

The Hammer Museum Presents *Take It or Leave It: Institution, Image, Ideology*
Featuring works by Jimmie Durham, Andrea Fraser, Mike Kelley, Barbara Kruger, Glenn Ligon,
Adrian Piper & more
On view February 9 – May 18, 2014



Los Angeles—The Hammer Museum presents *Take It or Leave It: Institution, Image, Ideology*—the first large-scale exhibition to explore intersections between the artistic strategies of appropriation and institutional critique in the work of American artists who emerged from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. *Take It or Leave It* features the work of 35 artists, and is organized by the Hammer Museum and co-curated by Anne Ellegood, Senior Curator at the Hammer Museum, and Johanna Burton, Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement at the New Museum.

On view February 9 – May 18, 2014, the exhibition traces shared impulses between artists associated with the imperatives of institutional critique—confronting the structures and practices of institutions to scrutinize their role within society—and those who are commonly identified with artistic strategies of appropriation—the borrowing and recasting of existing images, styles, and forms from popular mass-media and fine art sources. As means of critical interpretation, institutional critique and appropriation can be understood as overlapping methodologies, and indeed they share a number of fundamental concerns.

Ironically, while hardly ever discussed in conjunction with each other, institutional critique of the late 1980s and early 1990s—as utilized by artists such as Tom Burr, Mark Dion, Andrea Fraser, Renée Green, and Fred Wilson—and appropriative strategies of artists who came to prominence in the late 1970s and early 1980s—including Gretchen Bender, Dara Birnbaum, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, and Sherrie Levine—have almost universally been described by critics and art historians as growing out of and

expanding upon the ideas and practices of those associated with early institutional critique from the 1960s. Despite this ostensibly mutual foundation, the cross-pollination between artists recognized for their use of appropriation and those who adopted institutional critique in the 1980s and 1990s has been little explored. The majority of the works shown in the exhibition are from the 1980s and 1990s, a particularly ground-breaking moment in American art in which artists examined critical questions about identity and representation via practices that were deliberately politically and socially engaged. While *Take It or Leave It* is a historical show focusing on a period in the recent past, it nonetheless also includes very recent work, arguing for the continued relevance of these artists' practices today and also revealing their sustained commitment to strategies of appropriation and institutional critique. While the artists borrow from a vast array of sources and evaluate a wide range of social and cultural institutions, they share the belief that art can and should participate in the most critical debates of our time.

Take It or Leave It is presented in the Hammer's main temporary exhibition galleries, lobby gallery, lobby wall, video gallery, and outdoor spaces. The exhibition showcases 35 artists who came to prominence between the late 1970s and early 1990s, with works in a wide variety of mediums, including photography, film, painting, sculpture, installation, and performance. Although many of the selected artists are well known, others remain under-recognized, and many of the artists represented in *Take It or Leave It* have not had their works shown together before.

ARTIST LIST

Judith Barry	Renée Green	Glenn Ligon	Rirkrit Tiravanija
Gretchen Bender	Jenny Holzer	Paul McCarthy	Christopher Williams
Dara Birnbaum	Mike Kelley	Allan McCollum	Sue Williams
Nayland Blake	Mary Kelly	John Miller	Fred Wilson
Tom Burr	Silvia Kolbowski	Matt Mullican	David Wojnarowicz
Mark Dion	Barbara Kruger	Cady Noland	
Jimmie Durham	Louise Lawler	Adrian Piper	
Andrea Fraser	William Leavitt	Stephen Prina	
Robert Gober	Zoe Leonard	Martha Rosler	
Felix Gonzalez-Torres	Sherrie Levine	Haim Steinbach	

Barbara Kruger has been invited to do a site-specific installation in the Hammer's lobby, where she will cover the walls of the stairwell with her iconic language-based work. *Take It or Leave It* includes artists' signature works, such as a Jenny Holzer's LED sign from 1987, as well as lesser known works not widely exhibited, like an early projected slide by Sherrie Levine and two Mark Dion installations from his first gallery show in NYC in 1992. In addition, the exhibition includes Gretchen Bender's monumental video installation *Total Recall* (1987), wallpaper by Robert Gober (1989), a section of Mary Kelly's deeply influential *Post-Partum Document* (1973–1979), a wall of drawings by Matt Mullican, sculptures by Jimmie Durham rarely seen in the United States, early paintings by Sue Williams, and numerous works being exhibited in Los Angeles for the first time.

INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE

The category of art known as institutional critique has become widely understood—by art historians, theorists, and artists themselves, as well as within the more casual parlance of the contemporary art world—as a type of discursive practice in which artists challenge and question the institutions in which art is produced, displayed, and distributed: primarily the museum, the gallery, and the private collection.

Much of the early writing that set out to define institutional critique rightly discusses such practices within larger social and cultural contexts, astutely linking the museum to broader social and political systems of power. However, the notion that these other systems—be they the government, military, marriage, medicine, education, or even the American nuclear family—might be the *object* of institutional critique has not gained much traction in the evaluation of these practices to date. *Take It or Leave It* calls for a broader understanding of the “institution” within such practices, thereby allowing specific discussions of subjectivity to emerge and bringing to the fore issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

The curatorial argument for this broader inclusivity finds its roots in the practices of feminist artists of the early 1970s, like Mary Kelly, Adrian Piper, and Martha Rosler, whose practices grew out of conceptualism but who insisted on inserting subjectivity, psychoanalysis, and an awareness of the impact of mass media into their work. All three could arguably be characterized as engaged in institutional critique, not only because they challenged the museum and the art market through modes of installation and a resistance to the autonomous object, but also because they rigorously took up questions of identity and its formation through societal structures, focusing on such topics as motherhood, the beauty industry, the portrayal of the black male body in the media, war, and civil rights. *Take It or Leave It* is intentionally cross-generational, and foundational work by Kelly, Piper, and Rosler are positioned as profoundly influential to the critically engaged practices of artists who emerged later, such as Tom Burr, Andrea Fraser, Glenn Ligon, and Fred Wilson.

The extraordinarily impactful events of the period—from the AIDS crisis to the Iran-Contra debacle, from the end of the Cold War to the Savings and Loan crisis—compelled artists in the 1980s and 1990s to further articulate how their practices both critiqued art institutions and called for substantial changes to other kinds of social organizations. With this more expansive notion of the institution in play, *Take It or Leave It* includes artists recognized for their desire to upend conventions within the art institution per se, such as Fraser and Wilson, while also highlighting those whose works have excoriated the powerful entities that have failed to provide basic civil rights and equal opportunity. The latter group includes figures such as Jimmie Durham, Robert Gober, Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Cady Noland, and Sue Williams, who have been largely left out of the art historical discussion of institutional critique.

APPROPRIATION

Take It or Leave It also argues that artists more commonly associated with appropriation—many of whom are part of what is now referred to as the “Pictures Generation”—have borrowed their forms and images not simply because of the accessibility of existing materials or as a commentary on the role of the media, but because this practice allowed them to assess and critique social hierarchies and traditions. Barbara Kruger’s work, for example, has challenged systems of power for decades. Louise Lawler and Sherrie Levine have provocatively pushed against ingrained notions of authorship and the largely hidden infrastructure of the art world, suggesting new models for artistic production and interpretation.

CATALOGUE

A comprehensive publication accompanies *Take It or Leave It*, with major essays written by co-curators Anne Ellegood and Johanna Burton. Additional contributors include George Baker, Associate Professor and Vice Chair, History of Art Department, UCLA; Julia Bryan-Wilson, Associate Professor of Art History, University of California, Berkeley; Gavin Butt, Reader of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths, University of London; and Darby English, Starr Director, Research and Academic Program, Clark Art Institute.

The book includes thorough entries on each featured artist written by Ruth Erickson, Leora Morinis, and Corrina Peipon, a detailed chronology, a selected bibliography, and an archival section with reproductions of photos and ephemera drawn from the Fales Library and the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College Library selected by Marvin Taylor and Ann Butler.