

MAURIZIO CATTELAN

All

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Teacher Resource Unit

A NOTE TO TEACHERS

This presentation marks the first time that the entirety of Maurizio Cattelan's work has been assembled into a single exhibition, with nearly 130 works ranging from the late 1980s to the present and borrowed from private and public collections around the world. Long interested in the display of his work as part of his overall practice, Cattelan has a history of responding to the various contexts in which his art is encountered. His survey exhibition at the Guggenheim follows suit with his unorthodox and dramatic site-specific installation in the museum's Frank Lloyd Wright-designed rotunda, created to encapsulate his complete production to date.

This Resource Unit focuses on various aspects of Cattelan's work and provides techniques for exploring both the visual arts and other areas of the curriculum. This guide is also available at guggenheim.org/artscurriculum with images that can be downloaded or projected for classroom use. The images may be used for educational purposes only and are not licensed for commercial applications of any kind. Before bringing your class to the Guggenheim, we invite you to visit the exhibition, read the guide, and decide which aspects of the exhibition are most relevant to your students. For more information on scheduling a visit for your students, please call 212 423 3637.

Although some of the works in the exhibition may not be appropriate for younger students, this Resource Unit focuses on works and concepts that are integral to the curriculum and can be successfully used with students of all ages. As for all exhibitions, it is strongly recommended that educators preview the show prior to student visits.

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Maurizio Cattelan: All

November 4, 2011–January 22, 2012

Hailed simultaneously as a provocateur, prankster, and tragic poet of our times, Maurizio Cattelan has created some of the most unforgettable images in recent contemporary art. His source materials range widely, from popular culture, history, and organized religion to a meditation on the self that is at once humorous and profound. Working in a vein that can be described as hyperrealist, Cattelan creates unsettlingly veristic sculptures that reveal contradictions at the core of today's society. While bold and irreverent, the work is also deadly serious in its scathing cultural critique.

Cattelan's youth in the Italian city of Padua was marked by economic hardship at home, punishment at school, and a string of unfulfilling, menial jobs. These early experiences instilled in him an abiding mistrust of authority and a disdain for the drudgery of labor that haunts much of his early production. He describes his work from the late 1980s and early 1990s as being "about the impossibility of doing something . . . about insecurity, about failure." His pronounced anxiety about not succeeding was manifested in a series of performative escape routes from his artistic obligations. Bereft of ideas for his first solo exhibition in 1989, Cattelan simply closed the gallery and hung up a sign reading *Torno subito*, or "Be back soon." His early contributions to group shows were equally delinquent: in 1992, his participation in an exhibition at the Castello di Rivara near Turin consisted of a rope of knotted bed sheets dangling from an open window (*Una Domenica a Rivara* [A Sunday in Rivara]), while his response to the pressure of exhibiting at the Venice Biennale was to lease his allotted space to an advertising agency, which installed a billboard promoting a new perfume (*Working Is a Bad Job*, 1993).

Cattelan's disruptive and disrespectful gestures have at times taken the form of creative theft and even overtly criminal activity. For an exhibition at the de Appel arts center in Amsterdam, he stole the entire contents of another artist's show from a nearby gallery with the idea of passing it off as his own work (*Another Fucking Readymade*, 1996), until the police insisted he return the loot on threat of arrest. Cattelan's anarchist streak extends to works that revolve around issues of his Italian identity and the tensions of the country's ever-shifting political landscape. In response to a wave of xenophobic sentiment, he formed a soccer team composed entirely of North African immigrants who played in both outdoor competitions and in exhibition settings on an elongated foosball table (*Stadium*, 1991). Their uniforms bore the emblem *Rauss*, which recalled the Nazi phrase *Juden raus*, or "Jews get out."

Cattelan has also turned to his own distinctive features as a mainstay of his iconography, constructing a series of sculptural vignettes that promote his image as an Everyman, playing the part of the fool so that we don't have to. Notable examples include *La Rivoluzione siamo noi* (We are the revolution, 2000), which presents a diminutive Cattelan dangling by his collar from a metal coat rack, impudently dressed in the signature felt suit of German artist Joseph Beuys, and a 2001 installation created for the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam that depicts the artist peering mischievously from a hole in the floor at a gallery of Old Master paintings. Some of Cattelan's surrogates have been more allusive, such *Daddy, Daddy* (2008), an installation first shown in the fountain on the Guggenheim's rotunda floor, that depicts the puppet Pinocchio—another rebellious Italian boy with an oversized nose—floating facedown as if the victim of a tragic tumble from the ramps above.

Although an ironic humor threads much of his work, a profound meditation on mortality forms the core of Cattelan's practice. His recurring use of taxidermy, which presents a state of apparent life premised on actual death, is particularly apt for exploring this thematic concern. Perhaps the most poignant of his anthropomorphic animal scenes is *Bidibidobidiboo* (1996), in which a despairing squirrel has committed suicide in his grimy kitchen. Death stalks the artist's psyche and creeps into all manifestations of his production. With *All* (2007), he created what he described as a "monument to death," a sculpture that would commemorate its unrelenting presence.

Derived from ubiquitous media imagery of fallen bodies, and carved from traditional marble, the nine shrouded figures appear as victims of some unnamed trauma, silently recalling the unconscionable realities of our present-day world.

Among Cattelan's most startling projects is a cycle of lifelike waxworks that portray and contest iconic authority figures. The most incendiary of these works comprise *La Nona Ora* (The ninth hour, 1999), his notorious sculpture of Pope John Paul II felled by a meteorite, and *Him* (2001), a rendering of Adolf Hitler in the scale of a young boy, kneeling preposterously in a pose of supplication. Also included is the sculpture *Frank and Jamie* (2002), in which two New York City policemen are turned upside down and propped against a wall in a posture that has been interpreted as a visual parallel to the sense of vulnerability that permeated the country in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. A more overtly elegiac scene is constructed by *Now* (2004), an effigy of a serene and barefoot John F. Kennedy lying in state, a martyr to a shattered American idealism seen from the perspective of a disillusioned present.

Cattelan's career resists summation through a traditional exhibition. Many of his early, action-based meditations on failure would be impossible to reconstruct, and his singular, iconic objects function best in isolation. *Maurizio Cattelan: All* is thus a full-scale admission of the inadvisability of viewing his work in the context of a conventional chronological retrospective. Characteristically, the artist resisted this model, creating instead a site-specific installation that cunningly celebrates its futility. The exhibition brings together virtually everything the artist has produced since 1989 and presents the works en masse, strung haphazardly from the oculus of the Guggenheim's rotunda. Perversely encapsulating Cattelan's career to date in an overly literal, three-dimensional catalogue raisonné, the installation lampoons the idea of comprehensiveness. The exhibition is an exercise in disrespect: the artist has hung up his work like laundry to dry. Another analogy, one cited by Cattelan, is the juvenile propensity for stringing up the family cat, an inherently cruel and decidedly naughty act. Like all of his individual objects, the new installation resonates with multiple interpretive valences. Cattelan has certainly used the motif of suspension before, most notably in the poetically elongated sculpture created from a taxidermied horse, *Novecento* (20th century, 1997), but here it takes on epic proportions. Hoisted by rope as if on a gallows, the objects explicitly reveal the undertone of death that pervades the artist's work. In total, the installation looks like a mass execution, and constitutes, for its duration, an overarching, tragic artwork in its own right.

—Nancy Spector, Deputy Director and Chief Curator, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

The Leadership Committee for *Maurizio Cattelan: All* is gratefully acknowledged.

< ABOUT THE ARTIST >

Maurizio Cattelan was born in Padua, Italy, in 1960. His father was a truck driver and his mother a cleaner. Cattelan dreamed of escaping his lower-class life, but due to his mother's illness, he quit school at age 17 to contribute to the family income and help raise his two younger sisters. He took his remaining high-school classes at night.

Cattelan held part-time jobs but had difficulty following the rules. At 13, he was fired, from a shop at the local parish that sold religious trinkets and statuettes, for drawing moustaches on figurines of Saint Anthony. Cattelan recalls, "When the priests found them, they came straight to me, they didn't even ask the other twenty kids who were working with me. Basically they knew it had to be Maurizio's fault. So they came up to me and said 'Maurizio. Why!'"

When he left home at 18, he found employment at a laundry but was quickly dismissed. "They found me washing my own laundry at work. They said, 'What are you doing here?' And I said, 'Washing! Washing my laundry! It's my uniform! Where else am I going to do it?' They fired me."¹ The last in this succession of tedious jobs was as an assistant medical technician, working in a morgue. He came to despise the drudgery of menial labor and planned early on to avoid it at all costs.

During this time Cattelan began to experiment with a very personal, idiosyncratic form of



industrial design, but the decision to pursue a full-time career as an artist only happened, he claims, after encountering a self-portrait by Michelangelo Pistoletto (b. 1933) in a small gallery in Padua. He explains, "I was in Padua, walking to work at the hospital—I was a nurse there—and I saw in the window of this small gallery works by Pistoletto. They looked interesting, so I went in and asked the staff what they were about. They said, 'Are you interested in learning about art?' Then they gave me a few art history books to read. Five years later, I made my first piece."² He was 25 years old at the time and refers to this incident as the "epiphany" that changed the course of his life.

Cattelan, who has no formal training and considers himself an "art worker" rather than an artist, has often been characterized as the court jester of the art world.³ This label speaks not only to his taste for irreverence and the absurd, but also his questioning of socially ingrained norms and hierarchies.

In the late 1990s, Cattelan began to create hyperrealistic figurative sculptures. Though the artist has repeatedly used his own image in works of self-mockery and self-effacement, nobody is exempt from Cattelan's critique. In *La Nona Ora* (The ninth hour, 1999), a wax replica of Pope John Paul II is seen struck down

by a meteor. In *Him* (2001), a boy with the face of an adult Adolf Hitler kneels on the floor.

Cattelan's work has been included in every Venice Biennale since 1993 and in major venues worldwide, including exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1998), and the Tate Gallery, London (1999), but Cattelan insists, "I really don't consider myself an artist. I make art, but it's a job. I fell into this by chance. Someone once told me that [art] was a very profitable profession, that you could travel a lot and meet a lot of girls. But this is all false; there is no money, no travel, no girls. Only work. I don't really mind it, however. In fact, I can't imagine any other option. There is, at least, a certain amount of respect. This is one profession in which I can be a little bit stupid, and people will say, 'Oh, you are so stupid; thank you, thank you for being so stupid.'"⁴

My work can be divided into different categories. One is my early work, which was really about the impossibility of doing something. This is a threat that still gives shape to many of my actions and work. I guess it was really about insecurity, about failure. We can have a chapter here called "Failure."

< THE AESTHETICS OF FAILURE >

For Cattelan, the art world *is* the analyst's couch. Since the beginning of his career as an artist during the late 1980s, he has freely enacted his vulnerabilities, giving them physical form and a distinct narrative. Without being directly autobiographical, Cattelan's early work drew on his own emotional and psychological experiences. His goal, however, was not to invoke specific events or individuals but rather to summon up states of mind or emotions. While the work is not directly *about* him, he uses himself as a character whose foibles and travails invoke an empathetic identification on the part of the viewer.

Motivated at first by an almost paralyzing fear of disgrace, Cattelan created what can be characterized as an aesthetic of failure—an attitude that serves to manage expectations and make excuses before the fact. For his first solo exhibition in 1989, Cattelan was so disappointed with his production that he posted on the gallery's locked front door a simple placard that read *Torno subito*, or "Be back soon." This everyday shop sign reveals the artist's discomfort with the critical judgment that comes with showing work in a public exhibition.

Cattelan has stated, "I have been a failure for most of my life. I couldn't keep a job for more



Untitled, 1997. Taxidermied ostrich and wood chips, 124.5 x 134.6 x 50.8 cm. Photo © DR, courtesy François Pinault Foundation

than two months. I couldn't study: school was a torture. And as long as I had to respect rules, I was a disaster. Initially art was just a way to try a new set of rules. But I was very afraid of failure in art as well."

In an untitled work from 1997, a taxidermied ostrich buries his head in the gallery floor, unwilling to participate in the exhibition and hiding in full view. The work was shown in the exhibition *Fatto in Italia* (Made in Italy) at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, prominently signaling the growing significance of contemporary Italian artists. Cattelan expressed his feelings toward the recognition with an image of ambivalence. The ostrich elicits a sense of vulnerability. The flightless bird is in the gallery space seems to wish it were elsewhere, an attitude that may also have applied to the artist. Without a pedestal, the sculpture is stripped of any monumentality, and the viewer is transported into the surreal space of the artwork.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Untitled*, 1997

- ▶ Ask students to describe this sculpture and any associations they have with it. What appears to be happening here?
- ▶ Cattelan uses the ostrich as a metaphor to express the emotions that he was experiencing about showing his work. When people are “burying their heads in the sand,” it means that they are trying to ignore a dangerous or uncomfortable situation. In this case, the artist is trying to avoid facing the fact that he is exhibiting his work. If your students were to symbolize themselves as an animal, what animal would they choose? Why? What pose would their animal personas take? Why?
- ▶ Once Cattelan conceives an idea, the artist delegates the fabrication of his works to others. “I never even use my hands to create my work, just my ear glued to the phone. . . . Imagine: I never took a chisel in my hands, never even had a studio.”⁵

When we think of traditional sculptural methods, many envision an artist working with his hands and tools in materials like marble, clay, or metal to craft a three-dimensional work and not ordering a taxidermied ostrich over the phone. Many contemporary artists leave the manufacturing of their work to others. What do you think about this method of production?

- ▶ Have the class visualize Cattelan on the telephone describing the work that he wants made. Write, then act out a monologue (or dialogue) in which Cattelan describes, as clearly as possible, how he is envisioning this work and what will need to be done to realize it.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE) may have started the myth of ostriches burying their heads in the ground when he wrote that the birds “imagine when they have thrust their head and neck into a bush, that the whole of their body is concealed.”⁶ Though this phenomenon is not real, it can be a useful way to describe people who ignore the truth and refuse to accept reality.

We often use animals as metaphors or symbols for both positive and negative human behaviors and feelings. By themselves or in a group, students can write down as many metaphors using animal references as they can. They can use popular notions, like being a chicken or a pig, or invent new ones. Encourage them to think about which parts of the animal’s behavior they associate with various human qualities.

- In his work, Cattelan gives voice to an emotion that most of us have experienced, but few are willing to acknowledge: performance anxiety, more commonly known as stage fright. This emotion is often defined as a fear of speaking or performing in front of a group.

Many entertainers, including Laurence Olivier, Barbra Streisand, Carly Simon, Rod Stewart, and opera star Renée Fleming, have suffered from stage fright. Similarly, a 2001 Gallup poll noted that 40 percent of American adults are afraid of public speaking.⁷

Cattelan has, in part, made this work to acknowledge his discomfort. Have students write about a time when they were concerned about disappointing themselves or others by their performance. If they are comfortable sharing this experience, ask them to do so. If not, they can think about the experience and how they might deal with the situation differently (or similarly) in the future.

- Cattelan claims, “I am interested in people’s reactions, though: a work of art is not complete without the comments, the words, and ideas of whoever happens to be in front of it. They are the ones who create the work. I don’t do anything: art doesn’t exist without points of view and different interpretations.”⁸ How does the class react to this work? What comments, words, and ideas does it elicit?

The true history of the work is the history of a difficulty repeating itself. I've also started to think about the difficulty of being Italian, having a heritage, relationships with other artists, being a member of a community with a history.

< POLITICAL DIMENSIONS >

Cattelan claims that his art merely holds up a mirror to society without commentary or judgment. Though it often touches cultural, political, and social nerves with unflinching honesty, the work offers no opinion or call to action. It simply reflects, he asserts, what he witnesses around him. “I actually think that reality is far more provocative than my art. . . . I just take it; I’m always borrowing pieces—crumbs really—of everyday reality. If you think my work is very provocative, it means that reality is extremely provocative, and we just don’t react to it. Maybe we no longer pay attention to the way we live in the world. . . . We are anesthetized.” Despite these claims to indifference, and his work’s comedic air, Cattelan’s art often offers strong critiques of political events or developments on the world stage. Much of his early work revolved around his Italian identity and the country’s ever-shifting political landscape, changing populace, and stagnant national economy. Cattelan’s awareness of Italy’s tarnished past, with its fascist leanings and xenophobic tendencies, has been the focus of a number of works that

harshly lampoon contemporary manifestations of these trends. Whereas at the beginning of the 20th century, Italians had been among the largest groups to migrate to other countries, as the century came to a close, large numbers of immigrants from North Africa and Eastern Europe were arriving in Italy as refugees, and racism, not previously evident in Italy, became a severe problem.⁹

In the early 1990s, Cattelan founded a soccer team made up of North African immigrants. In artworks and performances with the team, Cattelan alluded to contemporary racial tensions and xenophobia toward immigrants while exploiting the institution of the European soccer team as both a capitalist money generator and vehicle for national aspirations. A.C. Forniture Sud FC (Southern Suppliers FC [Football Club]) was sponsored by a fictional transport company called RAUSS (derived from a Nazi slogan that means “get out”).

In 1991, Cattelan produced *Stadium*, a foosball table that accommodates 11 players on each side, and orchestrated a live foosball match pitting his team against an all-white group of northern Italians. Athletic, uniformed players hunched over the long, narrow tabletop provided a comical sight, but the makeup of the teams and the manipulation of the wooden figures suggested serious world politics. Now shown as a stand-alone sculpture with several balls on the table at once, the viewer is invited to interact with *Stadium*, retaining the original project’s spirit of communal play.



Stadium, 1991. Wood, acrylic, steel, paper, and plastic, 100.3 x 651 x 120 cm. Photo: Fausto Fabbri

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Stadium*, 1991

- ▶ Ask the class to look carefully at this work. In what ways is it familiar? How has the artist altered the way this object is usually constructed?
- ▶ If your students have ever played foosball, they should describe the experience. How did they feel about their opponent?

Show: *Cesena 47 – A.C. Forniture Sud 12*, 1991



Cesena 47 – A.C. Forniture Sud 12, 1991. Black-and-white photograph, 120 x 190 cm. Edition of 2

- ▶ Although this work is three-dimensional, it is not exactly a sculpture for it is intended to be used. How does seeing the photograph inform your students' understanding of this work?
- ▶ Cattelan uses this foosball competition as a metaphor for groups that band together against each other. Does your class agree or disagree that sports teams can be compared to other social affiliations? In what ways do sports competitions mirror political, class, or social associations within society?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Games are a great way to understand different cultures. They often show a society's aims or moral values. One infamous game that showed its culture's values is *Juden Raus!* (Jews out!), which advanced the Nazi policy of racial hatred. This board game, designed for families to play together, was introduced in 1936 in Dresden, and the object was to deport as many Jews as possible to Palestine.

Decades later, Cattelan outfitted his soccer team with uniforms bearing the word *Rauss*, which not so subtly recalled the Nazi-inspired phrase *Juden raus*. Xenophobia rose in Europe in the 1990s because of shaky economies and increasing immigration, inaugurating ultra right-wing political parties and skinhead movements in Austria, France, Germany, and Italy. Students can research this time in European history and the circumstances that gave rise to this political climate and discuss the historical parallels that Cattelan alluded to by using this reference. Then design a game that teaches a positive, rather than divisive message.

- In the United States, passions about immigration also run high, largely connected to undocumented Latino immigrants. The PBS documentary series, *The New Americans*, explores the immigrant experience through their personal stories as well as common misperceptions that often result in suspicion and discrimination. Test one's immigration IQ at pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/quiz.html.
- In 1945 George Orwell published an essay, "The Sporting Spirit," in which he examined the effect nationalism plays on sport. Orwell argued that the competition of sporting events triggers violence between groups rather than good will and sportsmanship. He stated, "Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting."¹⁰ Have your class read Orwell's essay and discuss it. Do your students agree or disagree with Orwell's point of view? How does Cattelan's work relate to Orwell's essay?

*My aim is to be as open and as incomprehensible as possible.
There has to be a perfect balance between open and shut.*¹¹

< SELF-PORTRAIT >



Super Us, 1998 (detail). 50 acetate sheets, 29.8 x 21 cm each

For an artist who consistently claims to be without ideas, as is the case with Cattelan, self-portraiture is a logical mode: one need not look beyond one's own face to find material. In Cattelan's early work, his presence was implied but never literally represented, but by the late 1990s, a battery of lookalikes, mini-mes, doubles, and surrogates began to populate his work. He has plastered gallery walls with 500 painted latex masks of his face; pictured himself in miniature on a bookcase, gazing absently into the abyss; and been photographed rolling around on the floor like a panting dog. *Charlie* (2003), depicting a boyhood version of himself, sped around the grounds of the Venice Biennale on a radio-operated, motorized tricycle, narrowly missing visitors. This juvenile iteration of the artist having the time of his life both annoyed and entertained visitors to the exhibition.

First created in 1992, the self-portrait *Super Us* also demonstrates Cattelan's irreverent approach to this type of work. It consists of

multiple portraits of Cattelan produced by police-composite-sketch artists and based on accounts submitted by friends and acquaintances. The results are a record of the varying impressions that he had made on those who provided the descriptions. Beyond portraying the self as a network of other people's appraisals, Cattelan's goal was also to visualize the way in which our perceptions of others can never form a complete picture. The work provides 50 different views of the artist, presenting a multiple and fractured self rather than a unified, integrated whole. Cattelan states, "That piece was really about how people around you perceive you in different ways than how you really are. So I was thinking about visualizing the idea of the self. The drawings really looked like me, but at the same time they were like cartoons. They were terrific. I don't know if it was a fluke."¹²

A more recent work, *We* (2010) is a double self-portrait of the artist that relies on scale shifts, doubling, and theatrical presentation to present a surreal, psychological depiction. Wearing tailored suits and well-made but scuffed shoes, the similar, but not identical, three-foot-tall likenesses lie on a small wooden bed covered with delicately embroidered bedding. Without touching, they stare blankly into space. The work depicts the artist much as he looks today, if not a little older. These identical, yet subtly different twins, have different facial expressions. As with many of Cattelan's pieces, the work is both clever and mysterious, a puzzle you can't solve.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Super Us*, 1998

- ▶ Ask the class to describe this work. What do your students notice?

These sketches were all done by a police-sketch artist, a person specially trained to create likenesses based on verbal descriptions of a person's facial characteristics. The subject of all of these drawings is the artist, Maurizio Cattelan, based on information provided by his friends and family. What characteristics are common to many of these images? Which characteristics are limited to only a few?

- ▶ Cattelan states, "That piece was really about how people around you perceive you in different ways than how you really are." Do students agree or disagree with this statement? Whose perception is more valid, descriptions from 50 people who know you well or your internal perception of yourself? Explain.

Show: *We*, 2010

- ▶ After surveying the art included in the 2011 Venice Biennale, *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith highlighted works that impressed her, including *We*, and invited readers to add their impressions in six words or less. Each student should brainstorm a list of six words; then as a class, see which six occur most frequently. Compare the words selected by the class with those posted at nytimes.com/interactive/arts/design/2011-venice-biennale.html#/2 and add your impressions.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- To create *Super Us* (1992), Cattelan asked an expert in police-composite sketches, whom he had never met, to create 50 drawings of the artist based on descriptions given by his friends and acquaintances. To make these images, trained artists draw, sketch, or paint after communicating with a witness or crime victim who describes the suspect. Though technology has improved, this process still requires interpreting the spoken word and drawing skills.

Try this exercise, which has both writing and drawing components and some similarities to Cattelan's process, with your students.

1. Have each student write his or her name on separate small pieces of paper. Place the names into a paper bag. Each student takes a name from the bag but does not divulge the identity of the person selected.
 2. Each student writes a careful facial description from memory of the student he or she has chosen without naming the person.
 3. The descriptions are collected and then randomly distributed, so that each student has an anonymous description. Students now draw an image solely from the written account. When the drawings are complete, display them. Do any bear a resemblance to the students in the class? Discuss the process of creating these works and the challenges encountered.
- Cattelan's double self-portrait, *We* (2010), makes one wonder about the artist's intent and message. Why might he depict himself in this way?
 - Although most of us do not have the means to create an exact likeness of ourselves as a three-dimensional wax figure, a digital camera can help students create a self-portrait. Like *We*, this work can be as personally symbolic or mysterious as they want.



We, 2010 (detail). Polyester resin, polyurethane, rubber, paint, human hair, fabric, and wood, 68 x 148 x 78.7 cm. Edition of 3. Photo: Zeno Zotti

I never purposely decide to create a scandal, to provoke. . . . Images sometimes manage to anticipate the future, and maybe that's what scandalizes the public—not to recognize themselves in what they see.

< FROM DISRESPECT TO ICONOCLASM >

Cattelan's early reputation in the art world as a troublemaker was fostered by his seeming lack of respect for all forms of authority. His initial admission that his art focused on "the ironic-disobedient-childish aspects of [his] personality" has extended into a long-standing professional impertinence. His work can be viewed as moving from one act of insubordination to another, with each project exhibiting increasing amounts of complexity.

An example of Cattelan's humorous commentary about the commodification of culture crystallized in an intervention at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, in 1998 where Cattelan explored the concept of the artist as mascot. He identified Pablo Picasso as the museum's most famous artist since he is often hailed as the father of modernism and is well represented in its collection. For the run of the show, an actor dressed as Picasso in a large molded head mask and the artist's striped boat-neck shirt occupied the galleries. This Picasso behaved like an amusement-park mascot, greeting crowds, posing for photographs, and signing autographs. The presence of the iconic character called attention to the fact that MoMA, like other major tourist attractions, is an international cultural destination and engages in self-promotion, from logo-stamped merchandise to affiliations with iconic individuals. The performance also highlighted the phenomenon of the glorified celebrity artist



Untitled, 1998. Polyester resin, paint, fabric, and leather, 217.2 x 139.7 x 59.7 cm. Edition of 2. Photo: Thomas Greisel

and the degree to which art history idolizes such figures.

This performative work (the show's only element) exposed what by the mid-1990s had become a growing correlation between museums and entertainment centers, where content is geared toward the lowest common denominator. The presence of Cattelan's Picasso as a friendly face, an inviting host, resembled those cartoon characters come-to-life at Disneyland, an emblem for lowbrow, wholesome amusement. Cattelan recognized his own complicity in the phenomenon: the more popular his own exhibition (and it was much loved by the public), the greater the risk to the museum and the artist of seeming to "dumb down" their content to a point of no return.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Untitled*, 1998

- ▶ As a class, look carefully at this photograph. What do you notice? What aspects of it seem familiar? Are there parts of it that are puzzling?
- ▶ One usually sees this type of large puppet as a cartoon character at an amusement park or a team mascot at a sports match. Instead Cattelan has created a puppet of Pablo Picasso, the most famous modern artist, cavorting around MoMA. How does changing the character and setting influence the impact and meaning of this work?
- ▶ Cattelan expressed surprise that the museum was willing to go along with his idea. Have students imagine they are the exhibition curator and Cattelan proposes this project. What would their responses be? What concerns might they have about providing a space for this work?
- ▶ Cattelan has admitted that his works are rooted in “the ironic-disobedient-childish aspects of [his] personality.” Does this work embody any of these characteristics? Explain.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Although Cattelan admits that his relationship to museums is symbiotic since they help further his career as an artist, they have not escaped his caustic, probing wit. “Contemporary art will never achieve the audience of football, pop music or television, so I think we should stop comparing its possible area of influence to that of big mass-media events. New buildings such as the Museo Guggenheim in Bilbao, as well as many recent international exhibitions, play inside the logic of the spectacle; they attract a large number of people as ‘artistic’ Disneylands. Today, sensationalism has replaced the critic’s knowledge of reality; the laws of the market are stronger than the efforts to fight against singular thought. We live in the empire of marketing, spectacle and seduction, so one of the roles of artists and curators is to deconstruct those strategies, to resist their logic, to use them, and/or find new means of activism against them.”¹³

In the statement above, and in his work, Cattelan criticizes museums for embracing commercial marketing strategies to attract visitors. Does your class agree or disagree with Cattelan’s point of view?

- The irony of *Untitled* (1998) is caused by encountering the unexpected. Irony is defined as “a manner of organizing a work so as to give full expression to contradictory or complementary impulses, attitudes, etc., especially as a means of indicating detachment from a subject, theme, or emotion.”¹⁴ Brainstorm other mismatches of character and setting and share the possibilities as a class.
- Although Cattelan is clearly referencing the animated characters that one encounters at a theme park or sporting event, large puppets are not only used in commercial ventures, but also as part of religious and cultural festivals and processions around the world, including those in Brazil, India, Mexico, and Vietnam. In Cattelan’s native Italy, the town of Viareggio holds an annual carnival that features papier-mâché floats, and oversized puppets that parade along the promenade. Students can research these traditions and share them with the class.



Hollywood, 2001. Scaffold, aluminum, and halogen headlights, 23.35 x 166.2 x 9 m. Installation view: *Hollywood* (special project for the Venice Biennale), Palermo, Sicily, June 10–November 4, 2001. Photo: Attilio Maranzano

*I tried to overlap two opposite realities, Sicily and Hollywood: after all, images are just projections of desire, and I wanted to shade their boundaries. It might be a parody, but it's also a tribute. . . . There is something hypnotic in Hollywood: it's a sign that immediately speaks about obsessions, failures, and ambitions.*¹⁵

◀ SPECTACLE CULTURE AND THE MEDIATED IMAGE ▶

For the 2001 Venice Biennale, Cattelan erected a replica of the iconic Hollywood sign—made of 500 tons of steel, iron, and concrete¹⁶—on top of the municipal garbage dump in Palermo, Sicily. In doing so, he displaced an image associated with dreams of the glamorous movie industry to a gritty and decidedly unglamorous locale. As he explained, “It’s like spraying stardust over the Sicilian landscape: it’s a cut and paste dream.”¹⁷ On second glance, however, both cities share some commonalities. Palermo and Los Angeles are both major metropolises, southern in their geographic orientation and relatively parched. Both are stricken with economic problems and urban unrest, with racial tensions in Los Angeles and organized crime in Palermo being defining factors in each city’s public profile. In fact, like Hollywood, Sicily has captured the imagination of many illustrious feature-film directors.

Installed only for a brief period of time, Cattelan’s replica of the Hollywood sign was the biennale’s first contribution ever presented outside Venice. Cattelan chartered a plane to bring some collectors, critics, and curators from Venice to experience the work in person. Most

viewers, however, have only seen the work in photographs.

Cattelan understands and exploits the capacity of images to seduce, provoke, and disrupt. From the beginning of his career, he has created sculptures, and produced events with their dissemination as photographic images in mind. He has a highly developed editorial eye and has assimilated the tactics of advertising and commercial photography, so prevalent in our media-saturated culture. He judges the success of a work by how well it translates into a picture and how well the picture is reproduced and transmitted by the media. His sculptures can be effectively adapted into the pictorial realm, and their impact is not diminished when they are illustrated in print. The images manage to have the same intellectual and emotional impact as the sculptures do in person. Cattelan has said, “Today we mostly see art through photos and reproductions. So in the end it almost doesn’t matter where the actual piece is. Sooner or later it’s gonna end up in your head, and that’s when things get interesting. I’m more interested in brains and memories than in site-specific works.”¹⁸

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Hollywood*, 2001

- ▶ Have your students ever seen this sign before? What associations do they have with this image?
- ▶ Although this may look like the famous Hollywood sign in California, a symbol of the movie industry, it is actually a replica that Cattelan had built over a garbage dump in Palermo. Landmarks are so interwoven with the sites they occupy that we rarely think about one without the other—the Empire State Building and New York or the Eiffel Tower and Paris—but Cattelan's *Hollywood* makes us think about what happens when a landmark is relocated. Cattelan says that his intent was to “[spray] stardust over the Sicilian landscape.” Did he succeed? How does knowing that this work is a re-creation in another place change its meaning?
- ▶ For generations people have traveled the world to visit original works of art in person, but Cattelan creates his work with the knowledge that many will only see it as a photograph in magazines and newspapers or online. He has said, “Today we mostly see art through photos and reproductions. So in the end it almost doesn't matter where the actual piece is. Sooner or later it's gonna end up in your head, and that's when things get interesting. I'm more interested in brains and memories than in site-specific works.” What is the class's response to Cattelan's statement?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- As a class, brainstorm a list of all the landmarks you can think of. Once the list is created, analyze what characteristics and attributes need to be present to deem something a landmark.
- Landmarks can be manmade, like buildings and bridges, or natural sites, like a tree or mountain peak, and have special significance because of their history, construction, or long association with a location. Landmarks help identify a place and give it a unique identity.

What landmarks are associated with your city or neighborhood? What qualities make them landmarks? What associations do they hold? Have students draw or photograph a neighborhood landmark and then create a picture postcard. On the back, they can tell the story of the landmark selected and its importance to your community.
- Cattelan's work is created with the knowledge that most people will see it reproduced in print and/or on the Web. Students should select something that is important to them, perhaps an item they made or own. They should photograph it so that the image conveys their relationship to the object and then compare the photo to the original object. What qualities do they think were captured? What was lost in the reproduction?
- The Hollywood sign in California has undergone its own set of transformations. Now a famous landmark, it was erected in 1923 as an advertisement for a real-estate development and originally read “Hollywoodland.” It was not intended to be permanent, but with the rise of the American cinema in Los Angeles, it became an internationally recognized symbol of the movie industry. The website, hollywoodsign.com, features a 24-7 webcam, illustrated history, and suggestions for how to get the best photos.

This resource unit for educators is adapted from essays and entries contained in the exhibition catalogue, Nancy Spector, *Maurizio Cattelan: All* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2011).

RESOURCES

Books

Bonami, Francesco, Nancy Spector, and Barbara Vanderlinden. *Maurizio Cattelan*. London: Phaidon, 2000. Revised and reformatted edition (2003) includes interview of Cattelan by Alma Ruiz and new text by Massimiliano Gioni.

Cattelan, Maurizio. *Die/Die More/Die Better/Die Again*. Paris: Three Star Books, 2008. (English and German)

———. *The Three Cattelan*. Paris: Three Star Books, 2010. Translated by Bram Opstelten.

Maurizio Cattelan: Is There Life Before Death? Exh. cat. Houston: Menil Collection, 2010.

Spector, Nancy. *Maurizio Cattelan: All*. Exh. cat. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2011.

Verzotti, Giorgio. *Maurizio Cattelan*. Translated by Marguerite Shore. Milan: Edizioni Charta, 1997. Revised and updated reprint, 1999. (English and Italian)

Articles

Morton, Tom. "Infinite Jester." *Frieze* (London), no. 94 (October 2005), pp. 150–57, cover. Also available at http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/infinite_jester. Reprinted as "Maurizio Cattelan: Infinite Jester." In *The Artist's Joke*. Edited by Jennifer Higgie. Documents of Contemporary Art (London: Whitechapel; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 205–11.

Robecchi, Michele. "Maurizio Cattelan." *Interview* (New York), 39, no. 5, June/July 2009, pp. 63–65. Also available at <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/maurizio-cattelan/3>.

Multimedia

Art Safari, DVD. Directed by Ben Lewis. UK: Bergman Pictures/BBC, 2002.

Fascism: The Legacy of Hate. Video. Montgomery, Ala.: Teaching Tolerance, 2000. <http://www.tolerance.org>. This 40 minute video examines the recent popularity of ultra right-wing political parties and skinhead movements in Austria, France, Germany, and Italy. Grades 9 to 12.

"Maurizio Cattelan—Artist's Works," Galerie Perrotin, http://www.perrotin.com/artiste-Maurizio_Cattelan-2.html.

NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the artist are from the exhibition catalogue, *Maurizio Cattelan: All*.

- ¹ "Nancy Spector in Conversation with Maurizio Cattelan," in Francesco Bonami, Nancy Spector, Barbara Vanderlinden, and Massimiliano Gioni, *Maurizio Cattelan*, 2nd ed. (London: Phaidon, 2003), p. 31.
- ² Franklin Sirmans, "Maurizio Cattelan: Image Maker," in *Maurizio Cattelan: Is There Life Before Death?*, exh. cat. (Houston: Menil Collection, 2010), p. 55.
- ³ "Maurizio Cattelan," Guggenheim Museum Collection Online, accessed September 28, 2011, http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/show-full/bio/?artist_name=Maurizio+Cattelan&page=1&f=Name&cr=1.
- ⁴ "Nancy Spector in Conversation with Maurizio Cattelan," p. 9.
- ⁵ Andrea Bellini, "An Interview with Maurizio Cattelan," *Sculpture* 24, no. 7 (September 2005), http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag05/sept_05/webspecs/cattelanenglish.shtml.
- ⁶ Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History of Pliny*, trans. John Bostock and Henry Thomas Riley (London: H. G. Bohn, 1855–57), p. 479.
- ⁷ Patrick Enright, "Pulling Back the Curtain on Stage Fright: Does Your Mind Go Blank in the Spotlight? Blame Biology, Experts Say," [msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20631646/ns/health-mental_health/t/pulling-back-curtain-stage-fright), http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20631646/ns/health-mental_health/t/pulling-back-curtain-stage-fright.
- ⁸ Bellini, "An Interview with Maurizio Cattelan."
- ⁹ Francesco Bonami, "Static on the Line: The Impossible Work of Maurizio Cattelan," in Bonami, Spector, Vanderlinden, and Gioni, *Maurizio Cattelan*, p. 54.
- ¹⁰ George Orwell, "The Sporting Spirit," *London Tribune*, December 1945. Also available at http://www.http://orwell.ru/library/articles/spirit/english/e_spirit.
- ¹¹ Sophie Arie, "'I Don't Do Anything. I Just Eat Images': Maurizio Cattelan Fills Galleries with Jokes and Dead Animals. Now People Are Taking Him Seriously—and He Doesn't Like It." *Guardian*, June 23, 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2004/jun/23/art>.
- ¹² "Nancy Spector in Conversation with Maurizio Cattelan," p. 32.
- ¹³ "I Want to Be Famous—Strategies for Successful Living: Interview with Barbara Casavecchia 1999," in Bonami, Spector, Vanderlinden, and Gioni, *Maurizio Cattelan*, pp. 133–36.
- ¹⁴ Dictionary.com, s.v. "Irony," accessed September 28, 2011, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/irony>.
- ¹⁵ LACMA Collections Online, <http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=focus:id=159246;type=101>.
- ¹⁶ Massimiliano Gioni, "Maurizio Cattelan: Rebel with a Pose," in Bonami, Spector, Vanderlinden, and Gioni, *Maurizio Cattelan*, p. 183.
- ¹⁷ "Maurizio Cattelan | Hollywood Landing in Sicily," <http://www.postmedia.net/cattelan/hollywood.htm>.
- ¹⁸ Sirmans, "Maurizio Cattelan: Image Maker," p. 23.

LANDMARK

A structure (as a building) of unusual historical and usually aesthetic interest; especially one that is officially designated and set aside for preservation.

TAXIDERMY

The art of preparing, stuffing, and mounting the skins of animals and especially vertebrates.

VENICE BIENNALE

A major contemporary art exhibition that takes place once every two years in Venice, Italy.

XENOPHOBIA

Fear and hatred of anything or anyone that is strange or foreign.