
Untitled, 1988 by Kiki Smith

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Source: *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, 1999, Vol. 25, No. 1, Modern and Contemporary Art: The Lannan Collection at The Art Institute of Chicago (1999), pp. 64-65+103

Published by: The Art Institute of Chicago

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4113000>

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Untitled, 1988

Ink on gampi paper; 121.9 x 96.5 x 17.8 cm (48 x 38 x 7 in.) [see p. 97]

Kiki Smith's highly individual figurative sculpture examines the physical and spiritual nature of the human body by presenting it in an abject, fragmented, and damaged state. Smith challenges and contradicts classical representations of the body as an absolute, universal form. Her use of decorative, domestic, and organic materials, such as sheets, glass beads, hair, and thread, further transgresses the hierarchy of artistic media. Often labeled as a feminist artist because she incorporates these materials into her work and frequently chooses female subjects, Smith addresses social and political issues in an intensely personal and intimate manner. Her provocative sculpture conveys the vulnerability of the body in an age when medical and technological advancements encourage a false sense of power and control. Smith has observed: "Our bodies are basically stolen from us, and my work is about trying to reclaim one's own turf, or one's own vehicle for being here, to own it and to use it to look at how we are here."¹

Smith's career began in the 1980s, when many artists used representations of the body to examine issues of gender politics and identity. Her art is rooted in the Post-Minimalism of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly as practiced by Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, and Nancy Spero, each of whom has worked in expressive and figurative modes, utilizing humble, malleable materials such as latex, cloth, paper, and wax. Smith has also cited late Gothic wooden carvings and early Northern Renaissance altarpieces, with their elongated, hyperextended depictions of Christ, as inspirations for her sculpture. In addition she has been influenced by the figures in Egyptian and Indian art, and by decorative art of all kinds. Medicine, anthropology, and anatomy have further informed her interest in the body, and in 1985 she trained as an emergency medical technician to better understand how the body functions in states of trauma and crisis. At this time, she began making sculpture that explicitly addresses issues of corporeality.²

Untitled is one of only a few sculptures executed by Smith that investigates the male form.³ In this construction, the flayed, bloodied, empty skin of a dismembered masculine head, torso, and limbs hangs limply from the wall. The body, once full of mass and energy, is now deflated and void

of life. Smith used tissue-thin gampi paper—a fragile, ephemeral material—to convey the porous and permeable quality of human skin.

Like much of Smith's work, *Untitled* is at once disturbing and beautiful. The artist's Catholic upbringing shaped her attitudes about physical suffering, failure, and death, and contributed to her fascination with the relationship between bodily systems and emotion, spirituality, and sexuality. The death of Smith's father, the architect and Minimalist sculptor Tony Smith, in 1980, followed by that of her sister, Beatrice, eight years later, had a profound effect on her art. During this period, Smith created *Untitled* and some of her most arresting and visceral sculptural forms. She has stated: "I grew up in a family with lots of illness. There was a preoccupation with the body. Also being Catholic, making things physical, they're obsessed with the body. It seemed to me to be a form that suited me really well—to talk through the body about the way we're here and how we're living."⁴ s. s.



Brauchitsch, Boris von. *Thomas Ruff*. Frankfurt am Main, 1992.
Frankfurt am Main, Museum Schloss Hardenberg, et al. *Thomas Ruff: Porträts*. Exh. cat. 1988.
Ruff, Thomas. *Thomas Ruff: Andere Porträts + 3D*. Ostfildern, 1995.

Untitled (Ralph Müller), 1986; Untitled, 1988; Untitled, 1988, pp. 54–57

1. Ruff, quoted in an interview by Stephan Dilleuth, "That remains to be seen. Many things are conceivable that have little basis in reality," in Ruff, p. 18.
2. Ruff, quoted in Brauchitsch, p. 24.
3. Ibid., pp. 23–24.
4. Ruff, p. 18.
5. Dilleuth observed of the star studies, "These large-format photographs (260 x 188 cm) rob star-gazing of its romanticism." Ibid., p. 26.
6. Ibid., p. 18.
7. Ruff, quoted in Brauchitsch, p. 24.
8. Ruff, p. 18. Undeniably, Ruff is someone who recycles imagery by others. These models for his work range from the massive documentation of the German people by the early twentieth-century photographer August Sander to the immense portraits of art-school friends by the late twentieth-century American painter Chuck Close (see pp. 74–75).

