

Chapter 24

The Body, Gender, and Identity



Learning Objectives

- 24.1** Explain why “beautiful” is an ambiguous word in reference to the body.
- 24.2** Discuss some of the factors that have motivated artists to use their own bodies in works of art.
- 24.3** Differentiate between biological sex and gender, and discuss some of the ways in which identity is constructed.

The **selfie** has become one of the most popular forms of photography ever. Literally millions and millions of them inhabit Instagram. (In 2014, the Android app boasted 200 million users. On the day the author looked, Justin Bieber’s Instagram account contained over 1,700 posts, a great many of them selfies, and had nearly 20 million followers.) The art critic Jerry Saltz recently argued that selfies are a “new visual genre—a type of self-portraiture formally distinct from all others in history. Selfies have their own visual autonomy.” Taken at arm’s length from the subject, they are closely cropped, and any photograph that shows both hands of the subject cannot, by definition, be a selfie—except for the selfie taken in a mirror, in which case the presence of the cell phone defines it. They can be narcissistic, but narcissism is usually a private affair—the self admiring the self—and selfies are a profoundly public form. They express who we think we are, and the more of them that fill our Instagram account, the more people can see the range of our being. They rarely achieve the high-art look of a posed photograph, let alone a self-portrait in painting. But the best of them possess a remarkable sense of presence. In this example by professional photographer Laura Knapp (Fig. 24-1), her bug-eyed expression—as if the flash on her camera phone delayed for a second, then

surprised her—offers an almost comic contrast to her evening dress, necklace, and lipstick. Unlike most selfies, this one takes advantage of some high-art principles of composition and design—most notably the complementary color contrast between red and green, the repetition of forms between her chin and her necklace, the play of light and dark, and the symmetrical balance of the whole. But it is, above all, the sense of surprise that draws us to it. It’s funny. And this sense that we are seeing Laura Knapp, at this moment, in all her pre-date anxiety, is the selfie’s most important quality. As Saltz says, selfies are “an instant visual communication of where we are, what we’re doing, who we think we are, and who we think is watching.” They capture our complex sense of the contemporary self—our bodies, our gender, and our identities—that is the subject of this chapter.

The Body Beautiful

Why is “beautiful” an ambiguous term when referring to the body?

The human body has always inspired a love for the beautiful, but different eras and cultures have defined what constitutes a beautiful human body in all

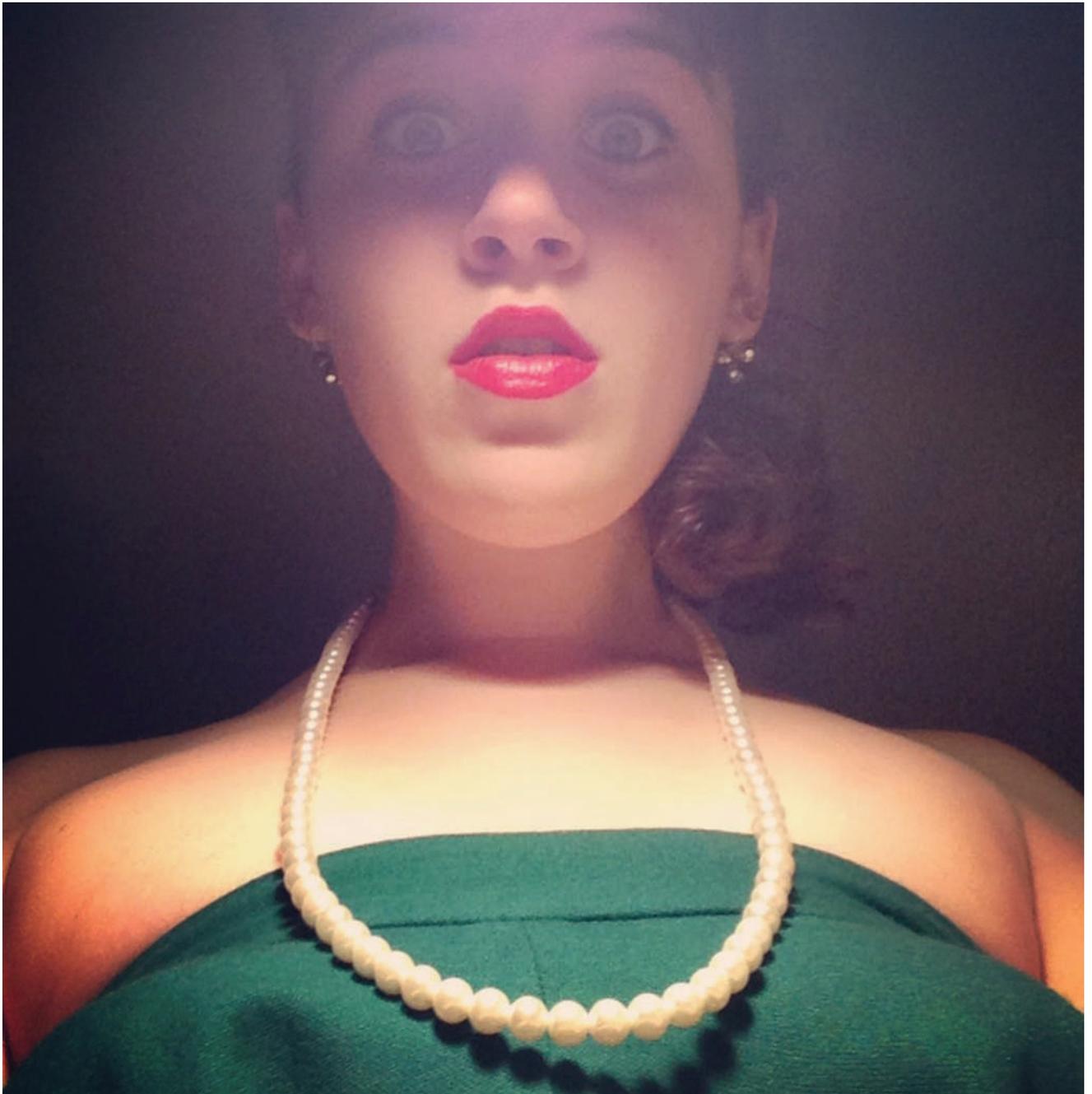


Fig. 24-1 Laura Knapp, *Selfie*, 2014. Digital color photograph, dimensions variable.
© Laura Knapp.



