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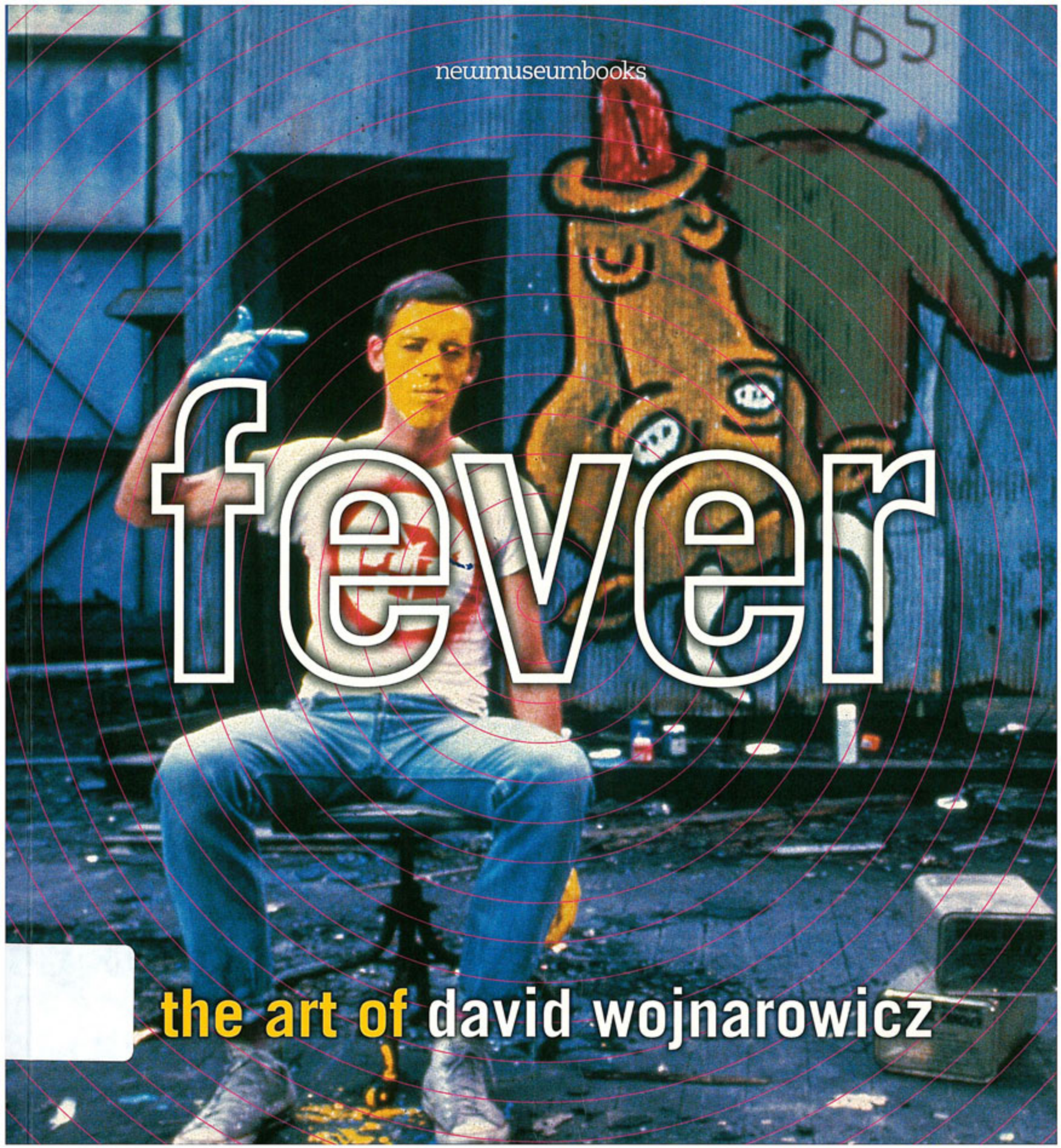

fever

the art of david wojnarowicz

Fever: The Art of David Wojnarowicz

The work of David Wojnarowicz (1954 –1992) was shaped by his experiences on the margins of American society. A private universe constructed from words, objects, and images borrowed from diverse sources, Wojnarowicz's art was driven by his passionate belief in art's power to shape human consciousness.

A central figure in New York's East Village art scene of the 1980s, Wojnarowicz was a painter, sculptor, photographer, writer, installation artist, musician, and video- and filmmaker. After being diagnosed as HIV-positive in the late 1980s, Wojnarowicz engaged in widely publicized debates over medical research and funding, censorship in the arts, and politically-sanctioned homophobia, lending his art a sharply political edge. The last few years of his life were an intense flurry of activity in a variety of mediums, fueled by rage and alienation that helped set the tone for contemporary art's exploration of social and private identities.

Fever: The Art of David Wojnarowicz is published in conjunction with a major retrospective of the artist's work at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. The book includes excerpts from Wojnarowicz's own writings and essays by Dan Cameron, Mysoon Rizk, C. Carr, and John Carlin that explore the extraordinary breadth and depth of his output and examine his considerable influence on artists and writers today.

fever

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fever

the art of david wojnarowicz

Dan Cameron
John Carlin
C. Carr
Mysoon Rizk

edited by Amy Scholder

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

Fever: The Art of David Wojnarowicz

New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
January 21–April 11, 1999
Organized by Dan Cameron, Senior Curator

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Cover: David Wojnarowicz on a Hudson River pier, ca. 1983. Photo: Ivan Dallatana

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Sponsor Statement

In continuation of Gianni Versace's passion and support for the arts, Versace Classic is proud to be involved with the New Museum of Contemporary Art's retrospective exhibition *Fever: The Art of David Wojnarowicz.*

In the past few decades, art and fashion have become increasingly accepted not only as end products but also as sociological commentaries. We realize that it is more than a photograph or a suit; it's an artist's language that communicates to people of all cultures. Gianni Versace and David Wojnarowicz spoke to us through these mediums.

Although these two artists expressed themselves in different mediums, they shared great similarities of vision. Drawing freely from popular culture, they created their own individual genres which shocked some people, moved others, and ultimately transcended modernity to become classic.

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Acknowledgments

David Wojnarowicz's status as one of the key artistic figures in the United States during the 1980s is only now being recognized by a substantial sector of the art world, following a number of years when his art and writing seemed to be taken for granted. For this reason, the arduous task of reassessing his work meant that the exhibition and publication *Fever: The Art of David Wojnarowicz* have taken more than three years to prepare. Needless to say, getting to this point would have been unthinkable without the ongoing support of a large number of people, many of whom were close friends and/or collaborators with the artist. First among these must be Tom Rauffenbart, the artist's partner and the executor of his estate, who has been unstinting in devoting the time and energy required to see the project through to completion and extremely gracious in accommodating our demands. The New Museum is especially grateful to Santo Versace and Mario Giraudi of Versace Classic for their immediate recognition that David Wojnarowicz's art should be shared with as large an audience as possible and for their commitment to creating a partnership with the New Museum to breathe life into this project. We also thank Andreas Kurz, President and CEO of Versace Classic, and his staff in New York for their sense of adventure and discriminating attention to all aspects of Versace Classic's sponsorship. Scott Rodgers played an early and important role in this collaboration and we thank him as well. The Henry Luce Foundation has provided leadership support for the exhibition and publication through its Program in American Art. In acknowledging that David Wojnarowicz is a central figure in the development of art over the last twenty years, the Luce Foundation has greatly helped our efforts to document and better understand Wojnarowicz's substantial contributions to our culture, so that his work may be shared with a new generation. Our sincere thanks to Henry Luce III and Ellen Holtzman for their belief in this endeavor. The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts is among the New Museum's most steadfast supporters and we are delighted that it has provided a major grant for *Fever*. We thank Pamela Clapp at the Foundation for championing Wojnarowicz's unique achievements. *Out* magazine, the media sponsor of the exhibition, has lent its considerable flair and expertise to publicizing *Fever*. Its wonderful contributions of advertising, printing, and other services have given a major boost to our efforts to spread the word about David Wojnarowicz and his art. Thanks to Lou Fabrizio, Publisher; James Collard, Editor in Chief; and Henry E. Scott, President, for *Out's* donation of time, talent, and funds. Wojnarowicz's dealers, especially Penny Pilkington, Wendy Olsoff, and Scott Catto of P.P.O.W., and Gracie Mansion have also been exceedingly helpful, allowing access to records and files from Wojnarowicz's career and fielding numerous queries with generosity and patience.

A number of persons who have spent considerable time working with Wojnarowicz's art have also been enlisted in this project, and their presence has been invaluable. Mysoon Rizk, who has been engaged for several years in advanced scholarship on Wojnarowicz, met and talked with us innumerable times, and her assistance has proven indispensable. Another prominent Wojnarowicz expert, editor extraordinaire Amy Scholder, has brought an in-depth familiarity with his

art and writings to the complex task of bringing together and shaping this publication. Rex Ray, who has already designed our Martin Wong publication in collaboration with Rizzoli International Publications, devised a brilliant design approach for this second collaboration with us. At Rizzoli, I would like to thank Solveig Williams, Christopher Lyon, and Elizabeth White for their patience and support during the long gestation of this book. C. Carr and John Carlin, insightful writers who knew the artist well and have written about him on other occasions, each made an invaluable contribution to this catalogue. Marvin Taylor, curator of the Wojnarowicz papers at New York University's Coles Library, was completely supportive of our research. It is impossible to thank all of the people who knew Wojnarowicz and who met with us as the project was in development; among the writers, artists, and scholars who have given generously of their time are Carlo McCormick, Barry Blinderman, Judy Glantzman, Kiki Smith, Ben Neill, Richard Kern, James Romberger, and Marguerite van Cook. Very special gratitude is owed to Marion Scemama, a collaborator with Wojnarowicz on many projects over the years, who generously agreed to edit existing video footage for the exhibition.

Any exhibition requires a number of lenders to make it a reality, and, because Wojnarowicz was highly successful during his lifetime, his work is part of more than a hundred private and public collections in the United States and abroad. While it was not possible to visit each collector individually, the many supporters of Wojnarowicz's art who did permit us to examine his work in their homes or offices were unfailingly hospitable and supportive. Although each of the lenders deserves a separate thanks, those who made a special effort to help us must be mentioned here. They include Steven Johnson and Walter Sudol, Emily and Jerry Spiegel, Nancy and Joel Portnoy, Evan Lurie, Bette Ziegler, and Michael Lynne, all of New York; Adam Clayton in Dublin; and Mercedes Buades and Chiqui Abril of Galeria Buades, Madrid. I would also like to single out for special thanks Kathleen Goncharov, curator at the New School for Social Research, and Robert Pincus-Witten at C&M Arts.

A project of this scope requires a substantial infrastructure to make it a reality, and those individuals at the New Museum who have been instrumental in bringing both the exhibition and the catalogue together deserve more of my appreciation than can be expressed in such limited space. Melanie Franklin, who as Curatorial Administrator/Publications Manager always does an outstanding job of coordinating publications with precision and insight, has taken special pains with this book to produce a document that credits the significant work done so far on David Wojnarowicz and his art and is also a valuable addition to the existing literature. Exhibitions Manager John Hatfield has provided a clear and workable budget and framework from the project, thereby enabling us to stretch our limited resources as far as possible. A number of curatorial interns have been of great assistance in helping realize research and loans. Yukie Kamiya, Henry Estrada, and Ignacio Macua were all extremely helpful in this regard, but the greatest amount of work fell on the shoulders of Chris Eamon, who has been remarkably well organized and irrepressibly cheerful in undertaking a daunting responsibility. Other New Museum staff who have contributed greatly to the success of this project include Sefa Saglam, Assistant Registrar; Tom Brumley, Installation Coordinator; and Yolanda Hunt, Grants Manager. As always, I am thankful to Dennis Szakacs and Marcia Tucker at the New Museum for overseeing and supervising my work.

Dan Cameron
Senior Curator, New Museum of Contemporary Art

Foreword

David Wojnarowicz's work, like the artist himself, was an uncontrollable force unleashed on a disengaged and unsuspecting audience. His was the proverbial voice in the wilderness, the testimony of a single brilliant and eloquent outsider to the brutality, suffering, and neglect that characterized his own brief life and the lives of so many unacknowledged others.

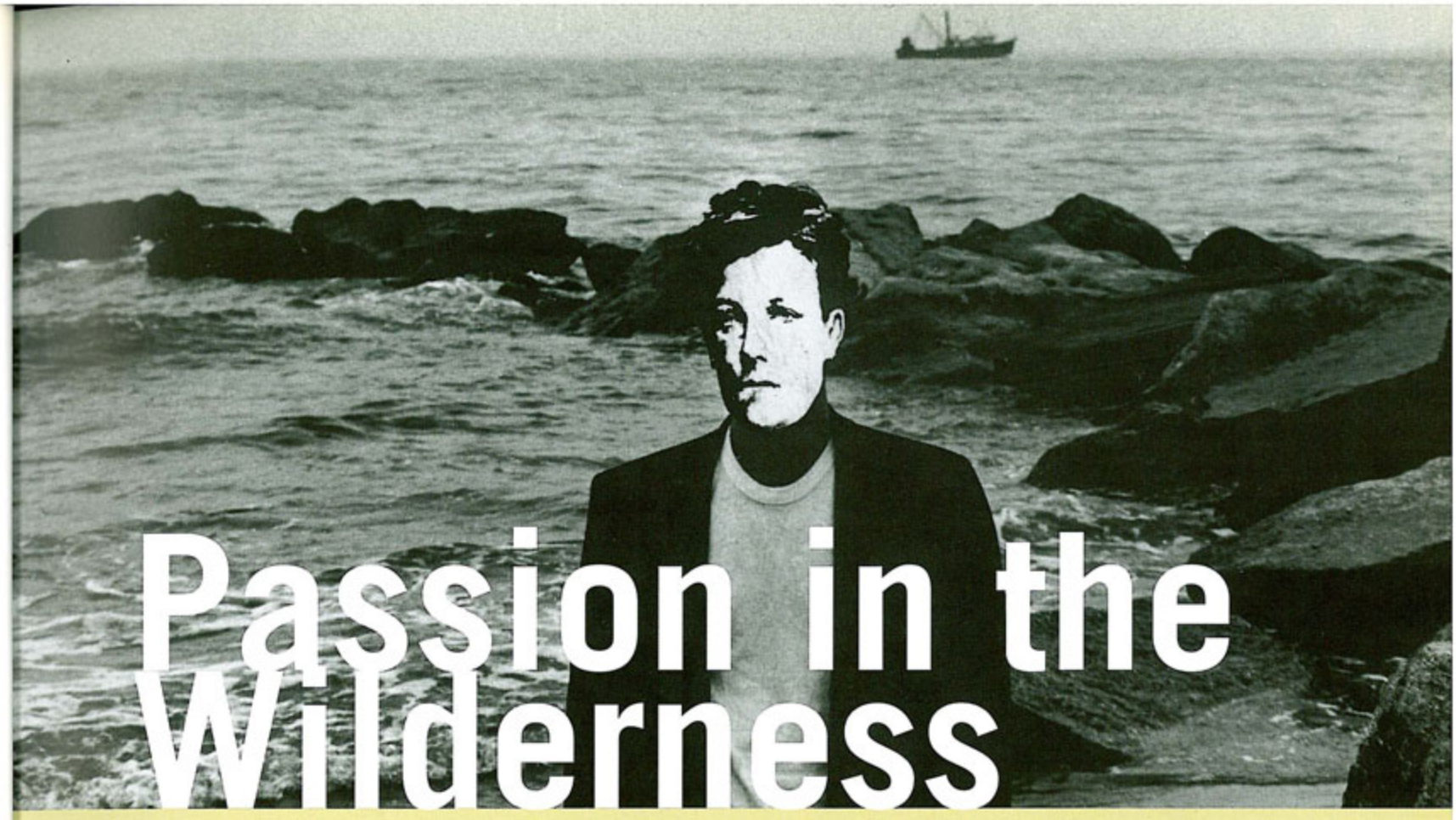
In an articulate and sustained howl of pain, rage, and longing, Wojnarowicz spoke movingly of a world so dark, so bitter, and so pervasive that its very existence was denied by those who had not experienced it firsthand. At the same time, his desire to articulate that world for those outside it and his ability to do so made him a heroic figure to his peers. Particularly in the New York art world of the 1980s, where volatile careers were built overnight, where ample money was available to reward market enterprise, and where both economic and artistic investment had reached a fever pitch, Wojnarowicz was an anomaly.

