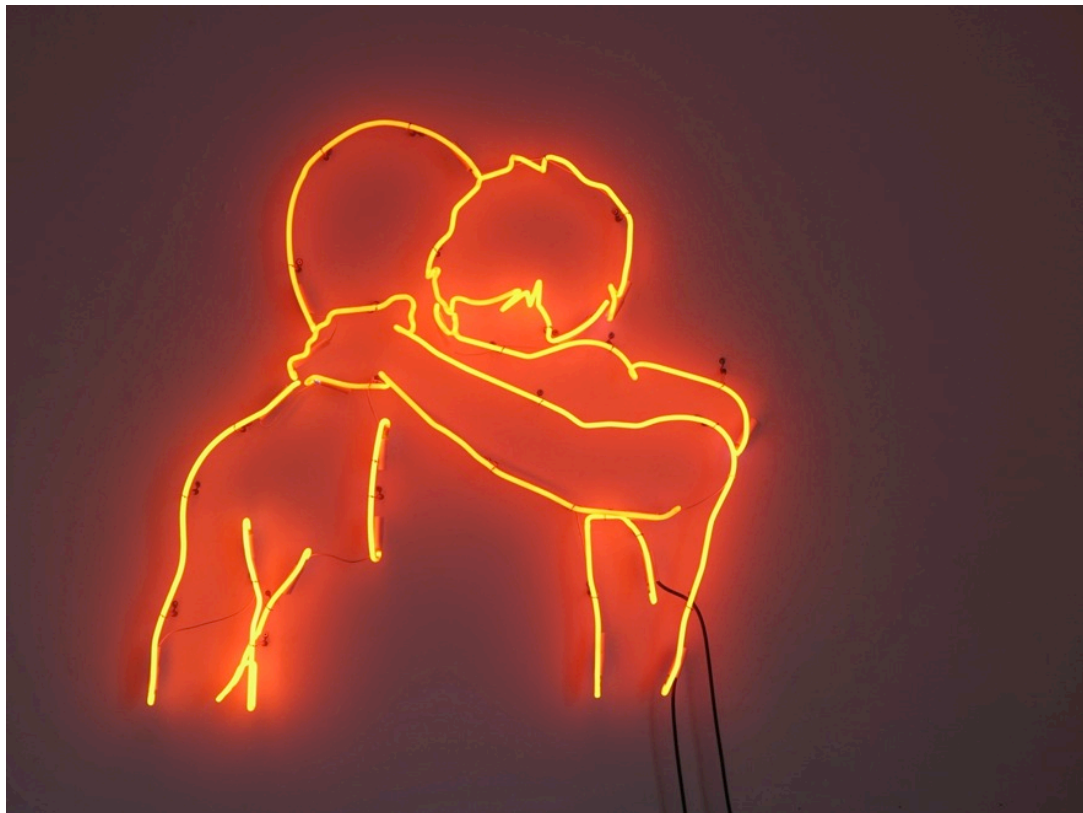


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Jacques Bedel, Fernando 'Coco' Bedoya, Paulo Bruscky, Noemí Escandell, León Ferrari, Anna Bella Geiger, Carlos Ginzburg, Narcisa Hirsch, Hudinilson Junior, Eduardo Kac, Leandro Katz, Carlos Leppe, Leonel Luna, Hernán Marina, Mónica Mayer, Marta Minujín, Claudio Perna, Norberto Puzzolo, Herbert Rodríguez, Miguel Ángel Rojas, Osvaldo Romberg, Juan Carlos Romero, Pablo Suárez, Yeni & Nan, Carlos Zerpa

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Hernán Marina. *Hug (orange)*, 2012. 9 mm neon. 92 x 97 cm. Edition 2/3

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An Art of Bodies

From the mid-'60s on, the reign of abstraction (geometric, lyric and 'informal' [or *tachiste*]) in avant-garde visual arts was interrupted by a series of bodies that set themselves opposite, and in place of, the work of art. The artist's body became the medium and tool on which to represent and intervene in reality. Not only was the role of the artist's individual body reconfigured, but also that of the social body, through emphasis on collective creation; and the political body too in the context of the new mass societies and the violent dictatorial processes of the '60s and '70s. Likewise, the body was used to challenge persistent ethical urges, via pieces with a strong erotic charge to them that advocated for sexual liberation as a means of social liberation; at the same time they questioned the traditional dichotomies of gender in the framework of the feminist and gay movements. Combining these different strategies, the physical body was artistically negotiated as a tool for action, agitation and resistance.

