

Print Article

**William Wegman***Milk/Floor*

1970

collection of Lola Wegman

"It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles 1969-1973"

**William Wegman***Big and Little*

1970

collection of Atlas Wegman

"It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles 1969-1973"

Pacific Standard Time

THE CUTTING EDGE AT POMONA

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Any curator worth her salt should be fired from at least one job because of the provocative shows she puts on, and so it was with Helene Winer, who briefly served as curator of the small [Pomona College Museum of Art](#), beginning in the fall of 1970. She was cashiered after a mere two years, and came east to direct Artists Space and then found Metro Pictures in 1980 with Janelle Reiring.

The story of those two years -- and it's really the story of a crucible of California conceptualism -- is told in the second section of "It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles 1969-1973," the three-part survey that is part of the vast Getty-sponsored "Pacific Standard Time." The first exhibition, [reviewed](#) in these pages, was dedicated to curator Hal Glicksman and his work with California Light and Space artists.

The current show can be considered a prequel to the much larger exhibition, "Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974-1981 at L.A.'s Museum of Contemporary Art." This idea-driven art, heavy on photos and texts, bears the ironic humor characteristic of the West Coast artists of that period. Not a giggle and slap humor but the droll wit of artists operating in knowing opposition to the mainstream that was New York.

Winer had worked at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Whitechapel Gallery before taking the Pomona job, where she organized a baker's dozen shows, including solos for [William Wegman](#) and [Jack Goldstein](#) (their first) and exhibitions of [Bas Jan Ader](#), [John Baldessari](#), [Ger Van Elk](#), [Joe Goode](#), [John McCracken](#) and [Ed Moses](#). "It Happened" features Wegman's earliest photographs of his Weimaraner, May Ray, including *Milk/Floor* (1970), a pair of black-and-white photos of the dog lapping up milk on a wood floor. In one picture, the floor boards run horizontally, while in the other they recede, yet the dog and the milk remain unchanged. Back then the joke was on the kind of stripe painting then in vogue. Another L.A. artist, [Ed Ruscha](#), bought 50 of Wegman's photographs around this time, which allowed the artist to get off food stamps and concentrate on his art.

When Wegman moved to New York, he turned over his Santa Monica studio to Baldessari, who is represented in the show by the photograph of a bowl marked by ashy fingerprints and a pile of ashes from his early canvases. *Evidence: Bowl Handed to Helene Winer, Dec. 1, 70.* (1970) documents the resounding termination of his painting career, when he had sent his studio work up in flames. Baldessari was teaching in those years at the newly opened California Institute of



John Baldessari

Evidence: Bowl Handed to Helene Winer, Dec. 1, '70
1970

collection the artist

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Allen Ruppersberg

Summer Days

1971

Pomona College Collection

"It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles 1969-1973"



William Leavitt

California Patio

1972

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

"It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles 1969-1973"

the Arts, and regularly packed his students into his VW van and drove them 50 miles from Valencia to Pomona to see each of the exhibitions Winer organized.

Allen Ruppersberg is represented *Missing You* (1972), five small tables of the sort used by magicians, draped in fringed black cloths. Each bears a book titled *Houdini* that is progressively cut down into small slices until it disappears -- nothing rests on the last table. Much of Ruppersberg's work at this time involved an artist who was missing, who was not center stage as it were.

The notions of presence and absence, art and illusion are also obvious in *California Patio* (1972), an installation by **William Leavitt** of a sliding glass patio door opening onto a terrace covered in artificial plants. This piece captures the weird essence of artifice versus reality that is a recurrent theme for artists living the shadow of Hollywood, especially during the 1970s and '80s.

The theme is present as well in Ger Van Elk's *The Return of Pierre Bonnard* (1971), a color photograph of a Bonnard painting that can only be seen in a mirror that is hinged to face the wall. The show also includes a perilous stacked block sculpture by Jack Goldstein, who would later show his film projections and airbrush paintings at Metro, as well as Ed Moses's poured resin paintings with red and blue horizontal lines created by a snapped chalk line, staircase reliefs by Joe Goode, a black resin wall relief by John McCracken and a projected black-and-white forest by Bas Jan Ader.

Winer commissioned a number of performances, including one involving a nude woman by **Chris Burden**. Not everyone in the conservative suburb of Pomona was appreciative of her approach. The final straw seems to have been Wolfgang Stoerchle's performance, in which he stood naked, drinking beer and urinating on the gallery floor. Winer's support of advanced art ran afoul of the school's administrators and she was relieved of her position. Pomona's loss was New York's gain.

The exhibition is on view through Feb. 20, 2012, but a good day to see this show is Jan. 21, when versions of some of the performances originally enacted at Pomona College are taking place as part of "Pacific Standard Time." **John White** is restaging *In Preparation F* from 1970, in which members of a football team enters the gallery, change into their uniforms and runs some scrimmages.

Judy Chicago is presenting *A Butterfly for Pomona*, a new pyrotechnic performance inspired by her 1970 "Atmosphere" environment using flares and fireworks. And **James Turrell**, who was both a student and teacher at Pomona -- one of his more extraordinary pavilions of captured light is a permanent installation on the campus -- is recreating his 1971 performance *Burning Bridges* using highway flares. Hirokazu Kosaka, who performed at Pomona in 1972, will perform at the Getty Center on Jan. 20.

"It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles 1969-1973," Aug. 30, 2011-May 13, 2012, at the Pomona College Museum of Art, 333 N. College Avenue, Claremont, Ca. 91711.

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



Chris Burden

Match Piece, Mar. 20, 1972

1972

photograph

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Wolfgang Stoerchle

Untitled (video fragment)

1972

Getty Research Institute

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Helene Winer, photobooth self-portrait, ca. 1969