KIENHOLZ
BEFORE LACMA
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24 January – 3 March 2012

In collaboration with Maurice Tuchman
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Abstract Expressionism was "in the air," with East Coast 1988–1992, which were all made in collaboration from Edward Kienholz was largely a self-taught artist, born into a poor Southern Idaho and theatricality can be found in full-blown dramatic potential of having made paintings out back, he could pass along woodworking scraps to his young artist tenant. "Five Car Stud," 1969–1972, was exhibited for the first time in the United States at LACMA, 4 September 2011 –15 January 2012; the touring exhibition of this extraordinary work is hosted by Director Paul Tejón and Curator Anders Kindt of the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, where it will be exhibited 6 June–21 October 2012. "Kienholz: The Signs of the Times," curated by Dr. Martina Weinert, and on exhibition at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany, through 29 January 2012, will travel to Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland, 22 February–11 May 2012.


CATALOG OF EXHIBITION

1. Black With White
   1957, mixed media assemblage
   70 ¼ x 34 ¼ x 1 ¾ in. (178.4 x 87 x 4.4 cm)
   Anonymous

2. Leda and the Canadian Honker
   1957, mixed media assemblage
   25 x 80 ¾ x 3 in. (63.5 x 205.1 x 7.62 cm)
   Private collection

3. Exodus
   1958, oil and wood on plywood with tent
   23 ½ x 48 x 1 in. (59.7 x 121.9 x 2.54 cm)
   Private collection

4. Untitled
   c. 1958, mixed media on panel
   33 ⅛ x 45 in. (84.5 x 114.3 cm)

5. The Little Eagle Rock Incident
   1958, paint and moss on plywood with mounted deer head
   61 ½ x 49 x 20 in. (156.8 x 124.5 x 50.8 cm)
   McClain Gallery, Houston, TX

6. The Medicine Show
   1958–9, mixed media assemblage
   69 x 48 x 6 in. (175.3 x 121.9 x 15.2 cm)
   Collection of Betty and Monte Factor, Santa Monica, CA

7. Mother Sterling
   1959, mixed media assemblage
   52 x 18½ x 18½ in. (132.1 x 47 x 47 cm)
   Private collection

8. One and One Half Tits
   1960, mixed media assemblage
   15½ x 18 x 6¾ in. (39.4 x 45.7 x 17.8 cm)
   Private collection

9. American Girl
   1960, mixed media assemblage with painted canvas, mannequin, wooden box
   20¾ x 13½ x 3 in. (52.7 x 33.7 x 7.6 cm)
   Private collection

10. Flow Gently, Sweet Often
    1960, painted wood assemblage
    35½ x 19½ x 8 in. (90.2 x 49.5 x 20.3 cm)
    Private collection

11. It Takes Two to Integrate (Cha Cha Cha)
    1961, painted dolls, dried fish, glass in wooden box
    31 x 27 x 7 in. (78.7 x 68.6 x 17.8 cm)
    Anonymous

12. Untitled (For Jenny)
    1960, mixed media assemblage with turntable, wire and sheet metal elements
    24 x 22 x 12 in. (61 x 55.9 x 30.5 cm)
    Courtesy of Jennette Kienholz

13. The U.S. Duck, or Home from the Summit
    1960, construction
    26 ¼ x 21½ x 6 in. (67.2 x 54 x 15.2 cm)
    Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
    Michael and Dorothy Blankfort Bequest

14. The American Way, II
    1960 and 1970, paint and resin on rubber garden hose
    with severed deer neck mounted on wood; once
    covered with paint and watercolor on canvas,
    subsequently removed by the artist
    22 ¾ x 22 ¼ x 8 in. (57.8 x 56.5 x 20.3 cm)
    Courtesy of Susan Camiel,
    from the Dorothy and Michael Blankfort Collection

15. Sleepy's Hollow With Handle and Wheels
    1962, mixed media assemblage
    29 x 28 x 18 in. (73.7 x 71.1 x 45.7 cm)
    Collection of Betty and Monte Factor, Santa Monica, CA

16. Ida Franger
    1960, mixed media assemblage
    33 ½ x 16½ x 18½ in. (84.8 x 41.9 x 47 cm)
    Private collection

17. America My Hometown
    1963, mixed media assemblage
    33 x 28 x 26 in. (83.8 x 71.1 x 71.1 cm)
    Private collection, Sweden

18. The Sky is Falling: Act One
    1963, mixed media assemblage
    45 x 24 x 22 in. (114.3 x 61 x 55.9 cm)
    From the private collection of
    Tony and Helen Berlant, Santa Monica, CA

19. The Little Black Heart
    1963, mixed media assemblage
    59 x 9 x 9 in. (149.9 x 22.9 x 22.9 cm)
    From the private collection of
    Tony and Helen Berlant, Santa Monica, CA

