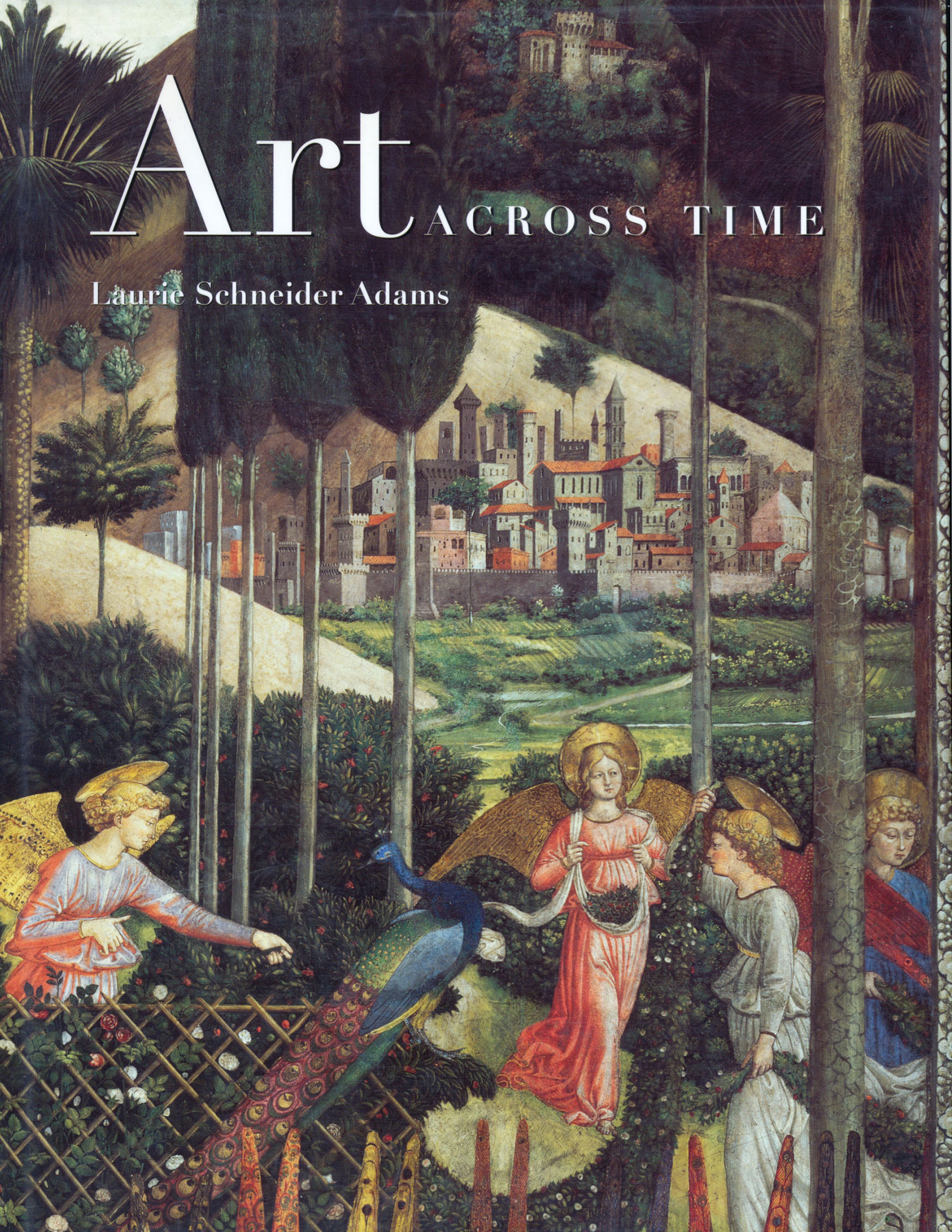


Art ACROSS TIME

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Thirty-nine is three times the number of Christ plus his twelve apostles. The tiled floor contains 999 names of famous women not referred to in the place settings. Traditional female crafts, such as embroidery, appliqué, needlepoint, painting on china, and so forth, are used for details. In part, this is to emphasize the value of these skills, which feminists believe to have been undervalued by a male-dominated society.

The artist established a foundation to send *The Dinner Party* on tour, and later published a monograph on it that included the biographies of the women it celebrated. Despite the originality of Chicago's conception and the new iconographic content of her piece, the work would have less impact without its historical relevance. For although the triangle can be read as a female symbol, it also refers to the Trinity, and is thus rooted in Christian art and culture. Likewise, the numerical regularity and symmetry of the design links the formal arrangement of *The Dinner Party* with Leonardo's *Last Supper*.

