

# 1 Negative Space

PETER WIEBEL

“What sculptures could be created only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and would have been unthinkable, unimaginable, in earlier centuries?” This question has troubled artist and theorist Peter Weibel (b. 1945) since a visit to the 1986 Centre Pompidou show *What Is Modern Sculpture*, which he felt offered insufficient answers. In a sometimes densely worded preface, this text lays out Weibel’s position: rather than being concerned with the presentation of objects in space, the vital plastic arts of the modern era have created the conditions of that space itself.

This publication follows an exhibition of the same name held at Karlsruhe’s Centre for Art and Media in 2019, and takes as its starting point the idea that 19<sup>th</sup> century developments in high-speed travel and communication technology separated our perception of reality from interaction with other bodies. It wasn’t until the early

20<sup>th</sup> century, however, that the effects of this were felt in three-dimensional art, with the advances of Futurism and Constructivism. Artists such as Naum Gabo (1890-1977) were amongst the first to present “negative space” as an integral aspect of their work. Since then, countless others, from Bruce Naumann (b. 1941) to Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963), have taken that emphasis in new directions.

This text is perhaps less groundbreaking in its underlying precepts – which draw on well-worn interpretations of modern art in relation to mechanisation and space-time theory – than in its sheer scale and intricacy of sub-theories. Weibel moves from mathematical models of space to planar and linear sculpture, spatial constructions and suspended installations, drawing on “signature works” that embody each idea. An indispensable supplement for any student or enthusiast of three-dimensional art.



Words  
Greg Thomas

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MIT Press  
mitpress.mit.edu

# 2 The Art of Protest

ALAIN BIEBER & FRANCESCA GAVIN

Celeste Dupuy-Spencer’s 2018 oil painting, *In the White House (perfectly demonic dynamism)*, captures Donald Trump and his followers in jarring colours, a wooden cross eerily tilting in the background. The piece signifies the confusion and subdued horror of the right-wing populism that engulfed the USA with Trump’s rise to office, and appears in *The Art of Protest: Political Art and Activism*. The book spotlights practitioners who interrogate urgent questions and exhibit tensions of power, addressing the connection between aesthetics and politics.

Art is not often conceived of as propaganda, however, it has, historically, been employed to achieve partisan aims and communicate state-mandated messages. The style of Soviet propaganda, with its defined text and arresting visuals, stems from the iconography of the Russian Orthodox church, and ironically pervades the realm

of advertising today in the west. Even as art serves the gods of totalitarianism and capitalism, many practitioners use their craft to subvert injustice. The line between art and activism remains blurred, but art tests the capacity of our imagination, which is vital for social change.

Brandalism, a Switzerland-based art collective, confronts consumerism by vandalising corporate ads in public streets. In an animated film by Michael Rakowitz, the action-figure of a US soldier faces Mesopotamian statuettes, a commentary on the colonial plundering of Iraq’s heritage. Meanwhile, Julian Charrière’s photographs of a lone silhouette on an iceberg pose a reminder of climate change. Ultimately, this book does not deign to answer its main thesis – can art also be activism, or is propaganda truly art? Rather, it presents projects that occupy that gray area, and provokes a conversation.



Words  
Iman Sultan

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Gestalten  
uk.gestalten.com

# 3 Africa: The Fashion Continent

EMMANUELLE COURRÈGES

Journalist Emmanuelle Courrèges has undertaken the mammoth task of contextualising contemporary fashion on the African continent in this beautifully illustrated volume. Leading with designers, this is nevertheless a collaborative narrative shaped by visual artists, photographers, stylists, models, textile designers, artisans, entrepreneurs and influencers. For the author, the current “renaissance” of African creativity owes itself to these pioneering individuals who are challenging stereotypes and reclaiming ownership of cultural identities. African fashion is, concurrently, gaining global coverage and influencing culture as its ready-to-wear industries develop in burgeoning youth and middle class markets, campaigns to #buyAfrican, and branding and publicity efforts.

The text’s first section focuses on designers who position themselves as socially and environmentally con-

scious innovators, preserving artisanal heritage, in the process, such as Mali’s Chris Seydou, who cut a pencil skirt from traditional Bogolan fabric. A second part explores style, and how citizens express themselves.

The final portion examines photography. We are asked to question how garments, identities and fashion spaces are constructed in imagery, bolstered by publications such as *Faculty Press* and *Nikkou*. How have photographers like Louis Philippe de Gagoue challenged visual tropes inscribed by the white western gaze, rethinking the Black body, gender, colonialism and human rights? These and other socio-cultural and political frameworks are offered to the reader but not critically explored. Rather, this book is a celebration of rich cultures, design and creativity across the continent, underscored by the notion that there is no “one” definition of African fashion.



Words  
Alexis Romano

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Flammarion  
editions.flammarion.com