20. The Black Angel
    1964, mixed media assemblage
    21½ x 35 x 15 in. (54.6 x 88.9 x 38.1 cm)
    Private collection

21. Instant On
    1964, mixed media assemblage
    with fiberglass and flock, electric blanket control, photographs, antenna
    9½ x 6½ x 6¾ in. (24.1 x 16.5 x 17.8 cm)
    Collection of Betty and Monte Factor, Santa Monica, CA
Since his high school days, Kienholz painted in oil and watercolor. In 1954 he began making wooden relief paintings. With these he often set himself the problem of starting and finishing a painting a day. Bits and wedges of leftover wood were nailed and glued to a panel and aggressively painted with a broom. The wood fragments comprised an armature, like a preparatory drawing on canvas, but they also served as a vessel into which paint could be poured and then smeared. ... Kienholz conceived of painting with the pouring process as a means of "getting into" the painting, "swimming around in it, like in a bathtub." In contrast, Kienholz titled these works (after their execution) with humorous names in order "to be able to laugh at the piece and thereby be shed of it." \(^2\)

The technique and imagery of his broom paintings constitute an original achievement, affected in a general and oblique way by action painting. The unusual color of these paintings — a rich murky brown, suggestive of natural aging, though often with a single bright orange or yellow patch — was prompted by Kienholz's encounter in the early fifties with a painting by the San Francisco artist Julius Wasserstein. (Chemically incompatible paints were deliberately mixed by Kienholz to prove that in art even sacrosanct technical laws can be broken to advantage. The ultra-sensitive receptivity of these painted surfaces to changing light is extraordinary and proves the artist correct.) Beyond this a search for influences upon Kienholz proves futile. \(^3\)
The tenor of these early works is surprisingly elegant and gay — surprising, for at the time of their execution, Kienholz conceived of the "broom paintings" as exercises in a non-artistic territory, a region of "ugliness." He proceeded on the premise that if he "could make something really ugly," it would help him "understand beauty."4
The Little Eagle Rock Incident
1958, paint and resin on plywood with mounted deer head
63½ x 49 x 20 in. (156.8 x 124.5 x 50.8 cm)

In “The Little Eagle Rock Incident” of 1958, Kienholz affixed a fully three-dimensional found object (a deer head) to a relief painting. This was the first work he titled in reference to a topical event (the crisis in racial integration at Little Rock), although the assemblage was not conceived explicitly in symbolic terms. Reference to contemporary life was first implied in “Eagle Rock.”

The Medicine Show
1958–9, mixed media assemblage
69 x 48 x 6 in. (175.3 x 121.9 x 15.2 cm)

In “The Medicine Show,” Kienholz adapted his relief painting in another manner by hinges the wooden armature to the wall surface, giving it the character of sculpture rather than drawing. Certain sections open and swing into space. Significantly, the work is valid both “open” and “closed” so that the viewer’s active involvement is required to experience the work. Later this two-fold possibility became characteristic of many box-like assemblages.

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1959, mixed media assemblage
52 x 18⅜ x 18⅜ in. (132.1 x 47 x 47 cm)
One and One Half Tits
1960, mixed media assemblage
15⅞ x 18 x 6⅛ in. (39.4 x 45.7 x 15.9 cm)

American Girl
1960, mixed media assemblage with painted canvas, mannequin, wooden box
20¾ x 13¼ x 3 in. (52.7 x 33.7 x 7.6 cm)

...[A] new series of boxes — low-toned, wryly conjectural rather than emotive...convey Kienholz’s penchant for symbolic caricature. They consist of wooden boxes in which are inserted manikin torsos cut in half lengthwise, covered with canvas and painted. The problem set by this series again concerned making variations in a restricted format. There is a sense here of formal exercise, recalling his self-imposed necessity in the fifties to produce a painting a day.?
Flow Gently, Sweet Often
1960, painted wood assemblage
35½ x 19¼ x 8 in. (90.2 x 49.5 x 20.3 cm)

It Takes Two to Integrate (Cha Cha Cha)
1961, painted dolls, dried fish, glass in wooden box
31 x 27 x 7 in. (78.7 x 68.6 x 17.8 cm)
As we stood together in our garden, surrounded by an eager, skeptical audience, he asked whether I would sell the piece back to him before he opened it. For the third time, my good faith was tested, and I refused.

What we saw brought gasps of appreciation as well as distaste. In the center of the construction was the gaping oval of a deer's neck, glossy brown hair and all, from which the head and all the innards had been removed. Surrounding the neck was a coil of ochre-colored rubber hose against a salmon background. The neck and the coil were contained in a painted wooden box approximately two-feet square. The title of the piece was *The American Way, II.*

I dared think that he had called it *The American Way, II* because it represented a mindless act of horror, not unlike one of Goya's drawings of war. Dorothy asked him what the title meant. "It's obvious," Kienholz replied. "The way you bought it is the American way. On the installment plan."

