

# The New York Times

## **ART & DESIGN**

Ed Bereal Brings Edgy to Bellingham



“Exxon: The Five Horses of the Apocalypse” at the Watcom Museum in Bellingham, Wash.  
Credit: Jenny Riffle for The New York Times

## **Ed Bereal Brings Edgy to Bellingham**

**Over the decades, the artist has only become more confrontational, exploring such themes as gun violence, racism, police brutality and corporate greed.**

**By Alex V. Cipolle**  
**Oct. 23, 2019**

BELLINGHAM, Wash. — The year is 2019, the place is the United States, and a black man walks into a foundry wanting to cast some bronze grenades. This is how the American artist Ed Bereal, 82, recaps preparing for his first retrospective at the [Whatcom Museum](#) here.

# Ed Bereal: The Most Important Activist-Artist You Don't Know

[H hyperallergic.com/583395/ed-bereal-the-most-important-activist-artist-you-dont-know](https://hyperallergic.com/583395/ed-bereal-the-most-important-activist-artist-you-dont-know)

Alexandra Vlask  
Cipolle

August 26, 2020

## Articles

At 83, Bereal is known as a habitual disturber of the peace. That's not how he'd describe himself, however. "I'm a landscape painter," says Bereal. "I'm painting the socio-political landscape."



Bereal in 2019 with his installation "Exxon: Five Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (2019) (photo by David Scherrer and the Whatcom Museum)

At 83, Bereal is perhaps the most important activist artist you don't know.

That's not how he'd describe himself, however.

"I'm a landscape painter," says Bereal. "I'm painting the *socio-political* landscape."

Wearing his go-to art uniform (overalls with pockets full of markers), Bereal strokes his

gray beard in the glow of his computer screen. During several zoom sessions and video tours, roosters crow in the background and the reflections in his round, wire-frame glasses reveal vignettes from his rural, Washington state compound: home, machine, and wood shop, a big, red barn housing the art studios for him and his wife, artist Barbara Sternberger. Their horse Mark Rothko and pit bull Ray Charles often make appearances.



Installation view of Ed Bereal’s “Exxon: The Five Horsemen of the Apocalypse” (2019) at the Portland Art Museum (photo courtesy the Portland Art Museum)

Washington’s predominantly white Whatcom County is where Bereal has lived since 1993. It’s a long way from Los Angeles’s predominantly black Riverside neighborhood where Bereal grew up and garnered fame in the late ’50s and ’60s for his early assemblage art and the controversial group show, War Babies.

Bereal is considering a mural proposal from a local food co-op in Bellingham. In late 2019, the co-op members had visited Bereal’s first retrospective and solo museum show — Wanted: Ed Bereal for Disturbing the Peace — at the Whatcom Museum. This is likely the first time Bellinghamers, as well as anyone else, had been confronted with Bereal’s work en masse. Bereal called the show a “hand grenade,” as the majority of work is a pulpy, writhing body of American flags and other symbols of what he calls predatory capitalism: from racist cops and Newt Gingrich to Hillary Clinton and Standard Oil.



Ed Bereal, “Miss America Preparing John Doe for Public Service” (c. 2002–2003) oil on composite material, 96 × 50 inches (photo courtesy the artist and David Scherrer and the Whatcom Museum)

Like many communities across the country, the co-op members wanted to paint a Black Lives Matter mural in support of the movement. And the fact that Bereal is considering the mural at all is significant as, for an activist artist, he has only painted one other street mural in his lifetime: He says he will only participate, however, if the mural says something more than “Black Lives Matter.”

“‘Black Lives Matter’ has already been said. Can you go deeper than that?” Bereal says. “I’m cursed with the demand that we all have to go further.”

That “curse” has propelled Bereal through a six-decade career of bricolage, street theater, video journalism, paintings, drawings, and installations, much of which was supposed to be on view to the public in 2020 before COVID-19 hit. With some recalibration, the show *Ed Bereal: With Liberty and Justice for All* is now on view virtually with the Viking Union at Western Washington University, where Bereal was an assistant art professor, and *Apex: Ed Bereal* will soon be up virtually at the Portland Art Museum.

