

Figure as Subject: The Last Decade



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This exhibition has been selected from the Permanent Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art by Patterson Sims, Associate Curator, Permanent Collection.

The south gallery of the Whitney Museum of American Art at Equitable Center is devoted to five changing exhibitions each year and the north gallery to long-term installations of works from the Permanent Collection.

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Figure as Subject: The Last Decade

Contemporary man sees himself in his art, not as an idealized godlike figure, in the manner of the classical tradition, but as a disrupted, contorted victim of the modern cataclysm, torn by forces of a magnitude beyond his comprehension, a grim figure, full of despair and anguish, entirely without hope. The “new image” is a monster, the product of irradiated esthetic genes.
(Alan R. Solomon, 1963)

The paintings and sculptures exhibited here proclaim a new direction in American art since the mid-1970s: after a decade of abstract Minimalist conceptions, the figure has returned to the mainstream. And the current attachment to the figure is remarkable for its diversity. Among the works on view we find a life-size plastic housewife reading a letter, a quasi-Paleolithic, wall-scaled scribble of running people, and a Day-Glo, cartooned Armageddon. These examples—by Duane Hanson, Jonathan Borofsky, and Kenny Scharf—signal the evolving mutation in recent figurative art. But beyond mere representation, these and other figurations are infused with narrative, sentiment, and distortion. They shop among the styles of the previous thirty years and offer—sometimes within the same work—wit, pathos, and despair. The figurative art of these so-called

New Image and Neo-Expressionist painters and sculptors has been hailed with remarkable swiftness by the marketplace. Enormous reputations have been fueled by immediate publicity and sales, and numerous artists, unknown in the mid-1970s, are now receiving one-artist museum exhibitions.

The dramatic reassertion of the figure around 1975 followed three consecutive vanguard movements: Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Minimalism. Abstract Expressionist paintings imbued non-objectivity with profound, often spiritual, emotion and, at the same time, a frenzied, gestural transfer of thought into paint. This heroic enshrinement of feelings proved strongly objectionable to two successive groups of artists who matured in the early 1960s. United in their desire to find alternatives to Abstract Expressionism, Pop and Minimalist artists turned, respectively, to America’s consumer culture and to precise variations on fundamental mathematical compositions.

American artists who have emerged since the mid-1970s perceive the postwar American artistic movements as historic. In the neatened accountings of art history, it is possible to explain recent figuration as a merging of the gestural liberties of Abstract Expressionism with a streetwise and existential rendering of Pop Art’s commonplace, media-inspired imagery. But in fact the figure’s recent revival seems to have grown from a multitude of sources, many of them retrospective. Less confident in the future than their predecessors, today’s figurative artists have embraced earlier aesthetic attitudes and pictorial conceits. The paintings of Jedd Garet, Ed Paschke, and William Wiley re-

vitalize Surrealism. The Abstract Expressionists’ painterly gesture marks the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Julian Schnabel. Joel Shapiro and Robert Moskowitz reinterpret the succinct and pristine isolation of Minimalism. Even nineteenth-century conventions of portraiture and history painting reappear, particularly in the works of Robert Arneson, Robert Graham, and Mark Tansey.

All of these artists, having absorbed the eclectic possibilities of the past, seem less possessed by the need to create an entirely new visual idiom. Their use of the figure responds to a fundamental need to re-establish contact with themselves and, not incidentally, with their audience—an audience which from the 1960s through the 1970s became increasingly disengaged by the simplicities of Minimalism.

The international dominance of American art from 1945 through the mid-1970s is now challenged by the genius of young German and Italian painters, the majority of whom have also turned, if not always to figuration, then at least to representational art. The spirited interchange between this generation of European and American artists affirms that the recent fascination with the figure is cross-cultural. Global concerns and fears have triggered global art. And it is an art which insistently appropriates the past in order to make the future more comprehensible.