His work spoke graphically about gay life, politics, sex, AIDS, homophobia, friendship, death, industrialization, grief, religion, and more—overlaying ideas, sensations, images, words, sounds, and icons in a richly textured, layered screen in which experience and fact coalesced and separated continously. Wojnarowicz was also a painter, printmaker, photographer, writer, and film- and video-maker whose interdisciplinary approach to his work was as broadly based and yet as focused as he was.

His presence was a sudden slap delivered in the face of hysteria, a well-timed and accurate blow calculated to shock and calm its recipient at the same time. His bracing sense of humor and characteristic empathy, combined with an outrageously outspoken manner, made him an influential, intimidating, yet respected figure whose contribution is deeply inscribed on the landscape of contemporary American art.

Wojnarowicz died at the age of thirty-seven, but his legacy is far greater than the brevity of his years would suggest. This exhibition, the first since his death, shows him to be the conscience of his time, a lucid, provocative, and prophetic artist whose work aroused the wrath of those who feared its message, and inspired the dedication of those to whom it continues to speak.

Marcia Tucker
Director, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York



Passion in the Wilderness

by Dan Cameron

This exhibition, the first overview of David Wojnarowicz's career since his death in 1992, is the result of broad efforts on the part of critics, curators, and scholars to come to terms with the interdisciplinary core of his creativity. This emphasis is crucial because it paves the way to understanding Wojnarowicz as an artist whose work, in its fervent embrace of different media and formal languages, was considerably ahead of its time. For Wojnarowicz, painting and sculpture were facets of a constantly expanding universe of expressive potential that embraced writing and photography and eventually included video, film, theater, music, graphic design, and printmaking. This does not mean that he aspired to be anything less than a serious artist, but rather that he envisioned artists of the future exerting a newfound freedom in their choices of materials and media. Whether consciously or not, Wojnarowicz led the way in exploring how an individual artist's practice might incorporate as many possibilities as there were techniques and materials to work with. As a result, he has justifiably earned a label that is barely used today, and which he might have repudiated had it been applied during his lifetime, but which fits his achievement more than that of any other contemporary figure: Renaissance man.

David Wojnarowicz is both one of the most influential and one of the least recognized artists to emerge from New York during the 80s. If this description seems contradictory, it is because the period with which his work is identified continues to be one of the least assimilated in terms of the mainstream art world, to the extent that it almost seems as if the whole thing never happened. This is particularly true in regard to those artists who were most closely associated

1. *Fever*, 1988–89. Gelatin-silver prints on museum board, 31 x 25". Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W., New York.

2. *Arthur Rimbaud in New York (On Shore)* (detail), 1978–79. From a series of twenty-four gelatin-silver prints, 10 x 8" each. Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W., New York. Photo: Fred Scruton.

with the loose network of East Village galleries, cafes, and clubs, which was looked upon by the art world primarily as a feeder system for the larger network of more professional galleries in Soho and on 57th Street. Because of a temporary collective lapse of memory, the questioning of community and artistic values represented by this neighborhood movement was left unsupported when the scene moved elsewhere at the end of the decade. For those who continued to support its values, however, the East Village remained a kind of underground mecca for precisely those artistic activities that thrived on confrontation and were less dependent on commerce: independent filmmaking, alternative music, performance art, and poetry. These differences in choice of medium were not merely cultural, however. Galleries, curators, collectors, and critics whose preferences tended strongly towards painting regarded Wojnarowicz, who was working in an interdisciplinary mode, as mercurial and his techniques as too uneven. Finally, Wojnarowicz's notoriety as an artist whose sensibility was deeply marked by his struggles against AIDS and homophobia inevitably meant that numerous supporters of his less incendiary early work drifted away as his name became surrounded by political controversy toward the end of his life.

So what, it might be asked, has changed over the present decade to encourage this reassessment of Wojnarowicz's artistic legacy? On the most visible level, the years since his death have witnessed a steady effort on the part of publishers and editors to place Wojnarowicz's accomplishments as a photographer and writer before the public. Thousands who are unfamiliar with his paintings are now intimately conversant with his journals and other writings. In addition to the recognition of Wojnarowicz's authorial voice as one of the most haunting of its era, times have also changed in a way that enables us to appreciate the idealism implicit in Wojnarowicz's relationship to art, which reflected a deep sense of community as well as his passion for using art to awaken a sense of social conscience, if not outrage. His frequently perilous journey of the soul, now heavily documented, was driven largely by the belief that he could find himself only through reconciling his internal struggles with the cultural battles that raged around him. In so doing, his life story became a narrative of one man's attempt to transform the world's disdain into a powerful indictment against intolerance and apathy. While his struggle against the many public injustices witnessed and suffered by him makes him a precursor of those artists producing socially grounded art today, Wojnarowicz's remarkable facility for constructing poetry out of words and images is what makes viewers and readers respond to his singular vision of the universe.

3. *Arthur Rimbaud in New York (Mural)*, 1978–79.
From a series of twenty-four gelatin-silver prints, 10 x 8" each.
Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W., New York. Photo: Fred Scruton.

4. *Arthur Rimbaud in New York (Duchamp, Pier)*, 1978–79.
From a series of twenty-four gelatin-silver prints, 10 x 8" each.
Private collection.

David Wojnarowicz's status as an artist who produced brilliant work in a surprising number of formal languages is directly tied to his identity as the archetypal bohemian East Village artist. He showed with various neighborhood galleries and alternative spaces, played in a band, made videos, films, and theater works, collaborated incessantly with other artists, donated his work to benefits, and was known both for his generosity to artists less fortunate than he and for constantly running out of money. He was a genuine idealist in the sense that he spoke up loudly and clearly for causes that he believed in and never hesitated to make his art a vehicle for his political convictions. But he was also a visionary artist in the sense that his works were often triggered by private experiences or dreams, and he was especially fond of creating links between ecstatic experience and polemical confrontation. At times, this multilayered, synchronic vision seems connected to Wojnarowicz's generally freewheeling use of different media, including techniques and processes that were new to him. As a result, it has often been difficult for his audience to connect Wojnarowicz the writer, who details his casual sexual encounters with unchecked passion, to Wojnarowicz the painter, who transforms a supermarket poster into a gory slab of meat, to Wojnarowicz the photographer, who crystallizes existential dread in an image of a rabid dog on a Mexico City street. This difficulty comes about for two reasons: because we are no longer used to seeing artists operate in several different media at once, and because artists who do mix techniques have tended to do so with a more consistent style. In this sense, Wojnarowicz was far from typical of the artists of his generation, who generally limited their range of artistic investigation to either social issues or aesthetic ones, but rarely both. In the most fundamental historical terms, Wojnarowicz appears to have been the leading voice in the first generation of artists to come of age in the AIDS era, for whom the relationship between the private and the political was powerfully evident.

Although I had not come across his work when I was researching the 1982 New Museum of Contemporary Art exhibition "Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Content in Contemporary Art," I can recall seeing David Wojnarowicz's name in connection with group shows. The first works by Wojnarowicz that made an impression on me were his murals at the dilapidated Hudson River piers, a place where gay men met for anonymous sex during the late 70s and early 80s. Photographs of the murals were published in the *Village Voice* in 1983, and I recall being struck by their ingenuity and audacity. They were ingenious because they extended certain theoretical principles of site-specific art being made in the 70s, and audacious because they transformed these precepts into a defiant celebration of gay male sexuality. Because of the piers' dilapidated state, it was not entirely safe to visit the murals at any time, but it was especially ominous under the conditions their appearance seemed to suggest: as a solitary visitor in the middle of the night. This memory is important in terms of my relationship to Wojnarowicz's work as a whole, because it recalls the success he had in dragging his public's attention to things that seemed best kept under wraps. Although the pier images were not intrinsically sexual, they explicitly pointed to the illegality and danger of their environment.[1] The artist's signature upside-down cow motif, its eyes crossed out to indicate death, immortalized on these crumbling walls, was a memento mori that must have seemed horribly prescient only a year or two later. The scrambled Krazy Kat mural, which recalled the San Francisco artist Jess in its use of rearranged comic texts and images, seems remarkably

5. *Untitled* [Sirloin Steaks], 1983. Acrylic on poster, 47 x 32 1/2". Collection of Hal Bromm, New York.

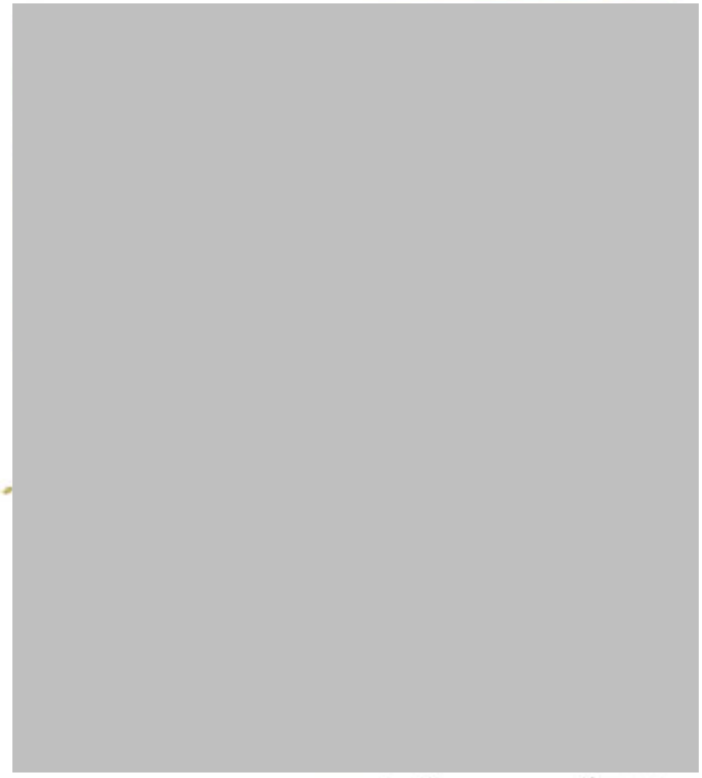
playful now in light of its decrepit surroundings. What was most startling about the pier murals was the fact that Wojnarowicz utilized the site in a way that seemed to be the antithesis of most graffiti artists' strategies: he drew attention to the place itself. Implicitly linking the sexually explicit content of Robert Mapplethorpe with the street-painting strategies of Keith Haring, Wojnarowicz wanted to make his audience acutely conscious of the place and its purpose, to make a direct link between his creative act and the charged, sexual environment that provided it with a context.

Although it was clear from the work in his first gallery exhibitions (ca. 1982–83) that he was still perfecting his techniques as a painter, Wojnarowicz's development as a visual artist had been underway for some years. His earliest complete series of work is a group of twenty-four black-and-white photographs made in 1979, titled *Arthur Rimbaud in New York*. Inviting his friend and musical collaborator Brian Butterick to don a homemade mask of the French poet's face, Wojnarowicz photographed him in different New York locations as a way to evoke the spirit of an artistic forebear whose fervent embrace of the underground became a direct source of Wojnarowicz's writings. This transformation of himself into a latter-day version of the legendary poet-rebel indicates that Wojnarowicz already had begun the process of turning his personal feelings of cultural estrangement into the core of his creative strength, making it especially striking that his earliest developed artistic statement took the form of a masquerade. Other works and activities from the late 70s suggest similar guerrilla overtones: a miscellany of photos and photocopy collages, an unfinished 1979 super-8 film, *Heroin*, and the 1980 dumping of hundreds of fresh cattle bones into the stairwell of 420 West Broadway (the address of the Leo Castelli gallery). Even if none of these statements carries quite the same resonance today as the Rimbaud photographs, they show the artist's determination to live out his creative vision in the form of a walking manifesto, in which every gesture, no matter how transitory, conveys the full force of its convictions.

Wojnarowicz was deeply involved in writing and making music at the time he began to develop his craft as a painter. Initially using stencils to produce graffiti advertisements for his band, 3 Teens Kill 4—No Motive, Wojnarowicz then made a transition to painting, following a route like that of his contemporaries Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, who also made their first artworks in the street. Partly because stencils have the eye-catching characteristic of seeming both handmade and machine processed, and partly because he had found a language that suited him, the street ads immediately garnered attention for him. Despite the technical limits of the medium, Wojnarowicz's first series of stencils on paper (ca. 1981) created at Todd Copy Shop in Soho, instantly transform often cursory subjects into dynamic compositions. The best of them require no further embellishment, as if each represented some raw kernel of truth that could not be refined without losing its essence. Even after his emergence as a more accomplished painter in the mid-80s, Wojnarowicz continued to use stenciled images intermittently in his work. And the lesson he drew from these anonymous images of burning houses and running soldiers in clouds—the centrality of the motif—would apply for much of his later work as well. In general, once Wojnarowicz seized an idea or an image, no matter how apparently mundane, he didn't let go until he had wrung every creative possibility from it. An early painting like *Peter Hujar Dreaming/Yukio Mishima: St. Sebastian* (1982; no. 59), created almost entirely with stencils, is visually convincing because each of the three motif layers is fully realized, yet overlaps with the others to suggest

6. *Arthur Rimbaud in New York (Coney Island)*, 1978–79. From a series of twenty-four gelatin-silver prints, 10 x 8" each. Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W., New York. Photo: Fred Scruton.

visually the dream awareness implied by the title. Two smaller stencil paintings on masonite, *Food from Space* (1982) and *Untitled* [Burning House] (1982; no. 62), use the comic-book convention of sequential panels to convey fablelike narratives about religion and politics, respectively. The ambitious but less convincing *Science Lesson* (1981–82), on the other hand, extends the stencil technique in terms of scale, scattering figures across the surface of a large, store-purchased photo mural of the earth viewed from the moon.



Wojnarowicz relied upon found surfaces to help him past the technical hurdles of his early years. The most favored of these was the map. Although he usually used the entire surface as the background for a collage-painting, he would also cut up maps to create figures and other collage elements. One of the most striking examples of this is also the simplest. *Falling Man* (1982) superimposes a familiar image of a man in an overcoat slipping on the ice, his hat flying off as his arms and legs flail helplessly, over a full-size map of the United States. Since the man is also cut out from a map, we get the sense that he represents an entire population, plunging from the sky toward earth with nothing to check his fall. Although maps would continue to appear in many guises throughout his work, Wojnarowicz used his other ready-made background from this period, the supermarket poster, for a comparatively short time. Printed supermarket ads provide the mundane background for a number of small paintings and prints of 1983 and 1984 that explode with violence and sexuality. *Untitled* [Pampers] (1984; no. 10), painted on a black-and-white poster, substitutes the comforting image of a baby with a murderous flurry of gore emanating from a bull's-eye centered on a detail of a dollar bill. In *Tuna* (1983; no. 9), a green sale poster is inset with a painting of the expressive eyes of a handsome cowboy, his hands tied and his mouth covered with a bandana. In a smaller inset, we see his head blown away by a pistol blast. The most elaborate and disturbing of the series is *Untitled* [Sirloin Steaks] (1983; no. 5): a running soldier with open shirt is caught in mid-stride by a bullet to the midsection. Although the fusion of eroticism and death would occur again in Wojnarowicz's art, this work remains one of the most powerful illustrations of the rage he felt at how much more attention society gave to the killing of men than the loving of them.

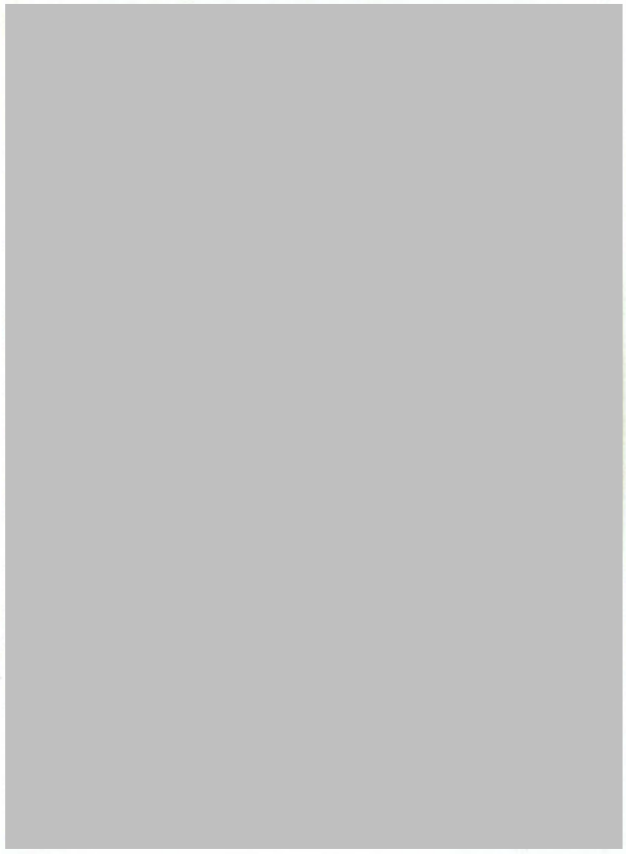
During this early phase of his career, Wojnarowicz began a close friendship with the photographer Peter Hujar, who encouraged the younger artist to focus on developing his vision, rather than allow it to become dispersed among a number of media. Two immediate effects of his friendship with Hujar are that the older artist became a regular subject of his paintings and that Wojnarowicz did not pursue photography seriously again for several years. He was, however, increasingly drawn to

7. *Untitled* [Burning House stencil], 1981. Spray paint on newsprint, 18 x 24". Collection of Don Hanson, New York. Photo: Fred Scruton.

