

# The Age of Collage

## Contemporary Collage in Modern Art

Foreword by Silke Krohn

MARTHA ROSLER  
1. THE GREY DRAPE  
1988  
New York City  
GALFRE CHIEN HUANG

Collages are part of our daily lives. We are flooded by images every day. Some touch us only briefly; others are burned into our memory. In our thoughts and dreams we put them together. We work steadily and constantly with copy and paste, and the word collage sometimes has a negative connotation, when something supposedly new and self-produced turns out to be a compilation of the intellectual property of others.

A collage can, however, also be an homage and reference; for example, when clips from films are included in music videos. Thus the Beastie Boys scattered scenes from cop shows of the 1970s, such as *The Streets of San Francisco*, *Baretta*, and *Starsky and Hutch*, into the video for their 1994 song "Sabotage". A collage can also be a provocation, as campaign posters demonstrate over and over, for example. Whereas the latter are subtle, apt quotations, posters from the punk scene usually work with clear contrasts. A collage need not always consist of quotations; when advertisements or music videos work with quick cuts the result is also a collage. And the term sampling has long since been used in ordinary language for much more than the remixing of sounds. Sampling and mixing have become part of our everyday culture, not least because of the technical possibilities they offer today. Advertising agencies use mood boards to organize their ideas, designing their campaigns by combining images and sequences from

films and documentaries; this supposed stealing of ideas appeals to our memory, to positive memories we are now supposed to link to the new product. The desire to create something new and different from the existing is found everywhere, also when we combine our clothes in ways not found in any fashion magazine, deliberately mixing high and low, as well as in our homes, when we combine design pieces from different eras with pieces from large chains to create our own unique style.

Collage proper has become a way that many spend their time, thanks to technological innovations. With just a few clicks, images from the seemingly limitless cornucopia of the Internet are copied, cropped, and reassembled. The ability to recombine the preexisting to create something very much one's own accounts for the special appeal of collage and is also surely why so many artists employ it. Rediscovering the long familiar and seeing what someone else has made of it is an attraction for the viewers.

Although today's collage artists also employ the possibilities of multimedia, the number of those who use scissors and glue is not declining—on the contrary, as this book demonstrates. Following on *Cutting Edges* two years later, it brings together artists who work exclusively with traditional collage. They include John Stezaker, who has not only influenced many artists with his extensive oeuvre but also contributed a great deal to research on

and exhibition of various trends in collage, and James Gallagher, for whom the expressive form of collage is inseparably linked to his life, as it is for Sergei Sviatchenko and Linder Sterling. This volume also presents recent approaches by artists such as Sarah Eisenlohr, who has only recently joined the world of collage. The 80 artists represented here are not divided into chapters, since collage means diversity. Over the past hundred years collage has undergone numerous developments, which today's artists quote, reflect, or negate. Only the principle of collage remains the same: taking apart and putting back together. The collage can separate things that belong together, unite the disparate; it can maximize artistic freedom but can also mean limitations; it can be a political pamphlet, pure fantasy, or more realistic than reality; it can be produced by chance or be the result of meticulous collecting; it can be a quotation and illusion. Breaking the boundaries of the flat glued image that art historians have imposed on it, the collage



can become a material study, a three-dimensional assemblage, or even an environment or performance.

The traditional collage is also far more than cutting and gluing. It is, above all, collecting, searching, or perhaps only finding. Since what might seem coherent or deliberately confusing to the viewer is, in many cases, the result of a long process and not that of a supposedly quick copy and paste. Many artists search for years to find the right image, and then they produce the collage in a day. Collecting can be a way of stopping time, of grasping or studying the past. The collage holds the possibility of correcting, reinventing the past and linking historical moments and people to one another.

The rich visual material here includes a wealth of inspirations that few other media of the visual arts can offer.

Artists have various strategies for getting the right images for their collages; some allow themselves to be inspired spontaneously; others seek specific motifs, colors, or forms and are regularly found at antique dealers, flea markets, and on the Internet.

Most artists limit themselves to images from a specific era or to themes. They assemble large archives, sorted by color, forms, or themes. For example, Randy Grskovic has created files with the subjects "Death," "Space," "Money," "Guns," "Architecture," and so on. He regularly fills them with visual materials he finds by chance or deliberately. Moreover, he looks on the Internet, and when he finds suitable material, he orders the original, often in large quantities in order to ensure that he can really work only with originals.

