world wars, she inserted bold, blocky type derived from advertising into her compositions, both as design elements and for their meaning (Fig. 7.47). The art museum was only one location in which Kruger's work appeared. She sought out public venues and commercial formats, putting her images and slogans on billboards and even department store shopping bags.

Despite the oppositional messages in her images, Barbara Kruger was well incorporated into the art world, the sales gallery, and even advertising, where her work was considered stylish. Indeed, by the mid-1990s, appropriation itself was mocked as a worn-out visual device, as when Amy Adler (b. 1967) photographed her own drawing of Sherrie Levine's appropriation of a photograph by Edward Weston.

CONSTRUCTED REALITIES

In a period of multiple convergences, one of the most fruitful for photographic practice was the hybridization of Conceptual art’s interest in ideas, postmodernism's investigation into visual and verbal signs, and the increased presence of installation art beginning in the late 1970s. The mixture was evident in the widespread practice sometimes referred to as the staged photograph. Interestingly, attempts to create fictions for the camera never acquired an accepted label. Especially in its early years, staging was awkwardly called the “fabricated-to-be-photographed” approach, meaning that a scene was composed mostly, but not always totally, of inanimate objects. Equally ambiguous terms were also tried, such as “the
constructed photograph,” which did not indicate the collage technique, but referred to any scenes assembled for the camera. As early as 1976, American critic A. D. Coleman outlined an extensive history for what he called the “directorial mode,” in which he made the case that contemporary staged photographs had precedents, such as Civil War photographer Alexander Gardner’s deliberate moving of a dead Confederate soldier so as to compose a more richly symbolic image (see Fig. 3.21), or the nineteenth-century stereograph, in which many narrative scenes were enacted as a matter of course (see pp. 82–83).17

Of course, the tableaux vivants orchestrated by nineteenth-century photographers Oscar Rejlander and Henry Peach Robinson (see Figs. 3.97, 3.100) were assembled to be photographed, but the artists’ motives could hardly be more different from those of contemporary picture-makers. Sometimes Rejlander and Robinson could not make the stubborn paper negatives and imprecise lens clearly capture the image they had mentally conceived. Rejlander and Robinson welcomed the hands-on, directorial aspects of composite photography as a way to negate the criticism that photography was witlessly automatic and therefore not an art.

When fabricated-to-be-photographed approaches became widespread in the 1980s, former technical difficulties had long been overcome, and the issue of whether a photograph could be art wasn’t contested. The omnipresence of movies and television, in which a director orchestrates scenes, may have subtly amplified photographers’ desire to direct for the still camera. More to the point, mundane studio work normally demanded staging, rehearsal, and lighting strategies. In particular, advertising photography offered a steady stream of
common was not a philosophy, but a methodology, and, perhaps, a boredom or anger with the limitations of Modernist idioms. Where Modernist photographers combed the visual field for delightful coincidence, poignant metaphors, or abstract patterns, none of which were (or should have been) contrived, the photographers working in the directorial mode conceived and fabricated subjects, disregarding photography’s traditional assignment of finding meaning from the look of the world.

The making of scenes, rather than the taking of scenes, was epitomized in the work of American photographer Sandy Skoglund (b. 1946), who created room-size installations to be viewed in their own right as three-dimensional sculpture, as well as photographs. In her work, exaggerated objects, such as cobalt-blue leaves or safety-orange fish, invade spaces occupied by sense-dulled people stranded in monochrome settings (Fig. 7.50). Skoglund’s work anticipated the partnership between sculpture and photography that pervaded art in the last decades of the twentieth century, ranging from the tongue-in-cheek balancing acts pictured by Swiss artists Peter Fischli (b. 1952) and David Weiss (b. 1946) (Fig. 7.51) to the cool, cerebral black-and-white world pictured by James Casebere (b. 1953) (Fig. 7.52). Large, richly colored and fabricated-to-be-

sophisticated fabricating techniques used to enhance the appeal of products, such as intricate artificial lighting and suggestive, unnatural color.

The lack of an overarching “ism” for staged photographs may owe to the fact that it was not an art movement driven by a core of beliefs, but an approach that interested image-makers with different artistic perspectives and ideological positions. What the fabricators had in
photographed scenes were also made by German artist Thomas Demand (b. 1964). Employing only cardboard and paper, Demand recreated life-size environments that were often based on historic locales pictured in books and newspapers, such as the disorderly Berlin bunker in which Adolf Hitler spent his last days. When Demand has completed a photograph, the cardboard construction is discarded, making the photograph an original work (Fig. 7.53).

Demand's fastidious planning contrasts with the work of Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco (b. 1962), which dwells on fleeting perceptions of art, especially the unintentional presence of sculpture in everyday life. Orozco points to the gracefulness of a melting popsicle, chronicles the brief life of a human breath exhaled on to the polished surface of a piano; he fabricates makeshift scenes to be photographed (Fig. 7.54). With many other late twentieth-century artists who use the camera, Skoglund, Fischli and Weiss, Casebere, Demand, and Orozco do not want to be known principally as photographers, but as artists who work with photography, as well as other media.

Small sculptural scenes, resembling the maquettes architects make as prelinary models, figured heavily in the fabricated-to-be-photographed method. Counterfeit table-top scenarios were favored as a way of indicating falseness, insincerity, and superficial knowledge, as in Irish photographer Michael Boran's (b. 1964) image in which a male doll flees an artificially lighted brick dollhouse (Fig. 7.55). American Laurie Simmons (b. 1949) also works with doll-house-like settings in which plastic figures, almost exclusively women, robotically act out routine incidents of domestic life (Fig. 7.56). When Simmons began making images of males, she continued her concern with authenticity and originality by manipulating ventriloquists' dummies.
GABRIEL OROZCO,
Cats and Watermelons (Gatos y sandías), 1992.
C-type print.