RUPPERSBERG, ALLEN

Los Angeles, Museum of Contemporary Art. *Allen Ruppersberg: The Secret of Life and Death*. Exh. cat. by Howard Singerman. 1985.
Plagens, Peter. "Ruppersberg's Encyclopedia." *Art in America* 73 (Dec. 1985), pp. 84–93.
Weelden, Dirk van. *Allen Ruppersberg: A Different Kind of Never-Never-Land*. Amsterdam, 1992.

Reminders: Novel, Sculpture, Film, 1991, pp. 78–79

1. *Reminders: Novel, Sculpture, Film* was included in an exhibition entitled "Tables: Selections from the Lannan Foundation Collection" at Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles, where visitors were permitted to handle and read the individual books. An exhibition context that allows for the work to function as an interactive sculpture invites a somewhat different reading than the one offered here.
2. The dichotomy between seeing and reading, or between looking and knowing, is at the heart of an earlier series of work by Ruppersberg. *Seeing and Believing* (1972) is a two-part photographic piece: *Seeing* consists of six black-and-white exterior shots of six older California bungalows; *Believing* consists of six shots of domestic interiors. The juxtaposition of both parts makes it obvious that the interior shots, with their modern design and architecture, do not correspond to the houses represented in the exterior shots.

RUSCHA, EDWARD

Auckland, Auckland City Art Gallery. *Graphic Works by Edward Ruscha*. Exh. cat. by Andrew Bogel. 1978.
Lake Worth, Fla., Lannan Museum. *Edward Ruscha: Words Without Thoughts Never to Heaven Go*. Exh. cat. 1988.

New York, Gagosian Gallery. *Edward Ruscha, Romance with Liquids: Paintings 1966–1969*. Exh. cat. by Yve Alain Bois. 1993.

F House, 1987, pp. 60–61

1. Robert Landau, "A Conversation with Edward Ruscha," in *Outrageous L.A.* (San Francisco, 1984), p. 9.
2. Lake Worth, Fla., p. 31.

SAMARAS, LUCAS

Glimcher, Arnold B. "Lucas Samaras: Photo-Transformations." In Long Beach, Calif., California State University, Art Galleries. *Photo-Transformations*. Exh. cat. ed. by Constance W. Glenn. 1975.
Lifson, Ben. "Photo-Transformations." In *Samaras: The Photographs of Lucas Samaras*. New York, 1989. Pp. 42–45.
New York, Pace Gallery. *Lucas Samaras, Pastels*. Exh. cat. by Milly Glimcher. 1993.
Schjeldahl, Peter. "Lucas Samaras: The Pastels." In Denver, Denver Art Museum. *Samaras Pastels*. Exh. cat. by Dianne Perry Vanderlip. 1981. Pp. 6–16.

Phototransformation (10/25/73), 1973; Phototransformation (4/4/76), 1976; Phototransformation (7/31/76), 1976, pp. 48–49

1. It is important to note that the Polaroid technology available to Samaras twenty-five years ago was substantially different from that in use today. Contemporary Polaroid film can no longer be manipulated in exactly the same way, due to advances in both the photograph casing and the developing process.

SMITH, KIKI

Amsterdam, Institute of Contemporary Art. *Kiki Smith*. Exh. cat. 1990.
Columbus, Oh., Ohio State University, Wexner Center for the Arts, et al. *Kiki Smith*. Exh. cat. by Linda Shearer. 1992.
London, Whitechapel Art Gallery. *Kiki Smith*. Exh. cat. by Jo Anna Isaak. 1995.
Montreal, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, et al. *Kiki Smith*. Exh. cat. by Pierre Théberge. 1996.
Posner, Helaine. *Kiki Smith*. Boston, 1998.

Untitled, 1988, pp. 64–65

1. London, p. 22.
2. Michael Boodro, "Blood, Spit, and Beauty," *ARTnews* 93 (Mar. 1994), p. 129.
3. Smith most frequently features the specifically female body in her work, in many cases selecting historical women from Christianity, Judaism, and various Eastern religions as her primary subjects.
4. London, p. 31.

STILL, CLYFFORD

Basel, Kunsthalle Basel, et al. *Clyfford Still, 1904–1980: The Buffalo and San Francisco Collections*. Exh. cat. by Thomas Kellerin. 1992.
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Clyfford Still*. Exh. cat. 1979.