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MUSÉE
MAILLOL
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press release



**ANDRES
SERRANO**

MUSÉE MAILLOL

27.04 — 20.10.2024

**PORTRAITS
OF
AMERICA**

◀ *Flag Face (Infamous)*, 2019

© Andres Serrano

Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

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Flag Face (Infamous), 2019

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Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

It's no coincidence that Andres Serrano's work is being presented in Europe, in Paris, in the year 2024. The upcoming campaign to elect the 47th President of the United States of America will undoubtedly be extremely violent, so deep and numerous are the fault lines in American society. With so many divergent aspirations. For a long time, Trump was seen as an isolated showman who owed it entirely to his considerable fortune to have been able to make his mark on the Grand Old Party. The image of a mad, solitary Trump has long prevailed. Even at the launch of his campaign for the presidency, his generally outrageous comments were relegated to the «Entertainment» pages of media outlets as short-sighted as the New York Times. Trump is not a solitary player. Andres Serrano demonstrated this gleefully in 2019 with the installation *The Game: All Things Trump*, and Jerry Saltz detailed the issues at stake in the book that accompanied the exhibition. This same Trump, present in 2004 in one of Serrano's most popular series, America, initiated in the aftermath of September 11, constitutes an anchor point from which the present exhibition was conceived: from a flag witnessing the trauma to another, older one, inscribed in the 2019 series *Infamous*.

Tempora and the Musée Maillol offer a journey through Serrano's «American» work, from his earliest pieces in the mid-1980s to his most recent creations. The series are arranged without necessarily following a strict chronology. Native Americans (1995-1996) introduces *Nomads* (1990), reflecting the artist's dual view of society. Homelessness is a permanent theme in Serrano's work, as evidenced by the installation of cardboard boxes purchased from homeless people and displayed in his own exhibitions over the past ten years. If *Nomads* explores the marginality of those left behind by the American dream, *The Klan* (1990), in a way, explores another facet of exclusion: that of the white supremacists whose values have been increasingly rejected by modern America, without any real response to their sense of decline. With his objective eye, Serrano invites us to reflect on what the image reveals, beyond the lure of its refined aestheticism. Behind the beauty of a cross, suffering; beyond the luminous steel of a Colt, death; beyond the pictorial form of the robe and hood, hatred and racism. Strangely enough, the artist, whose *Piss Christ* was at the heart of one of the biggest art-related polemics in the USA, never seems to want to take sides. His gaze claims the icy objectivity of a gun barrel. But the subjects speak for themselves: *The Morgue* (1992) depicts death as the ultimate space of equality, more so than life; *Holy Works* (2011) highlights religious hysteria; *Objects of Desire* (1992), the murderous impulse driven by the Second Amendment which guarantees the freedom to bear arms; *Torture* (2015), state-sponsored violence; *Infamous* (2019), the permanence of both racial and gender prejudices...

From series to series, Serrano delivers a portrait of America as he encounters it on a daily basis, and as he sees it evolving through his lens. Photography thus becomes a testimony that has largely conditioned the progression of his work: the choice of subject now reflects the tendency to analyse that permeates much contemporary art. Drawing on platforms such as eBay and public auctions, Serrano gathers anthropological material whose meaning is fixed in photography beyond the realm of nomenclature. In this respect, *The Game: All Things Trump* is a new political and artistic experience. We hope that the series presented here will provide a better understanding of the issues that are tearing America apart as it awaits its 47th President... on whom the future of the world will largely depend for years to come.

Andres Serrano was born in New York (USA) in 1950. He lives and works in New York.

Graduating in 1969 from the Brooklyn Museum Art School in New York (USA), Andres Serrano is one of the most-recognized contemporary artists on the international scene. His major solo exhibitions include *Andres Serrano - Retrospective* at the Moscow House of Photography (Russie, 2005), *Dark Places* at the Santa Monica Museum of Art (États-Unis, 2006), *Beautiful Suffering - Photography and the Traffic in Pain* at the Williams College Museum of Art (USA, 2006), *En Las Fronteras* at the Villa Croce Museo d'Arte Contemporanea de Gènes (Italy, 2006), *A History of Sex* at the Kulturen de Lund (Sweden, 2007), *Andres Serrano* at the Palais Fesch-Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Ajaccio (Corsica, 2014), *Ainsi soit-il* au Château de Villeneuve, Fondation Emile Hugues in Vence (France, 2015), *Redemption* at the Fotografiska Museum de Stockholm (Sweden, 2015), *Andres Serrano* at the Void Derry in Londonderry (Irland, 2016), *Torture* in the Collection Lambert, Avignon (France, 2016), *Ainsi soit-il* in the Collection Lambert in Avignon (France, 2016), *Uncensored photographs* at the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels (Belgium, 2016), *Andres Serrano* in the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris (France, 2016), *Andres Serrano* at the Petit Palais in Paris (France, 2017), *Andres Serrano - Revealing Reality* at the Huis Marseille in Amsterdam (Netherlands, 2017), *Torture* at the Stills Gallery in Edinburgh (UK, 2018), *The Game - All Things Trump* à ArtX in New-York (USA, 2019) and *Andres Serrano: An American Perspective* at the Red Brick Art Museum in Beijing (China, 2019).

He has also taken part in a number of major joint exhibitions, including *Street & Studio: An Urban History of Photography* at the Tate Modern in London (England, 2008), *Traces du Sacré* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris (France, 2008), *Autour de l'extrême* at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris (France, 2010), *Unsettled: Photography and Politics in Contemporary Art* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (USA, 2011), *NYC 1993* at the New Museum of New York (USA, 2013), *Le Mur* at La Maison Rouge in Paris (France, 2014), *Slip of the tongue*, Punta della Dogana, at the Fondation Pinault in Venice (Italy, 2016), *Perfect Likeness: Photography and composition* at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles (USA, 2016), *Nothing but blue skies* at the Rencontres de la photographie d'Arles, (France, 2016), *LOVE STORIES* during the PHOTOAUMNALES 2016 in Beauvais (France, 2016), *An incomplete history of protest* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New-York (USA, 2018), *Show your wound* at the Dom Museum in Vienna (Austria, 2018) and *Incarnations – African Art as Philosophy* at the Palais des beaux-arts – BOZAR in Brussels (Belgium, 2019).

Andres Serrano's work can be found in numerous private and public collections, including MOMA, New York (USA), Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris (France), Huis Marseille (Netherlands), National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (Australia), Vancouver Art Gallery (Canada), Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (Croatia), ARKEN Museum for Moderne Kunst, Copenhagen (Denmark), CAPC Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux (France), Collection Lambert, Avignon (France), the Institute of Contemporary Art in Amsterdam (Netherlands), the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (Israel), the Centro Cultural Arte Contemporaneo in Mexico City (Mexico), the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (United States), the Brooklyn Museum (United States), the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (United States), the Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth (United States), the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York (United States), the Groninger Museum (Netherlands), the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington (United States).

Andres Serrano has been represented by Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels, since 2012.



Andres Serrano

@Lukáš Oujezský

BIOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

- **1950:** Born in New York (USA)
- **1967-1969:** Graduate of the Brooklyn Museum Art School, New York (USA)
- **2015:** Solo exhibition at Musée de Vence (France) and Fotografiska Museum, Stockholm (Sweden)
- **2016:** Solo exhibitions at Maison Européenne de la Photographie (Paris, France); Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgium (Brussels, Belgium)
- **2017:** Solo exhibitions at Petit Palais (Paris, France); Red Brick Art Museum (Beijing, China); Huis Marseille (Amsterdam, Netherlands); Station Museum of Contemporary Art (Houston, USA)
- **2019:** Solo exhibition at Red Brick Art Museum (Beijing, China)
- **2020:** Solo exhibition at Fotografiska (New York, USA)
- **2022:** Solo exhibitions at Fotografiska (Stockholm, Sweden)
- **2023:** Solo exhibition at Fotografiska (Tallinn, Estonia)
- **2023:** Solo exhibition at DOX Center for Contemporary Art (Prague, Czech Republic)

Born in a family of Honduran and Afro-Cuban origin, Andres Serrano grew up in an environment strongly influenced by Catholicism, whose religiosity left a deep impression on him. A frequent visitor to the Metropolitan Museum of Art from an early age, his interest in religious and Renaissance painting was the catalyst for his desire to become an artist. His discovery of photography during his studies at the Brooklyn Museum and Art School laid the foundations for his artistic approach, which is close to painting in terms of the power of color and the formats used. He defines himself first and foremost as an artist in the broadest sense of the term, making privileged use of the photographic medium among the other means at his disposal, though he refuses to be described as a photographer.

For over thirty years now, Andres Serrano has been exploring the fundamental social and ethical issues that divide America, unfolding a multi-themed body of work that invokes death, violence, sex and religion. A keen observer of the society of his time, his work highlights the faces and bodies of the oppressed, of minorities, of those left behind by the American dream. Through his photographs, whose critical view of his contemporaries' shortcomings is nonetheless always imbued with humanity and a great deal of indulgence for his subjects, Serrano aims to "contribute to the debate on American identity in all its diversity, blending ages, genders, backgrounds and faiths."

