

Social Protest in Art

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Time: 80 minutes

Overview:

Artists play a major role in illuminating, challenging, and critiquing injustices that impact the Philippines. Artists provide a voice for the voiceless and have the ability to reach the masses through their vision. Human rights art has utilized direct messages during more tolerant eras, or has been embedded allegorically when imagery was strictly controlled. Artists inform our understanding of Philippine aesthetics as a set of values that are changing and growing as socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-religious issues continue to influence artists.

Objectives:

- Understand the similarities and differences between works of art.
- Understand the relationship of art history to other histories.
- Identify historical events that have contributed to the evolution of the arts.
- Develop observational abilities in order to critique visual art.
- Justify personal and non-personal critiques of art and architecture.
- Gain an overall academic awareness through the study of the fine arts.

Outcomes:

- Analyze the relationship between visual art and human rights.
- Connect human rights to larger social and cultural issues and movements.
- Understand how artists critique and challenge history and cultural conventions.
- Analyze the impact that artists have on improving the lives of those around them and society at large.

Background Information:

Political themes have a long history in Philippine art starting in the 19th century. Centuries of foreign control over the Philippines have benefitted many political dynasties. This has led to corruption, nepotism, and rampant abuse of citizens in the name of gaining and retaining power for a select few. The press, international watchdog agencies, historians, and artists have documented this corruption. While the Philippines has progressive human rights legislation, but those laws are often ignored or weakly enforced. Corruption has led to a high percentage of poverty and lack of resources being channeled into the rural areas. Large numbers of indigenous peoples are abused or discriminated against with little government assistance. Additionally, there are problems getting educational resources where they are needed the most.

Starting in the 1970s, the emergence of People's Art and Social Realist movements shaped art that was overtly critical of the government and foreign influences. Artworks were made in direct response to the Marcos patronage. The country underwent major financial and

political crises culminating in the imposition of Martial Law, and social unrest began to spread in many parts of the country. Student activism and Communist and Muslim separatist movements also grew, and these developments did not go unnoticed by artists. The fall of the Marcos regime eased the pressure of social unrest and proliferation of protest art. The need for a redefinition of social and racial identity led artists to explore the ideological basis of life in the Philippines. Artists challenged national history, the basic concepts of art (rejecting Western aesthetics), explored indigenous and folk art, and sought to create a unique Filipino expression. One group of social realists, the Kaisahan (Unity) group, created a large body of political art. In 1975, fourteen artists formed Kaisahan. The Kaisahan manifesto of 1976 states their major aims: to create art in the quest of national identity, to create art for the masses, to create alternative and oppositional art, base aesthetics on reflection theory, to create a relationship between form and content, to not limit style, to disseminate and expose as many people to their art as possible, and to create art that enacts social and political change to enable the building of a humane and just society for all. Some themes of the social realists: the Revolution of 1896, the three evils of society (feudalism, bureaucratic capitalism, imperialism), the anti-imperialist struggle, the struggle against feudalism and exploitation of farm workers, the struggle of tribal peoples, militarism and human rights violations, the threat to ecological balance, the theology of liberation, the plight of migrant workers, feminist themes, media censorship, and the growth of the mass movement.

Visual Art Slides:

Pablo Baens Santos, *Comprador*, 1978, Oil on canvas, NAGM, Manila (Figure 1B)

- Baens Santos (b. 1943) is a graduate of the University of the Philippines and a social realist.
- *Comprador* depicts two politicians in suits at the top of the composition with money passing through their outstretched hands. The politicians, one from the Philippines and the other from the United States, stand on the backs of the workers profiting from their labor.
- They laugh as a group of Filipino workers toils below, their struggle represented by bold, angular lines, a restrained color palette, and a strong diagonal pull across the composition.
- A large green dollar sign is located in the upper right corner, affirming that the politicians are only interested in money.