Whereas throughout history the body had been represented in the visual arts with varied social functions and through varied techniques and styles, starting in these decades one saw a reemergence of the body as direct presentation. By the same token, unlike the utopian ideals of a universal yet largely passive viewer, which the first avant-gardes propounded, artists began to consider a viewer made agent, active, contingent and specific.

The tumultuous '60s have been read in terms of the recovery of the innovative spirit of the historic avant-gardes of the interwar years, a theory advanced by art historian Hal Foster in his book *The Return of the Real*, which argued that the neo-avant-gardes constituted a delayed fulfillment of the promises of the interwar avant-gardes. Despite the fact that Foster's vision was clearly Western and First World, we can identify a similar reemergence in South America's Southern Cone. In that setting, the body took on special relevance and a distinct spatial presence, given the violence of the authoritarian régimes that subjected bodies to physical repression through physical, mental and social torture. The human body was thus converted into the political site in the battle waged between control and resistance.



Leandro Katz. *Eunuchs of the Forbidden City* - A play by Charles Ludlam, with Charles Ludlam and Black-Eyed Susan, 1971/1995. Cibachrome. 36 x 28 cm

Just as Oscar Masotta theorized a *Media Art in the '60s*, we might venture to suggest the emergence of a *Body Art*. The mass media offered interconnection and community, yet always in a form mediated by technology. The art of bodies arises in parallel with this trend, and through the direct and carnal aesthetic relation it proposes, it offers an alternative

to that technological mediatizing. Toward the end of the '60s and especially during the '70s, the art of bodies would also take on a key role in the face of the processes of political repression that were sweeping the region. The works described below respond creatively and independently to this artistic, political and social context, always "putting the body into the picture."

In the series *Voyages* of **Carlos Ginzburg**, the artist's body functions as an index within a semiotic system that classifies tourist destinations on the basis of a set of signs that boil down to monument, ticket window or tourist crowd, repeated throughout the world. **Oswaldo Romberg** also uses the resource of the index to classify lines of his body according to typological formulas. In another sort of journey, **Marta Minujín** extends the notion of the cartographical as personal in her video *Autogeografía*, which was part of *Comunicando con tierra* [Communicating with Earth], at the Centro de Arte y Comunicación in 1976. Similarly, the Venezuelan female artist duo **Yeni & Nan** use their bodies to demarcate the landscape geometrically. **Jacques Bedel's** 1970 series *Argos* incorporates the viewer's body in the work itself through use of mirrors. Conversely, pieces like *La Sabiduría* [Wisdom] and *La Soledad* [Solitude], both from 1975, offer a contemporary interpretation of classical allegorical sculptures, in which the human body is alluded to through rigid geometrical structures of acrylic "dressed" or covered in mineralized cloth.

Norberto Puzzolo's photography series *Ezeiza* records the massacre of young Peronists by right-wing terrorist groups, in the massive demonstration to welcome back the political leader on his return from exile in 1973. Instead of representing the mass, Puzzolo's images are focused on the confused and desperate bodies of young people trying to flee death. On the other hand, the political body is turned into an absent body in **Juan Carlos Romero's** work *De la realidad nacional (al compañero Mujica asesinado)* [Of National Reality (For Our Murdered Comrade Mujica)], created in 1974. The same thing occurs in the Works of the Peruvian-Argentine artist **Fernando 'Coco' Bedoya**, who took part in the famous collective aesthetico-political action *El Siluetazo* [the mass Body Silhouetting] in 1983. His figures, entitled *El trabajo sigue y debe seguir* [The Work Continues and Must Continue], are imprinted in stenciling [letraset] or silkscreening with human-rights slogans in response to Argentina's last military dictatorship.



