

THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER



CONTEMPORARY ART CINCINNATI:

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CONTEMPORARY ART CINCINNATI: 1965-1994

In September, The Contemporary Arts Center celebrates its 55th Anniversary as an institution dedicated to exhibiting the art of its time. The underlying philosophy behind The Center's origin stems from that of a European Kunsthalle; a hall begun in Germany approximately 100 years ago, which presents changing exhibitions rather than establishing a permanent collection. The inception of The Center came during the height of Modernism and at the onset of the rise of the United States as an international art power in the 1940s. The founders of The Center in 1939 demonstrated to the world Cincinnati's progressive cultural thinking. At this time contemporary art was a step child within the larger cultural scheme, and very few museums outside New York City were receptive to contemporary art. Since that time, many developments have come and gone and the entire strict homogenous sensibility of Modernism has given way to an art that makes up its own rules.

Contemporary Art

Cincinnati: 1965-1994, presents an array of outstanding examples of art collected by individuals living within the radius of Cincinnati. This show is a tribute to Cincinnati's sensitive collectors: approximately 100

objects come from 40 private collections. Beyond acknowledging and celebrating this cultural resource housed within the region, this show aims to educate and demonstrate to this community how contemporary art has evolved over the past thirty years. Since the 1960s, art has moved away from a Modernist formal and singular sensibility toward a pluralist and fragmented late Post-Modern aesthetic. Assembling a spectrum of works in a single setting affords viewers an opportunity to gain insights into the evolution of art over a span of three decades.

Contemporary Art

Cincinnati: 1965-1994 presents a diverse sampling of art produced during this period of history. Why is this period of time significant? On September 29, 1965, President Johnson signed Public Law 89-209, creating the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (both the NEA and the NEH comprise the foundation). Since 1965 there has been a rapid progression of art movements. In focusing on this period, one cannot hope to comprehend the developments of late Modernism and the ongoing paradoxical artistic activities that ensued without recognizing the vital role played by the National Endowment for the Arts. The NEA shaped the artistic thinking from this period through its many individual fellowships and institutional grants.

For a generation of emerging artists who came of age during the 1960s, the sociological events of that era, sparked by the violent deaths of world leaders and Vietnam, prompted drastic shifts in artistic thinking. By the mid-1960s, the philosophical foundations of Modern Art begin to erode, and a general agreement among artists and critics became evident in the United States and Europe. It was felt that there needed to be more to art than mere 'object-hood.' At this time Modernism, under the banner of Minimalism, had become exhausted: language, chance and idea became the foundations for Post-Minimal and Conceptual art. The emphasis on the object and its formal properties gave way to content as the central issue. Artists had a burning desire to break out of the excessively codified definitions of Modernism. They called into question all facets of life. Through the late 1960s, the visual arts in the United States appeared to have an order and the prominent movements emerged in a seemingly logical manner. Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism and Pop all seem to fit into Modernism's rigorous scheme, and the visual limit of each responded to previous styles in a dialectical manner. These styles possessed a monolithic quality and each had its own artist heroes. However, at the close of the 1960s,

something had radically changed: art since the 1970s neither evolved in a linear manner nor abided by any traditional rules. In the nineties, Neo-Avant-Garde artists rely heavily on the foundation set forth by the experimental Post-Minimalists.

In examining and reflecting upon the telling components of this exhibition, the viewer will realize how relative are the words *contemporary* or *avant-garde*, and how time, exposure, and education can impact on an audience's receptivity to art over time. Artists who were once perceived as being radical, today are respected: Frank Stella, John Cage, Barry Le Va, Carl Andre, or even Andy Warhol. In the 1990s, Marilyn Minter, Karen Kilimnik, Roni Horn, Emily Cheng, Tishan Hsu, Kiki Smith, Joel Otterson, and Amy Novelli represent the carriers of contemporary thought. For some, this art is strange, difficult, and outrageous; for others it is exciting and represents the here and how. Art by all of these artists included in this exhibition; this conglomerate of work is a testimony to Cincinnati's openness to change and futurist thinking.

