

Curriculum

Sam Contis

In 2012, Sam Contis visited Deep Springs, an all-male college in California, where she made a commanding body of work that considers the intertwined mythologies of masculinity and the American West. Gesture, skin, physical labor, and the subtleties of the landscape are among her preoccupations, whether working in color or radiant black and white. She has photographed young athletes, collaborated with the mezzo-soprano Inbal Hever, and followed a network of fences and walls in the English countryside—the subject of her new book, *Overpass* (Aperture, 2022). Often looking to the past, through her references to Eadweard Muybridge and Dorothea Lange, Contis crafts images that speak to the uncanny beauty of the present.



The Chinati Foundation

I spent the summer after I graduated college living in old army barracks in the west Texas desert, working at Donald Judd's Chinati Foundation. "Somewhere," he said, "a portion of contemporary art has to exist as an example of what the art and its context were meant to be." I had taken courses on Minimalism and Land art, and seen slides of Judd's concrete boxes and Roni Horn's copper forms. But nothing prepared me for actually being there. Situated over hundreds of acres, the installations make you hyperaware of your own perspective as a viewer and show how a work of art can be transformed by its environment.

This spread, clockwise from left: Donald Judd, 15 untitled works in concrete, 1980–84; Janet Cardiff, photo no. 5, from *Her Long Black Hair*, 2004; Ingrid Pollard, *Oceans Apart*, 1989; Cover of Annie Ernaux, *The Years*, 2017; Still from *Tokyo Olympiad*, 1965



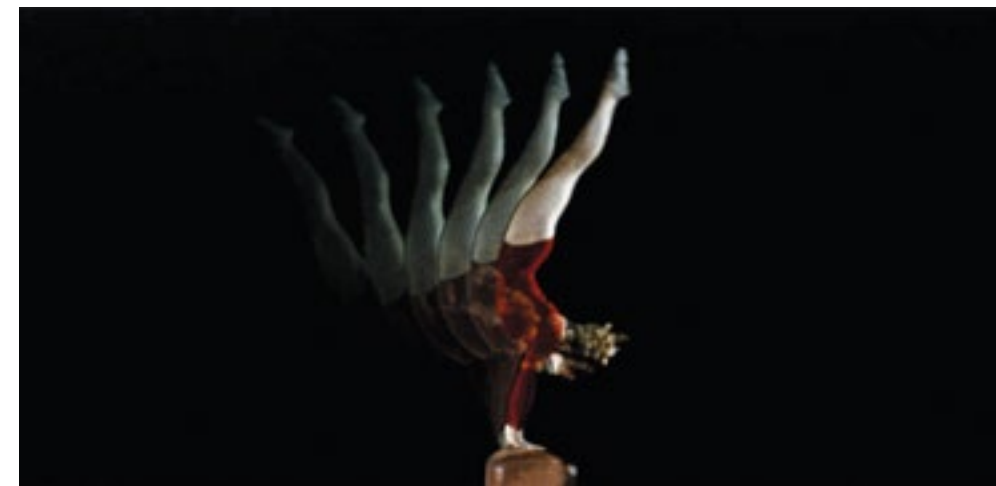
Janet Cardiff, *Her Long Black Hair*, 2004

Janet Cardiff's forty-five-minute audio walk through Central Park, created for the Public Art Fund, is centered around a group of photographs, including several of a young, dark-haired woman. When I first did the walk in 2007, you had to borrow a Discman and an envelope of photographs. Now you can download the audio files and look at the images on your phone (bring a good pair of headphones). The recorded ambient sounds of the city, its birds and sirens, are nearly impossible to distinguish from those in real life. Cardiff's narration is soft and confiding; she quotes Baudelaire and tells us about the now-covered streams beneath our feet and the thousands of people who took up residence in the park during the Great Depression. The walk feels like a waking dream—"one time across another." Stitching together memories, histories, and imagined futures, she asks us to question the visible and invisible structures that influence our ways of seeing: "There are always so many layers in front of my eyes . . . how can I really know what I've seen?"



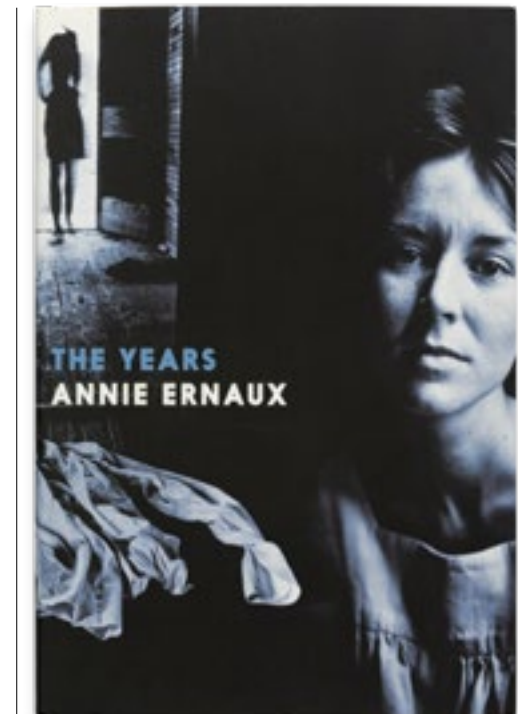
Ingrid Pollard

I'd been reading about Ingrid Pollard's work for a long time before I got to see any of it in person. Now she's had a traveling retrospective in England, *Carbon Slowly Turning*, with an accompanying catalog full of excellent texts. Earlier this year, I saw her *Oceans Apart* series at the Tate's *Life Between Islands* exhibition about British Caribbean postwar art. Pollard often arranges a group of images within a single frame: a stark image of a wave crashing against the shoreline, a pair of sepia-tinted photographs of a family in a rowboat in calm water on a sunny afternoon, a short text ("wish you were here . . ."). The personal photographs are bookended by historical images of slavery and colonialism. Pollard cannily flirts with nostalgia in her use of family-album photographs, hand-colored images, and cursive script, while pointing to the manipulability of photography and its role in constructing notions of home and belonging.



Kon Ichikawa, *Tokyo Olympiad*, 1965

Kon Ichikawa's documentary of the 1964 Olympics is unlike any other sports film I've seen. Halfway through, a gymnast in a red leotard comes vaulting into a darkened frame—it looks like a moving Harold Edgerton photograph. The rest of the world fades away and the gymnasts fly and float in a sea of black. In the film's longest sequence, the men's marathon, the camera shifts its attention from the runners to a water station: buckets are poured over a meticulously arranged tabletop of blue and pink sponges. The camera lingers, watching as some competitors grab a sponge and run on, while others pause to ladle water over their bodies. We lose sight of the front-runners, instead spending time with the runners you might not otherwise notice. In many of these moments the film is nearly silent. A fantasia of color and rich in small details, it's a mesmerizing look at bodies in time.



Annie Ernaux, *The Years*, 2008

I didn't read *The Years* until it was translated into English, in 2017. I haven't stopped thinking about it since. It's an autobiography that spans more than sixty years and, at the same time, a story of her generation. Ernaux's memories of each decade often begin with a description of a personal photograph, inscribed on the back with the place and year it was made. While she never specifically references herself in the photographs, she uses these descriptions to construct two images in tandem—one of herself, with an oval face and parted hair, and one of her times (the Algerian War, Agnès Varda, cars, quiz shows, abortion). At the end of the book, the woman in the photographs decides to write "a slippery narrative composed in an unremitting continuous tense, absolute, devouring the present as it goes, all the way to the final image of a life."