His series - *Torture* (2015), *Residents of New York* (2014), *America* (2002), *The Klan* (1990), *Nomads* (1990), *Bodily Fluids* (1990) or *The Immersions* (1987-1990) - highlight the artist's need to reveal the silent truths lurking behind morality, social hypocrisy and traditions still alive in today's American society. With his own visual language, Andres Serrano deconstructs the reality of these subjects by setting them in the large-format tradition of historical painting. In this way, subjects usually banished from the field of art find the means to flourish in his work, through the pictorial quality and format of his photographs. Each portrait is a monumental representation that aestheticizes and accentuates, like a mantra, the formal characteristics of these stereotypes. Generally speaking, Andres Serrano's work is made up of mental images. His photographs, transcended by the power of their colors and forms, are more than mere portraits: they become metaphors.

Andres Serrano first came to prominence in 1987 with his work *Piss Christ*, which caused an uproar in conservative American circles and, more recently, among fundamentalist Catholics in Europe. Since then, the artist has constantly challenged the normative scales of values accepted by our Western societies. The themes raised in his work are thus universal. Drawing on classical and baroque aesthetics, combined with a strong structural image - always carefully staged - with the use of shadows and color, Andres Serrano transforms the simple photographic image into a sculptural, quasi-monumental image. The aesthetics of his work sometimes evoke Caravaggio, sometimes Michelangelo, David or Géricault.

Although widely regarded as self-taught, Andres Serrano claims to have been guided by Duchamp. His choice of subjects is as wide-ranging as it is atypical: still life, Sulpician kitsch religious images, humans, robots, excrement, bodily fluids, even corpses evoking the recumbent figures of religious statuary. The choice of these motifs, which sometimes arouse the public's emotion, is a reference both to traditional subjects in the field of art and to those marginalized or considered taboo, the artist treating them on a perfectly equal footing, without making any value judgments. Through his images and his highly authentic approach, Andres Serrano demonstrates his intention to question the contemporary divide between what is acceptable and what is not.

Through the power of the images he conjures up, Serrano transforms what could be a simple documentary approach into a subject that invites reflection; he provokes and leaves it to the power of the image to challenge us on major timeless themes: religion, death, the body, hatred of others.

Nomads (1990)

Created in 1990, the *Nomads* series was Andres Serrano's first foray into the world of extreme precarity. The homeless, who reappeared in 2014 in New York as "Residents" and in 2015 in Brussels as "Denizens", are here brought back to the founding anthropological category of humanity: that of nomads. In other words, a human society whose survival depends on perpetual movement between camps that form the territory of the "tribe". So it is not the negative perception that is highlighted by the homeless, but rather a form of return to our roots that serves as a critique of the high-tech consumer society.

Serrano restores the human dimension to these wandering specters that the bourgeois conscience tends to avoid or simply brush aside. The "integrated" citizen therefore crosses paths with the homeless on the trajectory of his daily routine, always defined by the principle of necessity. An illusory necessity wholly fabricated by the global order within which we all move, while the *nomad* responds, through his very movements, to a vital imperative that all too often escapes our attention.

Serrano would return to this question, which brings into play the location and the narratives that can unfold within it. In *Nomads*, he focuses on the human figures. Perceived as a weapon and as an object of desire (a logic he would develop two years later in another series), the photograph identifies them. By showing those whom our society "invisibilizes", it names them. And in so doing, it restores their essential dignity. Keen to place his work in a broader historical context, Serrano revisits the legacy of Edward Sheriff Curtis (1868-1952). Like Curtis, his approach is as much ethnographic as photographic, and in 1990 he embarked on his first campaign to collect records of these post-industrial nomads known as the homeless. The eighty Indian tribes whose testimonies Curtis collected - in writing, sound recordings and photographs - are mirrored by the groups formed by the homeless according to their own specific sociology, rules and practices. The encyclopedic ambition that inspired Curtis is also present in Serrano's tender project.

Curtis wanted to capture the purity of these primitive peoples insofar as they appeared untouched by the process of acculturation - exactly the opposite of what Serrano would portray in his 1996 *Native American* series. Serrano prefers three-quarter-length portraits to scenes taken in situ, but nonetheless posed - more in keeping with the portraits in *Residents of New York* or *Denizens of Brussels* - to monumentalize a person's presence in all their human dignity. To carry out his work, he set up a lightweight mobile studio in the metro, in which homeless people he paid to pose would parade around. They become the equivalents of the Navaho Haschezhini or the Arikara Bear's Belly tribes, expressing a fragility of America: that of human groups threatened, on both sides, by the profiteering of unfettered capitalism. The element of pride is decisive here. Firstly, in naming a being who thus affirms his place in the human community. Secondly, in the way a pose is enriched by pictorially transposing the garment with all its anthropological significance. Although Bertha has nothing of value, through Serrano's lens, she becomes a figure *worthy* of representation. And her green tattered jacket contrasts with the red scarf wrapped around her head, as if it were not a question of struggling against the cold, but of participating in a pictorial logic that enables the model to move from the dregs of our society to a jewel of upper-class culture.

Serrano never passes judgment. His photographic venture itself - like Curtis's before him, dependent on the patronage of John Pierpont Morgan - is an economic operation of a capitalist nature: the artist is the owner of the idea; he has invested in its development; he defines its parameters; he chooses his partners; he obtains a product from which he will make a profit, via the gallery. While his approach is fundamentally moral, it is never self-righteous. At no point does he lose sight of his position in a process that he confronts with honesty.



Bertha (Nomads), 1990

© Andres Serrano

Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Infamous (2019)

Produced shortly before the Covid epidemic, the *Infamous* series was exhibited from October 2020 to February 2021 in New York as part of Fotografiska, before being shown, under the same banner, in Stockholm from January to May 2022. The series of photographs composed for the occasion provides a historical panorama of the racial question as perceived in the United States. In a country that has suffered the temptation of segregation and, at the same time, claimed to be the embodiment of democracy, racism appears to be an integral part of American history. Firstly, through the dispossession of native peoples, to which some works in the series such as “*Indian In A Cupboard*” 1920-1940’s Tin Can refer, and secondly, through the upheavals of the American slave trade.

This unique situation has led to prejudice becoming a norm that is perpetuated without any real awareness of its implications. This is particularly true of the artifacts that eBay markets in a form of moral blindness. Surfing the application, Andres Serrano realized that an impressive array of objects with blackface were being exchanged in innocuous transactions, without their inherent racism giving rise to the slightest concern. So, the artist set about buying and photographing these artifacts, which reveal the racial prejudices that undermine US society. There was a wide range: from everyday products whose packaging evokes the most racist stereotypes from the 1820s to the interwar period (“*Racist America*” V 1894-1920s Objects; “*Racist America*” Vintage Products 1920-1940s...) to objects marketed in the 1970s such as “X” *Malcolm X Car Air Freshener*. Racial fundamentalism operates in all camps, and prejudice takes on all forms of everyday life. The presence of black dolls testifies to the power of indoctrination from the earliest age, concerning both white and black children, by multiplying stereotypes that act as a driving force for the rejection of the other, as well as a model of identity to which to conform.

The result is ubiquitous, unrestrained racism. For example, a postcard showing a naked colored man hanging from a tree, his body bearing the scars of the lynching to which he was subjected, is printed like an innocuous postcard commemorating some happy memory!

“*Black Dolls - Larry*” *Vintage Rag Doll* is one of those ambiguous objects that disseminate the racialized vision of black people within their own community. The kind of animalistic joy expressed by the motif of the disproportionate mouth - a motif that would be used in the games featured in the *Infamous* series - and the hairstyle that, half a century later, would signal a Rasta identity to which Serrano referred in his early works, form codes that impose themselves on the black community from the racializing white gaze.

Objects are a new element for Serrano. Directly derived from the practice of encyclopedic collecting deployed, in 2019, to stage Donald Trump’s economic-political Barnum, the practice has two aims. On the one hand, to draw from an in-depth exploration of sales sites such as eBay a series of artifacts that capture a form of unconsciousness inherent in capitalism. Since everything can be bought and sold, everything is business. The whole world is subject to the rule of supply and demand. If demand responds to supply, it’s because demand acts according to what we might call the “capitalist unconscious”. Behind the act of buying now made commonplace by online trading - the responsibility of making a purchase no longer involves travelling, meeting a salesperson, seeing the object to be purchased, paying for it with cash..., but is the result of a “click” that triggers an automated process - a message is nevertheless conveyed. Through the

purchase, it restores “value” to objects from the past that underpinned a segregated vision of society. Through the transaction, it borrows arguments from the painful part of American memory, which it validates. In this way, past discourse becomes present assertion. And sheds light on the fragmentation of society that the Trump years have accelerated but not initiated.