Patterson Sims

Associate Curator, Permanent Collection



Robert Arneson
Whistling in the Dark, 1976



Duane Hanson
Woman with Dog, 1977

Robert Arneson (b. 1930)

Whistling in the Dark, 1976
Terracotta and glazed ceramic, $35\frac{1}{4} \times 20 \times 20$
Gift of Frances and Sydney Lewis 77.37

Robert Arneson has led a movement that began in northern California in 1955 to restore clay to its traditional value as a valid material for art. Arneson's medium, sensibility, geographic ties, and close friendships connect him with Richard Shaw, his former student, as well as Robert Hudson and William Wiley. Arneson's production now includes drawing and printmaking, and since 1965 his humanistic concerns have focused on self-portraiture. In his views of himself, his egoism is balanced by self-criticism and unstinting honesty (typically, his hearing aid is included). In *Whistling in the Dark*, Arneson's features are left an ashen gray. This large-scale mold-cast terracotta darkly describes its subject's demeanor during a period of serious illness. The sardonic title of the piece, inscribed on its appropriately hued base, is made apparent in the face's pursed lips. Like Shaw and Wiley, Arneson incorporates words to make his message explicit and, at times, more jocular.

Duane Hanson (b. 1925)

Woman with Dog, 1977
Cast polyvinyl polychromed in acrylic,
with mixed media, life size
Purchase, with funds from Frances and Sydney
Lewis 78.6

Duane Hanson's trompe l'oeil realism at first dealt with war, abortion, and violent death. Having passed through a phase of almost satiric wit (a loudly dressed American tourist couple, an overweight housewife with a cart full of fast foods), his sculptures now portray ordinary citizens in everyday circumstances. On occasion Hanson's figures are poignantly aged, lonely, or alienated, but most, like *Woman with Dog*, impress by understatement. Using a mold made directly off a Fort Lauderdale friend, Hanson cast *Woman with Dog* in polyvinyl acetate, then carefully sprayed and painted it with acrylic. He inserted fake eyes, sewed in hairs, and added clothing and props. The poodle's hair was sent to Hanson by a relative who had shorn it from his shaggy dog. Hanson intended the piece to simply evoke an ordinary housewife taking a few minutes to read a letter from a friend. His work's startling realism—enhanced by the inclusion of the pet—initially ensnares the viewer into believing that the figure is real. But the ultimate success of the sculpture derives from Hanson's keen understanding of emotional nuance, meaningful detail, and the expressiveness of posture. He commences in illusion and trickery but concludes in sociological insight and empathetic revelation.

Philip Pearlstein (b. 1924)

Female Model on Adirondack Rocker, Male Model on Floor, 1980

Oil on canvas, 60 × 72

Purchase, with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee, and the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art, by exchange 80.39

Philip Pearlstein began to produce his neutralized arrangements of bodies in the early 1960s. His realism initially appears to be conventional, with models, posed in his studio for extended periods, carefully rendered and accurately conveyed. But Pearlstein's special conception of figurative art eventually negates such a reading. As in this painting, the complicated poses and disposition of the figures abrogate traditional rules of composition: heads are either given little emphasis or, like limbs, cut off by the canvas edge. The artistic challenge of depicting flesh, not the models' personalities or relationship, is the painting's subject. Pearlstein treats these bodies like still-life objects, giving them no more or less focus than the rustic, upstate New York chair and Navaho Indian textile. The models' nudity suggests no erotic connotations; it is only used for formalist ends. As Pearlstein has declared, "I am the IRS man of a few of the bodies that inhabit New York City and visit my studio periodically."

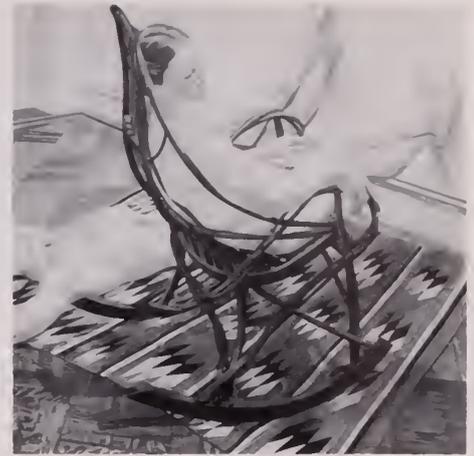
Robert Graham (b. 1938)

