

Print Article



David Hockney, *A Bigger Splash*, 1967, Tate, London



Edward Kienholz, *Walter Hopps Hopps Hopps*, 1959, Menil Collection, Houston, photo by Susan Einstein, © Nancy Reddin Kienholz



Ed Ruscha, *Standard Station*, Amarillo, Texas, 1963, Hood Museum of Art, © Ed Ruscha

Pacific Standard Time CROSSCURRENTS AT THE GETTY

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

As I race from Los Angeles to Pomona to San Diego and back, struggling to keep up with all the shows promising to unveil the missing history of art in Southern California, my thinking repeatedly returns to "Crosscurrents in L.A.: Painting and Sculpture from 1950 to 1970," the exhibition at the Getty Museum. The show truly provides the core of the Getty Foundation's larger initiative, which launched more than 60 exhibitions around the Southland.

"Crosscurrents in L.A." features many of the Art History 101 color plates of contemporary art -- Ed Ruscha's *The Los Angeles County Museum of Art on Fire* (1965-1968), John Baldessari's *Quality Material* (1967-68), David Hockney's *A Bigger Splash* (1967), Ed Kienholz's *Walter Hopps Hopps Hopps* (1959). For most viewers, these artworks have been nothing more than reproductions. Much of the art in "Crosscurrents" comes from museums and collections outside of L.A., and is included thanks to the Getty Museum's considerable clout. After the show closes in Los Angeles on Feb. 5, 2012, many of the works move on to the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin, where a version of the exhibition is slated to open on Mar. 15, 2012

Being fairly familiar with the material, I was surprised by the sheer quantity of visual delight. One of the ongoing ironies of the massive Getty Center complex is its modest amount of temporary



Peter Voulkos, *Little Big Horn*, 1959, Oakland Museum of California, photo by schoppleinstudio.com, © Mrs. Ann Voulkos, Voulkos Family Trust



Ken Price, *BG Red*, 1963, collection of Mr. & Mrs. Gifford Phillips, photo by Taylor Sherill

exhibition space. This show of 76 works by 40 artists was a challenge. Without the vast square footage of the typical contemporary art museum, the curators were forced to be concise. The galleries are definitely crowded, but the lighting and installation compensate to a great degree.

Instead of a chronological presentation of many works by a single artist, Pop and abstract paintings produced during the same period share the same gallery. Sam Francis' *Untitled* (1967), a ten-foot-tall canvas of bright white edged in blue and red, hangs near Ruscha's ten-foot-wide *Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas*, (1963), which happens to be painted in similar colors.

The energy of Abstract Expressionism in L.A. was weaker in painting than in clay sculpture, a difference testified to by the five-foot-tall, rhino-skinned stoneware of Peter Voulkos' *Little Big Horn* (1959), or John Mason's meandering wall-mounted clay forms *Blue Wall* (1959). And then there is the outrageous foot-tall red egg by Ken Price from 1963, which brings the irreverence of Pop to the realm of craft.

In lieu of expressionist painting, the show features first-rate examples of L.A. hard-edge abstraction, such as Lorser Feitelson's complex and asymmetrical *Magical Space Forms* (1948) and his iconic, simple *Untitled (Red on White Optical)* (1964), a serpentine red line on a white canvas. A gorgeous work by John McLaughlin, *#18-1961* (1961), two floating azure rectangles on a cream colored field, complements Joe Goode's *Torn Cloud Painting 73* (1972), a pale blue canvas that is cut open to reveal white underneath. A pair of dodecagonal resin paintings by Ron Davis made me wonder if anyone is working on a survey of his work.

The influence of the Beats can be seen in assemblage with a literary aspect, such as the tumble of used books in *The Librarian* (1960) by George Herms, verifax collage by Wallace Berman and the window frames containing arcane and poetic imagery by Betye Saar. The era's political consciousness is reflected in Ed Bernal's searing *American Beauty* (1965), a small tree shaped like a human figure that grows from a spray-painted white



"Pacific Standard Time: Crosscurrents in L.A. Painting and Sculpture, 1950-1970," installation view at the Getty Museum, with John Mason's ceramic Blue Wall (1959) in the foreground, photo by Rebecca Vera-Martinez, © 2011 J. Paul Getty Trust



Lorser Feitelson, *Magical Space Forms*, 1948, collection of Bunty and Tom Armstrong, New York, photo by Gerard Vuilleumier, © Feitelson Arts Foundation



Joe Goode, *Torn Cloud Painting* 73, 1972, © Joe Goode

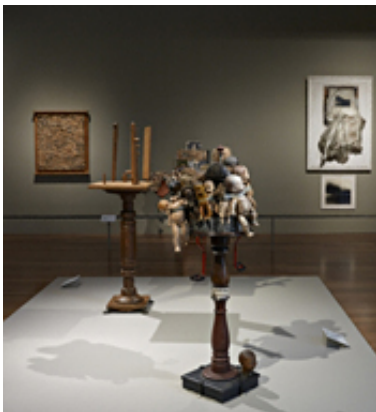
metal dome bearing a swastika of stars and stripes.

