

MARGARET
KILGALLEN

ENGLISH



THAT'S



WHERE

THE

BEAUTY



BORN BELANTEN



Margaret Kilgallen: that's where the beauty is.

American artist Margaret Kilgallen (1967–2001) died at the young age of thirty-three, just as her work was gaining recognition and prominence. Kilgallen's drawings, paintings, and installations move fluidly between graffiti and gallery projects, operating as a celebratory reminder of ordinary people and places. The Bonnefanten's presentation of *that's where the beauty is.*, brings to light the astonishing visual complexity of Kilgallen's short career, highlighting the major themes that unify her multilayered practice. Using Kilgallen's exhibition history as a chronological tool to guide audiences through the space, the exhibition examines her roots in the longstanding histories of printmaking, folk history and folklore, and feminist strategies of representation. *that's where the beauty is.* is Kilgallen's first posthumous museum exhibition and the first presentation of her work in Europe.

Born in 1967 in Washington, D.C., Kilgallen grew up in the small town of Kensington, Maryland. She went on to pursue her interest in art and received a bachelor's degree in printmaking from Colorado College in 1989. After college, she moved to San Francisco, where she became enamored

with the city's hand-painted shop signs, colorful murals, and handcrafted modes of advertising. She took a position as a book conservation technician at the San Francisco Public Library, studying typography and embracing printmaking as a medium, exploring woodcut, letterpress, and traditional sign-painting techniques, all of which became central to her practice.

California's landscape and the city of San Francisco were an inspirational environment for Kilgallen. Living in the Mission neighborhood, a center of Latinx culture, she became immersed in its artistic community, one imbued with a rich history of public art and creative expression. Working alongside artists that shared her affinity for the handmade—Chris Johanson, Alicia McCarthy, her husband Barry McGee and Ruby Neri, among others—Kilgallen worked both inside and outside, committed to making her work accessible to larger audiences. She would create site-specific installations for exhibitions, but also outside in public spaces. She painted murals, made T-shirts, drew record albums, and created her own zines and artist books, believing that all modes of expression and dissemination were equally important. Kilgallen loved seeing the mark of the human hand in the world and shunned using

a computer or projector to make her work. She followed the lineage of “chalking up” trains and boxcars with one's name or tag, leaving her own mark on the world.

At the core of her practice was the belief that beauty can be found in the humblest of places and that everything should be made by hand—scaled in relation to the human body. Interviewed shortly before she passed away, Kilgallen explained:

‘I like to see people's hand in the world, anywhere in the world; it doesn't matter to me where it is. And in my own work, I do everything by hand. I don't project or use anything mechanical, because even though I do spend a lot of time trying to perfect my line work and my hand, my hand will always be imperfect because it's human. And I think it's the part that's off that's interesting, that even if I'm doing really big letters, and I spend a lot of time going over the line and over the line and trying to make it straight, I'll never be able to make it straight. From a distance, it might look straight, but when you get close up, you can always see the line waver. And I think that's where the beauty is.’

Taking its title directly from Kilgallen, the exhibition reflects on the lasting power of her ideas and images, while bringing front and center an aesthetic that reminds us that we need not only look within the commercial mainstream or readily accessible narratives for inspiration and empowerment. Kilgallen's practice reminds us of the power that comes when we make our own mark on the world, revealing that there is beauty out there if we take the time to truly look.



Margaret Kilgallen and husband Barry McGee painting her SLAUGHTER mural at Gallery 16, San Francisco in 1997

1. SLAUGHTER (room 2.07)

Kilgallen embraced the use of bold outlines, flat, broad areas of color, and scenes of everyday life, mixing and matching different print traditions to create a way of working all her own. In Kilgallen's visual language, words were employed for both their form and their meaning. Borrowing and collecting language from different places and time periods, Kilgallen emphasized words and phrases with coded meanings, reclaiming space for phrases, ideas, and people from the not-so-distant past. Her use of the word "SLAUGHTER" is particularly poignant as it references a real person—American clawhammer banjo player Matokie Slaughter (1919–1999), an important creative influence on Kilgallen—while also evoking the word's definition—to kill, massacre, and slay. Kilgallen adopted Slaughter's name as her own moniker and wrote variations of it (Matokie, M.S., Slaughter, and META) everywhere she went—in large mural form, on the sides of bridges, on train cars, water towers, even subtly on the parking meters in San Francisco's Mission neighborhood.

