

**CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE MIA:  
1989-PRESENT**

**A Course Guide for Docents**



## INTRODUCTION

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Though it is somewhat of an artificial designation, scholars often point to the year 1989 as a launch date for the contemporary age, and in turn, for the rise of contemporary art. The reasons for choosing this point in history as the dawn of a new era are multifold, having to do with the end of the Cold War, the growth of a global economy, the emergence of new technologies, and various other world events. But with regard to the arts, it is the **globalization** of international art markets and the opportunities this allows for artists around the world that truly distinguishes the late 1980's.

*Contemporary art, a term long used to designate the most recent art, assumed an entirely new meaning when art production, following the turn of world politics and world trade in 1989, expanded across the globe.*

—Hans Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate"

Thus, "contemporary art"—as the name would suggest—is the art of an era, opposed to an art defined by any stylistic characteristics. Indeed, though there certainly are some commonalities in the art produced during the last 25 years, one of those commonalities is the very lack of any characteristics that are too common. **Pluralism** is the often-used term that designates this contemporary embrace of multiple aesthetics, media, **subject matter**, and so forth, and that challenges traditional notions of beauty, quality, originality, and correctness.

This course guide on contemporary global art, therefore, begins with the year 1989 and continues through the present day (there is a single work discussed herein that predates 1989). However, unlike much study of art from earlier eras, this guide is structured on neither a chronological nor a cultural framework. The nature of discussing such a short period of history, coupled with the issue of globalization, make both formats problematic as a unifying curricular design.

Rather, this program approaches contemporary art from the perspective of certain broad, unifying **themes** that have engaged artists during this time, and that are prominent in the artwork they have produced. These themes are defined as Identity (psychological identity as well as art dealing with the physical body), Passages and Place, Spectacle, and Time and Memory. Certainly such thematic ideas are not inclusive of all artwork produced over the last 25 years, but they encompass many works that are most relevant to this age, and that are most represented in the collections of major

museums, galleries, and exhibitions worldwide. The themes also encompass those contemporary works that are currently in the holdings of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. It should be understood that these themes—as with any organizing principle—are artificial constructions that attempt to codify the often-nebulous fields of history and art. Just as some works of art may not fit perfectly into any of these themes, many works will transcend multiple categories.

Because the sessions on contemporary art conclude the docent training program and the study of all previous historical eras and cultures, each thematic idea is introduced by way of comparison or contrast to examples of earlier art that explored the same theme. This educational strategy, sometimes called an “advance organizer,” attempts to make sense of new ideas by placing them in relation to ideas that students already understand. For example, the theme of identity in contemporary art is introduced in relation to how artists of other eras and cultures have explored the same theme, with works that the students have already studied shown as examples. The advance organizer can be particularly effective when the new ideas are conceptually challenging or different from that which is already understood, which is often the case with contemporary art. In any event, the reference to earlier works is only for the purpose of introducing a new idea; it does not frame the whole discussion of any theme.

In addition to the major themes of contemporary art, the course guide simultaneously introduces related ideas that are central to the study of art since 1989. These include such topics as globalism, pluralism and the blurring of high and low art, appropriation, politically-driven and activist art, new media, and other important concepts. Each of these concepts is presented in **bold face** the first time it is used in a meaningful context within the booklet. A glossary at the end of the booklet provides definitions for all of these key ideas.

Likewise, though the course guide does not adhere to a strict chronology, it does not disregard key historical events, especially those that impact the arts. A timeline of relevant world events from 1989 to the present is included at the end of the booklet.

## LIST OF WORKS ACCORDING TO THEME

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### SECTION ONE: IDENTITY

J.D. Okhai  
Ojeikere,  
Nigerian,  
Hair photos  
1974 (printed  
2013)  
2014.73.1-3

- ✓ Cindy Sherman, untitled photograph from *History Portrait* series
- ✓ Zhang Huan, *1/2 Text*
- ✓ Yasumasa Morimura, *An Inner Dialogue with Frida Kahlo (Hand-shaped Earring)*
- ✓ Rebecca Belmore, *Fringe*
- ✓ Swoon, *Alix and Naima*
- ✓ Pieter Hugo, *Chris Nkulo and Patience Umeh, Enugu, Nigeria*
- ✓ Yinka Shonibare, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Australia)*
- ✓ Siah Armajani, *An Exile Dreaming of St. Adorno*
- ✓ Willie Cole, *Ann Klein with a Baby in Transit*
- ✓ Kehinde Wiley, *Santos-Dumont—The Father of Aviation II (on loan)*
- ✓ Chantal Joffe, *Moll*
- Zanele Muholi, *South Afr. | Cape Town Portraits*, 2011, 2014.75.1-2

Lesley Dill, *A Word Made Flesh: Throat*, 1994  
P.95.2.4 Amer.

Mary Lee Bendolph, *Amer, Strings*  
2003-2004, 2011.74.3

### SECTION TWO: PASSAGES AND PLACE

- ✓ Yinka Shonibare, *Dressing Down*
- ✓ Cy Thao, *The Hmong Migration*
- ✓ Siah Armajani, *Mississippi Delta*
- ✓ Subodh Gupta, *Dubai to Calcutta #19*
- Nature ✓ Doug Aitken, *Migration (empire)—linear version*
- ✓ Mona Hatoum, *Cube (9 x 9 x 9)*
- ✓ Ai Wei Wei, *Marble Chair*
- ✓ Mark Dion, *Curator's Office*

Ghada Amer, *Egyptian*, 2008, 2010.52

### SECTION THREE: SPECTACLE

Jonathan Borofsky, *Singing Man*

✓ Takashi Murakami, *Panda*

✓ Yoshimoto Nara, *Your Dog*

✓ Do Ho Suh, *Some/One*

✓ Tetsuya Yamada, *Morices*

✓ Bill Viola, *Three Women*

✓ Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*

✓ Aaron Curry and Richard Hawkins, *Untitled [sculpture]*

→ Jennifer Steinkamp, *6EQUJ5*

### SECTION FOUR: TIME AND MEMORY

✓ Christian Boltanski, *Monuments (Installation Salle Petriere)*

✓ Damien Hirst, *The Death of St. John*

✓ Li Tianbing, *Me and My Brother with the Tree*

✓ Thomas Demand, *Junior Suite*

✓ Vik Muniz, *Verso (Rembrandt, Lucretia)*

↳ G 311 Remix

## SECTION ONE: IDENTITY

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### Overview

Questions and issues of human identity have been a compelling theme in the work of artists from nearly every cultural background and epoch. Historically, and especially in Western art, artists investigated this theme by focusing on the individual and that person's "existential identity." This investigation typically took the human figure as its subject matter, especially in the form of portraits and self-portraits, such as the MIA's *Shrine Head from Ife* (12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century) or Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* (1936, below).

In contemporary art, by contrast, artists have tended to focus on issues of social and cultural identity, racial and ethnic identity, gender, sexual orientation, or other group identifications. Often, these groups have been disenfranchised by or separate from Western society, and as a result of globalization, may be newly represented in contemporary art.



Related to works that emphasize the theme of identity are works that focus on the physical body, or the relationship of the body to one's identity. In the art of some earlier cultures (such as Classical Greek art or the art of the Italian Renaissance), artists often portrayed the body in an idealized way, suggesting and even celebrating the potential for human achievement (see image of *The Doryphoros*, right). At other times, artistic portrayals downplayed the physical body as a mere container for the immortal soul. Contemporary artists, however, are often more concerned with depicting the body devoid of humanistic or spiritual associations, that is, portraying the body either as a biological organism or as a cultural artifact and physical manifestation of identity.



Much contemporary art that explores the theme of identity also partakes of **identity politics**, the purpose of which is to raise social awareness and effect change through art. Evident in politically charged, identity-centered artwork are issues such as **diversity**, **hybridity** (the blending of identities), body politics, and the belief that

identity is constructed rather than innate, and changeable rather than permanent.

Though the theme of identity based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality may not hold as much interest for artists today as during the 1990s, identity is a recurrent and universal theme in art that will likely never cease to engage interest.

### **Selected Contemporary Exemplars in the MIA**

The following pages contain detailed descriptions of works in the museum's collection that explore the theme of Identity. They are listed in chronological order. Where a work also explores another theme or themes, it is cross-referenced to that section of this guide.

Key concepts in the study of contemporary art that are central to certain works are listed under the subheading "Related Ideas." Definitions of these concepts may be found in the Glossary.



# Cindy Sherman

## untitled

1989

Color photograph

33 ¼" x 24 ¼"

One of the leading artists working today, Cindy Sherman uses herself as a photographic canvas upon which she projects a vast range of personae. In the late 1970s she produced her breakout body of work, *Untitled Film Stills*, comprising grainy, black-and-white images of her in scenes suggesting B-movie outtakes. Now shooting in color, she appropriates visual and mass-media forms such as the centerfold, fashion images, history portraits, and pornography. Her highly fabricated images challenge traditional portraiture, involve feminist theory, and are usually simultaneously disturbing and humorous.



Sherman's untitled photograph of herself in the guise of a Renaissance woman is overtly disconcerting. Her opulent dress and jewel-adorned hair run counter to her awkward, false nose. Though piously folded, her reddened hands suggest hard work. The coloration beneath her eyes betrays a very real woman, while the classical column suggests an idealized European society portrait. (Indeed, on one level the work is an **appropriation** of 16<sup>th</sup>-century paintings, such as the MIA's portrait of Anna Buchner by Lucas Cranach the Elder, right.) By using extensive makeup and costuming to assume different personas in her *History Portrait* series, Sherman at once references and challenges the conventions of female portraiture. By emphasizing the artificial and the grotesque, Sherman urges viewers to look beyond the surfaces and consider portraits as constructions designed to serve a social, political, or even erotic purpose. Sherman's critique is as relevant for portraiture today, in which digital photography enables easy manipulation of images to suit the sitter's purpose.



