

## **Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason, 1950-1980**

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New York City, NY - The decades between 1950 and 1980 were beset by upheaval. Military conflict proliferated, while social and political unrest flared around the globe. Among artists, writers, critics, and philosophers, a growing disenchantment with what was perceived as an oppressive rationalism was matched by a mounting interest in fantastic, hallucinatory experiences. Together these developments gave rise to delirious forms of art. Opening September 13, 2017, [\*Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason, 1950–1980\*](#) explores the embrace of incongruity, irrationality, and disorientation among artists living in Europe, South America, and the United States.

“Delirium” is generally defined as a clinical disorder, but in the context of this exhibition it serves as an umbrella concept that includes a range of analogous experiences, all of which flirt with the irrational. The term also applies to works of art, not to artists. In the case of the objects featured in *Delirious*, delirium is leveraged deliberately, through the adoption of particular techniques or through the generation of specific effects that defy logic. Divided into four sections—Vertigo, Excess, Nonsense, and Twisted—the exhibition will include roughly 100 works of art by 62 wide-ranging artists, many of whom otherwise seem to operate at cross-purposes with one another. They include: Antonio Berni, Dara Birnbaum, Tony Conrad, Hanne Darboven, Nancy Grossman, Philip Guston, Dean Fleming, Eva Hesse, Alfred Jensen, Yayoi Kusama, Sol LeWitt, Lee Lozano, Anna Maria Maiolino, Ana Mendieta, Bruce Nauman, Jim Nutt, Hélio Oiticica, Claes Oldenburg, Abraham Palatnik, Howardena Pindell, Mira Schendel, Peter Saul, Carolee Schneeman, Paul Sharits, Robert Smithson, Nancy Spero, Paul Thek, and Stan VanDerBeek, among others. About a third of the exhibition will be drawn from The Met collection. Linked by a distrust of rationality, the selected works alternately simulate and stimulate delirium, straining the limits of both legibility and intelligibility. Ultimately, *Delirious* will ask if it is possible to understand a significant amount of postwar art—even seemingly rational art—as an exercise in calculated absurdity.

Sheena Wagstaff, Leonard A. Lauder Chairman of the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, stated, “The result of five years of research, much of it initially dedicated to the reception of Irish playwright Samuel Beckett among experimental artists, *Delirious* is a focused survey that reconstructs a historical phenomenon of great importance. It is the first exhibition to consider the fascination with irrationality in a holistic way and to ground it in contemporaneous social and political developments.” She continued, “It also speaks to The Met’s intention to organize idea exhibitions—that is, projects that explore parallel developments in a range of countries through a single curatorial rubric.”

In the works featured in this exhibition, delirium assumes disparate guises depending on the artist, object, and period in question. Not only did artists cultivate different varieties of delirium, they also chose to express them in different ways, for different reasons. Delirium might pertain to a work’s form, style, and technique; its perspective and point of view; its content and subject matter; or all of the above. Some artists strove to represent delirium, others to perform it, and others still to induce it: to precipitate vertiginous, hallucinatory states of being in viewers.

*Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason, 1950–1980* is curated by Kelly Baum, Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon Polsky Curator of Contemporary Art in The Met’s Department of Modern and Contemporary Art.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art and supported by the Antoinette Kraushaar Fund.

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