Pablo Baens Santos, *Congratulations to the Liberal Democrats*, 1986, Oil on canvas, NAGM, Manila (Figure 2B)

- *Congratulations to the Liberal Democrats* depicts a woman celebrating a political victory in the center of the composition. She hovers in front of a banner held by two identically dressed male citizens, while a crowd of supporters celebrates below.
- She is an embodiment of the Philippine flag; the top of the composition captures exuberance of the celebration through form and color.
- Below her are menacing faces mocking the woman as if her victory won't last.

Orlando Castillo, *Justice Under Martial Law*, 1980, Pastel on paper, NAGM, Manila (Figure 3B)

- Castillo (b. 1947) was a founding member of the Concerned Artists of the Philippines.
- *Justice Under Martial Law* is a narrative about abuse under Marcos. He stands in the center with one hand raised in a gesture of militancy; his other hand holding a gavel, his body cloaked in an American flag showing where his true interests lie.
- Behind him is the abuse of Filipinos at the hands of the police and military. There are also figures living in poverty due to his corrupt administration. The composition is packed with figures, yet shows restraint in color, as if they have been stripped of their humanity.
- Marcos is the only figure with vibrant color, coming from the American flag and from a halo resembling an exploding bomb behind his head.

Papo de Asis, *Bondage*, 1990, Oil on canvas (Figure 4B)

- Asis (b. 1949) is a Filipino artist and activist. When Martial Law was declared he left the Philippines and his art took on a political scope. He condemned human rights violations and called for independence and democracy in the Philippines.
- He founded Habi Arts, a collective of artists in L.A. committed to progressive social change.
- *Bondage* depicts a man trapped inside of a concrete structure with a large eagle on top, and teetering on rocks at the bottom. The eagle symbolizes democracy and imperialism.
- Below the mass is a skull and bones and the grim reaper rides a horse in the distance. A woman walks away from the trapped man down a desolate shoreline symbolizing isolation.

Antipas Delotavo, *Dama II*, 1994, Oil on canvas, NAGM, Manila (Figure 5B)

- Delotavo (b. 1954) is a Filipino artist that studied at the Philippine Women's University and was an original member of Kaisahan. His art reveals the harsh realities experienced by Filipinos and enlightens the public about the impact of poverty, oppression, and injustice.
- *Dama II* depicts assault rifles, machine guns, and handguns set against a grid pattern, as if they are hanging off hooks on a wall or protruding through a chain link fence.
- A face appears to the right, and a pair of hands grips an assault rifle to the left. It is unclear whether they are fighting for the same cause, or if one is the abuser and the other the victim.
- The main focus is on the guns and the message of violence, pain, and death they bring.

Salingpusa Collective, *Karnabal*, 1992, Acrylic on canvas, Pinto Museum, Antipolo (Figure 6B)

- Social realism resurfaced in the 1990s with Salingpusa, a collective of young artists who introduced a method of interactive mural painting. Salingpusa created large murals representing social ills like dread, isolation, and disconnectedness.
- *Karnabal* represents local and foreign influences on Philippine culture in a nightmarish manner. Figures are bulky and distorted, arranged in a composition that tilts downwards, forcing them into viewer space. They are exaggerated and overwhelmingly colorful.
- A carnival was utilized to register the artists' dissatisfaction with divisive socio-political realities that deflated euphoria following Martial Law.

- The composition is sinister; a woman levitated by a magician (controlling her), a straw man pointing to the wheel of fate (even though he is unwise), and a figure resembling Superman throwing a ball at the Virgin Mary (triumph of pop culture over traditional values).
- There is a game where toy soldiers shoot people (massacre of farmers), dolls in Filipina costumes in a wheelbarrow (exportation of women to foreign countries), a priest hearing confession from a clown, and Darna (local Wonder Woman) as a pole dancer.