8. *Slam Click*, 1983. Acrylic on poster on foamcore, 43 1/2 x 32". Collection of Emily and Jerry Spiegel, King's Point, New York.

making sculpture and objects, and he sought ways of bringing these media together in the form of installations. Of the myriad objects that Wojnarowicz produced in 1982, the ones that stand out most are the stencilled aluminum trash-can lids (no. 14). Like the stencil drawings, they succeed largely because they stretch a fairly limited technique to its expressive limits, and they share with the pier paintings a sense of the urban tendency to indulge primitive instincts. Although they are not directly about interventions in the street, their appearance immediately conjures up forbidding images of city life (homeless people rummaging through trash for food) to project a gritty defensiveness at the viewer. Even Wojnarowicz's choice of subjects—dog, cat, dinosaur, and a bewildered soldier titled *Paranoid Man* (1982)—reveals a desire to uncloak the rampant violence he sees at the core of the American system. A similar directness can be glimpsed in an untitled work from the same year, in which a simple blue humanoid shape stares as a house in the middle distance is consumed by flames. In the latter painting, however, we are unsure whether the figure is simply a mute witness to the tragedy or its cause.

Through 1983 and 1984, while Wojnarowicz was gradually building his craft as a painter, his most significant output consisted of sculpture and other objects. Considering the limited output of sculpture only two years later, these early examples reveal a surprising range of creativity. Perhaps the best-known are several painted wooden totems from 1983, which were displayed together in quasi-ritualistic fashion at Hal Bromm Gallery. Bearing titles like *Dollar Totem* and *Space Totem* (no. 11), these hybrid objects appear to bridge the gap in belief systems between our contemporary techno-materialistic society and cultures that produced such objects from a conviction that they afforded protection from uncontrollable forces. Less well known but more effective are twenty-three cast plaster "alien" heads produced in 1984, each of which was painted in a different stage of metamorphosis (no. 58). Wojnarowicz expressly designed this series to be experienced sequentially, so that the gradual transformation from a glowing red vitality to the bruised, gagged,



and bandaged countenance of the final heads, wrapped in fake dollar bills and maps, would convey an explicit narrative about the corruption of all forms of life (even extraterrestrial) through capitalism. During this same period, Wojnarowicz produced a number of animal sculptures, most of which were created by covering an existing skeleton or taxidermy specimen in the same standardized maps. Though several of these works were produced together with artist friends such as Greer Lankton and Kiki Smith, they are evidently grounded in concerns char-

9. *Tuna*, 1983. Acrylic and map on poster, 40 x 30". Collection of Gracie Mansion, New York.

10. *Untitled* [Pampers], 1984. Acrylic on poster, 44 x 32". Collection of Jerry Speyer, New York.

acteristic of Wojnarowicz's vision at the time. Despite its garish yellow mouth, his *Untitled* [Shark] (1984; no. 12) communicates a graceful ferocity that seems very much in tune with the artist's belief in the inherent wisdom and beauty of animals, as distinct from their less-than-inspiring human predators. Wojnarowicz was especially drawn to sheep skulls, which he would find and decorate, or, as in the case of the collaboration with Smith, reproduce as a papier-maché skull mask, at the edge of which perches a fisherman, his line attached to a miniature globe.

Wojnarowicz expresses rage throughout his oeuvre. Certain pieces, like the 1984 simulated Molotov cocktail made from a Night Train whiskey bottle with Ronald Reagan's face painted on it (titled *Variation on Magritte's Bottle*), use political satire as a form of street theater. Other works dig for a deeper, more personal form of reckoning, as in the case of one sculpture that seems to surpass most of his three-dimensional work: the 1984 *Untitled* [Burning Child] (no. 15), originally created as part of a temporary multimedia installation. Constructed from a nearly life-size doll of a young boy, the limbs are posed in mid-stride and the form is covered from head to toe with signature map fragments. Shooting from the child's arms and legs are cartoonlike representations of flames, which seem less unreal against the printed contours of the rest of the body. A color photograph of two men gathering animal skins is set into the child's chest, while his head cranes outward toward the world with a look of perpetual discovery. This is one of a handful of images that Wojnarowicz produced that could reasonably be considered surrogate self-portraits, and as such it offers a vivid basis for examination. When viewed against the backdrop of trees and leaves in the photograph used for his first retrospective in 1989, the figure appears to be an alien life form, making his

11. *Space Totem*, 1983. Acrylic on found wood, 79 x 5 x 7". Collection of Elaine Terner Cooper, New York.

12. *Untitled* [Shark], 1984. Acrylic and map collage on fiberglass, 51 x 22 x 26". Collection of Eileen and Richard Ekstract, New York.

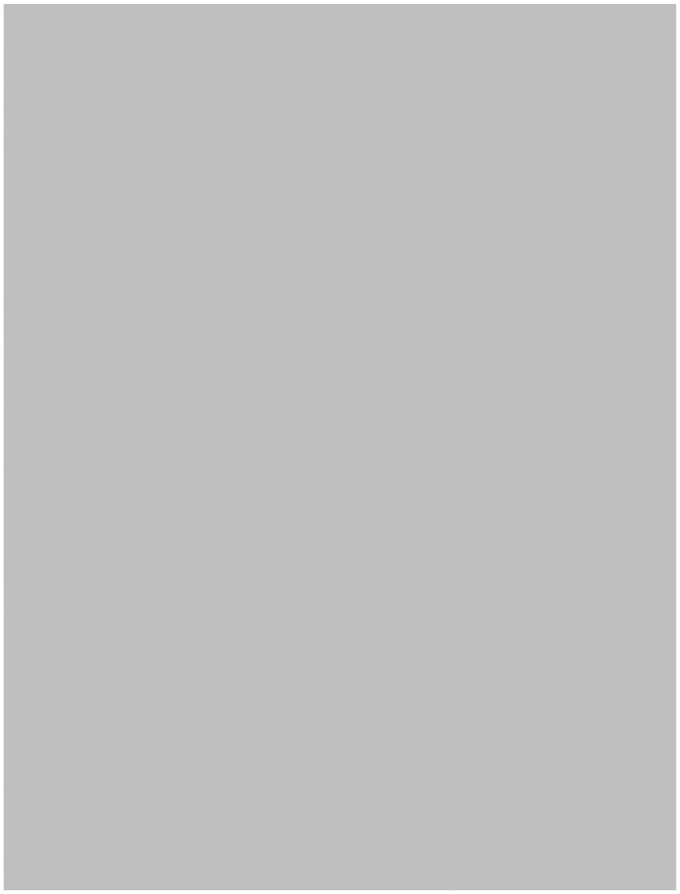
way gingerly through the world in complete ignorance of the conflagration that might erupt at any moment. This haunting fusion of innocence and danger is spelled out more literally in later work, like the 1990 *Untitled* [One day this kid . . .] (no. 53), a photo-text work based on a childhood photo of the artist and beginning with the text, "One day this kid will get larger." The motif of a burning figure appears again in two 1984 paintings, including *Untitled* [Burning Man] (no. 17), which depicts the protagonist fleeing from his fiery fate. This disaster motif, which is directly linked to the artist's traumatic childhood and adolescence, is rendered even more powerfully in *Untitled* [Burning Child], with its implicit message that the boy's experience of wonderment at being alive can never be separated from the threat of impending doom.

Wojnarowicz's maturation as an artist is directly connected to his lengthy battle with AIDS, which began roughly with Hujar's sickness and death, from 1984 to 1987, and continued after Wojnarowicz himself was diagnosed in 1987.[2] The steady buildup of intensity that takes place in his work after 1984 is, from any standpoint, a shattering artistic record of an entire society thrown into moral crisis by an epidemic. Wojnarowicz had always made direct connections in his work between his personal sense of identity and a worldview that embraced political and theological positions with equal fervor. Before AIDS began its domino process of exposing societal homophobia, highlighting public-health failings, and claiming the lives of people all around him, Wojnarowicz had deployed images borrowed from popular culture in order to express less personalized positions about the military, capitalism, the family, and so on. This tendency shifted noticeably in 1984, in what was also the first series of paintings to combine photo, stencil, and comic elements with a painterly base. *Untitled* [Burning Man], in its simple evocation of mountains, buildings, and sky,

13. *Science Totem*, 1983. Acrylic on found wood, 71 x 9 x 4 1/2". Collection of Paul Frankel, New York.

14. *Untitled [Trash Can Lids]*, 1982–83. Spray paint on trash can lids, 18" diameter each. Collections of Antonia Smith Robinson, New York; Nemo Labrizzi, New York; and Jean Foos and Dirk Rowntree, New York. Photo: Fred Scruton

communicates a sense of utter abandonment in the image of the man who runs through the town square, his cries for help unheeded. *Fuck You Faggot Fucker* (1984; no. 16), which again uses maps as a background, is divided into five or six sections, the central image a painted map fragment depicting a male couple embracing



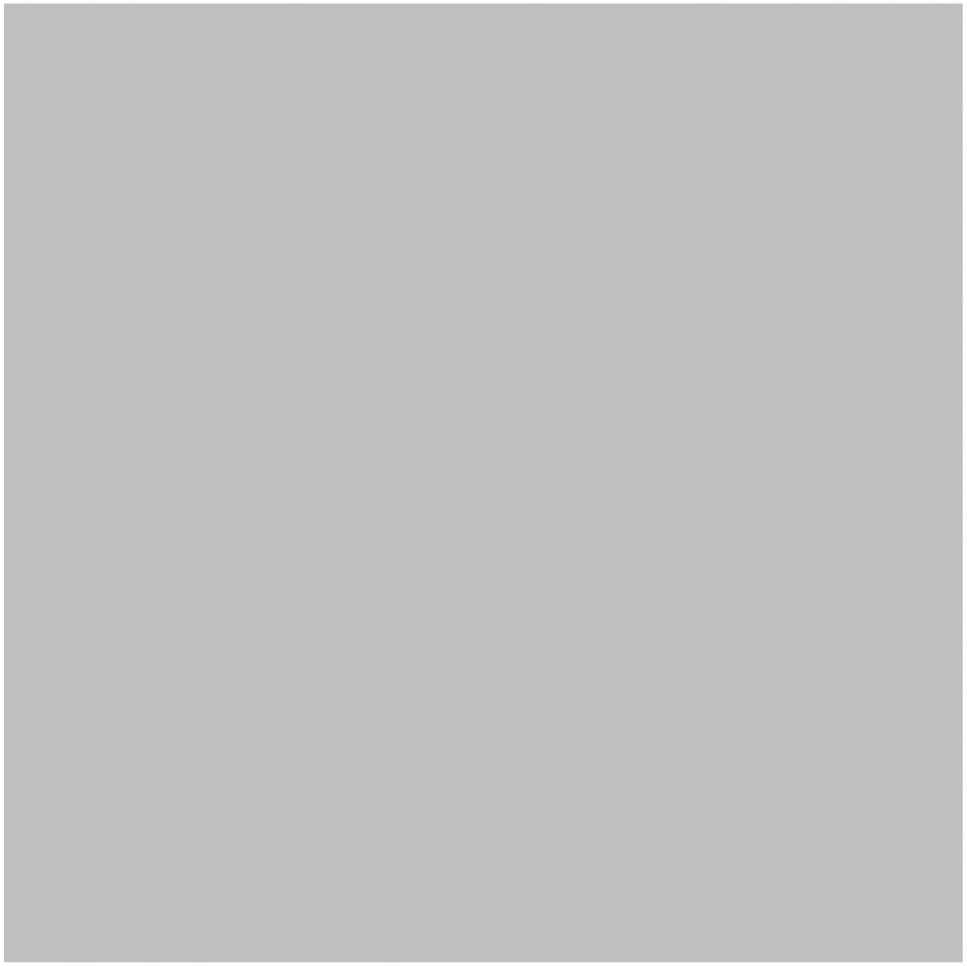
while waist-deep in water. Each of the four corners contains a black-and-white pier photo (three are identical) set into a whitish haze, while a smaller section at the bottom center frames the found bit of graffiti from which the painting's title was taken. Other paintings from this series, such as *Just a Little Bit of the Tin-Drum Mentality* and *Soon All This Will Be Picturesque Ruins*, convey the artist's growing sense of mortality at the same time as they suggest that he is pushing at the limits of his own capacity to make the work that he envisions.

The one major painting by Wojnarowicz of 1985, *Invasion of the Alien Minds* (no. 18), is close enough in format and execution to the work of the following year that it clearly anticipates the shift from a predominantly graphic sensibility to a vision that is grounded in images rendered with a developed painterly vocabulary. With its one-point perspective of a line of receding one-eyed colossi, the painting achieves a menacing tone while remaining compositionally static. In most of the paintings from 1986, however, Wojnarowicz manages to break through the technical limits of representation, while continuing to favor imagery and formats that rely on the influence of collage and other graphic media. This is especially true in *Queer Basher/Icarus Falling* (no. 19), in which the artist has used one of his earlier supermarket posters as background for the two threatening figures seen in outline. As we gaze into the bashers' interiors, a visual litany of violence and terror is capped by the image of a glowing shark circling hungrily at the picture's lower border. The separate visual compartments in *Some Things from Sleep: For Jane and Charley* (1986; no. 46), for example, resemble windows cut into a flat surface, out of which a three-dimensional world can be glimpsed. The troubling image of a newborn infant swimming underwater, a stream of blood trailing from its umbilical cord, is made more sinister by being shown in a cutaway view of a train compartment lying at the bottom of the ocean. The predatory side of human existence and the precarious hold that we all have on life—themes that are repeated throughout this group of paintings—finds its angriest expression in *The Newspaper as National Voodoo: A Brief History of the U.S.A.* (1986; no. 20). Dividing the painting into sections, Wojnarowicz places the large voodoo doll at the center of the composition, forcing the viewer to look around this oversized symbol of

15. *Untitled* (Burning Child), 1984. Acrylic and map collage on mannequin, 51 x 22 x 26". Private collection.

16. *Fuck You Faggot Fucker*, 1984. Black-and-white photographs, acrylic, and collage on masonite, 48 x 48". Collection of Barry Blinderman, Normal, Illinois.

fear and violence to see the details lurking in the corners. Suggesting that our collective immersion in disaster narratives is a way of not taking responsibility for anything that is actually occurring in the world, the painting is also a disturbing portent of the media frenzy that would engulf Wojnarowicz only a few years later.



Although he had worked on large surfaces prior to 1986, undoubtedly the most ambitious work in Wojnarowicz's oeuvre to this point is the painting *Crash: The Birth of Language/The Invention of Lies* (no. 44). Like his well-known 1987 serial paintings based on the four elements, this work presents a summation of a number of themes that have gone before. Manifest destiny, symbolized by the locomotive and Old West locale, becomes a destiny run aground: the train is a crumpled wreck, and the cowboy has been reduced to vulture food. Underneath this rubble are the remains of past civilizations—temples, coliseums, and other monuments—which in their joint collapse represent the essence of progress as a negative symbol of evolution. In Wojnarowicz's worldview, however, the deck is always stacked against the individual, who in this rendering takes the form of the departed fellow whose remains are already reentering the food chain. This interpretation is based on the artist's vision of civilization as a relentless forward momentum, which, as the title indicates, is propelled in turn by the mechanism of language. Because language, in this reading, generally can be used to help conquer the world but rarely to describe its nature, this forward momentum ceases to take into account anything other than its self-defined mission: to consume all in its path and discard whatever is obstructive or lacking in utilitarian value.