Stephanie and Spy, 1980–81

Bronze, two-part piece: *Stephanie*, 61½ × 12 × 12; *Spy*, 70¼ × 54 × 21

Gift of Roy and Carol Doumani 84.34a–b

In his own words, **Robert Graham** is "trying to make exactly what I see in front of me." But beyond his very selective replications, technique plays the central role in his sculpture. He creates his bronzes from the venerable *cire perdue* ("lost wax") method of casting, a complex process that requires exacting precision. Graham does not believe he imposes a style or attitude on his representations, yet a chilling verisimilitude and objectification result. His usual subject is the lithe and young California woman. But with certain pieces, such as *Stephanie* and *Spy*, he broadens his range. During the creation of *Stephanie*, Graham became intrigued by his model's rapt description of her horse, *Spy*. Graham saw the horse and, taken by her beauty, brought her into the studio to "pose" for him. While *Stephanie* can exist as a separate piece, *Spy* is only shown partnered with *Stephanie*. Female beauty, both equine and human, is placed on parade.



Philip Pearlstein
Female Model on Adirondack Rocker, Male Model on Floor, 1980



Robert Graham
Stephanie and Spy, 1980–81



Roger Brown
The Entry of Christ into Chicago, 1976, 1976



Mark Tansey
Triumph of the New York School, 1984

Roger Brown (b. 1941)

The Entry of Christ into Chicago, 1976, 1976
Oil on canvas, 72 × 120
Purchase, with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Edwin A. Bergman and the National Endowment for the Arts, and Joel and Anne Ehrenkranz, by exchange 77.56

Roger Brown's characteristic stylizations— theatrical space, shadowy silhouettes, and symmetrical, patterned compositions—were established by the late 1960s. His distinctive manner of painting owes much to his connoisseur's appreciation of folk art conventions of composition and perspective. *The Entry of Christ into Chicago* was made in response to the Belgian James Ensor's commanding masterpiece, *The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889* (painted in 1888), which was included in the Ensor retrospective that traveled to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1976. Ensor's much larger, populous, and political composition depicts the Savior arriving during Carnival. This clamorous, thickly rendered scene locates Christ almost as obscurely as in Brown's version. In Brown's painting, Christ enters Chicago on a flatbed truck. Animated vignettes parade across the composition, with former Mayor Richard Daley and Chicago's Cardinal Cody seen upon the dignitaries' dais. In the background, the Hancock and Sears towers and other Chicago landmarks can be identified. Urban life—incorporating here nearly three hundred and eighty figures—continues, distinctly undisturbed by the momentous entry.

Mark Tansey (b. 1949)

Triumph of the New York School, 1984
Oil on canvas, 74 × 120
Promised gift of Robert M. and Nancy L. Kaye P.5.84

Colored in the sepia of faded memories and vintage films, **Mark Tansey's** works evoke scenes that require postgraduate study. His *Triumph of the New York School* posits the transfer of the artistic center of the world from Paris to New York in terms of global war. One needs to know, for instance, that the standard texts on post-World War II American art are Irving Sandler's *The Triumph of American Painting* and *The New York School*. The left half of the picture represents the French artists whose triumph came in the second decade of this century; hence, they are appropriately dressed in World War I uniforms. The Americans to the right appear in the drabber military garb of World War II. Each figure is identifiable. Among the more prominent Europeans at the left are Picasso in fur, Matisse, in profile to the left, and Duchamp (resembling de Gaulle) with hands in pockets centered in the distance. André Breton turns his back as he signs the treaty with an Eisenhower-like critic, Clement Greenberg, doing the honors for America. Moving left to right the Americans include a smoking Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Robert Motherwell, and the looming presence of the critic Harold Rosenberg looking like General MacArthur. Tansey's "us and them" motif recalls that "avant-garde" was originally a military term, and so turns artistic dominance into a form of war, connecting national destiny with creative achievement.

Philip Guston (1913–1980)

Cabal, 1977

Oil on canvas, 68 × 116

50th Anniversary Gift of Mr. and Mrs.

Raymond J. Learsy 81.38

Philip Guston's artistic life can be separated into three distinct periods. From 1930 through the 1940s, following the conventions of the day, he pursued a socially conscious realism. Around 1950 his painting assumed an orchestrated abstraction of scrambled, impressionistic paint strokes. By the late 1960s he had abandoned Abstract Expressionism and returned to figuration. In this last phase, Guston maintained the same painterly treatment of images to depict his rich literary life and dreamworld. Amid a sea of brushstrokes, *Cabal* presents ten scheming heads huddled on the horizon in impossible proximity. Guston's figures are all eyes and brain and their plotting is situated in a remarkably visible location. As with so many of the images of Guston's last period, a story is both told and denied. Guston characterized his final paintings as "dreaming with your eyes opened." Dismissed when they were first exhibited in 1970, these later works marked the beginning of a new era of painterly and narrative figuration and have been a source of potent inspiration to younger artists.

