

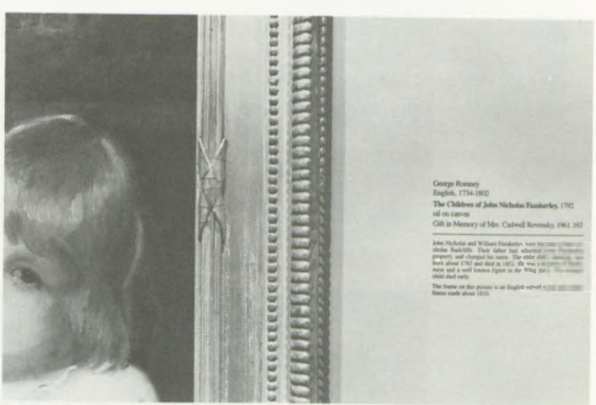
77-595153

The Museum of Modern Art
New York
September 19–November 10, 1987

projects: louise lawler

Enough.

9



Fragment/Frame/Text: "The Younger Child Died Early." 1984. Cibachrome print, 13 1/2 x 19 1/2" (33.7 x 49.5 cm)

I am showing what they are showing: painting, sculpture, pictures, glasses and words on painted walls furnishing the same material experience; my work is to exchange the positions of exposition and voyeurism. You are standing in your own shoes.

—Louise Lawler, 1987

projects

Designed to present recent work by contemporary artists, the new **projects** series has been based on the Museum's original **projects** exhibitions, which were held from 1971 to 1982. The artists presented are chosen by the members of all the Museum's curatorial departments in a process involving an active dialogue and close critical scrutiny of new developments in the visual arts. The **projects** series is made possible by generous grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Lannan Foundation, and J. P. Morgan & Co. Incorporated.

Left: Arranged by Tracy Atkinson, Director, Gregory Hedberg, Chief Curator and Jean Cadogan, Curator of European Painting and Sculpture, at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut. 1984. Cibachrome print, 16 1/2 x 22 3/4" (41.9 x 57.1 cm)

Right: From the Collections of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Sol LeWitt and Louise Lawler, Arranged by Louise Lawler. 1984. Installation at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford

All works courtesy the artist

louise lawler

The effort of my work is to show the habits and conventions of looking at art by taking on aspects of the system to make it visible.

—Louise Lawler, 1986

The art of Louise Lawler deals with the effect of presentation and display on the ways in which art is perceived. Her work includes photographic images, installations, objects, texts, and graphic design. Often appropriating or repositioning existing works of art, she examines the ways in which our responses may be shaped by relationships between objects and their physical, social, and economic environment. In Lawler's work, as in the work of artists such as Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, and Dan Graham, the content of the art is defined by the context in which it participates.

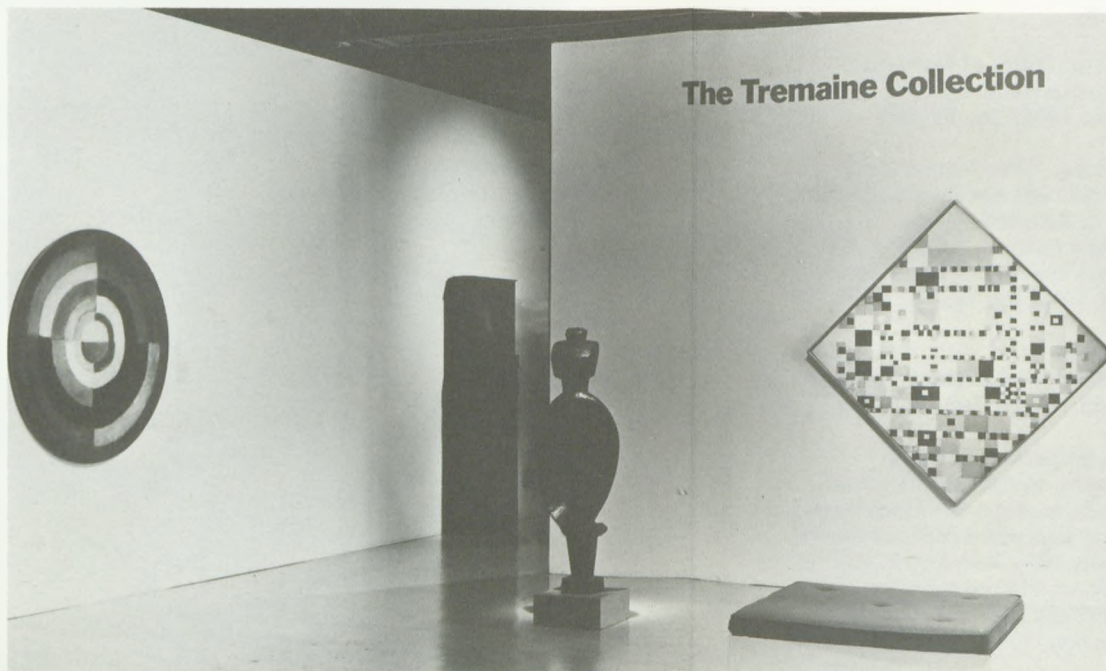
Lawler's artistic method reveals how the interpretation of a work of art is informed by many external factors, as several of her works from the last ten years suggest. For an exhibition in 1978 at Artists Space, a nonprofit gallery in New York, Lawler exhibited a nineteenth-century painting of a racehorse. Two spotlights were positioned above the painting, but were not aimed directly on it. One spotlight was directed at the viewer, while the other was placed so as to cast the viewer's shadow onto the building across the street. She thereby extended the meaning of the painting beyond the depicted image to include the elements of its presentation, the spectator's awareness of his/her own role as participant in the piece, and the work's continuation beyond the confines of the immediate exhibition space.