Kilgallen fervently believed that women should be more visible within the visual landscape and was committed to inspiring a younger generation of women. She wanted her work to "change the emphasis on what's important when looking at a woman" and was steadfast in her celebration of the achievements of women who had been forgotten, ignored, or never fully recognized. Her claiming of Matokie Slaughter's name was both an act of celebration and one of protest—an eloquent reminder that our landscape is shaped by the stories, actions, and gestures of people on the margins, unheeded, and/or rendered invisible.

Kilgallen's train tag MATOKIE SLAUGHTER WAS HERE 7-98 (1998)





2. THREE SHEETS TO THE WIND (room 2.10)

Upon arriving in San Francisco in 1989, Kilgallen took a position as a technician in the Conservation and Preservation Department at the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL). Working under the tutelage and mentorship of SFPL Book Conservator Dan Flanagan, she restored and repaired books, learning about different bookbinding techniques, papermaking, and typography. Using the library as a resource, Kilgallen studied Japanese woodblock printers and ukiyo-e paintings, embracing the economy and elegance in which a single brushstroke could evoke a tree or flower as readily as a letter or phrase. Translated as “Pictures of the Floating World,” ukiyo-e refers to a style of Japanese printmaking, where artists would utilize flattened perspective and innovative compositions to capture scenes and characters of urban life, responding directly to the interests of the general public. The idea of creating a culture of characters, symbols, and a means of storytelling that celebrated ordinary people with dignity resonated with Kilgallen.

She was also interested in work made from easily accessible, found materials, sourcing her paint for free from a local recycling center, and pulling in wood from the street. She covered each and every surface, front and back, perfecting her lettering and cast of characters. Kilgallen would paint directly onto the walls before creating her own groupings or clusters, mixing and matching drawings on paper with painted wood panels, metal printer trays, fragments of ephemera, and stitched canvases. Her first solo exhibition in 1997, *Three Sheets to The Wind* at the Drawing Center in New York, exemplifies this way of working. Below is Kilgallen’s artist statement from the exhibition brochure:



Top: Margaret Kilgallen, *Bird*, ca. 1997, acrylic on plywood. Private collection

Bottom: Margaret Kilgallen, *Low*, 1998, oil on wood panel.
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, gift of Lisa and John Miller



'My artwork is influenced by my day job of making and repairing books, my past education in letterpress printing, and my observation of present-day forms of communication such as lettering, signs, and markings. Books and letterform have been the basis of the transmission of knowledge and a mode of communication for several thousand years. They have become so ingrained in our culture that they are often taken for granted. Today, so much emphasis is put on computer skills and communication through the internet that it is rare to receive a hand-written letter. I am interested in things made by the human hand. Graffiti and hobo train markings are very simple forms of communication and self-expression. They are examples of the basic human instinct to mark and change our surroundings. Although the culture of graffiti and that of the train hobos are very different, they share a similar outcome, hand-written traces. It is the form of expression, whether it be lettering or imagery, as well as the person and culture it reflects, that intrigues me. Our dependency on technology limits our ability to be self-reliant, while at the same time we are increasingly isolated from one another. I am interested in making things that show evidence of the human hand. It is important for me to be able to rely on my own skills to produce work that incorporates organic, graphic imagery and letterforms.

I paint these images onto various materials including discarded paper endsheets from books, metal galley trays once used to store letterpress type, and primed wood. I present them together with images, shapes, and letters painted directly on the wall, and found objects such as used soap and matchboxes filled with insects, seeds, and other organic material. The overall feeling of the installation is nostalgic and implies the decay of culture.'

Margaret Kilgallen, *Untitled (Measure-Up)*, ca. 1997, oil on board.
Collection of Jack Shainman, New York





Left: Margaret Kilgallen, *Sloe*, 1998, color aquatint etching with sugarlift. Courtesy Paulson Fontaine Press

Bottom: *The Barnum & Bailey greatest show on earth. The world's largest, grandest, best amusement institution.* Poster (chromolithograph) copyrighted by The Strobridge Litho. Co., 1896. Courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



3. SLOE (room 2.12)

Evidence of the longstanding history of printmaking can be seen throughout Kilgallen's work, from references to the famous woodblock printed WANTED poster of the American West and the colorful typography of early 20th century Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus posters. In 1998, Kilgallen was invited to create a series of etchings with the printmakers at Paulson Bott Press (now Paulson Fontaine Press) in Berkeley, California. The result was a suite of five prints, each of which employ her signature color palette of warm muted tones and her flat, contour-line figurative style. Kilgallen's etchings create a new world, one which draws from her love of surf culture and the coastal landscape of California—places like Linda Mar, Pacifica, and Santa Cruz—while emphasizing her interest in the vernacular, on the language and dialects spoken by everyday people in their local communities.