The second objective of this series is to monumentalize the commemorative object through the pictorial practice of photographic portraiture. Once the object has been acquired and received, Serrano treats it as if it were a person in front of his lens. Its shapes, colors and use of space contribute to the formulation of a narrative that is less the fruit of the artist’s imagination than the “simple” recording of what it has to teach us. It becomes a figure, and therefore a narrative. The photographic act consists in making the most plastic use of the message, which goes from being a whisper to being monumental once on display. Prejudice loses its banal character to reveal a deep-seated violence that undermines the future of the United States.



«Black Dolls - Larry» Vintage Rag Doll (infamous), 2019

© Andres Serrano

Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

The Klan (1990)

One of the artist's flagship series, *The Klan* was exhibited in 1991 in Boulder, at the University of Colorado. It features the leaders of the racist movement that remains omnipresent in much of the United States. Made famous by the *Piss Christ* scandal, which caused a stir in political and cultural circles, Serrano was an artist who had an impact. And therefore, a media figure not to be underestimated. Is this what motivated the Knight Hawk of Georgia to agree to be photographed by an artist whose origins must have stared him in the face from the moment they first met? Beyond the now-famous photographs obtained, are we aware of the risk taken by an Afro-Cuban artist, already stigmatized for the impious nature of his *Piss Christ*, who, in order to take the portrait of the leaders of a supremacist secret society - one of whom is a woman (Klanswoman, Grand Kaliff - Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, 1990) - immersed himself in the depths of racist Georgia?

How should we define the artist's gaze in relation to his subject? He knows the history of the Klan, and the individuals he encounters fully endorse its violence. They have by no means renounced the principle which, around 1865, presided over the creation of the Klan in response to the "Jim Crow laws": to prevent by any means possible the application of the constitutional rights of Afro-Americans guaranteed by several amendments to the Constitution voted after the defeat of the Confederates. Obviously, in 1990, the KKK no longer had the power to act that it once had. Prosecuted by the courts, relegated to the margins of society by a large segment of public opinion, deprived of its relevance as federal laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1968 put an end to segregation in the United States, it maintained itself only through small groups, the most dangerous of which were dismantled in the 60s and 70s.

When he set up his mobile workshop - the same one used for the *Nomads* series, which also features marginal groups in American society - Serrano knew that the Klan was part of a racist folklore that was losing ground: the Afro-American people no longer feared them as before. They vote, hold official positions and are subject to positive discrimination, which contributes to their social advancement. Racial tensions are still high, but no longer find their crystallization point in the KKK. The climate has changed. Which goes some way to explaining the goodwill shown in 1990 by the Grand Dragon (in charge of a state in the same way as a governor) or the Grand Titan of the Invisible Empire.

Serrano places his lens in front of the shreds of a white America whose decline is leading a disillusioned fringe of the population to ally themselves with neo-Nazi and terrorist groups or, for the more moderate, to rally behind the ultra-conservative representatives of the Tea Party. A rhetoric hostile to federalism and the role of the State developed in an increasingly conspiratorial context. After representing no more than some three thousand members at the time of Serrano's series, they regained a certain audience in the 2000s, and then again with the advent of Donald Trump, who, while rejecting the KKK, took up some of its arguments, which came to the fore during the march on the Capitol on January 6, 2020.

Faced with the Klan members, Serrano remains focused on a formal work that operates independently of what the image makes us think beyond what we see. He plays with the relationship between form and content in a disturbing double entendre: detached from a black background, the Klansman's silhouette is marked by the ample drape of his robe, from which emerges his white, pointed hood. The motif would recur regularly in Serrano's

work: for *The Church* in 1991 and *Torture* in 2015. Inspired by the garments worn by Spanish processionaries, Serrano's work gives the garment a monumental, picture-like quality which gives nobility to the subject. Once again, reading the title - for those unfamiliar with the subject represented - provokes surprise, if not immediate shock. The work's noble, formal simplicity is dealt a heavy blow by the inevitable rejection of the subject. The work thus revolves around a fundamental dichotomy between aesthetics and ethics that characterizes much of Serrano's research, irrespective of the motifs chosen.



Klansman, Knight Hawk Of Georgia Of The Invisible Empire IV (The Klan), 1990

© Andres Serrano

Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Blood on The Flag (2001)

Stars and Stripes are an essential symbolic element in American popular culture. It couldn't escape Serrano's attention, and he incorporates it into a number of series in a variety of forms with multiple meanings: sometimes the expression of a long history, sometimes a reflection of current events.

With its fifty stars embodying the fifty states that make up the USA, and its thirteen stripes representing the thirteen British colonies that founded the country, the flag has a powerful identity role that goes beyond nationality or state representation to embody a set of moral values.

These refer to the symbolism of its colors: red for resilience and the blood shed in defense of the country; white for purity, innocence and hope for a better future; blue for justice, perseverance and freedom. It is therefore only logical that red should dominate this staging of the flag in the aftermath of the Islamist attacks of September 11, 2001. True to his philosophy, Serrano started from an abstract representation - a three-color play of alternating geometric surfaces and star configurations - with a strong symbolic impact, which he then modified to transform the flag's original meaning. In this way, we rediscover the compositional style that made the *Body Fluids* of 1986-1990, which preceded the *Immersion*s, so distinctive. In these large-scale, geometrically abstract photographs, Serrano staged, on the one hand, visual configurations close to the dominant artistic trends (from Op Art to Conceptual Art) and, on the other, their negation by the almost life-giving material dimension: circles of blood, rectangles of urine or monochromes of milk.

Blood on the Flag takes up this concept. The symbol of the nation becomes the expression of a deep wound, reviving the memory of earlier series, each of which in its own way reflected a profound fracture: racism and segregationist delirium (1990), misery and marginality (1990), a taste for weapons and violence (1992), a fascination with death (1992), the fate of Native Americans (1995-1996), a taste for spectacular sordidness (2001)... Serrano does not spare himself the cliché of a presentation mixing conformism and self-righteousness, even if he declares that he conceived this image "without apology or prejudice". *Blood on the Flag* supports a cathartic ritual.

Bloodied, the flag bears witness to a state of shock that has struck America beyond its divergences and differences. It also undoubtedly marked the tipping point in the rejection of the West by an increasingly significant part of the planet. It also triggered in Serrano a hitherto unspoken desire to react: the need to see the American project, if not the American dream, come to fruition in order to shape a different future. This is what led the artist to initiate the *America* series, which he worked on from 2001 to 2004.

In the artist's own words, the series is a kind of "statement" about America, which is now at war. About what it is and who it is. In response to this need, Serrano would take to the streets, bringing back America as a portrait gallery of infinite diversity, a kind of self-portrait of the artist through his America.

Here, too, nomenclature plays a considerable role: individuals are brought together beyond their standardized portraits on the basis of an index that includes first name, profession and ethnic or religious affiliation.



Blood on the flag (9/11), 2001

© Andres Serrano

Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Donald Trump (America) (2004)

Committed to the logic of war that followed September 11, 2001, Serrano wanted to deliver a panorama of an American society united to face its destiny. He took as his reference August Sander's project, which was presented in 1927 at the Kunstverein in Cologne under the title "Men of the Twentieth Century". As a portraitist of his time, Serrano aims to capture the diversity and differences that emerge throughout the series, without judgment or bias. Serrano delivers his ethnographic dictionary of American society as he sees it: known and unknown rub shoulders in religious, philosophical, sexual and intellectual diversity. Serrano's America is an iridescent Pop project that defines the palette of his studio's backdrop panels: America is a luminous, slightly kitsch dream that catches the eye of portrait subjects who, by definition, are happy to belong to the great American family. As the series unfolds, a sense of irony emerges, as if beyond the way we look at America, a form of overwhelming dominance of the US stereotype is revealed: everything tends to appear equal, if not uniform, through a codified use of difference and identity.

It was in this context that Donald Trump appeared, posing for Serrano's lens in 2004. This was not the populist politician who had taken "America is back" from Reagan and rephrased it as "Make America Great Again". This is the New York billionaire, heir to Fred Trump, who in the 1970s had succeeded in gaining a foothold in Manhattan's highly exclusive real-estate market. This is the Trump who, in front of Rona Barrett on *Looks at Today Super Rich*, is brimming with confidence and pride. The man who has been investing in Atlantic City casinos since 1984 and who, at the turn of the century, embodies prosperity at its most outrageous. And less legitimate, given that the economic reality of the Trump enterprise does not match the image its leader portrays. The calamitous results are countered by a style centered on the egotistical promotion of a bloated, grandiose self-image. The Trump Serrano photographed took his first steps as host of the NBC reality show *The Apprentice*. The show ran until 2015, when he popularized the expression "You're fired!".

Serrano integrates it into his series through the idealistic-pop décor, which employs orange and gold lighting to lend an aura to the sarcastic-looking character. No raised head, no radiant gaze, not even a smile. It's *The Apprentice's* devious master of ceremonies who, mocking and brutal, reveals himself to the camera.



