

The British Museum

The American Dream
pop to the present

London. Art opening March 7, 2017
Exhibition March 9 June 18, 2017



The

AMERICAN DREAM

pop to the present

This exhibition traces the creative momentum in American art over the past six decades through the medium of the print. From the moment pop art burst onto the New York and West Coast scenes, through the rise of minimalism, conceptual art and photorealism, to the engagement with issues such as race, AIDS and feminism, leading American artists have produced prints of unprecedented scale, boldness and ambition. Through their prints, they have celebrated, reflected and commented on the USA from the 1960s to today.





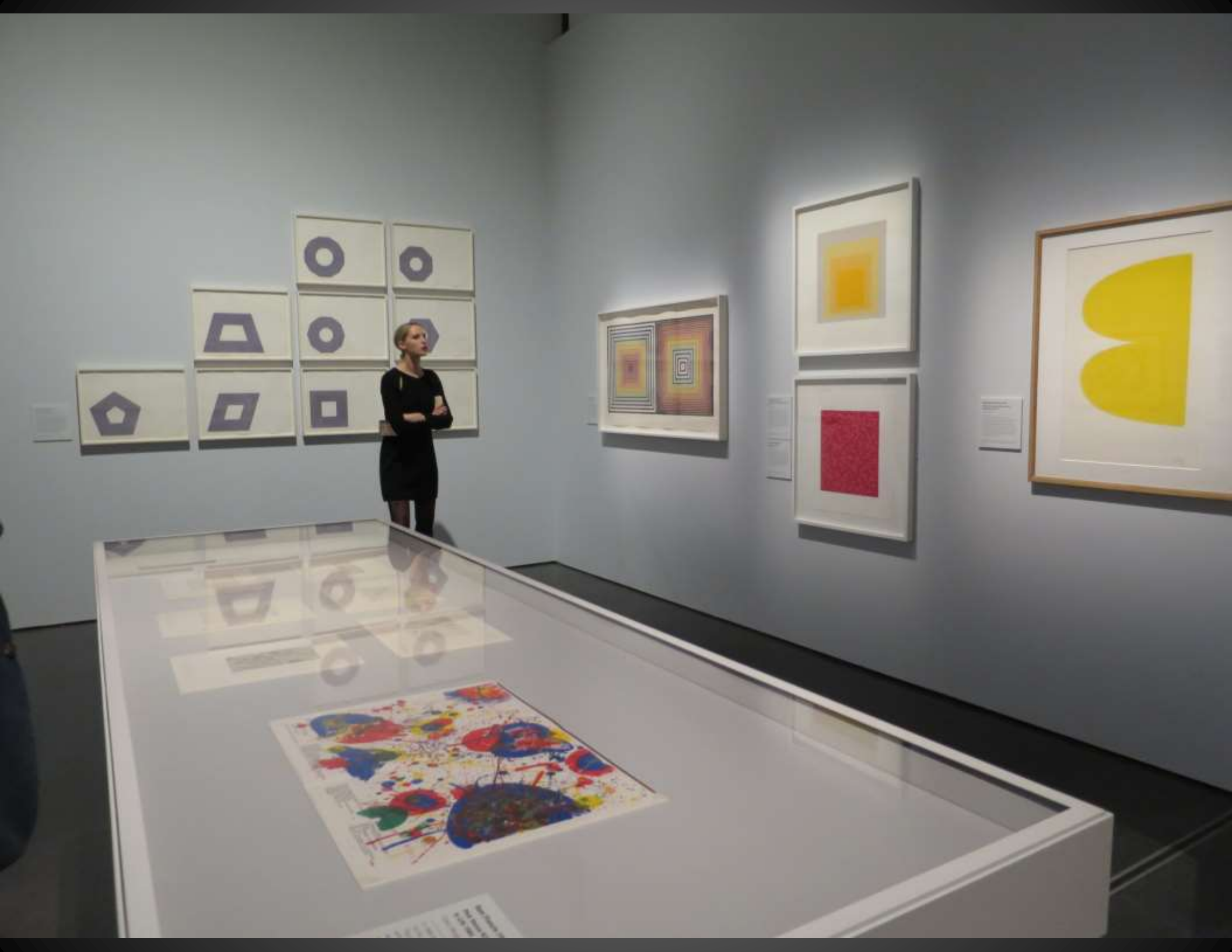
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Photorealism: portraits and landscapes

7/12

Photorealism developed in America towards the end of the 1960s, as artists rebelled away from abstraction and conceptualism. The style is characterized by highly detailed images presented with detailed clarity and the shallow depth of field of the original source photographs.

Several photorealist painters took up the creative possibilities of painting. Chuck Close and Alex Katz explored the monumental scale and two-dimensionality of abstract art to their perfection, then a deeply contemplative genre. Compared with a grid structure, Richard Estes' dreamlike urban landscapes are devoid of people. Also empty of human presence are the wet night skies and ocean waves of 'Vig Calvez' junks, which dissolve into abstraction.





Yankee Stadium at Night
Craig McPherson, 1983
Mezzotint
18 x 24 inches



Craig McPherson, *Yankee Stadium at Night* mezzotint, 1983



realism:
its and
apes



8/12

The figure reasserted

In the late 1960s the painter Philip Guston departed abruptly from his abstract expressionist style. He began to create cartoonish images of hooded figures, dismembered limbs and other representational forms. A decade earlier Richard Diebenkorn had shifted away from abstraction in favour of the human figure, still lifes and recognisable landscapes. Philip Pearlstein also started to work from life, producing nude figure paintings from the early 1960s.