In *Sloe* (1998), Kilgallen uses six different copper plates to build her composition. A stubborn mule, a simple rendering of a tree, the close up of a woman's face, and a woman dressed in clothing from a bygone era are paired with the handwritten phrase "Let it Ride. Sloe" Kilgallen's use of the word "sloe" recalls the Sloe Gin Fizz, an early 20th century cocktail made from gin infused with sloe berries (wild blackthorn berries), then mixed with citrus and soda water. Yet it also serves perhaps as a reminder to take heed and to slow down, a small bird perched on the letter "L" taking a breath before taking flight. Kilgallen's word choice offers an insight into a fading past, while also revealing her own passions and practice.



4. TO FRIEND AND FOE (room 2.13)

The notion of changing “the emphasis on what’s important when looking at a woman” is at the core of Kilgallen’s work. In her world, women run the streets—fighting, shouting, riding waves, riding trains, and claiming new territory and spaces. In images of her 1999 installation *To Friend and Foe* at the gallery Deitch Projects in New York, two women are painted larger-than-life onto sheets of plywood and the gallery wall. One woman has her hands at the ready like a boxer, cigarette hanging from her mouth, her dress a flat wash of dark blue. Her opponent is missing one of her high heels and, despite only having one shoe, determinedly brandishes a broken bottle, her hair kept off her face with a small white barrette. This same scene reappears in a small untitled drawing from 2000, except in this later piece, one of the women has thrown her purse to the side before beginning the fight. The same women often reappear in Kilgallen’s work, shifting in scope and scale, entering and exiting into different scenes, as if to say that they are here to stay.



Left: Margaret Kilgallen, *Untitled*, ca. 1999, acrylic on cardstock. Courtesy the Estate of Margaret Kilgallen and Ratio 3, San Francisco

Top: Margaret Kilgallen, *Untitled (Cardiff)*, 1999, acrylic on wooden panels. Collection of Jeffrey Deitch

5. MAIN DRAG (room 2.16)

Constructed from large sheets of hand-painted plywood, wooden panels, stitched canvases littered with words and figures, teetering shack-like dwellings, and paint applied directly to the walls, Kilgallen's installation *Main Drag* (2001) envelops the audience, thrusting one headfirst into her world. The last work made before her death, the large-scale installation was created for the exhibition *East Meets West: "Folk" and Fantasy from the Coasts* at the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania,

Philadelphia. Layered like a quilt, the installation stretches across a large corner, beckoning us like the bright lights and music of a local town fair. The phrase "MAIN DRAG," painted directly onto the wall, is rendered in a Circus-style font and spreads across the space like a flag waving in the wind. Recalling both the Depression-era of American history (1929–1939) and her time living in California (1989–2001), Kilgallen's installation operates as an homage to her community and a celebration of the numerous influences from which she drew inspiration.

