



Smithsonian American Art Museum

## **The Return of the Sixties: On the Meaning of the Sixties in Contemporary Art and Culture**

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The artistic and political movements of the 1960s and early 1970s have emerged as a major focus of contemporary art since the 1990s. Many of the artists who make work about the 1960s were born during or in the wake of that era, the most dramatic period of social transformation of the last half-century. Others were born long after the 1960s; their memories are second hand, drawn from films and books. Their practices exemplify what I call the 1960s return. For in the works of these artists the 1960s reemerges as a seminal moment of artistic and personal origination, and as a perpetual source of fascination.

This project is comprised of six chapters—six accounts of 1960s effects. The introduction considers the 1960s return as a theoretical model, as manifest in the practices of Kerry James Marshall and others who interpret the 1960s as history, as memory, and as an object of nostalgic longing. Chapter One analyzes the current monumentalization of Robert Smithson’s entropic art. Chapter Two describes the expansion of Institutional Critique during the 1990s. Chapter Three traces two legacies of site-oriented practice—the site-specificity of Richard Serra and the mobilization of place advanced by Smithson. Chapter Four recounts the emergence of the artist-traveler during the 1960s and his or her return during the 1990s, in concert with the nomadization of the art world during the current era of globalization. Chapter Five is a narrative of sculptural scale that leads from the somatic encounter of Minimal Art to the gigantism of today’s mega-installations. In each of these accounts, the meaning of “the 1960s” is explored. The contemporary is conceived both as 1960s effect and as a path out of the 1960s—as the end of the end of the 1960s.