Sanggawa Collective, *Kasal sa Hatinggabi (Wedding at Midnight: The Church and the State)* 1995, Acrylic on canvas, Pinto Museum, Antipolo (Figure 7B)

- Sanggawa developed from former Salingpusa members. Sanggawa members melded their individual styles to create a work that appears to be executed by one artist.
- *Kasal sa Hatinggabi* (1995) depicts a priest and a politician embracing; one holds a gun and the other a knife. Their partnership unified under a church bell, begs the question “Do they enact violence together or are meant for each other?”
- In the 1990s charismatic religious leaders emerged with millions of followers. For votes and endorsements, politicians appeared at their events during campaigns to be anointed.
- The event happens at night, alluding to a secret interaction, and criticizes an alliance that violates the separation of church and state.

Cultural Comparison:

Leon Golub, *Interrogation II*, 1981, Acrylic on canvas, AIC, Chicago (Figure 8B)

- Golub (b. 1922) was an American artist and civil rights activist.
- *Interrogation II* is part of a series that deals with the human rights violations in Central America he read about in newspaper articles covering the violent acts.
- By fixing the gaze of the grinning perpetrators onto the viewer, he forces them into our space making it difficult to look away.
- The victim is bound with a bag over his head making him anonymous; he could be anyone.
- This compels the viewers to examine their own relationship to the brutality depicted.

Andy Warhol, *Mao*, 1973, Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas, AIC, Chicago (Figure 9B)

- Warhol (b. 1928) was an American Pop artist, who utilized the silkscreen process to transfer photographed images to canvas. His mass-produced images mimic the way the media marketed celebrities like products.
- *Mao* is one of a series of portraits of Communist leader Mao Zedong. 15 feet tall, it mirrors representations displayed throughout China during and after Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976) and overwhelms the viewer with its immense size.
- His attitude toward Mao’s totalitarian propaganda is apparent; the brushstrokes resemble colorful graffiti. China’s Communist propaganda was similar to capitalist advertisements.

Charles White, *This, My Brother*, 1942, Oil on canvas, AIC, Chicago (Figure 10B)

- White (b. 1918) was an American painter from Chicago that believed that art could be an influential force in the struggle to promote racial equality for African Americans.
- *This, My Brother* addressed the quest for dignity and freedom and takes its title from a poem by John Rood about a rural miner who experiences a political awakening.
- A bulky and muscular man appears to break free from a mountain of rubble. His outstretched hands allude to the hope that social change could be realized.

Jim Shaw, *Untitled (British Protest in Front of U.S. Embassy from the aestheticized disaster series)*, 1992, Graphite on paper, MCA, Chicago (Figure 11B)

- Shaw (b. 1952) is an American artist who paints, draws, sculpts, and creates music. His work is surreal, ranging from playful and humorous to issues of violation and protest.
- His work draws on historical research and personal introspective, and is often an alarming reflection of the current social state.

Mona Hatoum, *So much I want to say*, 1983. Black and white video, 4 min 40 sec, MCA, Chicago (Figure 12B)

- Hatoum (b. 1952) is a Lebanese-Palestinian artist living in London since 1975, when she fled Beirut. Her work examines identity, the body, surveillance, control, and oppression.
- *So Much I Want to Say* is a series of images, changing every eight seconds, which show her face close-up with a pair of male hands gagging her mouth preventing her from speaking.
- The soundtrack repeats *So Much I Want to Say*. Her work criticizes the political situation of Lebanon and reflects on the thousands of refugees forced from their homeland.

In Class Discussion Topics:

- What techniques do the artists use to get their message across?
- How does the medium help to convey the message of the artwork?
- What makes these artworks successful or unsuccessful?
- What works fall under our traditional understanding of what art is and what works fall under contemporary art?
- How does each work of art engage with a human rights issue?

Homework Activities:

- Bring in an object from home that symbolizes a human rights issue to be used as part of a collaborative class project.
- Make a compilation of human rights images found on the Internet to share with the class during discussion.
- Look for a poem or short story that correlates with one of the artworks presented in class.

