

Lecture Notes

Syllabus 3/28/05 – THE BEAT GENERATION: BETWEEN EXPRESSIONISM AND POP - (REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM)

- BEAT GENERATION art also known as NEO-DADA. FORERUNNER TO POP ART.
- Johns and Rauschenberg (students) influenced by teachers John Cage and Alan Kaprow at Black Mt. College.
- Cage (experimental composer) said: “The artist should try to act in the gap between art and life.”
 - This idea helped launch pop art, performance art, and the art below, where artists turn to recognizable subject matter & found objects, appropriating images or actual materials from mass consumer culture
 - What is “the gap?” In 1840, art was for wealthy & elite to admire, removed from everyday life. This new kind of art bridges the gap and brings art into everyday life and vice versa.

- Often poked fun at the heroic gesture of Abstract Expressionism/ists like deKooning, Pollack



- **01_Painted Bronze – 1960 – Jasper Johns**
- **THE BEAT GENERATION -REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM**
 - Not a Pop Artist!
 - A bronze cast of 2 Ballantyne Ale cans that he painted realistically to look like the cans as a joke.
 - Johns and Rauschenberg arrived in NY from Black Mt. College in the 50s and Leo Costelli decided to show their work.
 - The kind of work they were showing used found objects and expressionist paint, unconventional things.
 - DeKooning hated Johns and Rauschenberg’s work and said “If Costelli can sell that stuff he can sell anything. I bet he could sell one of my old beer cans.” So Johns took the challenge and created the beer cans and they sold instantly.
 - Despite the joke, the art was important in that it was a sign that art was changing



- **02_Flag – 1955 – Jasper Johns**

THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM

- Famous work
- Painted with encaustic (wax/pigment) over old newspaper
- An experiment in “covering content”, but is now fading and not holding up well over time and no longer covers the content – you can read some of the words on the newsprint
- Drawn to the image of the American Flag to experiment
 - c/o it’s a totally recognizable thing.
 - He had read Greenberg who said a painting should be about painting. The image indeed echoes the shape of the support (rectangles).
 - Also fascinated by the fact you can stare at the flag and then look at a white wall and see an afterimage of complementary colors.



- **03_Target with Plaster Casts – 1955 – Jasper Johns**

THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM

- Wooden doors on top with trap doors
- Body parts inside the little compartments
- Appropriated target is recognizable symbol but strange implications arise:
 - Feels participatory / interactive
 - Body parts transform banal target into something strangely human
- Johns wanted people to wonder “what’s different about this target”



- **04 & 04A_Field Painting –1964 – Jasper Johns**

THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM

- At E. Wing of Nat’l Gallery in D.C.
- Primary colors represented in stencilled and wooden letters
- Autobiographical objects from his studio – paint can, light switch etc.
- Contradictory because words red, yellow and blue aren’t corresponding colors. They are actually complementary colors.
- About process, gesture, making of the painting, appropriated lettering and found objects



05_Perilous Nights – 1982 – Jasper Johns

THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM

- Typical of more current Johns work
- Many different clues
 - All autobiographical – reproduction of his own studio
 - Arms are plastered casts of his arms, Influenced by Duchamp.
 - Print pasted on behind plaster cast is tromp l’oeil reproduction of one of his own paintings (like Matisse’s Red Studio)
 - On Left is from Grunewald’s Eisenheim Altarpiece
 - Wood comes from his studio



- **06_Bob R’s Bed – 1955 – Robert Rauschenberg**

THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM

- DeKooning hated it c/o it pokes fun of him and traditional easel artists
- Framed and hung on the wall, stretched like a canvas
- painted with gestural abstract expressionist, heroic abstract mark like Pollack and deKooning



07_Photo of Rauschenberg

- Sitting in vacant lot next to his studio in NY
- His art described as “the rapid scan of the city dweller.”
- Rauschenberg’s art also “acts between the gap of art and life”



- **08_Black Painting by Rauschenberg (NOT IN BOOK!)**

THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM

- Rauschenberg admitted that Albers (color theorist) was most influential when he was at Black Mt. College
- This black painting came after a series of white canvases where visitors who stood before it could see the color of what they were wearing reflected on the canvas.
 - Participatory!
 - Acting in the gap between art and life
 - Dealing with principles and properties of color with reflected light according to Albers
- Black paintings were inverse of this in which he made paintings full of content hidden from audience, covered with black