Many American artists use *National Geographic* magazine and focus on specific years.

For many artists, the search for ideal images and the process of cutting—guiding the scissors, deliberately cutting out images or fragments from their original context—is the true creative process, and it cannot be replaced by working at a computer

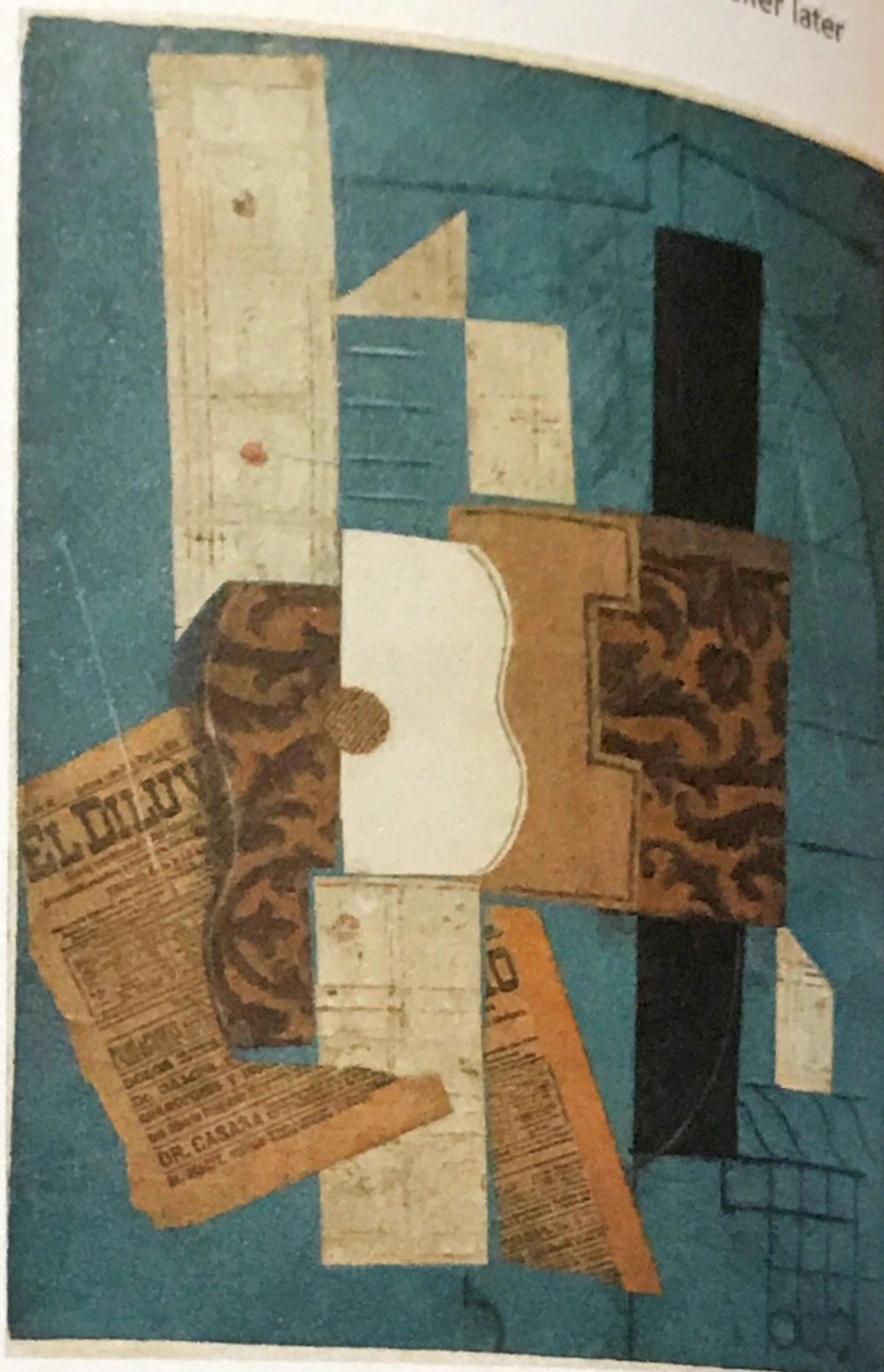
screen. Eugenia Loli, by contrast, has consciously chosen digital collage. For others, such as Eva Eun-Sil Han, the act of meditation is a necessary part of the handiwork as it allows the unconscious to flow into her collages.

