SECOND WAVE: Aesthetics of the 80s in Today’s Contemporary Art

Aesthetics of the 80s in Today’s Contemporary Art explores the influences of the artistic styles and subject matter from the artists in the 1980s on a new generation of artists, who were born or raised in this period, and have expressed the importance of this decade from nearly thirty years ago on their own work.

The art world of the 1980s was a decade that saw the resurgence of painting, exploration of authenticity, the employment of appropriation, an embrace and critique of consumerism, along with the rise of graffiti art, gay activism, and multiculturalism. While not an exhaustive list, some of the more familiar artists associated with this time include Jean-Michel Basquiat, Ross Bleckner, Eric Fischl, Jack Goldstein, Gran Fury, Guerilla Girls, Peter Halley, Keith Haring, Jeff Koons, Barbara Kruger, Shermie Levine, Robert Longo, David Salle, Julian Schnabel, Cindy Sherman, and Mark Tansey.

From a grand narrative perspective, much of the spirit behind their work could be viewed as a reaction to the prior decade of the 1970s that saw a rise of “anti-aesthetic” work with conceptual art, process art, earth art, and performance. The rising profile of the artist’s voice that occurred in the 1980s might be best symbolized by the “culture wars” that happened at the end of the decade when senator Jesse Helms attacked the National Endowment for the Arts for supporting work that made visible what had been repressed socially: sexuality, desire, power, and more. In other words, the artist’s voice was having such an impact that it attracted the attention of a senator, although negatively, and was underscored by the political atmosphere emboldened by Reaganomics deregulation.

Several exhibitions in the past ten years that have revisited the 1980s include American Art of the 1980s: Selections From the Broad Collections at the Hammer Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago’s This Will Have Been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s (2013); and Take it or Leave It: Institution, Image, Ideology at the Hammer Museum, UCLA (2014), which surveyed the use of appropriation and institutional critique in art from the 1980s. Additionally, there have been retrospective exhibitions of artists from the 80s, such as Jack Goldstein X 10,000 at Orange County Museum of Art (2012), focusing on an artist who helped initiate an avant-garde art movement referred to as the “Pictures Generation.” It is clear that there are mixed feelings about the decade contained within these titles. The resonance of the decade that they examine has only become more powerful over time, and is manifested in a new generation of artists who were born and raised in the 1980s, but have only begun their artistic careers in the past five years. This dialogue between the decades is reflected in the title of the exhibition.

While the exhibition does not include works by the artists from the 1980s, it does, however, feature works by contemporary artists who have expressed how the 1980s have impacted their own work. The exhibition is organized loosely around aesthetic trajectories that are identified with the 1980s, such as Appropriation, Feminism, Graffiti Art, Neo-Expressionism, Neo-Geometric Conceptualism, Neo-Pop, Mass Media, and Identity Politics. A selection of artists in SECOND WAVE made the connections between a recent past art history and current studio practices. One note of distinction is that these artists have established their careers in Los Angeles and the southern California region. This is meant as a purposeful counterpart to the careers of the artists in the 1980s that were established in the New York art world. Although, several studied in Los Angeles schools, such as California Institute of the Arts and UCLA, they then departed for the city where careers were being made at the time. However, it was in the 1990s and 2000s that Los Angeles’ stature rose on an international level, a sentiment that underscores the selection of artists in SECOND WAVE.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

The 80s saw resurgence in painting after being rejected by the 1970s avant-garde. Neo-expressionists, such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Anselm Kiefer, and Julian Schnabel brought back figurative content. Art for content making was increasingly becoming rich as the era was being saturated with media from cable TV to video cameras and the personal computer. With these new technologies made accessible design for the general public, painting began to dialogue with these electronic media.

A counterpart to this notion in SECOND WAVE is Gregory Eberhardt’s painting Bony. Dots (2015) which unites with other genres from the 1980s through works by Mark Batongmalaque, Brian Bress, Chet Glaze, Valerie Green, Pearl C. Hsiung, Ryan Perez and Devon Tsuno.

Mass Media art in the 1980s incorporated familiar print “languages” such as advertising used to great effect by Gran Fury and Barbara Kruger. Blending New Geo aesthetics with Mass Media, Batongmalaque has created a sculptural narrative touching on irony, humor and the politically questionable. Brian Bress explore ways to fuse the language of video and abstraction. His “video paintings” combine colorful geometric shapes painted in a minimalist style with video vignettes. Chet Glaze blurs the lines between sculpture and painting by means of appropriating images from pop culture and domestic landscapes. His work relates to that of Robert Overby who constructed images by borrowing fragments of advertising, pornography, architecture, bookcover illustrations and other popular ephemera. Through photography, Valerie Green investigates the kaleidoscopic abstractions and pixelated surfaces of screens from smartphones and digital tablets. Her mediated pieces disclose a geometric landscape of lines and forms similar to Memphis designs. Pearl C. Hsiung’s paintings resonate in the style of Neo-Geo and Biomorphic Abstraction. The work of Gregory Amenoff correspond with Hsiung’s work especially, whose composition offers the idea of escape and sanctuary from the dark realms of the cosmos. Perez uses materials.
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and techniques common to both commercial and art production. His sculptures and photographs attempt to reflect on how seduction and desire is located in both the mass-produced and the art object. The forms employed in Tsuno’s work represent individual organisms and networks of contemporary urban existence. The lines, shapes and forms depicted in his paintings characterize the social landscape both in isolation and connectivity.

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Saturday, November 14
OPENING RECEPTION | 6-9 PM | Culver Center of the Arts + Sweeney Art Gallery
Free admission and open to the public

FROM THE VAULT | Andy Warhol Photographs from the CMP Collection
4:30 – 6 PM at Culver Center of the Arts | 6-9 PM at California Museum of Photography | Print viewing | Open to the public | Free admission

FA R FROM NOSTALGIA, Panel Discussion | 5-6 PM | Culver Center of the Arts Screening Room

THE BINGs, Performance/Dueling DJ sets | 6-9 PM | Culver Center of the Arts Atrium

Thursday, December 3
CONTROL, 2007, Directed by Anton Corbijn | 7 PM | Culver Center of the Arts Screening Room | $9.99 Admission

February 4
#SECONDWAVE | 6-9 PM | Culver Center of the Arts | First Thursday ArtsWalk Activity

February 9
CONRAD RUIZ - UCR Art Department Visiting Artist Lecture Series
4 PM | Art Building Rm. 335 at the UC Riverside campus | Open to the public
Free admission

March 3
COLLEGE NITE: Artist Gallery Talk on Second Wave with Ryan Perez and Kristofferson San Pablo | 6-7 PM | Culver Center of the Arts | Open to the public
Free admission

February 9