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Catalogue for Allen Ruppertsberg's "You and Me or The Art of Give and Take"



Installation view of "Allen Ruppertsberg: You and Me or The Art of Give and Take," 2009
Santa Monica Museum of Art
Photo by Bruce Morr

RUPPERSBERG TIME

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Guest Informant, that slim local guidebook for tourists found in many hotel rooms, is the basis of the catalogue for the [Allen Ruppertsberg](#) exhibition "You and Me or The Art of Give and Take" at the Santa Monica Museum of Art. The particular *Guest Informant* that he appropriates is more than 50 years old, dating from 1956 and covering all of California and Las Vegas. It bears a big black label warning that "this volume must not be removed from the premises." We are thus notified at the outset that the artist has broken the rules and we are accessories after the fact. It is a minor crime, as crimes go, with an esoteric pay-off: finding oneself immersed in a rapidly fading past, a past that is painstakingly preserved throughout Ruppertsberg's work.

The original spiral-bound guidebook, purloined at some point from the Mark Hopkins in San Francisco, comes from Ruppertsberg's extensive archives, as does the rest of the material in this exhibition. Everything was reproduced in the context of Ruppertsberg's contention that copies are equal to if not superior than originals. Ruppertsberg altered the catalogue's cover to feature a postcard from one Memory Motel. The interior pages, charming with their 1950s advertisements for the likes of Finocchio's, a nightspot with the "World's Greatest Female Impersonators," or airline flights to L.A. for \$9.99, are collaged with the artist's own postcards and snapshots documenting sites and events that constitute his memories. Memories that occasionally jibe with our own. Excellent essays by guest curator Constance Lewallen, John Slyce, Greil Marcus and others are superimposed on top of the original pages of the book.

The catalogue is a portable version of the concepts in the exhibition. In the center of the museum's main gallery, a pegboard wall divides the two installations. One side is titled *The Sound and the Story/The Hugo Ball Award for 20th Century Graphics*, referring the poet of the Dada movement whose random combinations of words and images exemplified their esthetic. (It also lampoons the annual "Hugo Boss Award" in contemporary art.) On one side hang laminated photo-copies of fliers and album art by rock and punk bands from the 1960s and '70s, while the other side is adorned with the homely homilies of sheet music for songs, recipes and photographs from the earlier decades of the 20th century.

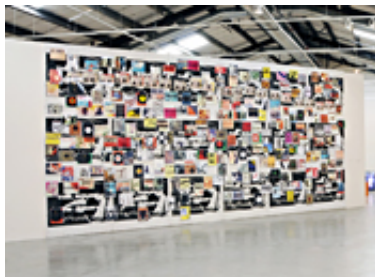
A second installation titled *The Never Ending Book Part Two / Art and Therefore Ourselves* is a sequel to *The Never Ending Book Part One*, which was shown at Art Basel in 2007. As in that event, Ruppertsberg has filled cardboard boxes with photocopied images from his archives that date back to the turn of the 20th century, a time when his grandparents owned a general store outside of Cleveland, where he was born. Viewers do not know which pictures are personal and which are documents of someone else's lost history, photographs documenting indecipherable events in phantom locations.



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Allen Ruppertsberg
The Sound and the Story/The Hugo Ball Award for 20th Century Graphics
2009
Courtesy of the artist
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The audience is invited to take home these photocopies to help complete the never-ending book (six pieces only please). The interactive aspect of the installation recalls the Happenings of **Allan Kaprow**, and Ruppertsberg is spending several days during with museum visitors rearranging his installation. On the walls are hung giant vintage banners advertising the circus, which bring to mind a bygone era. In fact, his subtitle for the installation is *Songs, Recipes, and the Old People, Echoes of the Past Vol. 2, Wave Goodbye to Grandma*.

In the 1960s, as a student at L.A.'s most progressive art school, Chouinard Art Institute (now Cal Arts), Ruppertsberg was aware of the Beats, collage and assemblage, the thumb-nosing installations and contracts of **Ed Kienholz** as well as **Ed Ruscha's** language-based Pop art. It was a groundbreaking period, and Ruppertsberg's own first exhibition was at the Eugenia Butler Gallery, which showed another of L.A.'s early Conceptual artists, **John Baldessari**. One of Ruppertsberg's earliest exhibitions was not held in a gallery but in a downtown restaurant that he renamed Al's Café, where he acted as chef of a fanciful menu offering such fare as pine cones and cookies. The 1969 event was interactive, surreal and poetic, the very qualities that would continue to materialize in his art.

However, Ruppertsberg's unique stature among the Conceptualists derives, I believe, from his determined and consistent use of literature. In 1974, he wrote the text of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a novella about a painting and the passage of time, in longhand across panels of white canvas. It was a substantial work, giving a notable autobiographical spin to theoretical avant-garde gesture.

Books have been a recurring concern throughout his oeuvre, as seen in the small survey of drawings from 1985 to 1989 included in the show. Each pencil rendering of a book from the artist's own library -- from *Fleurs du Mal* to *Tick Tock Tales* -- when purchased by a collector came with the assurance that the book itself would be bequeathed to collector after the artist's death.

Consequently, the show offers much to read and digest, which takes time. But that is the point really -- the pathos of time's passage. The catalogue is an extraordinary artist's book unto itself that transcends and extends the exhibition, and is accompanied by a 33 rpm vinyl LP record of songs, hymns and spoken word read by poet Bill Berkson. Has *Guest Informant* ever been put to better use?

Allen Ruppertsberg, "You and Me or The Art of Give and Take," Sept. 12-Dec. 19, 2009, at Santa Monica Museum of Art, Bergamot Station G1, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, Ca. 90404

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP writes about contemporary art in Los Angeles.



Allen Ruppersberg

The Never Ending Book Part Two/Ar and Therefore Ourselves

2009

Courtesy of the artist

Santa Monica Museum of Art

Photo by Bruce Morr



Allen Ruppersberg

The Never Ending Book Part Two/Ar and Therefore Ourselves (detail)

2009

Courtesy of the artist

Santa Monica Museum of Art

Photo by Bruce Morr



Allen Ruppersberg

Twins

1989

Courtesy of Mike Kelley

Photo by Bruce Morr



Allen Ruppersberg

The Gift and the Inheritance (Les Fleurs du Mal)

1989

Collection of Christine Burgin

Photo by Bruce Morr



Allen Ruppersberg

The Gift and the Inheritance (Tick Tock Tales)

1989

Collection of Lisa Lyons and Richard

Grossman

Photo by Bruce Morr