An artist's cuts can be a trademark. For example, Sergei Sviatchenko intentionally makes imperfect cuts, while others seek absolute perfection in the tradition of Max Ernst, trying to maximize the illusionism. Others, such as Andrew Lundwall and Nicholas Lockyer, do not cut at all but rather tear. In a sense, that brings them close to the images, but at the same time they have to be prepared to destroy them. The actual creative process can vary considerably; sometimes several works are produced simultaneously.

Some artists work as if in a laboratory, cutting first and then sorting the images according to colors, forms, and themes, producing real experimental setups, then rejecting them or fixing them in place. Other artists begin with one image and add to it gradually and spontaneously.

As different as the approaches, motivation, choice of themes, execution, and results of today's collage artists may be, the evolution of collage over the past hundred years was diverse as well. In the following sections, the most important movements are briefly sketched in order to show that various developments have influenced the artists represented in this book but only rarely in the form of a single current and often not with the same motivation and artistic execution; rather, the collages themselves have become an archive of inspiration for today's artists.

founded that movement to destroy the illusion of apparent three-dimensional space. In their paintings they broke objects down into geometric forms and spread them out across the picture plane simultaneously. They produced countless paintings and studies in which things were dissected and reconstructed, so that with time the artists were no longer depicting the actual objects but only an idea of them. In order to offer the viewer a mnemonic association, Braque began—as his dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler later



### The Cubist Collage

Collage first emerged as an art form in Cubism. Braque and Picasso

PABLO PICASSO  
1. GUITAR, CÉRET  
(1913)

66.4 cm × 49.6 cm  
© Succession Picasso /  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2013

KURT SCHWITTERS  
2. MZ 410 IRGENDSOWAS  
(SOMETHING OR OTHER)  
(1922)

18.2 cm × 14.5 cm  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2013

CARLO CARRA:  
3. MANIFESTO FOR  
INTERVENTION  
(1914)

76 cm × 58 cm  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2013

described—to integrate into his works a deceptively real-looking nail and then numbers. Later Braque and soon Picasso were painting primarily pieces of wood that looked very real. Thus they were creating so-called *trompe*



*l'oeils* in a double sense, since the artists were painting not pieces of wood but rather very modern wallpapers with wood grain, which were themselves optical allusions. It was not long before the artists were not just painting but also cutting out and gluing; they called these first collages *papiers collés*. They mark the entry of the collage into art and inspired countless artists.

#### Kurt Schwitters: All Merz

Kurt Schwitters of Hanover played a special role. He gained prominence together with the Berlin Dadaists, but he was never a member of the group, although at times he worked closely with Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann. His Merz movement differed from that of the other Dadaists because of its abstract compositions, nor was Schwitters as political as they were. He was less interested in

subject matter than in the relationship between form and color. On occasion, however, scraps of words would end up in his collages, and he certainly attributed meaning to them: "I called my new design with, in principle, any material MERZ. That is the second syllable of Kommerz. It came from a painting in which the word MERZ was seen amid the abstract forms; it has been glued there after being cut out from an ad for the KOMMERZ- UND PRIVATBANK. Later I extended the term MERZ to include first my poetry and ultimately all of my relevant activity. Now I call myself MERZ." His works became true material studies. He deformed, smoothed out, bent, covered up, and painted over various waste products such as packaging, posters, and admission tickets; he quickly extended the boundaries of the planar collage. For him, collage was not one means of design among many; it was his life. He transformed his own home into one great Dadaist environment: his Merzbau (Merz building).

#### The Futurist Collage

Collages are a very expressive way to present a clear message with text and images—using directly the words of their time, taken from newspapers and magazines. The first to do so were the Futurists. Although the Cubists had glued pieces from newspapers and magazines onto their *papiers collés*, as a rule they were understood as *pars pro toto* for the entire magazine. By contrast, the Futurists used them to propagate their messages unequivocally. The most famous example is Carlo Carrà's word collage *Manifestazione interventista* (*Interventionist demonstration*) of 1914. Its composition sparkles with dynamics and colors; it looks as if the spiral with its

circling movements sought to hypnotize viewers by all but screaming the words "Rumori, Strada, Sports, Tot, Noi siamo la PRIMA" and at the center "ITALIA" at them. The message, shortly before Italy entered the First World War, is clear: because the Futurists wanted a radical new beginning, they wanted war.



