

COUNTERING CULTURES: THE CALIFORNIA CONTEXT

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AN OVERVIEW

IT IS FAR FROM AXIOMATIC THAT PERIODS OF CULTURAL and political ferment produce art effectively addressing that ferment. The relationship between art and politics within the discourse of modernism has been particularly troubled. Käthe Kollwitz's haunting pleas for the working class, Pablo Picasso's brutal antiwar protests, and George Grosz's venomous satire appear to stand firm within the canon of modern art. Yet there has often been a deep ambivalence about mixing art and politics, even in periods of tremendous turmoil. This was at no time more evident than during the sixties, when New York's avant-garde responded to the Vietnam War with what Susan Sontag called an "aesthetics of silence."¹ The artist's dilemma, as the critic Max Kozloff observed in 1967, was that of "trying to resolve divergent obligations."² Morality and art made for uncomfortable bedfellows; to be explicit about politics was to court banality and naïveté—or, put in more extreme terms, to run the risk of "preaching in a fancy form."³

In California this ambivalence has been remarkably absent. What we find instead is a striking confluence of political agitation and passionately engaged art. California's role in twentieth-century politics is itself extraordinary. It is difficult to ignore the state when considering the peace and social justice movements of the sixties and seventies. The San Francisco Bay Area took the lead nationally with the founding of the free speech movement in 1964 on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley, and with the birth of the Beat and hippie countercultures, which catalyzed profound social change across the country.⁴ While the civil rights and peace movements grew simultaneously in cities nationwide, California played a significant role in their development. In their wake came the Chicano labor movement in the San Joaquin Valley, the revolutionary Black Panther Party in Oakland, as well as some of the most radical manifestations of gay liberation, Red Power, and environmental activism.

All of this activity was accompanied by an outpouring of political art unmatched elsewhere in the United States. Indeed, from the fifties until the early seventies, one had to look to California to find significant numbers of artists seriously engaged in political expression. During the Vietnam War in particular, at a time when many agreed that combining art and politics could only result in “well-meaning aesthetic embarrassment,” artists on the West Coast found ways of revitalizing the genre of political art.⁵ They did so by breathing new life into the iconography of protest—which, as the painter Ad Reinhardt correctly observed, had fallen into a state of exhaustion.⁶ They also extended the conventions of traditional formats, notably mural and poster art. One of the most intriguing results of the pairing of art and politics in California was a breaking away from conventional art media to produce new vehicles of expression. The desire to critique and circumvent the commercial art establishment led to a variety of avowedly antimaterialist, often inherently uncollectable forms of art, from junk assemblage to performance art, conceptual art, and video. It could be argued that political art is one of California’s more significant contributions to American art of the twentieth century.

Despite the importance of this contribution, the present volume represents the first broad examination of political art in California after the Second World War.⁷ The subject is discussed in studies focused narrowly on topics ranging from art created in Japanese American internment camps in the forties to the culture wars of the nineties. In recent years, with the newfound respectability that political art has gained in contemporary discourse, the literature has grown substantially. The revival has precipitated a number of critiques, beginning with the writings of Lucy Lippard, whose books on protest art and identity politics—notably *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (1984), *A Different War: Vietnam in Art* (1990), and *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (1990)—look well beyond the mainstream to include many of the artists Peter Selz

discusses in this volume. Lippard’s inclusive approach is taken up by Thomas Crow’s *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent, 1955–69* (1996), the first major text to explore California political art in an international context. According to Crow, the cultures of resistance that appeared on the national-international stage first emerged on the West Coast. Crow credits the radical counterculture of the Bay Area in the fifties with initiating a spirit of protest that had “exponential repercussions to come across the rest of the country and the world,” although he does not explain why New York produced comparatively little relevant art other than to observe that the “political temperature” there was markedly cooler.⁸ Francis Frascina’s *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (1999), the other major attempt to survey political art of the sixties, finds the same disparity. Concentrating on Los Angeles and New York, Frascina delineates in scrupulous detail an entrenched formalist orthodoxy operating in league with corporate and government interests to keep political art from making inroads in the East during the late sixties. However, other than identifying fewer restraints in Los Angeles, he does not make a real effort to account for why political art flourished in California.

Arguably the best analysis of the subject to date is Richard Cándida Smith’s *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California* (1995). Although Cándida Smith’s scope is early for our purposes—concentrating primarily on the Truman and Eisenhower eras—he explores aspects of the ideological, socioeconomic, and historic roots of both the political ferment of the period and its artistic expression. As Cándida Smith points out, many of the values of liberty and dissent taken up by the New Left were first articulated by the community of artists and poets in the San Francisco Bay Area who came to be known as the Beats. Essentially, Cándida Smith argues that the fundamental lack of support for contemporary art coupled with a growing opposition to canonical modernism after 1950 resulted in a self-sufficient under-

ground network of printing presses, artist- and poet-run galleries, and private venues. The sustaining ideology of this strikingly independent community was that of “the innocence of the clean slate”—an almost religious belief in personal experience as the only authentic source of values. Well before “question authority” became a mantra of the sixties, the artists and poets of this community challenged—albeit quietly, in work that was often never publicly presented—a great many restrictions on freedom of expression in both life and art. Cándida Smith notes that while they contributed little to the civil rights movement or to the critique of poverty, the ideas they expressed through their art, poetry, political activism, and personal example played a vital role in fostering dialogue on issues relating to sexuality and gender construction, capital punishment, ecology, and the Vietnam War.

Cándida Smith’s study provides useful background for understanding how artistic and political forces specific to California aligned themselves, yet he does not place them in a national context, nor does he explain why those forces were distinct to the region and not found in, say, Boston, Philadelphia, or Chicago—centers also distant from New York’s art market. Those cities had their contingent of political artists (Chicago especially), but they were less consequential in terms of both political agitation and artistic response.⁹ The usual explanation for California’s political activism is the state’s newness, that is, its recent settlement by European Americans, its consequent lack of entrenched traditions, and its special position on the farthest edge of the “New World.” According to this view, these distinctive attributes have made California particularly open to breaking conventions and embracing new ideas. Whether this characterization is recognized as reality or potent fiction, it is nonetheless routinely trotted out as the source of the state’s radicalism.¹⁰ Stephen Schwartz, in his book *From West to East: California and the Making of the American Mind* (1998), makes this the guiding thesis for his examination of California’s trend-setting contributions to American culture. He argues: “California was radical

from the beginning. It was not simply new, it was the newest society ever to have reached full development. . . . California’s role in a series of ‘cutting edge’ historical developments, in which it always occupied a forward post, its favorable geographical situation, and its instant rise to immense wealth during the Gold Rush have made it unique in the world. All societies undergo periods of radicalization; California has never known anything else.”¹¹

Yet almost the precise opposite could be argued. While California played a significant role in empowering the New Left, it was equally responsible for vitalizing the New Right. Although Schwartz is sound in his assessment of the extent of California’s radicalism, he misses the source of that impulse, as so many cultural historians do. Admittedly, California has been a wellspring of antitraditionalism. It is true that from the early 1900s the seclusion of Southern California from entrenched institutions made it a haven for some of the most radical social experimentation in the country. As we have heard repeatedly, the region spawned mystic cults, nudist colonies, and utopian communities. Writing in 1921, John Steven McGroarty observed that “Los Angeles is the most celebrated of all incubators of new creeds, codes of ethics, philosophies—no day passes without the birth of something of this nature never heard of before.”¹² San Francisco’s brand of radicalism was more political and evolved along more established lines. Unlike Los Angeles, which had no real bohemia, San Francisco had developed an avant-garde by the start of the twentieth century, with its North Beach emulating Paris’s Montmartre. San Francisco was host to some revolutionary groups—notably the Industrial Workers of the World, the ragtag organization of anarchists and socialists that the *Los Angeles Times* nicknamed the Wobblies. As early as the 1900s San Francisco could claim the most powerful labor movement in the United States, a movement that culminated in the Great Strike of 1934, which demonstrated to the country that a union of longshoremen could effectively shut down a city. During the Second World

War, the Bay Area became a center for pacifism. As Kenneth Rexroth pointed out, half of the nation's camps for conscientious objectors were within hitchhiking distance from the bay.¹³

Nonetheless, California's Left has always competed with a formidable strain of conservatism, and during the radical years of the sixties that conservatism was on the rise. Instrumental to the growth of the New Right was the tremendous boom in California's defense industry, which eventually overtook agribusiness as the engine of the state's economy. No other development in California transformed the region more than its strategic positioning as the staging area for the succession of wars in the Pacific.¹⁴ In the early years of the cold war the federal government pumped more than \$150 billion into arming the American West with the apparatus of massive destruction.¹⁵ As the cold war historian Kevin Fernlund has written, the result was a landscape that "bristled with airfields, army bases, naval yards, marine camps, missile fields, nuclear test sites, proving grounds, bombing ranges, weapons plants, military reservations, training schools, toxic waste dumps, strategic mines, transportation routes, lines of communication, laboratories, command centers, and arsenals."¹⁶ The link between right-wing politics and the defense industry is encapsulated in the extremely conservative enclave of Orange County. By 1964 Orange County produced ninety percent of all advanced communication for the nation, and sixty percent of its employees worked in the aerospace industry.¹⁷ The explosive growth of the defense industry, which reached its peak during the height of the Vietnam War, was accompanied by an equally explosive growth in population, as California surpassed New York in 1962 as the most populous state. Advocacy of defense thus became closely allied with bread-and-butter issues of growth and expansion, and Southern California emerged as the center of the "military-industrial complex" identified by Dwight D. Eisenhower in his 1961 presidential farewell address. Allied with this growth of industry and the military in the state was an increased need for

research, leading the University of California to rapidly multiply its campuses, eventually becoming the largest state university system in the country. During the free speech movement, it would become a heated point of contention that the school's growth was not merely an accommodation of the mushrooming population but was fueled by an infusion of defense research funds.¹⁸