Donald Trump(America), 2004

© Andres Serrano

Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Objects of Desire (1992)

Objects of Desire depicts America's erotic passion for firearms. In this case, for the Colt, 38, 45 or 357 Magnum. Rooted in the Constitution's Second Amendment, gun culture is a central element of American identity, even if since 1911 - and the adoption by the State of New York of the Sullivan Law establishing a license to acquire, possess and carry any weapon - the control of free access to weapons has been the subject of debate.

Playing with close-ups, Serrano eliminates the object to capture only its detail. The latter is treated in the subtlety of its composition and light. Quite apart from the function of the Colt itself, the artist aims to magnify its aesthetic qualities. The monumentality of these qualities reveals the artist's obsession with them. In this way, the overcoming of the principle of desire, so dear to Freud, is expressed in a feeling of power that has engineered the militarization of American society. Through this erotic display of weaponry, relations not only between individuals and between individuals and the State, but also between the federated States and their relationship to the Federal State are at stake. The issue is political, but also economic, social and cultural.

Beyond the security obsession of rednecks hostile to the "deep state", the freedom to own a firearm reflects a unique devotion to the Constitution, which protects the individual, his property, his values and his identity. For a large segment of the population, the right to bear arms is seen as a basic "natural right". Better still, as a means of completing the Creation account, according to the adage widely disseminated by the *National Rifle Association* (NRA): "God made men, Sam Colt made them equal". Even better, it's thanks to this exception specific to the American people that the English colonist could be driven out and freedom acquired.

Through the aestheticism of his photographs, Serrano magnifies the Colt as an "object of desire". The masculinity of the steel or the velvety wood of the stock evoke an erotic sensation that detaches the representation from its primary object. Yet the tool of death reclaims its rights when the barrel is pointed at the viewer. It reflects a lethal impulse that overturns the erotic aspiration assigned to the object. In this shift from weapon to photograph, Serrano transforms photography into a weapon. From the Colt to the Nikon, the same act is involved: aiming. In other words, taking aim at a fragment of reality that is then invested with meaning. Serrano does not see himself as a photographer per se. It's not the photographic act that motivates him. He sees himself as a painter who molds his subject, details the framing, distributes the light and adjusts the palette. This process aims to construct an aesthetic image. The artist never ceases to assert this in his interviews. But the man is armed. And his gaze planted in the viewfinder targets a reality of which he is undoubtedly not the creator, but which he chooses according to an intention that remains his, even if it advances in an inherently disguised way. In so doing, Serrano establishes himself as the shooter of a reality that he excavates with an incisiveness whose surgical quality is matched only by its aesthetic perfection.



Ruger 22 Long Rifle Mark II Target II (Objects of Desire), 1992

© Andres Serrano

Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

The Morgue (1992)

The fame of some of Andres Serrano's series has undoubtedly blunted the process based on the surprising effect of the dichotomy between aesthetics and ethics. For Serrano, the treatment of the image, largely dependent on a pictorial awareness of its depiction, constitutes an end in itself, independently of what the image reveals. Form evolves independently of meaning.

The series was presented in 1992 in Paris at Galerie Yvon Lambert, and in 1993 in New York at Paula Cooper, before touring the world as one of the major events in contemporary art. Recognized as a portraitist, Serrano has sought to explore the limits of the representation of the "other". In other words, his para-doxical reduction to the form of an object deprived of life. By entering the place that gives the series its name, without ever being visible, the artist intended to pursue his process of aesthetic-ization of depiction by taking photography's own mortifying dimension to its furthest limits. The embodiment of the living in the form of «it was». Here, it is embodied in a literal way.

These disturbing paradoxical images are matched by revolting ones: char-red, bloodied, shredded bodies that speak of a brutal end. Here a crime, there an accident or an illness. Each photograph carries a story and weaves a narrative. Placed side by side, these narratives form a society caught up in a singular point - where the dead meet - at a given moment in time.

For the artist, it's all about capturing the last vestiges of life still visible in these non-documentary representations. As David did for Marat in what was originally entitled *Le dernier souffle* (The Last Breath), Serrano captures the life that still pulsates in the first moments after death. This quest is all about detail. This requires a tight framing that places the artist in a sometimes-disturbing close-up with the body. In his interviews, Serrano recalls the difficulty of coming into contact, so to speak, with these bodies, with their smell of dead flesh, sometimes burnt, if not decomposing. Sensations that left a deep impression on him. In the eyes of some, making death aesthetically pleasing, through staging strategies that call on chromatic textures, the interplay of covers or powerful light contrasts, leads to its desacralization. And thus, to degrade its moral significance. The «beautiful death» of the Ancients, which referred to the hero, is replaced by work that magnifies the dead body of the most anonymous individual. Strangely enough, Serrano, who has never ceased to represent the margins of American society, here captures the only egalitarian domain where everyone sooner or later finds themselves reduced to the status of the other.



Killed by Four Danes (The Morgue), 1992

© Andres Serrano

Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Residents of New York (cartons) (2014)

In 2014, Andres Serrano began a series entitled *Residents of New York*, which renews the relationship with the homeless explored in 1990 in the *Nomads* series. The title - which was transposed a year later from Residents to Denizens in Brussels - reflects a reversal of perspective. The wandering figure is no longer magnified in studio portraiture but brought back to the place of which he is the sole permanent occupant. Serrano goes out to meet the homeless and forges relationships, sometimes close, with some of them. All are paid to pose. Throughout the series, which would be shown from May 19 to June 15, 2014, in the West 4th Street subway station, one detail catches the eye: the cardboard boxes on which each homeless person summarizes his or her story to elicit the compassion of passers-by. Little by little, Serrano began to collect these fragments of life. He bought them for fifty dollars apiece, without transforming them into his own work, even though he incorporated them into his exhibitions or staged them in film. As such, these boxes constitute an archive of human misery. They also bear witness to communication strategies that fluctuate between the tragic and the humorous. They underline the humanity of these bodies, rendered shapeless by the winter cold, who have taken refuge in the subway vents or under awnings to avoid the rain. Through these cardboard boxes, the untouchables of our postmodern societies speak. They address the ephemeral passers-by and attempt to establish a tenuous dialogue with them.

For Serrano, this series marks a change in his artistic practice. Always attached to the notion of a series as an encyclopedic accumulation, he takes this series one step further than photography. He does it by gathering archival material, of which photography will later constitute the visual inventory. It is on this basis that subsequent series will develop to constitute, with *The Game: All Things Trump*, a kind of environment based on the accumulation of collectibles. Serrano's work is part of a context that he claims is that of an "archival impulse", which brings him closer to projects such as Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* or Hanne Darboven's *Cultural History 1880-1983*.

The Game : All Things Trump (2018-2019)

The exhibition *The Game: All Things Trump* opened at ARTX in New York on April 11, 2019. For two and a half months, it would feature more than five hundred artifacts (out of the thousand gathered) purchased on eBay, at public auctions or via word-of-mouth. All relate to the life of Donald Trump, then in his third year in office as the 45th President of the United States. From the outset, the title of the multimedia exhibition indicated that beyond the permanent farce that Donald Trump has instituted, this is a game on a planetary scale in which everyone is taken to task and forced to engage. Everyone is caught up in this formatted game based on a certain image of America sketched out, in 2004, by Serrano in *America*.

As usual, Serrano intends to adopt an objective, if not disengaged, stance. Cautious, he doesn't indulge in frontal political criticism, but instead stages innocuous objects that tell the story of the man before he became the controversial president. The maze-like scenography invites us to wander among the many facets that the Trump character has constructed for himself: posters, photos, magazines, sportswear, ties, Trump Shuttle, Trump Vodka, Trump University, Trump Steaks and the famous "Ego" sign from the Ego Lounge of his Taj Mahal casino in Atlantic City. The result is a sense of sociopathic delirium, made all the more dizzying by a museum presentation as rigorous as a natural history display. Regardless of the - sometimes calamitous - economic projects, it is the Trump "brand" that all these artifacts magnify in a total confusion between man and product, in the service of an egotistical structure that constantly aligns its grandiloquence with that of America. Which underlines its importance. In this exhibition - in which Serrano has created nothing apart from the 2004 photograph for the *America* series - a personal program is outlined and structured, the outcome of which depends on identification with a certain America: that of downtrodden rednecks, that of those disillusioned with the welfare state, that of workers abandoned by the Left, of white males frightened by their loss of power, that of Wasps confronted with an immigration sold in the language of the "Great Replacement", that of all those left on the sidelines who see in Trump the expression of an economic, social and political success that makes him a kind of post-Disney messiah.

