

## Print Article



**Robert Heinecken**  
*Periodical #1 (Periodical Pain)*  
 1969  
 Courtesy Robert Heinecken  
 Estate and Cherry and Martin  
 Gallery, CA



**Robert Heinecken**  
*Blue Chip Stamp Girl*  
 1965  
 Courtesy Robert Heinecken  
 Estate, Chicago

## Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken L.A. POSTMODERNISM: SPEAKING IN TONGUES

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Since the Getty-funded Pacific Standard Time exhibitions are largely focused on art made in Los Angeles between 1945 and 1980, experimentation is something of a leitmotif. During those years, artists everywhere were pushing the boundaries of what could be considered art, and L.A. was especially bold. The artists **Robert Heinecken** (1931-2006) and **Wallace Berman** (1927-1976), both of whom expanded the use of photographic reproduction in particular, might have seemed to exist in separate realms entirely, but their current show at the Armory Center for the Arts in Pasadena, "Speaking in Tongues," proves that they were more closely connected than one might have thought.

Heinecken, who founded the photography department at UCLA in 1964, had very little interest in the camera, or in traditional darkroom techniques. He was more interested in the ways that the photographic imagery of magazines and television had come to infiltrate every moment of waking life. He had originally studied printmaking, and that process affected his methods. In a well-known series from 1966, "Are You Real," he exposed the front and back of a magazine page as though it were a negative, and wound up with a print that conflated fashion advertisements and daily news, the erotic and the violent, all emphasizing the absurdity of the mass media



**Robert Heinecken**  
*Time (1st Group)* (inside)  
 1969  
 Courtesy Heinecken Estate,  
 Chicago, IL



**Robert Heinecken**  
*Different Strokes*  
 1970/1997  
 Courtesy Robert Heinecken  
 Estate and Cherry and Martin  
 Gallery, CA  
 photo by Robert Wedemeyer



**Wallace Berman**  
*Untitled # 126*  
 1974-76  
 Courtesy Estate of Wallace  
 Berman and Michael Kohn  
 Gallery, Los Angeles

culture barrage.

In these works, we see the image of a soldier carrying the severed heads of two Vietnamese people, but it is blurred and obscured by fashion ads. Heinecken unapologetically distorted and regurgitated the media to emphasize its increasing intrusion in people's lives. He was an ex-Marine pilot who wore his very long hair in a ponytail, advocated the elimination of all restrictions on what might be represented, and often concentrated on female nudes and overt sexuality. He created montages drawn from porn magazines in which the sexy pictures were cropped, flopped, double exposed or presented as negatives, so that they became white imagery on a black background. Although porn was taboo during this time, Heinecken made sure that all the most disturbing or titillating "money shots" were still visible. He never backed off, and confronted any attempt at censorship with more of the same.

Similarly, Wallace Berman was concerned with the implications of ubiquitous photographic representations in the media. His work, however, was very much inspired by Beat poetry and the Kabbalah. In fact, the show's title, "Speaking in Tongues," refers to glossalalia, an ancient Christian practice of channeling the spiritual forces in speech, and relates to Berman's method of incorporating mystical symbols into his work. Five years older than Heinecken and one of the first artists to show at L.A.'s renowned Ferus Gallery, Berman was the epitome of cool. His Beverly Glen home was a regular hang-out for the likes of **Dennis Hopper** and **Dean Stockwell** and, after Heinecken moved into the neighborhood, he too became a fixture there.

Berman regularly produced small, hand-printed editions of poetry and pictures, called *Semina*, that he would mail to friends. Later, he began using a Verifax -- the forerunner of a copying machine -- to print the image of a hand holding a transistor radio, borrowed from a 1964 Sony ad. He replaced the image of the radio with a great variety of photographs, from sexy girls and bombs to skyscrapers and snakes, as though suggesting that the radio transmissions linked all representation and all existence. Like Heinecken, Berman incorporated abundant erotica into his art, and that is why his



**Wallace Berman**

*Untitled (Proof, Yalta and Broads in Beige)*

n.d.

Courtesy Estate of Wallace Berman and Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles



**Wallace Berman**

*Untitled (Business man)*

1964

Courtesy Estate of Wallace Berman and Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles

first show at Ferus, shut down by the police, led to his arrest on charges of obscenity.

With their lusty subject matter and affection for original methods of producing photographic art, Heinecken and Berman were indeed involved in parallel investigations during the 1960s and 1970s. Yet I had never thought about their connection until seeing this exhibition, which, in its juxtaposition of their production, further illuminates the strength of each artist's work. The show, organized by Claudia Bohn Spector with Sam Mellon, also has an informative and original soft-cover catalogue, which is modeled after Berman's *Semina*, those aforementioned informal publications. In it, essays and loose-leaf individual photographs of the artists' works are contained in a cardboard box.

"Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976," Oct. 8, 2011-Jan. 22, 2012, Armory Center for the Arts, 145 N. Raymond Ave., Pasadena, Ca. 91103.

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**Wallace Berman**  
*Untitled*  
date unknown  
Courtesy Estate of Wallace  
Berman and Michael Kohn  
Gallery, Los Angeles



**Wallace Berman**  
*Untitled (Red)*  
Courtesy Estate of Wallace  
Berman and Michael Kohn  
Gallery, Los Angeles