### The Dada Collage

The protest of young artists, some of whom were scarred by this devastating world war, did indeed produce the collages that are most widely appreciated and disseminated today: the collages by the Dadaists. The term Dadaist was originally intended to not mean anything, yet it said everything. Under that label, which was intended not to mean anything and yet said everything, writers and artists gathered, first in Zurich and then primarily in Cologne, Paris, and Berlin, who opposed not only con-

typography they deliberately jumbled. Their special innovation was the photomontage: they spliced together photographs and illustrations to produce a new whole, which was usually as absurd as it was true and served propaganda purposes. One of the most famous examples is Hannah Höch's *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauch-kulturepoche Deutschlands* (*Cut with the kitchen knife Dada through the last Weimar beer-belly cultural epoch in Germany*) of 1919. With a chaotic swarm of personalities of her time, often mutated with scissors into hybrid creatures, among parts of wheels, houses, a few animals, and the recurring battle cry "Dada," the artist depicts a comprehensive, deliberately polarizing panorama of the Weimar era in an atmosphere of upheaval. Höch's contemporaries understood the message very well.

At a time when National Socialism was threatening, Heartfield initiated tireless and dangerous battle against Hitler, because for him it was clear that "war can only be combated with war," and he was very well aware that another such war would threaten if

Hitler came to power. In August 1932, with financial assistance from a patron, he had large-format posters put up of his collage *Adolf der Übermensch: Schluckt Gold und redet Blech* (*Adolf the superman: Swallows gold and spouts junk*). This portrait of the future Führer shows him with his mouth wide open, a rib cage depicted as if in an x-ray that reveals his esophagus and stomach full of gold, and a swastika in place of his heart. Heartfield was not only making the Führer into a comic figure, but also exposes his support from wealthy capitalists.



temporaneous academic art but also the supposedly perfect society. They sought to create not art but anti-art; they wanted to destroy the image that newspapers and magazines tried to get them to believe in; their weapons were scissors and glue. Their members in Berlin—Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch, George Grosz, and the brothers Wieland Herzfelde and John Heartfield, who were directly involved in political events—reacted to them with particular aggression. Their collages were assembled from cutouts from leaflets, posters, and advertisements, whose

### The Surrealist Collage

Among the Surrealists who assembled around André Breton, such as Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, Hans Bellmer, Joan Miró, Yves Tanguy, and the poets Paul Éluard and Georges Hugnet, the collage played a crucial role. They admired Freud and wanted to create an art of the subconscious; their literature and art was supposed to come from the realm of



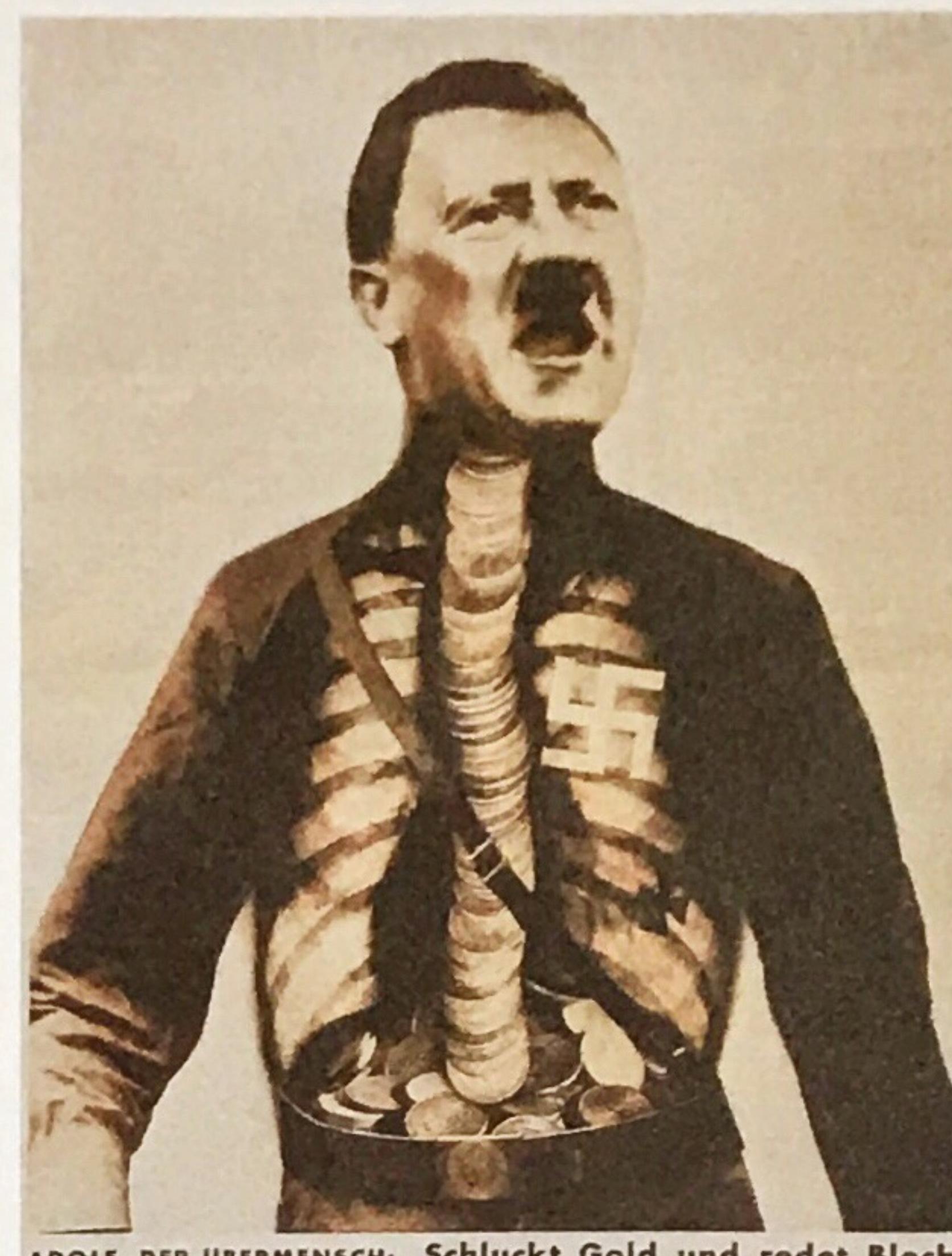
HANNAH HÖCH:  
1. SCHNITT MIT DEM  
KÜCHENMESSER  
[1919 / 1920]  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2013