Fig. 24-2 *Woman* (formerly a.k.a. the *Venus of Willendorf*), Lower Austria, ca. 25,000–20,000 BCE. Limestone, height 4½ in. Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna. akg-image/Erich Lessing.

kinds of ways—long-legged and slender or plump and voluptuous, petite and demure or athletic and aggressive. The body of the *Woman* from Willendorf (**Fig. 24-2**; see also Fig. 16-2) is typical of the earliest depictions of the human body, with its pendulous breasts, wide hips, swollen belly, and clearly delineated genitalia. This suggests that what was most valued about the body in prehistoric times was its ability to sustain itself for some period of time without food, and thus its ability to nourish a child at the same time. But archeologist Clive Gamble has recently argued that this body-type served as a form of nonverbal communication among groups of ancient peoples widely scattered across what is today the European continent. He suggests that, whenever groups of these hunter-gatherers met up, as they must occasionally have done when tracking game, these easily portable female statues served as signs suggesting the amicability of the hunters bearing them (it is doubtful that many, if any, of these groups shared a common language). These figurines, in other words, were invitations to interact and, in all likelihood, mate. They thus encoded a system of shared values—about the body, about sexuality, and about survival.

Many cultures have notions of beauty far different from our own. In the lower reaches of the Niger River, in a region that was once tropical rainforest but that has now been largely cleared for farming, the Igbo

people have created large display figures called *ugonachomma*—literally, “the eagle seeks out beauty”—depicting beautiful young women (**Fig. 24-3**). While not what we in the West might call a “realistic” depiction of the female form, the sculpture, carved as a centerpiece for a competitive dance, embodies all the attributes of beauty that the Igbo profess. The exaggerated length of her neck reflects the Igbo preference for long necks. As the mirror in her hand suggests, she is a triumph of cosmetic artistry. Her face is painted white, which reflects not only the Igbo preference for light-colored skin but also the practice of washing dark skin with a chalk solution in order to highlight the intricate designs—applied with indigo (*uli*)—that cover her body. Keloidal scars, cut into the skin of young women before marriage, lead down her torso to her navel, which is itself distended, another Igbo sign of beauty. This figure originally held an umbrella in her left hand, which, like the mirror, signified her wealth and prestige.

In Igbo culture, the *ugonachomma*'s beauty is paired with a different sort of beauty possessed by



Fig. 24-3 *Ugonachomma* display figure, Igbo, Nigeria. Wood, pigment, mirror, height 50 in. Seattle Art Museum.

Photo: Paul Maciopia.

men who have achieved titled status in the community. Known as “the eagle strengthens kinship,” the titled man is also the “eagle” who seeks out the *ugonachomma*’s beauty. Indeed, the beautiful maiden is often praised by being called the eagle’s “kola,” a reference to the rare, light-colored kola nut that is integral to every Igbo ceremony. The *ugonachomma* possesses “the power of beauty,” while the titled man possesses “the beauty of power.”

If the Igbo *ugonachomma* strikes the Western eye as anything but beautiful, that is perhaps the case because, in the West, we have come to value “right” proportion as an absolute standard of beauty, a standard for which the *ugonachomma* has no regard. Leonardo’s *Study of Human Proportion: The Vitruvian Man* (Fig. 24-4; see also Fig. 7-1) is based on the idea that the human body is beautiful in direct relation to its perfect proportions. It is an homage to the Roman author Vitruvius, whose notions of ideal proportion were, in turn, indebted to the Greek sculptor Polyclitus, who, in the fifth century BCE, wrote a now-lost text about proportion, known as the *Canon*. In Polyclitus’ system, the ideal human form was determined by the height of the head from the crown to the chin. The head was one-eighth the total height, the width of the shoulders was one-quarter the total height, and so on, each measurement reflecting these ideal proportions. For Polyclitus, these relations resulted in the work’s *symmetria*, the origin of our word “symmetry,” but meaning, in Polyclitus’ usage, “commensurability,” or “having a common measure.” Thus, the ideal figure reflects a higher mathematical order and embodies the ideal harmony between the natural world and the intellectual or spiritual realm.