Resources:

Books:

D.J.R. Bruckner, Seymour Chwast, Steven Heller, *Art Against War: 400 Years of Protest in Art*, Abbeville Press, 1984

- An overview of the history of war protest in art; Pieces by Alfred Kubin, Peter Paul Rubens, Picasso, Ben Shahn, Goya, William Blake, George Cruikshank, Kathe Kollwitz, and others.

Alice G. Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines, 1970-1990*, University of the Philippines Press, 2001.

- Documents social realism and other protest and revolutionary artists. Begins with the origins of protest art in the 19th century and pursues it to its full flourishing in the Marcos regime and variations during the Aquino administration. Projects the trajectory of art in the future as new issues emerge to engage political artists.

Flaudette May V. Datuin, *Home, Body, Memory: Filipina Artists in the Visual Arts, 19th Century to the Present*, University of the Philippines Press, 2002.

- Charts the itinerary of the history of Filipina artists in the visual arts and contains a comprehensive demonstration and discussion of how women's art-works present the female body using different media.

Wayne Baerwaldt, ed., *Memories of Overdevelopment: Philippine Diaspora in Contemporary Art*. University of California, Irvine, 1997.

- Exhibition catalogue commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Philippine drive toward democratic independence, a movement that caused thousands to flee political persecution or depart to find employment outside the country. Identifies contemporary artists whose work touches political issues like traditional materials and cultural icons.

David Brody, *Visualizing American Empire: Orientalism and Imperialism in the Philippines*, The University of Chicago Press, 2010.

- Explores the way visual imagery shaped the political and cultural landscape, drawing on sources including photographs, tattoos, the decorative arts, popular press, maps, parades, and material from world's fairs and urban planners. Argues that the way Americans visualized the Orient greatly influenced the fantasies of colonial domestication.

Lucila Hosillos, *Originality as Vengeance in Philippine Literature*, New Day Publishers, 1984.

- Concentrates on nationalist-Third World literature to help formulate its aesthetics and develop methods of studying it toward fulfillment of its humanist commitments.

Stanly Karnow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines*, Random House, 1989.

- Goes back 500 years to paint a portrait of Philippine history, focusing on the U.S. imperial experience in the islands. Portrays the U.S.'s attempt to remake the Philippines "in our image" complete with American political, educational, and cultural institutions

Vicente Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History*. Ateneo de Manila University, 2000.

- Cultural and political history of Filipinos and the Philippines examining the period from the onset of U.S. colonialism in 1898 to the emergence of a Filipino diaspora in the 1990s. Adopting the essay form to disrupt epic conceptions of Filipino history, its clusters of historical detail and reflections that do not easily fit into a larger whole.

Articles:

Patrick Flores, *Social Realism: The Turns of a Term in the Philippines*. *Afterall*, Issue 34, 2013.

- Looking at the legacy of 1970s social realist painting in the Philippines, it reflects on the intersection of postcolonial discourse, historical imagination, and political art practice.

Patrick Flores, *Everyday, Elsewhere: Allegory in Philippine Art*, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 2011.

- Traces the contexts of the allegorical impulse in Philippine image making and art, as it marks the self-consciousness to render time, place, and event legible. The allegorical bears the desire to belong to the world, referencing both the critique of colonialism as well as the possibility of transcending it at the very moment of revealing its ethical failure.

Jonathan Beller, *Visual Transformations in Philippine Modernity: Notes toward an Investigation of the World-Media System*, *Acquiring Eyes*.

- Concerned with the changes in visual art wrought by culture and technology accompanying and enabling economic development. The Philippines given its status as an American colony was subject to U.S. media yet produced its own counter-visions.

Websites:

<http://www.nationalmuseum.gov.ph>

- The National Museum is an educational, scientific and cultural institution that acquires, documents, preserves, exhibits, and fosters scholarly study and public appreciation of works of art, specimens, and historical artifacts representative of the cultural heritage of the Filipino people and the natural history of the Philippines.

<http://ncca.gov.ph>

- The National Commission for Culture and the Arts, Philippines is the policy making body, coordinating, and grants giving agency for the preservation, development and promotion of Philippine arts and culture. The National Endowment Fund for Culture and the Arts funds the implementation of culture and arts programs and projects.