GEORGES HUGNET:  
2. UNTITLED  
[1936 – 1937]  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2013

JOHN HEARTFIELD:  
3. ADOLF DER ÜBER-  
MENSCH  
[1932]  
© The Heartfield Community  
of Heirs / VG Bild-Kunst,  
Bonn 2013

dreams, from the subconscious. They used a variety of chance techniques to achieve it. The collage was particularly important, since it made it possible to realize two of the most important of the Surrealists' methods effectively: the metamorphosis and combinatorics. One of their favorite games was cadavre exquis, in which the first person in the group would draw the upper part of the being to be created, without the others watching, and then fold it so that only the end of the drawing was visible, before handing it to the next person. This resulted in fantastic hybrid creatures, which had their pendants in Surrealist collages; for example, shells became heads or a fish's head placed on a man's body. Nearly all the Surrealists experimented with collages, and even for the writers among them they were the perfect opportunity to make the unconscious visible. George Hugnet, who like many Surrealists had a large collection of erotic magazines, created a series of collages and photomontages, most of which featured women whose bodies had metamorphosed. The Surreal-

ists wanted to give free rein to sexual fantasies and to hold a mirror up to the sanctimonious bourgeoisie, and the collage was the perfect medium to do so. They used primarily visual materials from their period. One master of the collage was Max Ernst, who had previously belonged to the Dadaists. His art seemed to be the very image of a phrase from the writer Comte



3

de Lautréamont that the Surrealists frequently quoted: "Beautiful ... as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella!" In addition to his separate collages, Max Ernst also produced collage novels, based on woodcuts from magazines and popular novels from the late 19th century, which he combined in nonsensical but clever ways. Because he cut so precisely, the individual passages can only be identified by nuanced differences in the color of the paper, and then not at all in the printed version. They leave the readers all the more distressed as they gradually recognize the delusional world they are entering, robbed by the scissors of bourgeois respectability and abandoned to madness.

