragment of a Crucifixion (After Francis Bacon)*, you can see what Pfeiffer means when he calls his works **video sculptures**. Instead of being projected on a large screen, or scrim, creating a large-scale immersive environment, Pfeiffer's works are often presented at a much smaller scale, creating greater intimacy with the viewer. Whether placed directly on the floor, or presented up on a plinth, or stand, and covered in a vitrine (the clear box that sits over the object), keeping with the tradition of how sculptures are displayed in museums, Pfeiffer calls attention to the **intermedia** quality of his work and intentionally combines video, sculpture, and sound.

## Stop & Reflect: *Caryatids*

1. Why do you think Pfeiffer titled his work, *Caryatid*, after the ancient architectural feature?
2. How does his work subvert the popular, commercialized image of the athlete?
3. Why do you think Pfeiffer uses sporting events and athletes as his subject matter?
4. Even when the athletes are removed from his videos, what iconography (or symbols) of the event remains?
5. Why do you think Pfeiffer prefers a more intimate display for his videos?

## Focus: Zina Saro-Wiwa, *Table Manners* and *Karikpo Pipeline*

Zina Saro-Wiwa (born 1976) is a Nigerian artist currently based in Brooklyn, NY. She creates work that reflects Nigeria by showcasing the lush verdancy and cultural richness of her homeland, seeking to reject the dominant Western narrative of Nigeria as only an oil-rich, yet environmentally depleted country. Though there has been vast environmental destruction of the Niger Delta by oil companies, much of Saro-Wiwa's work focuses on the people who live in her home state of Ogoniland, which is in the southwestern part of Nigeria near the coast.

Her father was the renowned writer, human rights and environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941-1995), who was murdered by the Nigerian military dictatorship in 1995. Zina Saro-Wiwa, who prefers the term "culture-worker" instead of activist, believes artists can evoke powerful change through their artwork, just as her father did through his political and social activism. Prior to creating digital videos, Saro-Wiwa was a documentary filmmaker.

After living and going to school in England, Saro-Wiwa made her way back to Ogoniland, Nigeria, for a two year and a half stay. This long visit inspired the ongoing series of digital videos, *Table Manners*, which the artist began in 2014. *Table Manners* shows people from the Niger Delta while they are eating. The titles of the works are very straightforward; taken from the name of the person who is eating and the food they consume. As the series has progressed, the subjects are recorded eating snakes and other animals that appear in local folk tales furthering the connection between food and culture.



## Watch & Consider: *Table Manners*

Watch these two short clips from Zina Saro-Wiwa's series *Table Manners*:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-11>

Zina Saro-Wiwa, *Felix Eats Sorgor Salad with Palm Wine*, from *Table Manners*, 2014-2016, digital video (clip, 00:52 seconds).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-12>

Zina Saro-Wiwa, *Grace Eats Garden Egg with Groundnut Butter*, from *Table Manners*, 2014-2016, digital video (clip, 00:49 seconds).

## Optional: Listen & Consider: Zina Saro-Wiwa interview

Listen to a conversation with Zina Saro-Wiwa and Tyler Green on the [Modern Art Notes Podcast](#) from September 24, 2015 (1:01:43 hours)

Saro-Wiwa is interested in the symbolism of nourishment, the condition of the places that grow the things we eat, and how food preserves culture. She sees *Table Manners* as a way to highlight the fertile and dynamic landscape of Nigeria, particularly the Niger Delta where there is still a vibrant fishing and farming community. In doing so, Saro-Wiwa seeks to craft a narrative that is separate from the devastation of decades of oil extraction in the region.

In an interview for the exhibition [Landmarks](#) at the College of Fine Arts, The University of Texas, Austin, Saro-Wiwa said:

Nothing is more immediate than food, than the act of nourishing the self. I have found working with food the most strangely powerful and useful way to subvert and renew the conversation about the Niger Delta which defaults to this very circular, bleak hand wringing which has led to very little change or insights into who we really are as a people and how to transcend our predicament. Food has been my portal to accessing something elemental and mysterious but generative and powerful. And the way art reframes an idea or a place is often the embryo for change.

Let's connect Saro-Wiwa's work back to the terms presented at the beginning of this chapter. Her work is a great example of **collaboration**; her subjects are entirely in control of the pace of their meal and what they choose to eat and wear for the video. You could argue her work is also **dynamic** because the viewer feels a sense of connection with the subject, as if they are sharing a meal with them. This dynamic is reinforced through the installation of the work, pictured below.



Installation view of *Table Manners* at Tiwani Contemporary, 2015. Educational Fair Use. Original image can be found at the [Tiwani Contemporary website](#).

## Watch & Consider: *Karikpo Pipeline*

Follow the links below to view clips of this video installation to get a sense of the effect of the five different channels:

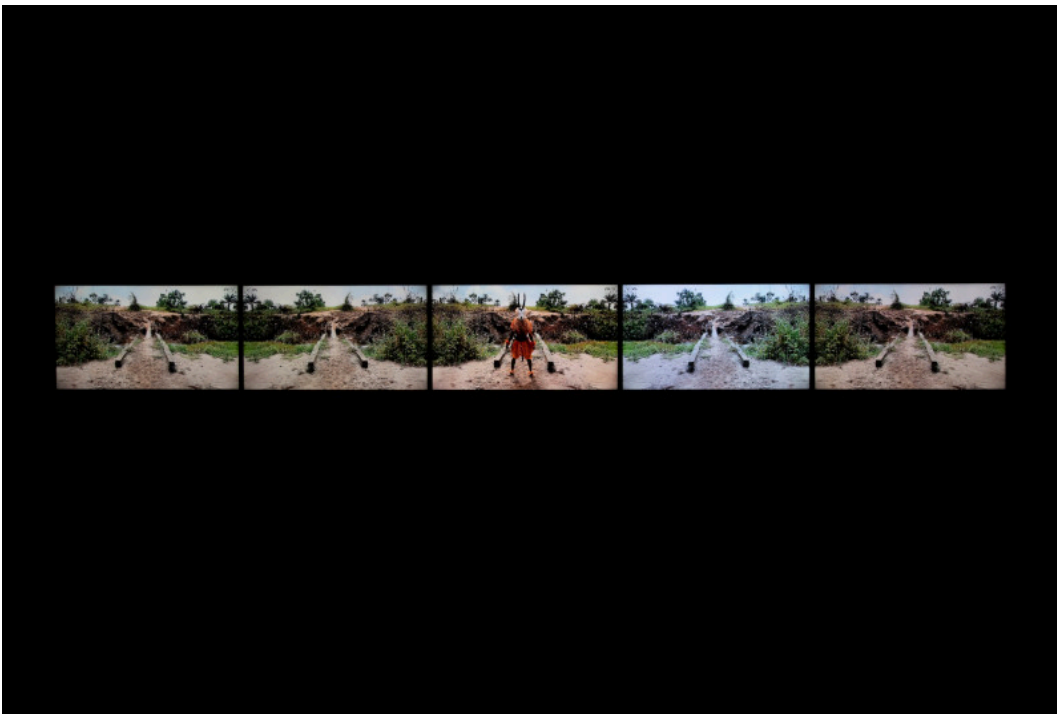
- [Karikpo Pipeline](#) (via Facebook, 0:56 seconds)
- [RCA Dyson Gallery Installation of Karikpo Pipeline](#) (via Facebook, 1:52 minutes)



Zina Saro-Wiwa,  
video still *Karikpo Pipeline*, 2015.  
Multi-channel video  
and series of  
photographs.  
Original image can  
be found at the  
[Modern Art Notes  
podcast website](#).  
License: [Educational  
Fair Use](#).



Zina Saro-Wiwa, video still from *Karikpo Pipeline*, 2015. Multi-channel video and series of photographs. Original image can be found at the [Modern Art Notes podcast website](#). License: [Educational Fair Use](#).



Zina Saro-Wiwa, *Karikpo Pipeline*, installation view. Screen shot from now removed Vimeo video. License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

Above are stills and an installation view from another digital video installation by Saro-Wiwa called, *Karikpo Pipeline*, 2015. This is a multi (5) channel installation that takes the viewer on a journey through signs of the aging, and now discarded, oil extraction infrastructure in Ogoniland. These old roads,



wellheads, and pipelines are superimposed with the images of male dancers performing the Karikpo masquerade. Dancers masked and moving like antelopes traverse this landscape with acrobatic agility, calling attention to the visible and invisible signs of the environmental impact of the oil industry on the Niger Delta.

### Stop & Reflect: Zina Saro-Wiwa

1. Saro-Wiwa calls herself a “culture worker;” how does this term reflect how she presents the people, culture, landscape, and traditions of the Niger Delta?
2. How does Saro-Wiwa’s work assert the humanity of the Ogani people?
3. What aspects of Nigerian culture and community does Saro-Wiwa’s work showcase?
4. How does her work celebrate her Nigerian culture? How does it critique stereotypes of West Africa?

### Focus: Rachel Rose, *Everything & More* and *Lake Valley*

Rachel Rose (born 1986) is an American artist known for her immersive digital video installations. Her work explored how our changing relationship to landscape has shaped storytelling and belief systems. Rose draws from and contributes to a long history of cinematic innovation, and through her subjects—whether investigating cryogenics, the American Revolutionary War, modernist architecture, or the sensory experience of walking in outer space—she questions what it is that makes us human and the ways we seek to alter and escape that designation (via Carnegie Museum of Art).

According to the artist, *Lake Valley*, 2016 explores childhood. Though we can’t currently watch the entire video online, you can notice through video clips and stills how Rose creates an illustrative, textural effect in her work.

The surface quality of each element in the video is important to the emotional resonance of the story. Rose achieves each form’s unique texture by reimagining its surface (the flowers, for example, are made of paper). This creates a sort of collaged quality to the work, and lends a handmade feel to the digitally produced images.



## Watch & Consider: Rachel Rose

To acquaint yourself with the artist and her work, watch the video “[Rachel Rose Interview: Between Living and Non-Living](#)” via the Louisiana Channel (16:36 minutes), which is embedded below. In this video, Rose discusses four of her video works. Please focus on:

- *Lake Valley*, 2016 (from the beginning to about 4:05)
- *Everything and More*, 2015 (from about 9:30 to the end).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-13>

There is also an artist talk with Rachel Rose that you can access on the Nasher Sculpture Center’s YouTube channel. [She discusses Lake Valley and shows additional still images, installation views, and video clips starting at 31:04.](#)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=32#oembed-14>

### Questions to Consider:

1. Can you describe some of Rose’s influences? What feelings inspire her and how does she explore these?
2. Consider how *Everything and More* addresses themes of mortality, detachment, and the body.
3. What role does sound play in Rose’s work and in her formulation of her pieces?
4. What everyday materials has the artist incorporated into her work? Do you recognize any of these materials in the excerpts of her creations shown throughout the video?
5. How does Rose use the everyday as a way to access the sublime?
6. Can you describe the intermedia qualities of Rose’s videos?
7. How is an effect of displacement achieved in *Everything and More*?
8. What way(s) does Rose consider gallery space and orientation of the viewer when installing her work?
9. Is Rose successful in connecting her installation to the real space and the virtual space simultaneously?
10. How would you describe Rose’s process and where do you see evidence of this process in her work?

## Conclusion

This chapter introduced you to different artists who work with digital video, revealing the breadth and variety of the medium. How do you think digital technology transformed video art? Can you compare and contrast an analog example of early video art from with a digital example from this chapter?

Before moving onto the next chapter, review the Key Terms outlined in the beginning of this reading and think about how you would apply them to the work examined here. For example, which works stand out to you as being collaborative? Which works rely on fragmentation, are hyperkinetic, or demonstrate qualities of hypermedia?

Finally, how is digital video, like many forms of New Media discussed throughout this textbook, participatory? How does it demonstrate the power and primacy of the viewer in the digital space?

### Key Takeaways

At the end of this chapter you will begin to:

1. Explain the history of video art.
2. Describe and compare significant innovations in digital video art and video installation.
3. Recognize developments in digital video art and consider how this medium is connected to the broader history of visual culture.
4. Explain how video art relates to the elements of New Media Art.

### Optional: Lesson Extensions

Below are some lesson extension activities to encourage learners to engage more deeply with the material presented in this chapter.

## Discussion Idea

In this chapter, you studied various approaches to video art and learned about the different reasons artists employ video as a mode of artistic expression. The reading, "Busting the Tube: A Brief History of Video Art," referenced the unique qualities of video that artists use, such as looping, feedback, and instant replay.

For your discussion post, pick one artist from the weekly module whose work demonstrates one or more of the qualities of Video Art mentioned above (looping, feedback, and instant replay).

Be sure to include the following in your post:

- The name of the artist you selected and the title of the artwork you'll be discussing. (Remember, titles of artworks should be italicized.)
- Include a still from the video (or a link to the video) in your post.
- Discuss how and where the artist has used looping, feedback, or instant replay in the work.
- Be sure you write a few sentences describing the effect of this technique (or techniques) on the viewer.
- Don't forget to respond to one of your colleague's posts and identify another observation about the subject matter, content, or formal qualities about the example they selected. Please describe something different than what the original poster observed.

## Creative Interpretation Ideas

- Rachel Rose uses digital collage in her video *Lake Valley*. Try making a collage inspired by Rose, or another artist, in this chapter.
- Sound can be an important quality to video art. Think of Dara Birnbaum's use of the *Wonder Woman* soundtrack to heighten the sense of urgency in her video *Technology/Transformation/Wonder Woman*, for example. Is there a video presented here that inspires you to create a soundtrack to complement it?
- Paul Pfeiffer and Dara Birnbaum use looping, erasure, and repetition in their videos. George Legrady and Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau explore user-generated outcomes in their digital videos. Try your hand at one of the techniques an artist in the chapter explores; you can experiment with either digital or analogue methods. For example, can you create a user-generated artwork by asking your friends to contribute something (words, objects, etc.) to the final piece?
- Many of the artists examined in this chapter create worlds for the viewer to explore. Write a short story or a poem inspired by a work that resonates with you.

## Further Questions to Consider: Reading, "[Busting the Tube: A Brief History of Video Art](#)" (PDF via the Video Data Bank)

1. What role did feminist theory play in the conscious-raising efforts of the 1960s? (pg. 1)
2. Why was television a primary target for activists in the 1960s? (pg. 2)
3. What theory did Marshall McLuhan propose regarding the interaction of humans and technologies? (pg. 2)
4. How did Radical Software hope to decentralize communication systems? (pg. 2 and 3)
5. What connection is made between the consumerism advanced by T.V. and the art gallery system? (pg. 3)
6. Why did artists embrace video? Why did media-activists embrace video? (pg. 3)
7. Why are early examples of video art often in "reel-time"? (pg. 4)
8. What are some examples of how the limitations of the early video equipment led to experimentation? (pg. 4)
  1. Feedback and instant replay are two critical visual characteristics of video that are discussed. Where do you see these effects in the examples from the module (e.g., *Fragment of a Crucifixion*)? What impact do these methods have on the viewer? (pg. 5)
9. What happens when the gallery system begins to embrace video art? (pg. 5 and 6)
10. What are some difficulties in collecting and displaying video art? (pg. 6)
11. How did the visual strategies of video art change in the 1980s? What factors led to these changes? (pg. 7)
12. What alternative models of communication has video art achieved? Where do you see the legacy of video art today? (pg. 8)

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9.

## LIGHT ART, INSTALLATION, AND LAND ART

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### Light Art, Installation, and Land Art

#### Elements of New Media Art in Light Art

As you explore Light Art in the first part of this chapter notice when you recognize these elements of New Media Art:

- Expands the definition of art
- Exploits new technology for artistic purposes
- Readymade – uses objects or material from everyday life
- Remixing – uses images or things made by others in new ways
- Merges new media with old media
- Ephemeral – isn't meant to or can't last forever

## Perspective is Everything

Although pioneered in many ways by Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), a leading figure in the Dada movement, many artists in the late 1950s and early 1960s were beginning to conceive art-making as a process that requires the viewer for completion. A rethinking of the relationship between the artists, the artwork, and the viewer prompted new approaches to existing fine art forms, such as painting and sculpture, and encouraged artist exploration of potential in newer art, such as performances, happenings, video art, installations, earth art, and installations. Many of these forms not only invited, but sometimes even required audience participation. (See a further discussion of the [influence of Dada](#) on New Media Art in the Introduction to this book.)



Mark Rothko, *No 1. (Royal Red and Blue)*, 1954, oil on canvas, 288.9 cm × 171.5 cm (113¾ in × 67½ in), Private collection. Source: Wikipedia, License: [Fair use](#).

Revolving the artwork around the spectator, hinges on their experience and

their perception. In this pursuit, artists were drawn to expanding beyond three-dimensions, beyond depth, instead relying also upon time, motion, and other senses. Land art, installation art, and light art, are centered around the perception of the spectator.

Most [Minimalist](#) and [Conceptual](#) artists were—in part thanks to prominent artists like Duchamp and Robert Morris (1931–2018)—more aware of the role of the viewer, increasingly conceiving of artworks that communicate experiences instead of narrative or messages. For media such as painting and sculpture, this initially entailed focusing on specific visual elements and select principles of design to engage the spectator.

The scale of Mark Rothko's (1903–1970) [colorfield paintings](#) combined with the nuanced emphasis of color, for example, immerses the spectator and creates an experience disjointed from the conventional visual consumption. When the focus is shifted to the perspective of the spectator,



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, backdrop: *The Warriors* by Marsden Hartley. Gelatin silver print photograph by Alfred Stieglitz. Reproduction from *The Blind Man*, n° 2, page 4. Editors: Henri-Pierre Roche, Beatrice Wood, and Marcel Duchamp. Published in New York, May 1917. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), License: [Public Domain](#).

the limitations of two-dimensional media become very apparent and, thus, the shift to new media became more attractive to artists engaging in this discourse.

## Watch & Consider: Art and Science



Carl Sagan, *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage* (1980). A thirteen-part television series. Screenshot of an episode. Source: YouTube, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). Click image for link.

Expanding art into other dimensions took a scientific probing that enveloped artistic careers and spanned decades. Indeed, the explorations of new media and of perception paralleled scientific development since the beginning of the Modern era. Science and science fiction inspired many authors to push against limits of understanding and re-imagine the world as it is and as it could be. Microscopes revealed hidden life and worlds, telescopes confirmed the Earth itself infinitesimal in the cosmos, physicists recognized relativity, locomotion changed forever, humanity stood with its ships at the shores of a new world ocean, so-to-speak.

In his television miniseries, *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*, renown scientist Carl Sagan (1934-1996) explained how difficult it can be to think out-of-the-box when it comes to perceiving dimensions, a concept creatively and famously employed in the science fiction book *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1882). Shifting paradigms in any field is often a slow and difficult process. While media and technological development in art is focus of this text, it is important to periodically take a step back and consider the interdisciplinary relationships. The avenues pursued by artists, might seem logical now, but until its done for the first time each step is a step into the dark. Thus, artistic practice in many of these fields are model after the scientific method. Each idea is postulated, systematically tested; results are peer reviewed; approaches change after each experiment.

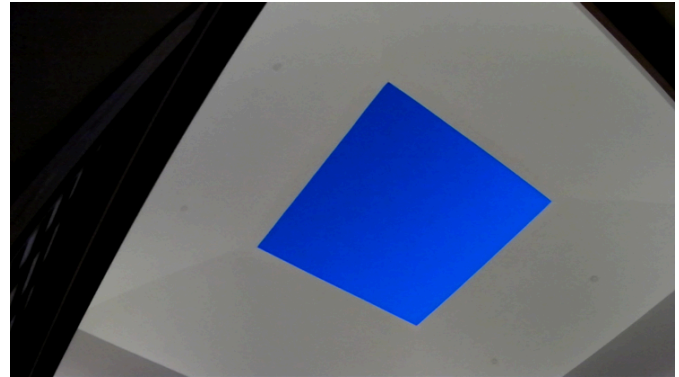
## Light Art

Consider contemporary light artist James Turrell's (born 1943) fields of color, using colored light, such as Image 4. *Milk Run II* (1997) or *Outside In* (2021). Because these fields of color are created by opening in the gallery wall backed with a brightly illuminated plane, it can be difficult to discern

its exact location. The mechanics of the projection manipulate the eye in a way that a fixed, two-dimensional object cannot, making it seem more like a mystical apparition. As noted in previous chapters, the artistic implementation of technology can not only serve aestheticism, but also can enhance experience for the spectator.

In New York, American Artist Dan Flavin (1933-1996) gained notoriety for creating sculptural objects and installations from commercially available fluorescent lighting fixtures. Flavin's initial designs were drawings and paintings, reflective of [Abstract Expressionist](#) influence. In 1959, he began to make physical assemblages, mixed media sculpture, and collages that included found objects from the urban environments. In Southern California around this time, a loosely affiliated collective of about twenty artists

interested in light art and new dimensions emerged, the art movement known as Light and Space. Installations associated with this movement focused on perceptual phenomena, such as light, volume and scale, and the use of materials such as glass, neon, fluorescent lights, resin and cast acrylic. Light and Space artists emphasized the experience of the spectator's experience often by directing the sources of natural light and artificial light within objects or architecture. In other cases, artists manipulated light, using transparent, opaque or reflective materials.



James Turrell, *Outside In*, 2017, installation at House of Lights, Tohka-machi, Niigata, Japan. Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC-BY-SA](#).



Dan Flavin, *Monument for V. Tatlin No. 53*, 1968, cool white fluorescent lights, 14 feet (427 cm) wide. Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC-BY-SA](#).

In 1963, the first of Flavin's more mature works began to be exhibited, works that exclusively utilized commercial, fluorescent lighting. In the decades that followed, he continued to use fluorescent structures to explore color, light and sculptural space, in works that filled gallery interiors. While most of Flavin's installations were untitled, titles were commonly supplemented with a dedication to friends, contemporary artists, and other significant individuals in parenthesis. *Monuments to V. Tatlin*, for example, served as a homage to the Russian Constructivist sculptor Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953). By 1968, Flavin had developed his

light sculptures into complete installations. Flavin continued these pyramidal light sculptures and installations as an ongoing series until 1990.

Parallel to the Light and Space collective in Los Angeles, artist James Turrell began experimenting

with light in his studio in Santa Monica in the mid-sixties. By strategically covering the windows and only allowing specific exterior light to permeate the interior, Turrell began creating light projections. Furthering the idea, Turrell explored the phenomenon of sensory deprivation together with Los Angeles artist Robert Irwin.

Their collaborations went on to influence an art-and-technology program initiated by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1967 and were reflected in the 1971 exhibition at UCLA "[Transparency, Reflection, Light, Space: Four Artists](#)".



Dan Flavin, *Monument for Tatlin*, 1969, cool white fluorescent tubing, 96 x 32 x 5 in. (243.8 x 77.5 x 12.7 cm), Fisher Family, Stanford Museum. Source: Flickr, License: [CC-BY-SA](#).

These early explorations in light art evolved into career long trajectories for many artists. In 1971 Flavin drafted a concept for a site-specific installation that wasn't fully realized until 1991, when [the installation](#) filled the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's entire rotunda celebrating the museum's reopening. The sculptural, minimalist interior space of the Guggenheim Museum can be appreciated in its own right, however the space has always lent itself well to installation pieces, an interesting challenge for Light and Space artists.

In 2013 Turrell presented the new project, [Aten Reign](#) (2013), in the Guggenheim rotunda, filling the immense space with



James Turrell, *Aten Reign*, 2011, Site-specific installation made with Daylight and LED light, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Source: Flickr, License: [CC-BY-SA](#).

shifting artificial and natural light. The exhibition effectively served as a tour d'horizon of the artist's explorations of perception, light, color, and space.



## Read &amp; Consider: Light and Perception



Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, 1647–1652, Marble, Height: 350 cm (11.4 ft), Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome. Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC-BY-SA](#).

The phenomenon of light in the visual arts is a significant journey through time and art history. From [animation of Paleolithic cave paintings](#) to illumination of [Carravaggio's \(1571-1650\) oil paintings](#) or Gian Lorenzo Bernini's (1598-1680) divine statues in the [Italian Baroque](#), from Claude Monet's (1840-1926) Modernist [studies of atmospheric light](#) to Daguerre's [capture of light](#) on silver plates, from Flavin's Postmodernist [sculptures of light](#) to the contemporary exhibitions of fireworks by Cai Guo-Qiang (born 1957). The relevance of light and perception became a greater focal point in aesthetic and phenomenological philosophy in the mid-twentieth century.

