

**Exhibition:** *Objects of Desire: Photography and the Language of Advertising*

**Dates:** September 4–December 18, 2022

**Location:** BCAM, Level 2



(Image captions on page 3)

(Los Angeles, CA—June 27, 2022) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art LACMA presents *Objects of Desire: Photography and the Language of Advertising*, an exhibition exploring the artistic appropriation of advertising techniques by photography-based artists whose innovations expanded the possibilities for photography as creative expression.

*Objects of Desire* traces the artistic manipulation of commercial photography, perhaps the most powerful mainstream visual language. In the 1970s, innovations led to dramatic shifts in the possibilities for photography as creative expression, and artists reworked advertising strategies to challenge the increased commodification of daily life and later to appropriate the command these images hold over the viewer/consumer. By exploiting advertising’s visual vocabulary and adopting its sites and formats, and through rephotography, appropriation, and simulation, artists create a shared photographic language that puts the onus on the viewer to determine what exactly these pictures are asking of us.

“This exhibition explores an underrecognized relationship between commercial and fine art photography. No other medium has such diversity in its application,” said Rebecca Morse, Curator, Wallis Annenberg Photography Department. “The exhibition places commercial photography at its center—examining where artists have imitated its look, appropriated its content, adopted its distribution methods, and generally exploited what has historically belonged to a strain of photography in the service of commerce.”

“Most of the works in this exhibition are drawn from LACMA’s collection, and many of its major pieces from the 1980s and ’90s were acquired at the time of their making,” said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. “We’re pleased to

display these works alongside recent acquisitions and contemporary works to showcase the breadth and depth of the museum's photography collection and our dedication to exhibiting innovative lens-based artwork."

*Objects of Desire* features work by 34 artists, including Adbusters, Lucas Blalock, Victor Burgin, Jo Ann Callis, Sarah Charlesworth, Sara Cwynar, Victoria Fu, Sanja Iveković, Elad Lassry, Roe Ethridge, Robert Heinecken, Barbara Kruger, Carter Mull, Pat O'Neil, Kim Schoen, Sandy Skoglund, Mitchell Syrop, and Hank Willis Thomas, among others. Their work is organized into six themes: Product and Color Photography, The Magazine, Image and Text, Scale, Stock Photography, and Humor. The exhibition includes photographs, video, film, and sculpture, as well as works on view beyond the museum: a billboard by Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel, a bus shelter by Jeffrey Stucker, and a mock advertisement by Chris Burden broadcast on social media.

*Objects of Desire* is accompanied by a catalogue edited by Rebecca Morse, featuring text by Dhyandra Lawson, Lisa Gabrielle Mark, and Rebecca Morse, with an additional feature by Gert Jonkers and Jop van Bennekom.

## **Exhibition Highlights**

### **Sandy Skoglund, Food Still Lifes series, 1978**

Rather than accepting the suffocating parameters of 1970s fine art photography, which prescribed a landscape- or portrait-oriented 8x10-inch black-and-white print framed within a mat and hung on the wall, Sandy Skoglund looked to commercial food photography and liquor advertisements for inspiration. In her series Food Still Lifes, she depicts, among other things, a square chunk of pink, marbled lunch meat sitting on a yellow Formica surface. Within the magazine pages of House Beautiful and Ladies' Home Journal Skoglund found, and was attracted to, the garish color palette of the commercial image and the presentation of subjects straight on and in diffused, overall lighting. She made this work in part to challenge the class system that pitted mass culture against "high art."

### **Sanja Iveković, GEN XX, 1997–2001**

Sanja Iveković was a pioneering figure in the feminist movement of 1970s Yugoslavia. Her work in photomontage, video, and performance explores the role of women in society, using her own life and history as source material. Iveković's GEN XX comprises six black-and-white photographs of women looking directly at the viewer. The artist appropriated almost all of the photographs from advertisements, replacing all of the text, slogans, and product references with names of anti-fascist, female resistance fighters from Nazi-occupied Yugoslavia: Sestre Baković, Anka Butorac, Nada Dimić, Ljubica Gerovac, Dragica Končar, and Nera Šafarić. Each name is

accompanied by details of the woman's charge and sentence. GEN XX suggests that these revolutionary figures should be held up as heroines, and should be as recognizable to us as the most popular models in the world, rather than falling subject to societal amnesia.

### **Hank Willis Thomas, Fair Warning series, 2010**

Hank Willis Thomas's photographic and sculptural works confront issues of identity, media, and the commodification of the individual. In his series Fair Warning, to which the three works in the show belong, Thomas extracted figures from cigarette advertisements and consolidated them on single pages, sometimes in a playful arc, as in *Alive with Pleasure! Chorus Line*, or in a pyramid, as in *Look Normal 1980*. Glamorous African American women, dressed in evening gowns and silky pantsuits, lock eyes with the viewer, all the while smiling happily and kicking up their heels in pleasure. In *Believe It*, a woman glances up admiringly at a man—wearing a gold necklace, a shiny jacket, and sunglasses—whose coolness emanates off the page. Although his cigarette has been removed, we recognize the pose of his hand and naturally equate style and sophistication with smoking.

### **Credit**

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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### **About LACMA**

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of more than 147,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

**Location:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. [lacma.org](http://lacma.org)

**Image caption:** (L–R) Sandy Skoglund, *Luncheon Meat on a Counter*, 1978, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Lynda and Robert M. Shapiro, © Sandy Skoglund, digital image courtesy of the artist; Image from *Toiletpaper* (December 2012), courtesy of the artists and LACMA Balch Art Research Library, © *Toiletpaper* (Maurizio Cattelan and Pierpaolo Ferrari), photo courtesy of *Toiletpaper*; Jo Ann Callis, *Untitled (Jayne Mansfield)*, #8 from the series *Cheap Thrills and Forbidden Pleasures*, 1993, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, © Jo Ann Callis, photo courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

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