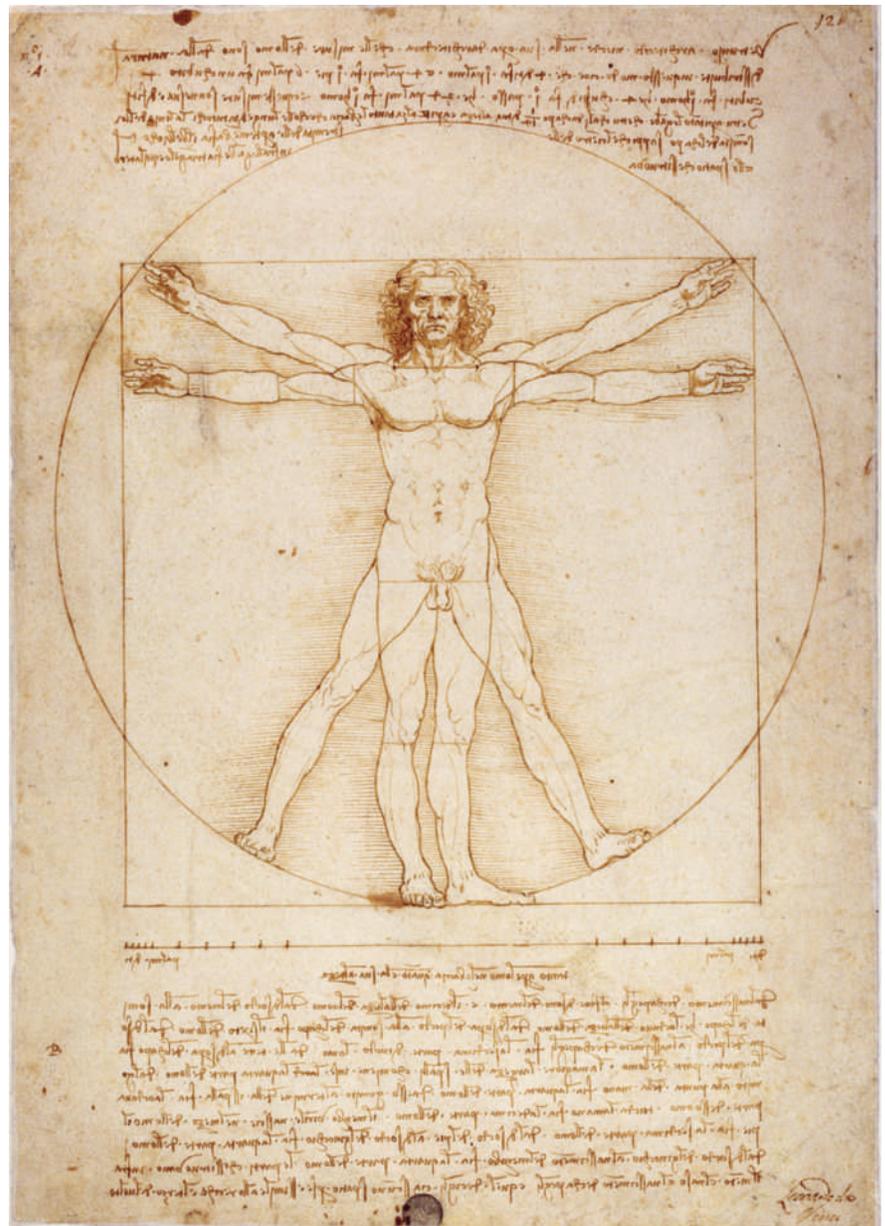


Fig. 24-4 Leonardo da Vinci, *Study of Human Proportion: The Vitruvian Man*, ca. 1492. Pen-and-ink drawing, 13½ × 9% in. Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice. CAMERAPHOTO Arte, Venice.

For Vitruvius, whose acquaintance with Polyclitus’ *Canon* provides our only firsthand account of the original, the circle and square were the ideal shapes. Polyclitus’ proportion was the geometrical equivalent of Pythagoras’ music of the spheres, the theory that each planet produced a musical sound, fixed mathematically by its velocity and distance from Earth, which harmonized with those produced by other planets and was audible but not recognized on Earth. Thus, according to Vitruvius, if the human head is one-eighth the total height of an idealized figure, then the human body itself fits into the ideal musical



Fig. 24-5 Peter Paul Rubens, *The Disembarkation of Marie de' Medici at the Port of Marseilles on November 3, 1600 (detail)*, 1621–25. Oil on canvas, 13 × 10 ft. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
akg-image/Erich Lessing.

interval of the octave, the interval that gives the impression of duplicating the original note at a higher or lower pitch. Such balance, harmony, and symmetry are the very definition of Classical beauty.

In the seventeenth century, Peter Paul Rubens likewise turned to Classical Greek sculpture as the model for his own notions of the beautiful body. But, as a painter, Rubens was not so concerned with the form of the body, but rather with the materiality of the body's flesh, as is suggested by the contrast between the three naiads, or water nymphs, at the bottom center of his *Disembarkation of Marie de' Medici at the Port of Marseilles on November 3, 1600* (Fig. 24-5; see also Fig. 19-3), and the two Greek gods, Neptune and Triton, beside them. The distinct difference in skin color underscores a crucial difference in the quality of their flesh. The male bodies are defined by their musculature—and they are in keeping with the Vitruvian model promulgated by Leonardo. But the female bodies are defined by soft bulges and rolls—the word “meaty” comes to mind. Rubens's conception of the female body beautiful was, in other words, quite different from the Greeks'. Where the suggestion of movement had been realized in antiquity by clinging drapery, Rubens renders it in wrinkles and folds of

skin. Where, in marble especially, skin is rendered as a smooth, idealized surface—consider Rodin's *The Kiss* (*Le Baiser*) (see Fig. 23-1)—in Rubens's hands, skin is textured, plump, carnal. As Kenneth Clark puts it in his book *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, “Rubens wished his figures to have weight.” And for Rubens this weight could be rendered best in oil paint, with the sensual feel of the brush on canvas, as if it were touching the very flesh it painted. In this, he could be said to inaugurate an approach to painting the beautiful body that results two centuries later in the nudes of Delacroix (see Fig. 23-8).

Performance: The Body as Work of Art

What are some of the factors that have motivated artists to use their own bodies in their work?

Among the earliest artists to actively use their body in an artwork itself was Carolee Schneemann. In 1963, the Icelandic, Paris-based painter Erró photographed her in an action in which her body became part of the painting titled *Eye Body: 36 Transformative*

Actions (Fig. 24-6). Schneemann developed the piece quite consciously as a rebuttal to Abstract Expressionist painting: “Using my body as an extension of my painting—constructions challenged and threatened the psychic territorial power lines by which women, in 1963, were admitted to the Art Stud Club, so long as they behaved enough like the men, and did work clearly in the traditions and pathways hacked out by the men.”

Schneemann built an environment consisting of four large panels that were, at the time, a series of works-in-progress, paintings that were themselves radical departures from traditional painting, rivaled at the time only by Robert Rauschenberg’s combine-paintings (see Fig. 9-33)—assemblages that included motorized umbrellas, a pile of fur, paint, shattered glass, transparent plastic, live garter snakes, a cow skull, a plaster-covered dress form, and various tools. Into this environment Schneemann inserted her own body. She describes the event:

Covered in paint, grease, chalk, ropes, plastic, I establish my body as visual territory. Not only am



Fig. 24-6 Carolee Schneemann, *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions*, December 1963. Paint, glue, fur, feathers, garter snakes, glass, plastic, with the studio installation *Big Boards*. Photographs by Icelandic artist Erró, on 35 mm black and white film. Courtesy of Carolee Schneemann.

I an image-maker, but I explore the image value of flesh as material I choose to work with. The body may remain erotic, sexual, desired, desiring, and yet still be votive—marked and written over in a text of stroke and gesture discovered by my creative female will.

In a very real sense, Schneemann’s work possesses a therapeutic drift, for her action was designed to begin to address the rift—both sexual and psychological—between men and women in the art world and beyond.

This sense of the importance of art intervening in the social dynamic was shared by the German performance artist Joseph Beuys. In 1974, Beuys flew to New York wrapped in a cocoon of felt. He was taken by ambulance to the René Block Gallery on East Broadway where he shared a fenced-in gallery space for three days with a wild coyote. The piece was called *I Like America and America Likes Me* (Fig. 24-7). The felt cocoon was a reference to his own myth of origin: When serving as a fighter pilot in the German Luftwaffe during World War II, he claimed to have been shot down in the dead of winter over the Crimea, where he was saved by a band of Tatars who wrapped him in animal fat and felt to nurse his body back to health. It now seems likely that this story is untrue, but symbolically it reminds us of Beuys’s principal theme, near-death and rebirth through healing, a process that he found impossible to communicate without such fables, and which he saw as central to the possibility of meaningful political behavior since, from his point of view, all of Western society was essentially a wounded body.