In late 2019, I visited Bellingham to cover the *Wanted* retrospective for the *New York Times* and have stayed in touch with Bereal since, because, as he put it, the retrospective was merely a “launching pad” for what comes next, both in medium and message; it was only a pitstop in the cursed journey of going further.



Bereal in September 2019 at the opening weekend of his retrospective *Wanted: Ed Bereal for Disturbing the Peace* at the Whatcom Museum in Bellingham; Bereal stands next to a portrait of himself taken circa 1961-1964 by photographer Jerry McMillan (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

This is a titillating promise since, in 2019, after 8 years of working on it, he completed the

most ambitious piece of his career: “Exxon: The Five Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” a 40-foot holographic installation combining painting, assemblage, metalworking, and projection. The piece features five life-size “horsemen” — a Nazi (War), Ronald McDonald (Plague and Famine), Donald Trump (the Antichrist), the grim reaper (Death), and a businessman (Predatory Capitalism). Their mannequin bottom halves are dressed in their respective costumes, all with oil nozzles as genitalia. The top halves spell out “EXXON” in a graffiti script made from layers of painted glass and projected images and light, creating a ghostly hologram effect for each horseman’s bust.

Considering Bereal first made a name for himself with small, gritty assemblage pieces featuring nails and pipes (and sometimes swastikas, Bereal was fascinated by the graphic punch of Nazi propaganda) such as “Focke-Wulf FW 19” (1960), Bereal’s cursed journey has already been long.



Ed Bereal “Focke-Wulf FW 190” (1960) mixed media, 21 ¼ x 12 x 6 inches, the Buck Collection at the UCI Institute and Museum for California Art (© 2018 the Regents of the University of California)

It can be traced back to 1966 when the Watts Rebellion, which had been raging on and off for a year, landed quite literally on the doorstep of Bereal’s Watts studio. The civil unrest against policy brutality in the black neighborhoods of LA had yet to pierce Bereal’s art world bubble, but the fatal police shooting of Leonard Deadwyler in May, while he was driving his pregnant wife to the hospital, reignited the protests, and the government’s response. On the morning of August 14, Bereal opened his studio door and was caught in the crosshairs of a National Guardsman’s .50-caliber machine gun. He realized that if the guardsman pulled the trigger, no art-world connections, no positive critiques, no impressive CV could deflect the bullet from tearing through him.

“Watts represented the way I was raised, forcing itself into the art world,” says Bereal.

LA looks like it’s going to burn down because of my former culture erupting. I looked around in the art world and they are pretending that ain’t going on. The U.S. is very good at pretending that something is not so. It was Let’s Pretend, and I’m not good at that.



Bereal's sketch of Leonard Deadwyler's widow, Barbara, from the televised trials "Untitled" (1966)  
graphite on paper  
11 × 8½ inches (courtesy of the artist and photo courtesy of the Whatcom Museum)



His Watts awakening provoked one of his first overtly political pieces, “America: A Mercy Killing” (1966–1974), which was subsequently acquired by the Smithsonian American Art Museum. “America: A Mercy Killing” is a mixed-media scale model of a stage set for a screenplay Bereal wrote about the hierarchies of class, race, governmental and corporate power, and media. At its focal point, Mickey Mouse is executioner, his grinning mug printed on a guillotine blade that castrates those who are regarded as a threat to this system. This piece marked the beginning of Bereal putting his socio-political conscience at the center of his work and transitioning out of making art to, in his words, “entertain wealthy people.”



Ed Bereal, “America: A Mercy Killing” (1966-1974) mixed media: wood, plastic, metal, ceramic and paper (photo courtesy the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase)

The fact that Bereal isn’t a household name may be precisely because he took the activist route. His LA contemporaries did group shows that garnered accolades, but outside of *War Babies* Bereal mostly declined to participate, not wanting to get lost in the polished, post-war, West Coast pop art propagated by peers and friends Larry Bell, Joe Goode, and Ed Ruscha.