Plastic has never looked so good. I walked into one gallery and actually gasped at how lovely and vibrant it all appears, this art made of acrylic or glass, sparkling under the careful lighting. The centerpiece is *Red Concave Circle* (1970), a nine-foot-tall tall cast-resin disc by DeWain Valentine. On one wall is Judy Chicago's *Big Blue Pink* (1971), a geometric abstract work in turquoise, peach and cream acrylic, and Craig Kauffman's 1969 yellow and pink acrylic loop, so perfectly installed and lit that the shadows behind the work are as resonant as the piece itself. A third wall, a 1967 work by Larry Bell, is striped with vertical white-and-black reflective glass.

This sort of art, once dismissed as "baubles for the rich" -- a rather quaint notion these days -- now can be seen as expanding contemporaneous notions of geometric abstraction while experimenting with the materials of the future rather than the industrial past. A lime green resin-covered plank resting against a wall, *For People Who Know the Difference* (1967) by John McCracken; a clear resin box filled with white clouds, *Cloud Box* (1967) by Peter Alexander; a Plexiglas dome over a tiny wax model of a partly peeled banana from 1967 by Robert Graham; and *Big Jim McLain* (1967), smoky lacquer on a hammered aluminum "dento" by Billy Al Bengston -- these are startling in their immediacy and appeal. The "Finish Fetish" esthetic, as it was known in the '60s, is vindicated a half-century later.

Missing in action are the artists associated with the so-called Light and Space movement, such as Robert Irwin, Doug Wheeler and James Turrell, though all are featured in another PST exhibition, "Phenomenal," at the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art. The Getty did commission a new work by Irwin for its cavernous white atrium, however -- a sculpture of massive slabs of smooth black granite.

The Getty curators -- Andrew Perchuk, Rani Singh, Glenn Phillips and Catherine Taft -- are making the case that an alternative modern art developed in Los Angeles, that artists here used different technologies and had different priorities than artists in New York or Europe. The show supports this



"Pacific Standard Time: Crosscurrents in L.A. Painting and Sculpture, 1950-1970," installation view at the Getty Museum, with works by (from left) Ed Moses, Wallace Berman, Ed Kienholz and Lynn Foulkes, photo by Rebecca Vera-Martinez, © 2011 J. Paul Getty Trust



Ed Boreal, *American Beauty*, 1965, collection of Betty & Monte Factor, photo by Larry Hirshowitz, © Ed Boreal

view, I think, especially in the many works made from materials and techniques that became available through the aerospace, automotive and film industries here. The use of Plexiglas and resin, sprayed rather than brush-painted surfaces, vacuum-forming, photographic finishes and an assortment of other methods were all new and native to Southern California. Not to mention the native monumental clay sculpture that defied limited notions about craft.

Defying limiting notions turns out to be the very essence of Los Angeles and its esthetic goals during these two potent decades. "Crosscurrents in L.A.: Painting and Sculpture from 1950 to 1970," and its accompanying catalogue, are a promising effort to lay a new foundation for California art in the 21st century.

"Pacific Standard Time: Crosscurrents in L.A. Painting and Sculpture, 1950-1970," Oct. 1, 2011-Feb. 5, 2012, at the Getty Center, 1200 Getty Center Drive, Los Angeles, Ca. 90049

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP is the author of *Rebels in Paradise: The Los Angeles Art Scene and the 1960s* (Henry Holt, 2011).



DeWain Valentine, *Red Concave Circle*, 1970, on loan from the Bank of America Collection, photo by Harry Drinkwater, © DeWain Valentine



Judy Chicago, *Big Blue Pink*, 1971, photo by Donald Woodman, © Judy Chicago



Craig Kauffman, *Untitled*, 1969, courtesy the Estate of Craig Kauffman and the Frank Lloyd Gallery. © Estate of Craig Kauffman