Fig. 24-7 Joseph Beuys, *I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974. Performance, René Block Gallery, New York, duration three days.

Photo: Caroline Tisdale. Courtesy of Ron Feldman Fine Arts, New York. © 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



Fig. 24-8 Kimsooja, *A Beggar Woman—Mexico City*, 2000. Single-channel video projection, silent, 8 min. 50 sec. loop. Courtesy of Kimsooja Studio.

In *I Like America and America Likes Me*, Beuys takes one of his most common performance roles, that of a wounded shaman, or mystical healer. The coyote was chosen to join him because it is the most adaptable of all native species and because in many Native American creation myths it is the coyote that teaches human beings how to survive. Over the course of the three days, Beuys would occasionally speak with the coyote, perform shamanistic rituals around the space, and sleep on a pile of hay that was originally meant for his four-legged companion, while the coyote slept on two large pieces of felt that were intended to serve as Beuys's bed. Each day copies of the *Wall Street Journal* arrived, representing the destructive forces of materialism that Beuys, the shaman, had come to America to heal. In the manner of a painting contained by a frame, Beuys's performance was framed by the gallery space. Like Jackson Pollock's paintings (see Figs. 6-12 and 6-13), where the drips and sweeps of paint on canvas record Pollock's actions as a painter and document them, the photographs of Beuys's work record his actions as an artist and similarly document them.

In her video work, Korean artist Kimsooja uses her body to investigate the human condition in all its frailty. *A Beggar Woman* (Fig. 24-8) was inspired when Kimsooja saw an old woman begging in the main square of Mexico City, the Zócalo. Seated on the ground, wrapped in upon herself, she put out her hand asking for money. "I was so struck by that action," Kimsooja explains in the art21 *Exclusive* video "Kimsooja: 'A Beggar Woman' and 'A Homeless Woman,'" and I wanted to question for myself again what that action really means." So she adopted the same pose as the old woman, and put out her hand to beg. When, finally, a man came up and gave her money, she suddenly felt completely vulnerable, and she began to cry. Similarly, she has lain down in the street as if she were a homeless person sleeping. "My body," she says, "becomes like a storm on the street." The videos are structured so that we can, in turn, identify with Kimsooja. They are shot from the rear, showing only her back. She becomes like a figure with its back to us in a landscape painting (see Fig. 19-16, Casper David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea*, for comparison), a stand-in for us all.

Gender and Identity

How do biological sex and gender differ, and how has this difference been explored in the arts?

Gender does not refer to one's biological sex, and traditional gender roles probably have more to do with social expectations than any biological imperative. In the last half of the twentieth century, the feminist movement challenged the gender stereotypes imposed on women, and it was followed soon after by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community's exploration of gender's enormous complexities. What both the feminist movement and the LGBT community have taught us is that identity is something constructed, not given.

Constructing Female Identity

A case can be made that we are constructions created out of the media imagery that inundates our world, and no artist has exploited the power of the media to define us to greater effect than Cindy Sherman. Beginning in the late 1970s, Sherman began to take photographs of herself as if they were stills from unknown Hollywood films. (She describes how she goes about setting up her shoots in the art21 *Exclusive* segment "Cindy Sherman: Mannequins and Masks.") Although they were not enactments of any actress playing a role in an actual film, these *Untitled Film Stills* were immediately recognizable. The fact that we can identify almost all of

the stereotypes that inform these photographs—and, in fact, the pleasure of Sherman's work can be said to reside in our ability to ascribe certain "personalities" to each image—demonstrates just how deep-seated our "knowledge" of female identity really is. What we know is what the movies have given us.

In 1981, *Artforum* magazine commissioned Sherman to create a series of color photographs. Inspired by the size of the magazine, Sherman decided to make a series of double-spreads imitating *Playboy* centerfolds (Fig. 24-9; see also Fig. 20-41). They violate the viewer's expectations by revealing, instead of the female body, a depth of character and emotion. Speaking of these works, Sherman explains:

In content I wanted a man opening up the magazine to suddenly look at it with an expectation of something lascivious and then feel like the violator that they would be. Looking at this woman who is perhaps a victim. I didn't think of them as victims at the time. . . . But I suppose. . . . Obviously I'm trying to make someone feel bad for having a certain expectation.

Some critics objected to the series, arguing that Sherman was reaffirming teenage stereotypes, but Sherman argued that she was simply revealing how pervasive and "readable" such stereotypes are. Nonetheless, fearing that the photographs might be misunderstood, *Artforum* never published them.



Fig. 24-9 Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #96*, 1981. Chromogenic color print, 24 in. × 4 ft.
Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.



Fig. 24-10 Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Monroe*, 1967. Silkscreen print, 37½ × 37½ in. Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Robert Gale Doyon Fund and Harold F. Bishop Fund Purchase, 1978-252. Image courtesy Chazen Museum of Art. © 2015 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

It is fair to say that the stereotypes that Sherman reveals are, by and large, the product of the male gaze as film historian Laura Mulvey describes it (see Chapter 23). Andy Warhol's repeated depictions of Marilyn Monroe (Fig. 24-10; see also Fig. 10-30), with their garish,

almost violent colors, address this same idea. Toward the end of her life, Marilyn Monroe, born Norma Jeane Mortenson, commented on her stardom: "My popularity," she said, "seems almost entirely a male phenomenon." It was, in other words, men who defined her—from Hugh Hefner, publisher of *Playboy* magazine, who first featured her in a centerfold spread in 1953, to her husbands, baseball player Joe DiMaggio and playwright Arthur Miller, to President John F. Kennedy, with whom she had a secret affair. In the movies she usually played "the humiliating stereotype of a dumb blonde: depersonalized, sexual, even a joke," as feminist author Gloria Steinem puts it in her book *Marilyn: Norma Jeane*. Steinem goes on to point out: "Acting, modeling, making a living more from external appearance than from internal identity—these had been Marilyn's lifelines out of poverty and obscurity." But, in the end, her suicide in 1962 suggests that, without an identity that seemed to her authentic, her life had become meaningless. In these terms, Monroe has become something of a feminist icon, the very embodiment of the fate of female identity in a male-dominated culture.