Mary Frank (b. 1933)

Swimmer, 1978

Ceramic, 17 × 94 × 32

Purchase, with funds from Mrs. Robert M.

Benjamin, Mrs. Oscar Kolin, and Mrs. Nicholas

Millhouse 79.31

Mary Frank turned to clay as her primary medium at the end of the 1960s, having previously employed wood, bronze, and plaster. The manipulability and ancient traditions of clay best suited her sensibility. With rolled slabs of high-fired clay, Frank creates rounded, hollow volumes buttressed or supported by walls. Unlike Robert Arneson and Richard Shaw, she usually leaves her clay uncolored, though glazes occasionally highlight surface impressions or delineations. As in *Swimmer*, numerous sections join to form the figure. While these fragments reflect the exigencies of firing clay (pieces must be fairly small and light to fit in the kiln), they combine as metaphors for struggle and movement. Before becoming a sculptor, Frank had studied dance, and its poise and motion are instilled in her work. But her figures seem to be lifted from dreams. A primitive, almost archaeologic, spirit clings to her creations. The females appear to be in trance-like raptures, while males such as *Swimmer* are more athletic and seem to pursue or be pursued.



Philip Guston
Cabal, 1977



Mary Frank
Swimmer, 1978



Robert Moskowitz
Swimmer, 1977



Joel Shapiro
Untitled, 1980–81

Robert Moskowitz (b. 1935)

Swimmer, 1977

Oil and pure pigment on canvas, 90 × 74¼

Gift of Jennifer Bartlett 82.9

Robert Moskowitz was identified in the late 1970s with a group of artists dubbed the New Image painters. Moving beyond Minimalism, they turned its pictorial devices to personal, often autobiographical ends. Among Moskowitz's representational distillations of the last decade, *Swimmer* is singular in its focus on a figure—normally he isolates a building or object against a monochrome ground. But as in Joel Shapiro's *Untitled*, Moskowitz's *Swimmer* is used to dissolve the boundary between abstraction and representation. Moskowitz shows a white shape against blue, which, as it is observed, becomes a swimmer. The sea is choppy yet solid against the silhouetted head and arm. Slightly awash with watery spray, the swimmer is surrounded and threatened by the blue sea. Struggle and composure, terror and grace combine in the posture. Moskowitz explained that *Swimmer* is about "being in New York City—trying to survive there is an ambiguity in the image—a balance between swimming and drowning, and a balance between a realistic thing and an abstract thing."

Joel Shapiro (b. 1941)

Untitled, 1980–81

Bronze, 52⅞ × 54 × 45½

Purchase, with funds from the Painting and

Sculpture Committee 83.5

Around 1971 **Joel Shapiro** started humanizing Minimalism by making miniature sculptures of personally symbolic motifs—a chair, a bridge and, most frequently, a box-like house. These tiny wood and cast bronze geometries, which parlayed Minimalism's reductiveness and sensuous appreciation of materials into objects of notable emotional conviction, evoked a lyric protectiveness on the part of their public. The figure entered Shapiro's vocabulary around 1976. At first it was characteristically small, but by 1980, as in this seminal piece, Shapiro began to enlarge it. Made of intricately cast 4-by-4-inch lumber sections crudely hammered together (the marks are visible), this bronze sculpture hovers between abstraction and representation. Heavily limbed yet lithe, the precariously balanced figure transforms a physical posture into an existential rumination.