French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) published the text "[Phenomenology of Perception](#)" in 1945 and garnered enough interest in the 1960s to warrant an English translation and global publication. Prominent American artists, art theorists, and writers continued the discourse, as seen in the works and writings of [Donald Judd](#) (1928-1994) and [Robert Morris](#). These minds that helped architect Minimalist and Conceptual art, made equally significant contributions to the development of performance art, land art, light art, and installation art. Many of [Morris' writings in the 1960s](#) aimed to demonstrate the significance and subjective nature of the spectator's experience. "Even the most unalterable property, shape does not remain constant. For with each shift in position the viewer also constantly changes the apparent shape of the work." The Conceptual understanding of art maintains that the *raison d'être* of an artwork hinges entirely on its viewer. [Morris noted in 1975](#), "Our encounter with objects in space forces us to reflect on ourselves, which can never become the objects for our external examination. In the domain of real space the subject-object dilemma can never be resolved." The consideration of the site, viewer engages with and experiences the artwork, therefore is equally as integral as the object itself. In this context, land art, installation art, and light art can be much better understood.

Contemporary Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang used the phenomenological approach of light art and site-specific installations to relay not just an experience, but partake in the discourse of contemporary political and cultural issues. Much of his oeuvre has been explosive gunpowder drawings and ephemeral sculptures, but his *City of Flowers in the Sky* (2018) is worth noting here for its use of light and site-specific nature. To celebrate the city of Florence as the epicenter of the Italian Renaissance, Guo-Qiang created a colorful semblance of flowers using fireworks across a



Cai Guo-Qiang, *City of Flowers in the Sky*, 2018, November 18, 3:50 pm, approx. 13.5 minutes fireworks, 170 meters tall, Florence, Italy. Source: Vimeo, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). Click image for link.

background of blue sky. The ephemeral piece lasted roughly ten minutes on Piazzale Michelangelo overlooking the city. Inspired by Sandro Botticelli's (c.1445-1510) Renaissance masterpiece [Primavera](#), some 50,000 fireworks released colorful smoke that resembled thousands of flowers.

## Installation Art

### Elements of New Media Art in Installation Art

As you explore Installation Art in the second part of this chapter notice when you recognize the following elements of New Media Art:

- Expands the definition of art
- Remixing – uses images or things made by others in new ways
- Merges new media with old media
- Ephemeral – isn't meant to or can't last forever
- Liveness – happens in real time, the artist is there
- Collaborative – the artist is a facilitator and viewers make the art with them

Installation artworks are designed to occupy an entire room or interior space that the spectator navigates in order to fully experience the work of art. Some installations are designed simply to be walked around (in-the-round) and contemplated or just from a specific vantage point. One characteristic of installation art that separates it from sculpture or other traditional two-dimensional

artforms is its expansion into space and guided sensory command of the view's interaction. The dimensional design creates a unified experience, rather than a display of separate, individual artworks.



Max Klinger, *Beethoven*, 1902, Marble, alabaster, amber, bronze, ivory, gold foil, Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig Germany. Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain](#).

During the turn of the twentieth century such exhibitions were commonplace in movements like those of the [Wiener Secession](#) or the [Arts and Crafts movement](#), where exhibition spaces were designed to display works coordinated by artists that shared formal and conceptual unity. The innovative composition of artists and artworks became known as the [Gesamtkunstwerk](#) ("Total Work of Art"), as embodied in the [1902 Beethoven exhibition](#) in Vienna with a sculpture of Beethoven by Max Klinger (1857-1920). In the Postmodernist era, Conceptual and Minimalist arts revisited the spatial emphasis of the Gesamtkunstwerk, while narrowing the scope of the vision to that of a single artist and more often a single visual element. Russian artist Ilya Kabakov

(born 1933) once [noted](#) that "The main actor in the total installation, the main centre toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the viewer."

Much of the postwar installation art movement emerged out of environments created by artists like American artist Allan Kaprow (1927-2006), who helped pioneer the "environment" and "happening" in the late 1950s and 1960s. Kaprow [said](#) of his first environment [18 Happenings in 6 Parts](#) (1959), "I just simply filled the whole gallery up [...] When you opened the door you found yourself in the midst of an entire environment." For this exhibition, Kaprow divided the inside of a gallery into three smaller spaces using wooden frames stretched with translucent plastic sheets. Each room was illuminated with different colors and in each room the audience was forced to sit and observe the performances. (See the chapter on Social Practice Art for a [further discussion of Kaprow](#) and his influence on New Media Art.)

As noted in earlier chapters, the 1960s marked a significant time for emerging artistic formats as artists pivoted away from historical fine art media, such as drawing, painting, and sculpture. Liberation in media allowed artists to first focus on an underlying concept that they wished to communicate and then explore a range of media until they found an appropriate platform for development. Art critics John R. Chandler and Lucy Lippard described this shift as "[the dematerialization of art](#)." One of the natural directions for artistic expression in the wake of dematerialization was the communication of ephemeral experiences. The dimensions of installations and site-specific works lend themselves in particular to this end.



Alan Kaprow, *Yard*, 1961, Performance with tires. "Environments, Situations, Spaces" exhibition in Sculpture Garden at Martha Jackson Gallery, New York. Photo: Ken Heyman. Source: Wikiart, License: [Fair use](#).

American Artist Eva Hesse (1936-1970) was interested both in using industrial media Minimalist sculpture and the formal, abstractionist vocabulary, used by artists like Robert Morris and Donald Judd. Morris published several writings outlining the Minimalist approach to process and materials in "[Notes on Sculpture](#)" and "[Anti-Form](#)". However, Hesse parted from her male contemporaries in media, producing her own unique style within the movement. Instead of using smooth, flat industrial materials that produce sterile, machine-like surfaces, Hesse opted for materials like fiberglass, latex, and resins that produced textures and a translucency that felt more organic.



Eva Hesse, *No Title*, 1969-70, installation of knotted rope in liquid latex, screenshot of video. Source: Vimeo, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). Click image for link.

[No Title](#) (1969-70) exemplifies this practice, a work that is composed of knotted ropes, dipped in liquid latex, and hung from the ceiling to dry. The organic entanglement of loops and runs mimic the forms of internal organs and in many ways are as expressive as Jackson Pollock's (1912-1956) [action-painted drips](#). This irregular, emotive style was a far cry from the clean-cut forms of her contemporaries. Lippard, known for feminist critique at this time, praised Hesse's abstracted style as a welcomed alternative to the male-dominated Minimalism.

In 1979 the installation [The Dinner Party](#) organized by Judy Chicago (born 1939) continued the subversion of museum space and institutional history. During the 1960s the calls from activists regarding the discrimination of women gained intensity and as an expression of this growing movement, women artists like Chicago drew attention to feminist discourse, such as minority of

women artists represented in art institutions, how women are represented as subjects, and how artistic media ascribed to women has historically been excluded from the realm of fine art. The collaborative work *The Dinner Party* was the accomplishment of many women artists under the direction of Chicago, a reaction to the aforementioned discourse as well as a criticism of the individualistic nature of art production.



Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79, ceramic, porcelain, textile, 576 × 576 in. (1463 × 1463 cm), Brooklyn Museum. Source: Flickr, License: [CC-BY-SA](#). Read about the components [here](#).

The resulting work itself was a large triangular table. The form is conceived as an equilateral triangle to symbolize femininity and the equality that feminism aims to achieve. Each side features 13 place settings: 13 being the number of men at the Christian Last Supper and the number of witches in a coven. These 39 settings are dedicated to diverse, historically significant women, from the Ancient Egyptian Queen Hatshepsut (died 1458 BCE) to Italian noblewoman Isabella d'Este (1474-1539) to American painter Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986). Each oversized place setting was adorned with an embroidered fabric table runner and 14-inch

porcelain plate decorated to honor the individual. While some plates were ornamented with two-dimensional designs, others were made in high relief, representing sexualized flower motifs and female genitalia. On a whole, the installation celebrates marginalized historical women and historically marginalized artforms like needlework and ceramic painting.

A similar conceptual approach was exercised by Jenny Holzer (born 1950) with the exhibition of her *Truisms* (1977-87) in diverse forms and spaces. The [Truisms](#) were a series of short, witty maxims intending to get the spectator to think or consider a position by communicating an aggressive, humorous, or aggressive statement, such as "Abuse of power comes as no surprise" or "Bad intentions can yield good results". These messages were displayed unsuspectingly on flyers, clothing, telephone booths, building walls, and even as [an electronic installation](#) in Times Square in New York City.





Tara Donovan, *Untitled*, 2003, Styrofoam Cups, Hot Glue, dimensions variable. Source: [AlfalfaStudio](#), License: [Fair use](#).

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s volatility in the art market spurred a reawakened of interest in conceptual art (art focused on ideas rather than objects) and the dematerialization of art that led installation art to rely stronger on light and sound. Many contemporary artists began reexamining the practices established by previous artistic styles and movements. The installation works of American artist Tara Donovan (born 1969), for example, resemble those of Minimalism. Her installation [Untitled](#) (2003) fills an entire room of the Ace Gallery in Los Angeles. As the viewer enters the space, the forms and textures make it difficult to discern whether a fabric or a lamp floats above them like a cloud. Upon a closer inspection, it

reveals to be thousands of styrofoam cups. Works like this are considered "site-responsive" in that a characteristic of the material of the site dictates the form of the resulting work. In this case, the soft, white appearance of the cups combined with their shape work to produce a specific effect for the space.

Utilizing the installation space to communicate and experience, Mexican artist Gabriel Dawe (born 1973) creates spiritual and culturally critical spaces for viewers to investigate. [Plexus no. 19](#) (2012) and *Plexus A1* (2015), for example, offers several critical insights into Mexican cultural norms in a way that transforms interior space into a spiritual shelter. Inside the Villa Olmo in Como, Italy, Dawe anchored threads to railings to span areas of the room, while illuminating them. The use of the material provides an ethereal, surreal visual effect that draws the viewer into the space to closer inspect and seek out new perspectives.

Physically the work appears as a colorful mist or dispersion of white light into its full spectrum of wavelengths. The impetus for this work was the desire to create a shelter for the human spirit. Thread is the basis of most clothing, what humans use to shelter their bodies. Dawe transcends this physical material to create shelter for the immaterial within us. The use of color was heavily influenced by the intense color commonplace in Mexican visual culture, but it carries significance in exploring gender politics as well. Finally, the adoption of thread



Gabriel Dawe, *Plexus A1*, 2015, embroidery Thread, 5.8 m × 3.7 m × 7.6 m (19 ft × 12 ft × 25 ft), Renwick Gallery, Washington D.C.. Source: Wikimedia, License: [CC-BY-SA](#).

represents the historical craft traditions of embroidery and intends on elevating their status into the realm of fine art.

## Earthworks or Land Art

### Elements of New Media Art in Land Art

As you explore Land Art (called Earthworks by Robert Smithson) notice when you recognize the following elements of New Media Art:

- Expands the definition of art
- Remixing – uses images or things made by others in new ways
- Ephemeral – isn't meant to or can't last forever
- Collaborative – the artist is a facilitator and viewers make the art with them
- Connectivity – made possible because of new global connections

Despite the revolutionary strategies of Conceptual and Minimalist artists, their exhibitions were largely limited to art galleries. However, special consideration of the site became a point of emphasis in the conception and execution of artworks in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As early advocates, artists like [Christo \(1935-2020\)](#), [Jean-Claude \(1935-2009\)](#), and [Robert Smithson \(1938-1973\)](#) championed the avant-garde, site-specific movement. Artists like these conceived and created artworks as installations and environments instead of as objects. The experiential character of these works continued the subversive, artistic endeavor of challenging the relationships between [spectator and spectacle](#), [signifier and signified](#), viewer and artwork and artist. In some cases the art altered the significance of a space by its occupation, others used the expanded dimension(s) to enrich definition and consumption of sculpture, and in most cases the viewer is intended to become part of the piece in some manner.

[Earthworks](#) are unapologetically detached from the historical dependence on institutional framing for artwork. How much further can one get from the interior space of a metropolitan museum or gallery than designating it outside miles from civilization? Consequently, many of these undertakings are created in remote locations, requiring significant planning of part of the spectators, which likens their experience to that of a spiritual pilgrimage in nature with art. The transcendent nature of these works simultaneously unite nature and sculpture and nature and dissolve the boundary between art and life. This brand of site-specific art can be defined as an environmental construction that sculpturally utilizes materials to interact with the

natural environment. Because of this connection to the natural world, these materials often are naturally occurring, like dirt, plants, water, and rocks. Similar to other ephemeral art forms, such as performance art, Earthworks are often documented only through photographs, film, and recordings.

One of the most early, notable, characteristic Earthworks of this character is Robert Smithson's [Spiral Jetty](#) (1970), a construction of a 1,500 foot earth and stone platform projecting into the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Consisting of earthen materials, the archetypal shape of the spiral visually resembles both natural order – like the growth of nautilus shells and formations of galaxies – and human design with spiral symbols found in diverse, international communities throughout history. The shape itself is capable of endlessly curling, which suggests a duality of growth and decay, of creation and destruction. The symbolism continues. Smithson has suggested that the salty, mineral rich water and natural algae of the lake refers to both the primordial waters, which once brought forth life, and the dead sea that ended it. Additionally, the balance of alpha and omega is seen in the abandoned oil rigs dotting the shoreline (often not pictured images of the structure), which reminded Smithson of the dinosaur remains that brought forth their existence and the remains of vanished civilizations. Like many ephemeral works, *Spiral Jetty* is dynamic and transient; a spectator cannot see it the same at a different moment in time. The work evolves and changes. Smithson wished the work to represent the perpetual “coming and going of things” and ensured that no maintenance be exercised on the structure, allowing it subject to the natural order. There have been years where it has remained submerged, filled with colorful algae, and covered with crystallized salt.



Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah. 1500 x 15 foot spiral of basalt (if unwound), sand, and soil. Source: Wikimedia, License: [CC-BY-SA](#).



Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Coast, One Million Square Feet* (1968–69). Little Bay, Sydney, Australia. Screenshot of video. Source: Vimeo, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). Click image for link.

by their first names, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and began working collaboratively wrapping objects from the size of motorcycles to the expansive scale of mother nature herself. These projects of envelopment can be considered political and a form of activism, referencing capitalism and consumer packaging.

Their first major undertaking of this nature was *Wrapped Coast, One Million Square Feet* (1968–69) in Little Bay near Sydney, Australia and the complex and laborious process ended up being just as noteworthy as the finished product. Christo and Jeanne-Claude worked with project coordinators, engineer), a team of rock climbers, and over 100 local art and architecture student workers and teachers. Together they overcame natural setbacks and engineering complications to wrap roughly one and a half miles of coast and cliffs with beige fabric, using 35 miles of rope.

A few years later Christo and Jeanne-Claude's began another temporary, site-specific, environmental work titled *Running Fence* (1972–76) – an 18-foot tall, white, fabric fence that ran from the ocean at Bodega Bay through over 24 miles of rural and agricultural land. The process proved ultimately much more ambitious than *One Million Square Feet*, calling upon hundreds of workers, necessitating 18 public hearings, and the negotiation of agreements between dissenting landowners. While the Minimalist sculptural object, a seemingly endless ribbon of white cloth cutting through the natural environment, the most pioneering aspect of the work is arguably the process, the people involved, the engineering, and the significance of the site.

Bulgarian artist Christo Javacheff started his avant-garde trajectory in Paris, working within the circles of [Nouveau Réalisme \(new realism\)](#) – artists seeking to connect art with urban life, by rejecting the media associated with fine art in favor of everyday objects such as [common household items](#), print media, refuse. In this scene, Javacheff began experimenting with temporary works of art that often incorporated fabric. It was here that he began collaborating with Jeanne-Claude Denat de Guillebon, a French artist interested in site-specific installations. Together the artists began going



Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Running Fence*, 1976, screenshot of video. Source: YouTube, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). Click image for link.





Walter De Maria, *The Lightning Field*, 1977, grided erection of stainless steel poles in Western New Mexico. Source: WikiArt, License: [Fair use](#).

The adoption of site-specific and earthworks continued to develop internationally, as demonstrated in works like Walter De Maria's (1935-2013) [The Lightning Field](#) (1977). Located in a desert in New Mexico, the physical work is essentially a 1-mile by 1-kilometer, rectangular grid of steel poles. These 400 poles with pointed tips can appear like an enormous bed of nails under most circumstances. However, during the electrical storms that frequently pass over the area, these poles act as conductors to concentrate lightning strikes into a spectacle. The work strikes an interesting balance of conceptual and minimalist artistic ideals, transforming the natural landscape into dynamic man-made and natural phenomenon.

Most of the works associated with Earth are art large, site-specific

sculptures. However, English artist Andy Goldsworthy (born 1956) focuses also on small, intimate works of natural materials. These works were often composed of natural media, such as grass, rocks, leaves, flowers, bark, snow, ice, and water. *Japanese maple* (1987) was made by carefully



Andy Goldsworthy, *Japanese Maple*, 1987, maple leaves, screenshot from video. Source: Vimeo, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#). Click image for link.

stitching maple leaves into a ring and placed into a rocky pool. This particular piece was designed to communicate the splendor of natural phenomenon through a contrast in color, form, and texture. [Works like these](#) are created meticulously, photographed, and finally dispersed back into nature, a similar approach to that of Tibetan monks, who create [sand mandalas](#). Goldsworthy's ephemeral sculptures made of ice and snow carry similar messages. Often with Goldsworthy's fragile, transient works reflect his disposition as an environmentalist and thus can carry somber messages like a [vanitas](#) image from a 17th-century Dutch still-life painting.

## Conclusions

As demonstrated in this chapter, many Minimalist and Conceptualist artists in the 1950s and 60s sought a schism from historical art-making processes. Since then many avant-garde artists further pronounced their departure through a variety of approaches: the dematerialization of art, the adoption of new media and technology, the reframing of historical art media, and the rejection of



museums and gallery spaces though site-specific art and earthworks. While not mutually exclusive, the presence of these techniques carry on into contemporary art.

## Key Takeaways

At the end of this chapter you will begin to:

1. Deconstruct the motivations for artists to depart from two-dimensional media.
2. Recognize the avenues of exploration light artists imagined in perception, light, color, and space.
3. Assess the impact that the emphasis of dematerialization had on art production.
4. Examine how the departure from two-dimensional media challenged the relationships between spectator and spectacle, signifier and signified, viewer and artwork and artist.

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10.

## INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE

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### Institutional Critique: Critiquing the Art Institution

Stop & Consider: What is a Museum?

Before you begin this chapter, reflect on these questions:

1. Can you name the types of museums that you have visited? What types of museums have you not visited?
2. Have you visited art museums? If so, which ones? If not, which ones would you like to visit?
3. What are your expectations when you visit an art museum? What are your expectations when you visit other types of museums? Imagine your experience.
4. What is the purpose of a museum? What is the purpose of an art museum?
5. How do museums define culture and society?
6. Why do we collect?
7. How do museums hold power in society? What is the authority of a museum? What is the influence of economics on the power of a museum?

### *Mining the Museum* by Fred Wilson

In 1992 in the roles of artist and [curator](#), Fred Wilson (born 1954) visited the archives and object storage areas of the Maryland Historical Society. He spent a lot of time in the archives and ultimately chose historical objects that impacted him and installed them in his own way, amongst the exhibits already on view, adding new meaning to the history made official by the Maryland Historical Society.



Fred Wilson, "Metalwork, 1793-1880," an installation view from *Mining the Museum* at The Maryland Historical Society, 1992-93. Silver vessels in Baltimore Repoussé style, 1830-80, maker unknown; slave shackles, c. 1793-1872, maker unknown, made in Baltimore. Image source: [Bmore Art](#). License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

In one display case titled "Metalwork, 1793-1880", Fred Wilson arranged silver repoussé pitchers and cups around a pair of iron slave shackles. As you look at this image, ask

- What meaning do these individual objects have for you?
- How does the meaning change when they are displayed together like this?
- Do you expect these objects to be displayed together?

In creating this exhibition, Fred Wilson "mined" the museum archives to find objects that spoke to parts of US history often hidden or glossed over. He has also explained that he "mined" or made the museum his, by finding evidence of his ancestors, evidence of the history of slavery and evidence of the systemic racism embedded in the institution.

The approach that Fred Wilson took for his exhibition *Mining the Museum* changed the art world by challenging museum curators to be more conscious of unspoken or hidden power dynamics in the museum context and how they use objects to tell stories. Wilson's project also cemented an approach to art that we call "institutional critique."

## Stop & Reflect: Fred Wilson

1. How does Fred Wilson's approach to curating make you rethink the meanings of museum displays?
2. How does this make you rethink the meanings created in museums?
3. How did his project confront racism in museums and in US society?

If you have access through your library to the JSTOR database, use the link below to look at other images from Fred Wilson's 1992 exhibition and discuss how he creates meaning in the different ways that he displays cultural artifacts.

Wilson, Fred, and Howard Halle. "[Mining the Museum](#)." *Grand Street*, no. 44 (1993): 151-72. Accessed August 31, 2021.

### Reflections 25 years later

Read Wilson's reflections on the exhibition 25 years later and look at other images from the 1992 exhibition in this article.

Kerr Houston. "[How Mining the Museum Changed the Art World](#)." *BmoreArt*, May 3, 2017. Accessed August 31, 2021.

## Institutional Critique defined

[Institutional Critique](#) is an artistic approach that critiques institutions, often art institutions like museums and galleries by pointing out their power in society, from economic power to power in shaping what is seen as valuable and how history is remembered.

The approach of Institutional Critique, coinciding with [Conceptual Art](#), began in the late 1960s and early 1970s in a climate in which social activism was strong with the [Civil Rights Movement](#), the [Women's Movement](#), and the [Antiwar Movement](#). Artists continued this critique in the 1980s often tied to [identity politics](#). It is only recently that we see artistic institutions, like museums, responding to the critique to lay bare the power structures and to promote positive institutional change.

## Watch & Consider: Institutional Critique

Watch this series of video lectures by Nicola Price. They are linked here and embedded below.

1. [Introduction to Institutional Critique](#) (7:56 minutes)
2. [Rise of Institutional Critique](#) (15:04 minutes)
3. [Institutional critique's second generation](#) (18:58 minutes)
4. [Contemporary institutional critique](#) (20:24 minutes)

As you watch the video, reflect on these questions:

1. Define Institutional Critique by using an example of an artist's work from the videos.
2. How does Institutional Critique intersect with [Conceptual Art](#)? Give an example from an artist's work.
3. How does Institutional Critique get its lineage from [Marcel Duchamp](#) (1887-1968)?
4. Give an example of art work that critiques institutional power. Explain what it is about the work that challenges the viewer to recognize institutional power.
5. How do artists expose racism in institutions?
6. How did museums, especially museum curators, eventually embrace and get involved in institutional critique? What are the implications of this? Is the critique as effective?



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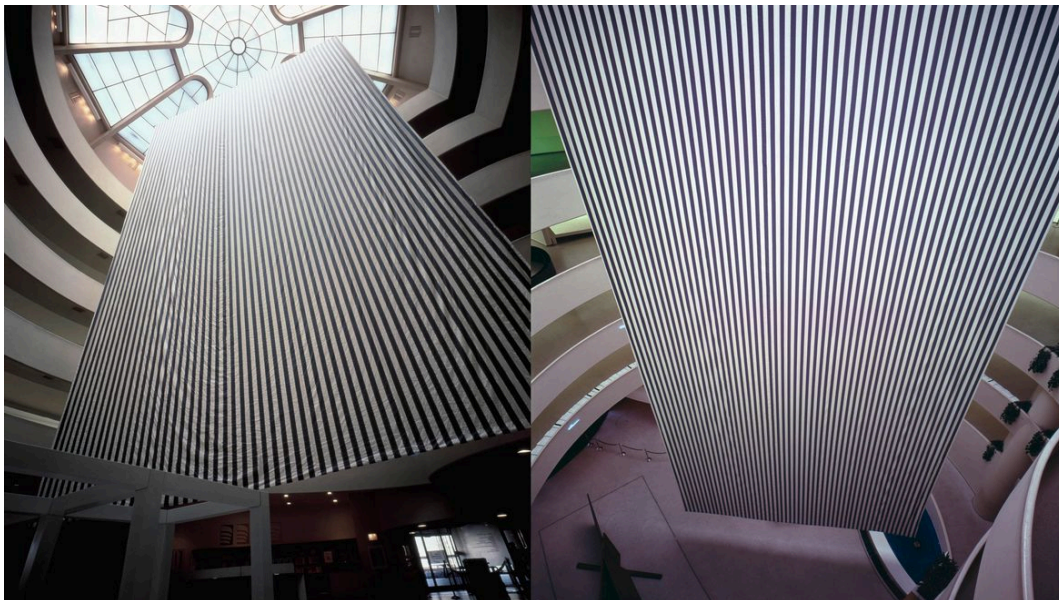


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## Artists Critiquing Art Institutions

Below you will find examples of artists who take different approaches to institutional critique, within art institutions. However, because art institutions are entangled with diverse forms of institutional power, many of these projects contain layers of critique exposing how art institutions are and have been complicit in systems of oppression since their inception.