Of course, the usual fate of women has been to assume the identity of "wife." But if, historically, "wife" is one of the most common identities that women have assumed, courtesan is another, both identities prescribed by the dominant male cultures in which women have historically found themselves. Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (Fig. 24-11; see also Fig. 18-11) may well represent both. As a Venetian painter, Titian would have been well



Fig. 24-11 Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1538. Oil on canvas, 47 in. × 5 ft. 5 in. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. © Studio Fotografico Quattrone, Florence.

acquainted with Venice's so-called "honest courtesans," who were among the city's most educated citizens and who—unlike ordinary prostitutes, who sold only their sexual favors—were highly sophisticated intellectuals who gained access to the city's aristocratic circles as well. "Thou wilt find the Venetian Courtesan a good Rhetorician and an elegant discourser," wrote one early seventeenth-century visitor to the city. Although subject to the usual public ridicule—and often blamed, together with the city's Jews, for any troubles that might befall the republic—they were understood by writers of the day to be more products of men's own shortcomings and desires than willful sinners in their own right. This group of courtesans, in fact, dominated the Venetian literary scene. Many of their poems transform the clichés of courtly love poetry into frankly erotic metaphors, undermining the superior position of men in Italian society.

A similar differentiation of roles developed during the Edo period in Japan—from 1625 to 1868—when the geisha and courtesans of the Yoshiwara pleasure district were continually celebrated in prints such as Suzuki Harunobu's *Two Courtesans, Inside and Outside the Display Window* (Fig. 24-12; see also Fig. 10-7). Each possessed a distinct identity in relation to her clients. Courtesans were essentially high-class prostitutes, while geisha were primarily entertainers, technically forbidden to compete with the courtesans in the sexual arena. The *tayu*, the highest-ranking courtesans, were renowned for their beauty and often attained celebrity status. And, like the geisha, they were highly trained in the arts. They were poets, musicians, calligraphers, and skilled sexual partners, all in one. Their artistic cultivation in some sense legitimized their trade—their clients found themselves in the company of not merely a prostitute but a culturally refined sensibility.

But their identity was in some measure as made-up as their powdered faces. Most were sold into prostitution at a young age in the hope that, in return for the financial benefit they brought to the family, they would live a more comfortable life and perhaps even receive an education. In fact, the girls had to pay back the money given their parents and were essentially indentured slaves imprisoned in the Yoshiwara district for as long as 20 years. They dreamed, of course, of becoming famous *tayu*, but the likelihood of ever attaining that rank was slim at best.

Well into the nineteenth century, the possibilities for women to define themselves in terms other than those



Fig. 24-12 Suzuki Harunobu, *Two Courtesans, Inside and Outside the Display Window*, Japanese, Edo period, about 1768–69. Woodblock print (*nishiki-e*), ink and color on paper, 26 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 5 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
Denman Waldo Ross Collection, 1906. 06.1248. Photograph © 2015 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Fig. 24-13 Édouard Manet, *The Gare Saint-Lazare*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 36¼ × 45½ in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Gift of Horace Havemeyer in memory of his mother, Louisine W. Havemeyer 1956.10.1. Photo © Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

imposed upon them by men were extremely limited, as Édouard Manet suggests in *The Gare Saint-Lazare* (Fig. 24-13). His model is Victorine Meurent. She had already appeared several times, most notably in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (see Fig. 19-24) and *Olympia* (see Fig. 1-15). Here she assumes a role very different than those she played in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia*. The little girl is the daughter of Manet's friend Alphonse Hirsch, in whose garden the scene is set; she gazes through the fence at the tracks, obscured by the smoke of a passing train, in the new train station of Saint-Lazare. The painting is a study in contrasts. The little girl is dressed in white with blue trim, while the older woman, posed here as her mother, or perhaps her nanny, is in blue with white trim. The one sits, regarding us; the other stands, gazing through the fence railing. The nanny's hair is down, the little girl's up. The nanny's angular collar is countered by the soft curve of the little girl's neckline. The black choker around the one's neck finds its way to the other's hair. The older woman sits with her puppy on her lap, an ironic symbol of contentment. The little girl is eating grapes (beside her on the ledge), which have bacchanalian associations. The older escapes into her novel, perhaps a romantic one, while the younger looks out at the trains leaving the station, possibly dreaming of adventure. And both are literally fenced in. Manet's painting suggests that the little girl will grow up into the woman

beside her, implicitly portraying the limits of women's possibilities in nineteenth-century French society.

Constructing Male Identity

It stands to reason that if female identity is not essential but socially constructed, the same should hold true for men. One of the first artists to address this theme was Richard Prince, who during the late 1970s had lived with Cindy Sherman in New York. By 1980—the year that horse-riding Hollywood hero Ronald Reagan was elected president—Prince had taken to photographing advertisements of cowboys, specifically the Marlboro Man, a practice that he has continued down to the present day (Fig. 24-14). Prince recognized that Philip Morris Co. was not so much selling cigarettes as it was an image—the smoker as the independent, rough-and-tumble hero. Thus, in rephotographing the original ads, Prince underscored the inauthenticity of the ad campaign itself. One of the underlying themes of this image is that the Marlboro cowboy, apparently riding free on the range, is symbolically galloping headlong toward his death. And as Prince well understood, in identifying with the image, the American male was mistaking dependence for independence.

In the catalogue to the exhibition *Richard Prince: Spiritual America*, at the Guggenheim Museum in New York



Fig. 24-14 Richard Prince, *Untitled (Cowboy)*, 1989. Chromogenic print, 4 ft. 2 in. × 5 ft. 10 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Purchase, Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Gift through Joyce and Robert Menschel and Jennifer and Joseph Duke Gift, 2000.272. © 2015. Image copyright Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence. © Richard Prince.

in 2007–08, novelist Annie Proulx described the particular appeal of Prince’s cowboys:

The clothing is important. There is, in the world, no costume so flattering and male as a cowboy getup: the tight jeans that show off thigh muscles and crotch, leather or woolly chaps with the

cutout front that enhances the wearer’s sexuality, fancy boots that make him look taller and leaner and that sound a solid footstep often enriched by the ring of spurs, the hat that dignifies the most foolish face, disguises a receding hairline, and adds more height, the leather vest casually open, the brilliantly colored shirt and contrasting silk neck rag, all add up to drama and indicate quick motion, masculine beauty, the work ethic, and a little danger. It is the clothing that attracts us to the cowboy.

It is the clothing, and the fact that he wears it, as Proulx explains, “against a backdrop of the most spectacular scenery in North America, both desert and mountain range.” The cowboy’s is an image to which most, if not all, American males aspired in the 1940s and 1950s—in the age, that is, of the great American cowboy films—and his is an image that still holds some ascendancy in the popular imagination, as the Marlboro Man attests.

Mel Bochner’s *Win!* (Fig. 24-15), commissioned by the Dallas Cowboys for their stadium in Arlington, Texas, addresses another side of American male identity.