Claudio Perna. *Portrait of Joe with hairs*, 1975. Gelatin silver print, ink, stamp, glue and pubic hair on paper. 14.7 x 10.4 cm

Miguel Ángel Rojas's photographs record, through a hidden camera, the clandestine sexual encounters in the Teatro Faenza in Bogotá in '70s. The viewer is thus invited to take part in the artist's position as voyeur in bringing to light these sexual and social acts not visualized by normative discourses. Other works turn to the erotic not only through the visual presentation of the body, but also through incorporating new senses such

as touch, as in the use of braille in **León Ferrari's** work *Me duele una mujer en todo el cuerpo* [A Woman Is Hurting Me in My Whole Body] which superimposes segments of the text of Jorge Luis Borges's *El amenazado* [The Threatened Man] (1972) over Man Ray's photograph *Les cheveux* [Hair] (ca. 1929). Similarly, Venezuelan artist **Claudio Perna** portrays his lovers in collages combining Polaroid photos of the figure paid tribute to with silhouettes, seals and patches of pubic hair, thus mingling the optic with the haptic. The sense of taste, meanwhile, is invoked in the sculpture piece *Fast food* [English in original], in which **Pablo Suárez** invites us to eat a naked man; and in the use of language as visual composition in **Paulo Bruscky's** *Poema lingüístico* [Linguistic Poem]. Contemporary artists like **Hernán Marina** use neon and copper to carry on, in a current-day key, the exploration of the tension between eroticism, desire and control. In the work by the Brazilians **Hudinilson Junior** and **Eduardo Kac**, the explicit presentation of segmented and highly erotic bodies suggests obscenity as a strategy for individual and collective liberation in resistance to social authority. A similar emphasis between sexuality, community and liberation appears in the photographs in which **Leandro Katz** recorded the productions of Charles Ludlam's *Ridiculous Theatrical Company*, which injected avant-garde theater with the camp and queer, in pursuit of an estrangement that could generate critical meaning. **Carlos Leppe**, in the violent setting of Pinochet's Chile, used references to the queer underworld as a way to resist the repression and regulation of bodies under a dictatorship, a plan **Herbert Rodríguez** carries out in similar fashion in the context of Peru.

Anna Bella Geiger set of mass-market postcards, entitled *Brasil nativo, Brasil alienígena* [Native Brazil, Alien Brazil] recreates, alongside her family and female friends, traditional postcards representing aboriginal women of the Amazon performing domestic tasks -- thereby questioning not only woman's traditional role, but also the differences in class and ethnicity that compound the gap in opportunities which distances those women from our bodies. A similar exploration of the relation between women and power, city and nature is presented in the Super 8 film *Amazona*, shot in 1983 by **Narcisa Hirsch**. **Carlos Zerpa** coincides with Geiger in invoking the representation of the aborigine in his drawing series *Acéfalo* [Headless] VI, in which he treats ironically the Western conception of the indigenous body in the era of conquest, thus alluding to its contemporary continuation through exoticism and discrimination. **Leonel Luna** also invokes such racial tension in his 2001 work *Corrida de Mazeppa* [Mazeppa's Ride], the title of which refers to a poem by Lord Byron but which recovers the 19th-century iconography of the European woman made captive through the aboriginal/ Indian surprise attack. Like Geiger,

Mónica Mayer, in 1978, turned to the format of the postcard to deal ironically with the questionnaires of women's magazines and ask the public what is normal, *Lo Normal* – her exhibition title – through provocatively feminist questions. Finally, **Noemí Escandell's** work *La tragedia del desarrollo (historia clínica genuina de un paciente de VIH)* [The Tragedy of Development (A True-Life Clinical History of an HIV Patient)], begun in 1992 and still underway, allows us to reflect on the tense relation between community and individual, a relation regulated by others as extreme as compassion and group responsibility, or discrimination and ignorance.

All these bodies correspond with an epistemological paradigm shift whereby structuralist thought, in which the work of art formed part of a system of autonomous relations, was subjected to a radical questioning of the subject-object relation by phenomenology and later by post-structuralism, which thus brought about a deepened questioning of the work of art as an independent, self-sufficient object. The body thereby came to collapse, carnally and directly, the relation between Art and life. Through these different, interrelated variables, these artists enable us to rethink, on an artistic, erotic, social and political plane, the body's many possibilities for being in the world.

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Norberto Puzzolo. *Ezeiza*, 1973/2014. Gelatin silver print. 30,5 x 40,5 cm. Edition 1/5 + AP