It would be hard to argue that the level of finish and technical execution in *Crash* is anything less than light-years ahead of Wojnarowicz's paintings from only two years before. Even more important, once he cleared the technical hurdle of making a large-scale work in which his own brushwork provided the compositional structure, Wojnarowicz never looked back. In 1987 he not

17. *Untitled* [Burning Man], 1984. Acrylic and map collage on masonite, 48 x 48". Courtesy of Adam Baumgold Fine Art and P.P.O.W., New York.

only produced a remarkably consistent body of paintings, but quickly picked up the loose ends from his earlier experiments in other media and began to regain lost ground in photography, video, theater, and writing. Incredibly, this was also the year of both Peter Hujar's death and Wojnarowicz's and his partner's diagnosis as HIV positive, and one cannot overestimate the impact these developments had on Wojnarowicz's view of himself and his work. As he explained in an interview a couple of years later: "Being with Peter at the moment of his death completely broke apart any foundations of spirituality I'd come up with in my life, and I realized that any sense of spirituality I had was based on odd cannibalizations of other cultures."[3] It seems self-evident that the remarkable surge of creativity in his work in this period emanated from the growing realization that he was running out of time. And it is also crucial to emphasize the shift in worldview that took place concurrently, since it meant leaving behind the familiar images and sensations from childhood and focusing instead on the very real crises facing him and his generation. The "Four Elements" series, which was completed that year, represents Wojnarowicz's most concerted effort to explain the world in terms different from those which had appeared in his work thus far. In this respect, the series is closest in format and conception to *The Death of American Spirituality* (1987; no. 50), a four-part painting in which the themes of earth, air, fire, and water are also explicitly spelled out. Here Wojnarowicz returns to images of the American West, the industrial revolution, and world religion, but as an examination of those causal links between civilization and the sorts of mystical icons lurking in the background of every society's belief system.

Despite the fact that they serve largely to articulate beliefs that the artist found difficult to sustain even while he was painting them, *Wind (for Peter Hujar), Fire, Water,* and *Earth* (all 1987; nos. 21–24) are passionate descriptions of systems that enabled Wojnarowicz to create a semblance of order from events and forces that were completely beyond his control. In the first work, air is experienced both as the medium that enables a dead soldier's soul to enter the body of a newborn and as the destructive fury of a tornado. Drawings of electronic circuitry overlap with images of clouds, while a dinosaur's effort to walk upright merges with man's use of aviation to defy the limits of gravity. While this representation of air as the medium through which all other phenomena pass can be read as conventional, what is refreshing about Wojnarowicz's interpretation is the metaphysical structure through which disaster or rebirth are experienced, which could be as mundane as a breeze blowing through an open window. By comparison, *Earth* revels in the tangible qualities of soil, the forest, geology, and the spongy, fertile tissue out of which organic matter emerges. Bringing back familiar icons such as the mounted cowboy and the wrecked locomotive, Wojnarowicz ties them into an evocation of the cycle of life: an insect patiently making its way along the forest floor, or a tantalizing image of a half-buried ceremonial mask poking up from the soil. The earth, then, is captured both in terms of the single-cell organisms from which all life evolved and the unyielding force against which man is constantly pitting himself.

Like *Earth,* the painting *Fire* is strongly grounded in textbook sources: images that bring simple science into conjunction with myths, fears, and other hidden mechanisms of civilization. As pure, pent-up energy, this interpretation has fire being most effectively communicated to the collective psyche in the form of evil. Wojnarowicz does not stray far from this reading, but he does make unlikely connections between carefully chosen metaphors for heat: a volcano, a beating heart, a cavernous treasure trove, a dung beetle, and early man's

development of tools. Of the "Four Elements" series, this painting is the only one that seems to suggest a level of personal ambivalence on the artist's part toward his subject. While the other paintings incorporate historical efforts to harness the elements, the only references to taming fire in *Fire* come in the form of a car battery and a series of "FBI Most Wanted" handbills.

The most elaborate of the four paintings is *Water,* which is apparently the element to which Wojnarowicz had the strongest spiritual connection. Rather than use the bluntly symmetrical compositions that are his hallmark, he creates a large microbe-shaped grid drifting to the painting's upper right, filling the exterior area with a dark blue underwater zone. The floating gallery of surrounding images includes a frog (a wrecked car photo set in its stomach), a ship with deadly cargo, a sea of sperm, and a prisoner's hand dropping a single flower into the snow. Within the grid, however, Wojnarowicz creates a surreal black-and-white storyboard that juxtaposes explicit sexual imagery with biological specimens, circular abstractions, landscapes, and other fantasy images. In this deeply personal, almost melancholic, interpretation of its theme, *Water* offers a wrenching glimpse of the sadness that lay at the heart of Wojnarowicz's hard-fought struggle to become a painter, on the threshold of the final, most productive phase of his life.

From 1986 to 1988, Wojnarowicz painted a handful of significant works besides the ones mentioned thus far, but it is fair to say that by 1988, painting had only a partial share of his attention. Each of his more complex paintings from this period, such as *History Keeps Me Awake at Night (For Rilo Chmielorz)* (1986; no. 27), *Late Afternoon in the Forest* (1986; no. 47), *Something from Sleep II* (1987–88; no. 26), and both versions of *A Worker* (1986 and 1988 [no. 61]), represents the culmination of a long process of gathering and arranging materials, requiring a time commitment which the artist was less inclined to make as health became more of an issue. The most visually engaging of this group of paintings, *History Keeps Me Awake at Night,* brings together two familiar motifs: the sleeping man and the standardized image of an armed assailant used in target practice.

Deploying these motifs against a vibrant collage background while crowding a number of disparate symbols of culture and civilization into the picture frame, Wojnarowicz addresses the psychological and emotional weight of his preoccupation with the violent legacy of his own past and that of the culture surrounding him. This lavish attention to detail becomes more infrequent in the post-"Elements" phase of his work, as can be seen in some of the less ambitious paintings from the period, such as *Seven Miles a Second* (1987), *Tommy's Illness/Mexico City* (1987; no. 56), *Street Kid* (1987), *Childhood* (1988), and *Bad Moon Rising* (1989). Most of these examples rely heavily on the stenciling and printing techniques that the artist used in the early 80s, but without exhibiting the same commitment of energy and resources that characterize Wojnarowicz's best works.

Despite the artistic triumph of his "Elements" series, the most significant developments in Wojnarowicz's art at this point are a direct result of the artist's decision to begin working in several media simultaneously. This shift is best exemplified by an explosion of mixed-media works between 1988 and 1989, such as *Anatomy and Architecture of Desire* (no. 28), *Untitled* [Hujar Dead] (no. 51), *Where I'll Go If After I'm Gone* (no. 25), and *Fear of Evolution* (no. 57) (all 1988–89). These works, which stand out for their inventive combination of collage and photographic and painted elements, appear simple and direct compared with their more elaborate predecessors, but they also achieve an economy of

expression that Wojnarowicz's art had been lacking. *Anatomy and Architecture of Desire* sandwiches a painted schoolbook image of the planet earth, its circumference ringed by futuristic images of transportation, between five black-and-white photos of a snake capturing and devouring a frog. Although Wojnarowicz had certainly explored ideas of social Darwinism before, he had never done so with quite the same satirical precision as in this work. *Untitled* [Hujar Dead] is one of the first of Wojnarowicz's pieces to incorporate a lengthy text of his own, and as such marks the artist's bold entry into a phase of production that contains, for many viewers, his finest artistic achievements. An equally dense layering of meaning occurs in *Where I'll Go If After I'm Gone,* which is built up from a grid of collaged back-and-white photos, mostly of gears, wheels, and other machinery. A leafy fern fills the painting's left side, while multiple inset images in different sizes are painted and pasted in what appears to be a randomly scattered arrangement. Within this arrangement, however, Wojnarowicz has brought together a number of images (a donkey, the phases of the moon, a winged foot) from his private cosmology that seem to speak to his conflicting spiritual needs: to believe in his own immortality and to familiarize himself with the experience of death. In comparison to these works, *Fear of Evolution* seems less compelling, although it manages to introduce an unexpected comic element in its appropriated image of a monkey carrying the earth in a wheelbarrow.

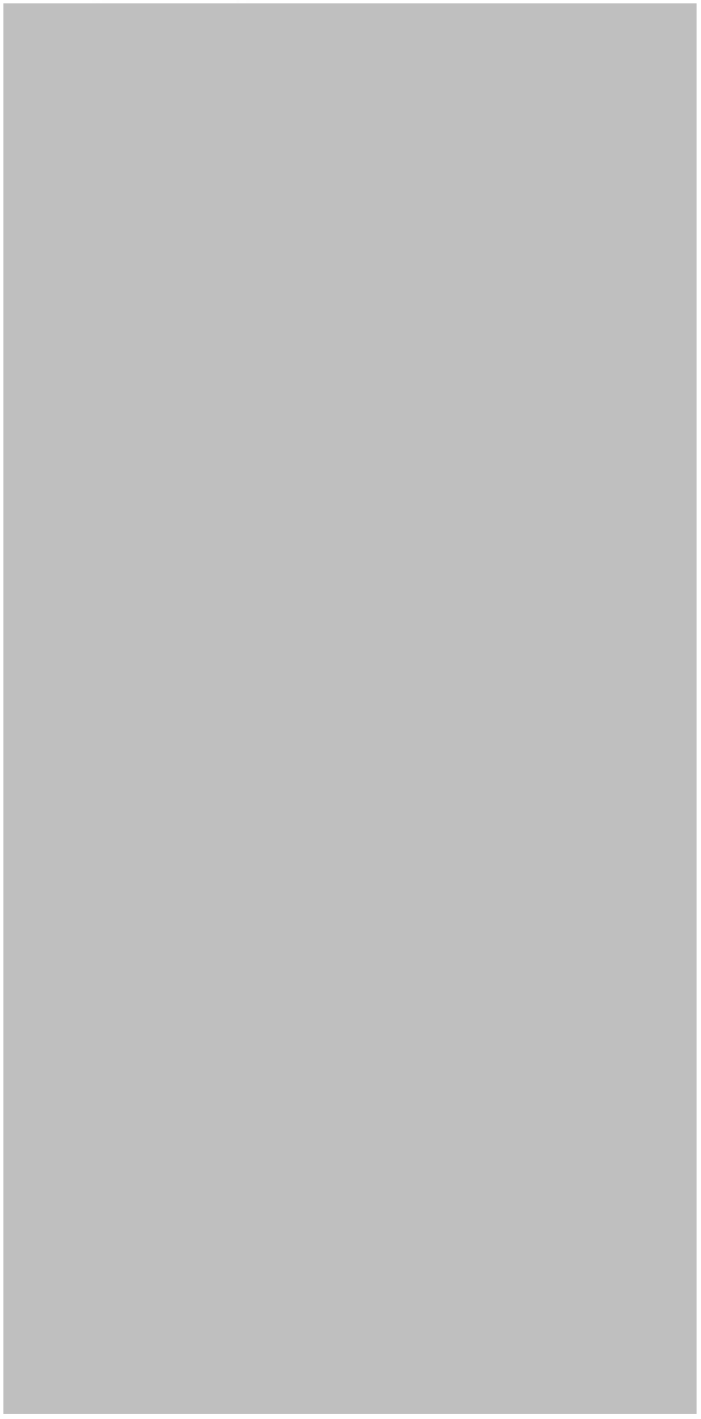
Between 1988 and 1989, Wojnarowicz focused a great deal of his energy on photography and produced a startling number of finished works and series in that short time. Many of these works contain photographs that he had taken years earlier, but the simultaneous use of multiple presentation formats enabled Wojnarowicz to put a number of images to use for the first time. The best-known of these works, the "Ant Series," the "Sex Series," and *Untitled* [Falling Buffalo] (1988–89; no. 75) used on the cover of a single by the rock group U2, were all photographed and printed using fairly conventional darkroom techniques. Considering their basic level of technique, the images have remarkable staying power. The "Ant Series," in which toy plastic ants are placed on the surface of photos which are then rephotographed, plays with sexuality, art, death, and religion in an almost carefree manner. The "Sex Series," by contrast, was the result of an arduous layering of found photographic materials with texts written by the artist. Each of these images begins with a large-scale photograph of war, industry, the woods, the city, natural disas-

25. *Where I'll Go If After I'm Gone,* 1988–89. Black-and-white photographs, acrylic, spray paint, and collage on masonite, 45 x 64". Collection of Ninah and Michael Lynne, New York.

26. *Something from Sleep II,* 1987–88. Mixed media on canvas, 36 x 36". Collection of John Post Lee and Karin Bravin, New York.

ter, or domesticity. The reversal of positive and negative values through printing adds a disturbing undertone to these stock images, a feeling that is heightened by the incorporation of smaller photos, mostly explicit sex images clipped from gay pornography, set into round frames. The combination and composition of images invite us to imagine that these smaller scenes are being carried out undercover within the larger ones. Wojnarowicz's incorporation of texts about AIDS into two of these works, along with secondary images of money, police brutality, and molecular biology, lends to the series an overall sense of loss and desperation that is present in the rest of his oeuvre.

At the same time he was producing the "Sex Series" and the "Ant Series," Wojnarowicz was experimenting with works that combined multiple photographic images within a single frame. A natural step following his incorporation of diverse imagery within single paintings, the works possess an emotional force that far exceeds that of any other phase of his art. These range from *Fever* (1988–89; no. 1), in which double images of a full moon and an overhead view of a rabid dog suffice to conjure up primordial fears of savage animals and lunar cycles, to *The Weight of the Earth, Part I* and *Part II* (1988–89; nos. 31 and 32), in which fifteen separate photographs in color and black-and-white combine to produce a deeply unsettling visual parable about suffering, beauty, poverty, fear, desire, and force. The connections between individual images in these works are highly subjective, even psychological, and demonstrate the level of ease that Wojnarowicz seems to feel in juggling the demands of a format that was entirely new for him. By comparison, *Silence Through Economics* (1988–89; no. 29), which makes use of only five black-and-white prints, shifts into an almost narrative mode in its use of adjacent images that seem directly connected



28. *Anatomy and Architecture of Desire*, 1988–89. Gelatin-silver prints and acrylic on wood (triptych) 70 1/2 x 34" overall. Collection Jean Foos and Dirk Rowntree.

over the course of time. In *Time* (1988–89; no. 74), which incorporates six different photographs, Wojnarowicz seems to be trying to achieve a more emblematic, even static, discourse about civilization's futile attempts to control the effects of time's relentless forward momentum. Perhaps the most powerful of these three works is *Spirituality (for Paul Thek)* (1988–89; no. 35), which sets out to link a number of disparate signifiers through seven discrete photographs, the largest of which is a close-up of a disfigured face of Christ nailed to the cross. By including rare glimpses of simple, sensual pleasures (dancing, smoking) in his formula, the artist is allowing for a possible spiritual dimension to the experience of loss and desire, but one that falls far outside the limits of established religious convention.

During 1990 Wojnarowicz continued working with photo-text combinations, and the strongest images to emerge from this group of work are single photographic images with the text overlaid. Some of these images seem to communicate a kind of summing-up, as if the artist were taking stock of the beliefs that had continued to sustain him through his years of crisis. *What Is This Little Guy's Job in the World* (1990; no. 36), based on a single image of a baby frog nestled in the artist's hand, is one of the least confrontational translations of Wojnarowicz's belief system into visual form. Enabling us to glimpse the artist's self-portrait in the attention he lavishes upon the helpless creature, the work also suggests that before he died, Wojnarowicz was able to come to terms with some of the beliefs, such as reincarnation, that he had abandoned earlier on. By contrast, *When I Put My Hands on Your Body* (1990; no. 30), with its vivid orange type laid over a haunting image of an excavated burial site, is shocking in its direct evocation of death and mortality. While its closing line, "All these moments will be lost in time like tears in the rain," expresses a deep sorrow at the futility of his own efforts to protect someone he loves, it also conveys an air of resignation, even grudging acceptance, of the fact that the experience of life must include the knowledge that everything one loves will vanish without a trace. Nearly the same technique was used in an equally despairing untitled photograph from 1992, in which words of despair and rage hover over the image of the artist's battered and bandaged hands. A smaller color photograph from 1990, *Subspecies Helms Senatorius* (no. 67), strikes a different emotional chord in its satiric expression of the artist's political sentiments regarding the efforts of politicians on the far right to hinder creative expression, block gay rights, curtail services for people

30. *When I Put My Hands on Your Body*, 1990.
Gelatin-silver print and silk-screened text on museum board, 26 x 38".
Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W., New York.

with AIDS, and destroy federal funding for the arts.

Wojnarowicz's final paintings, which borrow directly from the text-heavy format of the late photographic works, suggest an even deeper meditation on issues of beauty and the fragility of life. Based on images of single flowers, paintings such as *He Kept Following Me* and *I Felt a Vague Nausea* (both 1990; nos. 33 and 34) explore a more visually sophisticated process of layering than he had attempted before. Black-and-white photographic elements are not pasted onto the surface, but appear as small individual panels, which are suspended within square openings inside the painting and held in place by red string. For the first time, the textual content of the work is presented in the form of full-fledged short stories and/or essays, which require a lengthy reading before they can be mentally folded back into the picture. The lingering images within these works, however, are the flowers themselves: huge exotic blossoms whose brief moment in the sun has been painstakingly rendered by the artist with an atypical emotional detachment that borders on the scientific. These works differ dramatically from Wojnarowicz's final painting, *Why the Church Can't/Won't Be Separated from the State* (1992; no. 60), a curious amalgam of landscape and politics, with eight inset panels and numerous collaged and painted elements that suggest a view backward over his life's work. Since it also treats the subject of his illness more literally than anything else he produced, this painting serves to remind us of his extraordinary breadth of subject matter, ranging from fury to bliss to despair in the blink of an eye.

