

Willie Cole American, b. 1955
Stowage 1997
relief print on paper
56 x 104 in.
Collection Walker Art Center
McKnight Acquisition Fund, 1998

Willie Cole, *Stowage* 1997

"I think that when one culture is dominated by another culture, the energy or powers or gods of the previous culture hide in the vehicles of the new cultures. . . . I think the spirit of Shango (Yoruba god of thunder and lightning) is a force hidden in the iron because of the fire, and the power of Ogun—his element is iron—is also hidden in these metal objects." —Willie Cole

While Willie Cole was growing up in New Jersey, his grandmother and great-grandmother worked as housekeepers and they often asked him to fix their irons. When he moved into his first artist studio, he brought 15 broken irons with him. For Cole, this common household appliance has a number of connotations: domestic servitude, African rituals of scarification, and an African heritage of "branding"—identifying particular tribes by way of shields or masks. To make the print *Stowage*, he grouped several different makes of irons (Silex, General Electric, Sunbeam) around an ironing board that is meant to represent a slave ship. The marks of the various irons evoke members of different African tribes who may have been brought to America aboard such a vessel.



Jacques Lipchitz French, 1891–1973
Prometheus Strangling the Vulture II 1944/1953
bronze
91 3/4 x 90 x 57 in.
Collection Walker Art Center
Gift of the T. B. Walker Foundation, 1956

Jacques Lipchitz, *Prometheus Strangling the Vulture II* 1944/1953

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I wished to say to men, 'If you desire to continue freely in your creative work, it will be necessary for you to enter the struggle and conquer the forces of darkness that are about to invade the world.'" —Jacques Lipchitz

The alcove at the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden's east edge is dominated by Jacques Lipchitz's bronze sculpture *Prometheus Strangling the Vulture II*. It was inspired by the classical Greek myth Prometheus and the Vulture in which Prometheus stole fire from the gods as a gift for mankind. The god Zeus was so angry he punished Prometheus by binding him to a cliff for eternity, where every day a vulture devoured his liver. However, in this sculpture, Lipchitz portrays Prometheus triumphing over the vulture, strangling the bird with one hand and holding his claws in the other. For the artist, this was a symbol of human progress and determination and of democracy triumphing over fascism. The original version of *Prometheus Strangling the Vulture* was a 30-foot work cast in plaster for the Paris International Exposition in 1937. In 1943, the Brazilian government asked Lipchitz to sculpt another version of the work for the Ministry of Education and Health building in Rio de Janeiro. The Walker sculpture is based on the second version.

Can Art Change Society?



