

NEW POETICS

During the 1950s, in the wake of World War II, many artists rejected realism in favor of abstraction. In search of a fresh way to communicate profound spiritual and emotional meaning, these artists developed a new pictorial language based on vivid color, energetic brushwork, simple forms, and emphatic marks. Their work has inspired generations of younger artists interested in exploring the gap between representation and abstraction. These new approaches are varied and often highly personal: Some artists carefully distill what they observe to its pure visual essentials; others combine abstract imagery with objects, which sometimes are physically embedded in the work. Still others use materials, such as barbed wire or embroidery threads, which are heavy with meaning. Their works are part of a new poetics of abstraction in which pure form invites contemplation while being linked to the world around us.

REVIVING REALISM

For most of human history, artists have sought to represent the world around them. From the Paleolithic cave paintings at Lascaux to the grand-scale landscapes and history paintings popular in the mid-nineteenth century, realistic art was valued above all else. Only during the last century did realism become unfashionable in the West, as artists engaged with abstraction, language, ideas, performance, and other image-making strategies. However, thanks to an increasingly pluralistic world, realism is today enjoying vibrant resurgence. Artists in the United States, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America are using figural and representational approaches to explore individual and cultural identity, the natural world, interpersonal relationships, the pleasures and politics of the body, and even the nature of images themselves. Because each of us perceives the world uniquely, realism is ultimately as subjective as abstraction, and the works on view here are as diverse in style and approach as the artists themselves.

RECUPERATION

Artists have been recycling trash, scrap, and cast-offs in their work since the 1910s, when the Dadaists began making sculpture from found objects and the Cubists first glued fragments of newspaper onto the surfaces of their paintings. During the past fifty years, as the expanding global economy produces more and more goods, these two basic strategies—known as assemblage and collage—have become increasingly prevalent. Like Pop Art, assemblage and collage draw on consumer culture as a source, but they do so by incorporating the products themselves rather than reproducing their images. The works in this gallery are constructed out of materials scavenged from trash bins, flea markets, scrap yards, and antique stores. Some are witty reconfigurations in which one object morphs into another; others are gorgeous, even sublime abstractions made from nothing more than the stuff of everyday life.