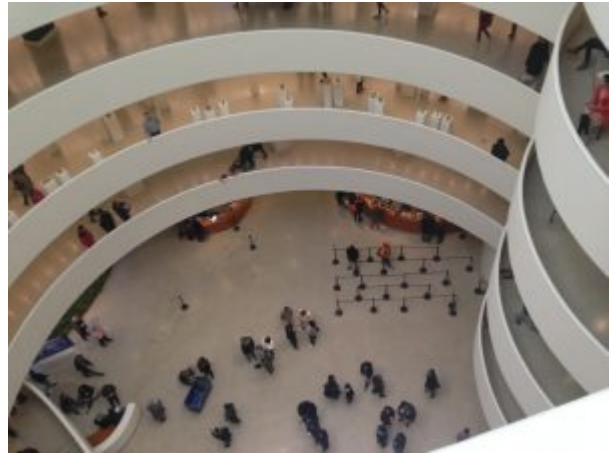
### Focus: Daniel Buren at the Guggenheim Museum



Installation views of Daniel Buren's painting at the *Guggenheim International Exhibition*, 1971, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, February 12 – April 11, 1971. Photos: [Robert E. Mates for the Guggenheim](#). License: [Educational Fair Use](#). Painting by Daniel Buren, 1971, acrylic on cloth, 65' 7 1/2" x 29' 9 3/4", installed for one day before the opening.



Frank Lloyd Wright, Guggenheim Museum, 1943-59, New York City, exterior view. Photo: Elizabeth Bilyeu, April 2016. License: [CCO](#)



Frank Lloyd Wright, Guggenheim Museum, 1943-59, New York City, interior view. Photo: Elizabeth Bilyeu, April 2016. License: [CCO](#)

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum was built in New York City in the mid-twentieth century by the iconic Modernist architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), and exhibitions in the Museum were central to the history of Modern Art after World War II. The structure is noted for its spiraling interior walkway that opens into multiple galleries as you walk up or down the ramp. As you exit the galleries onto the walkway, you are always brought back to the central atrium. The exterior facade of expresses the interior with its gleaming white concentric stacked circles growing in diameter to the top.

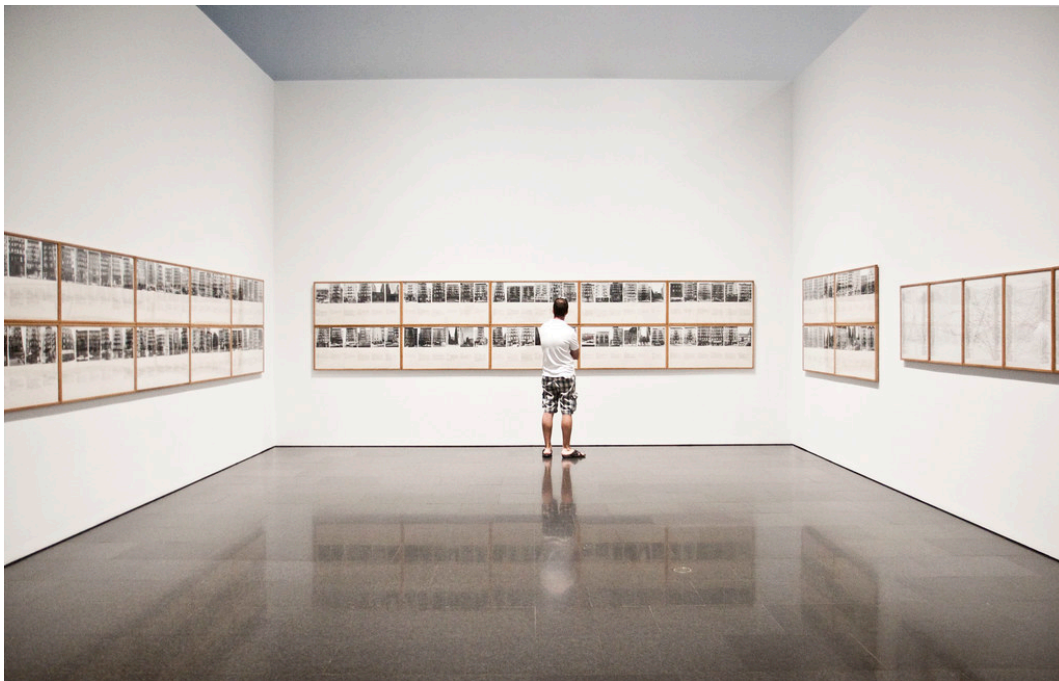
In 1971, French artist Daniel Buren (born 1938) hung a black and white striped painting almost 66 feet tall and 30 feet wide in the atrium at the center of the Guggenheim Museum and a smaller version outside across the street. The painting inside was removed before the exhibition opened.

### Stop & Reflect: Daniel Buren

1. What happens to the Museum when Daniel Buren installs this work?
2. How do you think this piece impacted other works of art in the show?

3. Buren said that the larger painting “placed in the center of the museum, irreversibly laid bare the building’s secret function of subordinating everything to its narcissistic architecture.” The Museum “unfolds an absolute power which irremediably subjugates anything that gets caught/shown in it.” What does he mean?
4. Daniel Buren is considered a conceptual artist. How is this work [Conceptual Art](#)?
5. Look at Daniel Buren’s [Within and Beyond the Frame](#), 1973, installed October 13 – November 7, 1973 at the John Weber Gallery, New York City. The series of black and white striped paintings are hung on a line inside the gallery and out the window across the street. How does meaning change depending on the location of the paintings? How does this critique the institution of the art gallery?

## Focus: Hans Haacke at the Guggenheim and MoMA



Hans Haacke,  
*Shapolsky et al.*  
*Manhattan Real*  
*Estate Holdings, a*  
*Real-Time Social*  
*System, as of May 1,*  
*1971, 1971, 9*  
 photostats, 142  
 gelatin silver prints,  
 and 142 photocopies,  
 installation view,  
 Museum of  
 Contemporary Art of  
 Barcelona (MACBA).  
 Photo source:  
[MACBA flickr](#).  
 License: [CC](#)  
[BY-NC-ND](#).

Hans Haacke (born 1936) has been known for his critical art. In his project *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*, he documented the large number of buildings in Lower Manhattan owned and controlled by members of one family who had ties to leadership of the Guggenheim Museum. The planned installation at the Guggenheim in 1971 was

a series of framed documents including two maps of parts of New York City, one of the Lower East Side and one of Harlem. Haacke displayed rows of photos of building facades and empty lots, including data sheets and charts on business transactions related to the real estate.

The installation was withdrawn from the Guggenheim before it opened. The museum director refused to allow the work to be exhibited, saying that it was not art, it was not in keeping with the Guggenheim Museum's charter of "pursuing aesthetic and educational motives that are self-sufficient and without ulterior motives." (quote from *New York Times* article linked below)

## Read, Listen & Reflect: Hans Haacke

View a [detail of Hans Haacke's \*Shapolsky et al.\*](#) and listen to the curator's comments at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Read more about the debate between the artist, museum director, and board of trustees:

Grace Glueck. "[The Guggenheim Cancels Haacke's Show](#)," *New York Times*, April 17, 1971. Accessed September 2, 2021.

1. How does this work critique the institution of the art museum?
2. How does it challenge the people who hold the power in the museum?
3. Does this work have aesthetic qualities? Can you visually analyze this work? How important are those qualities in art?
4. What does it mean to say that a museum is "self-sufficient and without ulterior motives"? How was Haacke trying to expose that statement as untrue?
5. Hans Haacke is considered a conceptual artist. What makes this work [Conceptual Art](#)?
6. This work is now collected by museums, like the Whitney, as you see in the detail linked above. Once the work becomes a part of the institution and its collections, does it lose its ability to critique? Is it as much of a critique now?

Look closely at the *MoMA Poll* below that Hans Haacke exhibited in another major art museum in New York City — the Museum of Modern Art. The poll reads: "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?" Nelson Rockefeller was not only Governor of New York at the time, but he was also a Trustee of MoMA. Additionally, there were allegations that Rockefeller companies were involved in manufacturing weapons for the American war in Vietnam.





Hans Haacke, *MOMA Poll*, 1970, printed poster, plexiglass boxes, paper ballots. Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), New York City. Photo source: [WikiArt](#), copyright Hans Haacke. License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

1. How does Haacke's *MoMA Poll* critique the museum?
2. How does it critique the viewer?
3. In what ways does it engage the viewer beyond looking at art?
4. If you were to create a poll like this, what question would you ask museum visitors? How would their answers show their biases? How would their answers reflect back on meaning that museums create?



## Focus: James Luna at the Museum of Man



Photograph of James Luna's performance *The Artifact Piece*, 1987/1990.

Photograph by Robin Holland, New Museum. Image Source:

[Smarthistory](#).

License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

As early as 1987, Luiseño (Payómkawichum) and Mexican-American artist James Luna (1950–2018) was using his art and art practice to critique colonial and racist ideas filtered through the institutions of museums. Luna used performance, photography, and installation of found objects to engage viewers in a conceptual critique of attitudes toward race and culture, in particular Native American culture. In *The Artifact Piece*, first performed in 1987 at the Museum of Man in San Diego, California, Luna laid in a display case wearing only a loincloth. Labels explained the origins of the scars on his body, and some of his personal possessions were included in the exhibition. Luna performed *The Artifact Piece* again in 1990 as part of the exhibition "The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s," a collaboration of the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Studio Museum in Harlem.

## Stop & Reflect: James Luna

1. Imagine visiting the museum and coming upon James Luna's performance and installation as you were perusing the exhibits. How would you feel?
2. How does his performance reveal objectification?
3. How does Luna's performance critique the institution of the museum and assumptions about cultures and histories?
4. Why do you think this exhibition was continued as planned, while earlier works of Institutional Critique (like that of Daniel Buren and Hans Haacke, above) were removed and censored?
5. What is Luna saying about the relationship between indigenous cultures and museums?
6. Think about assumptions that people make about you, your race, culture, gender, or ability. What object or personal possession would you highlight to challenge those assumptions?

This piece is also considered an iconic example of Performance Art. Return to the chapter on [Performance Art](#), and consider connections:

1. How does this piece demonstrate some relationships between Performance Art and Institutional Critique?
2. What [Elements of New Media Art](#) are expressed in Institutional Critique like James Luna's *The Artifact Piece*?

## Focus: Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña at the Quincentenary of Columbus' arrival to the Americas



Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit the West*, 1992, performance. Photo credit: [Coco Fusco website](#). License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

Cuban-American artist Coco Fusco (born 1960) and Mexican/Chicano artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña (born 1955) collaborated in performances that critiqued the relationship between colonialism and exhibition practices by referencing the display practices of World's Fairs from the nineteenth century. Their series of performances titled *Two undiscovered Amerindians visit the West* marked the quincentenary of Christopher Columbus' arrival to what is now called the Americas. They performed this piece at a variety of institutions, including the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Columbus Plaza in Madrid and at other locations in the United States and in Europe. Along with critically examining the racist ideologies of historical exhibitions in ways that resonate with James Luna's *Artifact Piece*, this series of performances also exposed the racist assumptions of contemporary museum visitors.

## Watch & Reflect: Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña

Watch the [trailer](#) (1:53 minutes) for the video *The Couple in the Cage* (1993, by Coco Fusco and Paul Heridia, produced by Third World Newsreel) based on their performances and viewers' reactions.

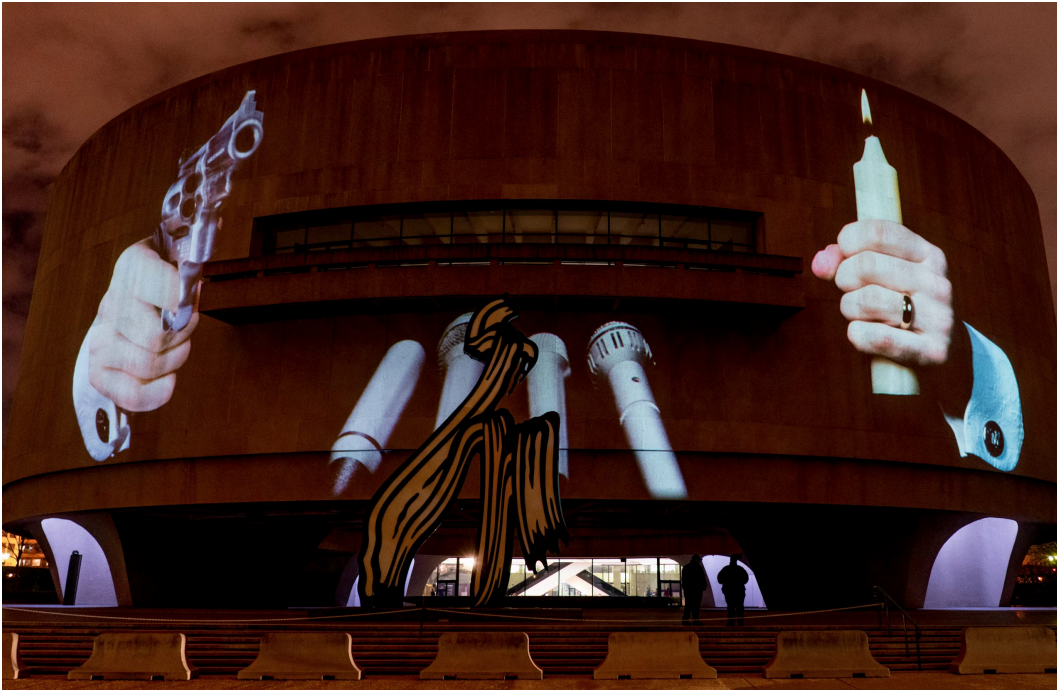


One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=36#oembed-5>

### Questions to Consider:

1. How do Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña use irony or tongue-in-cheek statements in their performances to make their critiques? What are some examples that you see here, and what are the critiques?
2. In what ways are Fusco and Gómez critiquing museums with this project?
3. Fusco has cited the treatment of historical figures like [Sarah Baartman](#) as informing this piece. After reviewing the [Wikipedia entry presenting the history of Baartman's life](#), what connections to you see?
4. Watch interviews by both artists linked below. Listen to them talk about the techniques of their performances. Consider how their explanations add to your understanding of the concepts and ideas in their work: Listen to Coco Fusco, in an [interview clip](#) (2004), talking about her work with Guillermo Gomez-Peña (0:43 seconds). Fusco would interview people about what kind of ethnic show they would like, and Gomez-Peña would interpret their request in his own way. Now listen to Guillermo Gómez-Peña explaining his preparations for performance. (1:38 minutes runtime) in [Works in Progress – Guillermo Gómez-Peña](#) (from One Nation Films). <https://vimeo.com/29757882> Both Fusco and Gómez-Peña are also considered artists who do performance work. Return to the chapter on [Performance Art](#), and consider the connections:
5. How is the Institutional Critique of Fusco and Gómez-Peña related to the Performance Art you learned about in that chapter?
6. What [Elements of New Media Art](#) are expressed in Institutional Critique like these performances by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña?

## Focus: Krzysztof Wodiczko on the National Mall in Washington DC



Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.* (1988), 2018, projection on the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C., 68' tall. Photo credit: [Victoria Pickering](#). License: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Polish-born New York artist Krzysztof Wodiczko (born 1943) projects symbolic images on public buildings, monuments, and other prominent sites to displace their customary public meanings. In the fall of 1988 for a few evenings during the Presidential election season, Wodiczko used xenon-arc projectors to project a 68-foot image of two hands onto the facade of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the contemporary art museum located on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. and part of the Smithsonian Institution. One projected hand holds a revolver, and the other holds a burning candle. They both flank a row of four microphones. The cylindrical museum building under the projection suggests a face adding to the symbolism of the images. [Visual elements](#) like the **light** of the projected images draws your attention as you walk by, and the large **scale** of the images and of the museum building add to the power of the message.

In 2018, on the 30th anniversary of the original projection, the Hirshhorn planned to restage the project. The evening projections were postponed after the tragic shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. You can read about the restaging and find other supporting material on the [Hirshhorn Museum website](#).



## Watch & Reflect: Krzysztof Wodiczko

1. In addition to the visual elements of light and scale discussed above, what [elements of New Media Art](#) can you tie to Wodiczko's work?
2. What meanings can you find tied to the symbols, visual elements, and elements of New Media Art? What is Wodiczko saying with this piece?
3. Why is Krzysztof Wodiczko's work a good example of Institutional Critique in art?
4. How does the meaning change based upon the timing of the projections? in 1988? in 2018?
5. For additional exploration, watch the Art21 segment "[Krzysztof Wodiczko in 'Power'](#)" (13:33 minutes). How does Wodiczko's projection project in St. Louis, Missouri relate to [Social Practice in art](#) (explored in the next chapter)?
6. If you were to project an image on a building or monument, what building or monument would you choose, and what image would you project? How would your projections change or enhance the meaning of the building/monument and image?

## Focus: Nancy Spero in the Museum



Installation view of  
 "Nancy Spero:  
 Works Since 1950,"  
 at the New Museum,  
 New York, 1989.  
 Photo source: [Fred  
 Scruton, New  
 Museum](#). License:  
[Educational Fair Use](#).



Installation view of  
“Nancy Spero:  
Works Since 1950,”  
at the New Museum,  
New York, 1989.  
Works from the  
series *The Codex  
Artaud*, 1972-1972.  
Photo source: [Fred  
Scruton, New  
Museum](#). License:  
[Educational Fair Use](#).



Installation view of  
“Nancy Spero in der  
Glyptothek Arbeiten  
auf Papier 1981 –  
1991,” at the  
Glyptothek  
(Museum), Munich,  
Germany, 1991.  
Photo source:  
exhibition catalogue.  
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Fair Use](#).



Nancy Spero, *Hymn to Isis I*, 2003, silk, thread, and acrylic paint, 153" x 43 1/2", in the Egyptian galleries of the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston. Image source: [MFA, Boston](#). Copyright: The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts. License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

Unlike the artists discussed above, Nancy Spero (1926-2009) is not considered a New Media artist

in terms of her artistic materials. She is also not noted as an artist who practiced Institutional Critique. However, as early as the 1980s, painter and feminist Nancy Spero began exhibiting her work in unconventional ways in museums and galleries. Beginning in the 1970s, Nancy Spero amassed a collection of mostly images of women, from prehistory to ancient to modern and contemporary times, and she reworked these images into her own lexicon that critiques violence against women in some combinations and in others, the images depict a bodily freedom for women. Spero repositioned and reconstructed these images from history in expressive drawings and prints on paper to amplify these feminist messages. By the late 1980s, she was challenging the institutions of art museums, art galleries, and the art market by displaying her images in the museums or galleries in unconventional ways. Spero printed her images directly on the walls in unexpected places. She hung her drawings and prints above or below eye level in galleries. In 1991, in an exhibition at the Glyptothek in Munich, Germany, Spero incorporated her drawings and prints among the ancient Greek and Roman sculptures bringing new meaning to the works, to the materials of art, challenging the Western male-dominated histories and architectural styles.

### Stop & Reflect: Nancy Spero

Look carefully at the images of Nancy Spero's works displayed in the art museums above.

1. How are these works displayed in unconventional ways?
2. How do these unexpected presentations of Nancy Spero's images critique the spaces that they are in?
3. How do the exhibition tactics add meaning to Nancy Spero's prints and textile?
4. Tie your answers to what you have learned about Institutional Critique in this chapter.

### Focus: Wangechi Mutu at the Legion of Honor

Wangechi Mutu (born 1972) is a Kenyan-born contemporary artist who, like Nancy Spero presented above, is also not immediately associated with Institutional Critique, though her work in film and performance connects her work to contemporary New Media Art. However her 2021 exhibition "Wangechi Mutu: I Am Speaking, Are You Listening?" engaged in a critical dialogue with Western Art History as an institution. The work in the exhibition was commissioned specifically for the Legion of

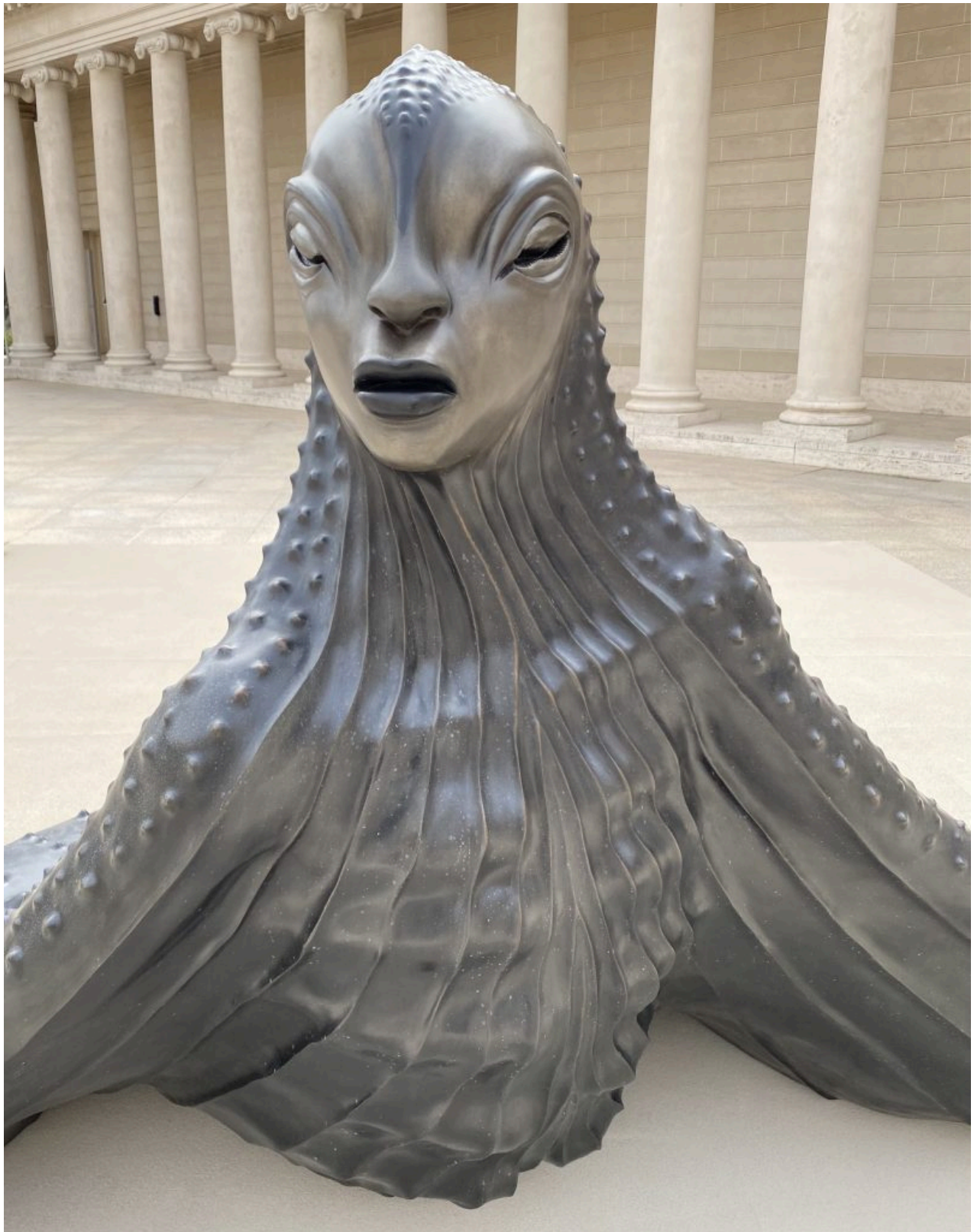


Honor Museum in San Francisco, where it was displayed and it featured sculptures, collages, and a film embedded in the galleries and museum courtyard.