### Related Ideas

**appropriation**  
**identity politics**  
**simulacrum**

## Zhang Huan

### *1/2 (Text)*

1998

C-print

36 3/4" x 29 1/4"

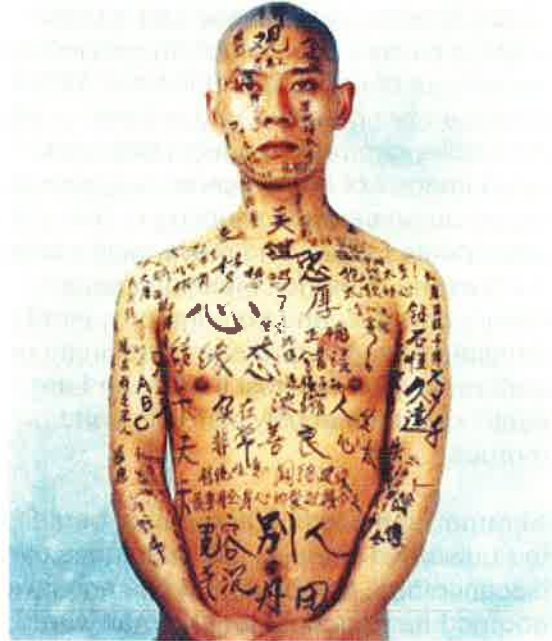
Shortly before Zhang Huan left his native China to relocate in the United States, he performed a work of art in which he invited friends to write phrases or words on his face and body with black ink. In this resulting self-portrait, Huan's ethnicity is literally inscribed on his body. Yet for most Western viewers the text is unreadable. *1/2 (Text)* is a visual metaphor for the difficult transcultural experience upon which Zhang was about to embark. As an Asian body circulating within a Western culture, would Zhang himself be as difficult to understand as his language? He said, "The body is the only direct way through which I come to know society and society comes to know me. The body is the proof of identity. The body is language."

#### Related Ideas

**globalization**  
**identity politics**

#### Related Themes

**Passages and Place**



**Yasumasa Morimura**  
***An Inner Dialogue with Frida Kahlo***  
***(Hand-shaped Earring)***

2001

Color photograph on canvas

58 ½" x 47"

Yasumasa Morimura defines himself as a cross between an actor and an artist. In his photographs he uses a mix of heavy makeup, costumes, painting, and digital manipulation to transform himself into iconic figures from pop culture or art history. He has appeared as the Mona Lisa, Marilyn Monroe, and even the artist Cindy Sherman, and while his self-portraits are certainly homages, they raise questions of **authorship**, and explore themes of artistic identity, gender, sexuality, and the culture of celebrity.



In this work, Morimura casts himself as Frida Kahlo, the Mexican artist known for her lush, surreal self-portraits. Morimura self-defines as a cross between actor and artist, transforming himself into iconic figures from pop culture or art history by using a mix of make up, costumes, painting and occasionally digital manipulation. The image is remarkably similar to its model (Kahlo's *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Dr. Eloesser and Daughters*, 1940), although the artist has modified a few details that touch on themes related to world cultures, gender, and celebrity. Kahlo's Mexican shawl, for example, has become a stylish Louis Vuitton wrap, and instead of fresh flowers Morimura wears a garish tiara of artificial blossoms atop his head that might resemble a Geisha's hair comb. Of this series Morimura said, "The various elements of Dona Frida and myself mix into a muddle and a chemical reaction occurs, creating this imaginary Frida of mine." A hand-painted backdrop further enhances the play between artist and subject, painting and photograph, imaginary and real.

Related Ideas

**appropriation**  
**authorship**  
**globalization**  
**hybridity**  
**identity politics**

## Rebecca Belmore

### *Fringe*

2007

Transparency in light box

96 1/4" x 32 3/4" x 6 1/2"



Rebecca Belmore often uses the body to address violence and injustice against First Nations people, especially women. A member of the Anishinaabe nation, she affirms, "My body is a place from which to address the whole notion of history and what has happened to us as Aboriginal people." The female figure in *Fringe* assumes the same reclining pose as the beautiful odalisques depicted by nineteenth century European artists, but bears an ugly slash from shoulder to hip. The deep scar running across the figure's back is created with the help of special-effects make up. What appear to be thin rivulets of blood running from the gash are composed of small red beads, a detail that evokes both Belmore's heritage and the trauma inflicted on indigenous peoples. Despite the graveness of the woman's injury, Belmore's *Fringe* is also about healing. The wound is not fatal, but the scar will never disappear.

#### Related Ideas

**identity politics**  
**postcolonialism**



## **Swoon**

### ***Alix and Naima***

**2008**

**Mixed media**

**119 ½" x 182" x 6"**

Street artist Swoon considers her work an addition to the naturally occurring collage of the city. She usually pastes her life-size, woodcut block print portraits directly onto a wall of a city street, enjoying the way it flakes and decays over time. In this multi-media piece, Swoon has transplanted a collaged cityscape into a gallery space by constructing a sculptural canvas out of salvaged urban materials. The scrap metal and wood wraps around a corner of the gallery, breaking the boundaries of traditionally hung artworks, and suggestive of a street setting.

In much the same way that Swoon inscribes her subjects into the urban milieu, she has inscribed the urban milieu into a museum gallery.



The two figures depicted in this sculpture are Brooklyn-based poets and fellow street artists Alix and Naima, who together form the duo Climbing PoeTree. Known for using art and poetry as tools for education, community organizing, and social activism, Climbing PoeTree seeks to overcome destructive elements with creativity. The two women hold each other, eyes closed and unaware of the viewer, who has been allowed to share in this intimate, loving, and joyful moment.

#### Related Ideas

**repurposing**

#### Related Themes

**Spectacle**

## Pieter Hugo

### *Chris Nkulo and Patience Umeh, Enugu, Nigeria*

2008

Digital C-print

60" x 60"

South African artist Pieter Hugo's career has taken him across the African continent, where his practice engages with traditions in photojournalism, art photography, and portraiture. His work is inherently political, focusing on subculture communities and the marginalized—from AIDS victims in their coffins to the Nigerian 'Nollywood' film industry. *Chris Nkulo and Patience Umeh, Enugu, Nigeria* is a photograph from Hugo's project on Nollywood. Produced for a primarily African audience, Nollywood movies are released quickly and cheaply, employing local actors and low budgets. Many of the narratives are drawn from local symbolic imagery and traditional storytelling. For this photograph, as for the others in the series,



Hugo asked Nollywood actors to recreate scenes and characters inspired by typical films. The image of Chris Nkulo, transformed by a make-up artist's special effects into a horror-movie demon, is simultaneously shocking, dramatic and playful. In the context of South Africa's recent history of colonial, apartheid, and post-apartheid conflict, Hugo's focus on outlandish or taboo subjects is intentionally provocative. With images such as *Chris Nkulo and Patience Umeh, Enugu, Nigeria*, he provides insight into life in Nigeria while commenting on the slippage between fact and fiction. The power of the photograph is in its duality. What we see is both a "representation" (of something real) and a "**simulacrum**" (with no secure reference to reality), a straight photograph co-mingled with fantasy and fiction.

#### Related Ideas

**globalization**  
**identity politics**  
**postcolonialism**  
**simulacrum**

#### Related Themes

**Passages and Place**  
**Spectacle**

## Yinka Shonibare

### *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Australia)*

2008

C-print mounted on aluminum

71 ½" x 49 ¼"

Yinka Shonibare MBE, born in London in 1962 of Nigerian parents who moved back to Lagos when the artist was three, has referred to himself a "postcolonial hybrid." He was born in London of Nigerian parents, raised in Lagos, and then returned to England to attend an exclusive boarding school. His dual identity as African and English, as well as his personal experience with issues of race, class, colonialism, and **post-colonialism**, has profoundly informed his work. Colorful printed fabrics like those used in *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Australia)* have become Shonibare's signature motif. The textiles are based on late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch and British factory-produced designs of Indonesian batiks. These fabrics became hugely popular in the markets of West Africa and have become inextricably linked with African identity. "But actually," says Shonibare, "the fabrics are not really authentically African the way people think. They prove to have a crossbred cultural background quite of their own."



In this work, a man who appears to have fallen asleep at his desk wears the fabric. The photograph is based on Francisco Goya's print *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (right), from his series "Los Caprichos," a veiled critique of Spain's political and social vices. Shonibare has adopted Goya's powerful commentary and applied it to contemporary issues of cultural identity, race, and the lasting impact of 18<sup>th</sup>-century colonization.