Richard Shaw (b. 1941)

Mike Goes Back to T., 1980

Glazed porcelain with overglaze transfers,

41¼ × 13½ × 17½

Purchase, with funds from the Burroughs

Wellcome Purchase Fund 81.4

Richard Shaw's figurative assemblages joust with issues of figuration versus abstraction and with trompe l'oeil media manipulation. The figures derive from a northern California school of comedy ceramics, displaying the bravado porcelain casting and decal work Shaw perfected following study with Robert Arneson and refined through collaboration with Robert Hudson. Shaw creates still-life arrangements that seem to be three-dimensional versions of the American nineteenth-century painters of trompe l'oeil John Frederick Peto and William Michael Harnett. Shaw adds wit and sentiment to the devotional craft and materialist pleasure of these earlier trompe l'oeil masters. *Mike Goes Back to T.* is an homage to a friend who returned to Texas. As Richard Marshall has written, it is complete with "a paintbrush hand that appears to be quick on the draw," decaled tidbits of regional news applied to its base, and a replica bottle of excellent Napa Valley white wine for a calf and foot. Using molds that made it possible for a cast tree branch to be a leg in one piece and a neck in another, Shaw mocks iconographic analysis.

James Surls (b. 1943)

Me and the Butcher Knives, 1982

Oak and mahogany, 101 × 37 × 39

Purchase, with funds from an anonymous donor 82.14

For the past fifteen years, **James Surls'** works have been synonymous with the vitality of the art scene in Texas. Teacher, exhibition organizer, and gallery owner, Surls has vigorously campaigned for the significance of Texas art and art in Texas. His strongest weapon has been his own art. Using an increasingly large scale, Surls' wood sculpture has grown from the compact and boxy to the flowing and figurative. He carves and bur-nishes tree trunks to vivify their spirit. Surls' sermons in wood bespeak man's primal condition. For all their violence, his scul-pures, such as *Me and the Butcher Knives*, depict victim as much as victimizer. His Saint Sebastian of East Texas is alive, undaunted by his raiment of long knives. Strung up, Surls' bloodless and wide-eyed self-portrait twists and turns. Like a miraculous freak-show veteran, he makes pain a performance. The allusion to violence and vitality, to hideous abuse and indomitable will in *Me and the Butcher Knives* is an overreaching yet telling exemplar of current figuration.



Richard Shaw
Mike Goes Back to T., 1980



James Surls
Me and the Butcher Knives, 1982



Peter Saul
de Kooning's "Woman with Bicycle," 1976



Ed Paschke
Violencia, 1980

Peter Saul (b. 1934)

de Kooning's "Woman with Bicycle," 1976
Acrylic on canvas, 101 × 75½
Purchase, with funds from the Sara Roby
Foundation 84.49

Peter Saul entered the art scene around 1960, when Abstract Expressionism still prevailed and, as the critic Dennis Adrian has noted, something of the savage intensity of Willem de Kooning's fractured female forms marks Saul's first works. In 1973, Saul began to appropriate masterpiece paintings as the primary subjects of his art. Although the idea of the restated masterpiece had been pursued by other artists, particularly Pop-related painters, Saul was partly inspired to copy "because most people don't want my pictures in the house, and 'Art' is a harmless subject that might not bother them so much." Saul's version of de Kooning's 1953–54 *Woman and Bicycle* adds a third mouth (the de Kooning woman has two) and tongue, and places his subject in high-heeled shoes on a set of steps derived from Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*. Overall, Saul attacks his enlarged copy with a Day-Glo visceral fragmentation that is even more frenetic than the famous original which, appropriately, is owned by the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Ed Paschke (b. 1939)

Violencia, 1980
Oil on canvas, 74 × 96
Gift of Sherry and Alan Koppel in memory of
Miriam and Herbert Koppel 82.46

Ed Paschke belongs to a group of artists known as the Chicago Imagists. Their recent national acceptance has challenged conventional attitudes about the limitations of regionalism. Seen together, their works employ a hybrid surrealism that both makes vivid and normalizes sexuality, deviance, and the unusual. Extracting images from various off-beat media sources, Paschke originally magnified them in a garishly polychromed, photo-realist style. In such recent paintings as *Violencia*, his work has become, in his own words, "a kind of orchestration of electronic impulses fluttering between 3-D and 2-D or substance and lack of it." His sources are the world of MTV and the R-rated Hollywood film. Physiognomic features are electronically zapped, irradiated, and melted into indistinction. As the painting's title confirms, Paschke's trio alluringly mixes sex, violence, and beauty. The suggestive interrelationship among his three figures speaks of a demi-monde of love and death, yet is well within what Paschke describes as the "zone of excitement" he routinely traverses.