<http://www.gov.ph/the-order-of-national-artists/>

- A National Artist is a Filipino citizen who has been given the rank and title of National Artist in recognition of his or her significant contributions to the development of Philippine arts and letters. It recognizes excellence in Music, Dance, Theater, Visual Arts, Literature, Film and Broadcast Arts, and Architecture or Allied Arts.

<http://malacanang.gov.ph/7054-the-andres-bonifacio-monument/>

- The Presidential Museum and Library features a comprehensive essay, videos, and traces the history of the Bonifacio Monument and the legacy it has left.

<http://www.artic.edu>

- The Art Institute of Chicago collects, preserves, and interprets works of art, representing the world's diverse artistic traditions, for the inspiration and education of the public and in accordance with our profession's highest ethical standards and practices.

<https://mcachicago.org/Home>

- The MCA's mission is to bring artists and audiences together to experience and contemplate contemporary art and culture in ways that can deepen what it means to be a citizen of both Chicago and the world.

<http://www.metmuseum.org>

- The Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a museum and library of art, for encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts, for the application of arts to manufacture and practical life, for advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and for furnishing popular instruction.

<http://www.moma.org>

- Founded in 1929 as an educational institution, The Museum of Modern Art is dedicated to being the foremost museum of modern art in the world. Central to MOMA's mission is the encouragement of an ever-deeper understanding and enjoyment of modern and contemporary art by the diverse local, national, and international audiences that it serves.

<http://www.guggenheim.org>

- The Guggenheim Museum is a vital cultural center, an educational institution, and the heart of an international network of museums. Founded on a collection of modern masterpieces, the Guggenheim is a growing institution devoted to the art of the 20th century and beyond.

<http://www.getty.edu/museum/>

- The J. Paul Getty Museum seeks to inspire curiosity about, and enjoyment and understanding of, the visual arts by collecting, conserving, exhibiting and interpreting works of art of outstanding quality and historical importance.

Videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD-NDGmdVag>

- René B. Javellana, Associate Professor of the Fine Arts Program at Ateneo de Manila University, discuss the intersection between Philippine art and social change.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bq1IDGs6l9k>

- Isang documentary project para sa Art Studies sa University of the Philippines, Diliman.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gw902x3fC3o>

- Salcedo Auctions presents the highlights of its Art Today: Contemporary Philippine Art.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmgJRgH9W2c>

- Concerned with the continuing violations of human rights, the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility produced a video to help the lay audience contextualize the discussion of human rights in the realities of the Philippines and its history.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNY8QovO7f0>

- Human Rights watch said that the Aquino government has not prosecuted a single case of extrajudicial killing or enforced disappearance committed during his presidency.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFN1Oi19vrw>

- Human Rights Watch documented 10 cases of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances since Aquino took office in 2010.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fSGWyTE_ek

- Tens of thousands of Filipinos have rallied across the country against the misuse of public funds. The protestors are angry about a scam that was revealed by the local media that involves the legislators' Priority Development Assistance Fund.

Social Protest in Art Image Sheet (B)

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Papo de Asis, *Bondage*, 1990, Oil on canvas (Figure 4B)