#### Related Ideas

**appropriation**

**authorship**

**globalization**

**identity politics**

**postcolonialism**

## Siah Armajani

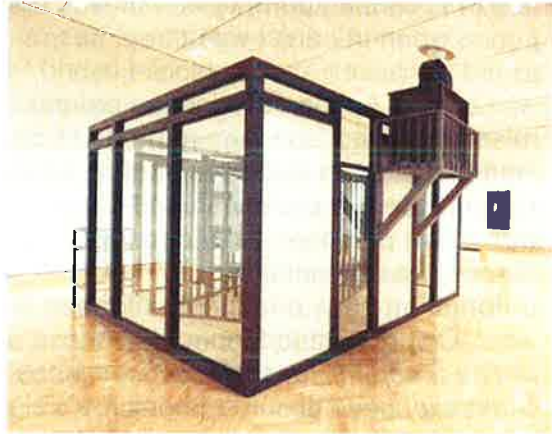
### *An Exile Dreaming of Saint Adorno*

2009

Glass, laminated maple, wood, paint, Plexiglass, copper, metal, clothing, fabric, plaster

126" x 200" x 186"

In 1960, 21-year old Siah Armajani left his native Iran to study at Macalester College in St. Paul, where he majored in philosophy but dreamed of being an artist. Today he is a world-renowned sculptor whose work articulates both his lifelong passion for art and ideas, and his experience of living in a culture that is not his own. In this work, Armajani explores exile as a physical, political, and emotional condition. He quotes Alberto Giacometti's surrealist masterpiece, *The Palace at 4 a.m.* (below right), which resembles a miniature stage on which a mysterious play is being enacted. Similarly, Armajani's cage-like structure is inhabited by a faceless figure who sleeps at a desk; outside and above, another watches. The two are frozen in this voyeuristic tableau, forever separated by the sculpture's closed doors and glass walls. Armajani's title references Theodor Adorno, the German philosopher who fled his native country during the Nazi regime. For him, exile was an ethical choice. As he wrote, "It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home."



#### Related Ideas

**appropriation**  
**globalization**

#### Related Themes

**Passages and Place**



## Willie Cole

### *Ann Klein with a Baby in Transit*

2009

Shoes, wire, washers, screws

36 1/2" x 12 1/2" x 14 3/4"

Influenced by African art, Willie Cole constructed this sculpture of mother and child by **repurposing** discarded high-heeled shoes. Cole has created similarly **ironic** artworks out of other used consumer objects, ranging from lawn jockeys and bicycle parts to salvaged irons and blow dryers. When reassembled by Cole, these cast-offs become potent objects that appear to issue from another time and place. *Ann Klein with a Baby in Transit* takes its name from the American fashion designer's label that appears inside two of the shoes. The rich black color and well-worn surfaces of the footwear evoke the beautiful patina of many African sculptures. The mother and child grouping is a regal but tender homage to African cultural traditions. The woman seated on a throne of shoes refers to royal maternity sculptures (see example, below right). Most African maternity sculptures celebrate fertility and abundance, and though Cole's sculpture also represents abundance, it is of a very material sort—the waste of American consumer culture.

#### Related Ideas

**irony, ironic  
repurposing**



**Kehinde Wiley**  
***Santos-Dumont—The Father of Aviation II***  
**2009**  
**Oil on canvas**  
**89 1/2" x 168"**



Kehinde Wiley is best known for his large-scale portraits of African-American men depicted in poses that cast them as kings, prophets, and saints in the tradition of "old master" canvases, reminiscent especially of Renaissance and Baroque painting. Part of Wiley's original strategy was to place images of young black men within the context of traditional European portraiture—a context where they have rarely been given center stage. *Santos-Dumont* is part of a larger body of work called "The World Stage." For this series, the artist traveled to diverse locations around the globe, including Africa, China, India, and Brazil. He invited his models to choose poses from important paintings or sculptures that are representative of the history of their surroundings. The two young men featured in this painting, whom he met in Rio de Janeiro, chose to position themselves as the two "fallen heroes" in a well-known public monument dedicated to one of Brazil's pioneer aviators, Santos-Dumont. By depicting these black men as the heroic pioneers of Brazilian aviation, Wiley places them in a position of power, essentially immortalizing them in oil paint. Wiley's images collapse history and style into a uniquely contemporary vision. Questioning issues related to identity and self on a global scale, his "World Stage" project took him to six countries on three continents. These two young men, for instance, located in a *favela*, or slum, and depicted in contemporary urban attire, could just as easily be from Harlem or Lagos as from the streets of Rio.

Related Ideas

**globalization**  
**identity politics**

## Chantal Joffe

### *Moll*

2010

Oil on plywood board

110" x 80"

Chantal Joffe was born in 1969 in St. Albans, Hertfordshire, England. She is a talented young painter who, while building on art historical traditions in painting and portraiture, has found her own voice within those genres. Her paintings tend to be dominated by girls and young women who exude the complexities of female sexuality.

*Moll* is an example of her strongest canvasses, which are dominated by girls and young women—often androgynous figures and archetypes—exuding the complexities of female sexuality. The young woman in *Moll* could be described as elfin-faced, with haunting eyes and a Lolita-like sensuality. Seemingly small in stature, she is a ten-foot giantess who can't be contained by the painting. She looms out at the viewer, anxious, intelligent, and strangely seductive.



For artists coming of age in the 21st century, the history of art is widely accessible via books, museums, art galleries, and the Internet. In the context of recent art history, Joffe's work extends the tradition of early 20th century Expressionist portraiture filtered through the lens of documentary and fashion photography, with clear references to some of the best figurative painters of the late-20th century, including Lucian Freud and Alice Neel.

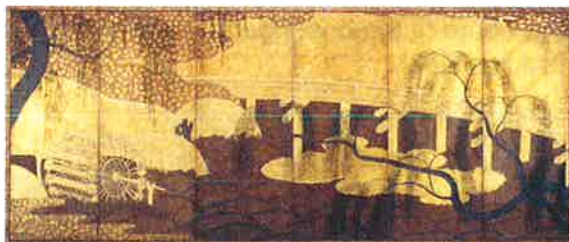
## SECTION TWO: PASSAGES AND PLACE

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### Overview

Throughout the history of art in many cultures, geographic locales and the journeys that take place between them have provided potent themes for artists to explore. The title of this section, “Passages and Place,” describes such notions of geography, homeland, and travel (especially as cultural migrations or **diasporas**, a frequent subject in today’s art).

Traditionally, artistic explorations of these themes focused on the beauty or sublimeness of specific places, or on the romanticism and adventure of a journey. Naturally, the most common subject of such works was the landscape, whether in recognizable images such as the MIA’s *Uji Bridge* screen painting from Japan, van Gogh’s *Olive Trees*, or in highly abstract works such as Morrison’s *Collage IX: Landscape* (clockwise from upper left, below).



In contemporary art, the landscape—whether as untouched wilderness or concrete jungle—remains a common subject. But artists today who are interested in themes of place and passage often turn to subjects other than the landscape to communicate



their ideas. Works such as Subodh Gupta's *Dubai to Calcutta #19* suggest powerful ideas about one's homeland through subject matter that is closer to still life than landscape, while other pieces, such as Mona Hatoum's *Cube (9 5 9 5 9)*, evoke similar ideas through a purely abstract form (see *Contemporary Exemplars in the MIA*, below).

Likewise, the geographic interests of contemporary artists often go beyond responses toward the beauty or magnificence of a locale. Rather, these interests are more likely to involve responses to political or ecological issues or to ideas about culture or religion. Certain places—especially one's homeland—and journeys that dislocate a person or group of people from their homeland, can be powerful aspects of identity. Along with the many characteristics of identity that we examined in the previous chapter, we identify strongly with the idiosyncrasies of our local geography, weather, and environment, whether rural, urban, or suburban. And regardless of differences we might have toward politics, religion, or other issues of the day, people often form social bonds merely on the basis of being from the same place.

Moreover, because of the significance of one's homeland to a person's identity, geographic relocations and dislocations often challenge that identity and raise questions about one's identity in response to adopting a new home and culture. The globalization of contemporary art markets has brought with it the opportunity for artists to live and work in places far removed from their native countries. As a result, the adaptations that come with such moves have provided a source of rich artistic ideas, as we saw in Zhang Huan's *1/2 Text* in the previous chapter.

Finally, the questions raised by cultural adaptations with regard to a person's or group's identity are no less true of forced dislocations or mass migrations. Globalization has also brought with it the opportunity for forcefully displaced artists to be heard, and for these artists to bring to public awareness important issues related to the diasporas of their people.

## **Selected Contemporary Exemplars in the MIA**

The following pages contain detailed descriptions of works in the museum's collection that explore the theme of Passages and Place. They are listed in chronological order. Where a work also explores another theme or themes, it is cross-referenced to that section of this guide.

Key concepts in the study of contemporary art that are central to certain works are listed under the subheading "Related Ideas." Definitions of these concepts may be found in the Glossary.

## Yinka Shonibare

### *Dressing Down*

1997

Wax printed cotton textile, crinoline, aluminum, plastic, felt

66 1/2" x 59" x 59"

At first glance this fancy gown seems right at home in a dazzling room from a Paris town house. Look more closely, however, and you'll notice that the dress is not made of silk but rather a printed cotton fabric produced in Europe for the West African market. The artist uses this type of Dutch wax fabric, inspired by Indonesian batiks, to suggest the complex web of trade and exploitation that enabled Europeans to control most of the world's riches for the last 400 years. *Dressing Down* is an alluring critique of colonialism. Its placement in the Grand Salon raises the question, "whose resources and labor made all of this luxury possible?" Medallions on either side of the room say volumes about the owner's assumption of power and privilege, for they portray the continents of the globe as beautiful women, each identified by a headdress. Europe wears the helmet of Minerva, Greek goddess of wisdom; Asia wears a camel; the Americas are represented by a woman in a feathered headdress; and Africa wears a headdress in the form of an elephant. Other carved and gilded decorations of the Grand Salon refer to hunting, music and the theater, all pastimes of a "gentleman."



Yinka Shonibare MBE has called himself a "postcolonial hybrid." Born in London in 1962 to Nigerian parents, the family moved back to Lagos when the artist was 3. He returned to London to attend the Byam Shaw School of Art in London, and now lives and works in London's East End. Shonibare was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 2005; he has chosen to make this ironic title a part of his name, a "platform" from which to further explore the colonial legacy, class structure and social justice issues that remain in his country.