Jedd Gareth (b. 1955)

Precarious Notoriety, 1982
Acrylic on canvas, 70 × 110
Gift of Fred Mueller 83.15

Jedd Gareth's paintings represent a lexicon of current artistic concerns: the popular combination of sculpture and painting; the figure as an asexual mutant; and the ironic narrative mode. As the critic Robert Pincus-Witten has noted, Gareth's subjects are "formed on Disneyland and sit-com T.V." They reside within a heavily articulated and bordered space. While possessing heads, legs, and arms, the bulbous bodies read like complex, mannerist versions of the sculpture of the Frenchman Hans Arp. Mutated and twisted, their masses are highlighted and edged as if they were made of marble or bronze. The weighted black mass of *Precarious Notoriety* floats atop a white cloud-like cloth and the upper, marbelized area reads as a night sky. The figure, confined in an ashen cell or coffin, embodies Gareth's nihilism. The title of this painting and its image of a figure resting on air may refer in part to Gareth's swift success and undeniable influence on the East Village art scene.

Louise Bourgeois (b. 1911)

Nature Study, 1984
Bronze, 30 × 14½ × 19
Purchase, with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee 84.42

Since the 1940s, **Louise Bourgeois'** sculpture has evolved from totemic wood pieces to the stone and bronze figural fragments she has been producing during the past decade. The roots of her art lie in the Surrealism of her native France, substantiated by her keen understanding of tribal art and artifact and their kinship to modernist forms. Brutally sexual and anatomically exaggerated, her recent pieces make sexuality, as perceived in female terms, their subject. *Nature Study* is a headless, womanly supplicant, whose grotesqueness is alleviated by a golden patina. The multi-breasted creature is nurturing but mindless, abundant and giving, sedentary, yet with ferociously clawed feet. The sculpture incorporates a base designed by the artist that both elevates and lightens the glistening subject.



Jedd Gareth
Precarious Notoriety, 1982



Louise Bourgeois
Nature Study, 1984



William Wiley
Harpoon for the Dreamer, 1981



Robert Hudson
Posing the Question, 1984–85

William Wiley (b. 1937)

Harpoon for the Dreamer, 1981

Acrylic, charcoal, and pastel on canvas; construction of polychromed bay laurel with steel wire, and plywood with acrylic, graphite, and colored pencil: canvas, 96¼ × 153; wood construction, 75 × 14 × 8

Purchase, with funds from the Sondra and Charles Gilman, Jr. Foundation, Inc. and the Painting and Sculpture Committee 83.9a–b

William Wiley's canvases are more drawn than painted. As in *Harpoon for the Dreamer*, they are filled with images and words to a degree that defies any simple explanation. Wiley's art overloads the eye and mind with inside information, double meanings, puns, and political and ecological sallies. He has influenced the northern California scene in a manner rivaled only by that of the sculptor and draftsman H. C. Westermann (1922–1981). *Harpoon for the Dreamer* is Wiley's wistful homage and symbolic portrait of the elder artist and his predilection for personal imagery. While working on this painting, which was originally conceived in a dream, Wiley learned that Westermann had died. He proceeded to add references to Westermann's art and death, including specific sculptures, the Death Ship (seen through the central window), the soldier's boot, and incidental Westermann-like sketches. The recumbent muse (or, alternatively, a portrait of Wiley dreaming) and the mordant inscription that "One Scythe Fits All Comers" makes death central here. Yet Wiley's issues transcend the memorial because numerous other elements, such as the art implements at left, refer to the creative process itself. The loaded paint palette spews forth a riot of color. Wiley's tracery of images enjoins art with mortality within, as he put it, "the line between what we call dreaming and what we call awake."

Robert Hudson (b. 1938)

Posing the Question, 1984–85

Polychrome steel and iron, 96 × 95 × 51

Purchase, with funds from Mr. and Mrs.