### The Pop Art Collage

Pop Art celebrated mass culture; the artists who felt they belonged to it were concerned with the connection between high culture and mass culture; they took up the motifs around them and used the visual language of the American mass media, such as cinema, advertising, newspapers, television, comics, and consumerism. The use of the collage and hence the direct integration of the media quoted was only

logical. Eduardo Paolozzi, who lived in London, began producing collages as early as the 1940s, including such ironic collages as *I Was a Rich Man's Plaything* of 1947, which he designed based on an advertisement. It was also the first appearance of the word Pop, although it did not really become programmatic until the "This Is Tomorrow" exhibition in 1956. Richard Hamilton's small collage *Just What It Is That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*—produced that year and included in the exhibition—became an incunabula of Pop Art. It shows the body builder Irvin Koszewski, who in 1954 placed third in the Mr. America contest, in a very modern domestic landscape stylized as an unreal universe. Hamilton included a number of images from various media in his small collage and placed the word Pop on a tennis racket in the



center. Hamilton, who was himself British, exposed the American way of life with the usual clichés of the cult of the body, the society of consumerism and media, and an ideal world.

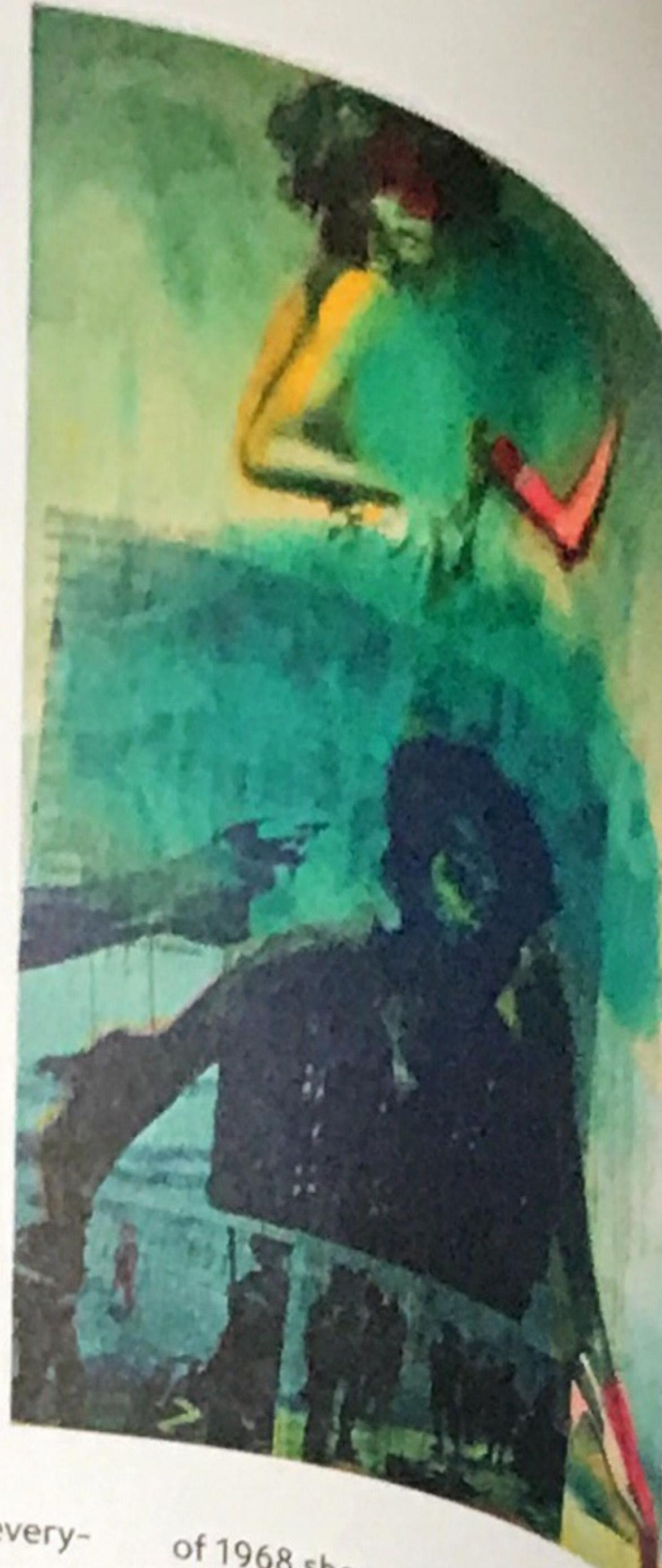
#### Beyond the Collage: Assemblage and Combine Paintings

Beginning in the 1950s, the classic planar collage disappeared along with the classic easel painting. The French artist Jean Dubuffet produced imaginative assemblages using things that had been assembled in the truest sense of the word: singed corks, metal foil, sponges, slag, clinker, and polyurethane. But this diversity of materials was not appreciated in the sculptures he formed from them; it could not be seen which materials he had used. Still, they all had human forms, including the materials studies he produced from butterflies.