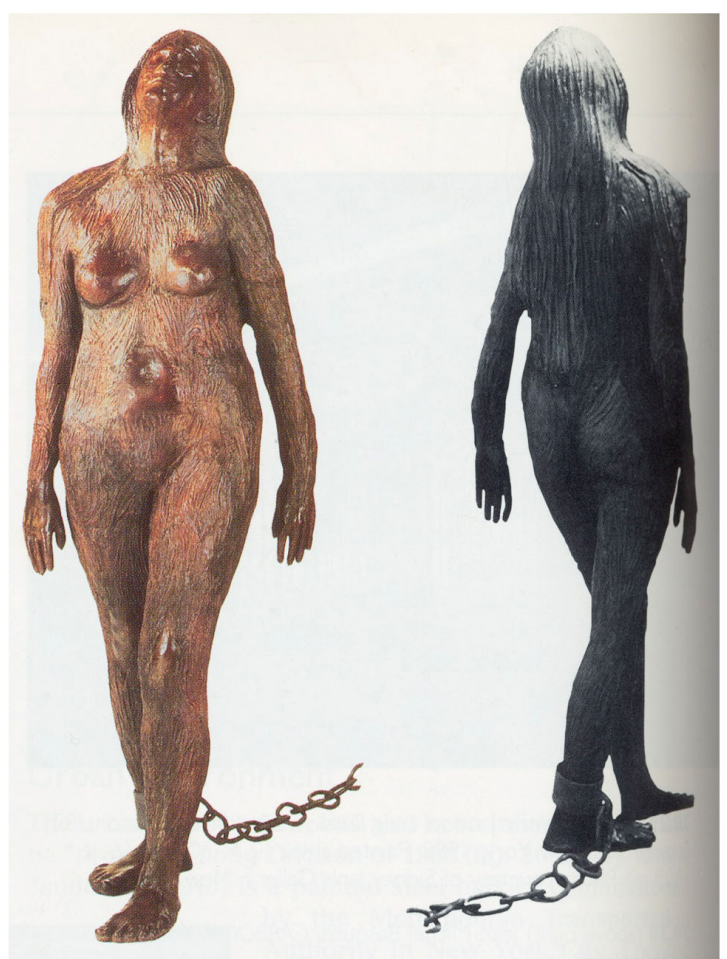
Body Art

A recent development, particularly in sculpture, that is derived from the feminist movement is so-called Body Art. In general, Body Art signals a return to the interest in the human form, which in some artists focuses primarily on the female body.

Kiki Smith The Body Art of Kiki Smith (b. 1954) challenges viewers by refusing to be "pretty." Smith has developed an iconography of body parts, in particular those that reveal the interior functions of the female. There is a political significance for Smith in the metaphor of the body and the "body politic," with the hidden body systems as signs of hidden social issues. She has been engaged with contemporary controversies over AIDS, gender, race, and battered women.

Smith was born in Germany to American parents; her father (David Smith) and sister were artists. When her parents died, she made death masks of them, as well as of her grandmother when she died. In 1976 Smith came to New York, studied *Gray's Anatomy* in 1979, and in 1985 trained as an emergency medical technician. Among her works are her mother's feet cast in glass, a bronze womb, hanging heads and hands, and veins, arteries, and body fluids preserved in jars. In these subjects, Smith evokes both the embalming practices of ancient Egypt, and the severed body parts of Brancusi.

Smith's *Mary Magdalene* of 1994 (figs. 30.32 and 30.33) is a traditional Christian subject rendered in a new light. The bronze body is covered with incised lines, except for the smooth breasts and navel area. The lines are reminiscent of the Magdalene's hair, grown long after the Crucifixion as penance for her sins. As such, the figure represents the penitent Magdalene, like that depicted by Donatello (see fig. 14.64) and other Renaissance artists. The long hair, combined with the ankle chain, endow the figure with a subhuman quality, which places her at the



30.32 (left) Kiki Smith, *Mary Magdalene*, front view, 1994. Silicon bronze and forged steel, edition 2 of 3, 59½ × 20½ × 21½ in (152 × 52 × 55 cm).

30.33 (above right) Rear view of *Mary Magdalene*, fig. 30.32.

borderline between human and animal, saint and sinner, chastity and lust. Seen from the front, she seems to be gazing upward, and from the back, moving in a lyrical dance-like motion.

Smith has related this sculpture to French folktales about the Magdalene's life after Christ's death. According to these stories, Mary Magdalene lived in the wilderness for seven years. When, on one occasion, she happened to catch sight of her reflection in a pool, she was punished for her narcissism and condemned to do further penance. Her flowing tears created the seven rivers of Provence, in the South of France.

Rona Pondick The Body Art of Rona Pondick (b. 1952) has an entirely different quality than Smith's. She creates surreal juxtapositions, or disjunctions, of body parts that often participate in a narrative setting. Her *Tree* of 1995 (fig. 30.34), a model for a larger project, is seen here installed in 1997 at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York. The bare tree is cast in aluminum, and the polished metallic fruit is strewn across the earth on the floor of the gallery. It seems that the fruit has fallen from the tree, and become orphaned. The oral rage of the infant deprived of food is indicated by the individualized fruit in the foreground—the teeth are cast from Pondick's teeth biting into the wax. Head and mouth are merged in a display of fear and aggression engendered by abandonment.



30.34 Rona Pondick, *Tree* (model), 1995. Mixed media, 32 × 24 × 24 in (81 × 61 × 61 cm). As installed in 1997, at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York.

The teeth are also those of the predators who gather up these biomorphic fruits to eat. But the little heads, like enraged children, will have their revenge; for despite their defenselessness, they will surely break the teeth of anyone attempting to bite into them. Pondick achieves an uncanny effect in such work by appealing to what is familiar in the infantile past of the viewer as well as of herself. Her stated interest in psychoanalytic narratives is reflected in drawings of heads accompanied by the written words “No,” or “I want.” Working like Smith in the tradition of severed body parts, Pondick shows her connections to Brancusi and the Surrealists.