Attached to the encyclopedic dimension of his project, Serrano is keen to leave the perspective free: the limitless accumulation and rhizome-like spreading of these artifacts-turned-indicators allow for any number of interpretations. On leaving the show, some will be disgusted, others fascinated. All will see how the man of a thousand facets - tabloid sex symbol, aggressive billionaire, shrewd businessman, reality TV star, controversial entrepreneur and, finally, leader of the "free world" - has been an integral part of American life for over half a century. A singular embodiment of the American dream, Trump has drawn on America to forge his image. Through this exhibition, Serrano presents a kind of reverse self-portrait of America: its fascination with wealth, its obsession with success, its leadership frenzy, the glamour associated with power and fame.



The Game : All Things Trump, 2018-2019

© Andres Serrano

Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Immersion (1987-1990)

Following on from the *Body Fluids* series (1986-1990), the *Immersion* from 1987 onwards retain the idea of working physically with liquids secreted by the body. While the *Body Fluids* exploit the imaginary of minimal painting, countering the conceptual dimension of geometric abstraction, the *Immersion* restore reality to its original photographic purpose. Of this series, the *Piss Christ* is undoubtedly the best-known and most controversial. It is nonetheless characteristic of the approach. Serrano starts from a reduced scale: he doesn't take creative masterpieces, as the presence of Miron's Discobolus or Rodin's Thinker might suggest, but industrial artifacts sold in museum stores or holy places. The crucifix used here is in no way a piece of art comparable to those that Serrano collects and may have used for other projects. It's a commercial product, just a few centimeters tall, which he immerses in a container where urine mixes with blood to create an environment that is both spectacular and decorative. The artist plays on the ambivalence of aesthetic perception, which runs counter to the ethical value embedded in the image. The slightly low-angle view, the harmony of the gradations, the softness of the lights, the painful spirituality of the sacrifice accomplished as life dissipates in fine bubbles of air all support Serrano's compassionate discourse. For Serrano's aspiration to represent beauty cannot exclude the cruelty that is consubstantial with it – he would return with the same references to the Passion of Christ in the *Torture* series in 2015. Hence the presence of blood - also omnipresent in many of the photographs in the 2011 *Holy Works* series - and the urine of the victim. The *Piss Christ* depicts the same violence as Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* (2004), but in a sublimated form reminiscent of medieval Germanic representations. The blood is stripped of its violence, as is the urine that ran down the legs once the sphincters had relaxed. The pain and humiliation at the heart of crucifixion are here transposed into an aesthetic register that abolishes its violence.

Far from being intended as blasphemy (see text on the *Piss Christ* scandal), this work is a fervent Christian's homage to Christ who died on the cross. If anything, it represents a critique of the commodification of Christ's image for the benefit of the Church, whom Serrano has not spared in his work since 1984.



Immersion, 1987-1990

© Andres Serrano

Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Executed in 1987, the photograph features a small plastic crucifix immersed in a jar, where the symbolic form, taken three-quarter view, seems to emerge from an orange-red tablecloth, studded with fine air bubbles associated with its immersion. In his first interviews, Serrano professes to be a devout Catholic, borrowing from the most expressive forms of the Passion of Jesus, and repeats his fascination with the body and blood of the suffering Christ. He points out that he has added urine to the blood in which this industrially produced crucifix - whose symbolism, in his eyes, has been worn away by use - is immersed: his own.

The insignificant size of the crucifix is matched by the monumentality of the representation - a 150 x 100 black-framed photograph - depicting the tragic end of Christ on the Cross. Beyond the institution, it's to the very foundation of faith - of his faith - that this image refers. Sacrifice and violence; self-giving and human cruelty. And yet, the image reveals itself, pacified in a symbolic fullness that has not escaped criticism. The image speaks for itself. In its warm chromaticism, in the quality of its lighting, in the richness of its references to ancient painting. Velasquez's *Crucifixions* in particular.

Drawing on the experience of his early years in the field of advertising, Serrano assigns an informative function to the title. In this case, *Immersion (Piss Christ)* is simply the superimposition of the technique of the material and the subject: it is indeed the association of Christ with urine that will provoke a reaction from ultra-conservative circles.

Although the formulation deserves clarification. Even before *Piss Christ*, Serrano had produced works which, contrary to what the artist himself claims, can be seen as an attack on religion as an institution. This is particularly true of his treatment of women as vehicles of sin through sexuality. In the "*Immersions*" series, other works take up Christian iconography to show it through urine and blood. The *Piss Christ* is matched by the *Piss Satan*, which aroused no controversy whatsoever. As with many other pieces, such as *Pietà*.

Exhibited at New York's Stux Gallery in 1988, *Piss Christ* elicited no particular comment. The work was then included in a group exhibition featuring ten artists, all of whom received a \$15,000 fellowship from the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art. Entitled "Awards in the Visual Arts 7", the project was presented at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, then at the Carnegie Mellon University Art Gallery in Pittsburgh, before moving on to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. All without major incident. It wasn't until January 1989 - two months after the exhibition closed in Richmond - that the controversy began to unfold.

Serrano seemed no more than a pretext for the "New Right" to unleash its fury on the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). At a time when the art scene was traumatized by the ravages of AIDS, the return to moral order initiated by Ronald Reagan's election as President of the United States in November 1980 sounded like a declaration of war. In the eyes of the ultra-conservatives, the NEA was seen as a place for "fossilizing the popular cultures of the past", and as an actor in the over-subsidization of a creative process stigmatized for its multiculturalism hostile to American values. The administration felt directly targeted.

The New Right therefore called for a restoration of values. And with these values, for the establishment of criteria and benchmarks that define and guide the nation's actions, in line with the evangelistic stance of Reverend Jerry Falwell. This "moral

majority”, which in fact brought together a mosaic of fundamentalist movements, intended to lead an internal crusade to evangelize America. They were to multiply their battles against mass culture, auteur cinema and controversial exhibitions.

This ultra-conservative “revival” owed its success to the modernity of its mobilization and action techniques. Pastor Donald Wildmon became a master of the “consumer boycott”. The mailing technique, developed to put pressure on television programs, would be mobilized against the NEA and its “decadent” symbols: mass mobilization (“grassroots movement”), tried-and-tested marketing and televangelical activism would be the tools of a “cultural war” that would scale up even further once social networks had been established.

Regan’s slogan “Take Back America” resonates like a compendium of passions and fears: national and religious passion; fear of the fall and loss of male supremacy; hatred of difference and culture. As soon as he entered the White House in March 1981, Reagan attacked the NEA as he had announced during the campaign. Unable to make significant cuts in its budgets (only Trump would manage to do so in 2020!), the Reagan administration sought to reshape the NEA from within, changing management, eliminating the scholarship program and abandoning numerous projects.

It was against this backdrop that Serrano’s *Piss Christ* stirred up all manner of hatred. On May 18, 1989, Senator Alfonso d’Amato presented a reproduction of the work, which he described as a “deplorable display of vulgarity” financed by public money. That is, by the NEA. Tearing up the reproduction, he added:

“Well, if this is the level to which contemporary art has sunk, this level of scandal and indignity - some may want to fund it, and why not. But not with taxpayers’ money. It’s not a question of freedom to exhibit, it’s a question of misappropriation of public funds. If we let this group of so-called experts [the NEA] do this, if we let them fund this, defame us and use our money, then we don’t deserve to sit here anymore.”

Broadcast on television, the footage marked the beginning of the “Cultural Wars”. Supported by Senators Jesse Helms and Slade Gordon, Alfonso d’Amato in fact became the spokesman for activists led by Reverend Donald Wildmon and his American Family Association.

It’s time to return to the “Awards in the Visual Arts 7” exhibition, which closed in Richmond in January 1989. On March 19, the Richmond-Times-Dispatch published a letter from a certain Philip L. Smith, who criticized the Virginia Museum for promoting a blasphemous work against the Christian religion, without arousing the protests that would inevitably have arisen had the same treatment been meted out to the Jewish religion. Philip L. Smith’s letter ended up on the desk of Reverend Donald Wildmon, who saw it as an opportunity to hit out at the NEA, which had awarded the artist a five-thousand-dollar grant in 1986. In *American Family Association Journal*, Wildmon stigmatized the work and asked anyone who had felt outraged to come forward. The machine was set in motion, targeting the NEA and the exhibition’s co-sponsor, the Rockefeller Foundation. The indictment followed a well-oiled rhetoric. On April 5, 1989, Wildmon addressed his members.

*"We should have known this would happen. In a recent exhibition presented in several museums across the country, a "work of art" depicts a very large, colorful photograph of a crucifix submerged in urine. The work, by a certain Andres Serrano, is entitled *Piss Christ*. When asked, since he has worked with urine, what he will do next, Mr. Serrano replies: "Sperm". And, of course, defecation will follow. [...]*

It seems to me that we Christians have to accept some responsibility for this. For many reasons, most of us have refused to respond publicly to the anti-Christian bigotry and prejudice that is rife in our society, especially in the media... Perhaps before the physical persecution of Christians begins, we might have the courage to mobilize against this desecration. I hope we do."