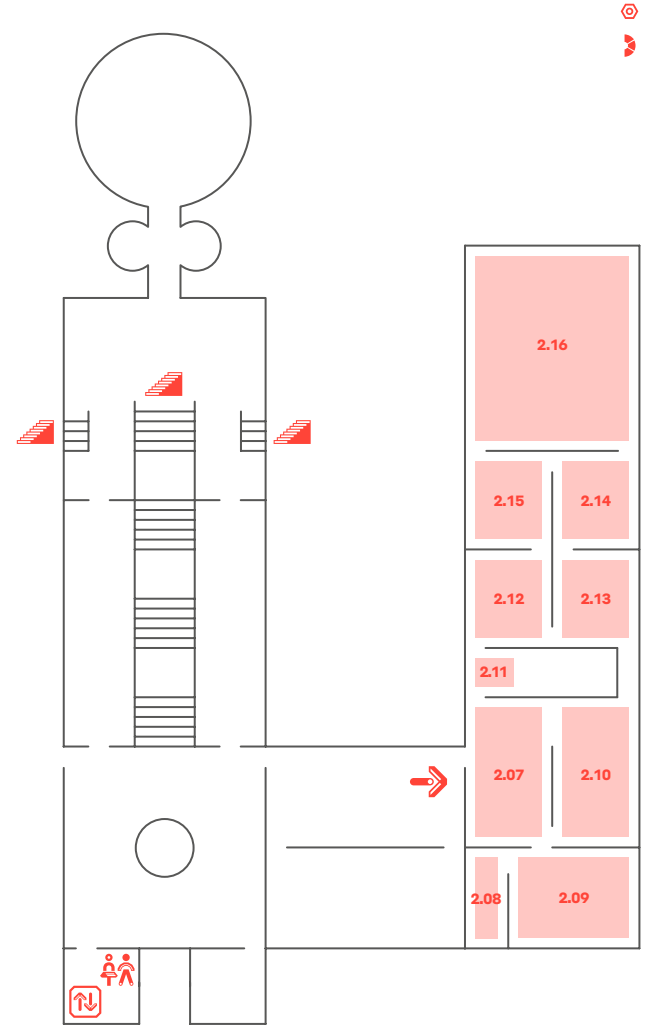
Margaret Kilgallen, *Untitled*, 2000, acrylic on unstretched canvas.
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art









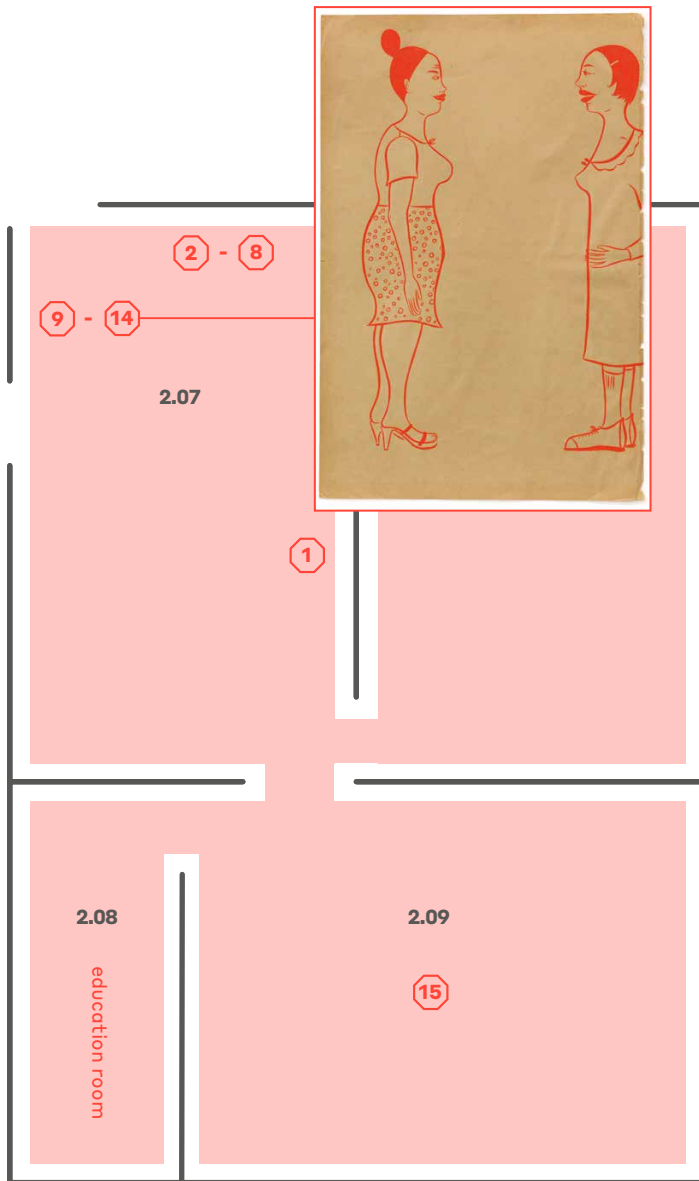
Margaret Kilgallen, *Untitled (Parking Structure Mural)*, 2000, acrylic on wood.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of the Estate of the Artist