#### Related Ideas

**globalization**  
**hybridity**  
**postcolonialism**

#### Related Themes

**Identity**

**Cy Thao**  
***The Hmong Migration***  
**1993-2001 (fifty paintings)**  
**Oil on canvas**  
**30" x 36" each**

Cy Thao is an artist, teacher, and political leader who recently served as a member of the DFL Minnesota House of Representatives for District 65A. He was born in Laos in 1972, but traveled to Thailand with his family in 1975 after the United States left Vietnam. His family stayed in a Thai refugee camp until 1980 when they immigrated to St. Paul, Minnesota. Taken together, the fifty canvases in *The Hmong Migration* comprise an epic **narrative** that recounts over 5,000 years of Hmong history—from life in southern China and the mountains of Laos, to alignment with the U.S. during the Vietnam War



and life in the refugee camps in Thailand, to resettlement in the United States. Thao's intent in this series was to expose the difficulties, menaces, and effects of any migration process. Although Thao has trained as a professional artist, this piece was created in a consciously "outsider" narrative style, mirroring the "story-cloth" tapestries he saw being made by his compatriots in the Thai refugee camps during his childhood, which he said were like picture books without words. For his visual narrative, Thao added a written commentary about each image, adding to their power. "I want the series to educate the younger generation, to have some closure with the generation that went through the war," he said, "and hopefully become a historical document for generations to come."

Related Ideas

**diaspora**  
**globalization**  
**identity politics**  
**narrative**  
**postcolonialism**

Related Themes

**Identity**

**Siah Armajani**

***Mississippi Delta***

**2005-2006**

**Colored pencil on mylar**

**43 ¼" x 162" x 2" (triptych)**



Armajani's drawing captures the disaster that befell the Gulf Coast and New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. All of the destructive forces of water are unleashed when a great flood occurs. Waters overflowing banks, dykes, and levees contaminate water and sewage treatment facilities making tap water undrinkable. Industrial waste, agricultural chemicals and other pollutants get added to the mix and flow into neighborhoods. Water short circuits electrical systems, turning out the lights, shutting down refrigerators and freezers, leaving little to eat. A dining table with empty plates, a bed, and a house, the comforts of home, flow downstream. A car floats by upside-down, no longer a means of escape. Upstream the bridge has collapsed. Crows survey the catastrophe, ignore the scarecrow, and wait to exploit the carnage.

Related Ideas

**narrative**

Related Themes

**Time and Memory**



## **Subodh Gupta** ***Dubai to Calcutta #19***

**2006**

**Bronze with gold patina and aluminum, in three parts**

**35 ½" x 32" x 22" (cart)**

**23" x 29" x 21 ½" (box)**

**15" x 22" x 15" (roll)**

In this work, Subodh Gupta has replicated the type of luggage millions of Indian migrant workers carry home after working abroad. Based in New Delhi, Gupta engages in a dialogue that goes beyond the forced migration of many Indians today to the practice of migrant workers worldwide. The economy-driven exodus experienced by innumerable workers is filled with both hope and tragedy, for greater opportunity comes at the sacrifice of family and home. Gupta has gained international recognition for his artworks based on found objects from his home country of India. His success lies in his ability to take everyday Indian objects—from milk buckets to cow dung—and turn them into cultural symbols. With this work, his use of expensive materials to construct such humble objects may represent the high cost that migrant workers place on their journeys.



### Related Ideas

**diaspora**  
**globalization**  
**identity politics**

### Related Themes

**Identity**

**Doug Aitken**  
***Migration (empire)—linear version***  
**2008**  
**Audio visual**  
**Dimensions variable**

Doug Aitken is considered among the leading video artists of his generation. He is known for creating exquisitely produced and engaging videos that utilize the visual richness of the medium to capture the complexity of society and culture today. In *Migration (empire)—linear version*, the movements of wild North American migratory animals are transposed onto the ubiquitous space of the modern roadside motel. As the indigenous animals inhabit these vacant and sterile interiors, the video explores the complex relationship between America's



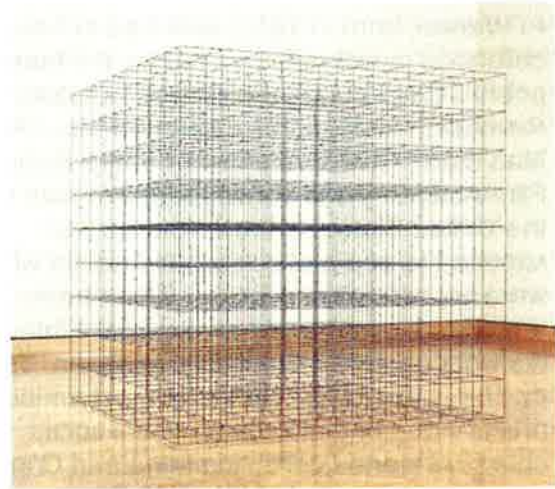
wilderness and its sprawling built environment. Images of vast landscapes, roadside businesses, and industrial cityscapes call to mind the migration of settlers across the great expanse of land—settlers who met the untamed wilderness to forge new ways of life defined westward expansion. But what was lost in the ambition to expand? Aitken's close studies of wild, North American animals released within the artificial habitat of the motel are spellbinding. A horse occupies a room, watching wild horses run free on television; a buffalo, the tragic American symbol of the wild West, trashes the space. The animals' displacement from their native environment seems at once humorous and horrific, strangely familiar and prophetic.

Related Themes

**Identity**

**Mona Hatoum**  
***Cube (9 5 9 5 9)***  
**2008**  
**Black finished steel**  
**71" 5 71 ½" 5 71 ½"**

Mona Hatoum was born in 1952 in Beirut, Lebanon, to Palestinian parents. Everything about *Cube (9 5 9 5 9)*, from its imposing physical presence to its construction of barbed wire, seems threatening and dangerous. Mona Hatoum's use of a provocative material in this piece reflects her belief that content should be conveyed through aesthetic and formal elements. She rejects the connection frequently made between her work and her birth in Lebanon to Palestinian parents. "I come from a background of war and all that unconsciously feeds into the work, but I am not trying to illustrate my personal experience," she explained. "It is more abstract than this. It is about presenting the audience with a set of objects and materials that may have certain associations and may bring out general feelings of discomfort or uncertainty and this will be different for each person."



Related Ideas

**globalization**  
**postcolonialism**

Related Themes

**Identity**

# Ai Weiwei

## *Marble Chair*

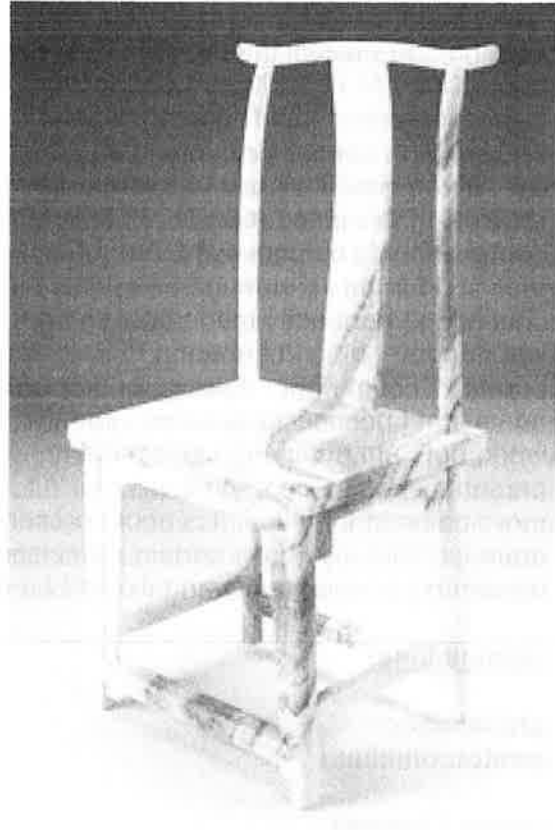
2008

Marble

47 ¼" x 22" x 18"

Ai Weiwei, born in 1957, spent part of his childhood in exile with his father, the famous poet Ai Qing, during the Chinese Cultural Revolution imposed by Chairman Mao. After Mao died in 1976, Ai enrolled at the Beijing Film Academy and subsequently moved to the United States. In New York he was exposed to pop and conceptual artists who were yet unknown in China. When he returned to his homeland twelve years later, his work garnered significant attention. Today he is one of the country's most eminent artists—and one of its most vocal social critics. Ai started collecting Ming and Qing dynasty pieces after his return to China, many of which he reconstructed into hybrid sculptures.

*Marble Chair* is part of Ai's practice that is inspired by antique Chinese furniture, the systematic destruction of Chinese culture and its legacy that began during the Cultural Revolution, reinforced by Chairman Mao's famous directive "without destruction there is not construction." Ai's work is often packed with personal, political, and culturally significant reference points. Carved from a single block of marble to resemble a traditional yokeback chair it was one of the few objects his family was allowed to keep when they were sent into exile. He has collaborated with and outsourced his work to highly skilled artisans who are trained in classical pottery and design. Their knowledge, in this case, of marble carving is employed as a means of conserving traditional skills. As a superb piece of craftsmanship, *Marble Chair* has become a poignant symbol for China's position as the world's largest manufacturing center and labor force, which includes the continuities and disruptions of cultural tradition and memory in the country today.