And Wildmon invited his fellow believers to write to Congress as well as to the Rockefeller Foundation and the local sponsor - an insurance company - of the exhibition. Tens of thousands of letters poured into Congress. The insurance company alone received forty thousand! All were accompanied by a personal missive from Reverend Wildmon, together with a reproduction of the *Piss Christ*. The strike force of the American Family Association turned a local issue into a major political event, and the conservative tenors of the Senate jumped on the bandwagon.

After Alfonso d'Amato, the Republican Senator from Washington State, had spoken, Slade Gordon took the assembly to task, asking if it was the state's responsibility to subsidize religious desecration, and whether the *Piss Christ* fell into a category other than blasphemy. And he asks:

"[...] what will the NEA subsidize next? Make fun of the Holocaust? Parody slavery? Praise the extermination of the native Indians?"

Alfonso d'Amato was the first to speak out against the NEA, but he found support in Jesse Helms, Republican Senator from North Carolina, who was directly concerned by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art's initiative. A representative of the White Southerners, Helms had been a radio host in the '60s. In this period of protest, when American society was undergoing a brutal and profound transformation, Helms saw himself as a spokesman for Republican thought. Elected senator in 1972, he developed an anti-modernist argument that synthesized the fears of the white Southern population, interweaving communism, civil rights, the amoral left and gay culture. In Jesse Helms' paranoid imagination, the cultural question was a form of relay for an anti-communism that was in need of renewal in the late '80s. The "Cold War" was succeeded by a "Culture War" which allowed this secular Republican to exploit for his own ends the themes and networks of the religious ultra-right, from which he intended to draw his electorate.

Helms recycled his anti-communist rhetoric to target the NEA and artists he deemed subversive. His anti-intellectualism was given free rein. Helms and his post-segregationist, neo-religious supporters intend to redefine Americanness by drawing on a repertoire that is both racist and sexist. An opponent of Martin Luther King Day on the grounds that he considered Reverend King a "communist", Helms specialized

in the fight against pornography and homosexuality during Ronald Reagan's two terms in office. As George Bush succeeded Reagan, his fight against the NEA's elitist culture and subsidized contemporary creation enabled him to loudly proclaim a hatred of modernity that united a large part of the white Republican electorate in the South. For these "White Trash", the values to be defended originate upstream from this modernity which, in the form of mass culture, encircles them on a daily basis. With his "paranoid" style that often rendered him uncontrollable, Jesse Helms asserted himself as their principal representative, supported by Wildmon. They lead a dangerous movement that combines populism and rejection of the federal state, hatred of the "perverse" intellectuals of the Big Apple and its corrupt elite. The tone is social, stigmatizing the eclecticism of a creative scene otherwise described as underground and marginal:

"Mapplethorpe and Serrano belong to the elite and believe their talent is superior to that of working people ... Truck drivers, factory workers, small carpenters and salesmen are artists too, but the government doesn't require taxpayers to give them \$171 million a year [the NEA's budget] to subsidize their art."

Much more than the *Piss Christ* itself, Serrano was a prime target for attacking the NEA. If the work occupies a singular position by making visible an unusual subject with transcendental scope, it also gives its author a specific function that Serrano refuses to accept: that of passing moral judgment on the social order in which he finds himself.

The result is a new questioning of the very meaning of artistic identity and, in the process, a re-examination of the artist's political function. Particularly in the sensitive debate on multiculturalism. In this context, the belief is asserted that the social or political positioning of the artist is only determined by categories of race, war or sexual practices with identity resonances, which are added to a logic of class - and therefore culturally dominant.

Asserting his American identity, Serrano is part of a New York culture. And he has been doing so ever since he was trained in Brooklyn. Yet his Hispanic ancestry - his father comes from Honduras, his mother from Cuba - places him on the margins of a system of which he sees himself as a product, while denouncing conformism. Deeply ironic, his vision aims to "push the boundaries" without claiming to be "political".

An artist whose very recognition is forged by scandal, Serrano enjoys a position that makes him the - unwitting - representative of an intellectual elitism in whose eyes he has integrated himself into a European tradition that is increasingly perceived as alien to the new American identity.

Hated by the conservative right, the artist is also criticized in liberal circles for his paternalistic view of the homeless in the 1990 *Nomads* series, and for his sexist treatment of women in photographs such as *Heaven* or *Hell*. Thus, despite his original marginal status, Serrano emerged as a figure of the artistic establishment. Connected with galleries - notably the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York - recognized by museums - especially European ones! - and prized by major collectors, Andres Serrano does not belong to that anxious America mobilized by ultra-conservative associations soon joined by Tea-Party circles.

This makes him an ideal target for all those who share the same nationalist passion, the same religious frenzy, the same fear of falling into the same category as blacks, Hispanics, Latinos, women, gays or lesbians, the same hatred of intellectuals equated with decadents. Even in Democratic ranks, the denunciation of the *Piss Christ* at the Senate instilled doubt as to the values to be defended.

In the immediate aftermath, thirty-nine Republican senators signed a letter to the Chairman of the NEA. Two weeks later, one hundred and eight members of the House of Representatives followed suit. The boycott strategy paid off. Some institutions, such as the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington - a private institution located a stone's throw from the White House - decided not to host the Mapplethorpe retrospective in June 1989, following the controversy surrounding *Piss Christ*. Emotions ran high. The cultural world did not stand idly by in the face of this act of self-censorship against a major artist on the American art scene.

The battle that was about to begin would dominate the decade to come. The first issue was the liquidation of the NEA, a goal pursued by the hardline conservative wing, backed by radical evangelists and televangelists such as Patrick Buchanan. As Frederic Martet points out, the aim was to "recapture the culture" they saw as having been misused by liberals during the Sixties, which appeared to mark the beginning of the end of the American Empire. The revolution was also intended to be moral. It was about rejecting a contemporary art form fueled only by the pursuit of lucrative scandal. The battle would be a long one, culminating in Trump's action against the NEA in 2020.



3D visuals, 2024

© Tempora

The exhibition traverses Serrano's artistic career from the late 1980s to the present day, not as a chronological retrospective but by exploring the different facets of his work in direct relation to contemporary American society, which he portrays in many ways. Through ten chapters and eighty-nine works on display, the exhibition explores some of the artist's most emblematic series: *Native Americans*, *America*, *Nomads*, *Infamous*, *The Klan*, *Torture*, *Holy Works*, *Objects of Desire*, *Immersion*, *Bodily Fluids*, *Nudes*, *History of Sex*, *The Morgue*, *Robots*, *The Game : All Things Trump...*

The sober scenography reveals the full power of Serrano's aesthetic, with its vivid colours, monumentality and pictorial style.

On the first floor of the museum, a selection of works chosen specifically for the occasion are displayed in dialogue with the permanent collections and the works of Aristide Maillol.

To accompany visitors through the exhibition, an audio guide has been produced with the help of Andres Serrano himself, who comments on the works in the exhibition and the major themes that inspire his artistic work. The artist offers an uncompromising look at the state of contemporary America and the themes that are close to his heart, such as the idea of the inventory, his relationship with painting, the homeless, racism, violence and weapons, religion and faith...

A fascinating journey with the artist into his multi-faceted world!



Tempora is a Belgian agency specialising in the design, creation, promotion and management of museums, exhibitions and cultural facilities. Founded in 1998, the company now has around 100 employees.

Over the years, Tempora has established itself as a major cultural operator whose exhibitions are exported to Europe and the rest of the world. It has an integrated team - historians and architects, scenographers, graphic designers and multimedia specialists, engineers and technicians - who are responsible for the entire production chain, from design to management and production.

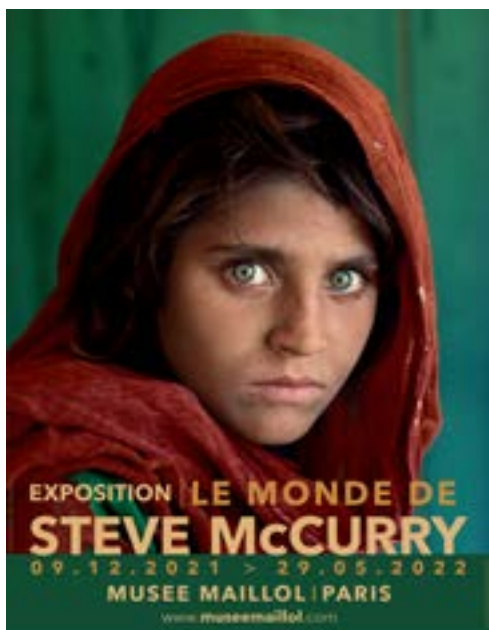
Tempora's approach is based on a certain number of values: respect for the sites and their history; the showcasing of the collections; the search for a balance between enjoyment, aesthetics and rigorous respect for scientific data; access for the greatest number of people and a focus on education.