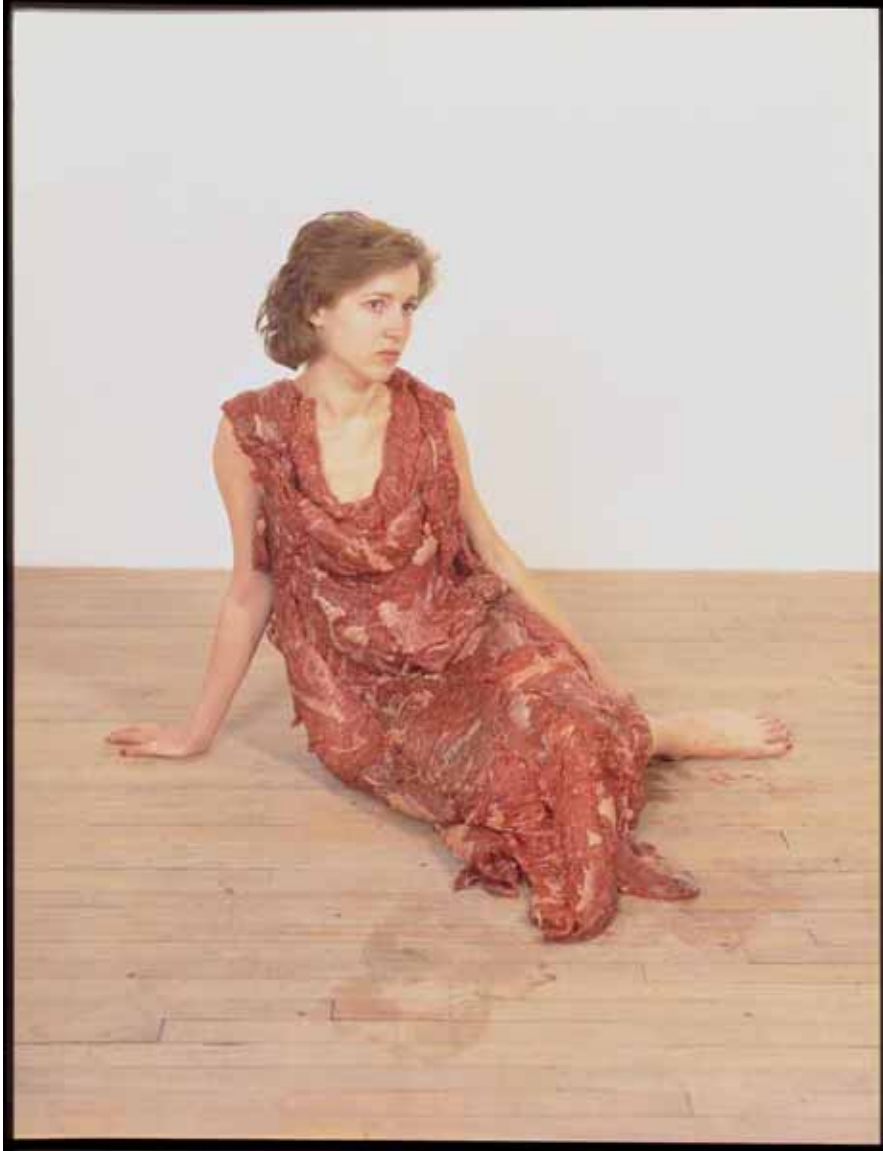
Adrian Piper American, b. 1948
The Mythic Being; I/You (Her) 1974 (detail)
black-and-white photograph, ink
10 images; 8 x 5 in. each
Collection Walker Art Center
T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 1999

Adrian Piper, *The Mythic Being: I/You (Her)* 1974 (detail)

“We started out with beliefs about the world and our place in it that we didn’t ask for and didn’t question. Only later, when those beliefs were attacked by new experiences that didn’t conform to them, did we begin to doubt: e.g., do we and our friends really understand each other? Do we really have nothing in common with blacks/whites/gays/workers/the middle class/other women/other men/etc.?” —Adrian Piper, 1981

Adrian Piper is an important figure in the early development of Conceptual Art in the 1960s and is one of the few African Americans involved in that movement. Her multidisciplinary work—which has included photography, performance, drawing, video, and sound installation—often combines text with image or ephemeral performance with physical documentation.

Beginning in the 1970s, Piper began to incorporate issues of identity while maintaining a strong conceptual basis in her work. As a black woman often mistaken for white, she sought to engage her audience with racism and sexism by drawing on an autobiographical catalogue of experiences. *The Mythic Being series* (1972–1975), which includes 10 images, was developed by Piper while she was a doctoral student in the Department of Philosophy at Harvard University. She created a male alter ego, and by performing in this guise found a release from the intense pressures and tensions of being the only black woman in her department. Piper challenges us to be actively aware of, and perhaps struggle with, ways that race and gender can misdirect our understanding of individuals.



Jana Sterbak Canadian, b. Czechoslovakia 1955
Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic 1987
mannequin, flank steak, salt, thread, color photograph on paper
dimensions of mannequin: 62 1/4 x 16 1/2 x 11 7/8 in.
Collection Walker Art Center
T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 1993

Jana Sterbak, *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* 1987

Vanitas is a term originally used to describe 17th-century Dutch still-life compositions of rotting meat and game, guttering candles, and skulls. These paintings were intended as meditations on the fleeting nature of life, the inevitability of death, and the necessity for a spiritual life. By calling this work *Vanitas*, Sterbak points the viewer toward ideas that animate her work: the alienation humans feel from their own flesh, aging, and mortality. Here, the natural aging process takes place before our eyes as the meat passes from a raw to cured state.

The work also addresses issues concerning women, fashion, consumption, and the body. The equation of women with meat and the notion that “you are what you wear” are common ideas in Western society. In the United States, statistics have pointed to a growing number of young women with eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa (referred to in the title), because their body types do not match the prevailing fashion or “look” sported by the tall, thin models populating the media.