Other examples are the Combine Paintings produced by the American artist Robert Rauschenberg from 1953 onward. One of the most famous is *Monogram* of 1955–59, in which a stuffed Angora goat with a car tire around its body is standing in the middle of a painted canvas. On closer inspection, it turns out the stretcher is

spanned with a bed sheet. The everyday objects that Rauschenberg used to turn his easel paintings into something part assemblage and part environment interested him not for the original function but for their effect, very much in the spirit of Kurt Schwitters's aesthetic of form.

While working on his Combine Paintings, Rauschenberg developed a rubbing technique that enabled him to introduce fragmentary visual quotations from the press as mirror-reversed prints; later he employed silk-screening and color lithography as well to combine printing and painting directly on the canvas. In the 1960s he used this to produce collage-like self-portraits modeled on x-rays. Wolf Vostell used a similar technique on newspaper photos. His *Miss America*



of 1968 shows the reigning American beauty queen with her eyes bound; above it, so that her slim legs running away from it are barely covered, Vostell printed the famous newspaper photograph of the shooting of a Vietcong prisoner, Nguyen Van Lem. The accusation is clear, and it is difficult to look the other way. The punk movement did not want to look the other way either; it used the collage technique for flyers. The cover of the 1997 single "God Save the Queen" by the Sex Pistols, which was based on a flyer, became world famous. The self-taught designer

Jamie Reid used a pixelated portrait of Queen Elizabeth, from which he tore the mouth and eyes, replacing them with the title and the band's name in the torn letters in the manner of blackmail letters. It expressed the frustration of an entire generation with its queen, who did not see and said nothing. It was an era that needed other, louder, bigger art, not small collages, even if they were to shout their slogans as loud as those of the Futurists and Dadaists had. It was the era of happenings, performances, and the Fluxus movement, whose actions were very much like collages. One varia-

tion, but it is difficult to classify artists today into those who use collage primarily as an aesthetic means and those who use collage to propagate their views. Because collage means diversity.

Moreover, those artists who advanced the birth of collage in its many facets usually worked together and pursued big, shared goals, whether that meant establishing abstract art, renewing the world, combating narrow-mindedness or war, or discovering together the depths of the subconscious. As variously as collaged was employed, especially during the first half of the

EDOARDO PAOLOZZI  
1. I WAS A RICH MAN'S  
PLAYTHING

[1962]  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2013

WOLF VOSTELL  
2. MISS AMERICA  
[1968]

© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2013

ROBERT  
RAUSCHENBERG  
3. MONOGRAM  
[1955–1959]  
© Robert Rauschenberg  
Foundation / VG Bild-Kunst,  
Bonn 2013



tion on the planar collage had survived the search for three-dimensionality, perhaps only because it needed space itself and was primarily the inversion of the collage: the decollage. The artists who employed it called themselves affichistes, and they removed posters layer by layer and declared the results to be art. Decollages satisfied not only the desire to destroy and discover, but also the longing for chance, which several artists evoked using collage technique.

#### Collage Today

And today? Today the achievements of the collage artists of past decades play an important role in providing inspira-

criticism. The collages of Eva Eun-Sil Han not only seem surreal, but the artist also tries to reach her subconscious during the process of creating them. And when Gordon Magnin addresses in his collages the human obsession with the three themes of commercialism, consumerism, and body image, he gets at precisely the core of Hamilton's small collage, and indeed Magnin's sources (images primarily from high fashion, body building, and pornography) are not that far from Pop Art, and yet the result is entirely different. John Vincent Aranda's collages, which combine Filipino and American comics, can also be related to Pop Art. Max Ernst's collage novels were produced in similar ways, albeit with a different intuition, but that is precisely what makes such comparisons interesting. For all collage artists challenge our cultural memory: What do we know? Where do we know it from?

Was that not something different? It is up to us to see precisely and discover.

20th century, artists often had one important thing in common: an artistic or political goal. So it is easy to present their works together.

Moreover, they had a more limited visual language, fewer predecessors, and above all distinctly less visual material. And yet there are numerous parallels. Leafing through this book, one discovers many hybrid creatures, bodies about to metamorphose, and fantastic worlds. They are not always those of the Surrealists. For example, in her fairy-tale-like landscapes

Sarah Eisenlohr calls into question the relationship between human beings and nature, and the surreal motifs of Eugenia Loli touch on topics of social