# Unit 5: (one week) Identity and Marginalization

### From the Margins to the Mainstream

At the end of this unit, students will be able to:

1. Identify artists and describe qualities associated with Feminist and Black art: 1,2,4,5, GE: 1,4,6,7, Core Skills: A, D, E
2. Define core concepts associated with these movements and artists Course Goals: 1,2,4 GE: 1,4,6,7, Core Skills: A, D, E
3. Question the theory and philosophy behind the movement, with emphasis on Sol Lewitt and Robert Smithson. Course Goals: 2,3,4,5,6 GE: 1,4,6,7,9 Core Skills: A, B, C, E, F, G

### Artists covered:

* Linda Benglis
* Sophie Calle
* Judy Chicago
* Guerrilla Girls
* Jenny Holzer
* Barbara Kruger
* Sarah Lucas
* Ana Mendieta
* Carolee Schneemann
* Nancy Spero

### Other artists:

* Marina Abramovic
* Tracy Emin
* Niki De Saint Phalle
* Miriam Schapiro
* Sue Williams
* Hannah Wilke
* Bill Traylor
* Quilts from Gee's Bend
* Jacob Lawrence
* Romare Bearden
* Kerry James Marshall
* David Hammons
* Chris Ofili
* Chakaia Booker
* Betye Saar
* Faith Ringgold
* Michael Ray Charles
* Renee Cox
* Fred Wilson
* Robert Colescott
* Kara Walker
* Kehinde Wiley
* Yinka Shonibare

Today, we look at women artists. And not just artists who are women, but women who make art because they are women. We’ve actually seen women artists already, but less than a quarter of the artists we’ve seen so far happen to be women. The artists we see today are not so happy about a woman’s marginalized role in society. They are not content to play the game against the odds and hope that they will be welcomed into a man’s world. So, how do they go about trying to change the game?

We look today at several strategies, and methods, of trying to play outside the rules. Unlike many of the previous lectures, these artists do not constitute a particular style, or chronology, as much as they all are interested in a particular objective. They want to make sure that women are given their just place in the art world, and the world in general. To do this, they employ several strategies, and today we try to loosely group these artists not by time or style, but by common strategy.

First, we look at women taking on stereotypically male roles in order to construct their artistic identity. So far we have been seeing women artists doing just that, trying to fit in and play a man’s game according to man’s rules. Today though, these artist’s make the gender role apparent, and discomforting. Niki de Saint Phalle, after playing the role of the beautiful model, the object to adore, changes course and begins shooting guns at artworks in a destructive act of creativity. Taking on male aggression and turning it into a form of self-therapy that violates the canvas, she says “In 1961 I shot at: Daddy, all the men, small men, tall men, important men, fat men, men, my brother, society, church, school, my family, my mother, all the men, Daddy, myself, men again.” She then turns to the most traditional female role, that of the mother, in her Nana series. Linda Benglis, as much as her artwork fits what is expected of a 1970’s process artist, posts humorously obscene ads in Artforum that challenge our ideas of both masculinity and femininity.

Next we look at artists who don’t just try to play the game, but actually tell the men in charge that they aren’t invited to the party. We start with Womanhouse by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago. Here, women artists were invited to create installations in a home where men were not allowed to tread, at least until after the opening day. This questioned whether the course of art so far, one determined by men and made by men, even deserved the attention of women, who could create their own, parallel history.

At this point, we start to examine the role of questioning authority. Nancy Spero challenges the powers that be, not just in terms of woman’s issues, as in pieces like Torture of Women, but governmental roles in general in the oppression of the masses. And we look at the Guerilla Girls, anonymous women artists, who create political pieces that examine the horrifying fact that the artworld, of all places, is even more backwards and resistant to women’s rights than mainstream America.

In the next few sections we look at the concept of power, and where power resides. We start with the body as a point of power, and women who look to use their bodies to exhibit this power. This is tricky territory, as women’s bodies are traditionally subject to objectification, and to seduce with an image of one’s body quickly plays into this. So how do they try to overcome this obstacle? Carolee Schneeman, starts with videotaped performances of bodies writhing in piles of meat, her body covered with sculptural materials as if she were herself a canvas. Then, in her most famous work, pulls a scroll from her vagina that confronts a film critic who has told her the messy feminine and emotional esthetic of her films makes them unwatchable. Hanna Wilke tries through various means to objectify herself and the female body while adding aggressive elements like guns, prosthetic wounds, and maladies to distance the viewer and bring humanity back to the body. She posses in pinup fashion covered with little sexual organs made of chewing gum attached all over her body and sais ““I chose gum because it’s the perfect metaphor for the American woman – chew her up, get what you want out of her, throw her out and pop in a new piece,.” When she herself succumbs to lymphoma at the age of 53, she documents her deterioration and forces the viewer to see women not just as objects but also as human.