Integral to the growth of the Right in California was the intensification of anti-Communism, a natural corollary to the Right's pro-defense patriotism. It is no coincidence that two of the nation's most high-profile conservatives—Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan—rose to the top of California's political ladder waving anti-Communist, pro-defense banners. Reagan's rise is a quintessential California "success" story—from president of the Screen Actors Guild to star witness against his Hollywood colleagues before the House Un-American Activities Committee, to spokesman of General Electric (which played a vital part in the defense industry), to governor of California, and ultimately to the presidency of the United States.¹⁹ The anti-Communist crusade was, of course, a national development most identified with the senator from Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy. The McCarthy era in American history has come to denote a time of conformity and suppression—in essence, a domestic cold war of internal containment. But the narrowing of politically and socially acceptable behavior was particularly restrictive in California, where the military's presence was the strongest. As the historian Kevin Starr has argued, conservative efforts to control "subversive" individuals—often in the form of invasive red-baiting—were particularly rancorous during the reign of California state senator Jack Tenney. The highly publicized investigation of Hollywood's Left in the late forties led to the blacklisting, arrest, and persecution of more than three hundred people in the film industry. With the imposition of a loyalty oath by the regents of the University of California in 1949, which forced the school's 3,200 professors to choose between their academic freedom

and their livelihood, the university partnered with the government in what became a wide-ranging attack on the left-wing intellectuals of California.²⁰

In short, California during these critical years was hardly a permissive “land of personal expression, innovation, and experimentation” that provided a natural cradle for cultural change in America. Rather, the region was characterized by a violent clash of contending forces—between a strong and growing political Left and an increasingly powerful Right supported by immense financial interests. Most important, it was the very friction between those forces that became the essential catalyst for agitation, providing what the art historian Renato Poggioli has called the “antagonistic moment”—or in this case, the series of antagonistic moments—that typically ignites an avant-garde.²¹ Because the friction between these forces was especially extreme in California, the rupture was particularly severe. The cold war historian A. Yvette Huginie might have been describing the situation more generally when she likened the struggle of race relations in the West to “an earthquake, produced by tectonic plates rubbing against each other as they slowly jostled for position.”²²

The first of these seismic ruptures was, not surprisingly, a reaction to the draconian censorship of California’s intelligentsia for more than a decade. On May 13, 1960, in a confrontation that came to be known as Black Friday, approximately two hundred demonstrators, mostly students from the University of California, Berkeley, sought admission to San Francisco City Hall to protest a hearing by the House Un-American Activities Committee.²³ They modeled their demonstration on the sit-ins that had begun only months before in North Carolina, when several black students refused to move from a Woolworth lunch counter.²⁴ The demonstration in San Francisco, unlike previous altercations, was met with immediate government-sponsored violence. When the students sat down and refused to leave, four hundred policemen reportedly hosed them and beat them with clubs, dragging many down the marble steps by their

feet and hair. The incident was a watershed, nationally and internationally, setting a precedent for radical activism by students throughout the sixties.

Black Friday served as a prologue to the free speech movement on the Berkeley campus four years later. The largest instance of campus disobedience in the country’s history to date, the free speech movement not only helped secure First Amendment rights on campuses nationwide, but reaffirmed constitutional protection of organized advocacy and freedom of assembly on a broad civilian scale. The free speech movement was also, ultimately, a warm-up exercise for the upheaval over the Vietnam War. Although the war was clearly an event of national and international magnitude, Berkeley once again took a leadership role in organizing student dissent. When the radical activist and future Yippie Jerry Rubin decided to organize the Vietnam Day Committee in May 1965, his prospects were bleak, as a former student at Berkeley recounted: “At the time pacifists, leftists, and independent-minded intellectuals who denounced the Vietnam War were ignored; few Americans objected to the war.”²⁵ Although earlier that spring the University of Michigan had organized its landmark antiwar “teach-in” and the first major march on Washington, D.C., by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) had drawn an estimated 25,000 demonstrators, the event Rubin organized—a two-day series of speeches and performances at the Berkeley campus, featuring Allen Ginsberg, Norman Mailer, Phil Ochs, and Alan Watts and culminating in a march—represented the largest campus opposition to the war to date. The media surrounding these events helped bring to national consciousness the gravity of the war, which had begun its dramatic escalation from 1964 to 1965, when the number of U.S. troops on active duty in Vietnam had increased from 23,000 to 184,314.²⁶ In the next few years, demonstrations swept across the nation with the revelations of atrocities: Operation Rolling Thunder, a policy of saturation bombing that dropped seven million tons of explosives (about twice the total used on Europe

and Asia in World War II), leaving an estimated twenty million bomb craters on a country of 128,400 square miles; Operation Ranch Hand, which sprayed approximately four million gallons of herbicide and defoliant over the countryside; and most wrenching of all, the My Lai massacre of March 1968, in which an American platoon senselessly executed, mutilated, and raped more than three hundred civilian women, children, and elderly men in a South Vietnamese village.

The controversy over the Vietnam War was particularly strident in California, not only because the defense industry sharpened the polarity of the state's politics, but because of its geographic position as gateway to the Pacific. The war could not simply be ignored when California was the last mainland stop on the way to Vietnam and the first point of entry from the battlefield. Between 1965 and 1968, 222,750 soldiers passed through the Oakland Army Base alone on their way to the Pacific.²⁷ The return numbers were similar: veterans came flooding back through the state's ports—some wounded, some former prisoners of war, many of them to stay—and so did the dead. A particularly chilling reminder of the war's toll was the participation of Oakland-based World Airways in Operation Babylift, which rescued thousands of orphaned babies and children from Vietnam in 1975.²⁸ California also became home to the largest population of Vietnamese refugees in the world, most settling in San Jose and Orange County.

The final and perhaps most significant clash between Left and Right in California occurred with the rise of the social movements of the sixties and seventies. Again, California's experience was part of a widespread national rupture, but one that was especially acute. To begin with, the liberation groups that emerged in California during the Vietnam War had a lot to do with the state's participation in that war—and the two preceding wars. California already had a long history of discrimination, with its large immigrant labor populations of Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican descent. California's Alien Land Law, the

Chinese Exclusion Act, the internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans, and Operation Wetback are but a few well-known examples of racial prejudice that affected minority groups in the West.²⁹ Yet the groups that had suffered the most in the past—Chinese and Japanese Americans—were the least active in the liberation movements of the sixties.³⁰ This made perfect sense in the new socioeconomic climate of the cold war West. Unlike Chicanos and African Americans, who experienced worsening economic and social conditions after the Korean War, Asian Americans tended to benefit from militarization. Between 1950 and 1965 Chinese and Japanese American men with training in engineering and science joined the white-collar workforce as they took high-paying jobs in the defense industry and for the first time enjoyed middle- and upper-middle-class status in appreciable numbers.³¹ During the sixties Japanese Americans were on the whole better educated than whites, and college deferments kept many from being called into military service.³²

This suggests how critical the impact of the cold war was in sparking political unrest in California. The magnitude and speed of the demographic shifts that occurred in the fifties and sixties, coupled with the repressive social developments, set the stage for insurrection among the groups in the state who faced the greatest discrimination during those years—African Americans, Chicanos, and gays. Along with the successes of the civil rights movement under Martin Luther King Jr., the free speech movement and massive antiwar protests inspired emancipatory fervor. In many cases agitation for civil rights combined with antiwar efforts. It is no coincidence that in the summer of 1965, only a few months after President Lyndon Johnson ordered a large increase of combat troops to Vietnam, the Watts riots erupted in South Central Los Angeles—one of the largest civil disturbances in American history, with 3,952 arrests and an estimated forty million dollars' worth of damage. The 2.5-square-mile area housed half a million African Americans, many of them migrants from the South who had come

to find work in the defense industry.³³ During World War II African Americans found employment working in the shipping and aircraft industries, but in the fifties and sixties the increasingly technical defense jobs went to whites and Asians. The Vietnam War not only tended to reinforce black-white segregation in the workforce, but blacks were also drafted into military service in disproportionate numbers.³⁴ The Black Panther Party leaders in Oakland were among the first to speak out against the high number of African Americans going to war, asserting solidarity with the nascent Chicano movement.³⁵

The Chicano liberation movement came of age the same year as the Watts riots. In 1965 César Chávez organized the Great Delano Grape Strike in the San Joaquin Valley, an event that helped make him the country's most visible Latino activist and led to his successes in California's labor movement through the United Farm Workers of America. The conflicts that gave rise to the Chicano movement were much the same as those affecting African Americans: a massive immigration during the decade after World War II (between 1944 and 1954, "the decade of the wetback," it is estimated that the number of undocumented workers coming from Mexico increased sixtyfold), followed by discriminatory housing, wages, education, and—a particularly sore point in the sixties—overrepresentation in combat and casualty rolls. In April 1968, the month that King was shot, ten thousand Mexican American students walked out of six East Los Angeles high schools to protest racism. Their disruption of the largest school system in the United States marked the entry of Chicanos into mass social activism, including many protests against the Vietnam War, culminating in 1970 in the march organized by the Chicano Moratorium in East Los Angeles, one of the largest off-campus antiwar demonstrations in the nation.