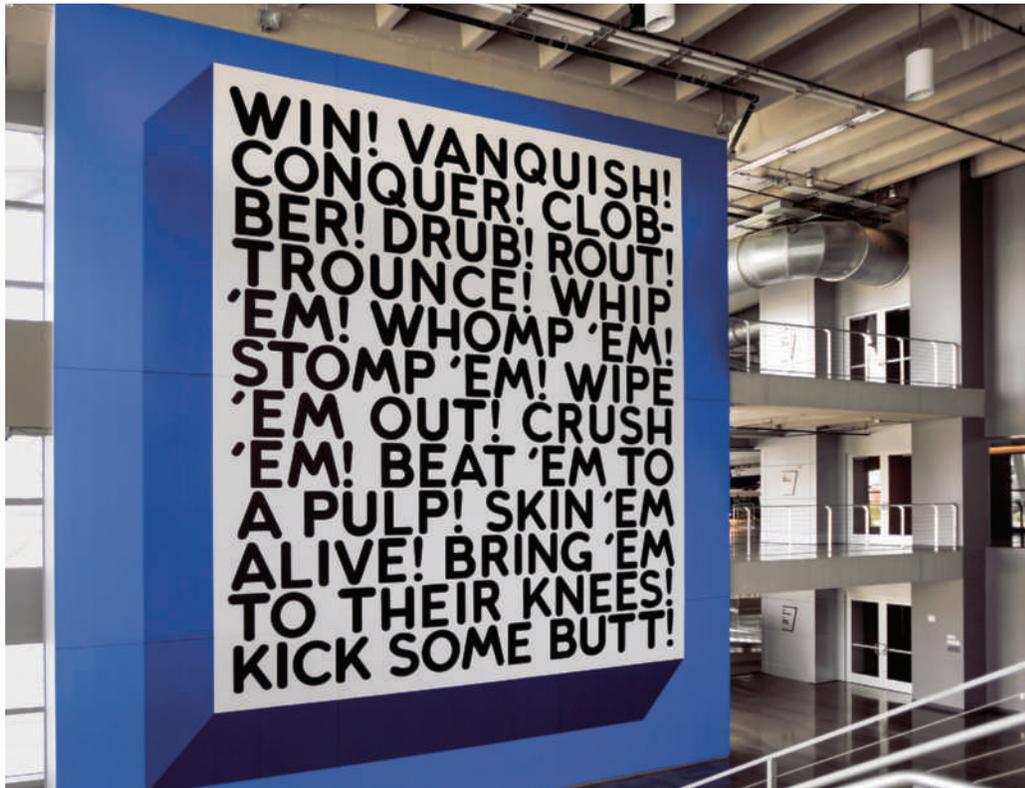


Fig. 24-15 Mel Bochner, *Win!*, 2009. Acrylic on wall, 38 ft. 2 in. × 33 ft. 3 in. Located in Northeast Monumental Staircase, AT&T Stadium (formerly Dallas Cowboys Stadium), Arlington, Texas. Photo: James Smith/Dallas Cowboys.

It subtly challenges the macho culture of professional football—and its fanbase—even as it seems to celebrate it. As one of the pioneers of conceptual art during the 1960s, Bochner became interested in the relationship between words and their visual display and began a series of “thesaurus paintings” which delve more deeply than one might expect into the cultural implications of words like “Money,” “Die,” “Useless,” “Obscene,” and “Sputter.” *Win!* is one of his most recent works in the ongoing series. By the time one finishes reading the painting, the violence that underscores the game of football is manifest—and appears alarmingly closer to war than sport.

The gay rights movement would play a dramatic role in challenging American attitudes about the nature of masculinity. In the early hours of Saturday morning, on June 28, 1969, police officers entered a gay nightclub in New York’s Greenwich Village called the Stonewall Inn, more or less expecting to close the establishment down for lack of a liquor license. But the Inn’s patrons reacted violently, throwing garbage cans, bricks, beer cans, and bottles at the windows and what a reporter for the *Village Voice* called “a rain of coins” at the police. Very soon after, the Inn was on fire. Rioting continued until about 4 AM, and nightly for several days thereafter. A year later, the first ever Gay Pride parade was staged to celebrate the events of June 1969.

The struggle for equal rights for gay people continues, of course, to this day. Sixteen years after Stonewall, in 1985, Andy Warhol conceived of his book *America*, a collection of his Polaroid photographs, at least in part as a means to “out” America, to show it its own gay side. At the very heart of the book is a “Physique Pictorial,” showing male bodybuilders. Early on he includes a portrait of himself in drag, just one of many he shot in the early 1980s. There is an image of a Gay Pride parade. And then there are the portraits of gay celebrities, such as Liberace (with punk star John Sex), Keith Haring, and Robert Rauschenberg.

Warhol also includes a portrait of Lance Loud (Fig. 24-16). Loud has quite evidently constructed his own image out of the Classical nude as realized in Leonardo’s *Study of Human Proportions: The Vitruvian Man* (see Fig. 24-4). Loud was the first reality-TV star. Born in 1951, he grew up in Eugene, Oregon, before moving to Santa Barbara for his teenage years. He discovered Warhol in his early teens, became his pen pal, and then, as a young man, moved to New York. When he was 22, in 1973, PBS featured the William C. Loud family—Mom and Dad, Bill and Pat (who incidentally separated and divorced on the show), and their five children, Delilah, Kevin, Grant, Michele, and Lance—in a 12-hour documentary series entitled *An American Family*. It chronicled the day-to-day lives of the family for seven months, and it attracted 10 million viewers. As a *Newsweek* cover story proclaimed in March