FLOOR 2



-  Exhibition starts here
-  Stairs to other floors

-  Lift to other floors
-  Toilets



➔ Exhibition starts here

① *Slaughter*, 1997
(recreated 2021), mural

② *Untitled*, n.d.,
acrylic on paper

③ *Untitled*, ca. 2000,
acrylic on paper

④ *Untitled*, ca. 2000,
acrylic on paper

⑤ *Untitled*, ca. 2000,
acrylic on paper

⑥ *Untitled*, ca. 2000,
ink on paper

⑦ *Untitled*, ca. 2000,
acrylic on paper

⑧ *Untitled*, ca. 2000,
acrylic on paper

⑨ *Untitled*, ca. 2000,
acrylic on paper

⑩ *Untitled*, ca. 2000,
acrylic on paper

⑪ *Untitled*, ca. 2000,
acrylic on paper

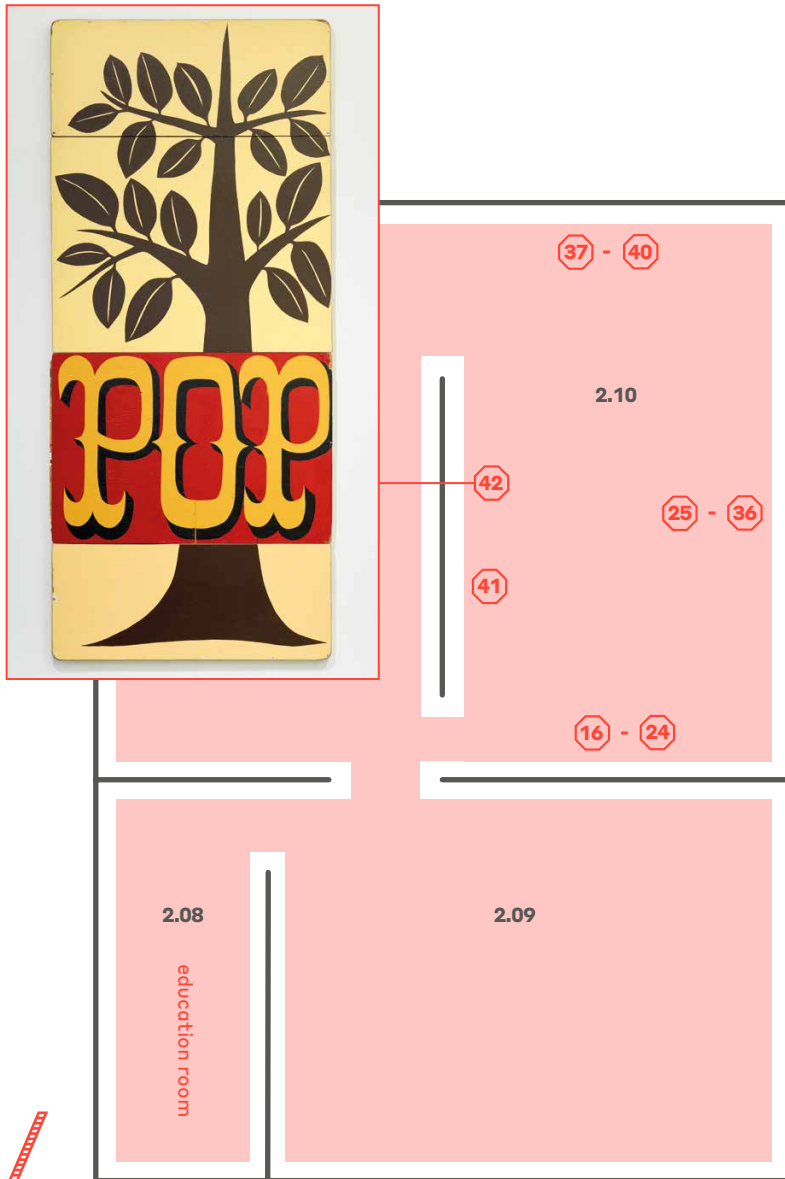
⑫ *Untitled*, ca. 2000,
acrylic on paper