Adding to this tide of protest activity, the women's movement arrived in 1966 with the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW), based in Washington D.C., and gay liberation soon after, fol-

lowing the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969.³⁶ While California did not assume a position of national leadership in the women's movement,³⁷ gay pride ascended to prominence in the state, eventually earning San Francisco the title of "the gay capital of America." Like the Chicano and African American movements, the struggle for gay rights in the West was profoundly shaped by the Korean and Vietnam wars and specifically catalyzed by conservative efforts at containment. Hostilities began with government and military purges during the fifties and sixties. (According to navy records, that branch of the service alone discharged an average of 1,100 sailors a year for homosexuality between 1950 and 1965.)³⁸ As early as 1950 some conservative politicians in California were comparing the "gay menace" to the threat of Communism. But this harassment only helped the homosexual cause; as Hugginie has noted, "An irony of the high-profile persecution of gays and lesbians is that it helped to 'mark'—define and advertise—that very identity [and thus] helped to put Los Angeles and San Francisco on the map as West Coast centers for gays and lesbians."³⁹ By the seventies an estimated 200,000 of San Francisco's residents were gay men and at least another 50,000 were lesbians.⁴⁰ San Francisco was among the first cities in America in which gays and lesbians gained electoral clout. A historic breakthrough was reached with the election in 1977 of openly homosexual San Francisco county supervisor Harvey Milk, whose assassination less than a year later made him a martyr for the gay cause.⁴¹

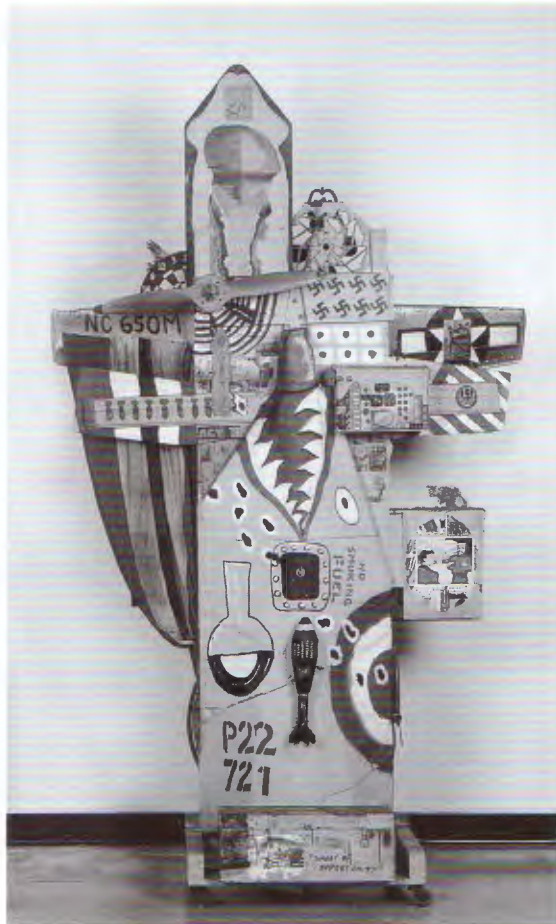
THE REMARKABLE political ferment in California does not in itself explain the artistic response it generated, which formed a striking contrast to the initial near-silence of New York's avant-garde. As mentioned earlier, one basic reason for the disparity was that the structure of art production was entirely different in California. In cities across the state, teaching positions rather than art sales provided support for artists, which gave them greater independence from the constraints of commerce.⁴² Thus conditions in the West—

particularly in the San Francisco Bay Area, which had few commercially successful art galleries until the early seventies—were conducive to a far greater range of artistic expression. This lack of competitive pressure meant that California artists were not locked into the market-driven orthodoxy that held New York artists in its grip. That orthodoxy can be summed up by the critic Clement Greenberg's dictum that contemporary art "should confine itself exclusively to what is given in visual experience, and make no reference to anything given in other orders of experience."⁴³ The writings of "Greenberg and the group" (as the critics who held sway in those years became known) were highly influential in promoting an art entirely drained of extra-aesthetic meaning.⁴⁴

Yet this was an ideology that ran deeper than mere marketing strategy; it had to do with shifting attitudes and alliances among the artists and intellectuals associated with the Old Left. Essentially, the effects of McCarthyism, combined with a growing boom in the art market and its cult of personalities, served to compromise—one might even say de-fang—whatever political aspirations those erstwhile radicals may have had.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, for the generation that emerged in the thirties nurtured on Marxist debate, abstraction itself had become politicized, standing for freedom and a hard-won triumph over Fascist and Stalinist realism as well as capitalist kitsch.⁴⁶ They took refuge in the premise that Meyer Schapiro put forth in his landmark essay "The Liberating Quality of Avant-garde Art" (1957)—the idea that rejecting tradition was itself a political act, and that the autonomy of art, as a form of personal liberation, was the only guarantee of political and ethical integrity in an otherwise deterministic world.⁴⁷ This became an ideological tenet of even the most left-leaning artists of the Abstract Expressionist generation like Ad Reinhardt and David Smith. In the sixties it would continue to serve as a rationale for New York's color field painters, Pop artists, and Minimalists. The Minimalist sculptor Donald Judd, a high-profile political activist who belonged to the Art Workers' Coalition and

was among the New Yorkers who participated in the Los Angeles *Peace Tower* in 1966, echoed the sentiments of some of the Old Left when he insisted that art and politics should remain in separate spheres. But Judd had trouble refuting those still scarce but increasingly vocal political artists like Leon Golub. Golub sounded an ominous warning to formalists in 1969 when he wrote to the editors of *Artforum*: "The abstract sculptures etc., in our cities become grimacing monsters if viewed in political or utopian contexts. . . . Those arts that began with the modernist dream of human freedom may find they serve technological masters and the American empire."⁴⁸

By contrast, California's postwar avant-garde was much more closely allied to New Left thinking and, indeed, as the historian Stewart Burns and others have argued, presaged a number of shifts in American radicalism.⁴⁹ There were certainly artists in California who followed the formalist imperatives emanating from New York. This was particularly true in early sixties Los Angeles, where a contingent of abstractionists clustered around the Ferus Gallery in West Hollywood, keeping politics at a safe distance from their art. One of the gallery's mainstay artists, Billy Al Bengston, for example, refused to participate in antiwar protests, by one account explaining cynically that "with the war going on all the people in Orange County had money to buy his art."⁵⁰ But Bengston represented a minority view. Far more significant for the evolving political discourse was the social commentary of the California Beats, a loose-knit, somewhat nomadic association of artists of largely anarchist and libertarian persuasion.⁵¹ The Beats formed a true underground in the sense that they functioned almost entirely through such noncommercial means as cooperative galleries and private presses. Wallace Berman, Bruce Conner, Jay DeFeo, Wally Hedrick, George Herms, Jess, Ben Talbert, and their literary cohorts Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Michael McClure, Stuart Perkoff, Kenneth Rexroth, Gary Snyder, and Jack Spicer were among the artists and poets who, as early as the forties, began to reject the formalism that had become



BEN TALBERT
THE ACE, 1963
 Assemblage, 96 x 50 x
 38 in. Nora Eccles
 Harrison Museum of Art,
 Utah State University;
 Marie Eccles Caine
 Foundation Gift.

obligatory in New York and to embrace a far more inclusive approach that combined an intense personalism with an uncompromising critique of society—specifically, of the increasingly conservative culture of cold war America. In their visual art and writings (which were sometimes collaborative), the Beats attacked a wide range of issues, including bigotry, homophobia, xenophobia, consumerism, censorship of all kinds, the destruction of the environment, America’s “colonial” foreign policy—and most of all (not surprisingly, considering they were in California), the growing military-industrial complex, which Ginsberg denounced as America’s “Moloch.”⁵²

Significantly, the Beats were not only witnesses to, but also *targets of*, conservative efforts at social con-

tainment through sanctions both legal and illegal. There are many examples that could be cited, but a few stand out: After publishing a candid essay on homosexuality in 1944, Robert Duncan found himself banned by the literary establishment.⁵³ In the mid-fifties the North Beach police continually harassed the black poet Bob Kaufman for having a white girlfriend; finally an officer stamped on Kaufman’s foot and broke his toe.⁵⁴ When the artist Cameron was found living among blacks in Pasadena, a bench warrant was issued for her arrest. Wallace Berman was denied unemployment benefits in Los Angeles because of his beard. Any explicit reference to sex was met with police action. The numerous arrests and trials of California artists on obscenity charges became causes célèbres



CHARLES BRITTIN
 ARTHUR RICHER,
 WALLACE BERMAN,
 JOHN REED, VICE
 SQUAD OFFICER, 1957

Gelatin silver print.
 Courtesy of the
 photographer.

in the art community and beyond. The arrest of Berman for exhibiting a drawing of a couple copulating (it was, in fact, a drawing by Cameron), the attempt by police to close down Edward Kienholz's show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art because of the artist's "obscene" *Back Seat Dodge '38* (1964, p. 95), and, most famously, the obscenity trial for Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1955) are just a few of the better-known highly publicized incidents of censorship.

In response to this unrelenting antagonism, some Beats withdrew, while others became increasingly bold in their critiques and open about their unconventional lifestyles. Ginsberg's declaration of his homosexuality in the national press in 1959, at a time when same-sex relations were still illegal in most states, Michael McClure's defiant play *The Beard*, which scandalized San Francisco in the mid-sixties and Mc-

Clure's poem "Poisoned Wheat" (1965), which laid bare the sins of America's founding,⁵⁵ were in an important sense precedents to, if not early manifestations of, the New Left's activist spirit. With the increasing media focus on the Beats, what had begun as a private underground began to fire a collective imagination far exceeding the boundaries of the art and poetry worlds. Ironically, the attempt to render the Beats harmless by a process of Dobey Gillification (that is, making them cute and laughable "dropouts") only served to swell the ranks of California's counterculture, laying the ethical foundation for the student protest movements, the hippies, and the rebellious youth culture that spread across America.

Thus, the Beats not only responded to the ferment; they played a major role in catalyzing it. And yet their work has been described as fundamentally apolitical—at least in the strict sense—in that it was generally designed for a private audience as a kind of personal catharsis shared among like-minded individuals.⁵⁶ George Herms's *Secret Exhibition* of 1956, for example, scattered over a series of weed-choked lots in Hermosa Beach in Southern California, was seen by only a very few.⁵⁷ Wallace Berman's hand-printed magazine *Semina*—produced from 1955 to 1964 and containing poems, photographs, and drawings—frequently dealt with highly charged political issues, from civil rights disturbances in Alabama to the censorship of Lenny Bruce, but its distribution was limited to a small group of friends. His *Semina* Gallery is yet another example of the Beats' disregard for public exposure. Housed in an abandoned roofless boathouse in the Larkspur marshlands, the gallery literally sank into the mud after hosting exhibitions by Berman's friends, each show lasting no more than a few hours. Typical of Beat assemblage, most of the works shown were made of cast-off materials and have long since perished. Such junk sculpture, or Funk Art, as it was later called,⁵⁸ was itself a political statement—a rejection of the consumerist culture of the postwar era and specifically of the elitist politics of the art market.