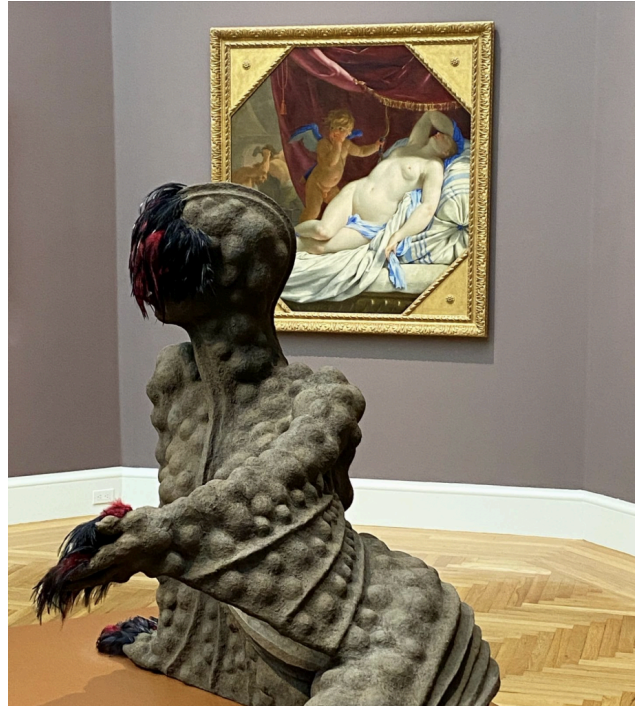
Wangechi Mutu, *Mama Ray*, 2020, bronze, Legion of Honor, San Francisco, Photo: Christine Weber, License: [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).





Wangechi Mutu, *Mama Ray*, 2020, bronze, Legion of Honor, San Francisco, Photo: Christine Weber, License: [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

In the main courtyard and many of the gallery rooms, Mutu posed questions about the museum's collections and the connections between Western Art History, power and oppression. She infuses (or invades) the museum with Afrofuturist / Posthuman beings that propose new mythologies countering Enlightenment and Western Christian narratives that hide the realities of colonial violence. A violence often obscured by art history. Mutu's work critiques the history of colonization in Africa, especially in her birth country of Kenya, and additionally speaks to the oppression of Black women in the United States where she currently lives.



Wangechi Mutu, *Outstretched*, detail, 2019, paper pulp, wood glue, soil, charcoal, pigment, feathers 35 7/8 x 63 3/4 x 29 1/2 in., Legion of Honor, San Francisco, Photo: Christine Weber, License: [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).





Wangechi Mutu, *Shavasana I* and *Shavasana II*, 2019, bronze, with Rodin's *The Thinker* in the Legion of Honor courtyard, Photo: Christine Weber, License: [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

## Look & Reflect: Wangechi Mutu

As you look at the work in “[Wangechi Mutu: I Am Speaking, Are You Listening?](#)” the 2021 exhibition installation at the Legion of Honor Museum in San Francisco, address the prompts below.

You can also watch this short film made in conjunction with the exhibition and takes viewers on a tour through Wangechi Mutu’s work dispersed throughout the Legion of Honor Galleries. Mutu narrates this film and it was directed by Dawit N.M. (9:30 minutes).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=36#oembed-6>

### Questions to Consider:

1. Discuss the meanings created when her art is exhibited in this way, woven throughout the galleries of European art.
2. What aspects of the Museum does her work critique? Give examples of when this critique is the strongest.

## Key Takeaways

By working through this chapter, you will begin to:

1. Define Institutional Critique in art, especially as it relates to the public art institution.
2. Understand how Institutional Critique is connected to Conceptual Art.
3. Explain how works of Institutional Critique exhibit some elements of New Media Art.
4. Recognize Institutional Critique in a variety of art media and practices



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11.

## SOCIAL PRACTICE

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### Social Practice and New Media Art

What is art not? Who makes art and what does art making look like? What is community and how can communities be built and connected more deeply through art practice? These questions are significant for a new approach to art making that began to develop in the late 20th century, called Social Practices. Though the scope and definition of Social Practice Art is debated and constantly being redefined, it is an approach that was influenced by artists working internationally after World War II, trying to make sense of a world fragmented by violence and oppression. Many artists began to feel that social bonds were disintegrating. They proposed art as a force that could allow people to know themselves better, forge new social connections and provide alternatives to the alienation pervasive in the modern world.



Theaster Gates, *The Dorchester Projects*, 2009, refurbished buildings, Chicago, Illinois. From *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art*, Soul Food Dinner at Dorchester Projects on 5/20/2012. Photo: Eric Allix Rogers. Source: [Flickr](#). License: [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

We'll explore the history and ancestors of Social Practice Art in this chapter, but first, let's consider contemporary artists who employ a variety of mediums and strategies to engage communities in their art practice. Keep in mind that some of the artists we'll look at in this chapter don't use the term "Social Practice" to describe their art. This term is a good example of historians and critics trying to make sense of related impulses and approaches. Labels like "Social Practice" come with a danger of limiting our understanding of an artist's work. As we have seen, most of the artists featured in this book have made work that expands the limited boundaries of our chapter headings. This is also true for the artists featured in this chapter.

## Contemporary Artist: Theaster Gates

One example of a multidisciplinary artist, whose work engages with Social Practice ideas, is Theaster Gates (born 1973). Gates came to art as a potter, creating vessels. In 2009, he bought an abandoned building in the South Side of Chicago and refurbished it considering the relationship of the building to the community around it. In the abandoned building he created a library, a slide archive, and a soul food kitchen, and maintained versatile spaces for a variety of community activities.

One building followed another, each focused on culture and community gathering for those financially disadvantaged with an eye to maintaining neighborhoods, and this became known as the [Dorchester Projects](#). The art is the activity in the buildings and the impact on the community, and Gates is the artist fostering and directing the social practice.



Theaster Gates, *The Dorchester Projects*, 2009, refurbished buildings, Chicago, Illinois. Source: [Art in the Public Sphere, OCAD](#). License: [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).





Theaster Gates, *The Dorchester Projects*, 2009, refurbished buildings, Chicago, Illinois. From *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art*, Soul Food Dinner at Dorchester Projects on 5/20/2012. Photo: Eric Allix Rogers. Source: [Flickr](#). License: [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

## Watch & Consider: Theaster Gates

Watch this [TED Talk by Theaster Gates](#) titled “How to revive a neighborhood: with imagination, beauty and art. (2015) (16:56 minutes)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=38#oembed-1>



### Questions to Consider:

1. Describe Theaster Gates' work. What kind of projects does he share in this video and how would you describe them to someone not studying New Media Art?
2. What are some major themes in Gates' work? What ideas link all of his different approaches to making art?
3. What questions do you have for Gates? If you could sit down and speak with him, what would you ask him?
4. What are some ways that Gates' work is connected to life outside of traditional art institutions? What connections do you see between Gates' work and your own lived experiences in the communities you move through?
5. Describe Gates' career development towards the way he practices art making today.
6. If we're using Gates' work as an example of Social Practice art, what are some ways you might describe Social Practices after listening to Gates talk about what he does?

## What is Social Practice Art?

Social Practice Art, also called [Relational Aesthetics](#) by the French curator Nicholas Bourriaud, has its origins in the mid 1990s, when many were exploring new connections and new global communication online. It therefore seems significant and perhaps unsurprising that Social Practice Art centered and continues to center social engagement is an art medium. Human relations became the content of Social Practice art, instead of a story or qualities of objecthood. The meaning of the work is often found in the situation rather than in an art object. Because of this, Social Practice remains outside of the art market. It is difficult if not impossible, to buy and sell. Social Practice art also often defies or exists outside of the [visual analysis approach](#) you read about earlier in this book. So Social Practice in art — rather than being about an art object and the viewer's response to it — is grounded in participation, especially participation that revolves around a recognition of or critique of communal relationships.

Social Practice is an integration of art and life. Social Practice is sometimes considered more democratic than other art forms because it doesn't privilege the artist, viewer, curator, or even the collector. It challenges traditional art historical hierarchies, especially the role of artist. Social Practice insists on community, founded in work that is collective rather than individual. Additionally, some Social Practice artists use psychological and sociological approaches to explore human interaction. In fact, many Social Practice artists work across disciplines, connecting art with fields such as linguistics, math and the sciences.

Artists embracing a social practice as their artistic practice may be interested in breaking down

what they see as false distinctions between art and life, resulting in collaboration with people in a variety of disciplines as noted above. Social Practice also acknowledges that art happens outside of a traditional art studio. This Post Studio approach allows social practitioners to make interventions into daily life, often documenting them and sharing them beyond the commercial gallery system. Social Practice artists might also collaborate with makers and creators who are not considered part of the art world, challenging the distinction between “professionals” and “amateurs”.

You might have begun to realize that Social Practice Art is related to other approaches discussed in this book, most notably, [Institutional Critique](#). While Social Practice art explores social interactions and relationships in ways not explored by Institutional Critique, both approaches may engage in critique of art institutions and the discourse surrounding art. Social Practices and Institutional Critique, both often take a critical approach to institutions beyond the art world, exposing systemic inequities at their core.

Like Institutional Critique, Social Practice Art does not rely on traditional art forms and materials. So this approach to art making might involve organizing events or engaging in activism, rather than painting or sculpting. Moreover, Social Practices deny traditional modes of presentation and audience reception, opting instead for engagement outside of traditional art institutions. With Social Practice approaches, the audience has agency and becomes an integral part of the creative work.

## Elements of New Media Art

Now that you’ve read a little bit about Social Practices, look back at the [Elements of New Media Art](#) you read about in the Introduction. Which Elements of New Media Art relate to what you’ve learned about Social Practice Art so far?

## Contemporary Artist: Suzanne Lacy

Suzanne Lacy (born 1945) is another contemporary artist who has been working for decades in different communities and whose work can be considered Social Practice, though as she notes, she and others having been making socially engaged art before the term “Social Practice” was coined. Let’s watch a video in which Lacy explains her practice, her focus on feminist activism and community and her use of time as an artistic material.

## Watch & Consider: Suzanne Lacy

Watch “Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here,” May 2, 2019, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Source: [YouTube](#). (3:12 minutes)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=38#oembed-2>

### Questions to Consider:

1. How does Suzanne Lacy describe Social Practice Art?
2. Lacy use a variety of different mediums in her work, because the concept is more important than the material or what the work looks like. What others works of art have you read about in earlier chapters that have a similar focus on ideas over form?
3. She also explains that the primary material she works with is time. What do you think she means by that?
4. What does she say about the relevance of Social Practice art today?

Now watch “Suzanne Lacy – ‘The Invisibility of Older Women’ | The Tanks,” August 3, 2012, Tate. Source: [YouTube](#). (4:26 minutes)

In 1987 The Crystal Quilt performance directed by Suzanne Lacy in Minneapolis, Minnesota, culminated three years of a public project focusing on empowering older women. Read about the project here “[Suzanne Lacy: The Crystal Quilt](#),” from the Tate Modern and watch the explanatory video posted below. Consider how participation, time, traditional materials, and technology all contribute to meaning in this work



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=38#oembed-3>

### Questions to Consider:

1. How does *The Crystal Quilt* project combat the invisibility of older women, according to Lacy?
2. Lacy also notes that this project explores the leadership capacity of older women, after watching this video, what do you think she means?

3. What does Lacy say about the challenges of exhibiting a time-based work of art like *The Crystal Quilt* in a museum?
4. Why do you think she chose to reference a quilt in this project?
5. What does Lacy say about the responsibility of an artist who is working with social issues in their art?

## Focus: Historical Threads of Social Practice Art

What inspired this approach to making art? Well, people have been communicating creatively and building community since prehistory, so we could trace the origins of Social Practice Art to earliest known communities. After World War I ended in 1919, in part because of their experiences in the war, artists began to use diverse practices to raise questions about society and about what art is. Dada artists in Europe embraced absurdity as a protest to "rational" thought that had led to World War I. Dada artists invented new ways of making art and began to suggest that art could encompass ideas as well as objects. The bizarre and nonsensical performances, sculptural objects, and printed publications, posters and pamphlets became a staple for this movement as it spread around the world to the United States, Germany, France, Russia, Romania, and Japan among other countries. The work was usually playful and often a cultural critique focused on irrationality, chance, imagination, and integrating art and life.

The artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) embraced Dada approaches in his own practice and challenged traditional materials and artistic processes with projects like his Readymades. As you read about in the [introduction, Duchamp made Readymades](#) by taking non-art objects that had already been made, removing them from their original context and inserting them into the art world, in part to emphasize the importance of context. With his Readymades, Duchamp challenged the traditions of art and laid the foundation for Conceptual Art decades later. Readymades also opened the door for New Media Art and Social Practices by suggesting that art does not have to be about skill, materials or form. Instead, art can be about an idea, or what is being said.

## John Cage and Black Mountain College

Marcel Duchamp was later part of and an influencer at [Black Mountain College](#) in Asheville, North Carolina, a progressive arts school that a number of American artists attended in the 1950s. Composer John Cage (1912-1992) also taught at Black Mountain College and in his own work was inspired by Duchamp's idea of the Readymade. Cage emphasized the conceptual and argued that

art could encompass actions and ideas as well as objects. Cage influenced young artists who began to find inspiration in the world outside of their studio.

And this idea is clearly expressed in an early work by Cage, first performed at Black Mountain College in 1951 and then performed publicly in Woodstock, NY in 1952, by musician David Tudor (1926-1996). The piece was titled *4' 33"* (*4 minutes and 33 seconds*) indicating the duration of the composition. To perform the piece Tudor entered the stage, sat at a piano, opened and closed the lid indicating three movements, and exited after 4 minutes and 33 seconds. While there were no deliberate sounds made, Cage explained that this piece is not about silence. According to Cage, "There is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound." In a [1957 lecture on Experimental Music](#), Cage described music as purposeless play and an affirmation of life. Not an attempt to bring order out of chaos, but a way of waking up to the very life we're living.

## Stop & Reflect: John Cage

The John Cage Trust developed an iPhone App to record and share your own version of *4' 33"* ([4' 33" App for iPhone](#)). Use the app to record your own version of *4' 33"*. Listen to other versions on the app if you like.

1. What are some of the differences between your version of *4' 33"* and the other versions you listened to?
2. Imagine listening to David Tudor's performance in 1952. What sounds might you have heard in 1952 New York that you didn't hear in your version today? What sounds did you hear today that might not have been present in the first performance?
3. What are some things that digital technology and the development of this app have added to this work of art that Cage may not have originally conceived of in the 1950s when he composed this piece?
4. In what way does a work like this challenge traditional ways of thinking about what art is?
5. What are some connections between this piece and some of the Elements of New Media Art we've been exploring in this text?

## Happenings

In the late 1950s and the early 1960s in the United States, artists began creating installations and staging events in environments, questioning the parameters of the art gallery and traditional definitions of art. Influenced in part by Japanese avant-garde artists like the Gutai Group, who exhibited in Europe and the US in 1957; and also by John Cage, these artists influenced many



developments in New Media Art and paved the way for both later performance artists and social practice work.

The artist Allan Kaprow (1927-2006), for example, began to think that making paintings in single, flat rectangles to hang on walls, no longer made sense. So he started making art out of the environment, embracing the entire world for use in his art. He coined the term Happenings to describe the work he began to do. Explaining that Happenings were a new art form, a new media, involving groups of people participating in [intermedia](#) performances. These Happenings began to actively blur the lines between art and life and between audience and performers. You can read examples of some other Happenings authored by Allan Kaprow in the [Performance Art chapter](#) of this text.



Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, at the Reuben Gallery, New York, October 1959. © 2021 Estate of Fred W. McDarrah. Photo: Fred W. McDarrah. Source: [MoMA](#). License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, was first performed in 3 rooms in a New York gallery in 1959. Attendees were given 3 small cards when they arrived with instructions to move to a different room each time a bell rang. There was a different Happening per room for each of the 6 parts, so no one person would be able to view all 18 Happenings. Some of the Happenings included things that might traditionally be associated with performance like people playing instruments (pictured here). Others featured tasks not often considered performative like squeezing oranges to make juice.

Kaprow saw art as a medium that could enhance our understanding of human psychology, sociology, aesthetics and politics. And thus his work has had a direct influence on some contemporary artists interested in Social

Practices. In a statement looking forward to the approach of many artists who make work considered New Media Art today, [Allan Kaprow explained](#), "The young artist of today need no longer say "I am a painter" or "a poet" or "a dancer." He is simply an "artist." All of life will be open to him."

## Fluxus

The international art group, Fluxus, also had a major impact on Social Practice Art and other approaches to New Media. Many Fluxus artists were students of John Cage at Black Mountain and at the New School for Social Research. And from Cage, they learned how to look at the world in an open-ended way and break down the distinction between art and life. As Fluxus artist Ben Vauthier

(born 1935) explained, "Without Cage, Marcel Duchamp, and Dada, Fluxus would not exist.... Fluxus exists and creates from the knowledge of this post-Duchamp (the ready-made) and post-Cage (the depersonalization of the artist) situation."

The name Fluxus references change, transformation, fluidity, and the group believed that "everything is art and everyone can do it." George Maciunas (1931-1978), the founder of Fluxus, wrote the Fluxus Manifesto in 1963 reacting against traditional and Modern art and stating the Fluxus promotes living art and art that can be grasped by all people, not just art critics and collectors. Fluxus artists argued that art doesn't only have to be concerned with formal qualities. Art can be about ideas. Art doesn't have to heroize the individual. Art can instead be about the world around us. Art can be about community and interpersonal connections. Finally, Fluxus artists also argued that art could be an experience rather than a commodity.

To make art that couldn't be bought or sold, Fluxus artists, including artists you've already encountered in this textbook, like Nam June Paik (1932-2006), did things like leading [Free Fluxtours](#) of neighborhoods in New York City. They developed a Flux-Sports event that featured contests like a 100 yard race while drinking vodka, a 100 yard candle carrying dash and crowd wrestling in confined spaces. And they wrote [Event Scores](#) that often celebrated the unpretentious pleasures to be found in everyday life. You can read about an iconic Fluxus Event Score written by the Fluxus artist Alison Knowles (born 1933) in the [Performance Art chapter](#) of this book. What are some differences between Fluxus Event Scores and other approaches to Performance Art shared in that chapter?

## Questions to Consider: Happenings and Fluxus

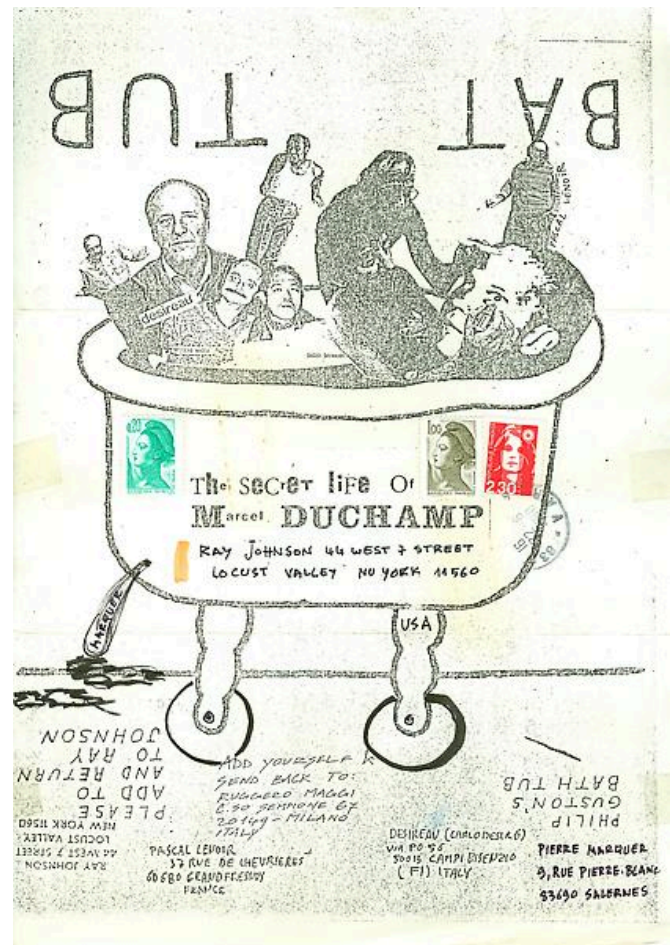
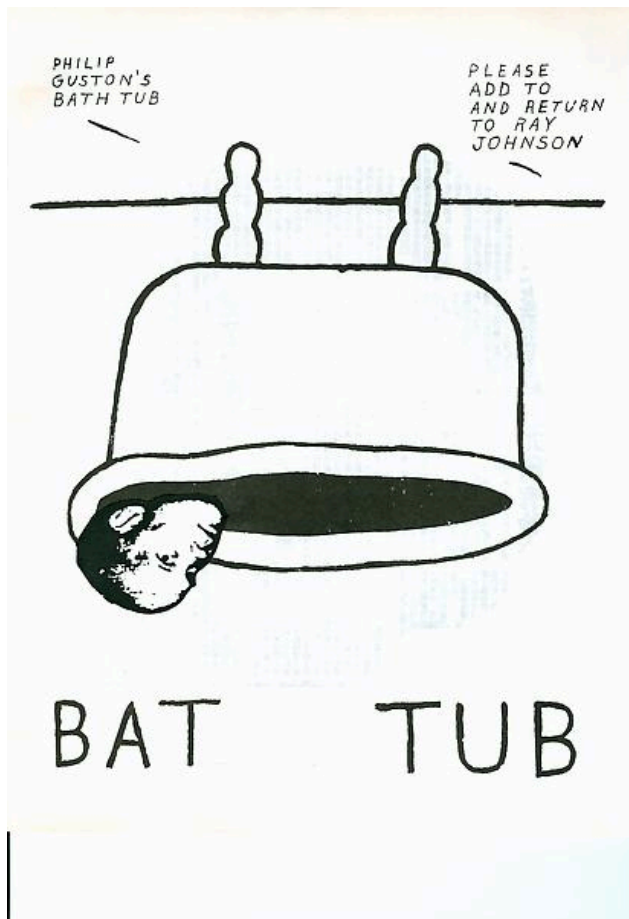
1. What are some differences between attending a traditional play in a theater vs. attending a Happening like *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*?
2. What are some differences between Happenings and Fluxus Event Scores?
3. In what ways do both Happenings and Fluxus Event Scores challenge traditional ways of viewing art in a gallery?
4. How do these pieces expand what it means to be an audience member or viewer?
5. How do these pieces expand what it means to be an artist?
6. In what ways do these approaches blur the lines between art and life?
7. Which of the Elements of New Media Art do see present in these mid-century expansions of traditional art media?

## Joseph Beuys and Social Sculpture

The artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) was a leading figure in the European avant-garde after World War II ended and as an artist from Germany, his work often dealt with the legacy of Nazi fascism and his belief that a major cultural transformation was needed and that art could play a vital role in that transformation. He was a politically active artist, who also worked with Fluxus and produced significant early Performance Art that he called "actions". But his most significant influence on Social Practice Art is his concept of [Social Sculpture](#).

Beuys argued that we shouldn't see creativity as the special realm of artists. He felt that everyone could (and should) apply creative thinking to their own area of specialization, whether that be law, education, physics, epidemiology, homemaking, or the visual arts. He saw Social Sculpture as a conscious act of shaping, of using creativity to bring a chaotic and perhaps oppressive aspect of the world into a state of new form. His expansion of the definition of art and his argument that all humans can engage with creativity have informed many Social Practice approaches.

## Mail Art (Correspondence Art)



Mail art letter begun by Ray Johnson (left) and finished by someone else (right), c. 1970s. Source: [Ray Johnson Estate](#). License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

Tied to Fluxus and Conceptual Art, [Mail Art](#) or Correspondence Art is another mid-20th century genre that contributes to Social Practice in Art as it

is practiced today. In the 1950s, Ray Johnson (1927-1995) began using the United States Postal Service to mail letters and postcard-sized works to friends in order for them to add their contributions and continue the correspondence. The works involved stamping, mimeographing and photocopying, drawing, writing, collaging and exchanging the works with others around the world. The often-collaborative works could be mundane, silly, nonsensical, tongue-in-cheek, and/or thought-provoking communication. Ray Johnson named his network "The New York Correspondence School of Art" in the 1960s, and by the 1970s, Mail Art was included in organized exhibitions around themes and published works with the exchange of art burgeoning around the world. The Mail Art movement is also a predecessor of Zine culture in the 1990s and a predictor of many developments in social media.





Ruud Janssen, envelope to Ray Johnson, early 1990s. Source: [Ray Johnson Estate](#) and [Ruud Janssen](#). License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

## Stop & Reflect: Mail Art

You can participate in a Mail Art project too. Check out this [clearinghouse of mail art projects](#) and exhibitions for ideas on how to participate.

While examining the Mail Art projects linked above, consider the following questions:

1. What are some of the ways that Mail Art challenges traditional ideas about what art can be?
2. How is Mail Art different than traditional art media? How is it related to New Media Art?
3. What are some of the Elements of New Media Art that you see present in Mail Art concepts?
4. Where do you see elements of Mail Art present online today?
5. What Web 2.0 or social media sites allow for meaningful creation and interaction amongst users? Are there sites that promise meaningful interaction, but also have barriers in place that thwart it? Are there sites that promise meaningful creation, but also control the aesthetic in such a way that hampers users' abilities to create?
6. What other links can you make between Mail Art and types of interaction online today?