As much as the body is a place of power, so is the voice, and this is explored by artists such as Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer. Kruger uses the language to consumer advertisements and cold war propaganda to lambaste the viewer for their complicity in male power. Jenny Holzer explores many voices through her truisms, and finds various artistic media with which to display these thoughts. Her piece Detained, from 2008, displays “redacted” documents obtained through the freedom of information act. These documents detail the controversial treatment of prisoners in Guatanamo. Throughout the documents, text has been blacked out before the report was made public, showing that we still live in world which fears the power of the voice.

Finally we look at the gaze as a source of power. Just by looking, by confronting the viewer, the artists gains power. We see this today throughout this lecture, when photographs of artists depict themselves looking straight back at us. Sophie Calle is one example of an artist who takes this to an extreme, as she becomes the voyeur, following people unsuspecting through the streets, or photographing their possessions when they are out of their hotel rooms. Sue Williams shows us that knowing what to look for is as important as the looking. Her seemingly innocent abstract paintings take on a new level of meaning once we know that within the gestures are hidden sexual organs and exploded body parts, challenging notions of sexuality and violence.

### After this class you should be able to

#### Define the following:

* feminism
* the gaze
* hegemony

#### Recognize artwork by the following artists:

#### Answer the following:

What was *Womanhouse*? What is *The Dinner Party*?

Which artist compiled lists of text that she called *Truisms*?

Which of these artist's work also fits into other movements that we have studied?

### External Links for further reading:

A good post on [Niki de Saint Phalle](http://slog.thestranger.com/2008/01/la_femme_niki) [Judy Chicago's website](http://www.judychicago.com/) [The Dinner Party](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/home.php) at the Brooklyn Museum [Nancy Spero's Obituary](http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/oct/23/obituary-nancy-spero) in The Guardian Off topic -- [Young Women Set Vocal Patterns](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/28/science/young-women-often-trendsetters-in-vocal-patterns.html)

As we saw in our lecture on Feminism, Identity politics starts to play an increasingly important role in contemporary art starting in the 1960s and 1970s. Gone are the days when we can believe art can address a Universal Truth perceived equally by all humanity. Instead, we see artwork exploring a personal or subjective experience. African Americans own one such collective experience that has produced a wealth of contemporary art, and to a larger extent, this is mirrored throughout the African diaspora.

**Presence:** Before it even became of interest to the contemporary artworld, the African American community had their own vibrant artistic culture. We begin by examining the work of Artists such as Bill Traylor, who was born a slave and died a free man. Untrained formally, his work continues to have a profoundly contemporary feel. We also look at the quilts produced by the community in Gee’s Bend, an artistic tradition that is passed from mother to daughter. Artists and arts communities such as these, who have always been present, have surfaced and become known to the larger arts community in recent years.

**Present:** Some artists who were very well versed in the contemporary art scene in the forties and fifties found inspiration both from modern artistic influences as well as from their personal cultural veiwpoint. Two such artists are Jacob Lawrence and Romare Beardon. They sought to present, in a sincere and straight-forward manner, black history and culture through narrative painting.

**Represent:** Other artists choose to create archetypes, or figures who stand-in to represent a larger experience, such as Kerry James Marshall’s Lost Boys, who represent the African American youth who’s childhoods have been lost in incarceration. Other artists produce objects which serve to validate the experience and pride within the community, such as David Hammonds flag for the U.N.I.A., Chakaia Booker’s abstract process art sculptures that also reference skin tones and African masks, or Chris Ofili’s large-scale paintings that immerse black pop references in an intricate web of colorful patterns.

**Re-present:** Another strategy for some artists is to directly confront racism and inequality by taking images from culture, re-contextualizing them, and displaying them in such a way as to make the history of oppression undeniable. This is what we see with pieces like The Liberation of Aunt Jemima by Betye Saar, or the Flag for the Moon by Faith Ringgold. Fred Wilson created meaning through juxtaposition in his series Mining the Museum, where historical objects are placed together to trace the history of racism in this country.

**Re-invent:** Finally we look at artists who completely reinvent history, by recombining factual and fictitious elements, and in the process produce new contexts within which we can examine our own culture. Kara Walker’s deeply psychological cutouts take archetypes from the Antebellum South and literally turn them on their ends. Kehinde Wiley infuses classical portraiture with a hip hop style in a nouveau riche time-warp redaction. Yinka Shonibare takes classical European clothing styles and represents them in colorful patterning. In so doing he traces what we think of as traditional African fabrics and shows their complicated history, as Indonesian textiles that were copied by the Dutch, made profitable by the English in sales to Africa, which in turn brought the slave trade to the Americas and increased the production of the cotton with which these fabrics were made.