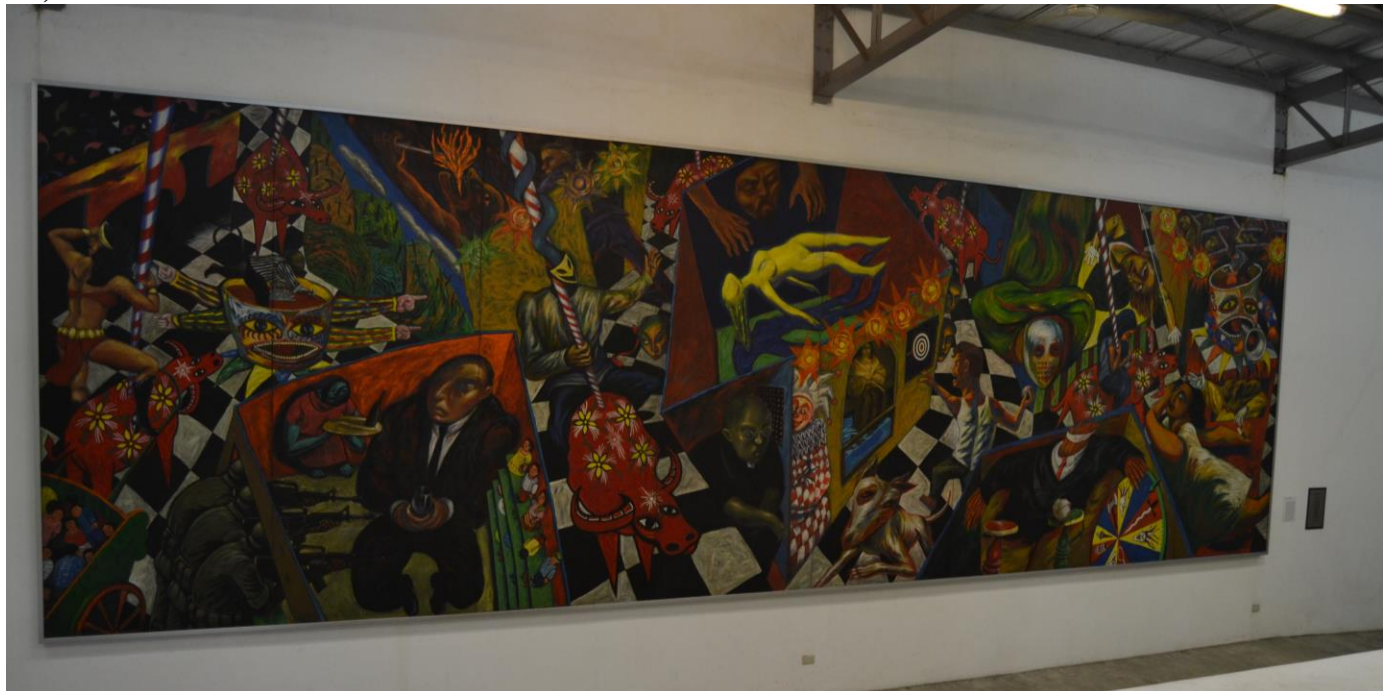
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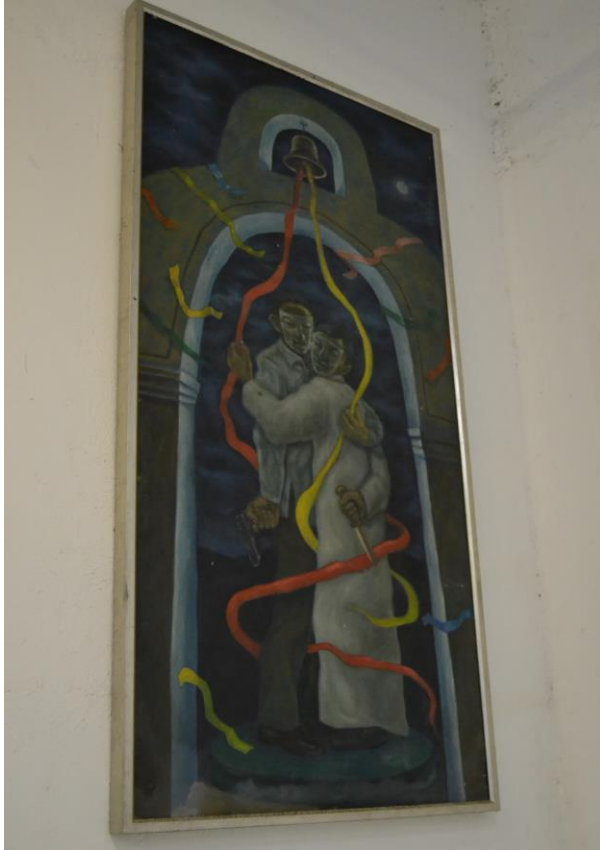
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