William A. Marsteller and the Painting and Sculpture Committee 85.13

In 1958, as a precocious art-school student, **Robert Hudson** started making abstract welded steel sculpture. His work has grown in scale and compositional clarity and sophistication, yet it retains its original additive construction and boldly painted surfaces. Like his high school friend William Wiley, Hudson overloads his compositions and incorporates movement and found objects from flea-market purchases. He began to employ the figure as a major theme in 1980. It unified the geometric incongruities of his sculptures and reflected the period's renewed enthusiasm for the subject. The geometric elements of *Posing the Question* congregate as a standing man with a question mark hooked to a staff or fishing pole. The figure's head and querulous punctuation are painted a somber black, while vivid polychrome prevails elsewhere. The sculpture's form and designation were suggested to Hudson by a remark overheard on the radio, as he was completing the work. Hearing the evocative phrase "posing the question," he decided to add the question mark and the dizzy, mobile halo that surrounds the featureless face.

David Salle (b. 1952)

Splinter Man, 1982

Oil and acrylic on canvas, 98 × 196

Purchase, with funds from Mr. and Mrs.

Charles M. Diker 82.12a–b

David Salle's joined panels and layered barrage of images insist on the splintering of conscious experience. Salle's propensity to mix subjects adapted from the media with personal details is a key to his success. Borrowing his multi-panel format from the Minimalists and his composition from the Pop artists Robert Rauschenberg and James Rosenquist, he draws as much as he paints. Salle's figures and attached objects eschew illusionism while evoking spatial indeterminacy. As with *Splinter Man*, the viewer seeks to decode and link ostensibly familiar but disconnected images. A nude female reflected in a mirror stands alongside an omnipotent fantasy cartoon figure. The left panel is derived from a photo in a nudist magazine, while the Splinter Man comes from a comic book. The juxtaposition contrasts media, subject, and perception. Salle used acrylic for one panel and oil for the other; he also opposed recessive space and frontality, observable reality and dramatic interior fantasy. Yet as Salle has pointed out, a male child might reverse what the adult here characterizes as reality and fantasy. Salle's bifurcation confounds perception while pictorializing the dualities of consciousness.

Barbara Kruger (b. 1945)

Untitled (We will no longer be seen and not heard), 1985

Portfolio of nine color photolithographs with serigraphy; each sheet, 9½ × 20½

Purchase, with funds from the Print

Committee 85.61.1–9

Barbara Kruger's art acts in the gap between advertising and life. Her blown-up, media-scavenged, rephotographed photos and artfully angled headlines polemicize against the pieties of capitalism and the insidious sexism that permeates perception, thought, and language. Photos and captions aim to connect, yet Kruger makes the viewer improvise these connections. This work is Kruger's first major print edition. Its nine individual panels of word and image combinations have a primary reading: "We will no longer be seen and not heard." Given the speaker (and regardless of the fact that the figures are both male and female), this sentiment turns the traditional parental dictum into feminist rejoinder. Yet the piece also may be reshuffled as "No longer will we be seen and not heard," "Will we be no longer seen and not heard?" or "We will no longer be heard and not seen." Such alternatives make for an unnerving set of possibilities. Although the images were derived from pictures of sign language (found in the files of the New York Public Library), Kruger paired them arbitrarily with the words. She intends her art to confound and substantiate the authority of language and her objective, like her choice of red frames, is always to make the viewer pay attention.



David Salle
Splinter Man, 1982



Barbara Kruger
Untitled (We will no longer be seen and not heard),
detail, 1985



Jean-Michel Basquiat
Hollywood Africans, 1983



Jonathan Borofsky
Running People at 2,616,216, 1979

Jean-Michel Basquiat (b. 1960)

Hollywood Africans, 1983

Acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 84 × 84
 Gift of Douglas S. Cramer 84.23

The meteoric career of **Jean-Michel Basquiat** exemplifies the speed of the current art scene. Only in his mid-twenties, Basquiat has moved in seven years from a localized graffiti writer of pithy sayings (with the pen name of Samo) to a more conventional, if disorderly, painter of international renown. The immediacy of his images recalls the authenticity of children's drawings, yet his messages are knowing, blunt, and adult. Basquiat merges the absorption in popular culture articulated by Andy Warhol (with whom he recently collaborated) with the free-form compositions of Willem de Kooning and Cy Twombly. *Hollywood Africans* stems from a much enjoyed sojourn in Los Angeles. Fascinated by the street life there, Basquiat set his floating faces amid references to sugar, cigarettes, and actors of the silver screen. Scrambling symbol, sign, and politics, he connects social realities with consumer and media hype.