“That wider art world that I was being exposed to had no place for the activist artist,” Bereal adds. “The deeper I got into the ghetto the further the art scene started to fade.”

“He didn’t want to be boxed in,” notes Matthew Simm, the West Coast collector for the Smithsonian’s Archives of American Art. “He had resisted opportunities for public exposure.” Bereal, with the assistance of Simm, is in the final stages of donating his papers to the archives, which firmly places him in the canon of American art.

Simms says:

The Archives of American Art is the largest archive focused on American art anywhere, and having his papers here, alongside the papers of other artists of color, including Senga Nengudi, John Outterbridge, Noah Purifoy, and many others, makes clear that what we call “American” is robustly diverse.

In the era of “America: A Mercy Killing,” Bereal founded the guerilla street theater troupe Bodacious Buggerilla, which performed on street corners and church steps, in laundromats, prisons, and nightclubs alongside headliners such as Richard Pryor. The troupe pilloried the status quo and its pillars of institutional racism and capitalism (often police who Bereal calls “urban terrorists,” were portrayed in pig masks), while also teaching black youth how to empower and defend themselves.



Still from Bereal, center, as “Uncle Sam” with Bodacious Buggerilla, untitled performance (c. 1968–1975) archival digital print, 11 × 14 inches (photo courtesy the artist)

Bodacious caught the attention of the FBI, which pushed the troupe to move to another

medium as Bodacious TV Works. With this production outfit, Bereal turned to video journalism and traveled the world to cover political unrest and war zones in Kosovo, Ireland, Malaysia, and Cuba.

When this period came to an end, Bereal and Sternberger — who he had met in the 1980s when he was teaching art at the University of California, Irvine — moved to Bellingham. Here, Bereal says he’s found the quiet needed to tackle the issues he’d faced in the streets.



Untitled (Bodacious Buggerrilla performance stills) (c. 1968–1975) archival digital prints (photo courtesy the Portland Art Museum)

His first formal foray back into the art scene since the late sixties was exhibiting his work in the 2011–2012 group show *Pacific Standard Time: Crosscurrents in L.A. Painting and Sculpture, 1950–1970* at the Getty. The exhibition displayed the 1965 assemblage piece, “American Beauty,” which features a prominent backwards swastika filled with stars and stripes.

In 2016, the Harmony Murphy Gallery hosted *Ed Bereal: Disturbing the Peace*, Bereal’s first solo exhibition in Los Angeles. The most explosive featured piece was “Miss America Presents Domestic Terrorism” (2003/2015) (now on display in the Viking Union show). A harbinger of what was to come for Bereal’s work and for the US, the large-format graphite drawing centers a defiant New York City policeman, jack-booted with arms crossed, enveloped in the unraveling American flag that makes up the body of Bereal’s “Miss

America,” character. She is a ghastly mistress of ceremonies who recurs in several of Boreal’s paintings, drawings, and installations, always sporting a skull with a crown of nails, bony mechanical arms, and full breasts. Scribbled across the image is the message, “New York’s Finest: Domestic Terrorists. Proud, Courageous, Loyal and Racist as Shit!”



Ed Boreal, “Miss America Presents Domestic Terrorism” (2003/2015) graphite on paper, 48 × 45 inches (courtesy of the artist and Harmony Murphy Gallery, Los Angeles)

Boreal says the lingering anger from the beating of Rodney King and the shooting of Deadwyler, and the police exonerations that followed, inspired the 2003 rendition. In 2015, he updated the piece with newspaper clippings about the police killing of Freddie

Gray.

“That piece could have been done in the middle of the last century,” or yesterday, Bereal says.

As Bereal embarks on his next body of work, with which he hopes he can push the “primitive” holography of “Exxon” to a more magical, illusionary place, he is also trying to push his examinations of racism and capitalism. Racism is rooted in a primordial terror, he says, and he wonders, after centuries of the systemic oppression of ethnic minorities in the US, if this terror has been coded into our genetics, a social evolution that has flipped on certain genetic indicators in our DNA.