While Beat art was in a certain sense anti-elitist,

its political impulse was never truly populist. This is arguably the deepest ideological divide between the political art of the Beats and that of the subsequent generation. In the sixties populism virtually exploded in California, bringing with it a profusion of political art forms that aimed to reach beyond the art world to a mass audience, mirroring the simultaneous burst of political activism. This tendency was particularly evident in the flamboyant counterculture of the Bay Area, where in the mid-sixties Haight-Ashbury “entrepreneurs” opened “free stores” that ridiculed consumerism. There was even an anarchist street theater group called the Diggers (named after a seventeenth-century English sect of religious communists), which gave away or burned money and made free lunches for thousands in the Panhandle.⁵⁹ This group popularized guerrilla theater in San Francisco, performing impromptu critiques of war, racism, and capitalist excess in the parks and streets of the city.⁶⁰

Of the artists associated with the Haight-Ashbury counterculture, it was perhaps the psychedelic poster designers who most embodied this populism. Victor Moscoso, who had studied at Yale University with Josef Albers, exemplified the egalitarian spirit when he stopped painting after realizing that “for a dollar or two anyone could buy one of his posters.”⁶¹ In fact, many posters were free. Rock concert impresario Bill Graham recalled tacking up dance posters along Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley in 1966, and after finishing four blocks discovering that people were taking them down as fast as he could put them up. After that he gave away posters to all advance ticket purchasers, but ultimately “bowed to the inevitable and offered free posters to all who attended.”⁶² While artists like Moscoso, Rick Griffin, Joe McHugh, Sätty, and Wes Wilson did not attempt to effect changes at the courthouse or ballot box, they did seek to foster an insurgent consciousness that challenged the consensus values of American culture. With their eye-catching neon colors and turbulent designs, these artists captured the ecstatic revelry of psychedelics and in doing so hoped to change conventional perceptions of



SÄTTY
STONE GARDEN, 1966
 Lithograph, 35 × 23 in.
 © East Totem West.

life itself—to make an impact on what R. D. Laing called the politics of experience.⁶³

As an art form that is not only anti-elitist but also inherently public, posters became the obvious medium of choice for a wide spectrum of activists in the sixties and early seventies. During that period thousands of posters were made for various political movements, from Chávez’s strikers to the Black Panthers to Vietnam War protesters. Political posters were already a well-established genre in America, having gained particular prominence during World War II, when illustrators such as Norman Rockwell and N. C. Wyeth popularized images of victory and patriotism. The new breed of American poster artist took inspiration from the European avant-garde and transformed the medium from a vehicle of government-sponsored propaganda to an expression of dissent.



ROBBIE CONAL
MONICA LEWINSKY, 1998;
HILLARY CLINTON, 1999;
BILL CLINTON, 2000

Charcoal on canvas,
approximately 22½ × 18½ in.
each. San Jose Museum of
Art. Gift of James Otis—
Peaceful Warrior Collection.

Political poster artists often circumvented the commodification system by means of private production and public dissemination. With no funding or institutional support, artists were forced to think, as the Los Angeles painter and activist Irving Petlin remarked, in terms of “the disposable and transitory life of the streets.”⁶⁴ Petlin himself helped organize one of the earliest and most dramatic artistic protest events of the Vietnam War era—the Artists’ Protest Committee’s White-out of 1965, which plastered the facades of art galleries along La Cienega Boulevard with posters stamped with the group’s “Stop Escalation” logo. Associated primarily with the antiwar protests of the sixties, this kind of guerrilla activity survives today in the poster art of Robbie Conal, who stages “art attacks” against Republican and Democratic leaders alike in “secret midnight blitzes” that cover the streets of Los Angeles with his satires.⁶⁵

Of all movements in California during the sixties and seventies, the Chicano movement gave the greatest prominence to the poster as a tool for political action. As George Lipsitz has observed, Chicano posters “functioned as part of the movement itself, as vital forms that performed important work in the struggle for social change.”⁶⁶ The first graphics were pro-

duced in the mid-sixties for Chávez’s United Farm Workers Organizing Committee to help mobilize its boycotting efforts. With the advent of community-based collectives, or *centros culturales*, throughout California in the early seventies, the impetus shifted to a broader range of concerns, from immigration and border politics to police brutality, drug abuse, and gang warfare. In more recent years poster artists such as Ester Hernández and Richard Duardo have continued to articulate issues of identity and cultural and historical reclamation.

If posters reach an audience far greater than that of paintings, sculpture, or even photography, so do murals, the other major art forms that reemerged in the early seventies. Like posters, political murals are hardly unique to California, but they have been especially prevalent in the state and have continued to remain a vital form of contemporary expression. San Francisco has a particularly strong history of political mural production, beginning with the projects sponsored by the Works Progress Administration in the thirties, notably the Coit Tower frescoes, which caused considerable controversy for their alleged Communist innuendos. The arrival in that decade of the Mexican muralists known as Los Tres Grandes—Diego Rivera in San Francisco and José Clemente



ESTER HERNÁNDEZ

SUN MAD, 1982

Screenprint, 22 × 17 in.

Courtesy of the artist.

Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros in Los Angeles—left a lasting legacy. When mural art experienced a resurgence in the early seventies, many artists turned to Los Tres Grandes for inspiration, positioning themselves in the populist tradition of the Mexicans. Mural painting has proved to be a particularly powerful tool for a variety of social and ethnic movements. In California, African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, women, and gays have all used murals to enhance cultural solidarity—an objective clearly enunciated in 1974 by the women’s collective Las

Mujeres Muralistas of San Francisco: “Our intent as artists is to put art close to where it needs to be. Close to the children; close to the old people; close to everyone who has to walk or ride the buses to get places.”⁶⁷

Not surprisingly, considering the strong Mexican antecedents, the Chicano movement has dominated the mural renaissance. Along with printing posters, the major artistic activity of the *centros* has continued to be organizing mural projects. Plaza de la Raza in East Los Angeles, founded in 1969, and Galería de la Raza in San Francisco’s Mission District, founded

JUDY BACA
GREAT WALL OF LOS ANGELES: DIVISION OF THE BARRIOS & CHAVEZ RAVINE; THE BIRTH OF ROCK & ROLL (DETAIL), 1983

Acrylic on cast concrete.
© SPARC
www.sparcmurals.org.



in 1970, were among the first *centros* to bring together artists and residents to create murals throughout their neighborhoods. The spirit of collaboration has been crucial to mural making in Chicano communities, as it has for other disenfranchised groups. The Chicano movement is particularly notable for forging alliances not only within its own communities, but with disparate other social groups as well. The muralist Judith Baca, founder of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), an organization dedicated to the documentation and preservation of murals in Southern California, has done the most to foster cross-cultural unification. Baca's half-mile *Great Wall of Los Angeles* (1976–), probably the longest mural in the world, is the creation of more than four hundred multiethnic neighborhood youths (many from rival gangs), forty artists, forty historians, and a support staff of over a hundred. The subject matter is also geared toward racial inclusivity, depicting the construction of the railroads by Chinese workers in the late nineteenth century, the de-

portation of Mexican immigrants in the thirties, scenes of Japanese American internment during World War II, and the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.⁶⁸

The communitarian impulse evident in Baca's project, as well as in the Chicano mural movement generally, runs through a wide range of political art and, indeed, may be considered one of the defining characteristics of California's contribution to political art in this country. Instances are as varied as they are numerous: they include street art, performance art, installation art, and other forms that do not fit any particular category.⁶⁹ An early and highly influential example is the *Artists' Tower of Protest* (also known as the *Peace Tower*), erected at the juncture of La Cienega and Sunset boulevards in Los Angeles in 1966. Designed and built under the direction of sculptor Mark di Suvero and coordinated by Irving Petlin, the fifty-five-foot tower was decorated with individual antiwar paintings by 418 artists—a virtual who's who of the Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York

art communities.⁷⁰ *Womanhouse* (1972) also ranks among the major landmarks of collective art. For this site-specific installation, twenty-one students from Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's Feminist Art Program at CalArts transformed a condemned mansion in residential Hollywood into a series of "fantasy environments," each room exploring the stereotypes and realities of the housewife.⁷¹ Bonnie Sherk's *Crossroads Community (The Farm)* (1974, pp. 228–29) took populist collectivism to an unprecedented extreme by extending an open invitation to the public to participate in her "social sculpture."⁷² Developed over a period of seven years on four and a half acres of land under a freeway interchange in San Francisco, *The Farm* consisted of crops and animals, a performance center, and art classes for children, senior citizens, and psychiatric patients.

The utopianism of collective political art in California sharply differentiates it from its European antecedents, such as Dada performances in Zurich. The critic Henry Sayre has argued that at least one strain of collective expression—performance art—can be traced to the hippie counterculture in San Francisco, citing the Human Be-In in Golden Gate Park in 1967 as a seminal event.⁷³ Others have found a potent source in the antihierarchical ideology of the women's movement, particularly among feminist groups in California.⁷⁴ But these are manifestations rather than causes. The communal urge so prevalent in the American West first emerged with the beleaguered counterculture of the Beats, stemming from a desire for solidarity, shared experience, and a hybrid, synthetic expression that blurred the boundaries between jazz, poetry, and painting. One of the first "Happenings" on the West Coast took place in 1957 (a year before Allan Kaprow coined the term). Billed as an evening of "collective expressionism," the event was a collaboration between painters and poets at the 6 Gallery in San Francisco. Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac read poetry while members of the audience used an ax to chop up a piano and some of the paintings on display. Ginsberg's legendary reading of *Howl* at the



same gallery in 1955—which incited something like the frenzy of a tribal rite—set a precedent for the performative, collective poetry readings that brought fame to San Francisco. The sixties counterculture, bolstered by the spread of collective political action, expanded upon the Beats' holistic, communal ideal, so much so that it became a leitmotif of the period, from Ken Kesey's massively attended "acid tests" of 1965–66—rock-and-light shows at which an estimated ten thousand people took LSD—to People's Park in Berkeley in 1969, and finally to the popular vogue for communal living and group sex. The driving force behind all of these efforts at unity was not merely social innovation or fashion, but ultimately a deeply political yearning to end the rampant divisiveness of the era.

