

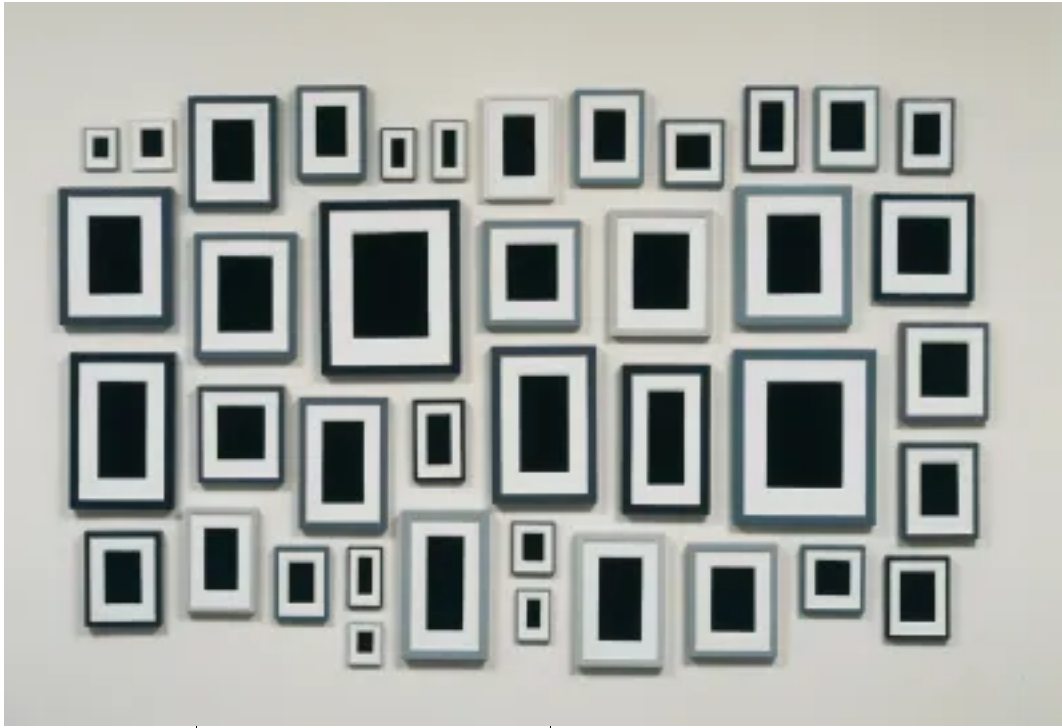
Petzel

“What Was the Picture Generation?,” *Art News*, Howard Halle, October 2, 2025.

Unnoticed amidst this civic unraveling was a group exhibition titled “Pictures,” which opened in September of 1977 at Artists Space, one of several nonprofit galleries that had sprung up to cultivate emerging talent. Featuring just five artists (Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith) working variously in painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, and film, the exhibit focused on how mass media and popular culture had transformed the general understanding of imagery through its transmission by photographs, movies, and television. While “Pictures” attracted the attention of only a slice of an art world that was small and localized compared with now, the show, and a generation of artists attached to its name, proved to be an inflection point for art through the rest of the century and into our own.

As the moniker implies, the term Pictures Generation (which also included Sarah Charlesworth, Barbara Kruger, Allan McCollum, Matt Mullican, Richard Prince, Walter Robinson, Cindy Sherman, David Salle, Laurie Simmons, James Welling, and a host of others) didn’t denote a style so much as it signaled the advent of a cohort born during America’s postwar baby boom. (They weren’t alone, but more on that later.) They ascended alongside the political forces that would ultimately yield the Reagan revolution, which dismantled the liberal, New Deal order, and while any direct correlation with the Pictures Generation is debatable, its members did manage to reshape the art world largely thanks to Reagan’s reconfiguration of America

Abstraction as Image



Allan McCollum, *Collection of Forty Plaster Surrogates*, 1982 (cast and painted in 1984)

Somewhat counterintuitively to the undermining of representation, two artists, Allan McCollum and James Welling, invested abstraction with pictorial attributes, turning it into another form of imagery—which is indeed how it exists in reproduction. Welling created black-and-white photos, for instance, featuring closeups of crinkled aluminum foil, or draped dark fabrics with white flakes collecting in their folds. McCollum, for his part, cast seemingly infinite permutations of the same small plaster relief sculpture: a black rectangle surrounded by bands suggesting a mat and picture frame; in essence, McCollum was compressing the preconception of what an art object resembles to its component parts.

<https://www.artnews.com/list/art-news/artists/pictures-generation-what-was-why-so-important-1234714566/the-pictures-generation-legacy/>