This new representational approach led to the rise of figurative expressionism among a new generation of American painters from the late 1970s and 80s. In printmaking, artists such as Robert Longo and Susan Rothenberg created psychologically charged images of the human figure.





10/12

Feminism, gender and the body

The rise of feminism in the 1960s and 70s challenged traditional male power structures in America. Artists began to address feminist theories, such as female sexuality, reproductive rights and the domestic role of women.

Galvanised by gender inequality in the art world, women artists began to form groups in the early 1970s. Printmakers such as May Stevens and Dotty Attie showed their work in non-profit, co-operative galleries set up to provide an alternative to the male-dominated commercial art scene. From the 1980s, artists as diverse as Louise Bourgeois and Kiki Smith have questioned traditional representations of the female body and the ways it has been objectified, as well as conventional notions of femininity.



THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST:

- Working without the pressure of success.
- Not having to be in shows with men.
- Having an escape from the art world in your 4 free-lance jobs.
- Knowing your career might pick up after you're eighty.
- Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine.
- Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position.
- Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others.
- Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood.
- Not having to shake on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits.
- Having more time to work when your mate dumps you for someone younger.
- Being included in revised versions of art history.
- Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius.
- Getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit.

GUERRILLA GIRLS



Race and identity: unresolved histories

From the mid-1950s, the growing civil rights movement led by the Baptist minister Martin Luther King, Jr. met with hostile, often violent, reaction. This was particularly the case in the Southern states, where segregation in public places was enshrined in law until 1964, when Congress passed the Civil Rights Act.

In the 1960s and 70s few artists of colour were able to penetrate America's mainstream art world. In recent years, the legacy of slavery has preoccupied the African-American artists Emma Amos, Kara Walker and Willie Cole. Glenn Ligon has drawn on literature to create text-based works exploring race and identity. As divisions persist in American society, the work of these artists continues to challenge inequalities and make visible the deep scars of history.



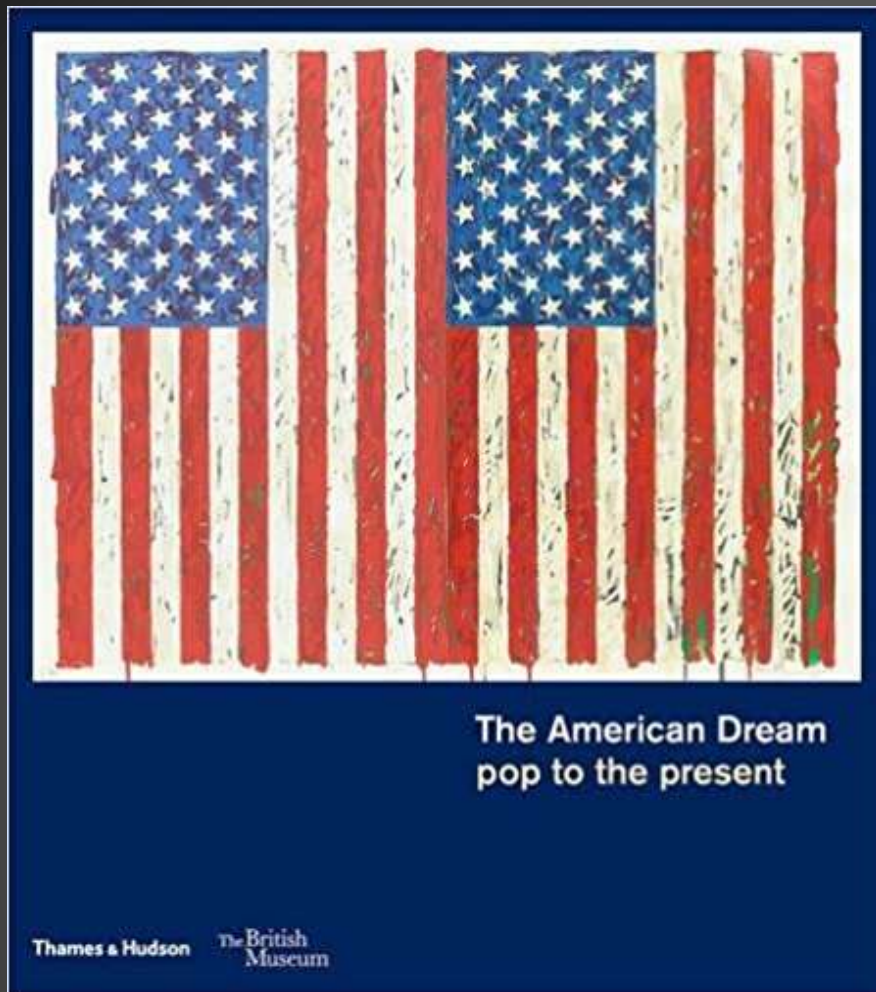


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The American Dream pop to the present

Authors: Stephen Coppel, Catherine Daunt and Susan Tallman

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Available on Amazon.com

A deep dive into American printmaking from 1960 to the present day

The American Dream: pop to the present, published to accompany an exhibition at the British Museum, presents an overview of the development of American printmaking since 1960, paying particular attention to such key figures as Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Ed Ruscha as well as Louise Bourgeois, Kara Walker, and Julie Mehretu.

This fully illustrated publication traces the creative momentum in American printmaking over the past six decades from the moment pop art burst onto the New York and West Coast scenes in the early 1960s, the rise of minimalism, conceptual art, and photorealism in the 1970s, to the different responses of artists working today. Using innovative techniques and appealing to a wide audience, American printmaking was the ideal medium to express the USA's power and influence, and to highlight contentious issues such as race, AIDS, and feminism.

350+ illustrations in color and black and white, with more than 200 works by nearly 70 artists.