In the seventies and eighties the artists who did the most to extend the collaborative tradition in California art tended to be those associated with the

SHEILA DE BRETTEVILLE
WOMANHOUSE
CATALOGUE COVER,
1971

Pictured left to right:
Miriam Schapiro and Judy
Chicago. © 1971 Through
the Flower Archives. Photo:
Courtesy of Through the
Flower Archives.

period's emancipatory movements. Initially they did so for practical reasons, as many disenfranchised artists had done before them when they needed strength in numbers, notably modernists early in the twentieth century. Artists' cooperatives were particularly vital for artists affiliated with social movements in California because they suffered from demographic *and* geographic marginalization. After 1970 some of the most radical forms of political art were the product of artists' collectives that rejected "high" art by engaging in direct interventions to effect social and political change. The performance group Asco (Spanish for "nausea"), for example, was born in 1971 out of the art world's refusal to show the work of its members—Harry Gamboa Jr., Gronk, Willie Herrón, and Patssi Valdez. The group's first effort was graffiti sprayed on the walls of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art protesting a curator's stated disinterest in Chicano art. The group went on to perform a range of guerrilla theater pieces, some of which were strikingly prescient in their critique of the conformity of Chicanos within the Chicano movement. They were more than a decade ahead of their time in works such as the *Instant Mural* (1974), a performance piece that satirized Chicano mural-

ASCO

Left to right: Harry Gamboa Jr., Willie Herrón, Patssi Valdez, Gronk, and Humberto Sandoval in 1974. Photo © 1974 Harry Gamboa Jr. Courtesy of Patricia Correia Gallery, Santa Monica, California.



ism. Only in the eighties and nineties did the anti-assimilation model begin to break down, replaced by a more inclusive identity politics articulating a theory of "intersectionality" and "post-colonial hybridity."⁷⁵

As the sociologist Todd Gitlin has noted, the flip side of the communal strain of the sixties and seventies was a seemingly opposed but equally powerful libertarian tendency that amounted to a cult of the self-sufficient individual searching for maximum personal freedom.⁷⁶ This predilection was especially evident in the social liberation movements, or identity movements, as they came to be called for their stress on transcending socially constructed personae. Feminists were among the first to promote the idea that defining the self was the first step toward liberation. Faith Wilding, who was on the ground floor of feminist art in California as a student of Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro at Fresno State (where the first feminist art program in America was established in 1970), remembers that the feminist artists' slogan from the beginning was "The personal is the political."⁷⁷ She recalls how Chicago and Schapiro's program "contested the canons of Greenbergian formalism" that were the required curricula of art schools: "Never in our previous art education had we been asked to make work out of a real life experience, much less one so emotionally loaded. . . . I remember the almost unbearable mixture of excitement, fear, and pain in the room as this raw work burst forth. . . . By fortuitous accident, it seemed, we had stumbled on a way of working: using consciousness-raising to elicit content, we then worked in any medium or mixture of media—including performance, roleplaying, conceptual- and text-based art, and other nontraditional tools—to reveal our hidden histories."⁷⁸

Numerous artists have since used storytelling as a means of reclaiming the past—both personal and collective. Paralleling the literary explosion of culturally diverse self-narratives, some of the most compelling art of recent years records emotionally charged recollections, from Roger Shimomura's re-



LONG NGUYEN
TALES OF YELLOW SKIN
#5, 1992
Oil on canvas, 66 × 66 in.
Courtesy of the artist.

membrance of his third birthday in a Japanese American internment camp to Carmen Lomas Garza's memories of tamale making in her childhood home in Texas. One of the most powerful examples of works in this vein, Long Nguyen's series *Tales of Yellow Skin* (1991–), bears witness to the artist's harrowing experiences as a boy growing up in the midst of war-racked Vietnam.

As Faith Wilding suggests, some of the most intimate disclosures have come from the feminist movement, particularly during the early years, when artists such as Lynn Hershman, Rachel Rosenthal, and Wilding herself addressed formerly untouchable themes, such as menstruation and the female orgasm. In recent years feminists have tended to move away from

body-based subjects but have not abandoned their preoccupation with intimate autobiography. Linda Montano's performances have covered a spectrum of personal topics, from a detailed account of her grief over her husband's accidental death to her own battles with menopause and aging. Gay and lesbian artists have also been confessionally frank in their work. David Hockney's paintings allow a glimpse into the most confidential aspects of his love life, while Lari Pittman proclaims his gay sexuality in vast, self-consciously celebratory canvases.

Attempting to expose the simplistic notions of ethnic and gender stereotyping, some artists have taken to fanciful reworkings of identity that go far beyond the mere exploding of myths. Eleanor Antin,



ELEANOR ANTIN
*MY KINGDOM IS THE
 RIGHT SIZE, FROM THE
 KING OF SOLANA
 BEACH, 1974*

Gelatin silver print, 6 x 9 in.
 Collection of Mildred Lane
 Kemper Art Museum, St.
 Louis, Missouri. Courtesy
 Ronald Feldman Fine Arts,
 New York.

for example, produced a photographic series casting herself as various outlandish fictional personae, most provocatively as the male “King of Solana Beach.” In unannounced, spontaneous performances documented by the photographer Phil Steinmetz, Antin donned a beard, hat, and cape and walked along the beach among her unwitting “subjects” (mostly teenage boys), bestowing “greetings, advice, and good wishes.”⁷⁹ Equally provocative gender-bending can be found in the tiny jewel-like paintings of Tino Rodríguez, who takes on the guise of bloodthirsty Saint Sebastians and androgynous mermaids. M. Louise Stanley has created some of the funniest fictional selves in her updated versions of Greek myths. Recognizable in her form-fitting capris, striped top, and flaming-red hair, Stanley plays a starring role in paintings such as *Pygmaliana* (1984), in which an Adonis

leans out of a canvas to plant a kiss on her lips. *Belly Dancer* (1993) has her jumping up and down on a prone man’s stomach to vent the very real frustrations Stanley feels about the art world’s ongoing sexual discrimination.

Stanley belongs to a distinctive line of Bay Area artists who employ wit to reveal painful social and political truths. The region’s penchant for political humor dates at least as far back as the early forties, when Clay Spohn painted his *Fantastic War Machines*, images of Rube Goldberg-like contraptions that mocked the military’s boastful visions of technological prowess.⁸⁰ In the mid-sixties, political satire returned with a vengeance in the eye-stinging canvases of Peter Saul. Using repellent rubbery distortions and lurid colors to shake his viewers out of their complacency, Saul has continued to assail American politics and culture. His



Vietnam paintings (1965–72) are particularly shocking, portraying American soldiers raping, sodomizing, and crucifying Vietnamese women. Later paintings expose the hypocrisies of American political leaders with venomous satire.

Another arch satirist from the Bay Area is Robert Arneson, whose grotesque caricatures of the seventies placed him alongside Edward Kienholz as one of the foremost California sculptors tackling political subjects. His missile-snouted generals rank among the most searing indictments of the military in American art. Caricatures of political leaders also figure importantly in Arneson's work, the best-known being the bust of George Moscone (1981, see p. 97), which caused an uproar after it was commissioned by the city of San Francisco and then rejected for its "disrespectful" portrayal of the assassinated mayor. The Bay

Area's tradition of irreverent satire survives in the caricature of Enrique Chagoya, who, like Arneson, began his career as a political cartoonist. Since the mid-eighties Chagoya has delighted in lampooning public figures, recently casting President George W. Bush and his cabinet in the roles of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (*Untitled*, 2004).

The artist who has probably achieved the most attention for his political satire in recent years is Robert Colescott. Although Colescott belongs to the generation of Bay Area painters who emerged in the late sixties and seventies—the East Bay group around Peter Saul and M. Louise Stanley that the art historian Whitney Chadwick called the Narrative Imagists—his work partakes of the contemporary taste for pastiche and appropriation.⁸¹ Colescott hit upon his signature approach in the mid-seventies, when he began

M. LOUISE STANLEY
PYGMALIANA, 1984
 Oil on canvas, 24 × 32½ in.
 From installation *Pompeian Villa*. Courtesy of the artist.

ROBERT COLESCOTT
GEORGE WASHINGTON
CARVER CROSSING THE
DELAWARE: PAGE
FROM AN AMERICAN
HISTORY TEXTBOOK,
1975

Acrylic on canvas, 84 x
108 in. Collection of
Robert and Lois Orchard.
Courtesy of the artist and
Phyllis Kind Gallery.



a series of parodies of famous paintings. The subject had been a staple of Arneson and his students since the sixties, but Colescott added a distinctive political twist by substituting white protagonists with blacks. *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an American History Textbook* (1975), for example, forces viewers to confront the absence of blacks in mainstream history and high culture.

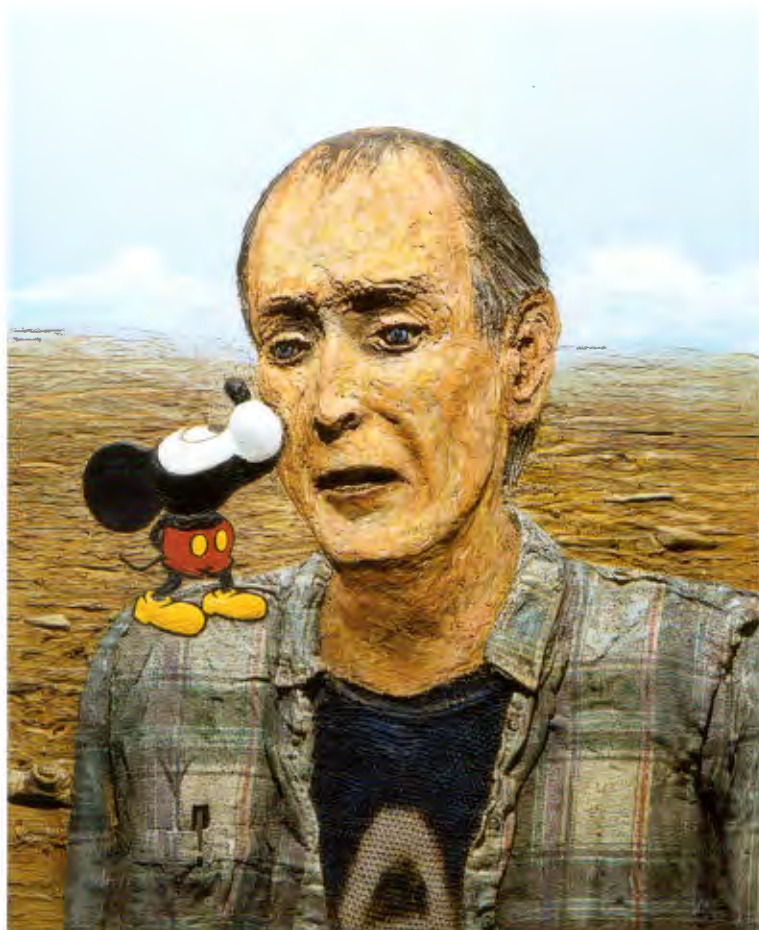
Colescott's nomination as the American representative at the Venice Biennale in 1997 coincided with a major reordering of values in the art world, a shifting of terms that led to the embrace of figurative art and its discredited cousin, political satire. Colescott has now been hailed as an important progenitor of contemporary trends. As the art curator Low-