“Terror is at the core. How do I put imagery together, a dialogue together, to address that?” he wonders. This question is central to what he wants to explore for the Bellingham mural.

“If you put the right question in your art, you can maybe get through,” Bereal explains.

“And this moment, of uprising, may be the moment to break through,” Bereal says.

“It does feel different. I don’t know why it has taken this long to produce this kind of reaction. That’s beyond my understanding,” Bereal says. “I’m hoping it’s real and that it’s deep.”

---

# The New York Times

## **ART & DESIGN**

Ed Bereal Brings Edgy to Bellingham



“Exxon: The Five Horsemen of the Apocalypse” at the Watcom Museum in Bellingham, Wash.  
Credit: Jenny Riffle for The New York Times

## **Ed Bereal Brings Edgy to Bellingham**

**Over the decades, the artist has only become more confrontational, exploring such themes as gun violence, racism, police brutality and corporate greed.**

**By Alex V. Cipolle**  
**Oct. 23, 2019**

BELLINGHAM, Wash. — The year is 2019, the place is the United States, and a black man walks into a foundry wanting to cast some bronze grenades. This is how the American artist Ed Bereal, 82, recaps preparing for his first retrospective at the [Whatcom Museum](#) here.

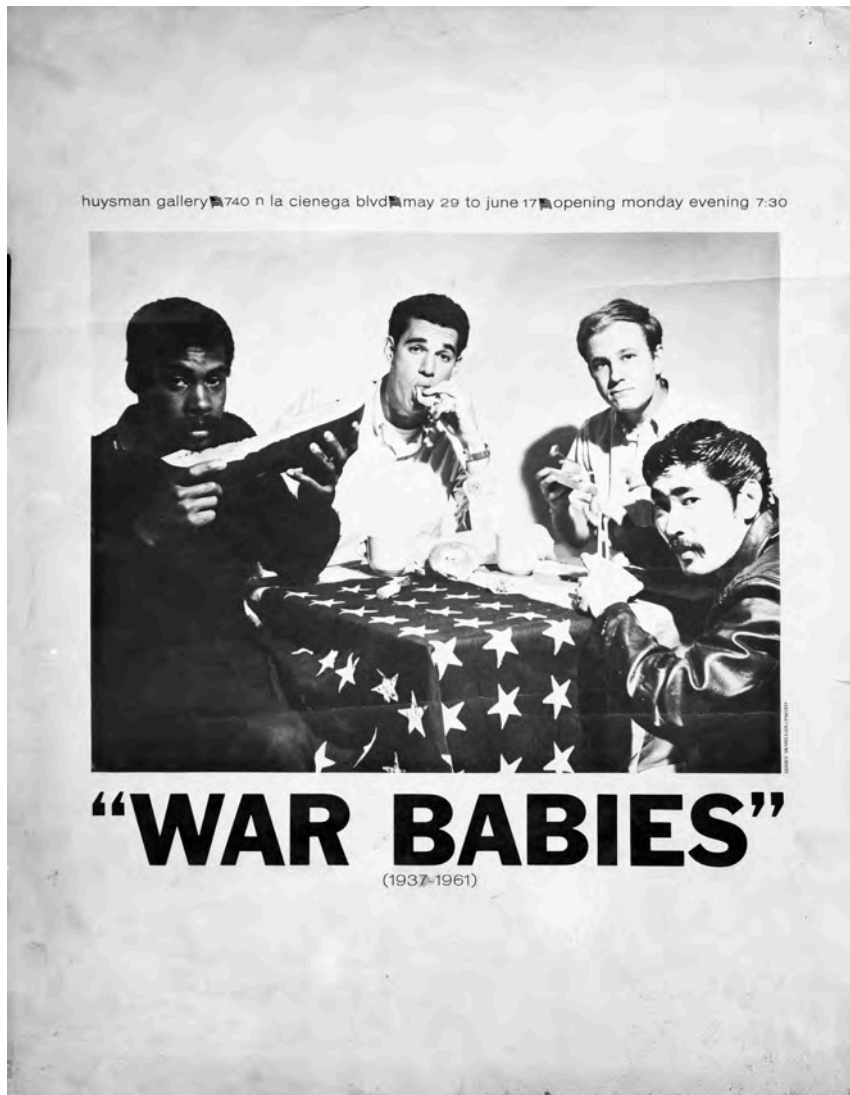
Creating new work for his politically charged exhibition "[WANTED: Ed Bereal for Disturbing the Peace](#)" raised some eyebrows in this predominantly white coastal city 20 miles from Canada. There was the foundry, Mr. Bereal said, where the staff was hesitant to serve him until a friend who happened to come in vouched for Mr. Bereal's artistic intentions. And that was before Mr. Bereal had explained that the grenades would stand in as testicles in an installation about the apocalypse.