Unlike his work in painting, photography, and sculpture, Wojnarowicz's explorations into music, video, film, and installation were an expression of his restless need to fuse personal experience with the work of creative individuals around him. His early (1983) recording and performances with the band 3 Teens Kill 4—No Motive depended heavily on the collaborative efforts of fellow musicians Julie Hair and Brian Butterick, who kept the band together years after Wojnarowicz stopped performing with them. In a similar vein, the extremely ambitious *ITSOFOMO—In the Shadow of Forward Motion* (no. 37), which was performed at The Kitchen in 1989, was co-conceived with the composer Ben Neill, whose musical treatments on the resulting CD serve as a dense vehicle for the Wojnarowicz texts that supplied the content and compositional structure. In general, the importance of collaboration for Wojnarowicz was based on his belief that the art he produced required the

36. *What Is This Little Guy's Job in the World*, 1990. Gelatin-silver print, 13 1/2 × 19". Collection of Penny Pilkington, New York.

support of and constant interchange with the highly creative individuals with whom he surrounded himself. His first play, *Sounds in the Distance,* which preceded his efforts to publish his writing, was adapted and directed by the photographer Allen Frame. The art for his legendary comic book, *Thirst,* which traces the artist's early adolescent years hustling on the street, was created by James Romberger. Some of the most memorable images of Wojnarowicz come from the Richard Kern film *You Killed Me First,* to which Wojnarowicz contributed a number of the key motifs, a film that also formed the basis of a 1986 installation at the gallery Ground Zero. Even the film and video works with which he is most identified, Rosa van Praunheim's *Silence = Death* (1989–90; no. 72) and *Fear of Disclosure* (1989) were the result of a lengthy collaboration with filmmaker Phil Zwicker, who was also responsible for co-editing the video projections used in *ITSOFOMO.*

The role Wojnarowicz played in all of these productions was invariably himself: abused child, visionary writer, urban stranger driven by his sexual appetites. They are temporal works, just as the installations mounted in various spaces over the years were created not in order to be preserved or otherwise maintained for posterity, but to fade into the memories of those who had seen them. In this sense, they have a great deal in common with Wojnarowicz's pier murals, which set out to provide an artistic encounter between a time, a locale, and a public that was more likely than not to have viewed the murals by chance. While they are meant to be experienced as fleeting encounters, they nevertheless form a crucial part of the artistic legacy that David Wojnarowicz left behind. The photographs from the 1984 installation in which *Untitled* [Burning Child] first appeared, his untitled installation in the Anchorage of the Brooklyn Bridge and *You Killed Me First* (both 1985), and *America: Heads of Family/Heads of State* (1989–90; no. 38), shown in the New Museum's "Decade" exhibition, communicate similar feelings of transience. It is safe to say that the artistic motives behind these works is diametrically opposed to the cur-

37. *ITSOFOMO: In the Shadow of Forward Motion,* 1989. Multi-media performance with music in collaboration with Ben Neill at The Kitchen, New York. Photo: Andreas Sterzing

38. *America: Heads of Family/Heads of State,* 1989–90. Installation view, "The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s," New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1990.

rent practice of installation art, in which image and structure are fused into a single entity. Wojnarowicz's installations were more like theatrical sets or tableaus, in which the jagged edges and disparate sensations of daily life are reproduced in their full uncertainty. They are occasional, in the sense of a musical or poetic work created to commemorate a specific event; they may have lasting value, but it is not necessary for them to endure in order to have made their mark. This transitory character, more than anything else, marks them as emblematic of the uncertain and angry times in which they were made.

To an extent that transience has become rare, if not altogether impossible, in today's art world, Wojnarowicz lived his adult life as an ongoing experiment in the artistically possible. This doesn't mean that he constantly lived on the edge, but rather that he lived his artistic principles forcefully enough to have made an indelible impression on the lives of nearly everyone he met. Besides reflecting his own preoccupation with the nature of the world and his place within it, Wojnarowicz's art is also indicative of his need to share his vision of life exactly as he saw it. One can debate the relative meanings and importance of individual works and series, but there is no question that complete honesty and forthrightness emanate from every image he drew and each object he built. Perhaps nothing was sacred to him, but this is precisely why his activism and his anger continue to resonate with the same perfect pitch as his more artistic endeavors. Nothing, with the possible exception of humankind's hubris and inhumanity, seemed alien to Wojnarowicz, and the remarkable inclusiveness resulting from this philosophy seems to have become a foundation for much new work being made today, even by artists who have only a slight familiarity with his output. For his more dedicated public, what comes across clearest in Wojnarowicz's art is the utter consistency with which each work offers an explanation of why he became an artist in the first place. Within the resulting panorama of epiphanies and betrayals, little if any attempt was ever made to separate metaphysics from politics, or religion from sex. On the contrary, for Wojnarowicz, even casual incidents frequently entered the chain of associations that was intimately linked to his most firmly held convictions regarding faith, desire, and the highly subjective truths of his own existence. Less than a decade after his death, the magnitude of his contribution compares only in inverse proportion to the unbearably short time that he was able to share it with us.

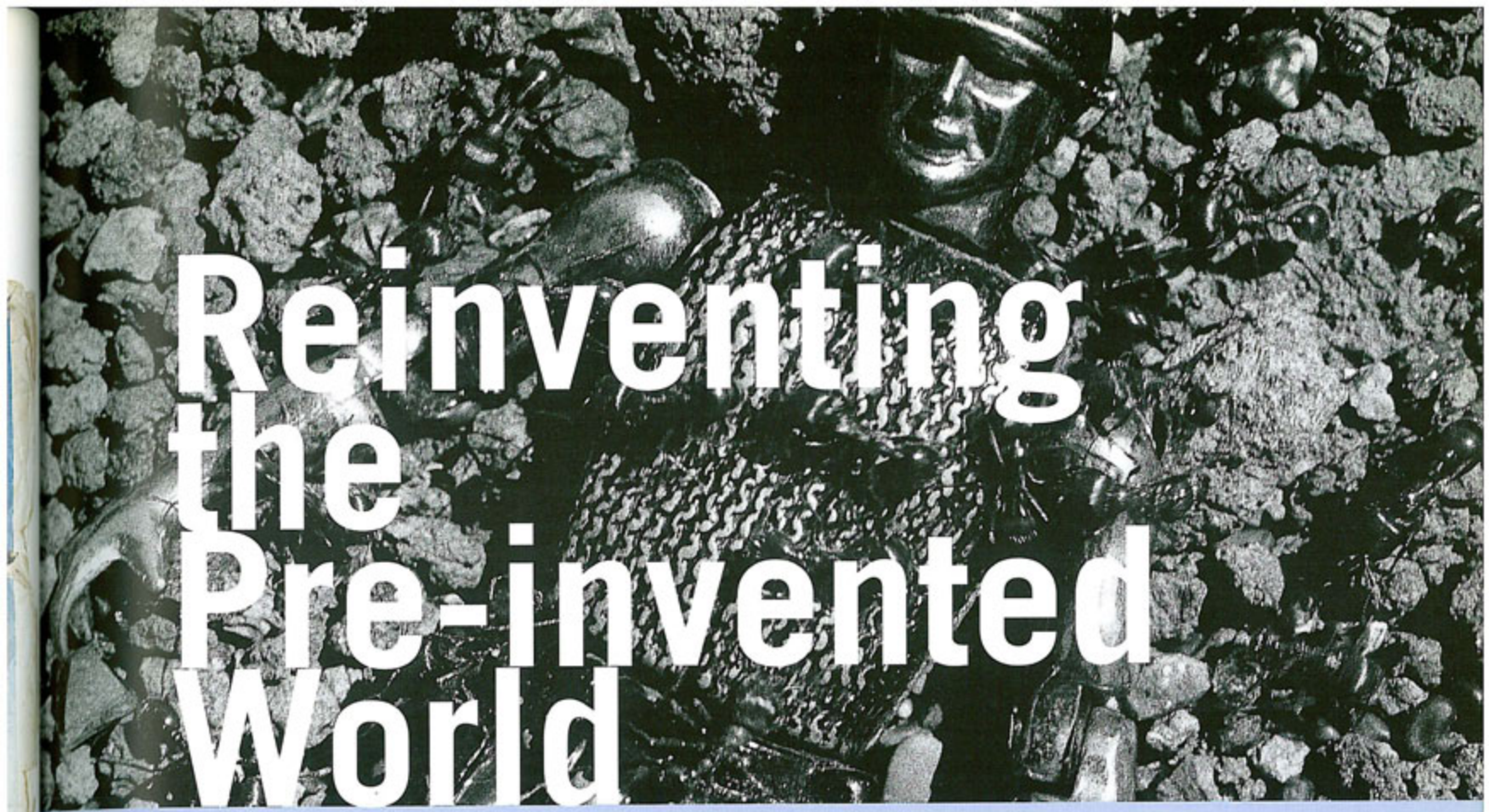
Notes:

1. The artist explained in his writings that the murals also drew attention to the threat of violent crime on the piers, which he attributed directly to the growth of poverty in the United States during Reagan's presidency. See Blinderman, Barry,ed., *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame* (exhib.cat.)(Normal, Ill.: University Galleries of Illinois State University, 1990, p.118.

2. One must also take into account the artist's broad network of friends and associates who were in different stages of AIDS during the epidemic's first five years. In his journals and published works, Wojnarowicz includes dozens of other names or initials, including many who appear in his notations of dreams.

3. *Tongues of Flame*, p. 49.

39. *Untitled* [Burning Child], installation view, Gracie Mansion Gallery, November 1–25, 1984. Photo: Adam Fuss.



Reinventing the Pre-invented World

by Mysoon Rizk

David Wojnarowicz was fifteen and living on the streets of New York City in the late 60s when he discovered the abandoned warehouses on the Hudson River piers where he would put Manhattan to his back. The industrial wasteland of the piers, a wilderness of "technological meadows,"[1] offered a kind of sanctuary, like the woods in suburban New Jersey where Wojnarowicz spent much of his youth in the 50s. In the warehouses, massive shells of ruinous real estate, he watched nature restake its claim: weeds, grass, and flowers emerged through cracked floorboards; rain, wind, and snow entered through broken windows; erosion, deterioration, and disintegration took a dynamic toll on steel roofs, tin ceilings, and wooden posts and beams. Meanwhile, the Hudson River churned endlessly around the piers' shaky foundations, offering a soundtrack that could sometimes drown out the hubbub of a sleepless New York City.

Growing up in a dysfunctional family with a violent alcoholic father, living on the streets as a runaway and underage prostitute, Wojnarowicz had long experienced a sense of impending mortality. That sense was compounded in the late 70s, when his father committed suicide and David returned after years of travel to resettle in New York—impoverished, wary of ending up on the streets again, and conscious of being queer in a society that deemed homosexuality abnormal. Until this time, he had also experienced speechlessness. Between 1975 and 1978, however, when he set out to make "images/writings/objects" as legacies of his experience, he began to find his voice.[2]

We are "born into a pre-invented existence," Wojnarowicz often observed; "we either adapt to it or we end up

dead or barely surviving, because none of us really had any hand in the shaping of [it]."[3] He characterized the "pre-invented" world in his memoir *Close to the Knives* (a compendium of writings spanning the 80s and published in 1991):

The world of the stoplight, the no-smoking signs, the rental world, the split-rail fencing shielding hundreds of miles of barren wilderness from the human step. A place where by virtue of having been born centuries too late one is denied access to earth or space, choice or movement. The bought-up world; the owned world. The world of coded sounds: the world of language, the world of lies. The packaged world; the world of speed in metallic motion.[4]

It was only as an adult, during the Reagan-Bush years, after long conditioning by this pre-invented world, that Wojnarowicz recognized his own mechanical nature:

What do these eyes have to do with surveillance cameras? What do the veins running through my wrists have in common with electric wiring? I'm the robotic kid with caucasian kid programming trying to short-circuit the sensory disks. I'm the robotic kid looking through digital eyes past the windshield into the pre-invented world. . . . I'm the robotic kid lost from the blind eye of government and wandering the edges of the computerized landscape; all civilization is turning like one huge gear in my forehead. I'm seeing my hands and feet grow thousands of miles long and millions of years old and I'm experiencing the exertion it takes to move these programmed limbs. . . . What can these hands raise?[5]

To elude the clutches of mechanical and social conditioning as well as the sensation that he was pre-programmed, Wojnarowicz returned again and again to the processing skills of his eyes, mind, and hands, and, through them, to the use of his imagination. Even if imagination was itself "encoded" by "the clockwork of civilization," he argued that in the use of it, "one adapts and stretches the boundaries."[6]

From the late 70s until the Hudson River piers were demolished in 1984, Wojnarowicz continually revisited their crumbling ruins. As he documented their social histories, natural collapse, and decay, Wojnarowicz began to inscribe his own marks on the warehouses' barren walls and windows (and, in 1983, for the Wardline Pier Project, recruited scores of other artists and friends to do the same).

An early work, *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978–79), documents some of Wojnarowicz's pier grafitti. This series of photographs tells the stories of Rimbaud, Wojnarowicz, and his friend and lover Brian Butterick, an occasional heroin user, who wears a mask representing the French Symbolist poet. The Rimbaud series was prompted

41. David Wojnarowicz with the pterodactyl pier painting, ca. 1983. Photo: Marion Scemama.

42. *Arthur Rimbaud in New York (Peep Show)*, 1978–79. From a series of twenty-four gelatin-silver prints, 10 x 8" each. Collection of the New York Public Library. Photo: D. James Dee.

by a desire not only to reexamine certain biographical "locations and movements" that led to Wojnarowicz's own predicament, but also to explore the persistent beckoning of the outlaw's life.[7] The artist was in his twenties before he discovered role models like Rimbaud, Jean Genet, and William S. Burroughs. Each of these mentors "confirmed that one could transcend society's hatred of diversity and loathing of homosexuals."[8] Moreover, each revealed creative strategies for doing so while demonstrating the value of preserving records of personal experience.

Wojnarowicz constructed histories that would otherwise go unrecorded. In the Rimbaud series, such sites as the desolate Hudson River piers or Times Square's red-light district allude to the lived experiences not just of Wojnarowicz and his fictive Rimbaud, but of countless other outsiders to history—queers, juvenile runaways, sex workers, intravenous drug users, the homeless. The use of a mask in the Rimbaud series effectively models the alienation of its protagonists and provides a compelling symbol for the outsider's experience, while drawing the viewer into it.

The shifting or scrambling of identity conveyed by the Rimbaud series emerged as a central strategy of Wojnarowicz's collage aesthetic as well as the conceptual operation at the heart of the artist's formulation of a spiritual genealogy and vision of history. His work lays bare not only the necessity for, but also the complications of, actively constructing a personal history as a defense against the many ways that silence may be imposed.

The Hudson River piers were fertile ground for Wojnarowicz's nascent experimentation with visual language. They liberated his capacity to express and create while affording him the space to make mistakes and to learn. Two of his earliest paintings and most striking pier works were 1982–83 murals of a screeching pterodactyl and a gagging cow, its head "exploding with fear."[9] Their scale and clarity not only call attention to the impossibility and strangeness of coming upon either animal in this abandoned urban structure, but also makes their actual arrival seem magically imminent (as wild animals depicted on cave walls in prehistoric times might have seemed to Palaeolithic people).

Approximating the actual size of the extinct flying reptile, the pterodactyl looms massively in one corner of a debris-filled room (no. 41). Its sharp-toothed beak is open, as if it were in the midst of a raucous cry, while its outstretched wings span the breaches of one wall and the broken panes of two windows. A field of animated black dots and dashes, which surrounds the pterodactyl's dark-contoured green body, seems to emanate from its beak as if representing its call.

The even more gigantic cow's head extends across a wall of a different room, eyes frozen in violent anguish, nostrils flaring, and black tongue protruding from the gagging mouth. Above the tongue hovers the Earth, whose relatively small size makes the cow's head, accompanied by scattered plus signs, seem like a mythical constellation among other satellites or stars. There is, on the one hand, the idea of an animal sacrificed on a religious altar to a sky deity. On the other hand, the cow, possibly in the throes of a brutal death, also brings to mind the nearby meat-packing industry, near the Hudson River south of Fourteenth Street, where butchered cattle are neatly packaged each day for consumers.

