

Youth has been explored by artists throughout time. Since the 1990s, in particular, images of youth in the Western world have elicited both desire and fear, reflecting social, cultural, and political shifts such as HIV awareness and increased acknowledgment and acceptance of gender fluidity. This exhibition examines the different ways youth is portrayed. It is simultaneously innocent and desirous, revealing the treatment of young bodies as sexualized, radical, and medicated objects.

This survey of works, drawn mostly from the MCA's collection, was inspired by Larry Clark's now infamous *Kids* series, which comprised photographs and a movie of the same name that was released in 1995. Written by Harmony Korine and coproduced by Gus Van Sant, the film tells the story of a single day in the life of a group of sexually active teenagers in New York City and offered breakout roles for actors Chloë Sevigny and Rosario Dawson.

The works gathered together for this exhibition are divided into thematic chapters: "The Fountain of Youth," "Portraits of Youth," "Desirous Youth," "Marketing Youth," and "Irreverent Youth." Collectively, they stretch from analogue culture into the utopic digital age.

The exhibition is curated by Omar Kholeif, Manilow Senior Curator, with Grace Deveney, Curatorial Assistant.

Lead support of *Eternal Youth* is provided by The Pritzker Traubert Collection Exhibition Fund. Generous support is provided by Martin Fluhrer and John Williams and Dr. Daniel S. Berger and Mr. Scott Wenthe.

FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

Youth is not just an age group but a state of mind.

These early works were created prior to the development of a consumer culture geared toward young people and before the HIV/AIDS crisis, a tragedy that deeply shaped the representation of adolescence. Therefore, many of the works evoke innocence and a sense of lightheartedness.

At the same time, these works do not shy away from depicting the darker aspects of youth culture. Some of the earliest works on view are photographs by Larry Clark, who would go on to create the film *Kids* (1995). *Tulsa*, the series included here, represents recreational sex and drug use amongst teens from his hometown. Collectively, these works depict the struggle for self-definition at the heart of adolescence and young adulthood, as well as the universal themes of experimentation, desire, and play that recur throughout the exhibition.

IRREVERENT YOUTH

Play, sarcasm, and humor are key themes for the works in this section. Photographers such as Melanie Schiff and Xaviera Simmons capture young women in the midst of cheeky gestures and performances. Painters such as Joshua Nathanson and Kai Althoff capture this sense of play through their fresh approaches to representation. Overall, these works embrace the relationship between coming-of-age and the experience of personal freedoms through play.

DESIROUS YOUTH

The youthful body as a site of desire is epitomized by works such as Herb Ritts's iconic photographs of Mark Wahlberg for Calvin Klein—which helped shape how the youthful body was portrayed. More recent works in this section, such as Amalia Ulman's *Excellences and Perfections* (2014) demonstrate the relationship between internet platforms, such as Instagram, and the creation of “desirable” personas that deliberately play into societal standards of beauty.

PORTRAITS OF YOUTH

Photographic portraits of youth were affected by major cultural shifts of the 1990s, including the growing prosperity and spending power, the beginnings of digital technology and media saturation, and the rise of cultural forms such as grunge and hip-hop music. At the same time, the ongoing medical and political crisis of HIV/AIDS, as well as the social conservatism of the 1980s, continued to shape representations of youth. Against this backdrop, some of the images in this section explore the struggle for self-definition while others speak to the notions of performance, play, and experimentation that eternally define youth.

MARKETING YOUTH

As nearly every form of media demonstrates, products are routinely marketed with promises of providing beauty, energy, and other qualities associated with youth. A number of the artists included in this section challenge this phenomenon by creating images that use the polished photographic language of advertising, while not selling any particular product. This process encourages viewers to reflect on the language of advertising and the strategies it uses to seduce consumers. Thomas Hirschhorn's drawings on magazine spreads offer a forceful critique of marketing and the commodification of young models. His deformation of the models faces, along with the command "TAKE MORE! GIVE MORE!" suggests the darker side of marketing youth, a fleeting concept that ultimately cannot be bought or sold.