



Bengston

Billy Al Bengston, along with his good friend Ed Ruscha, are generally perceived as the quintessential L.A. artists, influenced by surfing, cars, movies and climate. They came to national prominence in the late 1960's, with the Ferus Gallery which they established along with Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, Craig Kauffman, and Ed Kienholz.

Bengston, 50, came to Los Angeles from Kansas when he was 15. He was kicked out of every art school he tried to attend until he was 21, when he quit as a sophomore at what is now Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design. "I thought a lot of things in art school were superfluous and in retrospect I was correct. So I didn't have anything else to do," he said laughing. "I was at Barney's Beanery—the Santa Monica Boulevard hang-out for artists who made up the Ferus Gallery—and I was playing with a package of Iris Sugar. That was it." Bengston started a series of paintings of the Iris Flower that looked like graphic prints, bright images in the center of the

black background. His first painting, made in the summer of the respected "Magazine Art in America" last spring. From paintings of Iris, Bengston went on to iconic images of Valentines and Chevrons, first painted on masonite, then on metal. The Chevrons on bent metal, which Bengston called "Dentos," were sprayed on with automobile paint. The technique was inspired, in part, by his hobby of working on motorcycles. "You had to be very macho in those days," he said. "But there was also a tremendous intellectual, boring reason for doing them on bent metal, that had to do with abstract expressionism and getting things off the wall, and reflections on metal that made it difficult to locate the image in space. Also, I like it to look like troubled water, which came from diving, trying to see what's under the water while you're standing above."

Of the late 50's, Bengston recalled, "There was no precedent for being a career artist. We all thought we'd be doing odd jobs for the rest of our lives. There was no social life to speak of. Remember "Ozzie and Harriet? You'd go to a restaurant and when they asked about a beverage, you'd order milk. I drove convertibles because they were cheap."

Bengston had his first solo show in New York in 1963. "I was threatened by the dealer that I had to move to New York to become a successful artist but I said, 'I guess I'll never be successful then.' I preferred the bare-chested society. There's a difference between painting bare-chested to wearing a coat and tie. There's a certain freedom in not wearing a shirt and having all the doors and windows open."

Today, Bengston maintains his bare-chested approach with a studio in Hawaii, where he spends half the year. "A surfer, motorcycle racer, a swimmer, semi-jock. I wouldn't have all those avocations if it weren't for California. We have real active pastimes here."

Bachardy

Don Bachardy is considered the preeminent portraitist in Los Angeles, a visual biographer of the actors, authors, and artists, who make up the city's cultural life. Last winter, he did the official state portrait of former California Governor Jerry Brown.

A Los Angeles native, Bachardy trained himself to portraits by copying photographs of movie stars from magazines. "I grew up on the movies and was profoundly influenced. It was the double thing of not only being in a movie theater, but coming out and realizing that you're only a few miles from where the movie was made. I was conscious of it even as a child. Copying from movie stills was almost like doing drawings of friends. I felt I knew them better than my school friends, whom I would never draw. It was very strange several years later to be drawing the same people I had studiously copied years before. Montgomery Cliff, Barbara Stanwyck, Alice Faye. Of course, it was something I did because I had the poster in my room, I drew it just as a doodle."

Bachardy studied at Chouinard Art Institute—now Calarts—in the late 1950's. His classmates included other now famous L.A. Artists: Billy Al Bengston, Ed Ruscha, Larry Bell, and Joe Goode. Bachardy feels that California light is "Better than anywhere else I've worked. And there's more freedom, because there is more openness. As soon as you're hemmed in by buildings and city life, automatically there is less feeling of freedom. It never really seriously occurs to me to live anywhere else but here."

Peter Alexander's enormous paintings on black velvet come from a specific California experience. "I wanted to paint on velvet but I had trouble finding the right image. One night, at about 3 a.m., I was out fishing with (artists) Ed Ruscha and Jim Ganzer. In the middle of the ocean we stopped to pick up squid. It was about 3 a.m. and the Santa Ana winds were blowing. They used a big light to draw the squid up, like moth to a flame. I was on deck looking down at all these incredible pink creatures wriggling and below them, there were sharks. Out of the arc of the light, two whales had surfaced, and they were blowing phosphorescence."

