An important dimension to the 20th century becoming a “biologic era” had been the development of diagnostic imaging. It began at the end of the 19th century, when Wilhelm Röntgen (1845–1923) discovered x-rays; he was awarded the Nobel Prize for this in 1901 (1). George Ansell and Joseph Rotblat, working in Liverpool, visualized the thyroid in 1948, using radioiodine. The American engineer Hal Anger, in Berkeley, developed the γ-camera in 1952. In 1979 the Nobel Prize in Medicine went to Godfrey N. Hounsfield, working for EMI Ltd. in Britain, and a physicist, Allan M. Cormack, who was at Tufts University, for the development of computerized tomography. MRI was developed in the 1980s, and positron emission imaging in the 2000s (1, 2). The endoscope was invented in Germany in 1806 by Philipp Bozzini (1773–1809). Flexible fiberoptic endoscopes were developed in the 1950s, and then the charge-coupled device (essentially an electronic camera) was introduced in 1979 (3).

In parallel, at the beginning of the 20th century, the very concept of a work of art started to change. In the visual arts, the Dada movement, which had emerged during the First World War, expanded the concept of an artwork beyond the “classic” media. Performance, then mostly in the form of theater or cabaret, became an important mode of expression for artists. A work of art started to be thought of as not necessarily only an object, but also as a process leading to its creation. The now famous photographs of a leading abstract expressionist painter, Jackson Pollock (1912–1956), which show him creating a painting, emphasized this “action” element (4). In another strand, conceptual art emerged in the 1960s, professing that an idea in the artist’s mind is as important as the outcome, i.e., the resulting piece of art (5). And thus, also in the 1960s, body art evolved from performance and conceptual art. Body art is art made with, or consists of, the artist’s body. Incidentally, the same term is used to describe the entire industry of body decoration, which includes tattoos and body piercings, branding, and body painting.

As Amelia Jones said in her fascinating survey, the artistic emphasis on the body in the 1960s was a reaction to late modernism, which for several decades had actually repressed the body (and figurative art), emphasizing form and surface in artworks instead (6). Thus, in a kind of rebound, happenings and performances in the 1960s and 1970s addressed the mundane, the nakedness, and the bodily functions, often crossing taboos and shocking audiences.

Body art also relates to social and historical realities. The world wars, and later the war in Vietnam, influenced the artistic perceptions of the human body. Body art also became extensively employed by feminist artists. It reemerged again in the context of consumerism of the 1990s, commodification of art, and more recently, the celebrity culture.

In the 1990s technologies such as video became commonly used. In fact, the diagnostic imaging technologies fascinated artists even before body art emerged. To give just 2 examples, the American artist Man Ray (1890–1976), working mostly in France, used x-ray images in his photographs; later, the iconic German fashion photographer Helmut Newton (1920–2004) also created works based on x-ray images.

Fig. 1 presents Corps étranger (foreign body), a work by Mona Hatoum, an artist of Palestinian origin born in Lebanon and now based in London (7–9). The installation consists of a continuous video of endoscopic and colonoscopic images of the artist’s body, projected on the floor of a cylindrical chamber. A viewer needs to stand over them and view them in this enclosed space, observing technologically mediated, normally totally inaccessible images of the body.

Mona Hatoum taught in London and in Maastricht, Belgium, and for a time at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In Britain she was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1995. There is characteristic ambiguity in her works, which address, among other themes, violence and oppression. A telling example is Incommunicado (1993), an infant’s crib made of metal, rather menacingly suggesting a cage—or a hospital appliance (10).
Body art has directness which gives it power in addressing issues such as beauty, esthetic norms, identity, and gender. The use of essentially medical technologies in art, in addition to the meaning and interpretation of individual pieces, illustrates how artists can bridge normally inaccessible professional domains and the public view.

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**References**


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