Despite Kienholz' claim, I still see it my way, and there's no law that says I can't. Someday it will take its place at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art alongside another work of Kienholz' called *History as a Planter,* a deeply moving memorial to those who died in Hitler's ovens, bought jointly for the Museum by some collectors among whom we were proud to be included.

— Michael Blankfort, "Confessions of an Art Eater (with Apologies to De Quincey)"
Untitled (For Jenny)
1960, mixed media assemblage with turntable, wire and sheet metal elements
24 x 22 x 12 in. (61 x 55.9 x 30.5 cm)

The U.S. Duck, or Home from the Summit
1960, construction
26 7/8 x 20 1/4 x 6 in. (67.15 x 53.98 x 15.24 cm)
Sleepy Hollow With Handle and Wheels  
1962, mixed media assemblage  
29 x 28 x 58 in. (73.7 x 71.1 x 147.3 cm)

Ida Franger  
1960, mixed media assemblage  
33⅜ x 16½ x 18½ in. (84.8 x 41.9 x 47 cm)
America My Hometown
1963, mixed media assemblage
33 x 28 x 28 in. (83.8 x 71.1 x 71.1 cm)
The Sky is Falling: Act One
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21½ x 15 x 15 in. (54.6 x 38.1 x 38.1 cm)

Instant On
1964, mixed media assemblage with fiberglass and flock, electric blanket control, photographs, antenna
9¼ x 6½ x 6¼ in. (24.1 x 16.5 x 15.9 cm)
In four pace-setting years after the Los Angeles County Museum of Art opened to the public in April 1965, the Department of Modern Art presented 40 exhibitions of 20th century art, mostly of contemporary art, all accompanied by catalogues. The selection of only one artist in this remarkable array was met with opposition: that of Ed Kienholz. Resistance to my determination to feature the work of the artist as first among equals in a program committed to Los Angeles artists, came not from museum staff or artists, but from a few indignant collectors, from the LACMA Board of Trustees, and — later — from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. Working closely and in close harmony with Ed Kienholz from my earliest days in Los Angeles in August 1964, my plan had been to open the museum’s brand new Department of Modern Art with a survey of a decade’s work by the artist. Certain members of the department’s support group, the Contemporary Art Council, which numbered 18 members at the time, were angry and vociferous in denouncing the artist and their new curator; one woman quit the council in protest, while another would not speak to me for decades. More importantly, Norton Simon — who, along with LACMA founding director Ric Brown, had brought me to found the Department of Modern Art — was sufficiently irked by the decision to exhibit Kienholz, such that he appointed another trustee: the second most powerful man in Hollywood (the first Jewish leader to support Richard Nixon) to persuade me — really to try to force me — to abandon the Kienholz exhibition altogether. In a memorable and final call to me, he declared, if I was so foolish to persist, “you will never hear the sound of my voice again.” I never did.

With Ed’s support, in face of the unnecessary controversy of making this exhibition one of the new museum’s opening presentations, we re-scheduled the retrospective from April 1, 1965 to March 30, 1966.

Precedent for the tumult that was to grip the community was fresh in people’s minds from the bust of Wallace Berman’s 1957 Ferus gallery exhibition. Even more immediate was the extraordinary censorship of Kienholz’s “Bunny, Bunny You’re So Funny,” 1962, which was removed from the gallery at San Fernando Valley State College in 1963.

Following is a chronology of events that led to the 1966 LACMA exhibition, and its aftermath.
Ed and I saw each other often on Sundays. We signaled each other from our hilltop homes (Nichols to Laurel) with flashing mirrors, and made a dinner plan.

After he started his conceptual watercolors, starting with $2, he kept pestering me to buy one, and I resisted. After months of this, exasperated, Ed called me to warn me that the drawings would soon be out of my price range. To which I replied, “Ed, I don’t want money on my walls, and anything I have is yours for the asking.”

Ed was silent. Months later, he delivered a watercolor to my home that read “for anything I want from Maurice Tuchman.”

Long after, I could no longer resist asking Ed what he wanted. “Your wife,” came the instant reply. Sometime after that, I found a package on my doorstep at home - “The Family Album,” a comical, pornographic handmade book that inspired the LACMA 1966 catalogue design. It has never been shown publicly, and hardly ever privately, until now.

— MAURICE TUCHARUMAN, DECEMBER 2011
NOTES & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid, 6.
6. Ibid.

PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS
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For Ed Kienholz
— In Peace