Orozco’s work accentuates the temporary and the ephemeral. He makes fanciful, impromptu sculpture in public spaces, whose momentary existence is recorded with the camera, such as his whimsical grocery-store arrangement of cat food cans on a heap of watermelons.

MICHAEL BORAN,
C-type print.

Boran favors constructed photographs as a means to portray archetypal experience, such as the wish to bolt from constraining circumstances. Here, the character may be attempting to flee domesticity, indicated by the house and the background landscape, which Boran calls a “generic pastoral,” purchased from a model railroad shop. The title refers to a pop song.
LAURIE SIMMONS,
Blonde/Red

Simmons's doll-actors and deadpan enactments of women's roles in society seemed to find a response from a generation that grew up play-acting with Barbie dolls. Her work from the mid-1970s to mid-1980s was largely concerned with female behavior, enacted by the dolls whose poses, gestures, and facial appearances were saturated with clichés drawn from mass media.

TOKIHIRO SATOH, Photo-
Respiration (Breath-graph no. 29), 1988.

After making his large prints, Satoh presents them in Plexiglas boxes that serve as frames, or he suspends the images from the ceiling, as here. In effect, the photograph of a fleeting light sculpture becomes three-dimensional photo-sculpture.
The success of performance art before a live audience during the late twentieth century influenced the conception of staged photographs. For example, starting in the mid-1980s, Japanese photographer Tokihiro Satoh (b. 1957) initiated what might be called ephemeral sculpture or light performance pieces, not conceived for a live audience, but intended solely to be viewed as a photograph (Fig. 7.57). In interior settings, Satoh used projected light, such as a flashlight, and in exterior locations he captured and reflected sunlight with a mirror, all the while moving so quickly that his camera, adjusted for long, slow exposure, could record only twinkles and trails of bright light, not his body. Like Robert Smithson before him, Satoh created transient environments that exist only for the camera. Yet where Smithson tried to stop the flow of time, Satoh wanted his so-called Breathgraphs to suggest time’s progress; he imagined that his pictures intimated the accumulated streams of human energy that had been expended in the settings he photographed.

Famous paintings from the traditional canon became sources for fabricated images. The Life of Christ, as seen in the history of art, inspired several photographers to stage such scenes as the Last Supper and the Crucifixion. In one of his series, the London-born, Nigeria-raised artist Yinka Shonibare (b. 1962), who works in many media, posed himself incongruously in the midst of figures enacting a scene whose setting, gestures, costumes, and colors resemble late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painting (Fig. 7.58). American photographer Joel-Peter Witkin (b. 1939) also mined art history for ideas, occasionally improvising elaborate tableaux recalling familiar paintings in the Western tradition, and then aging the resultant image by scratching


Shonibare poses amidst well-to-do party-goers in a fabricated scene. Despite its nineteenth-century title, the image ironically recalls the eighteenth-century satirical paintings by William Hogarth (1697–1764), in which the black figure would not be an admired and socially prominent individual, but a servant. The photograph may reflect Shonibare’s experience of his high-profile rise to prominence in London art circles during the 1990s.
the negative and antiquing the print’s tone. The aging appearance adds an unsettling, dreamlike effect to his fantastic visions, which are often charged with an unsettling eroticism (Fig. 7.59).

As image-makers began to “make” and then “take” their subjects, they also increased the size and intensity of their pictures. For example, Sotiro’s Breathgraph #22 is 95 1/4” x 77 1/2”. This development was showcased in a 1983 exhibit at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, called Big Pictures. Not only did photographs come to emulate the size of large paintings in museums and galleries, they also acquired deeply saturated, tropically hot colors, more obviously associated with paint than with photographic materials. Sandy Skoglund’s installations and photographs erupt in the piercing colors of acrylic paint.

Similarly, the collages of waste materials gathered together and photographed by British artist Tim Head (b. 1946) concentrate on the eye-catching density of the color used in packaging consumer goods. During the 1980s, Head began gathering discarded mass-produced materials to serve as the basis for his photographs. At once luridly attractive and repugnant, Head’s images of ecological casualty imitate the push-pull of desire and guilt (Fig. 7.60).

**FAMILY PICTURES**

Although staged photographs did not arise as part of a consistent art movement, several motifs recurred among them: the subject of the family, a topic taken up around the world during the late twentieth century. Focus on domestic life intensified, in part because the concept of the ideal family had been rocked by a high divorce rate, picked over in family therapy, and mangled in the popular media, from Roseanne through The Simpsons. During the Reagan administration (1981–88) in the United States, and the years that Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of Britain (1979–90), traditional values, in particular the glorified norm of the white, middle-class family, were enlisted as remedies for a tattered social morality thought to reveal itself in the increase of single-parent families, the rising

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7.19

**JOEL-PETER WITKIN,**
*Las Meninas, New Mexico, 1987, Gelatin silver print.*

Witkin’s image is based on a famous painting by the Spanish artist Diego Velázquez (1599–1660) called Las Meninas (Maids of Honor), depicting a young princess flanked by her maids of honor. Witkin introduces homoerotic overtones through the display of paintings done by the late Renaissance artist Caravaggio (1571–1610), and replaces the princess by an older, more lascivious figure, apparently an amputee.