⑬ *Untitled*, ca. 2000,
acrylic on paper

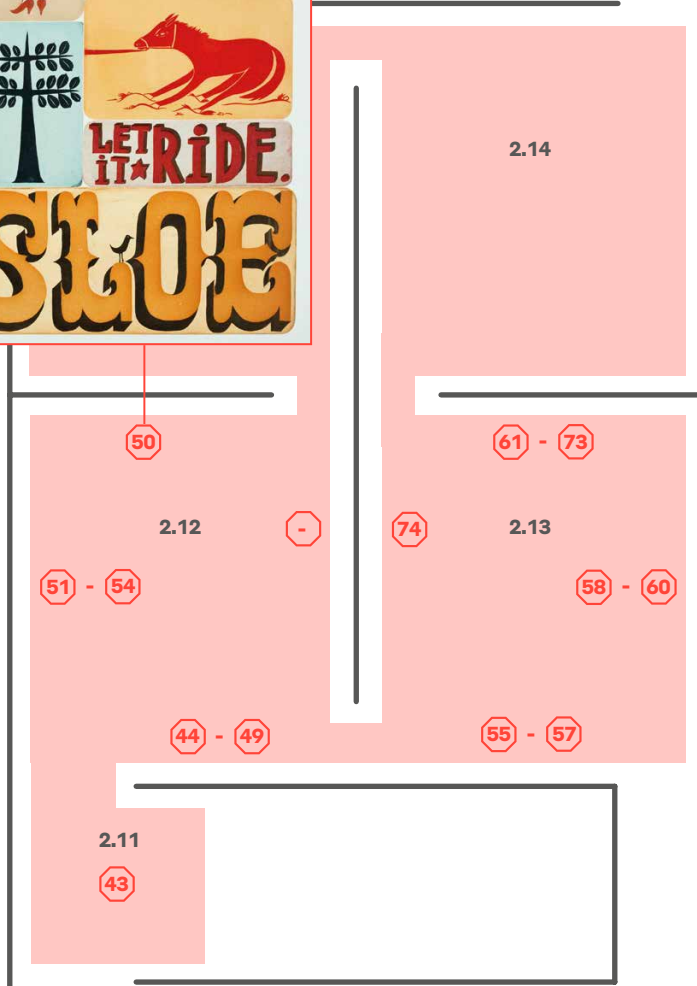
⑭ *Untitled*, ca. 2000,
acrylic on paper

⑮ Barry McGee & Margaret
Kilgallen in "Place," 2001.
Video; color, sound; 13 minutes,
53 seconds. Courtesy Art21,
art21.org, founded 1997

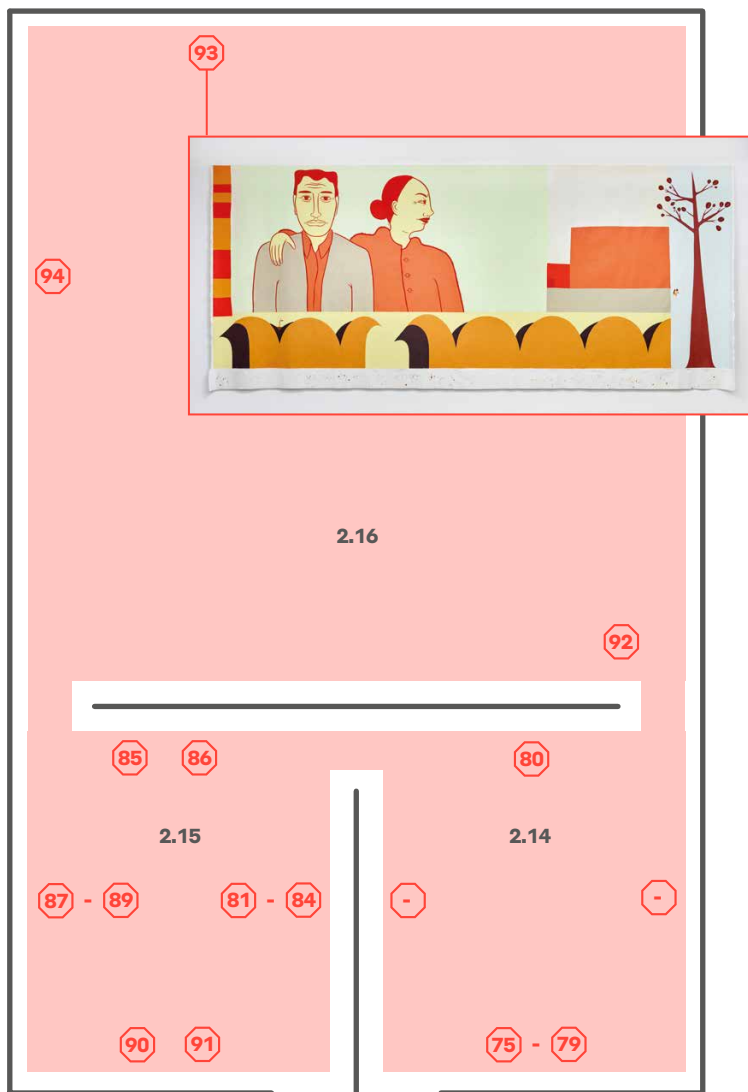
From Art21's *Art in the
Twenty-First Century* series
Created by: Susan Sollins &
Susan Dowling. Executive
Producer & Curator: Susan
Sollins. Executive Producer:
Susan Dowling. Series
Producer: Eve-Laure Moros
Ortega. Director: Catherine
Tatge. Editor: Donna Marino.
Director of Photography:
Bob Elfstrom & Joel Shapiro.