### Related Ideas

diaspora  
globalization  
identity politics

### Related Themes

Identity

**Mark Dion**  
***Curator's Office***  
**2012-13**  
**Mixed media**  
**Dimensions variable**

Mark Dion's installation *Curator's Office*, commissioned for the MIA exhibition *More Real?: Art in the Age of Truthiness*, adds another layer to his exploration of the ways in which collections of objects are formed and used. In his narrative about the piece, Dion claims that he discovered an office that was used in the 1950s by a curator of modern art employed at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. This office



supposedly was part of the museum's original McKim, Mead, and White building, but was forgotten after being sealed off during a renovation project. Dion's installation—with its vintage furniture, defunct office equipment, and forgotten artworks—is thus a droll version of the archaeological site that has been discovered intact.

Within the context of a museum exhibition, however, *Curator's Office* also becomes a “period room,” an installation of objects, furnishings, and architecture meant to illustrate a historical moment by re-creating its interior domestic spaces. Period rooms are popular museum attractions that are both authentic (in their contents) and false (in their detachment from their original contexts). As such, these displays pose complex museological questions: How does a curator decide which moment in time to re-create? How authentic can a retrospectively assembled room be? How does one maximize both accuracy and educational impact? Because *Curator's Office* highlights the ways in which one person's obsessions, sensibilities, and prejudices shape their research as well as a museum's collections, it can be read as a meta narrative on the problems posed by period rooms. “Today's museums demonstrate rather than seduce,” Dion has said. In *Curator's Office*, he aims to do both.

Related Ideas

**narrative**  
**simulacrum**

Related Themes

**Spectacle**

## SECTION THREE: SPECTACLE

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### Overview

THIS SECTION IS TO BE DEFINED LATER

*Museums must make a “shift away from passive experiences to interactive or participatory experiences, from art that is hanging on the wall to art that invites people to become part of it.”*

—Glenn Lowry, director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York

## **Selected Contemporary Exemplars in the MIA**

The following pages contain detailed descriptions of works in the museum's collection that explore the theme of Spectacle. They are listed in chronological order. Where a work also explores another theme or themes, it is cross-referenced to that section of this guide.

Key concepts in the study of contemporary art that are central to certain works are listed under the subheading "Related Ideas." Definitions of these concepts may be found in the Glossary.



## Jonathan Borofsky

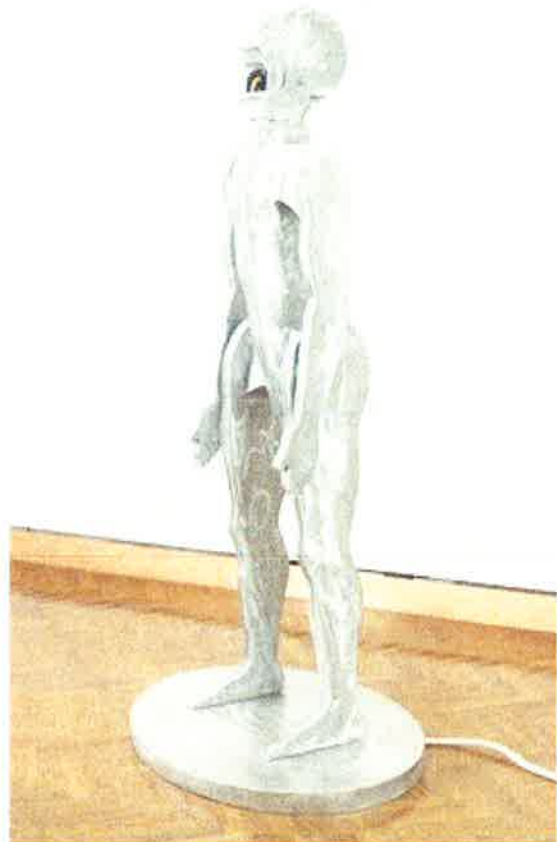
### *Singing Man*

1994

**Brushed aluminum, electrical components, compact disc player with remote control, compact disc and jewel case**  
**82" x 43" x 31"**

Jonathan Borofsky, born in 1942 in Boston, Massachusetts, has stated that most of his work is a mode of self-portraiture. *Singing Man* reflects an autobiographical expression of the artist's interest in music, while at the same time, manifests of his long struggle with the anxieties of daily patterns. Borofsky took aspects of the competing impulses of Pop art and Minimalism and combined them in this playful figurative sculpture, the aspect of his work for which he is best known.

This classic example of his sculpture also merges his interests in humor and spirituality. It is an artwork that stands as both a timeless piece of figurative sculpture and a signature piece of its time. With its cyborg-like form of stainless steel and a mechanical jaw stuck in endless repetitive "singing," it reflects one of the central concerns of 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy—the loss of humanity in an age of mechanization. At its essence, it is an artwork that raises questions about the human spirit.





# Takashi Murakami

## *Panda*

2002

Fiberglass with antique Louis Vuitton trunk

100" x 65" x 43"

Takashi Murakami is one of Japan's leading contemporary artists, internationally recognized for both his artworks and commercial products. The artist's diverse body of works explores the intricacies of the globalized market. Through the fusion of fine art with fashion, music, accessories, and film making, he has created distinct brand identity and consumer desire, especially within the context of Japanese pop culture. Since 2002 Murakami has been collaborating with Marc Jacobs, the head designer of Louis Vuitton, one of the most successful brands of fashion merchandise in the world, producing several highly successful series of handbags. The panda character featured in this sculpture has become an icon, of sorts, for the collaboration—featured in animated promotional videos and printed on handbags, which have themselves taken on an iconic status.

Perched atop a vintage Vuitton suitcase, *Panda* draws attention to the increasingly blurred relationship between art and commerce. Sometimes functioning more like a business than a fine artist, Murakami incorporated KaiKai KiKi, a factory-like studio that oversees the production of his art, filmmaking, and a range of cheaper goods mass produced for a larger market. In a world where art can be seen as just another luxury item, his distinctively hybrid fusion of Eastern and Western attitudes and style plays well to art collectors and fashionistas alike.



### Related Ideas

**globalization**

**kitsch**

## Yoshimoto Nara

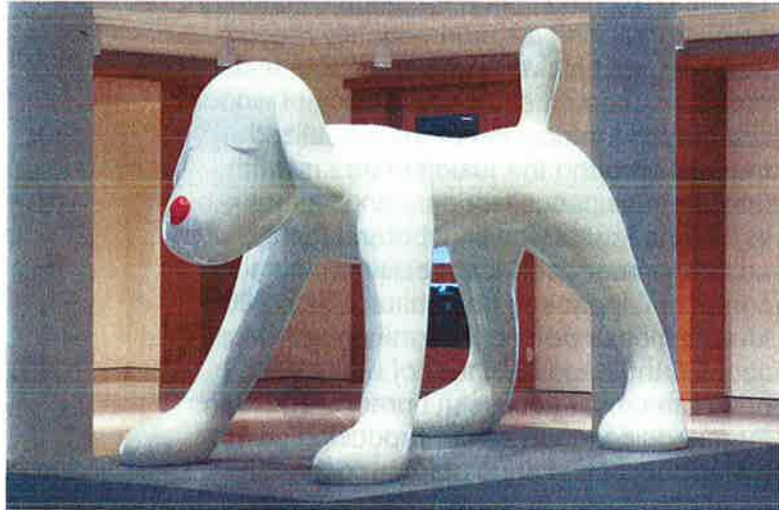
### *Your Dog*

2002

Fiberglass

72" x 51" x 108"

Yoshitomo Nara, born in 1959, lives and works in Tokyo, Japan. Staring into the flop-eared face of Nara's giant puppy is a contradictory experience; *Your Dog* is at once a welcoming childhood playmate and a menacing creature of larger than life proportions. The scale of the sculpture reduces us to smaller versions of ourselves, a startling reminder of how the world looks through the eyes of a child.



Much of Nara's work taps

into these kinds of uncertainties inherent in the lives of children, for whom the world is both a wondrous curiosity and a threatening unknown. His candy-colored, cartoon-like figures are unbelievably cute, an aesthetic turned obsession in Nara's native Japan, yet seemingly distant and alone. The angst in Nara's work has attracted large audiences across the globe, both in the form of fine arts institutions and commercial consumers. His work is shown in museums and galleries as well as sold in the forms of T-shirts, children's books, and other commercial goods.

#### Related Ideas

**kitsch**

## Do Ho Suh *Some/One*

2005

Stainless steel, military dog tags, fiberglass resin  
76" x 117" x 136"

Do Ho Suh was born in Seoul, South Korea, in 1962. After studying traditional Asian brush painting at the Seoul National University and fulfilling his term of mandatory service in the South Korean military, he moved to the United States to continue his study of art and where he received an MFA in sculpture from Yale University. When the artist first came to the United States to study art, he felt displaced by cultural differences in America. He said he felt as if he were living in someone else's body and didn't know what to do with the stranger's hands and feet. He could have returned home, where he already had begun to make his mark as a painter. Instead, he



used his sense of disorientation to create artworks that forge a richly expressive link between historical and contemporary concepts of culture, identity, and politics. Based on a coat of traditional Asian armor, this sculpture is composed from thousands of polished military dog tags. As the title indicates, the work juxtaposes the collective, represented by the armored sculpture, and the individual, symbolized by the dog tags, each representing a single soldier. The imposing, larger-than-life robe stands in contrast to the thin, vulnerable dog tags, which may also be said to embody the poetic symbolism of fallen warriors.