## Situationist International

These influences on Social Practice Art are also related to approaches developed by a group of avant-garde French artists and activists who called themselves The Situationist International or SI. The Situationists criticized postwar capitalism and the "bureaucratic society of controlled



consumption" that one of their leaders Guy Debord (1931-1994) labelled the "[Society of the Spectacle](#)." In 1967, Debord published a book of the same title, in which he applied [Karl Marx's theory of commodity fetishism](#) to the mass media. Marx explained how commodities are disconnected from their maker and how they are made and individuals are disconnected from their own labor value in the modern market. Debord added to this critique by explaining that humans are also disconnected from authentic lived experience in this spectacularized world.

Many of John Cage's ideas are related to the approaches the Situationists developed to challenge the spectacle. One approach they developed is called the [Dérive](#), which translates to "drifting" in French. Going on a dérive requires someone to drop their typical motives for travel and allowing themselves to be pulled in new directions. A dérive might give someone the opportunity to see an area they see often in new ways and to travel through parts of a neighborhood or city in ways that subvert controlling structures like sidewalks, paths and traffic lights that force specific paths through a space. Examples include selecting a train randomly and taking it to the end of the line, or using a map for one city to try to navigate another city of the same size. The artist [Khris Soden provided a tour of Portland, Oregon using a map of Tilburg, Netherlands](#) for the Portland Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA) Time-Based Arts Festival (TBA) in 2008, inspired by this Situationist strategy.

For the Situationists, the dérive could provide a subversive relationship to everyday life in late capitalism. Situationists felt that all citizens had the potential to be active and should not be reduced to the status of passive onlookers. The group influenced Social Practice Art, in part through their interest in providing ways for people to subvert the status quo and expose the spectacle as an oppressive and flawed picture of modern life. The Situationists thought that the best way to revitalize culture was to help everyone escape from their role as passive onlookers, so their strategies can also be considered precursors to many significant approaches to New Media Art and related to some elements of Web 2.0, which theoretically allows users to generate their own content and interact with each other in meaningful ways, rather than simply consuming content created by others.

## Focus: Contemporary Social Practice

As we conclude this chapter on Social Practice in Art by looking at more contemporary artists engaging intentionally in the social realm, think about ways in which the work is participatory, exploring human relationships, and attempting to break down the barriers between art and life.

## Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher

In 2009 a few years before Facebook became the largest social media network in the world and

a few years before the selfie became a standard in photography, artist and filmmaker Miranda July (born 1974) installed a series of sculptures and pedestals in a grassy area of Venice, Italy during the Biennale di Venezia. Knowing that tourists would visit with cameras in hand, she designed the works to encourage social interaction. Visitors posed with and on the works, making photos to share around the world.



Miranda July, *Eleven Heavy Things—Pedestals for Guilty Ones*, 2009, fiberglass panel, foam, steel, acrylic paint, Venice, Italy. Photo by Elizabeth Bilyeu. License: [CCO](#).



Miranda July, *Eleven  
Heavy  
Things—Pedestal for  
a Daughter*, 2009,  
fiberglass panel,  
foam, steel, acrylic  
paint, Venice, Italy.  
Photo by Elizabeth  
Bilyeu. License: [CCO](#).





Miranda July, *Eleven Heavy Things—Pedestal for Strangers*, 2009, fiberglass panel, foam, steel, acrylic paint, Venice, Italy. Photo by Elizabeth Bilyeu. License: [CCO](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).





Miranda July, *Eleven Heavy Things—Finger Tablet*, 2009, fiberglass panel, foam, steel, urethane paint, Venice, Italy. Photo by Elizabeth Bilyeu. License: [CCO](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Prior to 2009, Miranda July used Social Practice as a lens for earlier work like *Learning to Love You More* made with Harrell Fletcher (born 1967) from 2002 to 2009. Participants were given instructions to perform a numbered task like “#69. Climb to the top of a tree and take a picture of the view” or “#63. Make an encouraging banner.” They were asked to record the task, usually through a photograph, and to send it to the artists. July and Fletcher then shared the results of the assignments on their website <http://learningtoloveyoumore.com/>. Subsequently, the website was acquired by the [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art](https://www.sfmoma.org/). In addition to this foray into web-based art, the work anticipates the eruption of social media, and is founded in the significances of human interaction.



Other projects by Harrell Fletcher, July's collaborator on *Learning to Love You More*, include [\*The Sound We Make Together\*](#), 2003, video projection and poster series

## Tania Bruguera



Tania Bruguera, *El Peso de la Culpa* (*The Burden of Guilt*), 1997-1999, performance. License: [Educational Fair Use](#). See an additional higher resolution image of the performance at [AWARE \(Archives of Women Artists, Research, and Exhibitions\)](#).

Tania Bruguera (born 1958) is a Cuban visual, performance, and social practice artist. Her work is often political in nature criticizing, for example, the lack of free speech under Fidel Casto's rule in Cuba. Bruguera uses non-traditional art-making materials in her work: dirt, salt, her own body, hair, and animal flesh to make connections between life for Cubans during colonization and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Bruguera also developed a concept she calls the **social body**, meaning that she sees her body not only as her own, but as representing Cuban people and Cuban history, collectively. Her body takes on the burden of this history, collapsing time and space and revealing the lack of freedom afforded to the Cuban people, across centuries.

Many artists doing work described under the umbrella of social practices do not use that term to describe their work. Bruguera prefers the term **Behavior Art**, which she describes as moving beyond art historical categories and connecting art more directly to a sociopolitical agenda. She writes in "Arte de Conducta" on her [website](#) that Behavior Art retains the utilitarian potential of art. Rather than art rendered "ineffective" by its placement in an institution, like a museum with its focus on formal qualities or visual elements, Bruguera envisions art living outside the white walls and on the streets with people.

### Questions to Consider: Social Practice Art

1. Why is Social Practice Art related to New Media Art? (Use the [Elements of New Media Art](#) to help answer this question.)
2. In what ways is Social Practice art related to [Web 2.0](#)? (For example, sites and apps like YouTube, Wikipedia, Instagram, TikTok, etc.)
3. How does Social Practice Art challenge traditional ideas about art?
4. What are some differences between Interaction, Participation and Collaboration? Consider some forms of media and/or art you have experienced that allow interaction. Then consider some forms of media and/or art you have experienced that require collaboration. What are the differences?
5. Are there examples of interaction where you can't really change the outcome or the work of art? Are there examples of interaction where you meaningfully change the work? Or is collaboration a better way of describing that meaningful change?

## Key Takeaways

At the end of this chapter you will begin to:

1. Explain the context and history of Social Practice Art.
2. Describe and compare significant Social Practice projects.
3. Recognize developments in Social Practices and consider how this approach to art is connected to the broader history of visual culture.
4. Explain how Social Practice Art relates to the elements of New Media Art.

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# PERFORMANCE ART

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## An Art of Action

This chapter focuses on performance from the 1960s to today. Like their avant-garde predecessors, discussed in the [Introduction to New Media Art](#) chapter, the performance artists examined here create work that redefines traditional art-making practices. Frequently relying on direct audience interaction and participation, modern and contemporary performance artists explore the body, examine process, and further break down boundaries between art and life. Performance, as we'll see, is also time-based and ephemeral, often captured and made "permanent" through photography, film, and video. After watching and reading some background information, the examples throughout this chapter are presented as thematic case studies.

### Watch & Consider: The Case for Performance Art

For a brief historical overview discussing the significance of performance art, please watch the primer, embedded below, from PBS Studio's The Art Assignment, "[The Case for Performance Art](#)" (9:09 minutes).



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=40#oembed-1>*

## Read & Reflect: Performance Art

The reading from Smarthistory, linked to below, focuses on how performance artists seek to locate new forms of expression as alternatives to traditional media. It also discussed the importance of the viewer and places performance in historical context.

- “[Performance Art: An Introduction](#)” (Smarthistory)

## The Basics: What is Performance Art?

As we’ve seen in previous chapters, non-traditional art-making materials and methods, like dance and music, have been used by artists since the early 20th century. In fact, performance art has its roots in early 20th century avant-garde movements such as [Dada](#) and [Futurism](#). Dada performances, such as Hugo Ball’s (1866-1927) recitation of [Karawane](#) at the Cabaret-Voltaire, demonstrate an interest in incorporating non-traditional art-making materials and methods into performance art, as well as the enduring quality of [ephemerality](#).



Italian Futurists also used performance to express their dissatisfaction with the status quo, staging disruptive performances called [serata](#), which reconfigured the artist as a confrontational performer in the public sphere. These evenings incited audience participation and interaction, often even ending in brawls.

Hugo Ball reciting *Karawane*, at the Cabaret Voltaire, Zürich, Switzerland, 1916. Original photographer is unknown. CCO 1.0 Universal Public Domain.

Despite their extreme ideological differences, both Dada and Futurist artists were concerned with making art that interacted, at times viscerally, with life, rather than in creating a lasting art object removed from the messiness of living, meant for veneration on a museum's walls. We can still see the influence of these movements in performance today.

In the United States, performance art emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, against the backdrop of war (in Korea and Vietnam), developing social and racial justice movements for civil rights and equality, and technological advancements, such as the television.

Using their body as medium, performance artists question the definition of art, explore the role of art in society, and critique how art is valued. Through the often [intermedia](#) qualities of their works, performance artists also consider how traditional concepts of art (e.g., painting or sculpture) can be given renewed relevance through new technologies.

Perhaps because it confronts the viewer, takes place in real time, and uses the artist's own body as medium, performance has, historically, occupied a less privileged place in art history than conventional media. As you review the works featured in this chapter, watch for instances of intermedia, a critical cross-disciplinary strategy of New Media artists that encourages mixing materials and embraces new technologies.



*Una serata futurista* poster advertising a Futurist evening. CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain.

## A Two-Way Exchange: Audience & Performance Art

As mentioned above, performance artists are interested in breaking down boundaries between art and life, creating a new context for a work of art. What barriers exist between art and life? First, think of where you would traditionally view a work of art. You might have thought about the museum or gallery space as a primary venue for seeing art. While performance can (and does) exist in the museum or gallery space, historically performance artists sought to present work *outside* of traditional art-viewing venues. They did this both to engage more directly with the viewer in the public space and to separate their work from the value systems imposed by the art world.

Performance artists also blur the boundaries between art and life by using everyday, or non-art, materials in their works. In this chapter, you'll examine performances by artists who use meat, dirt, snow, and their own clothes, among other non-art materials, in their works.

We've already learned about [Marcel Duchamp](#) (1887-1968) in the context of Dada. Duchamp argued that both the artist and the viewer are necessary to complete a work of art. In "[The Creative](#)

[Act](#)" (1957), Duchamp said, "All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act."

Let's think about this quote for a minute. How do you interpret Duchamp's statement? You might consider how Duchamp's words attempt to dissolve the distance between artist and viewer, or spectator. If the viewer is responsible for bringing "the work in contact with the external world" then they are necessary to complete the work of art. This helps equalize the relationship between artist and audience and encourages a more active role for the viewer.

## Questions to Consider: Performance Art

As we move through the examples presented in this chapter, let's consider the following questions:

1. How does performance continue to shift the relationship between artist and viewer? Can you think of ways performance helps reinvent this relationship?
2. How does soliciting active involvement from the viewer challenge their historically more passive role? How does direct viewer participation break down traditional or conventional barriers between artists, the artwork, and the viewer?
3. Finally, when artists engage and collaborate with audiences to create or complete a work of art, do you think it's hard for them to relinquish some control over the work's outcome? Why or why not?

Additionally, throughout the chapter, look for examples where artists:

1. Perform and present work outside the traditional venues (e.g., museums or galleries),
2. Engage the audience directly, or
3. Use everyday (non-art) materials.

## Key Terms

These terms are presented in **bold** throughout the chapter. When you encounter one, be sure to note the definition. You may see these terms used elsewhere in the textbook; here they are discussed in the context of performance art, specifically.

- Behavior Art (associated with Tania Bruguera)
- Body Art
- Collaboration
- Conceptual Art
- Durational Performance
- Ephemeral
- Event
- Fluxus
- Happenings (associated with Allan Kaprow)
- Intermedia
- Kinetic Theater
- Participatory
- Performalist Self-Portraits (associated with Hannah Wilke)
- Score
- Social Body
- Street Action (associated with David Hammons)

## Performance Artists & Artworks

As we'll see through the example discussed in this chapter, performance art is diverse and often interdisciplinary. As you review each work, keep in mind that performance is defined by an individual work of art, rather than by an artist's entire career. In other words, someone who sculpts or paints can also create a performance, and an artist who makes a performance can also be a sculptor. What these pieces have in common is that they are centered on an action carried out, or arranged, by an artist. They are also time-based and ephemeral, rather than permanent artistic gesture with a specific beginning and an end. Since we are viewing these works now as photographs or videos, you can see how documentation of the performance might live on forever, but the performance itself is a fleeting moment in time.



## Focus: 1960s: The Impact of Fluxus

The early examples of performance discussed in this first section are connected to **Fluxus**. As you learned in the [introduction](#), Fluxus is an international art movement led by George Maciunas (1931-1978) that emphasizes chance, the unity of art and life, and the ephemeral moment. Without a single defining style, Fluxus sought to democratize art and art-making by creating **event scores** to be enacted by anyone. An **event** refers to a Fluxus performance, while a **score** is the set of directions the Fluxus performer follows and interprets. Fluxus events were anti-commercial as they were not intended to result in an object that could be purchased or collected. **Collaboration** and **intermedia** methods were encouraged in order to create art that was directly **participatory**.

While all four artists discussed in this section, Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann, Alison Knowles, and Benjamin Patterson, have a connection to Fluxus early in their careers, Ono and Schneemann distanced themselves from the movement (Schneemann after *Meat Joy*, specifically).

## Elements of New Media Art

As you review the examples discussed below, think about how each illustrates specific qualities of a Fluxus art. Also, consider how performance in general connects to New Media art. You might reflect on how performance:

- Dismantles the boundaries between art and life.
- Employs **chance**.
- Engages the viewer as a **participant**.
- Focuses on the **process** or the act of creating, not the outcome.

Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, 1964



Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, 1964, performance. Photo by [rocor](#) via Flickr. License: [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

The Japanese artist Yoko Ono (born 1933) debuted *Cut Piece* in Kyoto, Japan, in 1964, and has since performed it in Tokyo, New York, London, and Paris. The performance is the realization of a score, or a set of participatory instructions that result in the creation of the Fluxus event. A member of the Fluxus movement, Yoko Ono's work challenges the viewer to become an active participant in the performance by asking them to cut off pieces of her clothing, as she sits motionless on the stage.

### Read Yoko Ono's score for *Cut Piece*:

"Cut Piece First version for single performer: Performer sits on stage with a pair of scissors in front of him. It is announced that members of the audience may come on stage—one at a time—to cut a small piece of the performer's clothing to take with them. Performer remains motionless throughout the piece. Piece ends at the performer's option."

In a second version, Ono amended the instructions slightly, indicating that, "members of the audience may cut each other's clothing. The audience may cut as long as they wish."

(The above score is excerpted [from MoMA's website](#), quoted from Kevin Concannon, "Yoko Ono's CUT PIECE: From Text to Performance and Back Again," [Imagine Peace](#).)

### Watch & Reflect: Cut Piece

Watch [this excerpt from Yoko Ono's performance](#) of Cut Piece:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=40#oembed-2>

### Questions to Consider:

1. What do you notice about the performance? Where is the artist? Where is the audience? What role does the audience assume in this work? How is Yoko Ono's score reflected in the actions of the performance?
2. Read [this excerpt from a MoMA audio guide where Ono reflects on her experience performing Cut Piece](#).
3. How does Ono's piece reflect Fluxus ideology?
4. After learning more about Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*, how do you think you would have experienced her work as a viewer? Would you have participated in the event? Why or why not?

## Carolee Schneemann, *Meat Joy*, 1964 (re-edited 2010)

Carolee Schneemann (1939-2019) was an American multidisciplinary artist and an incredibly important figure in performance and feminist art. She is known for her explorations of gender, sexuality, and sexism in art history, through work that encompasses painting, performance, film, installation, and video art.

In *Meat Joy*, a group of dancers (including Schneemann) wear feather-lined bikinis and briefs, as they move in both choreographed and spontaneous ways atop a plastic sheet. They rub raw fish, chicken, and sausages over their bodies, and cover themselves in wet paint and scraps of paper. The result is a tactile experience and an honoring of flesh in many forms. Though not directly participatory, the audience could see the movement and hear the sounds of the dancer's bodies, and smell the mixing of meat, paper, and paint. Later, Schneemann pieced together bits of footage from various performances of *Meat Joy* and set it to music with a voice-over, adding yet another sensory layer.

In *More Than Meat Joy*, Schneemann writes of the performance:

The focus is never on the self, but on the materials, gestures & actions which involve us. Sense that we become what we see, what we touch. A certain tenderness (empathy) is pervasive – even to the most violent actions: say, cutting, chopping, throwing chickens. (Schneemann, 253).

Schneemann referred to her work as **kinetic theater** because it creates “an immediate, sensuous environment on which a shifting scale of tactile, plastic, physical encounters can be realized. The nature of these encounters exposes and frees us from a range of aesthetic and cultural conventions” (Youngblood, 366). As Schneemann describes, kinetic theater fosters an intermedia experience between dance and performance where touch and physicality are explored and celebrated in various forms. Kinetic theater relates to Fluxus because of the way the body is staged in a social space. Even though this performance is not directly participatory, we can consider the ways in which it embraces the use of everyday, non-art materials and creates a sense of immediacy and intimacy.

After viewing *Meat Joy* and reading Schneemann's statement about her work, consider its historical context. First performed in Paris in 1964, and then later that same year in London and New York, we might think about Schneemann's performance as an act of resistance. In 1964, the Vietnam War is raging and Black Americans, women, and people with disabilities are fighting for equal rights (the Civil Rights Act has only just been signed into law in 1964). By choreographing a piece that openly and publicly explores the body as a site for both sensuality and violence, Schneemann creates a performance that transgresses societal norms.

## Stop & Reflect: Meat Joy

Watch Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy*, 1964 (re-edited 2010), filmed performance, 10:33 minutes, color, sound, 16 mm film on video (you will have to click through to view on YouTube). You can also listen to [Carolee Schneemann discuss the sensuality of Meat Joy](#) (2:00 minutes).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=40#oembed-3>

### Questions to Consider:

1. What materials does *Meat Joy* use? How is this work an example of an **intermedia** approach?
2. Can you think of ways Schneemann's performance rejects the traditional "dismissive" approach to female sexuality prevalent in western art history?



## Alison Knowles, *Make a Salad*, 1962



Alison Knowles performing *Make a Salad*. Photo by [Allan J. Cronin](#) in San Francisco, CA, 2011. License: [CC BY 3.0](#).

Alison Knowles (born 1933) is an American artist and a founding member of Fluxus. She is known for her use of ordinary, non-art materials, and scores that celebrate the everyday. In *Make a Salad* the participants are instructed via a Fluxus score to...make a salad! The process of making the salad, from selecting the ingredients, to mixing in the dressing, to serving it, will vary. The salad you make will be *your* salad and will be entirely dependent on what you have on hand and how you interpret the score.

The piece also has a vital auditory component: close your eyes and imagine the noise made by the chopping of vegetables and the rustling of lettuce leaves. What sound does the bowl make as you mix your ingredients together? What about when you bite down on a piece of lettuce or a cucumber? This is considered music, as if one was listening to actual instruments performing a symphony. This idea of the "in-between" moments of everyday life being as important as a set of carefully composed notes has its roots in the scores of the American avant-garde composer John Cage (1912-1992), whose work inspired many Fluxus artists, though he was never a member of the group.

## Stop & Reflect: Make a Salad

First, to see this work and the process in action, watch [Alison Knowles – ‘I’m Making a Giant Salad’ | TateShots](#) about Knowles’ 2008 event at the Tate in London (3:47 minutes):



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=40#oembed-4>*

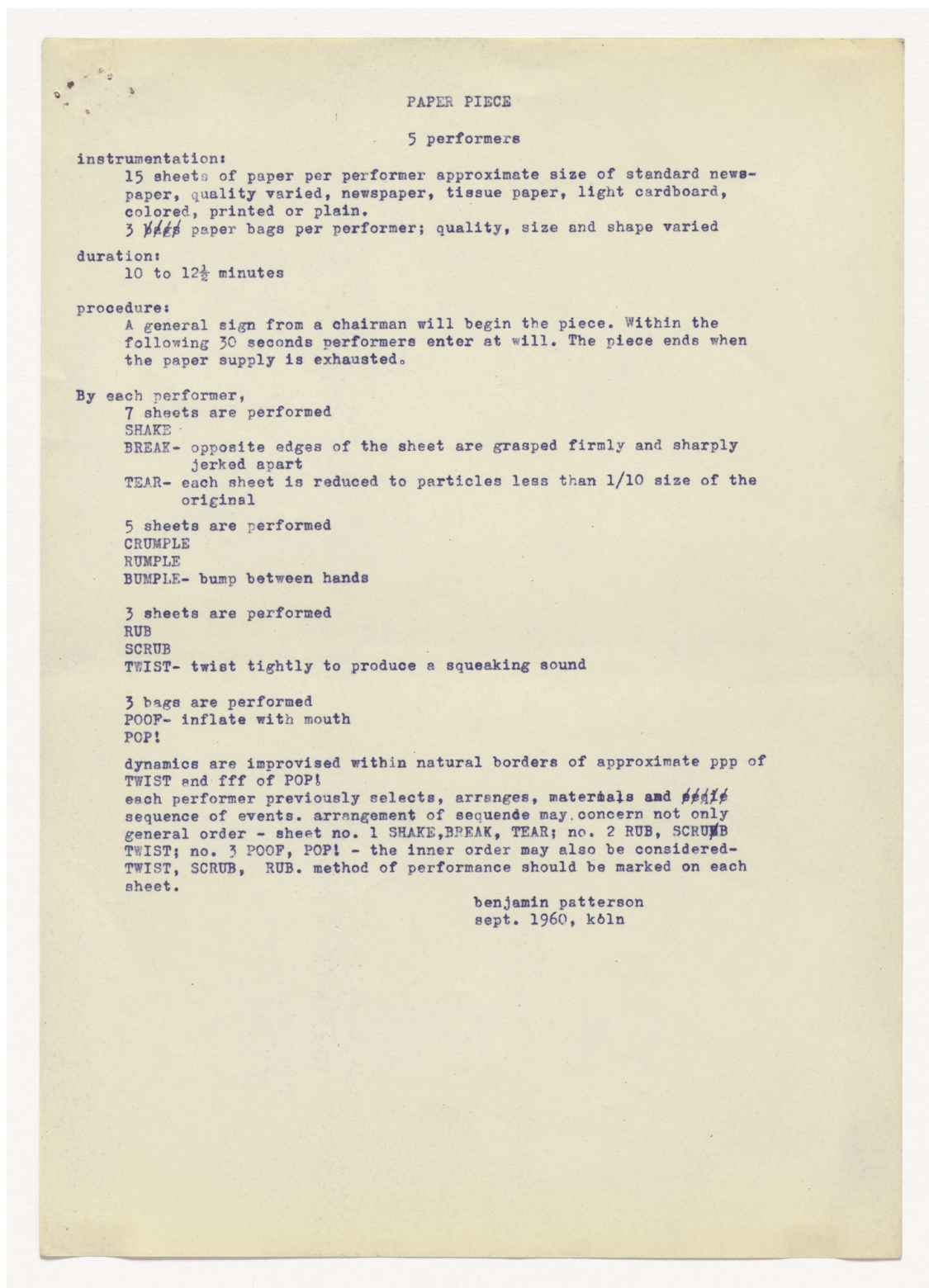
Then, for additional context, watch this video of Knowles discussing Fluxus more broadly, [Alison Knowles: Fluxus Event Scores](#) (2:57 minutes):



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=40#oembed-5>*

### Questions to Consider:

1. How does Knowles involve the viewer as participants in her event?
2. In 2008, Knowles performed this piece in front of a large audience at the Tate; how would this work be different if you performed it at home? How would it remain the same?
3. What other everyday moments could be celebrated through a score? What would you perform?

Benjamin Patterson, *Paper Piece*, 1960

Benjamin Patterson, *Paper Piece*, 1960, Diazotype. Higher resolution image available at [MoMA](#). Educational Fair Use.