- **09_Monogram – 1959 - Rauschenberg**
THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
 - Monogram is iconic symbol that stands for you – this is his monogram.
 - Found objects part of everyday life
 - A “combine painting”
 - Poking fun at Pollack c/o painting is on floor
 - Goat is trash-eater in a junkyard appropriating the junk of modern society



- **10_Estate – 1963 - Rauschenberg**
THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
 - Listed as painting but actually a screen printed multimedia image using photo silkscreen images and handpainting images
 - Experimented with multimedia
 - Sistine chapel on lower R
 - About Modern urban life



- **11_Blue Urchin, Hoarfrost Series – 1974 - Rauschenberg**
THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
 - Took think gauzy layers of material and silk screened layer upon layer so it's all superimposed
 - A painting but not really a painting – many layers of meaning

THE NEW REALISM

- The New Realists all have time / movement / space as issues in their art.
- The art always involved some kind of active participation by humans, either by living paint brushes or the artist themselves or special people or spectators and include the element of time, a 4th dimension incorporated
- Had some kinship to Dada in that they were interested in performance, interaction, conceptual
- Another attempt at artists to close the gap between art being elite and removed and actually experiencing art in one's life.
- **YVES KLEIN** a central figure –
 - Tried to take a belief in art as a thing that's made and integrate it into life in a different way
 - Tried to work spiritual content into what he was doing as avant garde artist. Always had an underlying serious investigation beneath the silliness of his stuff
 - Interested in spirituality (Rosicrucian Society) and Space, or “The Void” (LeVide). Said if people want to paint space they must experience it.
 - Brought people to 1960 exhibition called “Le Vide” where there were only bare walls. Served people drinks. Next morning they all urinated International Klein Blue. Talk about a double entendre on “The Void!”



- **12_Action Spectacle – 1960 – Yves Klein**
THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“THE NEW REALISM”

- Klein called these people living paint brushes.
- Musicians wear “International Klein Blue.” I.K.B. Blue patented by him



- **13_The Painter of Space Hurls Himself into the Void– 1960 –**

Yves Klein

THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“THE NEW REALISM”

- Believed he could levitate and obsessed with the idea
- This, however, is a hoax perpetrated by him – a doctored photo
- Fascinated by space and “the void” – felt the only way to comprehend the void’s empty expanse of space was physically to enter the void
- Arnason says it could be considered less prankish and more a depiction of an artistic “leap of the imagination.”



- **14 Blue Monochrome – 1960 – Yves Klein**

THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“THE NEW REALISM”

- Did series of these large, monochrome blues some with texture, some without. Showed different ways to use blue on large canvasses without any evidence of the artist whatsoever
- Idea was to give viewer a transcendent experience. He was trying to find ways to transcend the material world.



- **15 – Fire Painting – 1961-62 – Yves Klein**

THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“THE NEW REALISM”

- He coated surface of canvas with heat sensitive chemicals and took a blow torch to it. Did a number of these
- Investigating the elements, process and change



- **16_Homage to New York – 1960 – Jean Tinguely**
THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“THE NEW REALISM”
 - Famous for his painting machines.
 - Influenced by constructivism, Bauhaus, Moholy Nagy and kinetic art integrating the machine
 - This “painting machine” functioned as kinetic sculpture creating paintings as homage to NY School and also epitomizing hustle and bustle of modern urban city
 - Poking fun at the grand heroic gesture as part of the myth of Abstract Expressionist painting
 - Commissioned for opening of new courtyard at MOMA.
 - Not constructed to last past one “performance”
 - Had accidental effects in its function
 - Dangerous, caught fire, spewed sparking, burning parts, finally “put out” by the NYFD



- **17_Black Venus – 1965-67 – Nikki de Sant-Phalle**
THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“THE NEW REALISM”
 - Tinguely’s lover/wife?
 - Did experiments with random ways of creating abstract expressionist paintings
 - Began at first by shooting a gun at suspended sacks of paint that burst & dripped onto canvasses
 - Then created large paper mache sculptures of female iconic images based on fertility goddess image like the Venus of Willendorf combined with various cultural references to women
 - Black Venus
 - Wearing loud 60s looking attire = taking negative stereotypical image of black women and turning it around into a positive, joyful image