### Related Ideas

**globalization**  
**identity politics**  
**repurposing**

### Related Themes

**Identity**

## Tetsuya Yamada

### *Morices*

2007

Glazed ceramic, plywood, particle board, wood

Dimensions unavailable

Tetsuya Yamada, who was born in 1968 in Tokyo, Japan, moved to Minneapolis in 2004 to begin an associate professorship at the University of Minnesota. Trained in Japanese ceramics, Yamada also has a deep comprehension of Western modern art. His *Morices* are part of an elegant, formal and conceptual trajectory in that history, which links them with the innovations of early modern masters of both sculpture and conceptual art. A prominent and well-established artist living in Minnesota, Yamada is inventive by nature and constantly stretches the limits of his media to create pieces of rare intellect and ingenuity. In addition to their art historical pedigree, they are remarkably compelling works in their own right. Standing at almost human scale, each has a distinct, individual character—a solemn or playful (depending on one's perspective)

sentry composed of ceramic sculpture and found objects. Their pure and polished white ceramic 'bodies' represent a purity of form and spirit. When they appear as a group, their power is compounded. As if they were made to be together, they take on a fascinating aura as if guarding some secret history or memory.





## Bill Viola

### *Three Women*

2008

Color high-definition video on plasma display

61 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" x 36 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" x 5 5"

Bill Viola is an internationally-acclaimed video artist who has been a primary influence on the evolution of video in contemporary art. A near-drowning experience as a young boy, the tragic death of his mother years later, and an interest in world religions have pushed Viola to continually revisit themes of birth, death, and spirituality in his projections and installations. *Three Women* begins with a ghostly, black and white image of a mother and her two daughters slowly emerging out of "the ether" and moving towards the viewer. As the women approach, they come into sharper focus until they break through a threshold of falling water, emerging in high-definition color. Each woman responds with different intensities of wonder and emotion, and then eventually turns and walks back through the water, once again becoming immaterial.

This video is part of a series Viola calls "Transfigurations." In Christian theology, the word refers specifically to an event on a mountaintop during which Jesus' body began to radiate a divine light after he momentarily became one with the Godhead. Viola uses the word more generally to refer to the complete transformation of a person that occurs after he or she crosses a spiritual threshold. In the video, the mother and her daughters enact a transfiguration when they choose to pass through the wall of water and briefly enter a place of clarity. By exploring such universal human experiences as spirituality, birth, and death, Viola's videos communicate to a wide audience, allowing viewers to engage with the work in their own personal ways.

#### Related Ideas

narrative



## Nick Cave *Soundsuit*

2010

Metal, wood, plastic, pigments, cotton and acrylic fibers

97" x 48" x 42"

Nick Cave makes his Soundsuits from cast-off goods and clothing scavenged from thrift stores, flea markets, auctions, and art fairs. Drawing on his experience as both fiber artist and dancer, he assembles each suit with attention to both design and function. While the Soundsuits can work as freestanding sculptures, Cave intends for them to be worn. He has staged numerous events in which the Soundsuits become moveable collages of material and history, each "enacted" by a performer who takes on its unique character. In its fusion of fiber textile art, performance, and found objects, Cave's *Soundsuit* has been described as lavish and shamanistic. Indeed, it is a larger-than-life mash-up of African tribal ceremonial dress, carnival costumes, and hand-made elements that carries and conveys the (absent) wearer's physical energy.

### Related Ideas

**appropriation**  
**repurposing**

### Related Themes

**Identity**



## Aaron Curry and Richard Hawkins *Untitled [sculpture]*

2011

Ink and silkscreen on cardboard, acrylic on wood

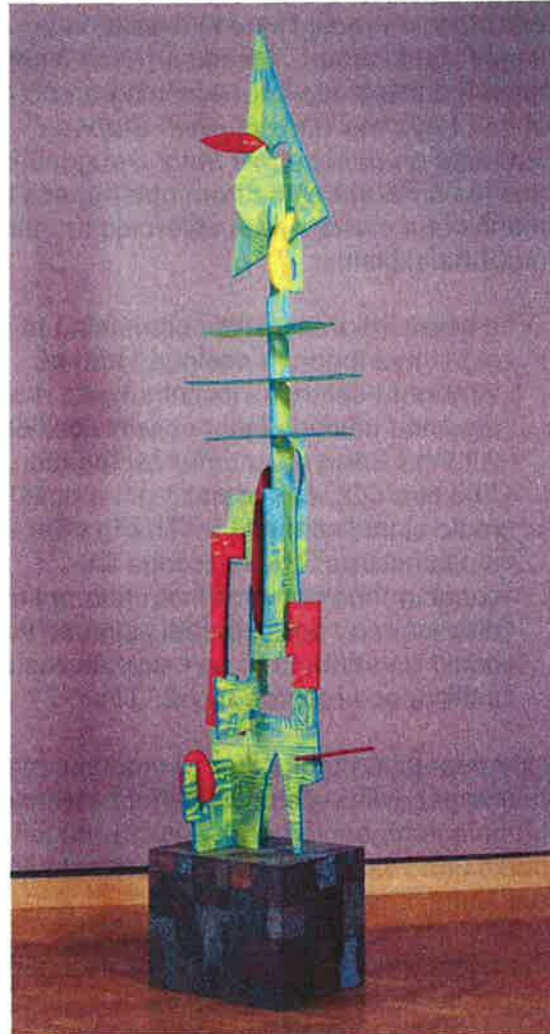
105" x 49" x 26 1/2"

During the late 1990's, Aaron Curry studied with Richard Hawkins at Art Center. Coming back together in a temporary collaboration, their respective mash-up of avant-garde, pop, and **kitsch** sensibilities resulted in an outstanding body of work. *Untitled* is one of the best selections from this recent series of collaborative installations. Exploding with energy and color, this installation by Curry and Hawkins can hardly be contained. The fluorescent, biomorphic sculpture at its center seems to have bounced off the walls, taking three-dimensional form against its cartoon backdrop. Like a piece of public sculpture, it boldly declares its presence, letting us know that contemporary art is alive and well.

A true collaboration between two maverick spirits, this work creates its own context by incorporating the walls in the corner of a room. As it is installed, *Untitled* has the theatricality of an artist's studio and the spontaneity of a booth at an international art fair. In an age of appropriation, image surfing, and recycling, their installations could not be more contemporary.

### Related Ideas

**kitsch**



## Jennifer Steinkamp

### *6EQUJ5*

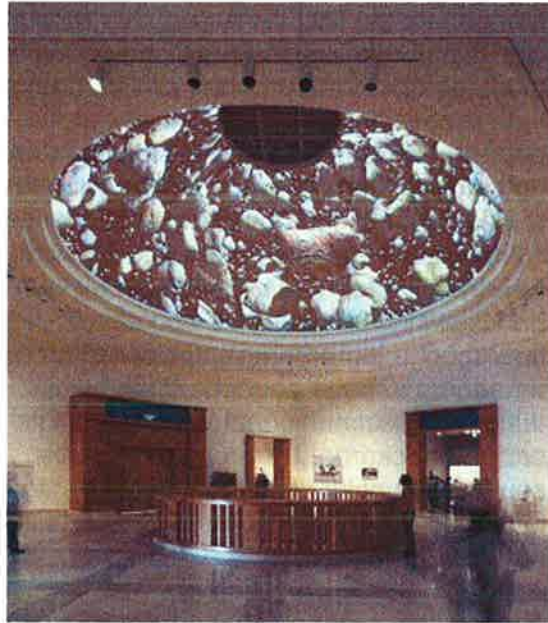
2012-13

Digital projection

Dimensions variable

*6QUEJ5* is a recent video installation by Jennifer Steinkamp. Steinkamp was inspired to create this piece after watching an episode of *Into the Universe with Stephen Hawking* on *panspermia theory*, suggesting that life on Earth came from outer space by means of a collision with asteroids or meteors. She explains:

It seems there is a little something missing in this theory. I decided to make intelligent asteroids inscribed with drawings and paintings that possibly collided with the Earth as another explanation. The title *6QUEJ5* comes from a possible radio signal scanned by The Big Ear radio telescope. The telescope was scanning the heavens in an attempt to discover any possible radio signals that could be attributed to an extra-terrestrial intelligence recorded by SETI in 1974. This is the only signal SETI has discovered.



Documentation of the piece in motion can be seen [here](#). The result is a window into outer space with a colorful field of asteroids suspended on screen, floating around and bumping into each other. Viewers are left wondering who decorated these celestial bodies and whether or not the asteroid field is an extraterrestrial experiment or if they are simply floating aimlessly.

On another note, Steinkamp has misspelled the radio recording known as the Wow! signal. Its correct spelling is 6EQUJ5. She's also mistaken the year of discovery, which was in 1977 — not 1974. While the devil is in the details, *6QUEJ5* remains an intriguing artistic interpretation of a scientific theory that demands imagination and curiosity about human existence.



## SECTION FOUR: TIME AND MEMORY

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### Overview

The theme of Time and Memory in the work of contemporary artists manifests itself in a variety of ways. For many, it is a conceptual or expressive focus of their art, much like the other themes examined in this booklet. For others, time (and sometimes memory) can function as a medium with which an artist works, a characteristic element of the art itself. Such “four-dimensional” art is not uniquely contemporary, but artists today emphasize time as a distinct medium more than artists of earlier eras. Indeed, certain contemporary art forms, such as video, film, and performance art, are inherently time-based.

Traditionally, artists often dealt with ideas of time and memory in narrative ways, telling stories about the past through the imagery of their art. *History painting* describes a kind of subject matter esteemed in European art between about the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which illustrated certain great events from the past. Nicolas Poussin’s *The Death of Germanicus* (right), in the collection of the MIA, is a perfect example of this genre. While such artwork undoubtedly idealized the events it portrayed, it was popular because of how it kept these stories alive, along with the virtues they impart.