- 16 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on paper
- 17 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on paper
- 18 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on paper
- 19 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on paper
- 20 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on paper
- 21 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on paper
- 22 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on paper
- 23 *Untitled*, n.d., acrylic on wood panel
- 24 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on paper
- 25 *Untitled*, 1997, four panels of enamel on metal, Collection of KAWS
- 26 *Untitled*, n.d., acrylic on paper
- 27 *Untitled*, ca. 1997, acrylic on wood
- 28 *Untitled*, ca. 1997, acrylic on wood
- 29 *Jellyroll*, ca. 2000, acrylic on wood panel. Collection of Ann Philbin and Cynthia Wornham
- 30 *Coup*, ca. 2000, acrylic on wood panels. Collection of Ann Philbin and Cynthia Wornham
- 31 *Tree*, ca. 1997, acrylic on plywood. Private collection
- 32 *E*, ca. 2000, enamel painted on wood. Collection of Ann Philbin and Cynthia Wornham
- 33 *Untitled*, 1997, acrylic on wood
- 34 *Bird*, ca. 1997, acrylic on plywood. Private collection
- 35 *Untitled*, 1997, acrylic on wood
- 36 *Roseville*, ca. 2000, acrylic on rusted steel panels. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Gift of Ann Philbin
- 37 *Untitled (Saro)*, ca. 1997, acrylic on paper. Collection of Jack Shainman, New York
- 38 *Untitled*, ca. 1997, acrylic on panel. Collection of Jack Shainman, New York
- 39 *Untitled (Ever)*, ca. 1997, acrylic on board. Collection of Jack Shainman, New York
- 40 *Untitled (Measure-Up)*, ca. 1997, oil on board. Collection of Jack Shainman, New York
- 41 *Low*, 1998, oil on wood panel. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, gift of Lisa and John Miller
- 42 *POP*, 1997, acrylic on plywood. Private collection



- 43 Margaret Kilgallen inspired playlist
- 44 - 49 All works: *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on paper
- Vitrine
- 50 *Sloe*, 1998, color aquatint etching with sugarlift. Courtesy Paulson Fontaine Press
- 51 *Untitled*, 1998, color aquatint etching with sugarlift and chine collé. Courtesy Paulson Fontaine Press
- 52 *Half-Cocked*, 1998, sugarlift aquatint. Courtesy Paulson Fontaine Press
- 53 *Linda Mar*, 1999, color sugarlift and spitbite aquatint etching with soft ground. Courtesy Paulson Fontaine Press
- 54 *Pilar*, 1999, color sugarlift aquatint etching with chine collé. Courtesy Paulson Fontaine Press
- 55 *Fly-Right*, 1998, mixed media on sewn paper. Private Collection
- 56 *Untitled (Stubborn)*, ca. 1999, acrylic on cardstock. Collection of KAWS
- 57 *Untitled (Pride)*, n.d., acrylic on cardstock. Collection of KAWS
- 58 *Untitled (Dulce, Creek)*, 1999, acrylic on wooden panels. Collection of Jeffrey Deitch
- 59 *Untitled (Cardiff)*, 1999, acrylic on wooden panels. Collection of Jeffrey Deitch
- 60 *Untitled (Hummable)*, 1999, acrylic on wooden panels and gouache on paper. Collection of Jeffrey Deitch
- 61 *Surfer Girl*, ca. 1999, acrylic on wood. Collection of Marialidia Marcotulli
- 62 *Untitled (Tree)*, n.d., acrylic on found object
- 63 *Untitled*, ca. 1999, acrylic on wood
- 64 *Untitled (cheater five)*, ca. 1999, acrylic on wood
- 65 *Untitled*, ca. 1999, acrylic on wood panel
- 66 *Untitled (deep)*, ca. 1999, acrylic on wood
- 67 *Untitled*, ca. 1999, acrylic on wood panel
- 68 *Untitled*, n.d., acrylic on wood panel.
- 69 *Untitled (lowers)*, ca. 1999, acrylic on wood
- 70 *Untitled*, ca. 1999, acrylic on wood panel
- 71 *Untitled*, n.d., acrylic on wood
- 72 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on paper
- 73 *Untitled*, n.d., acrylic on wood panel
- 74 *Untitled*, n.d., acrylic on cardstock