ery Sims observed, his narrative approach has secured him "a key position within the history of American art" for presaging the revival of figuration and "the bad manners of Post-modernism."⁸² The same claims have been made for the art of the Chicano and feminist movements. According to painter and poster designer Rupert García, the Chicano artists of the sixties gave rise to the postmodernist disregard for style development with their insistence on "expressive representationalism."⁸³ Lucy Lippard credited feminist artists with initiating the "sweeping" changes of the seventies. "In endlessly different ways," she wrote, "the best women artists have resisted the treadmill to progress by simply disregarding a history that was not theirs."⁸⁴ In Lippard's estimate, the most revolution-

ary contribution of feminist art was not its forms, but its content—a reversal of Greenbergian priorities.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe these tendencies as influential rather than revolutionary. Certainly the rise of identity art movements throughout the United States in the early seventies marked an end of an aesthetics-based avant-garde. As the eighties advanced, it became acceptable once again for artists to address social and political issues without being excluded from the mainstream.⁸⁵ But this had been the case in California for decades; indeed, in 1964 the curator Paul Mills commented on the complete rejection of “the whole power politics of style” by ostensibly nonpolitical Bay Area Figurative artists such as David Park,⁸⁶ who won much admiration among his California colleagues in 1957 when he dared to debunk modernism’s obsessive genealogy with the comment that “concepts of progress in painting are rather foolish.”⁸⁷

It is this emphasis on individual experience rather than on theory or tradition that has largely been responsible for the comparative abundance of political art in California. The widespread suspicion that formalism’s art-for-art’s-sake ideal was in fact “a ludicrous fantasy,” as the artist/poet José Montoya put it, has encouraged artists to pursue meaningful subjects in a plurality of styles—even availing themselves of the most discredited forms.⁸⁸ Only in such an artistic climate could painters like Hans Burkhardt, Irving Norman, and Llyn Foulkes devote decades to political dissent in the traditional medium of oil painting. California has been, if not a haven, certainly an environment where artists have been able to reinvigorate the genre of political art using any means they choose, whether old-fashioned easel painting or the latest forms of new media. With recent signs that the mainstream art world is relinquishing the aesthetics of neutrality that made Duchamp and Warhol the twin idols of the last century, the artists in this volume may strike a particular chord of relevance today—asserting values of commitment to the concerns of the collective heart and mind.



LLYN FOULKES
THE CORPORATE KISS,
2001

Oil, acrylic, and mixed
media, 31½ × 26¼ in. San
Jose Museum of Art. Gift of
The Lipman Family
Foundation. © Llyn Foulkes.

NOTES

FOREWORD

1. Susan Landauer, ed., *Selections: The San Jose Museum of Art Permanent Collection* (San Jose: San Jose Museum of Art, 2004), xvi.

OVERVIEW: COUNTERING CULTURES

I would like to thank Heather Farkas, Barbara Kutis, Debbie McKeown, David Richardson, and Lindsey Wylie for their help in researching and fact-checking this essay.

1. Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969). "Aesthetics of Silence" is the title of Sontag's first chapter, an apology for New York's formalism that echoes the support for the separation of art and politics in postwar writings of Old Left intellectuals such as Meyer Schapiro.
2. Max Kozloff, "... A Collage of Indignation," *Nation*, February 20, 1967, 248, quoted in Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 113.
3. Holland Cotter, "Politics That Makes Peace with the Beauty of Objects," *New York Times*, June 18, 2004.
4. For a concise discussion of these movements, see Stewart Burns, *Social Movements of the 1960s: Searching for Democracy* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990).
5. Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, 81.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Mention of West Coast political art is made in some of the large survey books on American art. See, for example, William C. Seitz, *Art in the Age of Aquarius, 1955–1970* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 171–73. Seitz identifies San Francisco's "radical and revolutionary counterculture," represented especially by Beat assemblagists, as having "initiated the disenchanting, anarchistic spirit that took hold in New York after 1967." He discusses George Herms, Bruce Conner, Wallace Berman, and focuses on Edward Kienholz and Peter Saul (whose name is inexplicably misspelled as "Peter Dail"). See also Irving Sandler's *American Art of the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 293. Most of Sandler's discussion in his chapter "The Artist as Political Activist" focuses not on art production but on artists' involvement with political protest. There are also

several broad surveys of California visual culture that discuss political art, although they do not give as much space to the subject as one might expect. Peter Plagens's *Sunshine Muse: Contemporary Art on the West Coast* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974) shows a marked formalist bias. His chapter covering Beat assemblage does not address the political context of the work and only minimally focuses on content; otherwise he ignores the politics of sixties counterculture and activist art entirely. Thomas Albright's *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945–1980: An Illustrated History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) briefly discusses the political nature of Beat assemblage, as well as the psychedelic posters and visionary art of the sixties. The publications accompanying the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's mammoth exhibition of twentieth-century California art, presented at the museum in 2000, contain essays discussing political art in the state. See Peter Selz, "The Art of Political Engagement," and Chon A. Noriega, "From Beats to Borders: An Alternative History of Chicano Art in California," in Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort, eds., *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900–2000*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Howard N. Fox, "Tremors in Paradise, 1960–1980," and Fox, "Many Californias, 1980–2000," in Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort, eds., *Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900–2000*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

8. Thomas E. Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent, 1955–69* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 32. Specifically, Crow identifies "Black Friday" of 1960 in San Francisco as the event that catalyzed radical activism in both Europe and America.
9. Chicago's artists generally rejected the strict formalism of New York, remaining figurative throughout the fifties and sixties. The Monster Roster (Leon Golub, Cosmo Campoli, Seymour Rosofsky, June Leaf, H. C. Westermann, Nancy Spero, and Ellen Lanyon) produced some sociopolitical satire in the sixties, as did some of the Chicago Imagists (including Jim Nutt, Gladys Nilsson, Ed Paschke, Roger Brown, Karl Wirsum) and the Hairy Who, a subcategory of the Imagists. After moving to

New York in 1964, Golub painted his *Napalm*, which protested the Vietnam War, in 1969. Spero also moved to New York in 1964, produced long horizontal paper scrolls depicting screaming heads and less bodies. Peter Saul, whose paintings stand among the most savage critiques of the Vietnam War, is associated with Chicago because he showed at the Allen Fine Gallery. Saul's most vehement political paintings, however, were inspired by his contact with the Bay Area sixties counterculture. He lived in Mill Valley during the critical years of the Vietnam War, from 1964 to 1967, then moved to Chappaqua, New York, and later to Austin, Texas, where he currently resides. According to art historian Franz Schulze, Chicago's "most vehement political art came from the mural movement, which began with William Walker's *Wall of Respect* on the South Side and led to a multitude of wall paintings throughout the city, nearly all of them politically hortatory in content." Franz Schulze, "Art in Chicago: the Tradition," in *Art in Chicago, 1945–1995*, exh. cat. (London: Thames and Hudson in association with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1996), 26.

10. This is not to say that California's dark side has not been examined as well. Beginning with Carey McWilliams's muckraking books, notably *Factories in the Field* and *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (1949), California's "noir" aspect has been a subject of discussion for its utopianism. See also Lars Nittve and Hellmuth O. Thoenen, *Sunshine and Noir*, exh. cat. (Humblebar, Louisiana: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 1995); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles* (New York: Random House, 1992). All these studies, however, focus on Southern California, a tendency to view Northern California's radicalism as a sign of its tolerance for newness and eccentricities. See, for example, Robbin Henderson's study in *The Whole World's Watching: Peace and Politics Movements of the 1960s and 1970s*, exh. cat. (Berkeley: Berkeley Art Center, 2001): "California's history is that of diverse people crossing land and ocean, settling at the extreme western edge of what Europeans called 'The New World.' Like the history of the West, it is a history of people recreating themselves in new ways, adapting to new environments, and facing