One might also speculate that the pterodactyl and cow-head murals, taken together, represent opposing experiences of being queer in the public realm. One might keep a low profile and do as one is told, like a domesticated, accommodating cow that, despite its obedience, ultimately faces the violent terror of slaughter. Then again, one might harbor no deceptions about one's needs and desires, resist social pressures to conform or compromise, as if adopting the survival characteristics of aggression and pre-

dation, like the pterodactyl, which, until its species is extinguished by a hostile world, soars without limits across the primeval sky. Either way, both murals convey a feeling of entrapment. The cow, depicted without a body and fixed on some celestial map, must perpetually wear its shocked expression of agony. The pterodactyl, though full-bodied and clamorous, its wings outstretched, nevertheless remains bound to a corner post.

According to the artist, one of the sources for the pterodactyl mural was a dream in which he saw himself "as a dinosaur or a fossil"—something both "ancient and alien."[10] The fact that this prehistoric creature could not have coexisted with humanity resonates with Wojnarowicz's experience of "being queer in america."[11] Moreover, the dinosaur, an icon of extinction, and the cow, victim of slaughter, effectively convey the artist's recurring sense of imminent death.

A collage aesthetic provided the means for synthesizing Wojnarowicz's own life and the lives of others—whether in visual form, as with the Rimbaud series and the pier murals, or a literary one, as in *Sounds in the Distance* (1982), a collection of anonymous monologues mingling the experiences of various people (including Wojnarowicz) of life on the streets. (Another version was published posthumously as *The Waterfront Journals*.) In addition, he transformed his real environment by spray-painting on urban surfaces (abandoned cars, Soho buildings, the Hudson River warehouses), in effect collapsing artistic imagery into mundane reality. In the cycle of collage paintings that followed these early works, he further synthesized images of himself with representations of countless other creatures—living, decomposing, or extinct, often adding mechanical parts or religious relics. Through collage, the artist depicted the collision of the personal and the social, the margins and the mainstream, a decimated past and an apocalyptic present, while conveying the intensity of our age's information overload.

The evolving sophistication of his collage aesthetic, which benefitted from his experiments in various media during the first half of the 80s, became most apparent in Wojnarowicz's paintings shown at Gracie Mansion Gallery in the 1986 solo exhibition "An Exploration of the History of Collisions in Reverse." Although he had earlier experienced a measure of success in the art world, this show was barely reviewed.[12] In 1987, when his reputation as an

43. *Something from Sleep IV (Dream)*, 1988–89. Gelatin-silver print, acrylic, and collage on masonite, 16 x 20 1/2". Collection of Luis Cruz Azaceta and Sharon Jacques, New Orleans.

important artist revived, particularly in relation to the AIDS crisis, some critics felt compelled to refer to Wojnarowicz as having overcome a "demise."[13] Yet the collage paintings from the 1986 exhibit demonstrate that he had never stopped working and that he continued to develop earlier themes and strategies. As versions of history, these paintings encompass more than ever before the full range of his preoccupation with the conditions of late-twentieth-century experience.

Wojnarowicz continued to record the particularities of his own experience. At the same time, he began to blend in more and more aspects of the general human condition, inspired in the mid-80s by trips to France, Argentina, and Mexico. Collage made it possible for him to suggest a multiplicity of other voices, faces, stories, and conditions in combination with the singularity of his own. Wojnarowicz's disparate source materials—from popular culture memorabilia to images drawn from history, science, and reference books—helped him represent the pervasiveness of the pre-invented world. For the purpose of providing room in the general record for outsiders like himself, he sought to make and preserve histories in which dominant narratives were besieged by still-emerging narratives as well as by the recovered fragments of invisible and disappeared ones (for example, those of nature).

The artist relied on a collage aesthetic because it provided a means not only of accurately recording his own conceptual and physical processes, but also of relating individual experience to society's pre-existing contexts. Within the frame of a painting, collage collapsed disjunctive images and ideas. It combined microscopic views with vast expanses of space and merged the artist's stock footage from memory, dreams, and popular culture with observed reality. Through collage, he reformulated the connotations of such found materials as currency, maps, newspapers, supermarket advertisements, and FBI wanted posters. His use of preprinted materials helped create clear and forceful representations of capitalist society's dissimulations. When he deployed the signs of the pre-invented world in his art, he shuffled meanings and associations, uncovered schisms and contradictions, and generated alternative narratives of his own history and that of the world (for instance, combining references to lost cultures with ones referring to contemporary events).

Like most of the works exhibited in "An Exploration of the History of Collisions in Reverse," *Crash: The Birth of Language/The Invention of Lies* (1986; no. 44) presents an allegorical version of history in which the remnants of many different past cultures are brought into dialogue with the continually forming elements of present culture. In this painting, an immense locomotive is about to plow into planet Earth, the small blue orb in the lower left. Brown stones—dunglike, as writer Michael Carter would have it—scatter in explosive motion as the train hurtles forward cataclysmically. A flood of images, rapidly coursing through hundreds of years of history, surround the train as if, in the seconds before impact, they are rushing through the collective mind of the globe. Whether memories or future projections, these images register the degree to which Earth has been affected by its metaphorical collision with human civilization, from Greek columns and kachina dolls to supermarket posters and newspaper advertisements. In the aftermath of this collision, or perhaps prophetically ensuring it, the birth of language is held accountable for fueling and facilitating the proliferation and questionable progress of humankind.

Above the hypothetical crash site, on the far left, a scattered array of letters emerges (language is born) together with a ground of supermarket ads (lies are invented). Spreading insidiously, this colorful ground becomes the backdrop for much of the work, underscoring Wojnarowicz's conviction that people blindly or compla-

cently accept advertising as a part of daily life. Lest we forget that civilization was not always like this—increasingly buried in newspaper and in a state of fatal acceleration—*Crash* also presents, at the upper left, an Arcadian and perhaps preliterate past.

Nature's peaceful coexistence with this ancient society is indicated by the extent to which verdant ivy has overtaken its built structures, now ruins, even sending tendrils into the present (surviving). Metamorphosing into electrical wiring, these trendrils become the mental circuits of the contemporary man whose head floats off to the right, past the train hurtling in the opposite direction. Drifting near this glassy-eyed, robotic head, a severed hand with a wristwatch appears to regulate the efficiency of the human machine. By contrast, back in the sleepy pastoral scene, a robed figure marks time, if at all, by carrying a stone from one spot to another.

Smoke belches out of the train, blackening the sky and seeming to generate a trail of scrap metal, while within the train's combustion chambers a conflagration destroys a large warehouse-like building. Meanwhile, entire cultures disappear, leaving behind fragmentary artifacts (Ancestral Puebloan or Anasazi cliff dwellings and a Hopi kachina doll, classical Greek columns and a Roman copy of a Greek statue). For Wojnarowicz, the image of the speeding train symbolizes the "acceleration of time."[14] As if alluding to humanity's current ability to destroy its world by pushing a button, the Earth is surrounded by an ominous red glow. In Wojnarowicz's words, "It's the moment of recognition of an entire civilization driving forward at a faster and faster rate of speed and we are asleep at the wheel and the impact is not so far ahead."[15]

On the far left, an incomplete red skeleton, formed from diverse animal remains, inconspicuously escapes from the impending disaster, seeming to limp away from primordial Earth, only to find itself in a head-on collision with the train. From the jaw of this primitive creature there seemingly erupt ineffectual cries of surprise that ultimately mutate into commercial advertising's sophisticated tools of communication. This creature, which might be seen as one of Wojnarowicz's many surrogates, is related to the cyborg protagonist of another 1986 painting, titled *Excavating the Temples of the New Gods* (no. 45).

A possible successor of the skeletal red form in *Crash*, the speechless, wide-eyed, and curious mutant in *Excavating* presents a strange amalgamation of parts: a bleached animal skull, a hard-shelled humanoid torso complete with electrical circuitry, and a set of baby-like prosthetic limbs. Shown exploring its vast industrial wasteland, the "infant" exhibits a childish trust in the illusory newness and accessibility of the world. Yet the lessons learned from the pre-invented ground over which it crawls on all fours are as old and codified as the information accumulated by its replaceable mechanical parts.

The postapocalyptic world depicted in *Excavating* features a gigantic junkyard of civilization's residue. Abandoned cars, motors, tires, smokestacks, and boulders top off a compacted blue-gray mass that already covers more than three-quarters of the planet's surface, represented by the world map that is the painting's ground. Nontechnological remains are fewer and smaller in size. On the other hand, they are as vibrant with color as the infant who seems transfixed by their scattered yet reverberating appearances in the darkened, machine-age landscape.

One image in the creature's line of sight is a circular apparition of Jesus Christ's thorn-crowned head, drained of spirituality. Lifeless yellow eyes pop out of the head, whose dark green hue has apparently been absorbed from a surrounding halo of paper money. Securely shored up by an accommodating scrap heap, the image of Christ glows radioactively as if drawing upon lingering traces of atomic energy. Equally mesmerizing to the cyborg kid is a second

45. *Excavating the Temples of the New Gods*, 1986.
Acrylic and collage on masonite, 48 x 48".
Collection of Barbara Schwartz, New York.

apparition, similarly buttressed by the temple of junk, in the top right corner. This shooting-range target depicting a mature stag—bull's-eye positioned just behind its front flank—is surrounded by wilderness long since displaced in this barren world.

The colorful apparitions—photocopies of printed illustrations—barely compensate for the spiritual void brought about by humanity's horrifying acceleration toward global annihilation. "Surely huge sections of the population will kneel . . . in reverence," wrote Wojnarowicz, if the no-

longer-animate pre-invented world were to "fuse" with "the unspeaking and unmoving stone lips" of ancient "religious icons."[16] In *Excavating the Temples of the New Gods,* this vision of rekindled spirituality moves beyond Christ's head and the stag target. Two further vibrant apparitions of Native American icons fuse uneasily if at all with this decimated world. Both of these go unnoticed by the ungainly infant, who is even about to bump into one of them. Dangerously off-balance yet straight as a totem pole, a petrified figurine strapped to a firecracker appears near the youngster's chin, practically underfoot. Meanwhile, superimposed over North America in the upper left, a Hopi kachina doll stands apart from the wreckage yet leans ominously toward it.

In the case of *Excavating,* the rather carefree cyborg infant appears both unaware of latent threats from the pre-invented world and deluded by its seeming control over its own mobility. In the absence of any such control, the 1986 painting *Some Things from Sleep: For Jane and Charley* (no. 46) depicts the human baby's experience of entry into the pre-invented world as one of immediate containment. A greenish baby, still tethered by a bloody, metallic umbilical cord, emerges from an industrial mother only to arrive in an organic holding tank on rails. In the amorphous guts of this geological train accelerating through time are stored the fossils and prototypes of the newborn baby's ancestors and descendants. Except for the helpless, anonymous baby, the setting is as dehumanized and desolate as that in *Excavating*—no one monitors pressure gauges or temperature changes. Moreover, unlike *Excavating,* where the junk heap recedes perspectivally in the distance and seems to offer a path of entry for the viewer, the frontal viewpoint of *Some Things from Sleep* denies any such entry. The pain associated with birth, and immediate threats to this fledgling protagonist's survival, are suspended in an animated blue plane of distant sensation, as if the event were being witnessed on television.

Wojnarowicz remained critically aware of the artifice involved in constructing histories. His representations of disappearing nature or of Native American cultures regularly acknowledge the historical gaps between their original forms and our contemporary cultural mediations of

46. *Some Things from Sleep: For Jane and Charley,* 1986. Acrylic on masonite, 48 x 72". The Eli Broad Family Foundation, Santa Monica.

them. The work relies on deploying well-known, iconic, or mass-reproduced images in new contexts, where new meanings and implications may be generated. For example, his depictions of Hopi kachina dolls are based upon cheap reproductions, and the sources for images of animals (especially endangered species) include postcards, firing-range targets, outdated encyclopedia entries, and natural history museum dioramas. The work attempts to call attention to, as well as to forge links across, the chasm between past and present.

Whereas the mind seems to represent for Wojnarowicz the last frontier of personal freedom, the body acts as container, trap, and means by which the mind can be controlled. His idea that "heaven is a place in your head"[17] suggests that his heaven is a place where one can think, imagine, dream, and fantasize without the physical and sometimes hellish limitations of the body. So, too, both desire and movement are contained and controlled by the body in the world yet, often, in his memoirs, their physical manifestations seem secondary in importance to their mental associations. This may be an old attitude (Neoplatonic, Romantic), but Wojnarowicz combines it with a late-twentieth-century cyberpunk sensibility. He explores imagination and experience, but—like the incubating newborn in *Some Things from Sleep* and the cyborg infant in *Excavating*—he does so through the eyes of a "robotic kid" in a "computerized landscape," a vast technobureaucratic world that depersonalizes human experience.[18]

No matter how much Wojnarowicz may have hoped to foster spirituality in the contemporary world, by fusing remains of the past with elements of the present and future, his depictions of these mergings often seem uneasy or untenable. *Late Afternoon in the Forest* (no. 47), exhibited in another solo show in 1986 (Anna Friebe Galerie, Cologne), is the largest of Wojnarowicz's collage paintings of that year. The bird-plane depicted in it is an example of one such morbid marriage of past and present forms. In previous

47. *Late Afternoon in the Forest*, 1986.
Acrylic, spray paint, and collage on masonite, 79 3/8 x 158 3/4".
The Eli Broad Family Foundation, Santa Monica.

sketches, this camouflage-gray creature is seen bursting into flames and plummeting to the ground. In this painting it has long since crashed. Entangled in the fallen vines and branches of dead trees, its wings and tail have disintegrated and begun to decompose into the mottled floor of a lavender-gray forest. It is dusk, and a noxious gray fog has settled among the skeletal tree trunks, turning the landscape into a valley of death.

At the same time, signs of renewal, transformation, and rebirth emerge from the cyborg mutant's wreckage (nature restaking its claim, as with the Hudson River piers and warehouses). Near the front of the bird-plane, a huge breach in its ruinous hulk reveals a riblike structure around a cargo of arteries and organs, still pulsating with saturated primary colors. Possibly a mutation of the bird's rib cage and body, this interior area has the same yellow hue as the bird's bare skull, which was the nose of the plane.

At the rear of the fuselage, another tear in the hull reveals arcaded chambers through which scramble "metallic insect mutations," or so William S. Burroughs described these bright red ants with human heads.[19] These creatures may represent the only survivors of the last crew of this bird-machine, or may be the survivors' descendants, or may simply be indigent forest residents who happened upon a better shelter. In any case, the red ants have transformed the broken-down vehicle into spacious living quarters.

By 1986, Wojnarowicz was frequently depicting characteristics of the human condition in association with, or in the guise of, animal experience. Crawling insects, for example, appear regularly, often as tenacious surrogate protagonists. For one thing, they easily convey the mechanomorphic aspects of primitive cyborg experience. Their bodies offer a segmentation of parts with dramatic shifts in scale and function, from spindly scurrying legs to twitching antennae to massive, immobile, armored outer casings. This armor, moreover, contributes to their look of apparent indestructibility, combined with a vulnerable robotic awkwardness.

As with *Excavating,* the remnants and relics of distant as well as more recent pasts make scattered and sometimes brightening appearances throughout this darkened world. In the top left corner, a view beyond the hilly black perimeter of the woods reveals what might be the persistent vestiges of contemporary times. In this distant and isolated scene, a last bit of blue sky hangs over a series of identical color photocopies of the Parthenon's ruins, together with a solitary postcard of the White House. Marking an architectural transition from Temple (or Church) to State, these visual icons arguably demonstrate the advantage of adapting to new functions. For years, their colonnaded facades successfully replicated and proliferated throughout history in the forms of other public monuments, corporate headquarters, banks, and residences. Despite their encroaching character, however, these reproductions seem but a mirage given our viewpoint from within a pervasive shroud of "palpable darkness," Burroughs's words for this forest world.[20]

Near the top center edge of *Late Afternoon,* a tiny and colorfully vibrant four-armed angel hovers over a tree limb. In the rest of the upper register, the darkly coated forms of a dog's skeleton, a set of industrial gears, and an ancient Greek sculpture dot the tree branches. On the forest floor, near the bird-plane's remains and occupants, rests a giant, yellowed alien head whose "unspeaking and unmoving stone lips"[21] are sewn together. Recurring repeatedly in Wojnarowicz's work, the image of sewn lips makes visible various states of utter silence, in this case that of an immobile alien (or ancient) relic unable to speak or reveal anything about its original function. This silence is not always due to the chasm between present and past (as with ancient religious icons, whose purposes are generally lost to the contemporary world), or from the separation between life and

state of being, as with the daily experience of being homosexual, of having to be invisible in order to survive. Wojnarowicz gave visual form to this silence when he photographed his own lips made up to look sewn together in a 1988–89 work.

