




ART IN **AMERICA**


300 YEARS OF INNOVATION



## Art in America: Three Hundred Years of Innovation

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Page 2: Richard Prince, *Untitled (Cowboy)*, 1995 (detail; see p. 311)

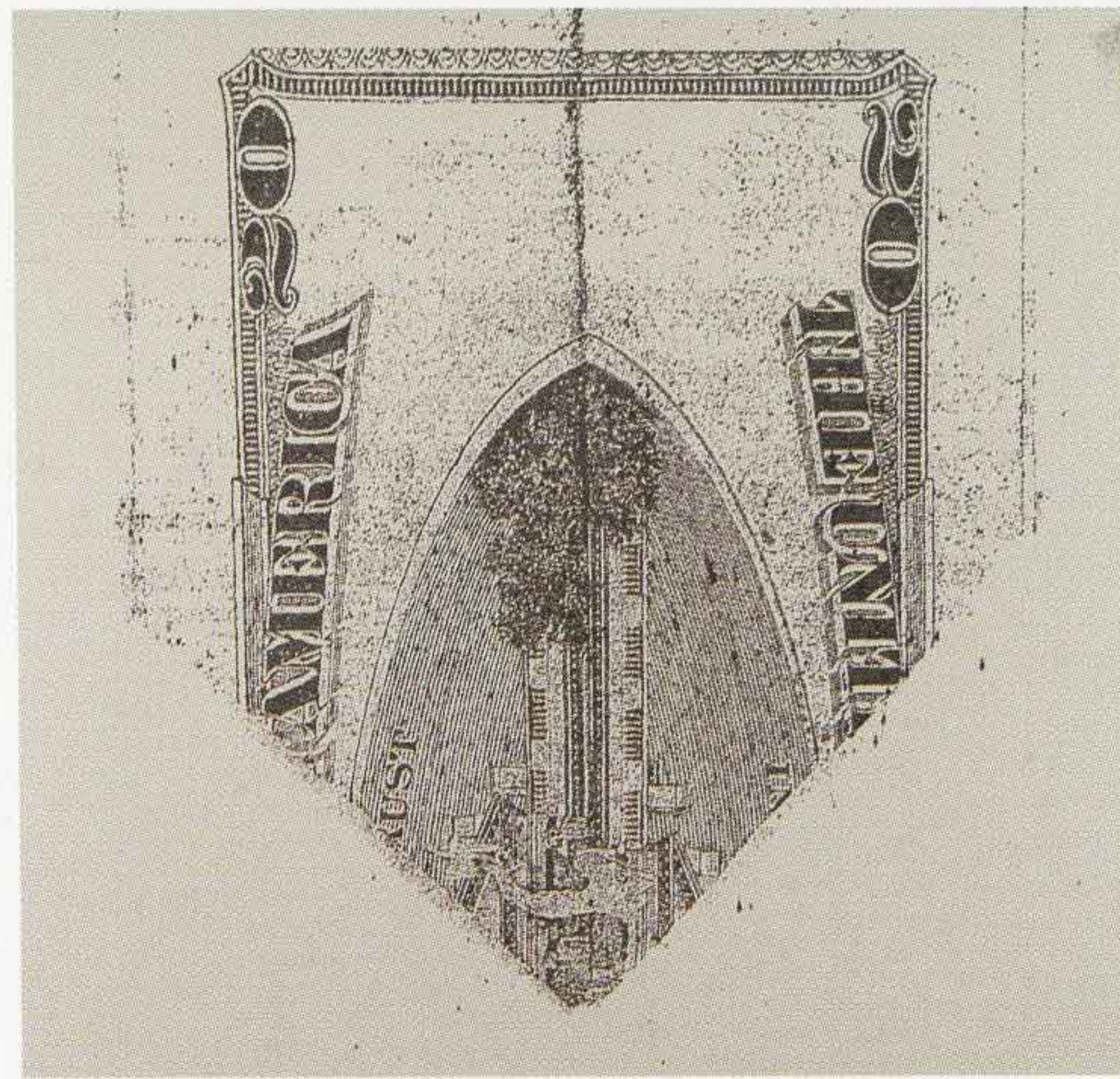


Fig. 117 Nate Lowman (b. 1979)