MUSÉE MAILLOL PARIS

In 1955, Dina Vierny, Aristide Maillol's model and associate, bought a flat in the building at 61, rue de Grenelle, famous for, among other things, Edme Bouchardon's majestic Four Seasons fountain. Little by little, over a period of twenty years, she managed to buy the whole building. It took about fifteen years to complete the redevelopment work under the direction of architect Pierre Devinoy. It took another twenty-five years before the Maillol Museum opened its doors on 20 January 1995. Today, it presents to the public the most important collection of works by the artist.

In parallel, the museum has presented an impressive series of temporary art exhibitions since its creation.





MAIN PERMANENT EXHIBITIONS

- *Musée de la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, Gdansk, Poland
- *Centre historique interactif de la ville de Poznan*, Poland
- *Ferme d'Hougoumont*, Waterloo
- *Centre d'interprétation de la légende de Saint-Georges et du dragon*, Belgium
- *Centre d'interprétation de la Grotte Chauvet*, France
- *Red Star Line Museum*, Antwerp
- *Museum aan de Stroom (MAS)*, Antwerp
- *Hof van Busleyden, Een bourgondisch stadspaleis*, Mechelen
- *Abbaye Villers-la-Ville*, Belgium
- *Le Musée du Fer, Fourneau Saint-Michel*, Belgium
- *House of European History*, Brussels
- *Le Beerstorium de la Brasserie Dubuisson*, Pipaix
- *OTAN Transparency Center*, Brussels
- *Belexpo*, Brussels
- Exposition permanente « *Planète Vivante* » Musée des Sciences naturelles, Brussels

MAIN TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

- *La Belle Europe*, Brussels, 2001
- *Einstein, l'autre regard*, Brussels, 2006
- *Dieu(x), modes d'emploi*, Brussels 2006, Madrid 2007, Quebec 2010, Ottawa 2011, Paris 2012, Warsaw 2013, Geneva 2019
- *C'est notre histoire ! Cinquante ans de construction européenne*, Brussels, 2007; Wroclaw 2009
- *C'est notre Terre 1 & 2 !*, Brussels, Warsaw, 2008
- *L'Amérique, c'est aussi notre histoire ! Trois siècles de relations entre l'Europe et les États-Unis* Brussels, 2010
- *Be. Welcome. La Belgique et l'immigration*, Brussels, 2010; Charleroi, 2011
- *14-18, c'est aussi notre histoire* Brussels, 2014
- *Via Antwerp. The road to Ellis Island* New York, Ellis Island Immigration Museum, 2016
- *L'Islam, c'est aussi notre histoire ! Douze siècles de présence musulmane en Europe*, Germany, Italy, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, 2010
- *21, rue la Boétie. Picasso, Matisse, Braque, Léger*, Liège 2016, Paris, 2017



- *Bruegel, A poetic Experience*, Brussels, 2019
- *Warhol. The American Dream Factory*, Liège, 2020
- *Inside Magritte*, Liège, 2021
- *Antoine de Saint Exupéry. Un Petit Prince parmi les Hommes*, Lyon, 2020 ; Brussels, 2022
- *The World of Steve McCurry*, Brussels, 2017 ; Lyon, 2019 ; Antwerp, 2021 ; Paris, 2021
- *The Climate Show*, Brussels, 2022
- *Pompeii*, Brussels, 2017, Richmond, 2019, Spokane 2020, Orlando 2020, Quebec 2021, New-York 2022
- *Hyperrealism Sculpture. Ceci n'est pas un corps*, Liège, 2019 ; Brussels, 2021 ; Lyon, 2022 ; Paris, 2022
- *Elliott Erwitt. Une rétrospective*, Paris, 2023 ; Lyon, 2023
- *Chéri Samba. Dans la collection Jean Pigozzi*, Paris, 2023
- *Toutankhamon. À la découverte du pharaon oublié*, Lyon, 2022 ; Strasbourg, 2023

MAIN CURRENT PRODUCTIONS AND FUTURE PROJECTS

- *Johnny Hallyday. L'Exposition*, Brussels, 2022 ; Paris, 2023
- *Bill Viola. Sculptor of Time*, Liège, 2023
- *Passion Japon*, Lyon, 2024
- *Pompeii*, Arlington ; Lyon, 2024
- *Serrano: Portraits of America*, Paris, as from April 2024
- *Les Mondes de Paul Delvaux*, Liège, as from October 2024
- *Antoine de Saint Exupéry. Un Petit Prince parmi les Hommes*, Strasbourg, as from October 2024
- *Nadia Léger*, Paris, as from November 2024
- *Centre d'interprétation des Glaciers et du Climat*, Chamonix, 2025-2026

DELEGATED OVERSIGHT

- *Bastogne War Museum*, Bastogne
- *Mudia*, Redu
- *WOM (World of Mind)*, Brussels
- *Musée Maillol*, Paris



- **Michel Draguet**
- **Élie Barnavi**
- **Benoît Remiche**

supported by the whole team at Tempora.

What is a “collective curatorship”?

At Tempora, the “collective curatorship” fulfils the functions traditionally assigned to a single person, the curator: creating, organising and managing a temporary exhibition. Comprising those responsible for the various aspects of the project - scientific content, scenography, artistic direction, production - who work as a team, the “collective curatorship” harmonises the work of its members, creates a fertile exchange between them and saves time. It relies on a large team. Everyone works as an integrated unit in which, at all stages of production, all the skills necessary for the smooth running of the project can be found. This method emerged empirically over the years. From now on, the “collective curatorship” is a trademark of Tempora. If you like, a component of its culture.

Michel Draguet

Michel Draguet has a PhD in Philosophy and Literature and holds an agrégation. He is an Art History Professor at the Free University of Brussels and a High Representative for Belgian Cultural Heritage. As a former Director General of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (2005-2023), he also temporarily directed the Royal Museums of Art and History of Belgium from 2010 to 2014. He created both the Magritte Museum in 2009 and the Fin-de-siècle Museum in 2013 in Brussels.

Specialized in the History of 19th and 20th century painting, he has curated 52 exhibitions on Symbolism, 20th century Belgian art and Magritte. He is the author of 120 scientific articles and 31 solo works, including *Khnopff ou l'ambigu poétique* (Paris, Flammarion, 1995 - Prix Arthur Merghelynck 1996 de l'Académie royale de Belgique); *Chronologie de l'art du XX^e siècle* (Paris, Flammarion, 1997; new edition in 2003); *Ensor ou la fantasmagorie* (Paris, Gallimard, 1999); *Le Symbolisme en Belgique* (Fonds Mercator, 2005), *Magritte Tout en papier (collages, dessins, gouaches)* (Hazan, 2006). *Alechinsky de A à Y*, (Gallimard, 2007) *Monet. Les Nymphéas grandeur nature*, (Hazan, 2010), *Les Nagas* (Fonds Mercator 2018- winner of the 2018 edition of the Prix International du Livre d'Art Tribal) *Fernand Khnopff* (Fonds Mercator 2018) or *Mémoires berbères. Des bijoux et des femmes au Maroc*, published in Brussels and New Haven, by the Fonds Mercator and Yale University Press in 2021.

Élie Barnavi

Élie Barnavi is a historian and essayist, and Honorary Professor of the History of the Modern West at Tel Aviv University.

From 2000 to 2002, he served as Israel's ambassador to France.

Since 1998, as a scientific adviser to the Museum of Europe in Brussels and scientific director of the Tempora company, he has directed or co-directed the scientific committees of several exhibitions.

He has published around 20 works on the French and European 16th century and on the contemporary history of Israel and the Jewish people, as well as research in professional journals in Europe, the United States and Canada, and political analyses in the mainstream press in Israel and abroad (France, Belgium, Spain, Italy).

Élie Barnavi has received several awards, including the Grand prix de la Francophonie from the Académie française in 2007 for his entire body of work.

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS - BRUXELLES

Since opening its first gallery in Paris in 1993, followed by one in Brussels in 2008 and a second venue in Paris in 2013, Nathalie Obadia has exhibited emerging and established artists from the international contemporary art scene. In autumn 2021, Galerie Nathalie Obadia opened a new venue in the Matignon-Saint-Honoré district of Paris. The gallery's mission is also to promote artists among institutions in France and abroad.

The Galerie Nathalie Obadia participates in international trade fairs: Art Basel, Art Basel Hong Kong, Art Basel Miami, Paris+ by Art Basel, Paris Photo, Art Geneva, Art Brussels, Art Paris, TEFAF Maastricht, TEFAF New York amongst others.