Near the alien head at the lower left of *Late Afternoon,* a Native American chief in full regalia seems to pause, hand on walking stick, at the edge of the crash site. In the bottom right corner, a partial, recently formed human skeleton points a handgun at its skull. Above the suicidal skeleton and to the right of the crash site emerges one last towering figure. This Native American icon made an earlier, more precarious appearance in *Excavating the Temples of the New Gods.* This time, although it is still strapped to a firecracker, the totemic relic is more securely rooted and glows, as if deriving sustenance from this postapocalyptic wasteland's persistent ability to recharge itself.

If the 1986 "history paintings" visualize a chaotic, contradictory, out-of-control, and doomed planet, the shift that occurs in Wojnarowicz's work in 1987 clarifies significant aspects of this vision. The works he produced between 1987 and 1992 continue to grapple with the same general issues but from within the specific context of the AIDS crisis. Until this shift in perspective, the artist's assessment of the contemporary world might have seemed hypothetical, even melodramatic. The consequences of the AIDS crisis confirmed his findings, in effect, and demonstrated that the personal issues his work raises have far-reaching social implications.

During 1987, Wojnarowicz had been providing support to several close friends with AIDS, including his best friend and mentor, the photographer Peter Hujar, who died in November. Also that year, Wojnarowicz himself tested seropositive for HIV. His sense of impending death returned full-force, but this time it was less a matter of biographical circumstance or corporeal fact than of societal indictment. Had AIDS been deemed the epidemic it was in 1981 when the first 246 cases were reported by the United States Centers for Disease Control, and had it thereby received the standard attention given to epidemics, including adequate funding for research, prevention, and treatment, then perhaps a global crisis could have been averted. Moreover, the current multipronged drug treatments and the promise of a potential vaccine might have emerged years earlier and saved lives. However, as soon as the first cases were attributed to GRID—"gay-

48. *Untitled,* 1985. Pig skull with map and money collage and acrylic paint. Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W., New York.

related infectious disease"—in December 1981, what came to be known as AIDS was regarded for almost a decade as a threat only to homosexuals, whose lives were apparently not worth saving.[22]

Each of the seemingly disparate issues that had long preoccupied Wojnarowicz converged in 1987 in a single field of conflict, his depiction of which began with five collage paintings on masonite and wood (arguably his strongest work thus far and the last of a lyrical and color-saturated mid-career style): the "Four Elements" series—*Wind (for Peter Hujar), Fire, Water,* and *Earth* (nos. 21–24)—and *The Death of American Spirituality* (no. 50). The fact that Wojnarowicz inherited from Hujar a well-equipped darkroom could account in part for his shift in focus, in 1988 and 1989, toward photography. At the same time, the urgency of the AIDS crisis as well as his heightened sense of mortality may also have played major roles in encouraging Wojnarowicz's increasing reliance on combinations of mediums including photography, writing, video, performance, and painting.

49. *Death in the Forest,* 1990. Gelatin-silver print, 26 x 38".
Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W., New York.

Wojnarowicz produced *Untitled* [Hujar Dead] (1988–89; no. 51) to memorialize his friend. In the border of the work, a school of money-coated sperm swim over a collaged backdrop of United States paper currency and cut-up painted fragments of supermarket poster, as if illustrating desire's entrapment by the deadly economics of the AIDS crisis. In the central area, below a black column of type, the artist buried photographs of Hujar's head, hands, and feet, which he had taken at his friend's hospital bedside just after his death. A critic has likened the effect achieved by nine combined views of Hujar's form to Renaissance works depicting the deaths of Christ or the Virgin Mary in which they are surrounded by mourners.[23] In sharp contrast to this effect, the superimposed text, written in the form of an impassioned (yet sober) manifesto, declares innocent everyone who has died from or continues to live with AIDS, and critiques mainstream society's attitude that people with AIDS are culpable and expendable.

In the "Sex Series (for Marion Scemama)" (also 1988–89), Wojnarowicz collaged both photographs and text. In the sixth image of this suite of eight black-and-white composite photographs (no. 52), a powerful tornado blackens or obliterates the entire landscape while providing a backdrop for two columns of circular insets and three overlaid blocks of text. The passages of writing shift from a tender description of a sexual encounter with a stranger to an enraged denunciation of the media's "use of AIDS as a weapon to enforce a conservative agenda" and suppress sexuality.

Throughout the "Sex Series," circular insets function, in part, as voyeuristic peepholes through which society observes and regulates human eroticism. According to Wojnarowicz, the circular insets are also meant to evoke the controlling activity of surveillance: the idea of gathering evidence or examining nature, whether through binoculars, camera, telescope, or microscope. The sixth image's insets offer glimpses of disparate fields of data, including a microscopic view of a human blood cell, a detail from a photographic negative of an image showing a painting of St. Sebastian's arrow-pierced and bleeding body, and a close-up photograph (also a negative) of two women making love on a bed.

The furious tornado in this photographic collage perhaps threatens to overwhelm these multiple systems of surveillance and, in the process, reveal how little control humans really have over their own lives. With a more contained fury, Wojnarowicz employed the photographic insets and passages of text to remind "people who control the means of image reproduction and information dissemination"[24] that he, too, held a camera and would use it to undermine such control.

In much of his writing, Wojnarowicz maintained that bodily desire and movement were disciplined by the world, a position represented by the 1990 photograph *Untitled* [One day this kid . . .] (no. 53).[25] Wojnarowicz has surrounded a 1950s school snapshot of himself as an all-American happy kid with a foreboding text that outlines what will happen "in one or two years" when he discovers his desire "to place his naked body on the naked body of another boy." He will then realize that his desiring, moving body is controlled not by himself but by family, church, school, the medical community, law enforcement, and the government. He will be driven to conform or be silent when enacting his desires, or else he will face the discipline of society. The power of the work lies in part in the artist's own refusal to be silenced.

In the 1990 work *When I Put My Hands on Your Body* (no. 30), Wojnarowicz silkscreened a passage of text over a photographed mound of crumbling, decaying human skeletons (a detail from a black-and-white photograph of the Dickson Mounds, a Native American burial ground in Illinois). Part of the text reads:

When I put my hands on your body on your flesh I feel the history of that body. Not just the beginning of its forming in that distant lake but all the way beyond its ending. . . . I am consumed in the sense of your weight the way your flesh occupies momentary space the fullness of it beneath my palms. I am amazed at how perfectly your body fits to the curves of my hands. . . . If I could attach our blood vessels in order to anchor you to the earth to the present time to me I would. . . . It makes me weep to feel the history of you of your flesh beneath my hands in a time of so much loss. . . .[26]

In reaching out to the person addressed in the text, Wojnarowicz finds himself in touch with the collective history of the human body, including the development, undeterred by mortality, of its "perfectly" shaped form. As mortality comes to represent an entire history of human loss, its contemplation enables the artist to move beyond the body's physical limitations by exploring and developing ties not only to the momentarily living but also to the dead and to the not-yet-born. Ultimately, he comes to view mortality as a phenomenon which not only underscores but potentially undermines society's control on individual experience by simultaneously allowing one to recognize such control and capture for oneself the tools of its manipulation.

In the two- and three-dimensional works of Wojnarowicz's late years (in painting, photography, video, and

51. *Untitled* [Hujar Dead], 1988–89. Black-and-white photograph, acrylic, text, and collage on masonite, 39 x 32". Collection of Steven Johnson and Walter Sudol, New York.

performance), he frequently collages visual and textual material. Likewise, his late written works (*Close to the Knives, Memories That Smell Like Gasoline*) draw heavily on collage strategies and make frequent references to visual imagery. In both areas, he seeks to make visible the full range of the implications for experience that the AIDS crisis had brought about, and he demonstrates the fundamental and tragic lapses unfolding in the late-twentieth-century relationship between society and the individual. At the same time, he continually asserts for the individual the redemptive power of overcoming silence and stasis. His late work manifests the self-determining possibilities enabled by speaking out (or making photographs), and it also captures metaphorically—in his collage aesthetic—the inherent dynamism and diversity of experience.

Anything experienced outside the "clockwork of civilization"—the imminence of death, homosexuality, the abandoned Hudson River piers, the woods near his suburban childhood home, being swept away by a flood at age six[27]—could facilitate such a shift in perspective:

Ever since I was a kid, anything we had no control over . . . signalled other possibilities. That the world wasn't just the family structure or the governmental structure—that there were things in the world that could possibly change the face of what we've come to know and accept as given.[28]

Accepting his mortality, his differences, and the physical confines of his "body vehicle" enabled Wojnarowicz to confront the "pressure of information, of all this knowledge that I exist inside of a blind society where they try to deny or suppress what I'm experiencing."[29] Acknowledging the chaos of identity offered a means of generating new possibilities, as *The Waterfront Journals'* last character desperately asserts in the monologue "From the Diaries of a Wolf Boy":

I'm trying to keep my body beyond the deathly fingers of my past but I'm fucked up bad never learned shit, how to create structures other than chaos. I'm attracted to chaos because of all the possibilities and I don't have to choose any of them or die frozen inside one.[30]

Making things provided the artist with the means of stepping back from his situation to see himself in the context of the world as well as to see the world more clearly. Making things, moreover, enabled him to confront, resist, rearrange, reinvent, and attempt to "lift off the weight of the imposed structure" in the process of sustaining a fluid identity.[31]

54. *7 Miles A Second*, 1992–95. Watercolor on photocopy, 11 x 17".
Collaboration with James Romberger and Marguerite van Cook.
Courtesy of James Romberger and Marguerite van Cook, New York.

Notes:

1. David Wojnarowicz, unpublished artist's exhibition statement, "David Wojnarowicz: In the Garden," P.P.O.W. Gallery (New York, November 1990).

2. Wojnarowicz, "Biographical Dateline," in Barry Blinderman, ed., *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame* (exhib. cat.) (Normal, Ill.: University Galleries of Illinois State University, 1990), p. 117. (Further references to this text are cited by editor's name.)

3. Wojnarowicz, quoted in Blinderman, "The Compression of Time: An Interview with David Wojnarowicz," in Blinderman, p. 52.

4. Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (New York: Random House, 1991), pp. 87–88.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

7. Wojnarowicz, unpublished artist's exhibition statement, "David Wojnarowicz: In the Garden," P.P.O.W. Gallery (New York, November 1990).

8. Wojnarowicz, "Biographical Dateline," in Blinderman, p. 117.

9. Wojnarowicz, quoted in Gideon Gill, "Artists Work to Help Fight Child Abuse," *Louisville Times*, 6 December 1985, p. E7.

10. Wojnarowicz, *In the Shadow of Forward Motion* (exhib. cat.), notes by Felix Guattari (New York: P.P.O.W., 1989), p. 18.

11. The title of Wojnarowicz's fourth chapter in *Close to the Knives*.

12. A powerful exception was the essay by Michael Carter, "David Wojnarowicz and the Crisis of Conscience," which appeared in *The East Village Eye* (July 1986), p. 47.

13. Wojnarowicz, quoted in Matthew Rose, "David Wojnarowicz: An Interview," *Arts Magazine* 62 (May 1988): p. 64. See also Michael Brenson, "David Wojnarowicz," *The New York Times*, 2 October 1987, p. C27.

14. Carter, "David Wojnarowicz and the Crisis of Conscience," p. 47.

15. Wojnarowicz, *In the Shadow of Forward Motion*, p. 20.

16. Wojnarowicz, in *Seven Miles a Second*, text by Wojnarowicz, illus. by James Romberger, color by Marguerite van Cook (New York: DC Comics, 1996), p. 38.

17. Wojnarowicz, artist's statement, invitation for exhibition opening, "An Exploration of the History of Collisions in Reverse," Gracie Mansion Gallery (New York, April–May 1986).

18. Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, p. 29.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

20. William S. Burroughs, "William S. Burroughs on David Wojnarowicz's Art," two-page statement dated 22 March 1992, Estate of David Wojnarowicz, B-47–F-1.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Wojnarowicz, artist's statement, invitation for exhibition opening, "An Exploration of the History of Collisions in Reverse," Gracie Mansion Gallery (New York, April–May 1986).

23. Between 1981—when the first cases of what came to be known as AIDS were reported by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)—and 1986, the prevailing governmental attitude held that only four marginal groups were at high risk: homosexuals, hemophiliacs, heroin addicts, and Haitians. This "4-H list," as Paula Treichler has termed it, which was developed between 1981 and 1982, "structured [CDC] evidence collection" until 1986 (when the CDC revised its approach), largely contributing to the misguided "view that the major risk factor in acquiring AIDS is being a particular kind of person rather than doing particular things" (Paula Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification," in Douglas Crimp, ed., *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* [Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991 (1988)], p. 44; this text offers an excellent overview of and bibliographic resource for the AIDS crisis, about which an extensive body of literature now exists). The result of this scientific bias was that statistics on the transmission of AIDS in other populations—for example, heterosexuals, women, or minority groups—remained unrecognized for five years. By that time (1986), according to the executive director of the New York City Minority Task Force on AIDS, the women and children of African-American and Hispanic communities represented the fastest growing group of people with AIDS; see Suki Ports, "Needed (for Women and Children)," in Crimp, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, pp. 169–76. Another excellent source of worldwide AIDS statistics is Jonathan M. Mann, Daniel J. M. Tarantola, and Thomas W. Netter, eds., *AIDS in the World: A Global Report* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

24. Jerry Saltz, "Not Going Gentle," *Arts Magazine* 63 (February 1989): p. 14. Perhaps even more apt comparisons might be made with more recent work (than that of the Renaissance) in which the painter was "forced, despite himself, to record the appearance of a loved one on his or her death-bed," a topic, according to Linda Nochlin, which can be traced back to the eighteenth century, and which received recurring attention during the nineteenth century by artists and writers associated with Realism (including Zola and Flaubert) as well as Impressionism (Monet). See Nochlin, *Realism* (London: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 60.

25. Wojnarowicz, text accompanying reproduction of the "Sex Series (for Marion Scemama)," in *Aperture* 121 (Fall 1990): p. 26.

26. *Untitled* [One day this kid . . .] (1990) was originally part of the installation *America: Heads of Family, Heads of State*, designed for "The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s." This major exhibition, organized in 1990 by three New York museums, presented more than ninety artists and some two hundred works, and it featured the following as the decade's key themes: biography-autobiography, sexuality-gender, myth-spirituality-nature, discourse-media, social practices–cultural criticism, and history-memory-artifice. Wojnarowicz's installation appeared in the discourse-media section of the show but in fact, as with much of his work, addressed every one of these themes. For a review of "The Decade Show," see Calvin Reid, "Multi-Site Exhibitions: Inside/Outside," *Art in America* 79 (January 1991): p. 57.

27. The image is reproduced in the *1991 Biennial Exhibition: Whitney Museum of American Art* (New York), p. 309.

28. Rescued by a human chain of lumbermen who gave him cocoa and let him warm up by a woodstove, Wojnarowicz "was sorry when my family came to get me"; "Biographical Dateline," in Blinderman, p. 113.

29. Wojnarowicz, quoted in Blinderman, "The Compression of Time," in Blinderman, p. 58.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

31. Wojnarowicz, *The Waterfront Journals*, ed. Amy Scholder, (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p. 114.

56. *Tommy's Illness/Mexico City*, 1987. Acrylic and collage on masonite, 36 x 36". Collection of The New School, New York.