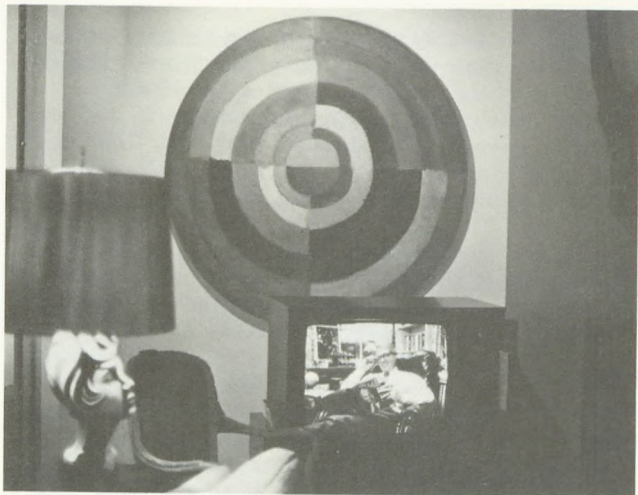
Through the use of already existing works of art, Lawler offers insight into the external conditions of art display. Subsequent and more elaborate "arrangements" have continued to engage the public in an analysis of the nature of presentation and to generate thought about contextually inspired assumptions. For the work *From the Collections of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Sol LeWitt and Louise Lawler, Arranged by Louise Lawler*, shown as part of her *Matrix* exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum (Hartford, 1984), Lawler

selected and installed a group of eight diverse works of art from these different collections. The installation included an early American clock, a seventeenth-century Dutch painting, contemporary works, and an artist's statement presented as a wall label. "Is it," she has asked in another piece, "the work, the location or the stereotype that is the institution?"

Of particular interest to the artist are those contexts that influence the work of art after it leaves the artist's possession. In addition to making arrangements using existing art works, Lawler photographs installations found in museums, galleries, corporations, and private collections. Utilizing conventional variables in the medium of photography—viewpoint, depth of field, type of film, focus, and cropping—to emphasize selected visual information, she highlights aspects of the work of art as it may be seen to operate in the given physical and cultural environment, particularly in terms of the activities of collecting and display. The photograph *Living Room Corner, Arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, Sr., New York City (1984)*, for example, shows certain works of art as they are hung in the home of these collectors. It may be contrasted with *Arranged by Tracy Atkinson, Director, Gregory Hedberg, Chief Curator and Jean Cadogan, Curator of European Painting and Sculpture, at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut*, which shows the same objects in the exhibition *The Tremaine Collection (Wadsworth Atheneum, 1984)*. Highly aesthetic objects in themselves, in their presumed objectivity Lawler's photographs question the role of subjectivity underlying presentation and reception.

Other works by Lawler focus on conventions, including framing and labeling, that traditionally are associated with museum and gallery installations. A photograph, *Fragment/Frame/Text: "The Younger Child Died Early,"* from an ongoing series, presents the entire label along with a small section of the frame and a detail of the painting *The Children of John Nicholas Fazakerley (1792)*, by George Romney (Wadsworth Atheneum). As an image her photograph emphasizes the extent to which labels and frames have





Living Room Corner, Arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, Sr., New York City. 1984. Gelatin-silver print, size variable

become an integral part of viewing and perceiving works of art. Isolated from their original context, these secondary presentational elements are integrated into a new context by Lawler and raised to primary status. Appropriated and repositioned within the framework of her presentation they become the work of art itself.

Language is an important component of Lawler's art. Her work, as in the *Fragment/Frame/Text* series, often draws attention to how words function as presentational supplements on labels, in text statements, or in press releases to participate in the "completion" of the art object. She also writes her own texts or uses quotations in conjunction with visual images or objects. Some provocative statements offer clues to subtle or hidden meanings in her art: "It Remains to Be Seen . . ." "'Whenever I hear the word culture I take out my check book.' Jack Palance." In other pieces striking visual objects or images direct the viewer's attention to larger social or political issues: "It costs 590,000 dollars a day to operate one aircraft carrier."

In addressing issues of particular relevance to contemporary art and culture, such as relationships between context and meaning, questions of authorship and originality, the use and re-presentation of existing imagery, and the commercialization of art, Louise Lawler shares certain concerns and procedures with other artists of her immediate generation, including Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, and Allan McCollum. Using a wide range of presentational forms, which include book design and objects as diverse as drinking glasses and matchbooks in addition to those forms previously noted, she challenges conventional ideas about works of art and their place in the contemporary world in a unique and compelling way. In Lawler's words, "Art is part and parcel of a cumulative and collective enterprise viewed as seen fit by the prevailing culture."

Cora Rosevear, Assistant Curator
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biography

Born Bronxville, New York,
February 3, 1947

education

Cornell University, Ithaca,
New York. BFA, 1969

selected individual exhibitions

1987

Metro Pictures, New York

1985

Gallery Nature Morte, New York

1984

Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford

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by the artist

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Selection and arrangement of photographs, in collaboration with Brian Wallis, in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, edited by Brian Wallis. New York and Boston: The New Museum of Contemporary Art in association with David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1984

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