Viewing and comprehending any work of art takes time. In a global society, references to cultural clichés become even more complex and difficult to decipher. The less familiar we are with certain references, traditions, and ideas, the

more discomfort we will experience in viewing contemporary art. Visual art is like any discipline: it takes time to acquire the knowledge and language to feel comfortable with it. This is nothing new; the same applies to society's response to Manet, Monet, Cezanne, Picasso, Duchamp, DeKooning and Rauschenberg. Furthermore, art forms such as music theatre, literature, and poetry require more than a casual glance to reveal their contents. So, why wouldn't visual art require more time than most people are willing to spend? Are we perhaps expecting the visual arts to descend to the low depths of sound-bite television information?

If there is a unifying element among this exhibition's diverse strains of contemporary art, it is in the establishment of social ties. The information superhighway forces all human beings to be instantly aware of larger world events; this phenomenon has precipitated a critical rethinking of art's social function. A work of art represents many things. In a group exhibition containing many objects, each particular piece is a telling fragment of history, taken out of its context and time and placed on the walls of a museum. However, beyond being a specific element in an exhibition, a work of art is an act of faith by an artist attempting to define his or her reality at a specific moment. Artists also project an intuitive feeling about

what has become reality within a particular set of social circumstances.

The power of contemporary art lies not in new stylistic inventions but rather in its diversity and its creator's intentions: the way artists conceive art and establish ties with the larger cultural and physical world. Each era manifests its own sensibility—humor, or the lack of humor, in a society captures the feeling of an entire time and place. The British have been exemplary at teaching us this lesson; if we allow humor to change from ribald slapstick to black deadpan, why not be generous to visual art? Is it not also a telling fragment about a moment in time? Cincinnati is fortunate to have so many private collectors who are providing this region with an ongoing record of society's ever changing cultural history. We at The Center are grateful to the collectors for their commitment to contemporary art and for agreeing to lend their treasures to this exhibition.

Elaine A. King
Executive Director

APPENDIX

THREE DECADES OF CONTEMPORARY ART: A TIME LINE

*Researched and prepared by Dana Levitt,
edited by Elaine A. King*

HAPPENINGS AND BODY ART

*Leading artists: Allan Kaprow, George
Brecht, Al Hansen, Jim Dine,
Larry Poons*

Happenings were theatrical events which were not based on a plot and a cast of characters, but instead offered the viewer a collage of sensations. These Happenings incorporated not only objects in the surrounding space, but also human beings as well as the passage of time. Out of these experiments, some artists began to realize that the human body—bent, twisted, and put into all sorts of situations could itself become viewed as art. John Cage and his influence at the Black Mountain School sought alternatives to traditional static movements. He became the new teacher of the new avant-garde.

FLUXUS

*Leading artists: Trisha Brown, Yvonne
Rainer, Carolee Schneemann, Lucinda
Childs, George Maciunas*

Fluxus was a loosely knit group of anarchists whose association was motivated by little more than their need for mutual support and performance places to share. In 1962, a Fluxus concert took place in Wiesbaden, West Germany. In 1964, the first New York City Fluxus concert occurred. According to Barbara Haskell, "The formative years of Fluxus proved seminal to the development of a reduc-

tionist art which was to find expression in Minimalist Sculpture and the Judson Dance Theater." Robert Morris and Robert Rauschenberg became involved with the Judson Dance Group by 1963. Happenings, Fluxus, and the Judson Dance Theater all explored new artistic links between art and everyday life.

POP ART- BRITISH/AMERICAN

*Leading British Pop Artists: Richard
Smith, Allen Jones, David Hockney*

The term 'Pop Art' had already been coined in 1958 by the English critic Lawrence Alloway, who used it to characterize the activity of many British artists at that time. British Pop art differed from American Pop art because the impact of the war was felt much more strongly in England, and the economic upswing of the fifties seemed to provide these artists with a much more decadent, almost hedonistic, approach to popular culture. They celebrated popular images for their exoticism and revelled in a new sense of luxury and freedom.

*Leading American Pop Artists: Jim Dine,
Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist,
Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert
Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol*

American Pop art made its dramatic public debut in 1962, with the individual exhibitions of Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, Andy Warhol, Tom Wesselmann, and Robert Indiana. These artists took material that the art establishment had previously condemned as banal and low culture and exalted it as the only possible subject-matter for the contemporary artist. Although their works were

embraced by the public and rejected by many critics, most agreed that whatever the source, there was an incredible virtuosity displayed in the handling.