Biography: David Wojnarowicz

One-person Exhibitions

The American Center, Paris. "David Wojnarowicz, My Brain Is Driving Me Crazy." 1996
Gallery 44 Center for Contemporary Photography, Toronto. "David Wojnarowicz." 1996
Hal Bromm Gallery, New York. 1994
P.P.O.W., New York. "Brushfires in the Social Landscape." 1994
P.P.O.W., New York. "7 Miles a Second—a collaborative comic book by David Wojnarowicz and James Romberger." 1993
Intermedia Arts, Minneapolis. "In the Garden." 1991
University Galleries, Illinois State University, Normal. "David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame," traveling exhibition. 1990
Dorothy Goldeen Gallery, Santa Monica. 1990
P.P.O.W., New York. "In the Garden." 1990
P.P.O.W., New York. "New Work." 1989
Galeria Buades, Madrid. 1988
Ground Zero Gallery, New York. 1987
Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York. 1987
Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York. 1986
Anna Friebe Galerie, Cologne. 1986
Cartier Foundation, Paris. 1986
Times Square Spectacolor Board, New York. "Messages to the Public." 1985
C.A.U.C., Buenos Aires. 1984
Civilian Warfare, New York. 1984
Anna Friebe Galerie, Cologne. 1984
Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York. 1984
Hal Bromm Gallery, New York. 1983
Civilian Warfare, New York. 1983
Milliken Gallery, New York. 1982

Selected Group Exhibitions

Galerie St. Etienne, New York. "Taboo: Repression and Revolt in Modern Art." 1998
Boston Center for the Arts. "Arts Communities/AIDS Communities: Realizing the Archive Project." 1996
The Drawing Center, New York. "Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC." 1996
Galerie Peter Kilchman, Zürich. "Reto Flury und David Wojnarowicz." 1996
Sprengel Museum, Hanover. "Sex and Crime: Von den Verhaltnissen der Menschen." 1996
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. "Thinking Print: Books to Billboards, 1980–95." 1996
Tyler Galleries, Tyler School of Arts, Temple University, Philadelphia. "Transforming the Social Order." 1996
Wessel O'Connor Gallery, New York. "Male." 1996
Gallery TPW, Toronto. "Of Blood and Affection: Family Post Mortem Documents." 1996
Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena. "Under Construction: Rethinking Images of Identity." 1995
Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. "Sites of Being." 1995
Burchfield-Penney Art Center, Buffalo State College, Buffalo, New York. "Alternatives: 20 Years of Hallwalls Contemporary Art." 1995
John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin. "Face Forward: Self-Portraiture in Contemporary Art." 1995
Mary Ryan Gallery, New York. "Male Desire: Homoerotic Images in 20th-Century American Art." 1995
Kunsthalle Basel, Basel. "Welt-Moral: Moralvorstellungen in der Kunst heute." 1994
Con Rumore, Breda, The Netherlands. "What You See . . ." 1994
Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati. "Figure as Fiction." 1994
Revolution, Ferndale, Michigan. "Three Person Exhibition." 1994
The Art Gallery at the University of Maryland at College Park. "Significant Losses, Artists Who Have Died from AIDS." 1994
Jersey City Museum, New Jersey. "States of Loss." 1993
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. "The Subject of Rape." 1993
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. "Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art." 1993
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. "Multiple Images: Photographs since 1965 from the Collection." 1993
7th Annual Bang on a Can Festival, The Kitchen, New York. "ITSOFOMO," performance. 1993
Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter Høvikodden, Oslo. "Tema: AIDS." 1993
Washington Project for the Arts, Washington, D.C. "Beyond Loss: Art in the Era of AIDS." 1993
John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin. "The Order of Things: Toward a Politic of Still Life." 1992
MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts. "Corporal Politics." 1992
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. "Photography: Expanding the Collection." 1992
The William Benton Museum of Art, University of Connecticut, Storrs. "Empowering the Viewer: Art, Politics and Community," traveling exhibition. 1992
Galerie St. Etienne, New York. "Scandal, Outrage & Censorship: Controversy in Modern Art." 1992
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. "More Than One Photography." 1992
The New York Public Library, New York. "Recent Acquisitions: Photography." 1992
Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown at Federal Reserve Plaza, New York. "The Power of the City/the City of Power." 1992
Kunstverein, Hamburg, and Kunsthalle, Lucerne. "Gegendarstellung-Ethics/Aesthetics in Times of AIDS," traveling exhibition. 1992
Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio State University, Columbus. "Re-Framing Cartoons." 1992

Tramway, Glasgow. "New York AIDS Polemics." 1992
Hofstra Museum, Hempstead, New York. "The Realm of the Coin: Money in Contemporary Art," traveling exhibition. 1991
Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Art Gallery, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts. "Departures: Photography 1923–1990," traveling exhibition. 1991
Emerson Gallery, Hamilton College, Clinton, New York. "From Media to Metaphor: Art about AIDS," traveling exhibition. 1991
Duke University Museum of Art, Durham, North Carolina. "Art of the 1980's: Selections from the Collection of Eli Broad Foundation." 1991
Philippe Briet Gallery, New York. "Domenikos Theotokopoulos—A Dialogue." 1991
The Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia. "Fuel," traveling exhibition. 1991
Baumgartner Galleries, Washington, D.C. "The Figure in the Landscape." 1991
Richard F. Brush Art Gallery, Canton, New York. "From Desire . . . A Queer Diary." 1991
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. "Whitney Biennial." 1991
The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut. "The Art of Advocacy." 1991
The New School for Social Research, New York. "Hands Off!" 1991
Fondation Deutsch, Belmont-sur-Lausanne, France. "Tableaux du SIDA." 1991
John Post Lee Gallery, New York. "The Third Rail." 1991
San Jose Museum of Art, California. "Compassion and Protest: Recent Social and Political Art from the Eli Broad Family Foundation Collection." 1991
Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn, New York. "American Narrative Painting and Sculpture: The 1980s." 1991
Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art. "Cruciformed: Images of the Cross since 1980." 1991
Vrej Baghoomian Gallery, New York. "Social Sculpture." 1991
The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. "The Interrupted Life." 1991
Rutgers University, Mason Gross School of the Arts, New Brunswick, New Jersey. "Outrageous Desire: The Politics and Aesthetics of Representation in Recent Works by Lesbian and Gay Artists." 1991
Deson-Saunders Gallery, Chicago. "Strategies in Photography." 1990
The International Center of Photography Midtown, New York. "The Indomitable Spirit," traveling exhibition. 1990
Carlo Lamagna Gallery, New York. "Life before Art: Images from the Age of AIDS." 1990
Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, Milwaukee. "Images of Death in Contemporary Art." 1990
Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin. "Ubers Sofa—Auf die Strasse!" 1990
Gallery 400, The University of Illinois at Chicago. "NATURE/nature." 1990
University Art Galleries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio. "Assembled." 1990
Artists Space, New York. "Joint Ventures." 1990
IMAGES, Cincinnati. "Emulsionally Involved: Ten Photographers Respond to AIDS." 1990
Perspektief, Rotterdam. "Critical Realism." 1990
The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. "The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980's." 1990
Milwaukee Art Museum. "Word as Image." 1990
Charles Lucien Gallery, New York. "Inside the Beast." 1990
Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York. "The Last Decade: American Artists of the 80s." 1990
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. "AIDS Timeline." 1990
Wessel O'Connor Gallery, New York. "Queer." 1990
Real Art Ways, Hartford. "AIDS/SIDA." 1990
Exhibition Center, Parsons School of Design, New York. "The New School Collects: Recent Acquisitions." 1990
Logkono Enero, Spain. "I Bienal de Pintura, Cultural Rioja." 1989
Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. "Golden Opportunity: The Sale of Major Artworks to Benefit Resettlement of Refugees in El Salvador." 1989
Lisa McDonald Gallery, New York. "Ulteriors." 1989
Artists Space, New York. "Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing." 1989
University Art Galleries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio. "The Assembled Photograph." 1989
Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York. "Departures: Photography 1924–89." 1989
Freedman Gallery, Albright College, Reading, Pennsylvania. "Art about Aids." 1989
The Kitchen, New York. "ITSOFOMO: In the Shadow of Forward Motion," performance. 1989
Weatherspoon Art Gallery, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. "Art on Paper." 1989
University Art Museum Berkeley, California. "AIDSTimeline." 1989
Franklin Furnace, New York. "Products and Promotion." 1988
University of Colorado Art Galleries, Boulder. "Unknown Secrets: Art and the Rosenberg Era," traveling exhibition. 1988
Harwock College, Oneonta, New York. "The Wolf at the Door." 1988
Boca Raton Museum, Florida. "Street Art." 1988
Littlejóhn-Smith Gallery, New York. "Billboards." 1988
Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York. "Small Works." 1988
Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York. "Art Against AIDS." 1987
Laurence Miller Gallery, New York. "Exposed and Enveloped." 1987
E. M. Donahue Gallery, New York. "Redtape Magazine Benefit." 1987
The Bronx Council on the Arts, Bronx, New York. "The All Natural Disaster Show." 1986
Fashion Institute of Technology, New York. "The East Village." 1986
Mori Gallery, Sydney, Australia. "A Survey of Recent Trends in East Village Art," traveling exhibition. 1986
The Bronx Council on the Arts, Bronx, New York. "In the Tropics." 1986
Gabrielle Bryers Gallery, New York. "Homage to Nicolas A. Moufarrege." 1986
Bronx Council on the Arts, New York. "Toys Art Us." 1986
Anna Friebe Galerie, Cologne. "Accrochage." 1986
Castello Di Volpaia, Italy. "Ultime." 1986
Stockholm Mobile, Stockholm. "Four American Artists," traveling exhibition. 1986

Aspen Museum of Art, Colorado. "Of the Street," traveling exhibition. 1986
Norton Gallery of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida. "Walls: Glier, Rodriguez, Wojnarowicz." 1986
Art et Industrie, New York. "Illumination: The Art of Your Future." 1986
Terra Artis Gallery, New York. "Potpourri." 1986
State University of New York at Stony Brook. "Eight Urban Painters." 1986
Albert Totah Gallery, New York. "America." 1986
DiLaurenti Gallery, New York. "Fresh." 1986
National Abortion Rights League Auction, New York. "Annual Auction." 1986
Bill Rice's Garden, New York. "Sounds in the Distance," adapted and directed by Allen Frame, play. 1985
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. "Whitney Biennial." 1985
55 Mercer Street Gallery, New York. "#2 Smart Art Too." 1985
T. Greathouse Gallery, New York. "Three Person Show," collaboration with Marion Scemama and Greer Lankton. 1985
Libriazzi Gallery, New York. "Graffiti and East Village Artists." 1985
The Clocktower, New York. "Artists Currently in Residence." 1985
Kamikaze, New York. "Recommendations, '85." 1985
Phoenix City Art Gallery, New York. "Prints." 1985
Anchorage, Brooklyn. "Creative Time's Art in the Anchorage." 1985
Vorpal Gallery, San Francisco, California. "New York/New Art." 1985
NADA Gallery, New York. "The Cracked Mirror Show." 1985
Palladium, New York. "Group Show." 1985
Holly Solomon Gallery, New York. "57th St. Between A and D." 1985
ICA, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. "Investigations Series." 1985
Civilian Warfare, New York. "Getting Off." 1985
Exposition Hall of Charlottenborg, Copenhagen. "A Brave New World, A New Generation." 1985
Ground Zero, New York. "You Killed Me First Installation #8," collaboration with Richard Kern. 1985
Brooke Alexander, New York. "Benefit for the Kitchen." 1985
Edith C. Blum Art Institute, The Bard College Center, New York. "Out of the Ooo Cloud: Artists Salute the Return of Halley's Comet." 1985
Anna Friebe Galerie, Cologne. "Group Show." 1985
The Kentucky Lithograph Building, Louisville. "The Missing Children Show: 6 Artists from the East Village on Main Street." 1985
B-Side Gallery, New York. "Hard Cold Facts." 1985
Portland Art Museum, Oregon. "Selections from Ed Cauduro's Collection." 1985
Steven Adams Gallery, New York. "Watercolors." 1985
Zero One Gallery, Los Angeles. "Season's Greetings." 1985
Greene Gallery, Coconut Grove, Florida. "East Village." 1985
Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond. "East Village Artists." 1984
Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York. 1984
University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara. "Neo York." 1984
Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, New York. "Modern Masks." 1984
Sensory Evolution Gallery, New York. "Acid Show." 1984
P.P.O.W., New York. "Indigestion." 1984
Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia. "The East Village Scene." 1984
Zellermeyer Gallerie, Berlin. "Romance and Catastrophe." 1984
Nello Studio di Corrado Levi, Milan. "New York New." 1984
Frank Bernaducci Gallery, New York. "North by Northwest." 1984
ABC No Rio, New York. "Vote/Veto." 1984
Museo Tamayo, Mexico City. "New Narrative Paintings from the Metropolitan Museum of Art." 1984
Anna Friebe Galerie, Cologne. "Sculpture." 1984
L.A.C.E., Los Angeles. "Group Exhibition." 1984
Artists Space, New York. "New Galleries of the Lower East Side." 1984
American Graffiti Gallery, Amsterdam. "Best of the East Village." 1984
Civilian Warfare, New York. "25,000 Sculptors from across the U.S.A." 1984
T. Greathouse Gallery, New York. "Soon to be a Major Motion Picture." 1984
P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York. "Portrayals." 1984
Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Harbor, California. "The East Village." 1984
Civilian Warfare, New York. "Fit to be Tied." 1984
Indianapolis Museum of Art. "Paintings and Sculpture 1984." 1984
White Columns, New York. "Too Young for Vietnam." 1984
P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York. "Limbo." 1984
Charles Cowles Gallery, Bonnier Gallery, and Germans van Eck, New York. "Totem." 1984
Anna Friebe Galerie, Cologne. "East Village." 1984
The Clocktower, New York. "Studio Program Exhibition: 37 Artists." 1984
Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York. "Salon Show." 1984
Kamikaze, New York. "Gracie Mansion Presents." 1984
Bill Rice's Garden, New York. "Sounds in the Distance," adapted and directed by Allen Frame, play. 1983
Sharpe Gallery, New York. "Sex Show." 1983
East 7th Street Gallery, New York. "Underdog." 1983
Brooklyn Terminal. "The Terminal Show." 1983

Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York. "Sofa/Painting." 1983
Fashion Moda, Brooklyn. "Soup Kitchen Benefit." 1983
Greenville County Museum of Art, South Carolina. "From the Streets." 1983
Harm Bouckaert Gallery, New York. "Saint." 1983
Pittsburgh Center for the Arts. "Urban Pulses." 1983
Hal Bromm Gallery, New York. "Summer Show." 1983
Limbo Lounge, New York. "Acid Paintings," in collaboration with Luis Frangella. 1983
Cleveland Contemporary Art Center. "Prints and Drawings for Collectors." 1983
White Columns, New York. "Speed Trials." 1983
International Running Center, New York. "Running '83." 1983
Monique Knowlton Gallery, New York. "Intoxication." 1983
Milliken Gallery, New York. "3 Part Variety." 1983
Wardline Pier Project, New York. Organized by Mike Bidlo and David Wojnarowicz. 1983
Milliken Gallery, New York. "Fast." 1982
Gallery 345, New York. "Hunger Show." 1982
P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York. "Beast Show—Cacabunnies," action installation. 1982
Civilian Warfare Gallery, New York. "3 Person Show." 1982
Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York. "Famous Show." 1982
Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York. "COLAB Show." 1982
Lucky Strike Gallery, New York. "Group Show." 1982
Cheltenham Art Center, Cheltenham, Pennsylvania. "Raw Edge." 1982
Inroads Gallery, New York. "Gracie Mansion at Inroads." 1982
Franklin Furnace, New York. "Street: Image Brawl (PADD)." 1982
Mudd Club, New York. "Lower Manhattan Drawing Show." 1980
Club 57, New York. "Erotic Show." 1980
Leo Castelli's Staircase, New York. "Hunger," in collaboration with Julie Hair, action installation. 1980

Contributors

Dan Cameron, senior curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, has published over two hundred texts on art in various international art publications, including *Artforum, Arts, Parkett, Frieze*, and *Flash Art*. He has contributed to numerous museum catalogues for such institutions as the Royal Academy of Art, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh; Center for Contemporary Art, Glasgow; and Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley. As an independent curator, Cameron has organized large-scale exhibitions of contemporary art at several major venues, including the Aperto at the Biennale di Venezia (1988), "Cocido y Crudo" (Centro Renia Sofia, Madrid, 1994–95), and "Threshold" (Fundação de Serralves, Oporto, 1995). He attended Syracuse University and Bennington College, earning a B.A. in 1979.

John Carlin was the principal art critic for *Paper* magazine in the mid-80s. At the time he was teaching art and popular culture while curating exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art and various downtown galleries. In the late 80s he went to law school and upon graduation began representing artists and corporate entertainment clients. He began the Red Hot Organization, a not-for-profit company that produces albums, videos and multimedia to help fight AIDS through popular culture, and he helped found and run an interactive production company, Funny Garbage, through which the CD-ROM that accompanies this exhibition was produced.

C. Carr is the author of *On Edge: Performance at the End of the 20th Century* (Wesleyan University Press, 1993), and is a staff writer for the *Village Voice*.

Mysoon Rizk received a Ph.D. in modern and contemporary art history from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1997. She wrote a doctoral dissertation on David Wojnarowicz and, while conducting her research in New York, cataloged the materials in his Estate. She is an assistant professor in the Liberal Studies Division of the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, and is working on a book-length study of Wojnarowicz's work.

Amy Scholder is an editor of art and literary publications. She was the founding Editor of High Risk Books/Serpent's Tail and of Artspace Books, and has also edited books for Grove Press, Crown Books, and City Lights Publishers.

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