Then there was the print shop. Mr. Bereal said that when the owner realized the images the staff were printing for him likened President Trump to the Antichrist, the cost of services quadrupled. Mr. Bereal found another printer.

None of this surprised the artist. The Riverside, Calif., native described Bellingham as conservative, preserving a 1950s way of life, albeit with a small but vocal left-wing contingent.

What did surprise Mr. Bereal was that Patricia Leach, executive director of the museum, approached him to do the show in the first place.

"Patty was very conscious of the fact that I'm edgy for them," Mr. Bereal said. "I kept asking her, 'Are you sure?'"



Ms. Leach laughed when she heard that. "We've been wanting to do something about Ed for a long time," she said. "Part of our mission is to provoke and promote curiosity on a variety of issues."

A poster from the the 1961 exhibition, "War Babies," in Los Angeles.

Credit...

Jerry McMillan, via Craig Krull Gallery, Santa Monica, Calif.

Ms. Leach said that Mr. Bereal is well known outside of Bellingham — perhaps most so for when he was living and working in Los Angeles, a time that included his assemblage pieces using bones, pipes and Nazi imagery; the 1961 exhibition “[War Babies](#)”; and the radical activist performance troupe the [Bodacious Biggerilla](#), which performed in places that included laundromats and Richard Pryor concerts.

In Bellingham, however, people primarily know him as a retired Western Washington University art professor. In 1993, Mr. Bereal and his wife, the artist Barbara Sternberger, moved to Bellingham. They live on a farm with an art studio in Whatcom County.

His current exhibition runs through Jan. 5 at the Whatcom Museum, a Smithsonian Institution Affiliate, featuring six decades of work, much of it new or never seen by the public. The oeuvre of Mr. Bereal, a self-described political cartoonist, is painterly, sophisticated and explosive. Over the decades, it has only become more confrontational, grotesque and darkly satirical, exploring themes of gun violence, racism, police brutality, corporate greed, complicity, the military industrial complex and, most recently, climate change.



Ed Bereal in his Whatcom County, Wash., studio. He is having his first retrospective at the Whatcom Museum.

Credit: David Scherrer

Mr. Bereal said a woman at the exhibition opening described him as an anarchist Boy Scout, a grand compliment. The observation is apt as one of Mr. Bereal’s greatest influences since he was a child is Norman Rockwell, the de facto illustrator of white nostalgia.



“He was probably the most political artist that I have ever known and maybe that is still true. He was showing a kind of America that was really kind of alien to me,” Mr. Bereal said. “He was on the sunny side of the street, and I was on the shady side.”

“Wanted” can be seen as a lifetime of Mr. Bereal answering the question provoked by Mr. Rockwell: What does America look like from my side of the street? Or, as the artist has personified it, what does “Miss America” look like?

Mr. Bereal’s answer is a grim, industrial spin on Lady Liberty, with skeletal metal fingers, sneering teeth and a nail crown. Miss America is Bereal’s puppet master and appears frequently, such as in the installation “Miss America: Manufacturing Consent (Upsidedown and Backwards),” where docile Americans queue to have their heads nailed on upside-down and backward by the matriarch.