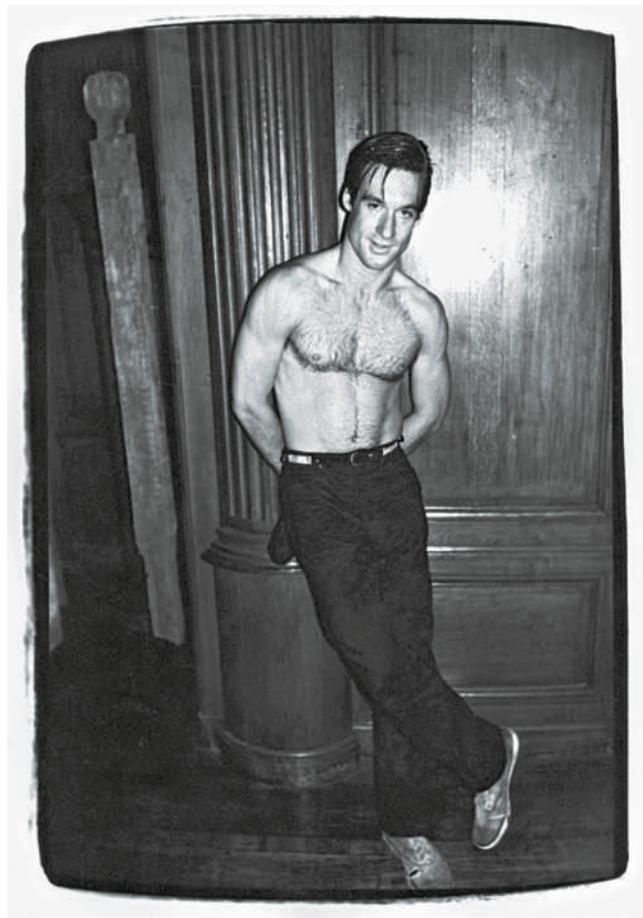


Fig. 24-16 Andy Warhol, *Lance Loud, from America*, 1985. Black-and-white photograph.

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1973, the show torpedoed the fantasy of the American family embodied in shows like *The Brady Bunch*. Lance’s forthright homosexuality spurred a national controversy, especially after he appeared on *The Dick Cavett Show* and other talk shows, and as it became apparent that he was inspiring countless other gay and lesbian Americans to acknowledge their own sexuality. By 1978, Lance had started the band The Mumps, a rock band that played weekly at CBGB’s and Max’s in New York; Warhol’s photograph is of Lance Loud the rock star—yet another media model for the male. American attitudes about masculinity and male identity were in a state of transition, and sexual stereotypes were being challenged as never before.

Challenging Gender Identity

In 1862, Manet painted his favorite model, the same Victorine Meurent who would appear 11 years later as a nanny in *The Gare Saint-Lazare* (see Fig. 24-13), this time in the costume of an *espada*—the matador in a bullfight (Fig. 24-17). Meurent worked for Manet, in effect, as a performance artist, assuming this role, then that, for over a decade. Most telling, Manet has no qualms about



Fig. 24-17 Édouard Manet, *Mademoiselle V... in the Costume of an Espada*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 5 ft. 5 in. × 4 ft. 2¼ in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929.100.53. © 2015. Image copyright Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence.

drawing attention, by simply titling the painting as he has, to the fact that his female model is dressed in male clothing. Indeed, at the Salon of 1863, Manet exhibited this painting along with *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* and *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* as a triptych. In the former, his younger brother Gustave donned the same trousers and bolero that Meurent wears here, and in the latter Gustave posed for the male figure on the right. Seen together, they self-consciously challenged the assumptions of Realist painting. These were paintings constructed using models who played parts interchangeably from painting to painting. They clearly had very little to do with Realism, then such an important style in French painting (see Chapter 19). In fact, Meurent stands in the bullring in a space radically and illogically disconnected from the scene behind her, where a bullfight takes place not drawn from life but from a series of 33 prints by Francisco Goya, *The Tauromaquia*, published in 1816 (Fig. 24-18). Manet insists that his paintings are fictions. By extension, so is identity.

Cross-dressing is a strategy for announcing that one's biological sex is not necessarily coincident with one's gender identity. In the early 1920s, and then on and off for the rest of his career, Marcel Duchamp dressed and signed works of art under the name Rose Sélavy



Fig. 24-18 Francisco Goya, *The Tauromaquia: The Spirited Moor Gazul is the First to Spear Bulls according to the Rules*, 1816. Etching, 9⅞ × 13⅞ in.

© 2015. Photo Art Resource/Scala, Florence.

(Fig. 24-19). The name is a pun: *Eros, c'est la vie* ("Eros, that's life"). Puns, of course, are linguistic expressions of semantic doubling and ambiguity. They are at once the same and different. They model, in other words, the sameness and difference in the simultaneity of different biological and gender identities. This is the same point Duchamp makes by adding a mustache to Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* in the work punningly titled *L.H.O.O.Q.* (see



Fig. 24-19 Man Ray, *Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy*, ca. 1920-21. Gelatin silver print, 8½ × 6⅜ in. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White Collection, 1957. © 2015. Photo Philadelphia Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence. © 2015 Man Ray Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.



Fig. 24-20 Eleanor Antin, *My Kingdom Is the Right Size*, from the series *The King of Solana Beach*, 1974.

Photograph mounted on board, 6 × 9 in.

Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Fig. 20-11). Here, in Man Ray's photograph of Duchamp, Rose wears the hat and fur-trimmed coat of Germaine Everling, the soon-to-be second wife of Francis Picabia (see Fig. 23-16). The hands in the photograph are Everling's as well, and their distinct femininity adds to the illusion. Or, Duchamp seems to ask, is it really an illusion after all?

Beginning in the early 1970s, Eleanor Antin began assuming a series of personae designed to allow her to explore dimensions of her own self that might otherwise have remained hidden. One of the earliest of these personae was the King—a medieval knight errant, decked out in a false beard, a velvet cape, lacy blouse, and leather boots, who would wander the streets of “his” kingdom, the small town of Solana Beach, just north of San Diego, California, conversing with his “subjects” (Fig. 24-20). “The usual aids to self-definition,” Antin wrote the same year as this performance piece, “sex, age, talent, time, and space—are merely tyrannical limitations upon my freedom of choice.” Here she explores the possibilities of being not merely male, but a powerful

male—something wholly at odds with her diminutive physical presence. “I took on the King,” Antin further explained, “who was my male self. As a young feminist I was interested in what would be my male self . . . he became my political self.”

Shigeyuki Kihara is an artist of Japanese/Samoan extraction who resides in New Zealand as a transgender woman—a biological male who lives as a woman—the word for which among the Samoan peoples, for whom the “third gender” has historically held a place as not only socially acceptable but also widely practiced, is *fa'a fafine*. Kihara's work is directly inspired by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs of Samoan islanders taken by non-Samoans whose assumptions about the lives of their subjects were deeply tainted by the same sorts of ideas that drew painter Paul Gauguin to the South Seas during the same era—the dream of a “primitive” culture of unity, peace, and naked innocence far removed from the turmoil of “civilized” life (see Fig. 19-33). *Ulugali'i Samoa: Samoan Couple (ulugali'i is Samoan for “married couple”)* (Fig. 24-21) is a

recreation of one of these colonial photographs, which were, in fact, distributed worldwide as postcards. But as a result of the impact of Christian missionaries in the islands, by the time these postcards were circulating throughout the West as part of a burgeoning trade in pornography, the Samoans themselves most usually dressed themselves in Western clothing. The photographers required their adolescent Samoan models to expose their breasts in order to satisfy the same fantasies that so appealed to Gauguin.