- communities" (1). References to California's "embrace of the new" in conjunction with its paradigm shifts can also be found in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's *Made in California* and *Reading California*, even when the authors are aware they are characterizing an image more than a reality. See, for example, Kevin Starr, "Carey McWilliams's California: The Light and the Dark," in Barron, Bernstein, and Fort, eds., *Reading California*, 17, and Fox, "Tremors in Paradise," in Barron, Bernstein, and Fort, eds., *Made in California*, 193.
11. Stephen Schwartz, *From West to East: California and the Making of the American Mind* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 3–4.
 12. John Steven McGroarty, quoted in Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1946; reprint, 1994), 249.
 13. Steve Fox, "From the Beat Generation to the Sanctuary Movement," in Kevin J. Fernlund, ed., *The Cold War American West, 1945–1989* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 147. Until 1957 the city was also host to the decidedly left-leaning California Labor School, which had the largest art department of its kind in the country. See Mark Dean Johnson, ed., *At Work: The Art of California Labor* (San Francisco: California Historical Society Press, in conjunction with Heyday Books, San Francisco State University, and the California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, 2003).
 14. See Marilyn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
 15. A. Yvette Huggin, "Containment and Emancipation: Race, Class, and Gender in the Cold War West," in Fernlund, ed., *The Cold War American West*, 55.
 16. Kevin J. Fernlund, "Introduction," in Fernlund, ed., *The Cold War American West*, 1.
 17. Maria E. Montoya, "Landscapes of the Cold War West," in Fernlund, ed., *The Cold War American West*, 16.
 18. Stewart Burns pointed out that the free speech movement "was about more than freedom of speech. Reportedly, most participants, and the silent majority who supported them, felt alienated in the academic assembly line of this huge, impersonal institution that seemed increasingly harnessed to the needs of large corporations and the Pentagon." Burns, *Social Movements of the 1960s*, 64.
 19. See Ronald W. Schatz, *The Electrical Workers: A History of Labor at General Electric and Westinghouse* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983).
 20. See Kevin Starr's discussion of the loyalty oath in the chapter "Police Action," in his *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940–1950* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 312–16. In Starr's view, anti-Communism was only a secondary concern of university regents (the school had "no hard evidence of Communist Party membership on the part of a single UC faculty member"); rather, the loyalty oath had more to do with xenophobic fears and a desire to regain control of an institution "that was no longer local and hence moving beyond their grasp" (315).
 21. Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 26.
 22. Huggin, "Containment and Emancipation," 64.
 23. See William Mandel, "Defying the Red-Baiters: The 1960 HUAC Hearings," in *The Whole World's Watching*, 22–25.
 24. David Lance Goines, *The Free Speech Movement: Coming of Age in the 1960s* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1993), 687. According to Goines, by September 1961 more than seventy thousand people had participated in civil rights sit-ins.
 25. W. J. Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War: The 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 91.
 26. Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, 23.
 27. Marcia A. Eymann, Introduction, in Eymann and Charles Wollenberg, eds., *What's Going On? California and the Vietnam Era*, exh. cat. (Oakland: Oakland Museum of California; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 4.
 28. *Ibid.*, 4–5. See also Allison Martin, "The Legacy of Operation Babylift," www.adoptvietnam.org.
 29. See Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
 30. Asian Americans did, however, participate in the identity movements of the seventies and eighties, in which marginalized groups sought to connect with their cultural heritages. For more on the participation of Asian Americans in this later phase of the liberation movements, see Karin Higa, "What Is an Asian American

- Woman Artist?" in Diana Burgess Fuller and Daniela Savioni, eds., *Art/Women/California: Parallels and Intersections, 1950–2000*, exh. cat. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 81–94.
31. Huginnie, "Containment and Emancipation," 52–54, 58. Asian Americans also enjoyed markedly improved civil rights after the Korean War—for example, the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, which allowed Korean and Japanese immigrants to naturalize and an increase in the number of Chinese immigrants. According to Huginnie, these improvements were in part motivated by international criticism that "challenged the notion of the U.S. as the leader of the 'free world' given its treatment of non-Whites. . . . In the West, Asian Americans were in the spotlight of this transformation, whereas nationally it was African Americans" (52).
 32. *Ibid.*, 58. Huginnie points out that even while Japanese Americans tended to be better educated than whites, their salaries tended to be lower.
 33. The African American population in California more than tripled between 1950 and 1970—from 462,172 to 1,400,143. Kevin Allen Leonard, "Migrants, Immigrants, and Refugees: The Cold War and Population Growth in the American West," in Fernlund, ed., *The Cold War American West*, 38.
 34. This was because the draft policy during the Vietnam War gave exemptions to men in college. A disproportionate number of working-class white men were also drafted.
 35. Charles Wollenberg, "California and the Vietnam War: Microcosm and Magnification," in Eymann and Wollenberg, eds., *What's Going On?*, 17.
 36. Some historians date the modern gay movement in California to the early fifties. The repression of homosexuality in the West spurred resistance early on, beginning with the formation of the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles in 1950 and the Daughters of Bilitis in San Francisco in 1955. These groups were semiclandestine and merely sought personal adjustment and social acceptance until the mid-sixties, when they opened chapters in New York and began picketing for equal rights in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. In San Francisco, as early as 1966, three days of fighting followed a police raid on Compton's Cafeteria, a gay hangout. But the Stonewall riots in New York, which erupted after a police raid on the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, were the watershed for gay activism in America, sparking the first mass demonstrations in gay history and the formation of the Gay Liberation Front in New York in 1969. For more on the history of the gay liberation movement in California, see Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *Gay by the Bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996).
 37. Interestingly, while the political leadership of the women's movement was concentrated in the East, California artists took a leading role in fostering feminist art. As early as 1970 Judy Chicago initiated the Feminist Art Program at Fresno State College (now California State University, Fresno), the first of its kind in the nation. Just a year later she and Miriam Schapiro launched another, even more influential program at CalArts in Valencia—now legendary for producing *Womanhouse* (1972), a feminist installation that involved the collaboration of more than twenty artists.
 38. Leonard, "Migrants, Immigrants, and Refugees," 45.
 39. Huginnie, "Containment and Emancipation," 63.
 40. Leonard, "Migrants, Immigrants, and Refugees," 46.
 41. Milk's status was recently affirmed by the ongoing exhibition *Saint Harvey: The Life and Afterlife of a Modern Gay Martyr*, which opened at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society in San Francisco on June 26, 2003.
 42. See Paul J. Karlstrom, "Art Sketches: Notes on the Central Role of Schools in California Art and Culture," in Barron, Bernstein, and Fort, eds., *Reading California*, 84–109.
 43. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1965), reprinted in Francis Francina and Charles Harrison, eds., *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 8.
 44. "The group" included Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss, Jane Harrison Cone, and Sidney Tillim. See Francina, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, 142–43. See also Barbara Reise, "Greenberg and the Group: A Retrospective View," *Studio International* 175 (May 1968), 254–57 (Part I), and 175 (June 1968), 314–16 (Part II). An exception to the formalist approach of Greenberg and others could be found in the criticism of Harold Rosenberg, who looked with disfavor upon Greenberg's limited view of art's

- expressive potential. Yet while Rosenberg appreciated a wider spectrum of content than most of his colleagues, he was by no means comfortable with mixing politics and art, and in the late sixties was openly disdainful of the New York political group Angry Arts. See Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, 132–33.
45. For a fascinating discussion of the suppression of painting with political and social themes by the postwar art economy, see Bram Dijkstra, *American Expressionism: Art and Social Change, 1920–1950*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with the Columbus Museum of Art, 2003).
 46. Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, 58.
 47. Meyer Schapiro, “The Liberating Quality of Avant-garde Art,” *Art News* 56 (Summer 1956), 36–42, reprinted in Meyer Schapiro, *Modern Art: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Selected Papers*, vol. 2 (New York: George Braziller, 1978), 213–26.
 48. Leon Golub, quoted in Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, 147 (see also Frascina, 140–41). In 1970 Lucy Lippard attacked Judd for expressing his disgust with the war in private meetings with the Art Workers’ Coalition but keeping silent in public, positioning Judd as a member of “the art community’s silent majority”; Lippard, “Art Workers’ Coalition: Not a History,” *Studio International* 180 (November 1970), 172.
 49. Stewart Burns argues that the New Left looked to the Beat counterculture for inspiration, citing in particular the Port Huron Statement by Students for a Democratic Society (1962), a critique of American society that sounds very much like Beat ideology; Burns, *Social Movements of the 1960s*, 58–59. According to Francis Frascina, critics upholding the modernist orthodoxy in New York found “the worlds of the Beats and of the ‘counter-culture’ were deeply unsettling”; Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, 110.
 50. Frascina, paraphrasing Billy Al Bengston, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, 32.
 51. For a comparative presentation of the differences between the Beat cultures on the East and West coasts, see Lisa Phillips, *Beat Culture and the New America* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, in association with Flammarion, Paris, 1995). This study, however, omits the vital Southern California Beat scene centered in Venice; see John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991).
 52. Ginsberg’s line concerning Moloch reads: “sphinx of cement and aluminum . . . Moloch whose mind is pure machinery!” Allen Ginsberg, *Howl, and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Pocket Bookshop, 1956), 17.
 53. Robert Duncan, “The Homosexual in Society,” *Politics* 1 (August 1944), 209–11. On publication of this essay, in which he argued that gay writers were obliged to be honest about their sexuality, Duncan was banned from the *Kenyon Review*, at that time America’s leading literary journal.
 54. Scrapbooks of William Margolis, mid–late 1950s, William Margolis papers, Temple of Man, Beverly Hills, California.
 55. In Richard Cándida Smith’s words, the poem describes “Conquest instead of discovery; slavery instead of enterprise; a funeral pyre of indigenous peoples instead of breadbasket of the world or arsenal of democracy; atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki instead of the ‘good war’”; see Cándida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 360. Cándida Smith recounts that McClure sent 576 copies of “Poisoned Wheat” to prominent journalists, and when none responded “began to consider whether acts of violence might ultimately be necessary to sabotage the military machine” (360). Gary Snyder also presaged many of the reformist ideas of the New Left; see Cándida Smith’s chapter “Gary Snyder on the Responsibilities of Utopia: Expanding the Boundaries of Domesticity” (372–99).
 56. Both Cándida Smith and Frascina have described the Beats’ work as “apolitical” in that it did not, on the whole, attempt social change. See Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, 58, and Cándida Smith, 210. William Seitz, on the other hand, singled out the California Beats as the most politically effective artists working in 1950s America, noting that they “were the first to merge, by new figurative modes, modernism with social criticism”; see Seitz, *Art in the Age of Aquarius*, 16–17.
 57. Rebecca Solnit relates that while Herms was living in Hermosa Beach, the accumulated objects he had “harvested from beaches and vacant lots began to grow into art, and by the time [Herms and his wife] left Hermosa

- Beach for Berkeley . . . Herms had a good-sized array of assemblages. Rather than transport all this transformed junk, he returned it to its source. He installed all his early constructions in a nearby area of several square blocks of razed houses, where the foundations formed a flat, blank space like a landing strip, and left them there to be taken, destroyed, or to disintegrate. This was the *Secret Exhibition*, and he showed it to only two people, Wallace Berman and the artist John Reed"; Solnit, *Secret Exhibition: Six California Artists of the Cold War Era*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990), 15.
58. Peter Selz, *Funk*, exh. cat. (Berkeley: University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, 1967).
 59. For more on the "Digger Feeds" and Haight-Ashbury's counterculture in general, see Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1984).
 60. See Fox, "From the Beat Generation to the Sanctuary Movement," in Fernlund, ed., *The Cold War American West*.
 61. Albright, *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area*, 171.
 62. Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury*, 66.
 63. Alan Bisbort, *The White Rabbit and Other Delights: East Totem West: A Hippie Company, 1967-69* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1996), 3. Very little of substance has been written on the hippie counterculture. An excellent essay that is itself a period piece is Warren Hinckle's "A Social History of the Hippies," which appeared in *Ramparts* before the Summer of Love, in March 1967. Hinckle insisted that while hippies were dismissed as passive utopians, they were deeply political. Writing about a "Summit Meeting" to discuss the political future of the movement, held in the foothills of the Sierras (participants included novelist Ken Kesey and Beat hero Neal Cassady), Hinckle reported that the tone was serious: "They talked about reducing government controls, the sanctity of the individual, the need for equality among men. They talked, very seriously, about the kind of society they wanted to live in, and the fact that if they wanted an ideal world they would have to go out and make it for themselves, because nobody, least of all the government, was going to do it for them."