A founding member of Fluxus, Benjamin Patterson (1934-2016) was a classically trained double bassist who connected his experimental musical scores with audience participation to create what he called **compositions for actions**. Interested in the democratization of art and music, Patterson's focus on indeterminacy was influenced by a meeting (and, later, a performance) with John Cage in 1960, while both composers were in Cologne, Germany. The first version of Patterson's *Paper Piece*, was actually part of letter he mailed home to his parent a Christmas present to them, since he wouldn't be home to celebrate.

A joyful celebration of everyday movements and sound, *Paper Piece* asked the audience to "crumple," "rumple," and "bump" sheets of paper. See the video below of the Ensemble for Experimental Music and Theatre performing Patterson's score in 2013 (YouTube, 9:58 minutes):



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## Stop & Reflect: Fluxus

1. What are some ways you would describe a Fluxus Event Score?
2. What are some differences between attending a traditional play in a theater vs. participating in a Fluxus Event Score?
3. In what ways do Fluxus Event Scores challenge traditional ways of viewing art in a gallery?
4. How do Event Scores expand what it means to be an audience member or viewer?
5. How do Event Scores pieces expand what it means to be an artist?
6. In what ways does Fluxus blur the lines between art and life? Fluxus Event Scores are different than other approaches to Performance Art discussed below. Consider some of these differences as you continue to work through this chapter.

## Focus: 1970s: Body Art

Optional Video: [Can My Body be Art? How Art Became Active](#) (Tate, 4:05 minutes)



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**Body Art** is a type of performance that developed in the 1960s and 1970s. As its name implies, Body Art uses the body, usually but not always the artist's, as a basis for the artwork. **Endurance** is often central to Body Art, such in the examples by Chris Burden and Hannah Wilke discussed below. Body Art can also negotiate issues of identity, gender, and sexuality. Ana Mendieta's work, for example, explores feelings of displacement related to her identity as an exiled Cuban artist living in the United States. It's important to note that Carolee Schneemann's work, discussed in the previous section, is also considered Body Art; remember that, especially in New Media, boundaries are fluid and artworks will belong to more than one category.

### Chris Burden, *Shoot*, 1971

The American artist, Chris Burden (1946-2015), performed *Shoot* at a Santa Ana, CA gallery called F Spot in 1971; the artist was 25 years old. Standing in front of a small audience of mostly friends, Burden's friend shot him with a .22 long rifle from a distance of 13 feet. The bullet, meant to graze Burden's arm, actually hit him, causing the artist to be taken to the hospital. [You can see still images from the performance at Media Art Net.](#)

This work is an example of Body Art. As discussed above, Body Art is a type of performance that explicitly uses the body, often pushed to its extremes, to address the relationship of the body to society. *Shoot*, like many examples of Body Art is transgressive, meaning it pushes the boundaries of what's comfortable or acceptable (this also applies to *Meat Joy*). In Burden's work, he engages in an acute action in order to shock the viewers, forcing them into an immediate, emotional response.

Staged when the United States was embroiled in the controversial Vietnam War (1955-1975), Burden's performance can be interpreted as a way to process images of violence seen by many on the nightly news during this "televised" war.



## Stop & Reflect: *Shoot*

Watch: “[Shot in the Name of Art](#)” (Op Docs, the *New York Times* via YouTube, 4:39 minutes)

Content Warning: A person being shot with a gun.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=40#oembed-8>

1. How does *Shoot* comment on the public’s growing desensitization to violence?
2. Does the viewer of a violent act become complicit in the artist putting his body at risk?
3. Can you compare and contrast Burden’s use of his body with one other artist discussed in this chapter?

## Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Blood Sign #2/Body Tracks)*, 1974



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Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Blood Sign #2/Body Tracks)*, 1974, performance on video (1:20 minutes); clip is 1:13. [See a video still and read about Mendieta's performance at the Reina Sophia Museum website.](#)

Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) was a Cuban-born cross-disciplinary artist living in exile in the United States. Forced to leave Cuba when she was just 12 years old, due to her father’s involvement with a counterrevolutionary group, Mendieta and her sister were separated from her mother and younger brother, and sent to live in Iowa via [Operation Pedro Pan](#). She would not reunite with her whole family for another 18 years.

In much of her practice, Mendieta used her body to address a sense of dislocation and express the trauma of violence against women. In *Untitled (Blood Sign #2/Body Tracks)* we watch as the artist, dressed in white and cream, approaches a white wall. She raises her arms, placing them against the wall. She then begins to kneel, slowly dragging her arms down the wall. Mendieta rises and walks

out of the frame, leaving behind two red lines, marks made by her forearms, which were covered with animal blood.

The lines create a shape reminiscent of a tree trunk and serve as a reminder of the **ephemerality** of the artist's body, which is no longer present. *Untitled (Blood Sign #2/Body Tracks)* also ties into Mendieta's *Siluetas* series (1973-1978) in which the artist photographs and films her body, both its presence and absence, in nature.

Ana Mendieta, *Silueta*, 1973-1978



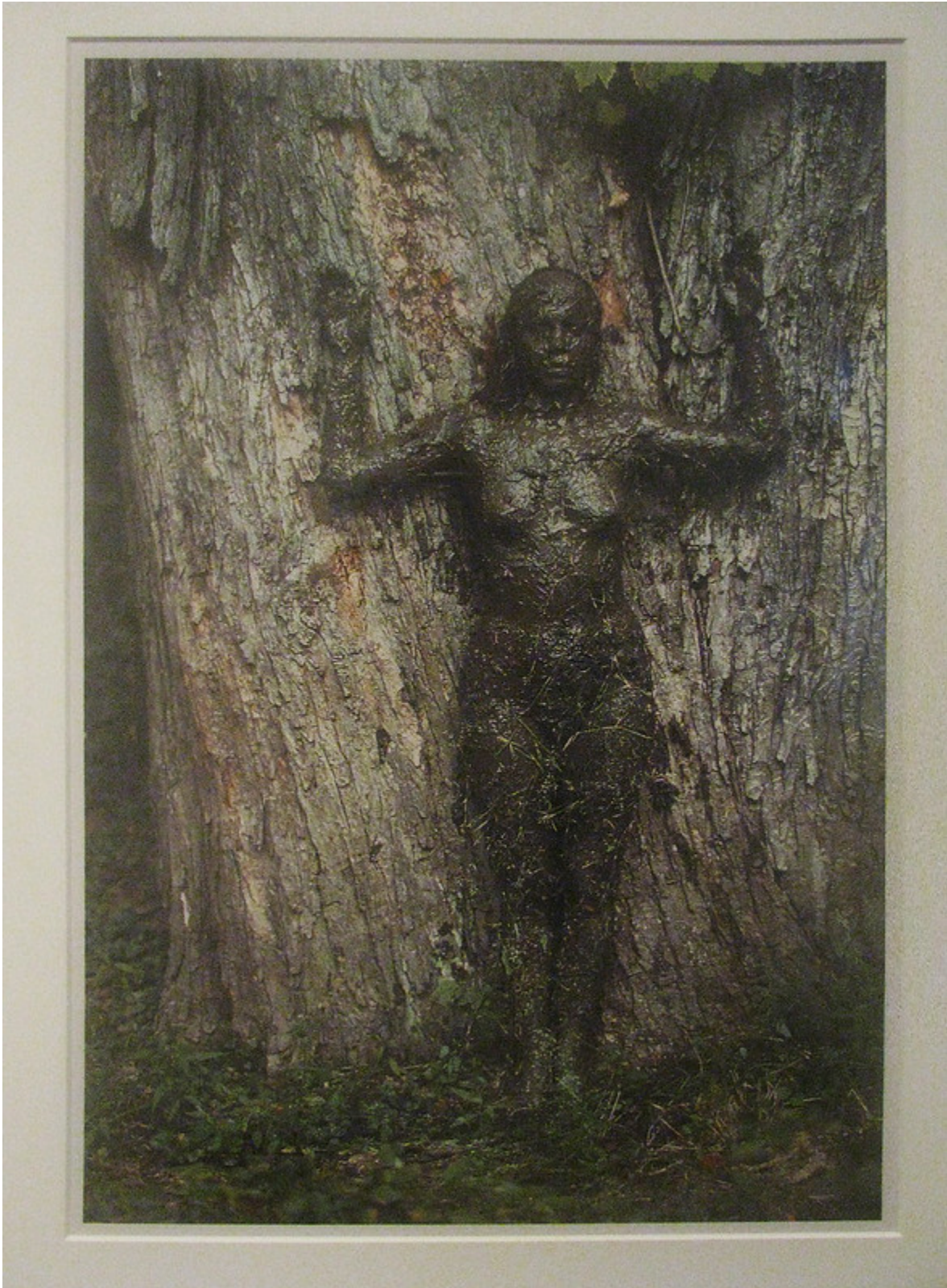
Ana Mendieta, *Silueta*. Photo by [rocor](#) via Flickr CC BY-NC-2.0.

Mendieta began work on the *Silueta* series in 1973 while on a trip to Oaxaca, Mexico, with her classmates in the Intermedia program at the University of Iowa and their instructor, Hans Breder. Mendieta was fascinated by Mexico, in part because the country reminded her of Cuba, and she continued the series when she returned to Iowa. The photographs and films she took serve to document her performances in the land and are a type of performance that Mendieta called earth-body works. These works align Mendieta with both performance, land, and feminist art.

In one *Silueta*, pictured above, we see a photograph of Mendieta laying naked in a Zapotec tomb. White flowers lay over her body, obscuring it. The flowers seem to grow from her, connecting her visually and symbolically with the land. We might think of the cycles of life and death when examining Mendieta's work. Since she was uprooted from her home in Cuba as a child, many art historians interpret her *Silueta* series as seeking to re-root the body in place.

In *The Tree of Life*, pictured below, Mendieta covered herself completely with mud, fully incorporating her body into the landscape, her form making a raised impression against a tree. Making her body part of the earth, and allowing the There is a sense of intimacy in the scale of Mendieta's performances; highlighted by the relationship between the artist's body, the land, and the viewer.





Ana Mendieta, *Silueta*. Photo by [rocor via Flickr](#) License: [CC BY-NC-2.0](#).

Mendieta went on to create more than one hundred *Silueta* in Mexico, Iowa, and Cuba (where she



returned to visit in 1981) covering her body with a wide range of substances, including rocks, blood, sticks, sand, and cloth. Or, she'd make an impression right in the earth, letting it fill up with water or sometimes red pigment. There is a relationship between Mendieta's series and [Santería](#), which is an African diasporas religion a commonly practiced in Cuba. Santería's use of natural symbols, such as earth, blood, water, and fire, are echoed in Mendieta's practice.

Through her performances, Mendieta is considered important to feminist art history. Like other women discussed in this chapter, Mendieta controls the presentation of her own body, taking an active role in how the viewer sees her (or doesn't). She also takes a non-invasive approach to the land, rather than altering it, she becomes a part of it by gently and temporarily transforming it through her presence. Finally, Mendieta's work mediates feelings of displacement and indeterminacy; this sense of ephemerality and vulnerability arguably helps her work transcend her individual identity and biography by questioning the physical experience of being a part of the world.

## In Her Own Words: Ana Mendieta's Artist Statement

Artists write statements to describe their work and their interests. Read Mendieta's statements below to better understand her aims. (Excerpts are from Olga Viso, *Unseen Mendieta: The Unpublished Works of Ana Mendieta*, Munich, Berlin, London and New York 2008.)

"The first part of my life was spent in Cuba, where a mixture of Spanish and African culture makes up the heritage of the people. The Roman Catholic Church and "Santeria"—a cult of the African divinities represented with the Catholic saints and magical powers—are the prevalent religions of the nation. For the past five years, I have been working out in nature, exploring the relationship between myself, the earth, and art. Using my body as a reference in the creation of the works, I am able to transcend myself in a voluntary submersion and total identification with nature. Through my art, I want to express the immediacy of life and the eternity of nature." (Ana Mendieta, 1978)

"I have been carrying out a dialogue between the landscape and the female body (based on my own silhouette). I believe this has been a direct result of my having been torn from my homeland (Cuba) during my adolescence. I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature). My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that unite me to the universe. It is a return to the maternal source. Through my earth/body sculptures I become one with the earth ... I become an extension of nature and nature becomes an extension of my body. This obsessive act of reasserting my ties with the earth is really the reactivation of primeval beliefs ... [in] an omnipresent female force, the after-image of being encompassed within the womb." (Ana Mendieta, 1981)

"For the last twelve years, I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body. Having been torn from my homeland (Cuba) during my adolescence, I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast out from the womb (Nature). My art is the way I reestablish the bonds that unite me to the Universe. It is a return to the maternal source. These obsessive acts of

reasserting my ties with the earth are really a manifestation of my thirst for being. In essence, my works are the reactivation of primeval beliefs at work within the human psyche." (Ana Mendieta, 1983)

### Stop & Reflect: Ana Mendieta

1. How do you think Mendieta's exile from Cuba influenced her artwork? How are feelings of displacement and dislocation explored in her works?
2. What aspects of *home* resonate with you on a sensory level?
3. What materials does Mendieta use to create her work?
4. Can you describe the role of the body in her artwork?
5. How are life and nature intertwined in Mendieta's work?
6. How do the works in the *Siluetas* series suggest the fragility of the human being in relation to the forces of nature?

### Hannah Wilke, *Gestures*, 1974

Hannah Wilke (1940-1993) was an American artist whose intermedia works combined performance, film, sculpture, painting, and photography. *Gestures* is a recorded, **durational performance** that shows the artist manipulating her face with her hands for the length of the video (about 35 minutes). She pushes, pinches, smooshes, and pulls at her face, stretching and contorting it like clay, a material she often worked with before creating her first video work. These gestures ask the viewer to question standards of conventional beauty. Referring to these explorations as **performalist self-portraits**, Wilke used her body to play with ideas of abstraction and representation, and to call attention to how women's bodies are objectified.

Using her hands, her face transforms, interrupting the viewer's gaze, and calling attention to the commodification of the female body. Wilke, like Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann, and Ana Mendieta, uses her own body in an effort to reclaim it and define it herself, within a patriarchal society. She says, "I made myself into a work of art. That gave me back my control as well as dignity." (Wilke, quoted in Montano, p. 139). (You can read more about *Gestures* in the [Early Video Art](#) chapter.)

## Stop & Reflect: Hannah Wilke

Hannah Wilke, *Gestures*, 1974, video (black and white, sound), 35:30 minutes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpoqCMdiGKc>

### Questions to Consider:

1. Wilke's work addresses female objectification through the exploration and transformation of her own face and body. Why do you think self-representation is important to Wilke?
2. How does *Gestures* compare to Schneemann and Mendieta's use of their bodies in examples examined earlier in this chapter?

## Focus: 1980s: Ritual Space

The artists presented in this section create space for performance outside the traditional museum or gallery setting. Allan Kaprow and Tehching Hsieh explore patience and time through their **durational performances**, while David Hammons reclaims space for Black bodies through his **ephemeral** performances.

Allan Kaprow, *Trading Dirt*, 1982/83-1985



Allan Kaprow, *Trading Dirt*, 1983-1985, performance. Photo by [xennex](#) via WikiArt.  
CC BY Fair Use.

An early practitioner of participatory art, Allan Kaprow (1927-2006) valued the performative possibilities of all forms of art. Known for developing the **Happening** in the late 1950s, Kaprow's later work included meditative performances, such as *Trading Dirt*. This durational performance, dematerialized the art object, while at the same time, it ritualized the mundane process of moving dirt from one person and place to another. *Trading Dirt* began in 1982 or 1983 when the artist was studying at the Zen Center in San Diego, California and represents a shift from his earlier Happenings of the 1960s, to a more intimate and time-based work.

*Trading Dirt* is referred to as a durational performance because the passage of time is an essential element to the work. The work unfolds sporadically over a number of years, whenever Kaprow felt like initiating the process, ending in about 1985. Kaprow begins the performance by trading buckets filled with dirt from the Zen Center for dirt from his own backyard. He then trades soil with friends, farmers, and others. The act of trading dirt, especially with strangers, led to spontaneous actions and conversations that become a part of the work. You can watch Kaprow tell a story about the process and his motivations for *Trading Dirt* [in a video from Media Art Services linked here](#) (14:36 minutes).

Influenced by composer John Cage's emphasis on the sounds between the notes (See his [4'33"](#) for example. You can also find a [further discussion of Cage's influence](#) in the chapter on Social Practices.), Kaprow was interested in the human interactions and chance encounters between the act of trading dirt.

Of *Trading Dirt*, Kaprow writes, "The dirt trading and the stories went on for three years. It had no real beginning or end. The stories began to add up to a very long story, and with each retelling they changed. When I stopped being interested in the process (it coincided with my wife and I having to move after our rental property was sold), I put the last bucket of dirt back into the garden." (*Trading Dirt*, 1982/83-1985) (Kaprow, 1993)

### Stop & Reflect: Allan Kaprow

1. Kaprow wrote, "Life is much more interesting than art. The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible" (Kaprow, *Untitled*, p. 709). How does work, like *Trading Dirt*, exemplify this quote?
2. How does Kaprow's work honor chance encounters and lend significance to everyday events?
3. Can you relate **Happenings** back to what you've learned about Dada and Fluxus?
4. As we've noted, many of the artists discussed in this text make work that is difficult to categorize and can be understood through multiple lenses. Read about Allan Kaprow's Happenings in the [Social Practice chapter](#), if you have not already done so. What are some differences between the way his work is contextualized in that chapter vs. the way his work is contextualized in the history of performance art?
5. Why do you think Happenings fit into both categories?



## Tehching Hsieh, *Time Clock Piece (One Year Performance 1980-1981)*, 1980-81

Another example of a durational performance is Tiwanese American artist, Tehching Hsieh's (born 1950) *Time Clock Piece (One Year Performance 1980-1981)*. Durational performances can express an artist's endurance because they happen over a long period of time. Hsieh's performance everyday, for a full year, also explores our relationship to time by revealing it [as a precondition for all life](#).

[Scholar Ash Dilkes discusses Hsieh's interest](#) in collapsing boundaries between “art time” and “life time.” In a durational performance, lines between art and life are ultimately blurred as Hsieh must wake himself up every hour to punch a time clock, which he has installed inside his studio, for the duration of the yearlong performance. The process of documentation became so a part of Hsieh's daily routine that he only missed 133 punches out of 8,760 (Dilkes). His life *is* the performance; art and life are experienced simultaneously, reflecting a culmination of a central goal of Performance Art as the boundaries between art and life are dissolved.

### Stop & Reflect: Tehching Hsieh

Watch the following 2 videos on Tehching Hsieh and his performance practices (2:36 and 3:38 minutes):



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Next, [watch the artist and curator Nina Miall discuss Tehching Hsieh's \*Time Clock Piece\*](#) (the second of his one-year performances). (Das Platforms Multimedia Projects, 9:05 minutes):



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### Questions to Consider:

1. Watch the stop motion embedded above. How is the passage of **time** reflected in Hsieh's self-portraits?
2. Consider the role of **process** in Hsieh's performance. Do you think the artist's experience of creating the work is more important than any objects or records that are the outcome of the process? Why or why not?
3. What do the [installation views](#) of the performance reveal to the viewer about Hsieh's performance and process?
4. Especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, can you describe a moment from your own life that helps you relate to the repetitive quality of Hsieh's work?

### David Hammons, *Bliz-aard Ball Sale*, 1983



David Hammons, *Bliz-aard Ball Sale*, Cooper Square, New York, 1983-1985. License: [Educational Fair Use](#). See additional higher resolution images of the performance at the website [Public Delivery](#).

David Hammons (born 1943) is a sculptor, printmaker, performance, and installation artist known for

his ephemeral public performances and installations. Remaining intentionally elusive to the museum and gallery systems, Hammons' work explores and critiques systemic racism in the United States. In *David Hammons: Bliz-aard Ball Sale*, author Elena Filipovic writes:

*"You cannot think of these works or of Hammons' street actions in general without reckoning with what blackness meant (and means still) in public space. Or without acknowledging that by putting himself out on a street corner with his wares, Hammons may well have been playing with racist stereotypes associated with blacks (homeless vagrant, street hustler, drug pusher) and at the same time undercutting them through his calm, serious stance and willfully elegant style. The adage 'the white man's ice is colder' speaks for the sort of internalized racism that causes black Americans to believe that businesses, products and services offered by whites are better, more reliable. Turning the expression on its head, Hammons' act implicitly suggested that although you could easily make your own snowball, this black man's ice was worthy of purchase; it was perhaps colder, even."*

Documented through photographs, Hammons performed *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* on a New York City street near Cooper Square in 1983. He laid out a woven rug and set out his snowballs, carefully arranging them in descending order, according to size. Each snowball was crafted using spherical molds, so they have a perfectly round shape, something you couldn't as easily achieve if you formed each snowball by hand.

In addition to evaluating Hammons' **street actions** as a reflection on his experience as a Black American, another way to interpret *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* is as a critique of the art market and the value attributed to artworks by galleries and auction houses. The snowballs Hammons hawked were, by their very nature, ephemeral objects that he seemingly sought to profit from. They are also commonplace (especially in New York in December), so by assigning value to them, Hammons draws attention to the arbitrary nature of the art market, presenting a contrast between the art world and the more tenuous financial position of the street vendor.

## Stop & Reflect: David Hammons

1. In an interview, when asked whether or not he thought his work is political, Hammons replied, "I don't know. I don't know what my work is. I have to wait and hear that from someone." So, what do *you* think? What is an argument for Hammons' work as political? If not, what do you think his work is about?
2. In what ways would being presented in a museum or gallery space change the meaning of *Blizz-ard*

*Ball Sale?* Why is site important to Hammons' performance?

## Focus: 1990s: The Social Body

In this next section, we'll turn to three artists whose performances address politics and identity. For our case studies, we'll review a performance by the Chinese artist Zhang Huan whose work about the human condition pushes his own body to extremes, often under the watchful and suspicious eye of the Chinese authorities. We'll also study work by Tania Bruguera, a Cuban artist who conceptualizes performances critical of the Cuban government and of authoritarianism more broadly. She has had her passport confiscated and her works banned in her home country. Finally, we'll look at Mona Hatoum, a Palestinian performance, multimedia, and installation artist whose piece, *Roadworks (Performance Stills)*, investigates how individuals struggle under authoritarian control.

### Zhang Huan, *12 Square Meters*, 1994



Zhang Huan, *12 Square Meters*, 1994, single channel video, 3min 2sec, documentation of a 40-minute performance. [Educational Fair Use](#). See an additional higher resolution image of the performance at [Google Arts & Culture](#).

Zhang Huan (born 1965) is a Chinese artist who lives and works in both Shanghai and New York. In *12 Square Meters* we see, through photographic documentation, the artist seated, naked, on a toilet in a public restroom. The title refers to the size of the room, which is 12 meters, or about 130 square feet. His body appears to shine, a result of being smeared with fish oil and honey, and we can see that flies and other insects have landed on him.

As the artist sits in this small, enclosed lavatory, during the summer, covered in oil, honey, and bugs, how would you describe his expression? What other senses does this work engage? Can you imagine the smell of the public restroom? Can you feel the air and sense the temperature of the space? Is it warm? Humid?

Zhang Huan sat in this restroom for hours at a time. The restroom is in an economically disadvantaged town outside of Beijing called Dashancun Village. Zhang and other artists called this area, where they also had art studios, Beijing East Village, after the New York neighborhood, Greenwich Village, known for its many artists. This was a subversive dig at contemporary Chinese artists who were living and working in more affluent areas of Beijing. The work Zhang and his contemporaries were creating in Dashancun called attention to the area's squalid living conditions, and remained both physically and conceptually outside the Chinese government's institutionally sanctioned art.

Let's consider the role **meditation** and **endurance** play in Zhang's performance. He sat, perfectly still, seemingly unbothered by his surroundings. In his essay, "Revising Performance Art of the 1990s and the Politics of Meditation," Hentyle Yapp, Assistant Professor of Art and Public Policy at New York University, writes,

"Meditation structures Zhang's performance in *12 Square Meters*. He does not merely endure through discomfort; he allows it to become a form of practice and self-cultivation. Zhang's sitting, along with his acute sense of focus, is located within his present moment, not within the past or future."

Think about this quote in the context of Zhang's performance. What do you think it implies? Did Zhang accept his surroundings? How does enduring something become an avenue for self-actualization?

### Stop & Reflect: Zhang Huan

1. If you could create a durational performance piece critical of an aspect of where you live, what would it



be?

2. Can you think of nine adjectives to describe Zhang's performance? How are these adjectives supported by your understanding of his work?