Ms. Leach said that when she was planning the retrospective, she conferred with David Doll, the Bellingham police chief, the city’s mayor, Kelli Linville, City Council, the museum board and other community leaders.

“It wasn’t so much convincing the community that we had to do this show,” Ms. Leach said. “It was very important that we prepare people, especially policymakers and community leaders.” Preparation also included partnering with the [Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center](#) to train staff in how to work through conflict. The museum’s curator of art, Amy Chaloupka, said that this level of training is unusual for the museum.



Miss America is Bereal’s puppet master and appears frequently, such as in this installation “Miss America: Manufacturing Consent, (Upsidedown and Backwards)”

Credit: Jenny Riffle for The New York Times

“I can do some gallery talks, but it’s really the docents and our front line staff who are going to come across that person who walks in the door and doesn’t know what they are getting into and maybe feels confronted,” Ms. Chaloupka said.

The training was to help the staff feel equipped to talk with museum visitors about pieces like [“Exxon: The Five Horsemen of the Apocalypse”](#), — a 40-foot holographic and mirrored installation reimagining the Bible’s Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

In Mr. Bereal’s version, five figures stand at attention, each with a top half constructed from a mirrored letter and an oil spill at their feet. Together, they spell Exxon. Viewers are confronted with Donald Trump as the Antichrist, holding a Bible with an inverted cross; War wears a Nazi uniform; Plague and Famine take the shape of Ronald McDonald; Death is the Grim Reaper, and Bereal’s fifth addition, Predatory Capitalism, is in business attire. Here the bronze grenades hang with gas nozzles as male genitalia.

There is also the graphite drawing [“Miss America Presents Domestic Terrorism”](#), featuring a New York police officer with scrawled words calling him proud, courageous, loyal and racist imposed over newspaper headlines about Freddie Gray’s death.

“We’ve just set up, in that gallery, a battlefield,” Mr. Bereal said. “Our docents come in as medics.”

Weeks after the show opened, Ms. Chaloupka and Mr. Bereal said the public response had been positive. The museum hosted “Art, Politics, and Community: A Conversation Inspired by Ed Bereal’s Work” on Sept. 21, with a panel including the police chief; the mayor; Vernon Damani Johnson, a Western Washington University political science professor; and Mr. Bereal. Panelists and community members were prompted with questions about which pieces of art provoked them and what it has taught them about their own values.

“The level of honesty in the conversation and the heartfelt response from people was so true,” Ms. Chaloupka said. “It felt very natural, and urgent.”

“People were acknowledging the fact that the show is uncomfortable, and in many cases, kind of frightening,” Mr. Bereal added.

And another surprise for the artist?

“They didn’t blame the messenger,” he said. “They dealt with the message.”

A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 27, 2019, Section F, Page 12 of the New York edition with the headline: Bringing Edgy to Bellingham.

# Ed Boreal disturbs the peace

---

[cascadiaweekly.com/cw/currents/ed\\_boreal\\_disturbs\\_the\\_peace](http://cascadiaweekly.com/cw/currents/ed_boreal_disturbs_the_peace)



## Wanted

---

Ed Boreal disturbs the peace

## Attend

---

WHAT: “Wanted: Ed Boreal for Disturbing the Peace”

WHEN: Through Jan. 5

WHERE: Whatcom Museum’s Lightcatcher Building, 204 Flora St.

COST: Admission is \$5-\$10

WHAT: Art, Politics, and Community: A Conversation Inspired by Ed Boreal’s Work

WHEN: 4pm Sat., Sept. 21

WHERE: Whatcom Museum’s Old City Hall, 121 Prospect St.

COST: Free; register in advance

INFO: <http://www.whatcommuseum.org>

By Amy Kepferle

Wednesday, September 18, 2019

At first glance, I thought the six people standing in line by a “Please Enter Here; Have a Nice Day” sign near the entry of the “Wanted: Ed Boreal for Disturbing the Peace” exhibit at Whatcom Museum’s Lightcatcher Building were patiently waiting their turn to look at the sculpture suspended from the wall in front of them.