Recounting stories of the past is evident in the art of non-European cultures, too. In the MIA’s *Winter Count*, by an unknown Lakota artist (right), we see a similar interest in interest in memory and stories of the past, told in a very different artistic idiom.



Though narratives are common in the work of contemporary artists, such as Thomas Demand’s *Junior Suite* and Tianbing Li’s *Me and My Brother with the Tree*

(see *Selected Contemporary Exemplars in the MIA*, below), many artists explore the theme of Time and Memory in non-narrative ways, or ways in which narrative is less explicit. Often in contemporary art, the appropriation of imagery from the past, and especially from the history of art, is a way that artists incorporate an element of time into their work. Christian Boltanski's *Monuments (Installation Salle Petriere)* is an example of a work that appropriates images from the past.

## **Selected Contemporary Exemplars in the MIA**

The following pages contain detailed descriptions of works in the museum's collection that explore the theme of Time and Memory. They are listed in chronological order. Where a work also explores another theme or themes, it is cross-referenced to that section of this guide.

Key concepts in the study of contemporary art that are central to certain works are listed under the subheading "Related Ideas." Definitions of these concepts may be found in the Glossary.

## Christian Boltanski

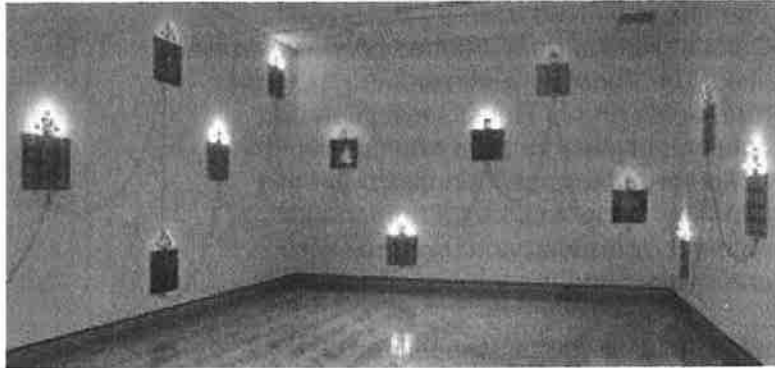
### *Monuments (Installation Salle Petriere)*

1986

Photographs, electric lights and wiring (22 elements)

Dimensions variable

Christian Boltanski was born in Paris in 1944 to a Jewish father of Ukrainian heritage and a Corsican mother. Boltanski's dramatic installations visually conjure the twilight place in memory between past and present. The artist incorporates photographs in some fashion into most of his works, masterfully capturing



the inconsistency of recollection. By its very nature, a photograph implies selection and priority: it is one moment crystallized from limitless possibilities. *Monuments* features photographic portraits of a group of young French children whom Boltanski often memorialized, referring to them collectively as "The Children of Dijon." All we know of these children is that the artist was personally interested in them as they grew up in the 1970s. Boltanski admits the images flirt with death because the children in them are "now dead, not really dead, but the images of them were no longer true," since they have grown into adulthood. "The children in the photos," he observed, "no longer existed, so I decided to make a monument to the glory of childhood that has now passed."

#### Related Ideas

**appropriation**

#### Related Themes

**Identity**

## Damien Hirst

### *The Death of Saint John*

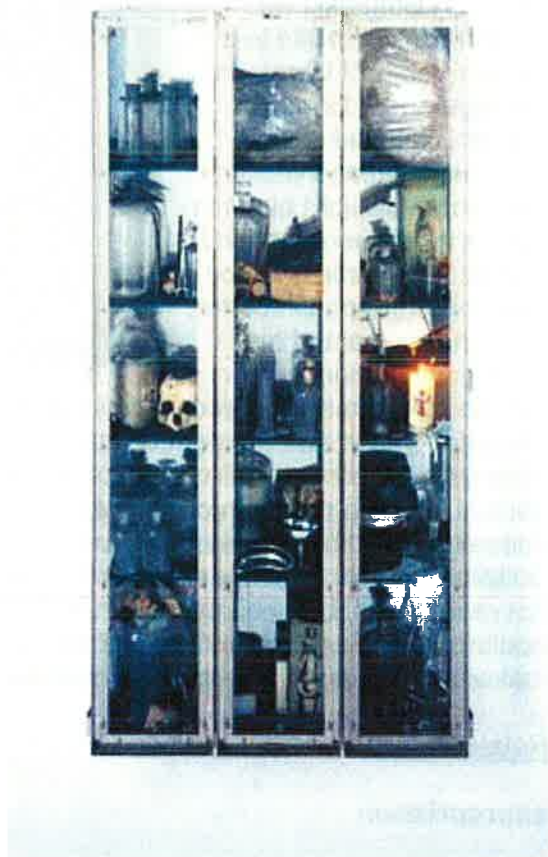
2002-03

Nickel-plated stainless steel and glass cabinet with medical glassware and various objects

70 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" x 36 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" x 10 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub>"

The mirror-backed case by British artist Damien Hirst is from a series of twelve works titled *The Apostles*. Each work in the series represents one of Christ's disciples and contains objects that are reminders of the temporary nature of life on earth. In this altar-like modernist box, a human skull, smoked cigarettes, and a burned-down candle speak to the impermanence of life.

It also includes items associated with St. John the Evangelist—a small ceramic eagle and chalice—that are emblematic of the disciple's relationship with Jesus. A 15<sup>th</sup>-century print by Albrecht Glockendon, *Christ on the Cross with Mary, Saint John, and Two Angels*, depicts the waning hours of the Crucifixion, where only Mary and St. John remain with Jesus. Similar scenes were wildly influential in the Middle Ages, urgent reminders that Christ died for Man's sins. To make the message more vivid to his viewers, the artist set the scene against the backdrop of a German city, probably Marienberg. Likewise, Hirst's shiny metal cabinet provides a cool 21<sup>st</sup>-century container for the collection of relics within.



#### Related Ideas

**appropriation**

## Li Tianbing

### *Me and My Brother with the Tree*

2008

Oil on canvas

78 ¾" x 118 ⅛"

Born in 1974 in Guilin, China, Li Tianbing studied at the Institute of International Relations in Beijing and the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. The son of a soldier in the Chinese army, Li Tianbing explores in his work the ideas of memory, personal history, and identity from the perspective of a Chinese artist trained in the West.



In semi-autobiographical paintings such as *Me and My Brother with The Tree*, Li Tianbing depicts events from his childhood in post-Cultural Revolution China. In fact, Li Tianbing was an only child. The imaginary brother featured in this and other works speaks to the loneliness of growing up without siblings, and is a poignant commentary on China's one-child only policy.

In looking to the past, however, Li Tianbing's work also explores Chinese culture as it has evolved to the present day. The contrasting themes of East and West, communism and capitalism, traditional culture and contemporary consumerism lie at the heart of Li Tianbing's paintings.

#### Related Ideas

**globalization**  
**identity politics**  
**narrative**

#### Related Themes

**Identity**

## Thomas Demand

### *Junior Suite*

2012

Diasec mounted C-print

55 ¼" x 45 ¼" x 1 ⅜"

Thomas Demand was born in 1964 in Munich, Germany, where he grew up surrounded by art. He has been called an illusionist of the real, and is known for making photographs of three-dimensional models that look like real images of rooms and other spaces. The artist chooses his subjects for their social and political associations and provocation and meaning.

Based on media photographs of Whitney Houston's last meal, which were published shortly after her death, *Junior Suite*, depicts a half-finished meal served on a table tray in a hotel room. If you look closely, you can see that the entire image has been fabricated; from the hotel furniture to the purple flowers, Demand painstakingly constructed everything you see from colored paper.



The work, with its strange stillness of a recently vacated space, suggests the artistic genre of *memento mori*. The *mis-en-scene* invites the viewer to ponder the larger context and reality being portrayed: the last meal of a troubled celebrity, haunted by an addiction to drugs, who is leaving behind a mercurial, unfinished life and a young daughter in the next suite.

This image of Houston's "last supper" has become an iconic image of her death, even without picturing Houston herself. The viewer is granted the illusion of intimacy with Houston and the situation of her death through a morbid invasion of privacy. In an interview with the *New York Times* in April 2012, Demand commented on his shock at the existence of such an image in the media: "The proliferation of that kind of image at the time when she was not even in the coffin amazed me. It amazed me that it would ever have been released." The presence of such a photograph begs the question "is nothing sacred?"

#### Related Ideas

**narrative**

**simulacrum**



## Vik Muniz

### *Verso (Rembrandt, Lucretia)*

2012

Mixed media

60 3/4" x 52" x 4 5/8"

Vik Muniz was born in 1961 in São Paulo, Brazil, and currently lives in New York City. A sculptor in his early years, Muniz became interested with the photographic representations of his work, and eventually turned to photography as his primary artistic medium. Relying on mundane objects such as sugar, thread, chocolate syrup, and refuse, Muniz creates imagery that is challenging and ironic, and as likely to be culled from pop culture as from the history of art.

In *Verso (Rembrandt, Lucretia)*, Muniz turns to art history in creating a **simulacrum** of one of the MIA's signature pieces, Rembrandt van Rijn's painting *Lucretia* (see image, right). But Muniz' copy of the work is of the back of the frame and canvas, a side never seen by museum patrons. As such, the work challenges the notion of traditional aesthetics, as represented by Rembrandt's painting, with the modernist abstraction of the backside of the work. Likewise, Muniz provokes the viewer's curiosity in wondering what lies on the reverse of his piece, and raises the question of whether Rembrandt's work might fairly be called a "verso" of Muniz'.