That incident inspired velvet tapestries of underwater imagery and later, glowing sunsets. They drew critical acclaim and were included in the Museum of Modern Art's International survey of painting and sculpture last May.

Alexander, 45, grew up in Los Angeles but initially studied architecture rather than art. After finishing at the University of Southern California, he practiced in L.A. with renowned architect Richard Neutra. "After all that, I found I hated it."

He went back to school, at UCLA, for his Masters in Fine Art. "I'd done some painting when I was about seven. I found that what I had liked about architecture was drawing, the problems that you solved, alone. I didn't know anything about art at the time, I just had a strong visceral attraction to it."

Alexander came onto the art scene in 1965, after the emergence of the Ferus Gallery.

He established himself with cast resin sculptures. "Resin casting is something I discovered out of surfing. I coated the boards with resin and knew the results." His first resin boxes were environments, like Glass Rooms, that contained clouds. The sculptures matured as geometric forms of resin. "They spoke more of the material, thick at the bottom, thin at the top. They had the architectural influence but it was a California idea. It came from being in an airplane and looking at the water as it meets the shore, how the deep blue goes to nothing as it hits the sand. Like solidifying water."

Alexis Smith, 35, grew up in Los Angeles. "I grew up here but when you grow up here, every place else seems odd. By the time you realize there's the rest of the world, it's too late."

Alexis Smith happily admits that L.A., from Chinatown to Hollywood, is the major influence on her work—large painted collages which incorporate snippets of cartoons, photographs, advertisements, slogans, pulp fiction and popular culture. The artificiality which comprises L.A. is perceived by Smith as reality.

Smith, 35, grew up on the grounds of the Metropolitan State Hospital, in Norwalk, where her father worked as a psychiatrist. She also lived in Palm Springs and Whittier before going to college at U.C. Irvine. "It's obvious that California has been a major influence, along with growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. The junk I was taken with in those years, I'm taken with now. Fortunately, the appreciation for that stuff has blossomed. My work is often seen from its quirky anthropological side." She is one of three artists from Los Angeles selected to be included in the Museum of Modern Art's prestigious exhibition of International Art which opened their new building in May.

Other artists from California have had an effect on Alexis. "I was very interested in Billy Al Bengston's work. His 1968 retrospective at the L.A. County Museum of Art was a real eye-opener."

Smith says that as she's gotten older, her work has gotten even more influenced by California. "I used to borrow from the writings of Borges and Thomas Mann, but now I use Raymond Chandler, pulp fiction, and the movies. I'm not a regional person but I'm addicted to this place as a source of material."



Howard W. Koch, Sr.

At 68, Howard W. Koch, Sr. is one of Hollywood's most successful independent producers. He has built an impressive reputation around a career which has spanned almost 50 years.

He has racked up an outstanding list of credits not only as the producer of such varied films as "Fort Yuma"; "Beachhead"; "Manchurian Candidate"; "None But The Brave"; "The Odd Couple"; "Last of the Red Hot Lovers" and "Airplane!"; but as a director of feature films (including "Shield For Murder"; "Born Reckless"; "Andy Hardy Comes Home") and various television segments ("Hawaiian Eye"; "Maverick"; "The Untouchables"). He also produced eight Academy Awards shows (his last was in 1983) including the 50th Annual Academy Awards Show which was the highest rated show in Oscar history.

As a former head of production of Paramount, he now maintains offices as an independent producer at the studio where he continues to ride the crest of the wave in a business that is often all at sea with the ever-changing tide of the movie going public's taste.

Koch got his first taste of the picture business when he was a child in New York. "I used to watch the movies at the local theaters and I was fascinated by them. I just knew I had to be a part of the business. Everyone told me that if I wanted to be in the picture business, I'd have to move out here."

At 19, Koch moved to Los Angeles and within six days he landed a job at 20th Century Fox in that studio's film library. ("My father knew an executive at the studio.")

Koch remembers Fox as it was in those days—a thriving, massive studio complex which covered some 480 acres and spread from Santa Monica Blvd. to Pico Blvd. without interruption from Olympic Blvd. as it does today.