"The utopian sentiments of these hippies were not to be put down lightly. Hippies have a clear vision of the ideal community—a psychedelic community, to be sure—where everyone is turned on and beautiful and loving and happy and floating free. But it is a vision [that] necessarily embodies a radical political philosophy: communal life, drastic restriction of private property, rejection of violence, creativity before consumption, freedom before authority, de-emphasis of government and traditional forms of leadership"; Hinckle, "A Social History of the Hippies," reprinted in Dennis Hale and Jonathan Eisen, eds., *The California Dream* (New York: Collier Books, 1968), 330.
 64. Irving Petlin, quoted in Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, 29.
 65. See Patricia Hickson, "National Affairs: Recent Work by Robbie Conal," *Frameworks* (San Jose Museum of Art) 6 (Summer 2000), 4.
 66. George Lipsitz, "Not Just Another Social Movement: Poster Art and the Movimiento Chicano," in Chon A. Noriega, ed., *Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California*, exh. cat. (Santa Barbara: University Art Museum, University of Santa Barbara; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 73.
 67. Victoria Quintero, "A Mural Is a Painting on a Wall Done by Human Hands," *El Tecolote*, September 15, 1974, 6, quoted in Terezita Romo, "A Collective History: Las Mujeres Muralistas," in Fuller and Savioni, eds., *Art/Women/California*, 177.
 68. Whitney Chadwick, "Reflecting on History as Histories," in Fuller and Savioni, eds., *Art/Women/California*, 33.
 69. There are so many examples of collective art that only a fraction can be mentioned. Among the projects that have included thousands of participants in recent decades are Ariel's *Banner of Hope* (1986, p. 78), which was created by children, and the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, an ongoing project conceived in 1985 in San Francisco by gay rights activist Cleve Jones, involving, to date, more than 82,000 family members, friends, and loved ones of AIDS victims.
 70. The *Peace Tower* was organized by the Artists' Protest Committee in Los Angeles. According to Francis Frascina, "Those participating artists named as 'illustrious' by the organisers in a fund-raising letter were: Elaine

- de Kooning, Herbert Ferber, Sam Francis, Judy Gerowitz, Lloyd Hamrol, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Motherwell, Lee Mullican, Ad Reinhardt, Larry Rivers, Jim Rosenquist, Mark Rothko, Frank Stella, George Segal, Jack Zajac, Philip Evergood, George Sugarman, Claes Oldenburg, César, Karel Appel, Jean Helion, Leon Golub"; Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, 17. The *Peace Tower* was the model for another bicoastal production, *Collage of Indignation* (1967), organized by Artists and Writers Protest and comprising around 150 canvases by individual artists, some of whom, including Petlin and di Suvero, had also contributed to the *Peace Tower*.
71. Laura Meyer, "Constructing a New Paradigm: Women American Artists in California, 1950–2000," in Fuller and Savioni, eds., *Art/Women/California*, 104.
 72. "Social sculpture" is Daniela Salvioni's term for "interventionist" artists such as Baca, Sherk, Rieko Goto, Helen and Newton Harrison, and Suzanne Lacy; see Salvioni, "Introduction: Art in Context," in Fuller and Salvioni, eds., *Art/Women/California*, 7.
 73. Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 13.
 74. Faith Wilding, for example, noted that "The California branch [of feminism] focused on collaborative art making, and education and was less career-based than the New York group"; Wilding, "The Feminist Art Programs at Fresno and CalArts, 1970–75," in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 290, n. 2.
 75. Although artists such as Judith Baca, Faith Ringgold, and Adrienne Rich have explored the intertwined issues of racism and sexism since the early days of the feminist movement, it was not until the early eighties that theorists such as Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw began to speak of such ideas as "intersectionality." See Crenshaw's "Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew" for a shrewd discussion of structural, political, and representational intersectionality, in Mari J. Mastuda et al., eds. *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech and the First Amendment* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), 111–32. Lucy Lippard became a major advocate for "cross-culturalism," particularly after the publication of her book *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990). A relatively recent example of intersectionality is Thelma Golden's *Freestyle* exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem, composed of artists who refute the African American label and whom Golden calls "post-black"; see Golden et al., *Freestyle*, exh. cat. (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2001). On the West Coast, one of the best articulations of this inclusive approach to identity discourse can be found in the proceedings of an artists' roundtable at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1994, published as Reagan Louie and Carlos Villa, eds., *Worlds in Collision: Dialogues on Multicultural Art Issues* (London: International Scholars Publications in association with the San Francisco Art Institute, 1994).
 76. Todd Gitlin, "Afterword," in Stephen Macedo, ed., *Reassessing the Sixties: Debating the Political and Cultural Legacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 291–92, paraphrased in Margaret Crawford, "Alternative Shelter: Counterculture Architecture in Northern California," in Barron, Bernstein, and Fort, eds., *Reading California*, 268.
 77. Wilding, "The Feminist Art Programs at Fresno and CalArts," 35.
 78. *Ibid.*, 34.
 79. Howard N. Fox, "Tremors in Paradise," in Barron, Bernstein, and Fort, eds., *Made in California*, 232.
 80. See Susan Landauer, "Painting under the Shadow: California Modernism and the Second World War," in Paul Karlstrom, ed., *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press in association with the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996), 50–55.
 81. Whitney Chadwick, "Narrative Imagism and the Figurative Tradition in Northern California Painting," *Art Journal* 45 (Winter 1985), 309. Chadwick describes artists such as Colescott and Stanley as having "produced works in which social comment, satire, morality plays, puns, and personal mythology combine with flamboyant and eccentric personal styles to form a visual running commentary on the world."
 82. Lowery S. Sims, "Robert Colescott, 1975–1986," in Rob-

- ert Colescott: A Retrospective, 1975–1986*, exh. cat. (San Jose: San Jose Museum of Art, 1987), 3.
83. Rupert García, quoted in Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, eds., *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992), 23.
 84. Lucy R. Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s," *Art Journal* 40 (Fall–Winter 1980), 363.
 85. For a good overview of the politicization of New York's avant-garde in the seventies and eighties, see I. Michael Danoff, "The Establishment of Social and Political Art," in *Compassion and Protest: Recent Social and Political Art from the Eli Broad Family Foundation Collection*, exh. cat. (San Jose: San Jose Museum of Art in association with Cross River Press, 1991), 8–16. Danoff notes that as late as 1984 viewers were "shocked" by *Content*, an exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. At the time, he explains, it was still a very new idea for art to be driven by "subject rather than style, form, or method" (8).
 86. Paul Mills, "Bay Area Figurative Art," *Art in America* 52 (June 1964), 43.
 87. David Park, quoted in Paul Mills, *Contemporary Bay Area Figurative Painting*, exh. cat. (Oakland, Calif.: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), 7.
 88. José Montoya, quoted in Tere Romo, "Points of Convergence: Iconography of the Chicano Poster," Noriega, ed., *Just Another Poster?*, 94.
- Democratic Republic*, exh. cat. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).
6. Bernhard Heisig, conversation with Dore Ashton, Peter Nisbet, and the author, Leipzig, February 6, 1988; quoted in Peter Selz, "Revival and Survival of Expressionist Trends in the Art of the GDR," in *ibid.*, 33.
 7. Peter Selz, "Art and Politics: The Artist and the Social Order," in Hershel B. Chipp with Peter Selz and Joshua C. Taylor, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 456–500.
 8. See Peter Selz, *German Realism of the Twenties: The Artist as Social Critic*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1980).
 9. Peter Selz, "The Art of Political Engagement," in Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort, eds., *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900–2000* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), which was a companion volume to the exhibition.
 10. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 36.

INTRODUCTION: PATHS TO ENGAGEMENT

1. This was the title of a provocative and highly influential book on modernist art: Harold Rosenberg's *The Tradition of the New* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).
2. Pablo Picasso, "Statements about the Artist as Political Being" (1945), quoted in Alfred H. Barr Jr., *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Life* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946), 248.
3. Bertolt Brecht, quoted in Martin Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1969), 143.
4. F. T. Marinetti, "Initial Manifesto of Futurism" (1909), in Joshua C. Taylor, *Futurism*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961), 124.
5. George Grosz, *A Little Yes and a Big No* (New York: Dial Press, 1946), 163.
6. Anthony W. Lee, *Painting on the Left: Diego Rivera, Radical Politics, and the San Francisco Public Murals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xvii–xviii.
7. Richard Nixon, quoted in George F. Sherman, "Dick Nixon, Art Commissar," *Nation*, January 10, 1953, 21.

PROLOGUE: A PERSONAL VIEW OF THE INTERACTION OF POLITICS AND ART

1. Adolf Hitler, speech at the opening of the Haus der deutschen Kunst, Munich, July 18, 1937, cited in Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *Art under a Dictatorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 76.
2. This dissertation was the basis for my first book: Peter Selz, *German Expressionist Painting* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).
3. Peter Selz, *New Images of Man*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 12.
4. See Peter Selz, *Fifteen Polish Painters*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961).
5. See Peter Nisbet, ed., *Twelve Artists from the German*