OP ART

*Leading artists: Victor Vasarely, Bridget
Riley, Yaacov Agam, Richard Anuszkiewicz,
Larry Poons*

Also developing during the fifties and sixties was a group of artists experimenting with the optical effects of particular patterns and colors of contrasting hues. These intensely energetic works play upon the perceptual ambiguities created by purely optical devices designed to shock and disrupt the vision of the observer.

MINIMAL ART/POST-PAINTERLY ABSTRACTION/COLOR FIELD PAINTING/HARD EDGE PAINTING

*Leading artists: Kenneth Noland, Jules
Olitski, Frank Stella, Josef Albers,
Ellsworth Kelly, Morris Louis*

Seen as an alternative to the low culture of Pop Art and the visual bombardment of Op art, Minimal art attempted to clearly express a single image without any distracting details. These artists sought to eliminate from painting all experiences that were not inherently visual and derived from the physical properties of painting. Focusing specifically on the way color operates when it is allowed to act as a force in itself, they emphasized two-dimensional space, flat shapes, optical sensations and the relationship between the painted areas and the edge of the canvas.

MINIMAL SCULPTURE

Leading artists: Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Donald Judd

Like Minimal painting, Minimal sculpture attempted to create meaning using only the simplicity of the form. One characteristic of Minimal sculpture is the artists' use of prefabricated units. The possibility of an art work being created without the artist making or even touching the art object was first put forward by Marcel Duchamp in 1914, when he exhibited a common French hardware store item - *Bottle Rack* - as art. The Minimalists' avoidance of the human form and its implications paralleled their interests in the relationship between the sculpture and its base - which most often is the floor. This relationship was most often expressed in forms that are more horizontal than vertical.

POST-MINIMALISM

Leading artists: Barry Le Va, Richard Serra, Robert Morris, Keith Sonnier, Eva Hesse, Mel Bochner, Richard Tuttle, Lynda Benglis, Jackie Winsor, Robert Smithson, Alan Saret, Jackie Ferrara, Joel Shapiro

The term Post-Minimalism is ambiguous, and yet describes the art that dominated the decade of the 1970s. Post-Minimalism countered Minimalism's hermeticism, autonomy and rationalism with less stringent approaches that included the exploration of serial imagery and a concern for the inherent physical properties of materials. Narrative content frequently occurs in Post-Minimalism. Although not usually the story-telling variety, it often appears as a

sequence of events in time, such as Douglas Huebler's "Duration" works, Richard Serra's "Splashing," or Barry Le Va's "Scatter" works.

CONCEPTUAL ART

Leading artists: Ed Ruscha, Bruce Nauman, John Baldessari, Douglas Huebler, Gilbert and George, Hilla and Bernd Becher, Hans Haacke, William Wegman, Joseph Kosuth, Laurence Weiner, Mel Bochner, Barry Le Va, Sol LeWitt, Dorothea Rockburne, Richard Tuttle

Conceptual artists valued the intention or intellectual contribution over the actual execution of the work, seeking to redefine artworks outside of an object-orientation. Thought processes and the methods of approach took precedence over actual subject matter. These artists desired to undermine the concept of art as commodity. Using photographs, words, and artists' books to de-materialize the art object in favor of the ideas it represents, Conceptual artists emphasized the new dimensions of impermanence.

EARTH ART / ENVIRONMENTAL ART / LAND ART

Leading artists: Robert Smithson, Christo, Michael Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim, Richard Serra, Walter De Maria

In the early 1970's, Minimalist sculptors brought raw nature, literally the earth, inside for their gallery installations. Eventually, these artists began moving out of doors, using the earth itself to create works of art on a monumental scale.

Most of this art was necessarily temporary, since nature is constantly changing, so photography became increasingly important as a means to document the event and the existence of the work.

VIDEO / PERFORMANCE ART

Leading artists: Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys, Nam June Paik, John Baldessari, Peter Campus, William Wegman, Vito Acconci, Michael Snow, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Gilbert and George, Chris Burden, Laurie Anderson, Joan Jonas

Video art originated in 1965 when Nam June Paik made his first tapes on the new portable Sony camera. The medium has provided for an almost limitless range of possibilities and variations. Artists utilize tape to be used in performance art or installations. Many artists create tapes for museum or gallery use, while others broadcast or cablecast their own work on television. Video artists use the technology of the medium and incorporate most traditional art forms in "line time," or filmed or recorded time, to reflect the dynamics of the post-modern world.