Tania Bruguera, *El Peso de la Culpa* (*The Burden of Guilt*), 1997-1999



Tania Bruguera, *El Peso de la Culpa* (*The Burden of Guilt*), 1997-1999, performance. License: [Educational Fair Use](#). See an additional higher resolution image of the performance at [AWARE \(Archives of Women Artists, Research, and Exhibitions\)](#).

Tania Bruguera (born 1958) is a Cuban visual, performance, and social practice artist. Her work is often political in nature criticizing, for example, the lack of free speech under Fidel Casto's rule in Cuba.

In *El Peso de la Culpa* (*The Burden of Guilt*) Bruguera revisits Cuban history. Her work responds to a story of indigenous people who vowed to eat nothing but dirt, rather than become prisoners of the Spanish conquistadors. In the performance, Bruguera stands in front of a Cuban flag that's made of human hair, and wears a butchered lamb around her neck. She takes her time mixing dirt (earth) and salt (tears), which she then eats. This performance acknowledges indigenous Cubans who took their own lives by starving themselves as an affront to the abuse of the colonizing Spanish.

Bruguera uses non-traditional art-making materials in her work: dirt, salt, her own body, hair, and animal flesh to make connections between life for Cubans during colonization and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. By eating dirt, Bruguera connects these two moments in Cuban history, reflecting on both the strength and poverty of the Cuban people. This connection also reinforces Bruguera's notion of the **social body**, meaning that she sees her body not only as her own, but as representing Cuban people and Cuban history, collectively. Her body takes on the burden of this history, collapsing time and space and revealing the lack of freedom afforded to the Cuban people, across centuries.

Finally, Bruguera prefers the term **Behavior Art** to describe her work, which she describes as moving beyond performance and more readily connecting art to a sociopolitical agenda. She writes in "Arte de Conducta" on her [website](#) that Behavior Art retains the utilitarian potential of art. Rather than art rendered "ineffective" by its placement in an institution, like a museum with its focus on formal qualities, art can live outside the walls and on the streets with people.

## Stop & Reflect: Tania Bruguera

1. How does the term **Behavior Art** compare to Fluxus? Do you think it offers a continuation, or modernization, of Fluxus ideals?
2. What are sociopolitical realities expressed in Bruguera's work?
3. Can you point to specific ways history manifests in Bruguera's performance? Why do you think it is important for the artist to reflect on this history?
4. Keep her concepts of Behavior Art and the **social body** in mind when we examine two more of her artworks in the section Performance Art Now, below. Then, compare and contrast her performance strategies.

## Mona Hatoum, *Roadworks (Performance Stills)*, 1985-1995



Mona Hatoum, *Roadworks (Performance Stills)*, 1985-1995, gelatin silver print on aluminum, 30 × 42½ inches. License: [Educational Fair Use](#). See an additional higher resolution image of the performance at [BOMB Magazine's website](#). All images courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York.

Mona Hatoum (born 1952) is a Palestinian performance and multimedia installation artist who lives in London. She was born in Beirut, Lebanon to Palestinian parents, and travelled to London for a visit in 1975; she became stranded there due to war breaking out in Lebanon. Like Ana Mendieta, discussed earlier in this chapter, Hatoum's work often addresses feelings of displacement and explores her identity as a person living in exile.

In 1985, she created three pieces for an exhibition called, *Roadworks*, which she performed around the district of Brixton, in southern London. The exhibition, organized by the Brixton Art Gallery, sought to move art from beyond the gallery walls through a series of unannounced performances that took place around the city, in order to reach new audiences. The image pictured above is a record of one of those performances. In it, we see the artist's legs, photographed in mid-stride from about the knees down, as she walked barefoot through the city streets for about an hour. Tied around her ankles by their laces is a pair of black Doc Marten combat boots. Photographic evidence of this series of performances was published a decade after they took place.

In the early 1980s, intense protests for racial justice occurred in Brixton due to its racist policing and housing policies, which disproportionately targeted Black Londoners (Brixton has a large African and Caribbean population). In 1985, the same year as the *Roadworks* exhibition, [a Black woman was shot by the police in Brixton during a raid on her home](#), leaving her paralyzed from the waist down. More protests following. In this context, Hatoum's performance can be interpreted as a response to the city's trauma. Are the black boots following her, or holding her down, or is she marching in solidarity with the community?

Hatoum shared stories of this work in a 1991 interview saying, "One comment I really liked was when a group of builders, standing having their lunch break, said 'What the hell is happening here? What is she up to? And this black woman, passing by with her shopping, said to them, 'Well it's obvious. She's being followed by the police.'" (Diamond, 131). Hatoum's performance, taking place unannounced and outside of the traditional art space, allowed viewer's to form their own interpretations of the work, connecting it to their community's current events. Like Tania Bruguera and Zhang Huan, Hatoum's body becomes the social body, the big black boots following her symbols of both individual and societal oppression.

### Stop & Reflect: Mona Hatoum

1. Hatoum stipulates that the photograph of her performance, which is printed on reflective aluminum, be exhibited directly on the floor, leaning against the museum or gallery walls. How does this means of display reflect the intermedia qualities of New Media? Do you think placing the photograph on the floor creates more or less of an interactive space for the viewer to experience the work?

### Focus: Performance Art Now

This final section showcases examples of performance art from the last two decades. As you're reviewing the case studies presented below, think back to the previous examples we've examined in this chapter and see if you can make connections between earlier and later performance art.

You'll learn more about Theaster Gates in the [Social Practice](#) chapter of this text, so keep in mind how artists who work in contemporary performance art continue to work across media and genres.



We'll also take another look at Tania Bruguera's work in this section and it is useful to compare and contrast the examples presented below and *El Peso de la Culpa* (*The Burden of Guilt*), discussed above. Finally, consider how Dread Scott's work, which is the first case study you'll encounter in in this section, connects to the sociopolitical performances examined throughout this chapter.

Dread Scott, *I Am Not a Man*, 2009



Dread Scott, *I Am Not a Man*, 2009, performance. Photo by [Karl Steel](#) via Flickr. License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

Dread Scott (born 1965) is an American artist whose practice in performance, installation, video, printmaking, and painting critically examines race and racism in the United States. Of his multimedia approach, [Scott writes in his artist statement on his website](#), “two threads that connect them are: an engagement with significant social questions and a desire to push formal and conceptual boundaries as part of contributing to artistic development.” What connective threads can you identify in Scott’s statement? How do these threads fit in with the goals of performance more broadly? As you learn more about his performance, *I Am Not a Man*, keep Scott’s intentions as an artist in mind.

In *I Am Not a Man*, Scott walked the streets of Harlem, New York for an hour. He’s dressed in a tan suit jacket with black pants, a black tie, and a white shirt. He wears black-rimmed glasses and a tan and brown hat. He’s also wearing a large signboard with the words, “I AM NOT A MAN.” The sign references the 1968 Memphis Sanitation workers strike and the artist [Glenn Ligon’s 1988 painting \(Untitled\) I Am Man](#) (which also refers back to the sanitation strike).

As you can see from the still images of the performance, Scott’s work attracts attention from people on the street. At one point, he’s surrounded by a group of police officers (you can hear Scott talk about this encounter on The Modern Art Notes podcast). In the last image on his website, he is shown with his pants down. Here, Scott’s performance recalls a specific moment when he witnessed police officers searching a Black man on the street by pulling his pants down. In other parts of the performance, Scott puts his hands up against the wall, lays down on the ground, and pulls the pockets of his pants inside out.

## Stop & Reflect: Dread Scott

- [Listen to an interview with Dread Scott that aired on June 3, 2020 on The Modern Art Notes podcast](#) (50:09 minutes; *I Am Not a Man* is discussed at 26:47 to 32:52)
  - [Look at still images from \*I Am Not a Man\* from Scott’s website](#). Be sure to also scroll down below the images to read his statement about the work.
1. As you look through images of *I Am Not a Man* and listen to the artist speak about his work, think of specific ways Scott’s work critiques the way Black Americans are treated in the United States.
  2. What is the effect of the use of text in Scott’s performance? Would this piece be different if the artist had walked the streets of New York declaring, “I am not a man,” aloud? Why or why not? Would the effect of this performance be different if it were performed in a museum or gallery space?
  3. How does Scott’s work reflect directly on history? You can read more about the [Dred Scott Supreme Court decision on the PBS website](#) and more about the [Memphis Sanitation Strike of 1968 on the Civil Rights Museum website](#).

## Tania Bruguera, *Tatlin's Whisper #5*, 2008 and *Tatlin's Whisper #6*, 2009, collaborative performances

As discussed in the previous section, Politics and Identity, Tania Bruguera is an artist whose work defies easy categorization. Her work is often explicitly political and based on viewer participation and interaction, and participation from the institution, such as the museum. In addition to using the terms Behavior Art and the social body to describe her practice, she also refers to what she does as initiating (rather than creating) a work of art, preferring to work collaboratively with others to decentralize the role of the artist. Her work fits in with both performance and [social practice](#).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=40#oembed-13>

Watch *Tatlin's Whisper #5* performed at the Tate Modern museum, above. (Tate Shots, 4:00 minutes) and [read about \*Tatlin's Whisper #5\* on the artist's website](#).

*Tatlin's Whisper #5* shows two mounted police officers directing the crowd inside the great Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern museum in London, England. The people encounter the mounted police as they perform their typical job, but they've been taken out of their usual context and placed inside the museum space; Bruguera describes this as the "decontextualization of an action." People don't have to obey them, but they do. The authority of the mounted police extends to this new context. In the video from the Tate Modern, Bruguera says that she prefers when the audience can experience the work as a live event, rather than a representation of a live event.



Tania Bruguera, *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)*, Havana, Cuba, 2009. Original photo by [Studio Bruguera via Open Edition Journals](#), Collection Solomon R. Guggenheim, New York, Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund, 2014. © Tania Bruguera. License: [Educational Fair Use](#).

*Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* also addresses power and authority. In this case, Bruguera presents the viewer with the symbols of a political speech: a microphone and podium, flanked by two guards (who are actors), in front of a curtained backdrop. Audience members are invited up to the microphone and allowed 1 minute to say whatever they want; they have one minute of totally free speech before they are pulled from the podium by the guards. As you can see in the Art21 video clip linked to above, people scream, cry, and yell into the microphone.

## Stop & Reflect: Tania Bruguera

- [Read about Tatlin's Whisper #6 \(Havana Version\) on the artist's website](#)
  - [Watch an excerpt from the performance from the Art21 interview with Bruguera](#) (the discussion of the artwork starts at 23:35).
1. How does Bruguera's work expand the definition of performance art?
  2. How do the works presented in this section compare to *El Peso de la Culpa (The Burden of Guilt)* discussed earlier?
  3. What role does absence place in *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)*?
  4. What political message do her works convey? How does she communicate these messages?



5. How does Bruguera's approach to performance differ from the other artists examined so far in this chapter? Does she use a different approach to engage the audience?
6. Do you think the outcome of the performance changes when the artist's body is *not* present?

## Theaster Gates, *See, Sit, Sup, Sip, Sing: Holding Court*, 2012 and *Processions*, 2016–2019, series of collaborative performances

You learned about the American artist Theaster Gates (born 1973) in the [Social Practices chapter](#). Below, you'll study two of his collaborative performances, which are an extension of his social practice work.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=40#oembed-14>

[Watch a few minutes of Gates' performance of \*See, Sit, Sup, Sing: Holding Court\* from the Studio Museum in Harlem](#) (22:50 minutes)

In *See, Sit, Sup, Sip, Sing: Holding Court*, Gates initiates another type of space for conversation. This collaborative project is part performance and part installation. It also plays with ideas of presence and absence, similar to Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)*.

*See, Sit, Sup, Sip, Sing: Holding Court* consists of salvaged materials (like *The Dorchester Projects*) from a closed public school in Chicago's South Side. The chairs, desks, tables, and chalkboards are arranged to encourage learning and listening.

When the space is activated, people fill the chairs, the chalkboard is covered in questions and ideas, and voices rise and fall in conversation and community. Gates occasionally "holds court," but the space can be used freely by others. When the space is empty, it sits as a silent reminder of the importance of learning from one another, and the institution's role in listening to its community.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=40#oembed-15>

Read about [Processions on the Hirshhorn Museum website](#), where you can also view still images of the different performances and watch a video of *The Runners* (4:48 minutes.), embedded above.

His project, *Processions* at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C. was a series of four collaborative performances that the artist created with local and national Black community arts leaders.

A true **intermedia** project, *Processions* combined dance, music, theater, visual art, and African American culture. Several of the performances were part improvisational as Gates collaborated with choral singers, experimental music ensembles, and even student athletes.

### Stop & Reflect: Theaster Gates

1. Community collaboration and creating opportunities for exchange and dialogue are at the heart of Gates' practice. Can you compare Gates' process for *Processions* with his work on *The Dorchester Projects*, reviewed in the [Social Practice](#) chapter?
2. How do these works each reflect Gates' focus on fostering community? How do they also relate to supporting and celebrating Black identity?

## Conclusion

This chapter introduced you to a broad range of artistic practices encompassing performance art. As we've seen, performance art challenges the hierarchy of the institution by pushing out of the museum or gallery walls, and bringing art out into the public sphere. Performance also de-centers the importance of the art object, valuing instead the ephemeral actions of the artist. This shift to action over object reveals performance artists' interest in demonstrating that art exists in real life and in real time, rather than as a commodity available to only a privileged few.

As we saw in other chapters discussing [Institutional Critique](#) and [Social Practice](#), New Media artists seek out new modes of expression that are less and less tied to historic, Western notions of how we view and experience works of art. Performance artists also recognize this shift and seek to create work that engages the viewer and encourages their active participation in the creative process.

## Key Takeaways

At the end of this chapter you will begin to:

1. Explain the context and history of Performance Art.
2. Describe and compare significant pieces of Performance Art.
3. Recognize developments in Performance Art and consider how this approach to art is connected to the broader history of visual culture.
4. Explain how Performance Art relates to the elements of New Media Art.

## Optional: Lesson Extensions

Below are some lesson extension activities to encourage learners to engage more deeply with the material presented in this chapter.

### Further Reflection:

1. How would you define performance art? How does performance push back against conventional ways of viewing and experiencing an artwork?
2. How does performance art differ from the theater?
3. Can an original piece of performance art be performed again? Should it be?
4. Is performance art designed to make you uncomfortable?
5. What are some of the historical precedents for performance?
6. How does performance art draw attention to the intersection of art and life?
7. How does performance anticipate other forms of new media?
8. Why do you think the body becomes so central to Performance Art?

## Creative Interpretation Idea

### Create a Fluxus Event Score

We've learned that Fluxus artists desired to merge art and life and often called attention to the ordinariness or mundane aspects of our day-to-day experiences. Their work relies on audience participation and chance.

For this assignment, you will compose an original Fluxus event score inspired by your immediate surroundings.

Your work will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Your score is inspired by the Fluxus movement but is not derivative of another artist's work.
- Your score is about 4-6 lines long (it can be a bit shorter than this, but should not be much longer).
- Your score is based on a specific site or feeling inspired by your immediate surroundings.
- Feel free to be creative with your presentation. You can play with fonts, layout, color, and graphics to create a score that reflects your inspiration.

## Discussion Assignment Idea

As you learned in this week's module on performance art, artists can break down the barriers between art and life by:

- performing and presenting work outside the traditional venues (e.g., museums or galleries)
- engaging the audience in the public sphere
- using everyday (non-art) materials

Select one of the artists presented as case studies in this chapter and discuss how their work breaks down barriers between art and life. You can base your response on the criteria above, but you may also share other ideas about how artists can blur the lines between art and life inspired by the artist and artwork you've chosen.

## Further Reading

Read the interview, "[Tehching Hsieh and Marina Abramović in Conversation](#)" from the Tate Museum's website.

Based on your understanding of the reading, respond to the following questions:

1. How are Tehching Hsieh's and Marina Abramović's artistic practices the same? How do they

differ?

2. Can you explain, from the reading, how each artist prepares for a performance?
3. Pick a quote from the reading by either artist. Why did this quote resonate with you? What do you think it reveals about Hsieh's or Abramović's artistic philosophy?

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13.

## THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

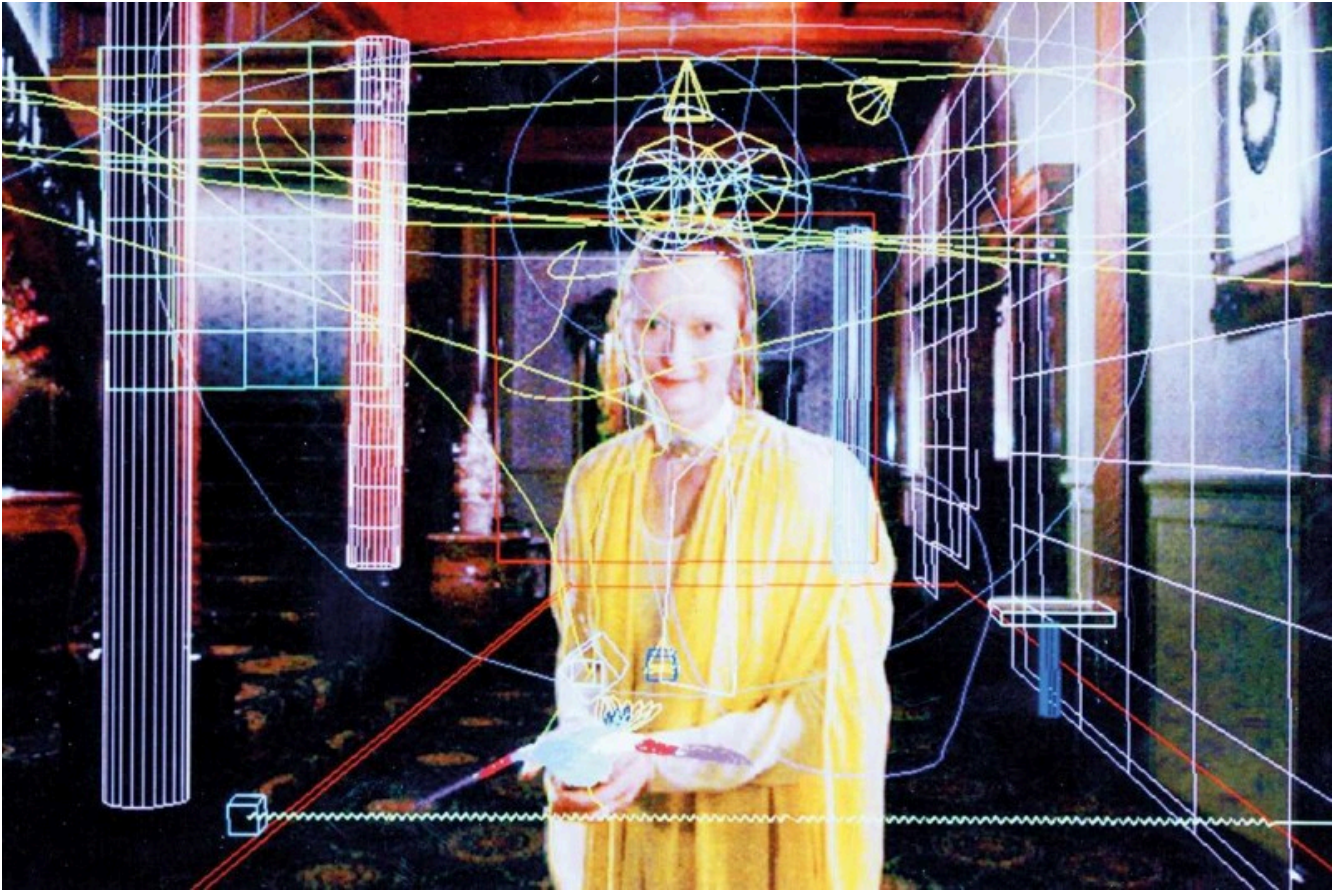
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### New Media Art in the Digital Age

In this unit, we'll discuss how concepts of New Media Art relate to the Digital Age. We've seen some New Media artists argue that the best way to revitalize culture is to creatively integrate art into everyday life and make viewers producers instead of passive observers. So in the era of [Web 2.0](#), a term coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2004, New Media approaches became more prevalent because, while Web 1.0 limited people to viewing content passively, a Web 2.0 site or app allows users to interact and collaborate with each other, creating user-generated content on social media sites, blogs, wikis or video sharing sites. This means that some of the concepts of New Media became even more relevant in the early 21st century.

Artists have only been using digital technologies for a few decades, but as we've seen, new technologies and New Media Art concepts are part of a much longer history of image making. So while concepts of art have been radically transformed by New Media, this transformation did not begin with the introduction of computers in the 1980s or the Internet in the 1990s. The transformation has been happening in the art world for at least a century. New Media Art did not arise in a vacuum. In fact, one definition of New Media Art is art that exploits the emerging technology for artistic purposes. So we can find the roots of New Media Art in projects that make use of emerging media technologies and projects that are concerned with the cultural, political and aesthetic possibilities of new tools going all the way back to the 19th and 20th centuries.

In fact, the history of modern computing and digital technology began in the Early Modern Era with [Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz](#) (1646-1716), who invented a calculating machine that used the binary system in the 17th century. [Ada Lovelace](#) (1815-1852), a 19th century mathematician, became the first to recognize the full potential of computers beyond just calculation. She also developed the world's first computer language, one-hundred years before digital computers. If you're interested in learning more about Ada Lovelace, check out this fictional account of her life by the New Media Artist [Lynn Hershman Leeson \(born 1941\). \*Conceiving Ada\*](#) (1997). (This link takes you to a trailer for the 82 minute film. You should be able to find the film in your local library.)

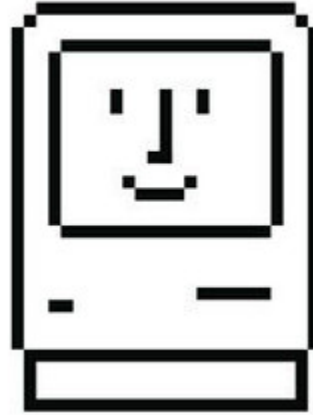


Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Conceiving Ada* film still, 1997. Copyright Lynn Hershman Leeson. [Educational Fair Use](#).

## The History of Computers

After the early explorations of pioneers like Lovelace, the essential ideas of modern computing were articulated in the 1940s and 50s, including [networking](#), using [computers for real-time control](#) and [graphical interface display](#). In the 1960s, the most significant development in computing was the [Internet](#), though we can also find strong conceptual connections between computing and avant-garde art of the 1960s.

When the Macintosh computer was released in 1984, artists and designers were among the first to realize the potential for this new technology. Macintosh popularized the graphical user interface, designed by [Susan Kare for Apple](#). It also had a simple drawing and painting program that emphasized a new role for the computer as a creative tool. You can read a critical analysis of earlier developments in graphic user interface (GUI) during the 1970s in this essay titled ["Black Goopy Universe" by American Artist](#) (born 1989) in *unbag* (Winter 2018). American Artist explains the dominance of white, cisgender designers and proposes how that early dominance shaped racial biases and erasures online today.



Susan Kare and the Happy Mac icon she designed. Image: tualamac. Source: [Creative Commons](#). License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

By the end of the 1980s, when Adobe released their new digital image editing software called Photoshop, the position of the digital computer as an artistic tool, for creation, appropriation, manipulation and deconstruction, was solidified. While cultural theorists like Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) were analyzing the media decades before the 1980s, other theorists added their voices to the dialogue and began to critically examine the roles for New Media as it started to leave the military, government, big business and academia. Both [Jean Francois Lyotard's The Post Modern Condition](#) (1979) and [Jean Baudrillard's Simulacra and Simulation](#) (1981) contain detailed discussions of computing and [Sherry Turkle](#) and [Donna Haraway](#) quickly arose as American academics engaging critically with this new technology.

## The History of New Media Art in the US

But it wasn't until 1995, that American universities and art schools, especially on the West Coast, initiated programs in New Media Art and Design and began to open faculty positions in New Media Art. One of the first websites devoted to online art called Net Art, was a site called ädaweb, developed by the Walker Art Center and named for Ada Lovelace. ([adaweb.walkerart.org](http://adaweb.walkerart.org)) It was developed in December of 1994, the same month that Netscape released its Internet browser and just one year after the first web browser Mosaic was introduced. Äda Web was curated by Benjamin Weil with the goal of both mounting online exhibitions and commissioning online art projects. Over the course of its life, ädaweb presented more than two dozen projects all meant to encourage interaction on the World Wide Web. The organizers explained that they saw their site as "A research and development platform, a digital foundry, and a journey. Here artists are invited to experiment with and reflect upon the web as a medium." (From the Äda Web manifesto)



Äda Web homepage. detail. 1994-1998. Screenshot: Christine Weber. Source: [Walker Art Center](#). License: [CC NC-SA 4.0](#)

[artnetweb](#) was another collaborative founded in 1993 to provide artists access to the investigate and use new technologies in their projects. In 1997, they organized [PORT](#) as an “exhibition of networked digital worlds on the Internet, providing a platform for experimental, networked and time-based art projects. Another venue for Internet Art between 1997 and 2003 was Gallery 9, also organized by the Walker Art Center. You can find an archive of the work they supported linked here [Gallery 9](#).

