

TONY BERLANT

Works from 1962-1964

8 September – 8 October, 2011

Opening reception for the artist: Thursday, 8 September, 2011, 6-8 P.M.

Venice, CA – L.A. Louver is pleased to present the early work of Los Angeles-based artist Tony Berlant. This is the first time these pieces have been exhibited in almost five decades.

I made these “girl pieces” between 1962 and 1964. Seeing them recently, for the first time in almost 50 years, was like reconnecting with my 21-year old self... [They] were born in 1962 when I had a friend lie down on my plywood “canvas” so that I could trace her body with a pencil. Using my friend’s clothes, polyester resin and paint I started these works. Some of them are portraits, but most are spontaneous creations without direct reference to anyone. I wanted them to feel alive and inhabited.

---- Tony Berlant

Pre-dating the sophisticated collage works in tin on wood panel for which Berlant has become renowned, these “girl pieces” provide a unique insight into the early development of the artist’s work. Although hung on the wall, these pieces are three-dimensional objects. Berlant combined non-traditional art materials -- clothes and resin -- as well as paint, to create hybrid works that exist between painting and sculpture. The outside edge of each work is a prominent extension of the face of the picture, conveying a strong assertion of object-hood. Most of these life-size works have direct reference to the figure, but without allusion to the face. Several are self-portraits, while others -- such as *Elaine*, *Barbara* and *Sue* -- refer to friends of the artist. *Les 8* portrays a series of brightly colored shirts presented in two rows of four; in the enigmatic and emotive *3 a.m.*, one distinguishes a woman’s negligee under the thick accretions of dark paint and resin, while *Made in Germany* seemingly diverts from the figure entirely.

I find it startling that these “girl pieces” are so similar in their presence to things that I am doing now [...] At the time of their creation, I was newly infatuated with art of all types, some ancient, some recent, some being made as I watched. Now they’re out and bursting forth, exuding who I was then and the scent that was in the air.

Works from this early period were shown in Berlant’s first solo exhibition in 1963 at David Stuart Gallery, which was located at 769 La Cienega Boulevard -- the center of Los Angeles’s nascent gallery community. Of this series, three works entered public collections: *Self-Portrait*, 1963, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, New Talent Purchase Award, Modern Art department; *Jeanie*, 1964, Orange County Museum of Art; and *Betty*, 1963, Long Beach Museum of Art.



Sue, 1963, cloth, polyester resin and enamel on plywood
48 x 38 1/2 in (122 x 98 cm)



Les 8, 1963, cloth, polyester resin and enamel on plywood, 42 1/2 x 48 in. (110.5 x 122cm)

In 1959, Tony Berlant attended the University of Southern California, but after a year transferred to UCLA, earning a B.A. in 1961, M.A. in 1962, and M.F.A. in 1963. In 1960, he was recognized by Clement Greenberg, who selected one of his paintings for inclusion in a regional exhibition of artists at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In 1964, the same museum awarded Berlant the New Talent Purchase Grant. Since this time, his work has been exhibited throughout the United States, including solo shows at Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, Washington (1973/74); Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, Texas, and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1982); Centro Cultural del Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City, Mexico (1988); and The Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii (2003). In summer 1997, Berlant's work was included in the Louisiana Museum's presentation of *Sunshine Noir: Art in LA 1960-1997*, and in 2006, he participated in the landmark exhibition, *Los Angeles 1955-1985* at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France.

In 2012, three large-scale architectural sculptures that Berlant created in the mid-1960s (previously exhibited in *The Marriage of New York and Athens* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1973) will be permanently installed in the grounds of the Château La Coste in Aix-en-Provence, and presented in individual glass structures designed by Frank Gehry.

Tony Berlant Works from 1962-1964 is the inaugural exhibition of L.A. Louver's programming in conjunction with the area-wide Getty initiative, *Pacific Standard Time* (PST), which features art made in Los Angeles, 1945-1980. A fully-illustrated brochure is published in conjunction with the L.A. Louver exhibition, with text by Tony Berlant, that delivers a first-hand account of the experiences and influences of a young artist working in Los Angeles during the early '60s.

Tony Berlant's work is included in the following PST exhibitions:

Artistic Evolution: Southern California Artists at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 1945-1980
Natural History Museum, 2 October 2011 – 15 January 2012

Under the Big Black Sun: California Art, 1974-1981
Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2 October 2011 – 13 February 2012

Concurrently on view in L.A. Louver's first floor galleries:

Leon Kossoff: Recent Works 1999-2010

This is a rare exhibition of paintings and drawings by the renowned British artist (b. 1926). A 72-page, fully-illustrated catalogue, with a text by Lawrence Gowing, accompanies the exhibition.