75 *Untitled (Mike Maldonado)*, skateboard deck

76 *Untitled (Brian Anderson)*, skateboard deck

77 *Untitled (Elisa Steamer)*, skateboard deck

78 *Untitled (Ed Templeton)*, skateboard deck

79 *Untitled (Chris Senn)*, skateboard deck

- Vitrine

80 *Untitled (Parking Structure Mural)*, 2000, acrylic on wood. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of the Estate of the Artist

81 *Untitled*, n.d., acrylic on paper

82 *Untitled*, 2001, acrylic on sewn canvas

83 *Untitled*, 2001, acrylic on canvas

84 *Untitled*, n.d., acrylic on paper

85 *Untitled*, 2001, acrylic on cardstock

86 *Untitled*, 2001, acrylic on cardstock

87 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on canvas

88 *Untitled*, ca. 1999, acrylic on canvas

89 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on canvas

90 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, acrylic on canvas

91 *Untitled*, ca. 2000, paint on steel pot with Jade Tree

92 *Main Drag*, 2001, mixed media installation

93 *Untitled*, 2000, acrylic on unstretched canvas. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Purchase, by exchange, through a fractional gift of Evelyn D. Haas, and through gifts of Albert M. Bender, Vicki and Kent Logan, Janice and Henry Rooney, and bequests of Dr. Gertrude Ticho and Dean Barnlund

94 *Money to Loan (Paintings for the San Francisco Bus Shelter Posters)*, 2000, mixed media on paper and fabric. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Gift of the estate of Margaret Kilgallen and partial purchase with funds provided by The Judith Rothschild Foundation



Biography

Margaret Kilgallen (b. 1967, Washington, D.C.; d. 2001, San Francisco) studied at Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA, and Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO. Exhibitions of Kilgallen's work have taken place at: REDCAT, Los Angeles (2005); Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (both 2004); Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, San Jose Museum of Art, CA (both 2002); Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, DESTE Foundation Centre for Contemporary Art, Athens (both 2001); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (both 2000).



Scan below for the Margaret Kilgallen inspired playlist:



Margaret Kilgallen: that's where the beauty is.

18.05 – 07.11.2021

Artistic Director

Stijn Huijts

Curator

Courtenay Finn

Assistant Curator

Roxy Jongewaard

Project Manager

Marijntje Knapen

Project Assistant

Laura Hovens

Design

Pati Petrykowska/Bonnefanten

Print

Drukpartners Zuid B.V.

The Bonnefanten receives a multi-year grant from the Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The museum is also subsidised by the Province of Limburg and the BankGiro Lottery.

We thank all copyright owners for their kind permission to reproduce their material. Should, despite our intensive research any person entitled to rights have been overlooked, legitimate claims shall be compensated within the usual provisions.

Cover image: Margaret Kilgallen, *Untitled*, ca. 1999. Acrylic on wood panel, 17 1/4 x 7 1/2 in (43.815 x 19.05 cm). Courtesy the Estate of Margaret Kilgallen and Ratio 3, San Francisco.

Margaret Kilgallen: that's where the beauty is. is organized by the Aspen Art Museum. Curated by Courtenay Finn.

Unless otherwise noted, all works: Courtesy the Estate of Margaret Kilgallen and Ratio 3, San Francisco. © Margaret Kilgallen



www.bonnefanten.nl
+31 (0)43 3290 190

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

@bonnefanten
#bonnefanten

FREE WIFI

Bonnefanten gast

MUSEUM OPENING HOURS

Tuesday to Sunday, 11.00 – 17.00



This exhibition is made possible by:



Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed
Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en
Wetenschap

provincie limburg



BankGiroLoterij

FONDS21