*Paper Airplane*, 2004

Alkyd on canvas, 60 × 60 in. (152.4 × 152.4 cm)

Courtesy of Maccarone Inc. and the artist



trends, which prompted artists to examine the unparalleled influence of film on the cultural psyche as well as the proliferation of diverse readings of history. The rejection of one master narrative and the acknowledgment of multiple viewpoints, as well as interest in the rôle of the subconscious in the formation of subjectivity, which had revolutionized artistic production and identity theory in the 1970s and 1980s, has continued to inform the art of younger artists, including the work of Barney. The artist's early gender-bending performances and his use of the metaphor of the undifferentiated zygote (the fertilized egg before becoming male or female) are indebted to the gender theory of the previous decades that explored the Lacanian concept of the split subject.

#### THE PERPETUAL RETURN OF PAINTING

The ascendancy of installation art and its interactive qualities has pushed painting to the periphery over the years. Aligned with conservative thinking and an interest in beauty and formal issues, conventions that were rejected by a Postmodern generation (as well as Conceptual artists before them and the Russian Constructivists before that), painting has been declared dead as often as it has been resurrected. The past ten years have witnessed a renewed interest in figure painting, a trend exemplified by the popularity of such artists as John Currin (born 1962) and Lisa Yuskavage (born 1962; pp. 326, 327). Borrowing from a long tradition of master painters, ranging from Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553) to Botticelli (1444/45–1510) to Caravaggio (1571–1610), Edgar Degas (1834–1917), and even Norman Rockwell (1894–1978), both artists re-examine the female form in a contemporary context. In their canvases, the traditional nude is distorted and exaggerated, almost to cartoon-like ends. Likened to sex kittens and kewpie dolls, the women in these lush paintings walk a fine line between acknowledging the burden of the male gaze and succumbing to it. Yet while the subjects of these works may be said boldly to take ownership of their sexuality, they also remain vehicles for the pure act of painting, simultaneously paying homage to and critiquing a long tradition.<sup>7</sup>

The works of Elizabeth Peyton (born 1965; p. 328), which likewise helped to feed the return to painting, have also been contextualized

within an esteemed historical tradition of portraiture, exemplified in her case by the likes of Frans Hals (c. 1580–1666), who has been invoked in descriptions of the artist's works.<sup>8</sup> Yet, while Currin and Yuskavage take on the familiar female form, Peyton's works are often filled with boys and men. Influenced by Andy Warhol (1928–1987) as well as David Hockney (born 1937) and his portraits of intimates and cultural figures, the artist creates sensitive renderings of friends, celebrities, and historical personalities alike. Evidence of our fascination with celebrity and the artist's own status as fan,<sup>9</sup> Peyton's works impart to their subjects a familiarity and a humanity that are lost in the usual frenzy of star-watching. The paintings of Tim Gardner (born 1973), based on polaroids of his brothers and other young men in sports jerseys hanging out on couches, sitting in hot tubs, or drinking beer, offer an unusual firsthand look into a private, masculine world. In contrast to an established art-historical convention that focused on the female form, these studies of a macho realm, particularly in an age that is usually suspicious of the white male, are strikingly atypical. Captured in paint, these portraits of youthful, masculine identity are elevated to another level. Perhaps what has made the work of these painters of particular interest to an art world usually hungry for more media-based art is the urge to slow down the act of looking, the need for a break from the fast stream of images already available, and the opportunity to exert even more control over them.

#### POST-9/11

The control of images has taken on particular significance in America in the last few years, which have witnessed the implementation of Homeland Security and heightened surveillance strategies as well as the suppression of images that are a threat to the American status quo.<sup>10</sup> Images of bodies jumping from the World Trade Center as well as the flag-draped coffins shipped home from Iraq are seen everywhere but in the United States. Despite such erasures, in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the American public has gained a new awareness of American identity as well as the country's place on the international stage. The United States is again the image reflected by the current president—the lone cowboy bravely righting wrongs as he waves



Lisa Yuskavage (b. 1962)

*Blonde, Brunette, Redhead*, 1995

Oil on linen, three panels

Overall: 36 × 108 in. (91.4 × 274.3 cm)

Collection of Yvonne Force Villareal,

New York