### After this class you should be able to

#### Define the following:

* racial identity
* identity politics
* curator
* stereotype

#### Answer the following:

* Explain the complicated history of the textiles found in Yinka Shonibare’s work. How are they tied into the history of slavery?
* How do artists use stereotypes in their art as a way to confront racism?
* What cultural reference is being made by Kerry James Marshall by calling his series “Lost Boys”?

#### Recognize artwork by the following artists:

### External Links for further reading:

More about [Bill Traylor](http://www.high.org/Art/Exhibitions/Bill-Traylor-Exhibition.aspx) [The Gee's Bend Foundation](http://www.quiltsofgeesbend.com/) interview with [Kerry James Marshall](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug01/westkaemper/callaloo/marshall.html) re:making history David Spalding interviews [Fred Wilson](http://www.artpapers.org/feature_articles/feature2_2003_0102.htm) [Kehinde Wiley](http://www.kehindewiley.com/) website [Yinka Shonibare](http://www.yinkashonibarembe.com/) website

slides|/documents/art125/slides-race.pdf,slidelist|/documents/art125/slidelist-race.html

* Linda Benglis did not:

1. pose nude in Artforum.
2. make process art sculptures.
3. work with twine and found objects.
4. experiment with new materials.

* Carolee Schneemann uses her body:

1. To create sexual arousal as Art.
2. As a weapon.
3. In the way traditional artists used paint and canvas.
4. To push herself to physical limits.

* We studied the Cuban artists Ana Mendieta in Feminism, but she could fit into other categories as well. Which of the following is not a part of her work:

1. photography
2. racial identity
3. pop art
4. earth art

* Guessing if a sentence was one of Jenny Holzer’s truisms would be hard because:

1. They are esoteric and intentionally hard to remember
2. She writes in multiple voices to express multiple opinions
3. They flash by on an LCD screen
4. Barbara Kruger stole her ideas

* Jenny Holzer’s truisms have been used to create artwork

1. on T-shirts
2. on the time square LED screen and indoor LED screen installations
3. on marble benches
4. all of the above

* Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro’s “Womanhouse” was not:

1. a domestic setting turned into a space to view art.
2. a place where woman were allowed to make art and men could not enter.
3. a large table setting showing the importance of women in history.
4. a group show of woman artists.

* Artists of the second half of the twentieth century explored using scale, or size, as a means of making work unlike anything in the traditional visual arts. Which of these four artists did not use scale in this way:

1. Jackson Pollock
2. James Turrell
3. Judy Chicago
4. Bill Traylor

* Kerry James Marshall’s “Lost Boys” series:

1. Personifies the Sudanese “Lost Boys” and examines the fate of child warriors in a series of individual portraits.
2. Takes the “Lost Boys” of Peter Pan who are unwilling to grow up, and uses this as a metaphor to examine inner city youth who lack the resources to grow up.
3. Examines the “Lost Generation” in Argentina, in portraits of political prisoners who suffered harsher fates because they were black.
4. Examines the fate of African American youth who are lost in the system when they put all their hopes into becoming professional athletes.

* How do Betye Saar and Fred Wilson use African American stereotypes differently in their work:

1. Saar combines found objects together to form new sculptures, while Wilson arranges museum collections to create new contexts.
2. Saar point out the racism in the images, while Wilson uses them to celebrate diversity among African Americans.
3. Saar photographs her arrangements to make connections, while Wilson uses sculpture.
4. Saar is interested in issues of femininity in the black community, while Wilson is interested in issues of labor.

* Explain the complicated history of the textiles found in Yinka Shonibare’s work. How are they tied into the history of slavery?

1. By using textiles produced in Africa to remake colonial costumes, Shonibare alters the past and recasts Europeans as slaves.
2. The textiles he uses were produced in England but sold in Africa in exchange for slaves, so they exemplify the complicated economics of international slavery.
3. The cloth he uses is the kind worn by slaves in the new world, but it became thought of as African cloth.
4. They are Asian textile designs but produced by American slaves with American cotton.

* [re:making history](http://www.artpapers.org/feature_articles/feature2_2003_0102.htm) *David Spalding interviews Fred Wilson*
* [Oral History Archives](http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-robert-colescott-11502)*Interview with Robert Colescott*