SUPER-REALISM / HYPERREALISM / PHOTOREALISM

Leading artists: Alex Katz, Richard Estes, Philip Pearlstein, Chuck Close, Malcolm Morley, John Clem Clarke, Gerhard Richter, Robert Cottingham, Ralph Goings, George Segal, Duane Hansen, Audrey Flack, Alfred Leslie.

An outgrowth of Pop art, Photorealism was based on the possibilities and limitations of the photographic image. In some respects, Photorealism was like a

Mannerist phase of Pop art, borrowing the use of secondary images, emotional detachment and uniform surfaces. The intent here was to deny the subject matter its importance and concentrate entirely on the abstract elements of the painted surface. Often the subjects were deliberately banal, and in some cases, the artists claimed the subject was irrelevant or meaningless. The important aspect of this style was the accuracy of the depiction of a given image.

PATTERN AND DECORATION

Leading artists: Joyce Kozloff, Miriam Shapiro, Judy Pfaff, Kim MacConnel, Robert Kushner

The term Pattern and Decoration was first used in the mid-1970s to describe works by a variety of artists whose paintings, collages and sculptures became related by their extraneous patterning and flat decoration. Surfacing when Minimalism and Conceptual art were considered an aesthetic norm, Pattern and Decoration was a rebellion against the puritan aridities of these other movements. Artists embraced the craft-like fret works in Islamic art, the detailed interlaces of medieval Celtic art, and the geometric images in native American art. With the emergence of the women's movement in the 1970's, the ideas and works of many feminist artists contributed to its rise and recognition.

NEW IMAGE PAINTING

Leading artists: Nicholas Africano, Susan Rotenburg, Neil Jenny, Joe Zucker

Emerging in the late 1970's, New Image painters used images that fluctuated between abstraction and representation.

Generally they favored a flat plane, borrowed from Minimal painting but imbued it with quirky forms and silhouetted shapes against flat grounds. They renewed the possibility of narrative content which had long been absent from American art, and they marked the transition from the austerity of Minimal painting to the vibrant utterances of Neo-Expressionism.

NEO-EXPRESSIONISM/ NEW FIGURATION

Leading artists: Philip Guston, Leon Golub, Malcom Morely, Jonathan Borofsky, Julian Schnabel, David Salle, Anselm Kiefer, George Baselitz, Sigmar Polke, Francesco Clemente, Sandro Chia, Enzo Cucchi, Gerard Richter

In the 1970s, painting took a back seat position to the new art forms that surfaced under the banners of Conceptual art, Video, Performance Art, Installation and Earthworks. Neo-Expressionism marked a significant turning point in contemporary art, one that the Pluralism of the 1970s only hinted at, by emphasizing perceptual experience above all else. With the exception of the work by Jonathan Borofsky, Neo-Expressionism was primarily a painting phenomena. The personal, autobiographical, sensuous, erotic, emotional, narrative and historical, along with literature, music, and myth, all inform this type of painting. The content once again became important in painting, and opened up to audiences a full range of human experiences from what had previously been a more narrow focus on perceptual issues. This led to the Post-Modernist's critique of cultural signs and images.

SIMULATION ART/NEO GEO

Leading artists: Jeff Koons, Allan McCollum, Haim Steinbach, Tim Ehmer, Peter Haley, Meyer Vaisman

Simulation art, also called Neo-Geo, Smart Art and New Abstraction, began attracting attention in 1985. "Simulacra" was first used by the post-structuralist French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. In post-structuralist theory, art is a symbol of power and social prestige. Those who own it signal that they have enough discretionary income to afford it and enough education to understand and appreciate it. For this reason, much "simulation art" intentionally resembles furnishings of the middle class. The artists do not disdain kitsch taste, but instead celebrate it.

ART IN THE 1990S

It appears that during the final years of the twentieth century, a pluralistic art, similar to the art of the 1970s, has once again surfaced, taking forms such as Neo-Conceptual, Neo-Figurative, and Neo-Installation art. The art of this era emphatically rejects the emphasis on the single artist as an overriding personality, and turns instead to the thematic exhibitions that explore social and political issues such as gender, AIDS, the homeless, social inequality, and political leaders. It is once again a confusing time, but as in the past, relevant artists are working and will be discovered. Among the trends and reactive theories, it has not yet been decided just who the important players are in the 1990s.