18_SHE -A Cathedral – 1966 – Nikki de Sant-

Phalle

THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“THE NEW REALISM”

- Large paper mache installation of a woman with a swollen belly suggesting pregnancy, on her back with the entrance between her legs
 - Inside was “The Womb” with different participatory installations
 - Deliberately taking on female body taboos
 - Overt feminist art. Pretty radical at the time.
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HAPPENINGS:

- **Extending art into a theatrical situation or a total environment**
- **Whole purpose: rebellion against commoditization of art and dealers and the galleries that showed art**
- **ALLAN KAPROW a leading spokesman: “It is art but seems closer to life”**
- **Happenings were planned but not scripted & were not to be documented because**
 - They were to be experienced in the moment by those present and then when over live in the memory of those who experienced it
 - they didn’t want the experience commoditized by the sale of photos by galleries
- **Meant to be experienced by participants and spectators alike**



19_Household – 1964 – Allan Kaprow

THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“HAPPENINGS”

- Kaprow on faculty at Black Mountain College when Johns and Rauschenberg were there
- This Happening was when he was on faculty at Cornell
- Students painted car w/ bread and jam and licked it off

FLUXUS:

- Sometimes called Neo Dada
- Performance art!
- Documented and saved everything
- “Mail Art” originated with Fluxus
- Arose in reaction to Abstract Expressionism and Greenbergian Formalist Modernism (that we haven’t looked at yet) in Europe, Japan and later in the U.S.
- George Maciunas founder. Spread quickly.



- **20_Painting Myself – 1964 – Ben Vautier**
THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“FLUXUS”

- All about “The Gesture – I paint myself.” **He’s painting himself as the ultimate self referential gesture (a kind of parody of abstract expressionism)**
 - Greenberg advocated abstract painting and also that painting be “self critical” (needing to turn inward, be self referential, and be about itself and nothing else. That way it can never be threatened because nothing else will be like it)
 - Acting in the gap between art and life – the performance gesture: doing a take on the act being more important than the final product



- **21_Brushing his Teeth after Eating Flux Mystery Food – 1963**
– Ben Vautier
THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“FLUXUS”

- They were interested in all kinds of mechanisms of modern society and art (packaging, canning etc.). They made and packaged their own food



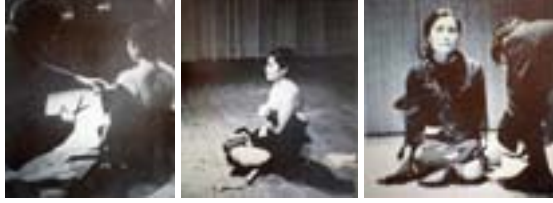
- **22_How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare – 1965 – Joseph Beuys**
THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“FLUXUS”

- Interested in “transformation”
- Beuys not Fluxus from start to finish but was with them briefly
- Beuys was German fighter pilot in WWII. Shot down over frozen Crimea. Rescued by nomads (Tatars, AKA Tartars) and wrapped in animal fur and healed by a Shaman kind of figure. This transformed him.
- Decided to become artist and make art that would be transformative.
- All his art must move or convey messages that will help to change society for the better.
- Art is Personal and intriguing
- This work:
 - honey and gold leaf on face - refers to medicine that healed him but also to ancient practice of alchemy (the equivalent of holistic medicine today as an alternative to conventional medicine)
 - carrying a dead rabbit around in an art gallery – image of innocence, symbolic of nature in unnatural environment of art gallery. Could also be read as a slam at critics who try to explain pictures which is as futile as explaining them to a dead rabbit



- **23, 23A_The Pack – 1969 – Joseph Beuys**
THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“FLUXUS”

- Sleds with flashlights hooked together like dog sleds (reference to the way he was rescued but also takes on ominous effects: looks like robotic war machines, mine sniffers, or missiles etc.)



24, 24A, 24B_Cut Piece – 1961

• – Yoko Ono

THE BEAT GENERATION – REACTIONS TO FORMALIST MODERNISM
“FLUXUS”

- Ono a leader of Fluxus in Tokyo
- Met John Lennon at gallery in NY
- Much of her work is feminist
- Remained motionless and audience could come up and cut away her clothing. Multiple meanings among which are:
 - Challenges the line people will cross
 - Refers to women’s bodies and vulnerability issues