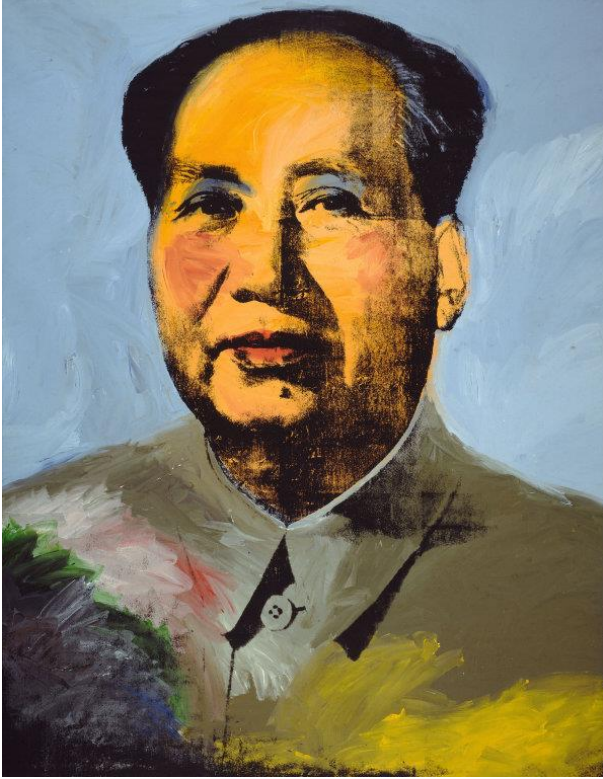
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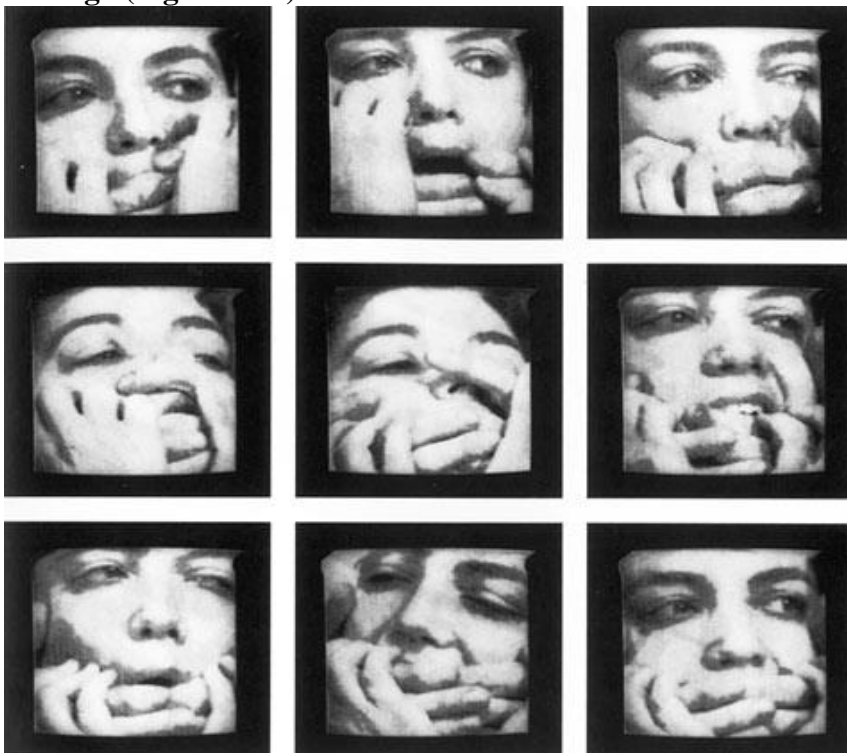
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