Then I noticed that the fellow at the front of the queue, a businessman type holding a large black bag resembling a lunchbox, had his bespectacled head on upside-down. Meanwhile, a mallet-wielding woman with pendulous breasts and a head and arms comprised of metal was on the verge of doing something unspeakable to him with her raised weapon. The rest of the nameless crowd—a preteen and a pregnant woman among them—waited for their fate like mute animals being led to slaughter.

The piece, “Miss America: Manufacturing Consent (upside down and backwards),” was alarming in more ways than one. My first instinct had been to join the cleverly disguised mannequins on their inevitable path to destruction, and it was only upon taking in the entirety of the installation that I caught my mistake. Also disturbing was the fact that the titular Miss America was a horror show. The stars and stripes of the flag she was enveloped in seemed to act as a prison—not as a symbol of freedom.

My date and I had arrived in the middle of a docent tour, and the knowledgeable woman leading arts patrons through the mixed-media exhibit focusing on the 82-year-old artist’s first solo show of his long career was discussing a 1999 oil painting, “The Birthing of the Middle Class.” The monstrous Miss America was there again, literally and figuratively pushing forth what looked to be a fully formed white man. The words “It’s a boy!” were painted across the top of the red, white and blue painting, and stars were cutting through a variety of questionable characters (among them Adolf Hitler).

“Red is something we associate with violence,” she said. “Blood. Anger. We see the stars are actually cutting into the side and opening the men up. The stars are weapons. Ed is showing us that the symbol we put our hands on our hearts for—and that we are so thankful for—can become a weapon.”

The theme of Boreal disturbing the peace is evident throughout the sprawling exhibit, which contains 120 works and spans six decades—from the time the African-American artist was making assemblage and performance art in Los Angeles in the 1960s, to his awakening of the need to merge art and activism during the Watts Rebellion, and his ongoing examination of racial inequity, gun violence, corporate greed and political power structures.

These days, Boreal lives on a farm in Whatcom County, and is still involved in making

creations that pack a punch, whether it's through pop art, political cartoons, assemblages or oil paintings.

In "Wanted," viewers get to see the scope of an artistic life lived with purpose. We see sketches that led to full-fledged paintings and sculptures, a chilling installation dubbed "Exxon: The Five Horsemen of the Apocalypse" that was years in the making," and an "Homage to LA" that features kids with teddy bears and machine guns.

Look closer, though, and you'll also find messages of hope and even humor. It's part of what makes the exhibit so enthralling.

# ARTFORUM

## INTERVIEWS

### ED BEREAL

February 12, 2016 • Ed Bereal discusses his life and art



Ed Bereal, *Miss America Presents Domestic Terrorism*, 2003, graphite on paper, 45 x 48 1/2”.

*In the 1960s, the Los Angeles art world’s detachment from the violent tumult of the Watts riots politicized Ed Bereal’s practice, propelling him toward a critical focus on multifarious forms of social inequality. He abandoned studio art in favor of guerrilla street theater, and later a satirical TV series for PBS. Both were ultimately deemed too radical for the general public’s tastes and shut down, and Bereal in 1990 returned to making what he calls “political cartoons,” which took the form of painting, sculpture, and assemblage. His latest exhibition, “Ed Bereal: Disturbing the Peace,” is on view at [Harmony Murphy Gallery](#) through April 2, 2016. It is his first solo exhibition in LA, showing works from 1963 through 2011, including*

*footage of his performances with the theater troupe Bodacious Biggerilla and clips from his short-lived show on PBS.*

IN THE 1960s, I was living a privileged life thanks to Bob Irwin and a few of my elders who had positioned me very well in the art world. Dwan Gallery was paying me to stay in my studio, and that was working pretty well until 1965. One morning during the Watts riots, I walked out of my house and there was a jeep parked across Venice Boulevard that just so happened to have a machine gun pointed right at my door as I opened it. I can remember looking at that National Guardsman and thinking, If I put all the articles that were ever written about my work and Irving Blum and Walter Hopps in front of me, that bullet would go through all of them. Those things had no real meaning.

