additional explanation, unfinished:

## Feminism

Because we are covering so many artists this week, I am not assigning an outside reading. Instead I want to use this time to look at some of the strategies that are used by artists when confronting identity politics. 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.

### If you can't beat him, join him

Women artists were often forced to take 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. Feminist artist’s however learned to make the gender role apparent, and discomforting.

Niki de Saint Phalle, Shooting piece, 1960s

Niki de Saint Phalle, Nanas, 1974

**Niki de Saint Phalle**, after playing the role of the beautiful model, the object to adore, changed course and began 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.

### A space of her own

There were also artists who didn’t just try to play the game, but actually tell the men in charge that they aren’t invited to the party. This perhaps starts 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. Without having to appeal to the artistic trends of the time, they instead made works for an audience of woman. 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.

### Questioning Authority

At this point, we can start to examine the role of questioning authority in general. **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 the **Guerilla Girls**, anonymous women artists, created 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.

### The body as power

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.

### The voice as power

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.

### The gaze as power

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.

## Black Identity

Just like 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. Starting in the 60's, we see a growing presence of African Americans who tackle issues of race in their work.

### Presence

Before it even became of interest to the contemporary artworld, the African American community had their own vibrant artistic culture, with 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. Also the quilts produced within the community show extraordinary aesthetic sophistication, such as those made 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

There are also 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.