Kihara has posed herself as the woman in this photograph, bare-breasted, holding a plaited fan (a traditional status symbol), and wearing a bark cloth dress, traditionally made throughout the Pacific Islands from the paper

mulberry tree. The male is similarly attired and holds a fly whisk, like the fan, a status symbol. Around his neck he wears a *ulafala*, a red lei crafted from the fruit of the pandanus tree and normally worn by a high-ranking Samoan *tulafale* (orator chief). As in nineteenth-century photographs, the couple is posed in the studio in front of an array of tropical foliage as if in a natural setting. Kihara further undermines this construction of “authentic” island identity by digitally superimposing her own face, now made-up with a wig and mustache, on the body of the male. The photograph challenges accepted notions of identity at every level—in terms of gender roles, colonial assumptions about Samoan culture, and even the reality of the photographic image itself.



Fig. 24-21 Shigeyuki Kihara, *Ulugali'i Samoa: Samoan Couple*, 2004–05. PC-type photograph, 31½ × 23¾ in. Edition of 5. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of Shigeuki Kihara, 2009.112. © 2015 Image copyright Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence. © Shigeyuki Kihara.

THE CRITICAL PROCESS

Thinking about the Body, Gender, and Identity

In 1961, when she was just 12 years of age, the Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta and her 14-year-old sister were sent, along with 14,000 other Cuban children, to the United States through the “Operation Peter Pan” program jointly run by the United States government and Catholic charities. Her politically prominent family feared reprisals from Fidel Castro’s Communist revolution. She lived, at first, in refugee camps and other institutions, until she finally entered foster home networks in Iowa. It was not until 1966 that she was reunited with her mother and younger brother, and not until 1979 that her father joined them, finally having been released from prison for his role in the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Mendieta never fully recovered from the trauma of separation, not merely from her family but from her native land. In Iowa, she felt she had no sense of self, no identity. As a graduate painting student at the University of Iowa, she addressed this issue directly by transplanting the beard of fellow student Morty Sklar to her own face. The immigration of the beard reenacted, in terms of gender, her own removal from Cuba to Iowa. The beard did not “belong,” although she claims that, when she saw it on her face, it seemed to have become “natural,” quite likely a reference to the “naturalization” process undertaken by foreign immigrants.

Soon after graduating, she journeyed to Mexico and felt a connection to the land that she had not experienced since leaving Cuba. There, she began to place her silhouette—*silueta* in Spanish—onto and into the earth itself. In the action illustrated here (Fig. 24-22), she formed a *silueta* on the beach at La Ventosa, Mexico, filling it with red tempera that was ultimately washed away by the ocean waves. “I am overwhelmed,” she would later write, “by the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature). . . . Through my earth/body sculptures, I become one with the earth. . . . The after-image of being encompassed within the womb is a manifestation of my thirst for being.”

But the image is not merely a bodily imprint in the sand. It is simultaneously the image of a broad-handled knife, and a bloody knife at that. This is a reference to the African-Cuban religion of *Santería*, specifically to the *orisha* (a spirit



Fig. 24-22 Ana Mendieta, *Untitled*, 1976. From *Siluetas Works in Mexico, 1973–77*. Color photograph from a suite of 12, 19 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 26 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

Purchased with a grant provided by Judith Rothschild Foundation. © Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC, courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York.

or deity who is one manifestation of God) Ogun, the fierce warrior and inventor of the knife who defends his *Santería* followers against injustice. It is he who gives the initiate the authority to use the knife in animal sacrifice, a required part of any initiation into the religion since, without blood sacrifice, the *orishas* are not present and the consecration would thus be illegitimate.

How does the double meaning of Mendieta’s *silueta* reflect her own sense of identity? Her image on the beach was soon washed away by the tide. What does this suggest to you about her sense of her own body? Why is the beach—the zone between land and sea—a particularly apt place to put a *silueta*?

Thinking Back

24.1 Explain why “beautiful” is an ambiguous word in reference to the body.

Different eras and different cultures have defined what constitutes a beautiful body in different ways. Prehistoric peoples apparently valued a body-type characterized by pendulous breasts, wide hips, and a swollen belly. How has archeologist Clive Gamble explained the preponderance of these female figurines? How does the *ugonachomma* figure reflect the values of the Igbo people? For the ancient Greeks, the beautiful body was determined by how closely it conformed to ideal proportions. How did they think these proportions reflected larger universal truths? How did Peter Paul Rubens define the beautiful body?

24.2 Discuss some of the factors that have motivated artists to use their own bodies in works of art.

Why did Carolee Schneemann incorporate herself into the work *Eye Body*? German performance artist Joseph Beuys saw himself as a shaman, healing social and political divisions. What division was he trying to heal in *I Like America and America Likes Me*? What motivated Kimsooja to work in the street as if she were a beggar?

24.3 Differentiate between biological sex and gender, and discuss some of the ways in which identity is constructed.

Contemporary artists like Cindy Sherman have argued that female identity has been largely constructed by the media,

movies in particular. How do Sherman’s many self-portraits in a wide variety of roles support this assertion? What, from Andy Warhol’s point of view, were the consequences of this role-playing for Marilyn Monroe? Historically, women were relegated to two principal roles—wife and courtesan. How do these roles reflect the imposition of male power? How does the *Venus of Urbino* mediate between both? What is the difference between a geisha and a courtesan? What possibilities for women in nineteenth-century French society does Édouard Manet’s *The Gare Saint-Lazare* suggest?

Male identity is as socially constructed as female identity. What sense of self does the Marlboro Man suggest in Richard Prince’s work? How does Mel Bochner’s *Win!* reflect yet another media model? How has the gay rights movement changed American attitudes about masculinity?

One’s given biological sex may differ from one’s gender, the culturally learned social roles with which one identifies. Cross-dressing is a strategy for announcing that one’s biological sex is not necessarily coincident with one’s gender identity. How did Manet use it to underscore the difference between his art and the dominant Realist style? Why did Marcel Duchamp and Eleanor Antin choose to dress as the opposite sex? How does Shigeyuki Kihara address wider questions of colonial power through her examination of gender identity?