The [Dia Foundation](#) also began commissioning artists to make work for the Web in 1995. Dia selected artists based on their interest in exploring the aesthetic and conceptual potentials of the medium. They were not concerned with choosing artists who had a fluency or proficiency in digital tools or computer programming. Then, for the first time in 2000, the Whitney Biennial in New York had a room dedicated to Net Art and in 2001 there were two large survey exhibitions of Net Art and other forms of New Media Art, Bitstreams at the Whitney and 010101: Art in Technological Times at SFMoMA. So what had been a cultural underground, making art to critically engage with the Internet and the Web, was becoming an established academic and artistic field by the early 2000s.

Between 2001 – 2003, New Media Artists Mendi and Keith Obadike (both born 1973) organized [Black.Net.Art Actions](#), which is a suite of artworks that argue that racial discourses aren't just relevant online, they are essential to how we interact with computer networks. Historian Megan Driscoll has written about their work and about race and identity in the early developments of New Media Art online, explaining that in the 1990s and early 2000s, there was a prevlanet myth that race disappears online. And that myth shaped how people understood the emancipatory potential of computer networks. Driscoll argues that the actions taken by Mendi and Keith Obadike helped counter that



myth by revealing how online encounter are permeated by the histories that influence one's ideas and experiences of race, demonstrating that the relationship between race and computer networks is an essential subject for internet-based art. You can read the entire exploration of *Black.Net.Art.Actions* here, [Dr. Megan Driscoll, "Art, Race, and the Internet: Mendi + Keith Obadike's \*Black.Net.Art.Actions\*," in \*Smarthistory\*, September 21, 2020.](#)

## Listen & Reflect: An Oral History of the Internet

Watch *An Oral History of the Internet #6: Mendi & Keith Obadike*, Creator: NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery, Source: [YouTube.com](#) (2021) (44:37 minutes).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=42#oembed-1>

### Questions to Consider:

1. What do Mendi and Keith Obadike have to say about what it felt like when the Internet started?
2. What do they say about what it means to work, act and create art online?
3. They talk about making art on the Internet as making public art. What do you think that means?
4. What do they have to say about the Internet as a “utopian” and “democratic” space in the 90s?
5. What can we learn about the early days of the Internet (and even the tech as it works for us today) by listening to New Media Artists like Mendi and Keith Obadike?
6. Later in this chapter, you’ll look at work by an artist named Tabita Rezaire, who works to critique digital colonialism, what do the Obadike’s have to say about the legacy of colonialism in the early days of the Internet?

## Explore & Consider: net.art

Examine the following net.art projects and consider how they engage you as a viewer:

1. [Jenny Holzer, \*Please Change Beliefs\*](#), May 1995, the first ädaweb project.

In this project, US artist Jenny Holzer (born 1950) explored the collaborative nature of the web by encouraging users to change her Truisms, a conceptual art project she had been working on since 1978.

2. [Mendi Lewis Obadike, \*Keeping Up Appearances\*](#), 2001, Black Net.Art Actions project.

This is a hypertext project by Obadike, in which she recounts her experiences as a young Black woman with an older white, male mentor. Be sure to read each text and hover your mouse to uncover more aspects to the story.

3. [Komar and Melamid, \*The Most Wanted Paintings\*](#), 1995

In this project, Russian artists Vitaly Komar (born 1943) and Alex Melamid (born 1945), attempts to discover what a true “people’s” art would look like. Through a professional marketing firm, they conducted a survey to determine what Americans prefer in a painting; the results were used to create the painting America’s Most Wanted. Look through as many examples of the paintings selected as you can

4. [Francis Alÿs, \*The Thief\*](#), 1999

For his first project for the web, Belgian born, Mexican based artist Francis Alÿs (born 1959) created an animation, available as a screensaver, as his response to the computer, the network, and the ubiquitous Windows metaphor. The process by which he came to this clip has been documented in a series of short arguments where Alÿs investigates the parallels between contemporary interface design and “Alberti’s Window,” a method of linear perspective drawing encoded and canonized during the early Renaissance through Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472).

5. [Wilfredo Preto, \*A Moment of Silence\*](#), 2007

For his first web-based project, Cuban artist Wilfredo Prieto (born 1978) invites visitors to participate in a moment of silence. When opening this project, take a deep breath. Your computer is not crashing.

## Questions to Consider: net.art

1. How did you navigate each project you examined? Was it easy or difficult to find your way around in the work of art? Did you scroll, click around or use some other type of navigation?
2. What was the project like when you first entered? What did you expect and what happened when you started interacting with it?
3. What kind of interaction did the project allow? Describe the level of audience involvement. Could you change the work of art? Were you unable to change the project? What about other people who participate in the project, have they changed or add to it? Why do you think each artist chose the approach to audience involvement that they did?
4. What is each of the net.art projects you examined about? What themes are explored? What was the goal of each project?
5. How was your experience with net.art projects you examined different than visiting a gallery or a museum?
6. Did any of the web-based art projects you just examined reference earlier print-based technologies? If so, explain how.

## Hypertext and Non-Linearity

As we've discussed, we can go back further and find [correlations between new media throughout history and developments in new media today](#). For example, interactive computer art further develops ideas already explored in the art of the 1960s, continuing the shift from passive audience reception to active participation pioneered by Fluxus. There are also correlations between the reception of new technologies on the part of makers and the general public. There is often fear when new media is introduced as we've seen when printmaking was introduced to Europe and some were afraid that they would lose their livelihoods and others afraid that they would lose their positions of power within the dominant structure. Sometimes as a way of easing into a new paradigm, the first experiments with new media reference old media technologies. For example, in fifteenth century Europe, Johannes Gutenberg (died 1468) made his first printed manuscript look like it had been handwritten by a scribe. And as we have seen, some of the earliest photographs looked like paintings. Today, print culture is mixing with digital culture and the language and formats of print

culture are still with us. E-readers and websites often employ the linear reading style of scrolling or turning pages despite the fact that hypertext, which allows for a non-linear engagement with multiple texts, was invented in the 1990s.

The linear reading methods employed by many digital tools were designed by people who learned to read using analog media like books. [Hypertext](#), in contrast, allows a programmer to link information from other sources to their pages, [creating a non-linear web sometimes called a rhizome](#). Along with having the potential to transform and complicate linear thought, new digital tools also challenge the logic of traditional art. Traditional art history and the art world assumes a one of a kind art object, made by a single, artistic genius and distributed through a set of exclusive galleries, museums or auction houses. But as we've seen, New Media Art privileges the existence of numerous copies and many different states of the same work. The user is often able to change New Media Art through interactivity. Authorship can be collaborative. And distribution of New Media Art can bypass the traditional gallery system. For further context see the [discussion of Hypermedia in the chapter on Digital Video Art](#).

## Explore & Consider: Hypertext

Examine the hypertext projects linked below. Choose one and answer the questions listed below in relation to the web art project you have chosen.

1. [Tim Rollins and K.O.S., Prometheus Bound](#), 1997

Tim Rollins (1955-2017) and K.O.S. (Kids of Survival), created a series of “dialogues” which weave together excerpts from Aeschylus’ play, studio discussions, and outside commentary. The outcome is pages or “scrolls” which are works of art that, as with all of their work, has been produced collectively.

2. [Fantastic Prayers](#), begun in 1995, as a collaboration between writer Constance DeJong (born 1950), artist Tony Oursler (born 1957), and musician/composer Stephen Vitiello (born 1964). It challenges linearity through its presentation of text/poetry and prose, sound, video, images.

3. Also examine [Wikipedia](#), not a New Media Art project, but as you probably know, Wikipedia is a free, collaborative, crowd-sourced encyclopedia, founded in 2001 and it’s a great example of hypertext.

## Questions to Consider: Hypertext

1. What are some of the differences between reading these texts and reading a physical book?
2. What are some differences between reading these texts and scrolling through a news article or blog post online without hypertext?
3. What makes a hypertext project non-linear? What are some advantages to reading a hypertext project? What are some disadvantages or downsides?
4. Based on the definitions of New Media Art we've been developing, why would you consider hypertext related to New Media Art?

## Relationships between New Media and Old Media

Scholar [Lev Manovich](#), a professor of Digital Humanities, has suggested that digital computing and new media are a massive speed-up of manual technologies that already existed before computing. One example Manovich provides is linear perspective, which was used by human draftsman to create an illusion of 3-dimensional space on a flat surface, long before digital drawing, CGI and other digital animation tools were designed. Manovich also argues that Quick-Time, which was introduced by Apple in 1991, is a speed up of the Kinetoscope of the 1890s. Both tools were used to present short image loops. Both featured images approximately 2-3 inches in size. And both called for private viewing rather than exhibition in a large room full of people.

The invention of digital photography in the 1950s massively sped up image capturing abilities. Photoshopping is also a speed up of composite photography or collages made by people in the Victorian era and the early 20th century, by gluing multiple photographs together and sometimes rephotographing them. Contemporary means of digital image production and socially networked means of image distribution like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Flickr and Twitter, give global populations the possibility of presenting their photos, videos, and texts in ways they never could in the 19th or 20th centuries. Since the introduction of first Kodak camera "users" have had tools to create their own media, but it's only recently that we've had access to multiple paths that allow media objects to easily travel and allow users to interact and collaborate with each other.

Digital Art also has parallels to Video art because video art was made possible by the introduction of the Sony Porta-Pak, which was cheap and easy to use allowing artists and other users to access the world of video for the first time. A generation later the introduction of the web browser led to the birth of computer art as a movement. New Media artists saw the Internet as an accessible artistic tool



and they started using computers and eventually the Internet to explore the changing relationship between technology and culture. You can read more about the early years of video art in the [Video Art chapter](#) of this book. You can also read more about Digital Art that employs video in the [Digital Video Art and Video Installation](#) chapter.

## Focus: Hacking Culture

As we become more and more engaged with the Internet in every aspect of our lives powerful questions have arisen regarding the ownership of digital media and information. The relationship between corporations, governments, and individuals online and the powerful influence of popular culture are issues being critically explored by contemporary New Media artists, including members of the [Free Art & Technology \(F.A.T.\) Lab](#), [Evan Roth](#) (born 1978), [Greg Leuch](#) and [Aram Bartholl](#) (born 1972), among many others. Artists like [Alexei Shulgin](#) (born 1963) produced some of the earliest real-time performance art via the Internet, inspired by early 20th century Dada performance art. Also in 2000, in a critical exploration of the new Internet marketplace, eBay, a student named Michael Daines offered to sell his body under the sculpture category on eBay. Daines project recalls the work of early performance artists like Chris Burden and Marina Abramović who treated their bodies as sculptural objects. The project also hacks eBay and encourages user to think critically about the nature of buying and selling art and more specifically doing that online. These are similar to questions raised by Mendi + Keith Obadike in projects like [Blackness for Sale](#) also a project engaging with ebay and critically recalling the history of slavery.

New Media artist [Mark Tribe](#) (born 1966) has argued that remixing and culture jamming is a form of New Media Art also innovated by early 20th century Dada. In [A Hacker Manifesto, written by McKenzie Wark](#) in 2004, Wark extends the idea of hacking beyond to the computer and into other domains. Hacking is innovation, wherever it is practiced. By hacking codes, for example the codes of art, we create the possibility of new ways of thinking and new things to examine.

An excellent example of hacking and the influence of Dada culture jamming and is a project from 2001 by [Critical Art Ensemble](#). The project, titled Child as Audience, was a CD-ROM with instructions on how to hack and alter GameBoy video games. So not only did this project involve taking a found object and found code and creating something new, but it also gave the power over to the viewers or users, allowing them to hack the game device in whatever ways they saw fit.



Critical Art Ensemble, *Child as Audience*. Includes instructions on how to hack a GameBoy, along with other radical content. 2001. Source: [Critical Art Ensemble](#). Educational Fair Use.

Another project called Prepared PlayStations, by the [Radical Software Group](#), exploited bugs and glitches in PlayStation games to create game loops that were exhibited in art galleries in the context of New Media Art shows.



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Radical Software Group, *Prepared PlayStation RSG-THPS-4-2*. 2004. Creator: [Radical Software Group](#). Source: [YouTube](#). (2:25 minutes)

Cory Arcangel (born 1978) is another artist who works across media and critically examines technology. He often hacks machines to make interventions that encourage users to think about the structure, aesthetic and interface of the technology in new ways. For example, he hacked a Super Nintendo cartridge to create his piece [Super Mario Clouds](#), by removing all other components of the game Super Mario Brothers, until clouds are the only thing left.



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Cory Arcangel, *Super Mario Clouds*, 2002. Uploaded by coryarcangel. Source: [YouTube](#). (5:54 minutes.)

While these are more recent projects, game modifications have been happening as early as the 1980s, with skilled fans creating new items, weapons, characters and sometimes entirely new story lines for their favorite games. In fact, these modifications of digital games are indebted to the original interactive games born in the 1970s, Table Top Role Playing Games like Dungeons and Dragons.

## Watch & Consider: Video Games at MoMA

Watch the TED talk by Paola Antonelli titled “Why I brought Pac-Man to MoMA”, TED (2013) Source: [YouTube](#) (18:22 minutes).



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## Watch & Consider: The Case for Video Games

Watch “The Case for Video Games” by The Art Assignment from PBS Digital Studios (2020) Source: [YouTube](#) (13:27 minutes).



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## Questions to Consider: Video Games

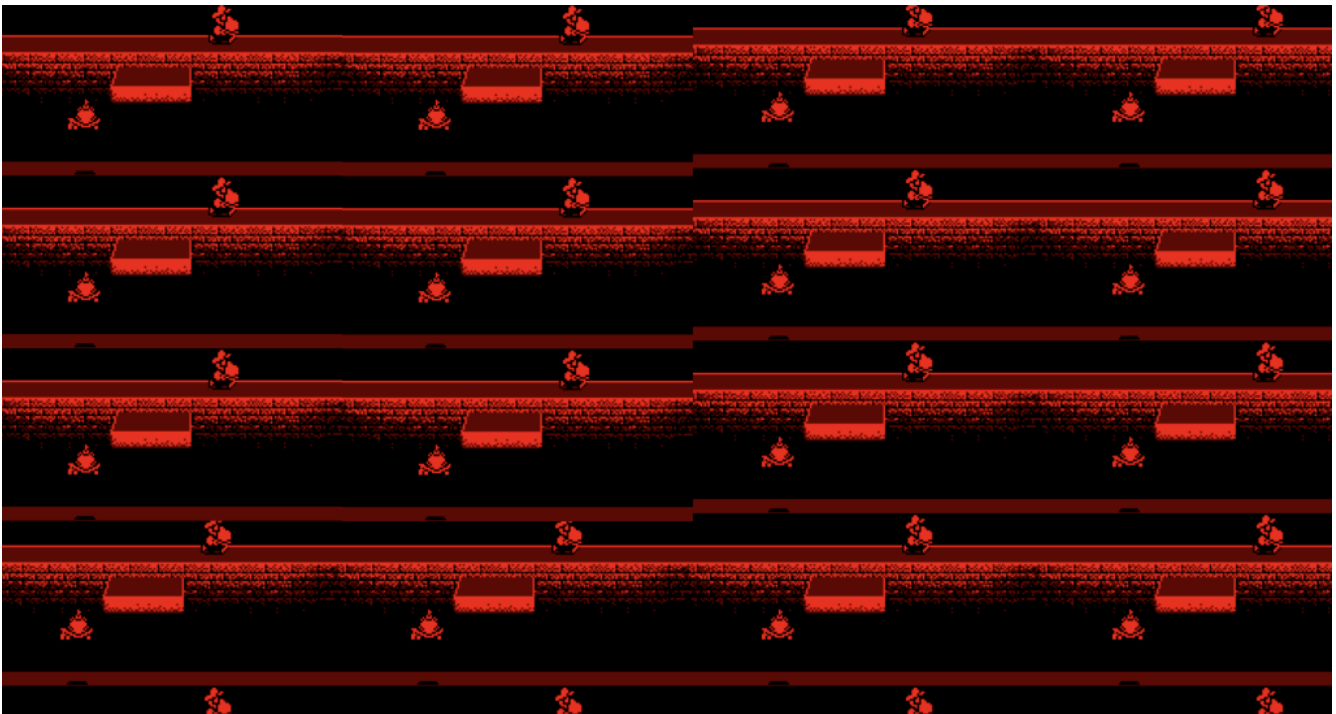
1. What are some of the reasons that Video Games can be considered New Media Art?
2. What are some of the differences between traditional video games and hacking projects by artists like the Critical Art Ensemble, the Radical Software Group and Corey Archangel?
3. Consider how the viewer or user is engaged with in some of the video games presented in “The Case for Video Games”, what are some of the different types of interaction that someone playing a video game might encounter? (Consider a traditional scrolling or platform games like early Mario, consider first person shooters, consider structured narrative RPGs, also consider sandbox or open world RPGs and MMORPGs (or Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games) and simulation games like the Sims or Second Life.)
4. What kind of user engagement does creative hacking involve and how is that level of engagement different than playing some of the different types of games you’ve described in response to the previous question?
5. At the beginning of this book we talked about the artist Cao Fei (born 1978), who constructed a fictional, open world city in Second Life called [RMB City \(2008-2011\)](#). What are some of the differences between this project by Cao Fei and some of the video game formats you have described above?

## Focus: Glitch Art

Another approach to digital art that can involve Dada Hacking and Readymade strategies is Glitch Art. Glitch Art is often made with lost bits of the old and new technology. Some Glitch artists

manipulate old digitized photographs or old Internet gifs, using editing software to "corrupt" the image, creating layers or distorting pixel blocks to achieve a glitchy or distorted look. A "glitch" is something created as the result of a technology malfunction and in the 1990s, visual artists became interested in using digital glitches to make art. However, there are earlier precursors to Glitch Art, including works like [Nam June Paik's TV Magnet](#) (1965) and [Digital TV Dinner \(1978\) by Jamie Fenton and Raul Zaritzky](#).

Some of the earliest examples of Glitch Art made online was made by Jodi.org. A group formed in 1993 by Joan Heemskerk (born 1968) and Dirk Paesmans (born 1965). Jodi.org is a website that deconstructs the visual language of the web in the 1990s, by manipulating found HTML scripts and images. Like other examples of New Media Art we've looked at, Jodi.org exploits an emerging technology for aesthetic purposes. It is also an open system with no point of closure and temporal, rather than a fixed object.



JODI (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans), Screenshot from [jodi.org](http://jodi.org), 1994. License: [CC BY 4.0](#).

More recently, the curator and scholar [Legacy Russell has articulated the idea of Glitch Feminism](#) as a tool to subvert dominant narratives and create alternate, radical futures. Russell identifies the glitch as a disruption, an embrace of malfunction, and a "tear in the fabric of the digital". She notes that the digital has often been equated with the radical. But she argues that the dominant institutions currently defining the future of visual culture (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and others) are anything but radical. One way she identifies a glitch is as a strategic occupation of these platforms that define our Internet status quo and privilege certain voices and certain identities over others. Russell posits a glitch as not just a failure to perform, but a conscious refusal. She proposes that



identities and action formerly defined as “error” can be redefined as glitches that expose gaps in the digital reality that is often assumed to be unquestionable in its function and goals.

## Watch & Reflect: Sondra Perry

The interdisciplinary artist Sondra Perry (born 1986) often manipulates and exploits features in Open Source software like Blender and Chroma Key compositing to explore the intersections of race, identity, community, capitalism and technology during what we might still call the Digital Revolution. Listen to this video interview, where Perry discusses some of her projects with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Sondra Perry: Typhoon coming on” Creator: Serpentine Galleries, Source: [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42#oembed-6) (2018) (14:26 minutes).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/?p=42#oembed-6>

### Questions to Consider

1. What are some of the ways Perry exploits operator errors in Blender, like the purple/pink texture, to convey ideas?
2. How does Chroma Key blue add meaning to Perry’s work? How does she use Chroma Key blue and green differently than other artists working in video production?
3. How do Perry’s installations allow us to reflect on our own use of screens and the different viewing experiences made possible by different types of screens?
4. Perry often uses the physicality of video, making objects we might call sculptures, like the exercise machines. What artists from previous chapters work similarly with video? (Think particularly about what you learned in the [Early Video Art](#) and the [Digital Video Art and Video Installation](#) chapters.)
5. What are some of the most significant ideas explored by Perry in her work?
6. In what ways does Perry’s art challenge the status quo, an [Element of New Media Art](#)?
7. In Perry’s installation *Typhoon Coming On*, how does Perry use both the ocean modifier in Blender and a [historical painting by British artist J.M.W. Turner](#) (1775-1851) to examine the history of slavery?
8. What does Perry mean by saying “making new futures requires looking back”?

## Explore & Consider: Glitch

Examine the following web projects and consider the questions listed below while examining each site and each project.

1. [A Refusal, by American Artist](#) (2015-2016). online performance.
2. [Afro Cyber Resistance](#) (2014), by Tabita Razaire (born 1989). video collage. Read more about Razaire's war against digital colonialism in this article, [We've Become Cyber Slaves! Okay Africa](#).
3. [Clickistan, by Ubermorgan.com](#) (2010). web project.
4. jodi.org My Desktop OS X 10.4.7 (2007) (Click a lot on [jodi.org](#), also [watch this video of the page on Ubu.](#)) web project.
5. [They Rule, Josh On](#) (2004). See also the [They Rule project on the MoMA website](#).
6. [Shredder 1.0 by Mark Napier](#) (1998). interface.

### Questions to Consider:

1. Spend some time reviewing each of these projects. Watch the videos, if any. Click around on each site. Describe the aesthetics of each project. What were your first impressions? What do they look like or feel like after you have spent some time with them? (Use as many specific examples as you can.)
2. Are there things that seem strange about these projects? What seems exciting? Did you encounter any frustrations while exploring each project? Explain.
3. In what ways is viewing each project similar to viewing a traditional work of art like a painting or drawing? In what ways is it different?
4. Which of these projects would you describe as an open system? Why does it not have an end?
5. The projects at the top of the list were created more recently and the projects at the bottom of the list were created in a very different media environment than our own in the 2020s. Are there some projects that resonate with you more than others? If so, explain why.
6. All of these projects expose aspects of digital culture that often remain hidden. Consider which aspects of our digital world on and offline are being highlighted by each project.

## Focus: NFTs

And finally, the newest development in Internet Art during the Digital / Crypto Age is the NFT (Non-

fungible Token). Read the Wikipedia description of NFTs linked below. Also read the short article about the NFT market and its implications for the art world. Finally, the most famous NFT was made by an artist named Beeple, who sold the very first NFT for \$69 million dollars. Read the short critical analysis of the actual images in Beeple's NFT below.

## Read & Consider: NFTs

[What is an NFT? \(Wikipedia entry\)](#)

Martha Buskirk, "[NFT Market Feeds Our Obsession with Ownership](#)", *Hyperallergic*, March 14, 2021.

Rishi Iyengar and John Carlin, "[NFTs are suddenly everywhere, but they have some big problems](#)", *CNN Business*, March 30, 2021.

Ben Davis, "[I Looked Through All 5,000 Images in Beeple's \\$69 million Magnum Opus. What I found isn't so pretty](#)", *artnet.com*, March 17, 2021.

### Questions to Consider:

1. What makes an NFT a good example of New Media Art? How are NFTs connected to the elements of New Media Art that we've been examining this term?
2. What are some of the ways that NFTs challenge traditional ideas about what art is and what art can be?
3. Does radical use of new technology, always result in important or compelling art? What are some of the problems people have with and/or the criticisms that people have raised about NFTs?

## Key Takeaways

At the end of this chapter you will begin to:

1. Explain the context and history of Internet Art and Web 2.0.
2. Describe and compare significant pieces of Internet Art (or net.art).
3. Recognize developments in art of the Digital Revolution and consider how Internet Art is connected to

- the broader history of visual culture.
4. Explain how Internet Art and Web 2.0 relates to the elements of New Media Art.

NOTE: Chapter 14: Interactivity and Immersive Technologies is still under construction. Coming Soon!

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