During the riots, you could go into the Hollywood Hills and still see smoke everywhere. You could smell it. And the art world didn't take notice. I began to realize that I was alienated from a place that had at one point informed me. I left my gallery and started writing things that turned into plays. My former students at UC Riverside and I made this monster called Bodacious Biggerilla, doing street theater about racial stereotypes, performing in bars and laundromats and on church steps. We got so good that we drew the attention of the FBI, who were investigating the Black Panthers, New Africa, paramilitary groups, the California grape pickers with Cesar Chavez—we were all in the same bag, as far as they were concerned. They started making it impossible for us, the students' scholarships were put into question, and others were interrogated at their jobs. We morphed into Bodacious TV Works, a three-color-camera studio, and PBS accidentally let me through the door—then they shut it. That happens periodically to me, and then I find another door. We did a satirical game show called "Pull Your Coat," which is a ghetto term for a warning. We disseminated information on there that the media wouldn't share, using stereotypes of an egghead, a church lady, a black valley girl, or a guy shouting "Kill the Pig!" It was on national television for ten days, and then the management went, "Hey, shut that shit down."

I'm not into art for art's sake. I'm not into entertaining wealthy people. I think art can instruct, and I think it can destruct—it can be a weapon. Bob has a good eye, and we agree on a lot from a technical perspective, but once my stuff starts drifting into that idea of art as a weapon, he starts to back away. Bob comes from a different perspective in that way. I adore him. And you'll never find a sweeter person than Ed Ruscha. But I don't know if they understand me, and I don't push it. I enjoy with them what I can enjoy with them.

I like some of what's happening now—I love what Beyoncé did at the Super Bowl, it was something the mainstream media does not want her to do. I cosign that. But I did get a beautiful criticism from a young guy, one of my collectors' grandsons who was in my studio. I told him, "I would like my stuff to have a conversation with people your age." He said, "What's your website?" I said, "I don't have one," and he said to me, "I thought you wanted to talk to us." He's absolutely right. I'm an old fart, but I've got to keep up the conversation.

— *As told to Janelle Zara*

# Los Angeles Times

By CAROLINA A. MIRANDA STAFF WRITER  
MARCH 3, 2016 10:44 AM



Harmony Murphy is showing collages, assemblages and sculpture by L.A. artist Ed Boreal.  
(Ed Boreal / Harmony Murphy)

**Ed Boreal, “Disturbing the Peace: Assemblage, Sculpture, and Painting 1963-2011,” at Harmony Murphy Gallery.** Boreal became known in the ‘60s for participating in the infamous 1961 L.A. exhibition “War Babies,” whose poster featured the artist, along with three others, eating foods that were stereotypical to each of their cultures over a table draped with an American flag. Over the years, he worked as teacher, writer and in theater, but has returned to art-making: primarily collage, assemblage, sculpture and other works that deal with violence, war and racial clichés. *Through April 2, 358 E. 2nd St., Los Angeles, [harmonymurphygallery.com](http://harmonymurphygallery.com).*



# HYPERALLERGIC

## EVENTS

### **ArtRx LA**

Matt Stromberg

April 5, 2016



#### **Ed Berial: Disturbing the Peace**

When: Closes Saturday, April 9

Where: Harmony Murphy Gallery (358 E 2nd St., Downtown, Los Angeles)

Ed Berial emerged in the early 1960s as an important figure in the California assemblage art movement, creating a politically oriented body of work that expanded to include performance, video, and social engagement. Surprisingly, his current exhibition at Harmony Murphy Gallery, *Disturbing the Peace*, is his first solo show in Los Angeles. Spanning almost 50 years, it includes drawings, collages, and mixed-media sculptures, providing a much-needed reassessment of the work of this overlooked LA artist.

**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



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

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 Boreal's** searing *American Beauty* (1965), a small tree shaped like a human figure that grows from a spray-painted white 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 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).