The dress was stitched together from 60 pounds of raw flank steak and must be constructed anew each time it is shown. Following a centuries-old method of food preservation, the meat is heavily salted and allowed to air-dry. Over the span of the exhibition, the aging process drastically changes the appearance of the work.



Paul Thek American, 1933–1988
Hippopotamus from Technological Reliquaries 1965
beeswax, plexiglass, metal
11 3/8 x 19 3/4 x 11 1/2 in.
Collection Walker Art Center
T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 1994

Paul Thek, *Hippopotamus from Technological Reliquaries* 1965

"I was amused at the idea of meat under plexiglass because I thought it made fun of the scene—where the name of the game seemed to be 'how cool you can be' and 'how refined.' Nobody ever mentioned anything that seemed real. The world was falling apart, anyone could see it." —Paul Thek, 1981

Paul Thek began a group of "meat" pieces in the mid-1960s. They evolved primarily from two negative impulses: a reaction against the clean, cool forms of Minimalist and Pop Art and, more importantly, his revulsion with U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Both impulses positioned the artist in opposition to the mainstream current, where he continued to stand until his death from AIDS in 1988.

The meat pieces suggest the fragile hold on life that is our shared human condition. Encased in a vitrine resembling both an incubator and a glass casket, *Hippopotamus* leads the viewer to contemplate the literal and spiritual mortification of the flesh that haunted Thek throughout his career as an artist.



Kara Walker American, b. 1969
Endless Conundrum, An African Anonymous Adventuress 2001
paint on wall; exhibition copy of paper original
180 x 420 in.
Collection Walker Art Center
T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 2002

Kara Walker, *Endless Conundrum, An African Anonymous Adventuress* 2001

"My works are erotically explicit, shameless. I would be happy if visitors would stand in front of my work and even feel a little ashamed because they have . . . simply believed in the project of modernism." —Kara Walker, 200

Kara Walker's work, done in the style of silhouette portraits widely popular in the 17th and 18th centuries, has focused on an exploration of the history of slavery and of black-white race relations in the United States. *Endless Conundrum, An African Anonymous Adventuress* represents an expansion of this subject matter, adding an examination of the role of African tribal motifs in the genesis of modern art. These motifs played a crucial but undercredited role in Western art's move from realism to conceptual and expressive representation and in the work of such artists as Pablo Picasso, Constantin Brancusi, and Alberto Giacometti. (Brancusi's sculpture *Endless Column* is referenced in the title.) While the influence of African sculpture has been disputed in the case of this work, Walker clearly indicated that the debate is absurd.

Commissioned by the Fondation Beyeler, a Swiss museum that exhibits African tribal sculptures alongside modernist works of art, Walker's piece asks us to examine the issue in the context of other problematic appropriations of blackness in Western culture. She portrays key works from the Beyeler's collection, including a nail fetish and Rodin's *Iris*, alongside African-American performer Josephine Baker, who is dancing her way out of the "exotic" banana skirt that made her famous. A resounding homage to the creativity of African and African-American cultures, Walker's work highlights the power dynamics behind the cultural exchanges, appropriations, and combinations that are part of our society today.



Andy Warhol American, 1928–1987

16 Jackies 1964

acrylic, enamel on canvas

80 3/8 x 64 3/8 in.

Collection Walker Art Center

Art Center Acquisition Fund, 1968

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Andy Warhol, *16 Jackies* 1964

"The more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away and the better and emptier you feel." —Andy Warhol, 1975

For Warhol and fellow Pop artists, reproducing images from popular culture was the visual means for expressing detachment from emotions, an attitude they regarded as characteristic of the 1960s. Like droning newscasts, repetition dissipates meaning and with it the capacity of images to move or disturb. Warhol created *16 Jackies* in response to the November 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, an event whose mass-media coverage reached an unparalleled number of people.

The four images of Jacqueline Kennedy, each repeated four times, were enlargements of news photographs that appeared widely and continually in the media after the assassination. Taken from issues of *Life* magazine, the images depict, from top to bottom: Jackie stepping off the plane upon arrival at Love Field in Dallas; grieving at the Capitol; stunned at the swearing-in ceremony for Lyndon B. Johnson aboard Air Force One after the president's death; and smiling in the limousine before the assassination. *16 Jackies* combines a number of themes important in Warhol's work, such as his fascination with American icons and celebrities, his interest in the mass media and the dissemination of imagery, and his preoccupation with death.