List of featured artists: *Brook Andrew, Edgar Arceneaux, Martin Barré, Nú Barreto, Valérie Belin, Carole Benzaken, Guillaume Bresson, Rosson Crow, Luc Delahaye, Patrick Faigenbaum, Roland Flexner, Roger-Edgar Gillet, Josep Grau-Garriga, Laura Henno, Fabrice Hyber, Shirley Jaffe Estate, Hoda Kashiha, Seydou Keïta, Sophie Kuijken, Robert Kushner, Guillaume Leblon, Eugène Leroy, Lu Chao, Benoît Maire, Rodrigo Matheus, Meuser, Johanna Mirabel, Youssef Nabil, Manuel Ocampo, Shahpour Pouyan, Laure Prouvost, Jorge Queiroz, Fiona Rae, Antoine Renard, Sarkis, Andres Serrano, Lorna Simpson, Jessica Stockholder, Mickalene Thomas, Nicola Tyson, Joris Van de Moortel, Agnès Varda, Wang Keping, Brenna Youngblood, Ni Youyu, Jérôme Zonder.*

ANDRES SERRANO

PORTRAITS OF AMERICA

From April 27 to October 20, 2024

Rates

Standard: €17,50

Youth (6-18 years): €12,50

Group (up to 15 people): €15

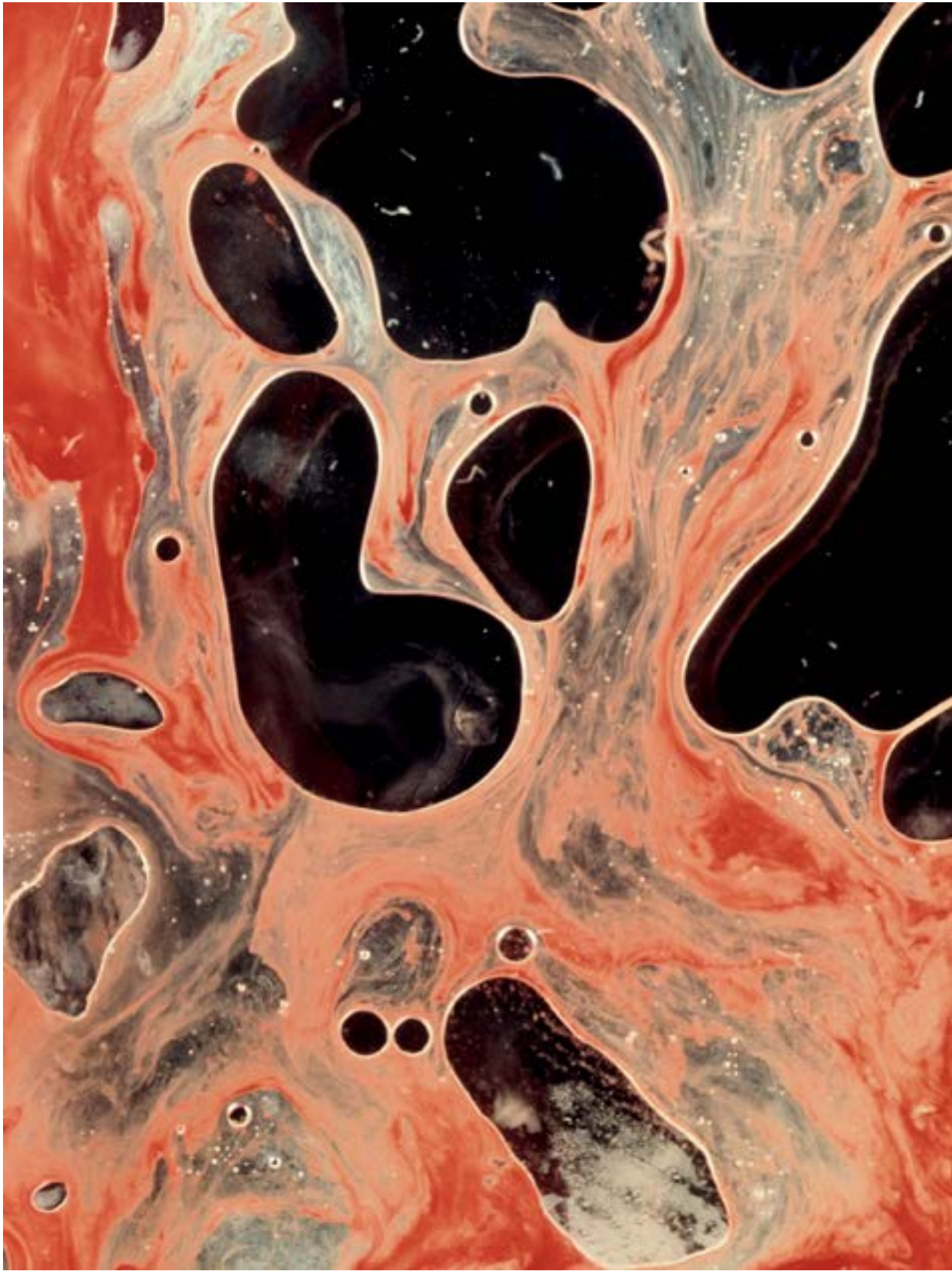
Discovery Wednesdays (every Wednesday): €14,50

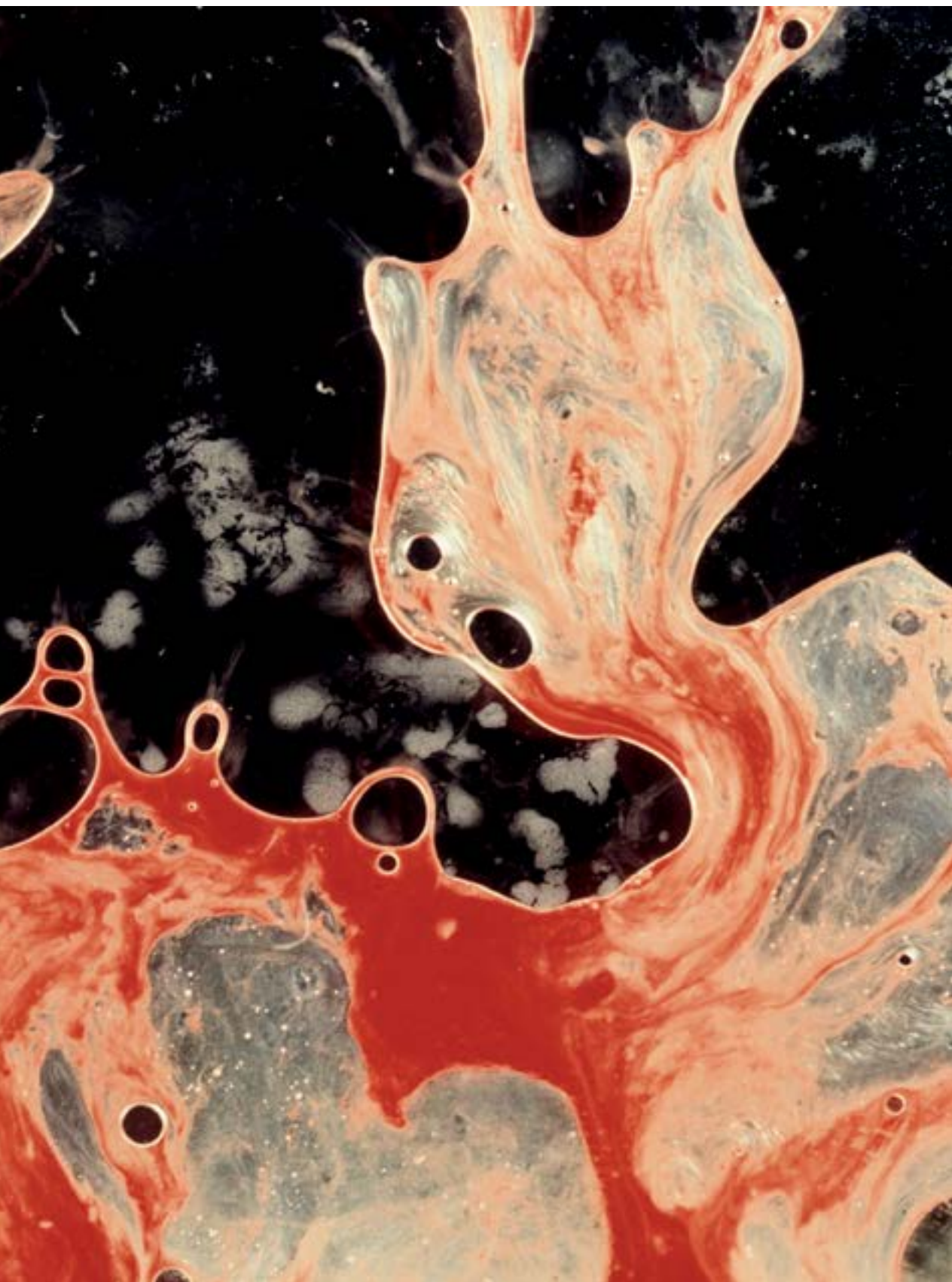
Address

MUSÉE MAILLOL

59-61 rue de Grenelle

75007 Paris





Semen_ &_Blood_III (Bodily Fluids), 1990

© Andres Serrano

Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

ANDRES SERRANO PORTRAITS OF AMERICA

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