He also remembers that "Fox was on the approach to the Santa Monica Airport and the studio used to send up balloons painted with warnings not to pass over because they were filming.

"In those days you didn't have to go anywhere else to make movies. Everything was on the lot from a New York scene to an English street to a Western town. Whatever location you needed to shoot, it was there."

Today there is a lot of talk about the film business going elsewhere to shoot and Koch remarks that "the best crews, the best of everything is here in L.A. The only reason to go elsewhere is if your story takes you there. And," he adds, "if it's a stage set, why go anywhere else?"

When Koch first started in the business, he worked with such giants as L. B. Mayer, Darryl Zanuck and Jack Warner. "With Mayer and Zanuck I was an assistant director within their companies but with Jack Warner I was a director and producer and had a chance to work with him as a film maker. He was fabulous.

"The films those men made were made by absolute control. One man made the decisions. People came out of the theaters feeling good. The good guy got the girl. Today those films wouldn't make it. Today a picture as recent as "Love Story" would be laughed at. Maybe it was laughed at then, but people came to see it. They wouldn't go to see it today."

Koch understands that the bulk of today's movie public are the 10 to 25 year olds and they want action. "Good or bad, what they want is fantasy; just like I did when I was their age. Today's filmmakers have to suit the needs of the audience. Things are different. One man doesn't make the final decisions. There are plenty of talented men at the studios, but many of them are agents and their job is to make deals. Maybe that's more important than making films, but I don't know."

When Koch first came to Los Angeles he used to say that he always wanted to go back to New York. "But when I went to New York, I couldn't wait to get back here. There is a kind of a 'mañana' attitude here and I was always a step or two ahead. After a few years here," he laughs, "I guess I became 'mañana' too.

"We live an enviable lifestyle here. It's tropical, relaxed and I think our style of living sets trends in the way people live and dress in other parts of the country and the world."

Koch and his wife, Ruth, have been married for 46 years and their lifestyle is typical of many movie business couples. They prefer to entertain close friends at home: mostly dinner and a movie. Many of their closest friends are not in the film business but rather friendships maintained since their school days.

Charitable affairs are very much a part of the Koches' lives. "I think this is one of the most giving industries in the world. I also think that every one of us who work in this business are mandated to give a percentage of what we earn to the Motion Picture Country Home." (An institution which provides care for retired entertainment people. Koch is an active trustee.)

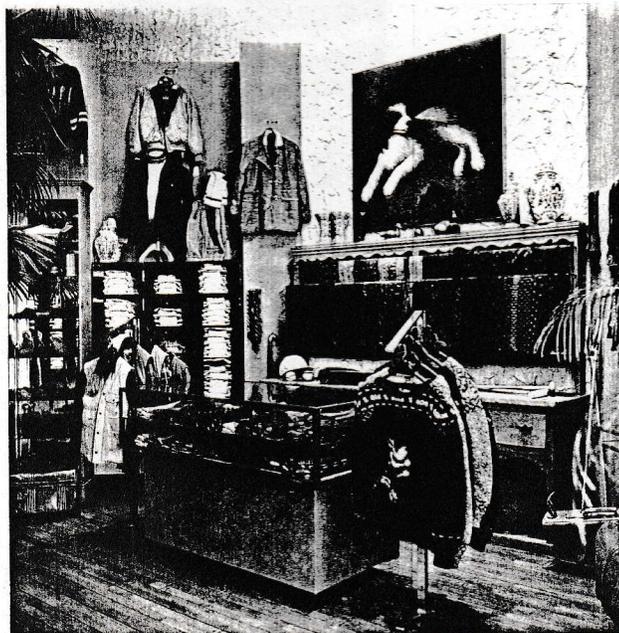
Koch feels that Los Angeles has given him great opportunities, perhaps more than he would have had in New York. "However," he adds, "I might have been a success on Wall St. After all, I was a runner there when I was 17. The only thing I didn't like about it was the regimentation." (Especially the formality of dress.)

After a moment's reflection, Koch smiles and admits that he "loves every minute of this business. I'm the past president of the Academy (of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences)...the head of a studio at one time ...I've lived it. If I pass out of this picture now, I've had a hell of a life!"

—Dale Kern

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