Jonathan Borofsky (b. 1942)

Running People at 2,616,216, 1979

Latex paint on wall and/or ceiling,
 dimensions variable
 Purchase, with funds from the Painting and
 Sculpture Committee 84.43

A track star at Carnegie-Mellon University, **Jonathan Borofsky** turns *Running People at 2,616,216* into an image with strong personal associations and rich metaphorical possibilities. Its blurred jumble of runners evokes athleticism, euphoria, and even panic. *Running People at 2,616,216* began as a wordless dream image that Borofsky sketched, transferred onto clear gel, blew up with an opaque projector, and then painted to fit the wall(s) and, on occasion, the ceiling. This small scribble that assumed giant proportions is the first such wall painting that Borofsky has permitted to be purchased. The Whitney Museum owns the gel and the right to reproduce it on the wall. The artist, his assistants or, most often, the appropriate Museum staff accomplish its giant replication. The same piece was simultaneously included in Borofsky's recent traveling retrospective and in this exhibition. The number that appears as part of the title refers to Borofsky's ongoing process, begun in 1969, of obsessively counting from one to infinity. Since 1972 he has been combining these numbers with his art; 2,616,216 is the number he had attained when he made the original sketch for *Running People*.

Julian Schnabel (b. 1951)

Hope, 1982

Oil on velvet, 110 × 158

Purchase, with funds from an anonymous donor 82.13

Julian Schnabel is now regarded as the progenitor of a new figurative expressionism. In Schnabel's work, iconography—in the form of personal imagery crudely conveyed in densely layered combinations—has made a tumultuous comeback. The title "Hope" itself evinces the shift from untitled Minimalist formalism and Pop Art's blatant ironies to paintings of unabashed feeling and sentiment. A white-outlined self-portrait centers the composition and posits the artist as the symbol of hope. Originally titled "X-Ray, Stages of Man," this work's technicolor brushstrokes on pieced velvet disclose, in clockwise progression, a skeleton, a striding figure, a crucifixion, a ceremonial helmet, and, in the bottom-left corner, a figure in despair worthy of, and possibly inspired by, Edvard Munch. Surrounded by the emblems of death and sacrifice, Schnabel stands calm and contained; the artist restores himself to the position of hero.

Kenny Scharf (b. 1958)

When the Worlds Collide, 1984

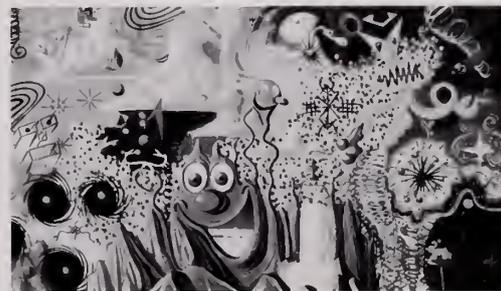
Oil, acrylic, and enamel spray paint on canvas, 122 × 209¼

Purchase, with funds from Edward R. Downe, Jr. and Eric Fischl 84.44

Kenny Scharf conducts his career within the increasingly undemarcated nexus of studio, gallery, and nightclub. He is as pleased to show his art at a disco as at a museum. His "user-friendly" imagery is unquestionably weird but essentially upbeat. Nightmares are populated by cotton-candy mutants, goonishly smiling figures who make the apocalypse look like unforgettable fun. He uses oil and acrylic, which is sprayed, air-brushed, and finger painted, to achieve lurid compositions in which he "can't make a mistake. . . . I just use a mistake, keep going, transforming it." Science fiction, the Flintstones, and Carnivale (he lives part of the year in Brazil) meet in his art. *When the Worlds Collide* may aspire to be a painting of World War III, an alien attack on earth, or the ultimate disaster, but it only achieves the terror of a drive-in horror flick; camp exaggeration makes fear fun. Scharf has summed up his aesthetic philosophy as "more, newer, better, newer, funner." Neither conventional language nor painting is his purpose. Hollywood-born, his aesthetic consists of visual hedonism; he trades morality and truth for good times and charts a cheerful cosmology that jettisons past and present.



Julian Schnabel
Hope, 1982



Kenny Scharf
When the Worlds Collide, 1984

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