#### Related Ideas

**simulacrum**

## GLOSSARY

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### **appropriation**

The borrowing or copying of a preexisting object or image, for incorporation into or as the basis for a new work of art. Sometimes referred to as “sampling” (especially in music) or “remixing.” See also, **authorship, repurposing, simulacrum.**

### **authorship**

The concept underlying the question of who (or what) is the creator of a work of art. Much contemporary art raises questions of authorship, as did some modernist works. See also, **appropriation.**

### **diaspora**

The migration and displacement of peoples from their homeland, especially in an involuntary way. The impact and consequences of diaspora on cultural identity has been a common theme in the work of artists from diaspora communities. See also, **postcolonialism.**

### **diversity**

A broad term, referring to a multitude of social groups that differ with regard to one or more identifying traits, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical abilities, socioeconomic class, or other characteristics.

### **globalization**

The worldwide expansion of contemporary art exhibitions and markets, beginning in about 1989. Globalization has resulted in the participation within the mainstream art world of artists from cultures previously unrecognized, or whose art was valued mostly for ethnographic reasons. See also, **postcolonialism.**

### **hybridity**

The blending of identities among individuals or groups who were formerly distinct. Hybridity may involve one group assuming more of the identity of the other than the other way around. Such one-sidedness is often a result of one culture imposing its values and practices on another, as with cases of colonialism. See also, **diversity, identity politics, postcolonialism.**

**identity politics**

A political stance that focuses on the interests and views of distinct social groups, with the intention of raising social awareness and effecting change. Contemporary art is often politically charged around issues of identity with regard to culture, gender, sexual orientation, or other forms of social identification. See also, **diversity**, **hybridity**.

**irony, ironic**

The expression of an idea in art by using imagery that typically signifies the opposite meaning, often for humorous or emphatic effect. Many modernist and post-modernist artists have used irony in their work, as in Pop Art, where imagery from popular media was appropriated for serious and challenging art. See also, **kitsch**.

**kitsch**

A kind of image or design that has mass appeal, often with forced sentimentality, melodrama, or aesthetic gaudiness. Kitsch imagery is often associated with “low-brow” art, although many contemporary artists use kitsch in an ironic manner. See also, **irony**.

**narrative**

A characteristic of art that tells a story or otherwise communicates how some event progresses over time. Narratives are associated closely with traditional art in many cultures, but some contemporary artists also employ narratives in their work.

**pluralism**

A common term that designates the acceptance in art of multiple aesthetics, media, subject matter, purposes, and other characteristics, and that challenges traditional notions of beauty, quality, originality, and correctness. Pluralism is a central characteristic of contemporary art.

**postcolonialism**

A school of thought that examines the cultural legacies of colonialism, and how the history and identity of colonized peoples has been impacted by outside control and exploitation. Postcolonialism advocates the study of art from diverse cultures on its own terms rather than in relation to the art of the Western tradition. See also, **globalization**, **diaspora**.

**repurposing**

The use or conversion of materials for a purpose other than their intended use. Many contemporary artists use repurposed materials as a medium for their art. Typically, repurposed objects have fulfilled their original function, and are not simply new materials obtained for making art. Repurposing often involves some degree of **appropriation**.

**simulacrum**

An image or representation that highly mimics the appearance of another thing, though usually lacking some of the qualities of the original. More than just a copy of something, a simulacrum often establishes a new kind of truth in itself. The term “hyperreal” is sometimes used to describe the state created by simulacra. See also, **appropriation**.

**subject matter**

In art, a term that usually refers to the outwardly recognizable objects or imagery in a work. Common generic subject matter includes still life, the human figure, portraiture, landscapes, and architecture. Purely abstract or nonobjective art does not have recognizable subject matter. See also, **theme**.

**theme**

The underlying meaning or focus of a work of art, especially when described in broad terms. An artist may explore a particular theme through a work's **subject matter**, medium, style, artistic approach or strategy, process, context, or by other means. A theme is sometimes described as the "content" of a work, although the latter term is usually more specific and detailed.

## **KEY HISTORICAL EVENTS 1989-PRESENT**

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### **1989**

- Berlin Wall falls—symbolic ending of the Cold War
- Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing
- Exxon Valdez tanker spills 11 million gallons of oil in Prince William Sound, Alaska
- First commercial email communication
- U.S. Congress prohibits National Endowment for the Arts' funding for artwork that is declared obscene

### **1990**

- The Federal Republic of Germany is created from the former East Germany and West Germany
- Collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
- Nelson Mandela is released from prison after 27 years

### **1991**

- Rodney King beating instigates a national debate on police prejudice
- South Africa repeals apartheid laws
- Anita Hill accuses Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment
- Slovenia and Croatia separate from Yugoslavia, provoking civil war

### **1992**

- Democrat Bill Clinton is elected U.S. President
- Officers charged in the Rodney King beating are acquitted, provoking riots in Los Angeles
- The term "virtual reality" is coined by the futurist Jaron Lanier



## **1993**

- U.S. Holocaust Museum opens in Washington, D.C.
- World Trade Center in New York City is bombed by terrorists
- U.S. agents storm the Branch Davidian cult complex in Waco, Texas
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## **1994**

- Andy Warhol Museum opens in Pittsburgh
- O.J. Simpson is charged with the murders of his wife and a former acquaintance
- Nelson Mandela is elected president of South Africa

## **1995**

- The AIDS virus affects over 1 million people worldwide
- The Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City is bombed by domestic terrorists
- The Million Man March draws 400,000 African American men to Washington, D.C.
- Genocide of thousands of Hutu refugees by Tutsi militia in Rwanda

## **1996**

- AIDS Memorial Quilt displayed in Washington, D.C.
- U.S. President Bill Clinton elected for second term

## **1997**

- Princess Diana killed in automobile accident in France
- Announcement of the first successful cloning of a sheep, named "Dolly"
- Ellen DeGeneres becomes the first openly gay actor in a prime time series

## **1998**

- Architect Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum opens in Bilbao, Spain
- U.S. President Bill Clinton is impeached on charges of obstruction and perjury relating to his involvement with intern Monica Lewinsky
- Euro currency introduced by the European Union

## **1999**

- Y2K scare provokes concerns about failure of computer systems with the turning of the millennium
- Shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado results in the death of 13 students and teachers

## 2000

- The Tate Modern opens in London
- Scientists establish the human DNA sequence
- World population tops six billion people
- Republican George W. Bush is named U.S. President after a contentious election against Democrat Al Gore

## 2001

- Al Qaeda terrorists destroy the World Trade Center in New York City and attack the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.
- Enron scandal results in corporation filing bankruptcy

## 2002

- Former President Jimmy Carter awarded the Nobel Peace Prize
- The number of AIDS cases worldwide tops 42 million

## 2003

- *American Idol* and *Survivor* are among the top American “reality-TV” shows
- Space shuttle Columbia is destroyed while reentering the Earth’s atmosphere, killing seven aboard
- U.S. initiates air strikes against Iraq
- Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein is captured by the U.S. military

## 2004

- Demonstrations in Haiti call for the overthrow of President Jean Bertrand Aristide
- Terrorists bomb train stations in Madrid, killing 190 people
- Chechen separatists seize a Russian school killing 320 people, many of them children
- Tsunami in Indonesia kills over 230,000 people in fourteen countries

## 2005

- Pope John Paul II dies, and papacy passes to Benedict XVI
- U.S. President George W. Bush is elected for second term
- Hurricane Katrina strikes New Orleans, becoming one of the deadliest and most costly natural disasters in U.S. history
- Irish Republican Army (IRA) revokes use of violence in seeking a united Ireland

## 2006

- World's population reaches 6.5 billion people
- "Global warming" becomes a household term as former vice-president Al Gore releases his movie *An Inconvenient Truth*
- The social network site Twitter is launched

## 2007

- Multinational panel of scientists report that climate change is unequivocally caused by humans
- First successful use of human skin cells to create embryonic stem cells
- Shooter at Virginia Tech University kills more than thirty people during rampage
- Use of steroids in professional baseball gains widespread attention with publication of *The Mitchell Report*

## 2008

- Summer Olympic games are held in Beijing, China
- International stock markets plummet following news of U.S. recession
- Earthquake in Sichuan province, China kills over 68,000 people
- Senator Barack Obama is elected first African American President of the U.S.

## 2009

- Pop star Michael Jackson is found dead
- Director James Cameron's film *Avatar* becomes highest grossing movie of all time
- General Motors and Chrysler corporations file for bankruptcy in midst of U.S. recession

## 2010

- Earthquake in Haiti kills over 85,000 people
- British Petroleum oil rig spills 4.9 million gallons into the Gulf of Mexico, producing largest oil spill in history
- U.S. Congress passes the Affordable Care Act, providing sweeping health care reform for the nation

## 2011

- World's population reaches 7 billion people
- Artist Ai Wei Wei is arrested in China
- The Arab Spring, a series of uprisings in the Middle East, provokes changes in Egyptian, Tunisian, and Libyan regimes
- U.S. Special Forces find and kill Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin-Laden in Pakistan
- Earthquake and tsunami in Japan kills 15,000 people and causes meltdown of

Fukushima nuclear reactor

**2012**

- U.S. President Barack Obama elected for second term
- NASA lands the Mars Curiosity rover on the Red Planet
- Civil war continues in Syria in aftermath of the Arab Spring
- Gunman kills twenty children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut

