

Julie Mehretu Transcript

Julie Mehretu: My name is Julie Mehretu. I'm most interested in the work being made after the war, when things feel so dehumanized. So angst is a part of that—and desperation. But there's also this other kind of light possibility of invention of something else. And it's also about creating pictures and these paintings from within this moment of struggle.

Narrator: In her presentation, *Cry Gold and See Black*, artist-curator Mehretu selected works that contemplate the artistic response to trauma or catastrophe, especially in the post–World War II era.

Julie Mehretu: There's this kind of aspect of confusion, but it's also . . . there was this insistence on possibility. What could be made in this moment of cognitive confusion?

Narrator: Mehretu sees much of that confusion manifested in depictions of the fragmented body, which represent greater ideas of personal and societal turmoil. You'll see that in the work of artists Francis Bacon and Jean Dubuffet, who were active in the 1940s and 50s, as well as African American artist David Hammons, who is working today.

Julie Mehretu: The body has become really interesting to me—the disembodied parts of bodies and how that's been represented through photography and through performance and through ideas around representation.

I was interested in different ways of visualizing the figure in space. But then also there's an undercurrent of the psychological dynamics around experiencing violence.

Narrator: Mehretu believes the moment we are living in now hearkens back to past periods of upheaval and shares similar themes, tensions, and struggles.

Julie Mehretu: Things are shifting globally and politically in ways that we don't understand, and we don't have a way to really negotiate and make sense of what's happening on a much grander scale, politically, right now. Where we are at the moment, there's a different challenge to the powers of balance, and things feel really unstable. At the same time you see a lot of possibility and a different type of future that can emerge from it that's also kind of interesting.

Narrator: In selecting works by artists from a range of backgrounds, Mehretu points toward that new future.

Julie Mehretu: I was really trying to mine and see what artists are in the collection that weren't European. And trying to see what did the collection look like, from artists from the Global South or from artists of color. I'm also interested in pushing that, what is missing from that conversations that can contribute and make that conversation richer.