Joyce Neimanas (b. 1944)
*M & H*, 1989
Gelatin silver photogram
Art Rental and Sales Gallery Fund, 1991.66

Since the photograph has such a strong connection to "real life" and particularly to memory (which is itself often airbrushed), the artist photographer should not be seduced into a desire to conform to a preconceived notion about it as a medium. Society will continue to look for pictures (and literature) that confirm previously held truths and ideals. In that narrowness, even reality is held accountable. "That is as pretty as a picture." Any deviation becomes suspect. Photography, on the other hand, does not have to suffer from such a rational philosophical dictum as observed reality. The photographer need not illustrate society's temporary truths. There is no morality in mixing media -- no positive or negative mark. The right color process does not exist, nor does the perfect black- and-white print. The ideal subject is an illusion, as is the perfect archival print. Art is an attitude that produces an object by using media. Media does not produce Art.

Joyce Neimanas

Joyce Neimanas' philosophy about art is an outgrowth of her formal training and two decades of teaching and personal exploration. She studied at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the 1960s, a time when established notions about art and artistic conventions were being scrutinized. Photographers were encouraged to use whatever tools, materials, methods, or media were necessary for the full realization of an image. Artists crossed boundaries of media
freely and were combining and inventing new forms to create imagery that was coherent with the increasingly more technical world.

This reevaluation of art’s methods and purpose led Neimanas to explore the processes and role of photography; it is an exploration which she continues today as a practicing artist and the Chair of the Department of Photography at the School of the Art Institute. She plays with the general perception of photography as a mechanical representation of the world, demonstrating in her work that photography is subject to conventions like all other forms of pictorial representation. Her various strategies call attention to the surface of the photograph itself and to its maker, not simply to the representation of “reality.” With the purchase of an SX-70 camera in a pawn shop in 1980, Neimanas began creating assemblages in which prints of unrelated objects and spaces were arranged to create the illusion of a realistic subject. It was in these works that Neimanas’ interest in gender and stereotypes first emerged. In 1985, she started making collages of clipped magazine images which she printed mural size in black and white. These pieces address issues of female identity and the relationship between a woman’s psychological and physical “being.”

Male and female stereotypes and behavior are explored in Neimanas’ M & H of 1989. Nearly full-size images of Marilyn Monroe and Hulk Hogan are superimposed, uniting two personalities from separate eras who epitomize stereotypical gender roles. Neimanas’ skilled arrangement of the images gives the illusion that the figures are
reacting to one another’s presence. Hulk Hogan, with rippling muscles and wrestling boots, clutches Marilyn Monroe across her voluptuous breasts. Dressed in fish-net stockings and her characteristic short dress, Marilyn gestures resignation and submission with her arms and hands.

*M & H* is a photogram, a photograph made (without a camera) by laying objects directly on a light-sensitive surface. Neimanas juxtaposed a photographic image of Hulk Hogan with one of Marilyn Monroe and placed them on top of photographic paper that was then exposed to light. The result is a fabricated image that crosses time periods and merges genders. Neimanas challenges the viewer and breaks down the long-held belief that photography is a reliable and immediate record of reality. MR

**QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES**

1. Before providing students with the above information on *M & H*, have them look at the photograph and discuss their observations and opinions. How do they think it was made? What message do they think Neimanas was conveying in her selection and arrangement of these celebrities?

2. Many contemporary artists use art, at least in part, as a vehicle for commenting on prevalent political and social issues. Ask students to discuss the issue(s) that *M & H* raises. Next, have each student select a current issue to address in a work of art of their design. Like
Neimanas’ photographs, their works can incorporate magazine pictures and/or images from popular culture.

3. The 1960s were a time of great experimentation in American art. Have students research an artist who crossed boundaries in his/her interpretation of art’s materials, production, and/or meaning.

4. See “America Personified” in the “Sample Lessons” section.