

Art Basel Miami Beach's 21st Edition Marks a Milestone in the Fair's History



Miami Beach Mayor Steven Meiner, left, and Art Basel CEO Noah Horowitz at the opening press conference on Wednesday. Photo by Elizabeth Freeman

By J. SCOTT ORR, Photography by Elizabeth Freeman December, 2023

When the doors flew open on the media preview to this 21st edition of [Art Basel Miami Beach](#), an eager crowd of press and VIPs was greeted by a giant inflatable globe. This, it would seem, is a representation of the globally essential art fair's limitless reach. And, yes, the globe was made small by the size and scope of the behemoth Art Basel has become.

It's difficult to avoid hyperbole when describing this grandest of all art fairs - some don't even try. Miami Beach Mayor Steven Meiner, whose city spent \$600 million modernizing the Miami Beach Convention Center where the event is held, could hardly contain his enthusiasm: "Art Basel has been referred to as the Olympics of the art world and we are right now in Miami at the epicenter of the arts and culture world," he said. "This week has become the apex moment of the American cultural calendar, a place where you simply have to be," added Art Basel CEO Noah Horowitz.

Row after row of gallery stalls make the world look small during the press opening for Art Basel Miami Beach.



Ed Bernal's CHARGED with Disturbing the Peace. Photo by Elizabeth Freeman

By Friday's public opening, hundreds of collectors and others will already have inspected the art work during VIP events that started on Wednesday. Tens of thousands of other art lovers are expected to exercise the turnstiles over the weekend. When its gate is combined with that of the dozen-plus satellite shows that have cropped up around Art Basel Miami Beach over the past two decades, some 80,000 people will have taken part.

There are works by established art world greats and emerging artists, there are paintings, figurative, abstract, and everything in between; there is sculpture in bronze, clay, plaster, ceramic and glass; there are digital works and interactive installations; countless artists, 277 galleries, and 34 countries are represented. To say the art, like the taste of attendees, is diverse is a disservice to the word.



The entrance to Art Basel Miami. Photo by Elizabeth Freeman

Sometimes, the diversity in vintage, style and subject occurs within a single Art Basel booth. This is the case at Aquavella Gallery of Palm Beach and New York, where works by Picasso and Francis Bacon share wall space with Jackson Pollock, Keith Haring and others.



*Cynthia Talmadge's immersive installation Half Light.
Photo by Elizabeth Freeman*

Here, you'll also find a work by self-taught American artist Damian Loeb, whose piece *Immaculate Conception*, in oil on linen, is a none-too-subtle exploration of ecclesiastic femininity in swirling, animated, psychedelic patterns. The Virgin Mary often appears to the faithful in odd places, like a grilled cheese sandwich, in one well publicized example. Loeb's pareidolia has led him to find her in a vagina.

The arresting work of Ed Boreal, brought to the fair by Elizabeth Leach Gallery of Portland, Ore., is one of many examples of Art Basel's latter day embrace of Black American artists. Boreal gained wide exposure for his artistic immersion in the politics of race during the 1960s. His collage work, for which he is best known, incorporated classic drawing techniques alongside expressionist elements and pop art references.



Betty Tompkins' Afternoon Idyll. Photo by Elizabeth Freeman

The presentation offers a collection of early self-portrait drawings created between 1958 and 1965 before fast forward to a stunning work called *CHARGED with Disturbing the Peace*, a 1998 photographic diptych that parodies American racial stereotypes. The work satirizes a Los Angeles Police Department mug shot of a black man with a wildly exaggerated, smiling, toothy mouth.

At the booth of New York's 56 Henry Gallery, Cynthia Talmadge's immersive installation *Half Light* takes viewers into the artist's imagined vision of the studio of painter Mary Pinchot Meyer, whose unsolved 1964 murder is sometimes thought to have been linked to her affair with President John F. Kennedy.

Through six large pointillist paintings and a hand-dyed carpet, Talmadge imagines Meyer's studio at three different times: the last year of her life, immediately following her murder and what it might have looked like in 1969 had she not been killed. Talmadge's limited color palette, complex monochromes and use of simple geometrics mimic some of Meyer's paintings.



Damian Loeb's Immaculate Conception. Photo by Elizabeth Freeman

New York's P·P·O·W Gallery brings a rarely-seen series of subdued works on paper created between 1992 and 2003 by "accidental dissident" Betty Tompkins. Tompkins is best known for attracting the attention of authoritarian censors for her photorealistic, close-up imagery of sex, love, and desire including her iconic *Fuck Paintings* series.

In the series presented here, Tompkins harvested photographs from books on vintage softcore portraiture like *Wheels and Curves: Erotic Photographs of the Twenties* which she combined with her own oil crayon renderings of idyllic landscapes. The results are works that make laughable the evolution of censorship and shrill public distress over nudity in art.



Arthur Jafa's untitled work that proceeds from a photograph of Iggy Pop's famous backbend pose. Photo by Elizabeth Freeman

New York's Gladstone Gallery's offerings include several works by Arthur Jafa, the American **video artist** and **cinematographer**. The three largely black-and-white works, all created using acrylic and archival inkjet printing mounted on wood panels, included one that featured Iggy Pop, doing his famous backbend during his silver-slacked days as the frontman of seminal punk band The Stooges. Jafa adds to this image some acrylic abstract filigree that ably captures the chaos that was attendant Stooges performances of the period.

There you have it, a highly subjective selection of five examples from the thousands of interesting and engaging works of art that are, for a mere three days, on display across the convention center floor. The show opens to the public on Friday and closes on Sunday. **WM**



CULTURED

The Freshman Class of 2023: Meet 8 Art Galleries Making Their Art Basel Miami Beach Debut

These fresh-faced dealers hail from cities as far-flung as Cairo, Warsaw, and Mexico City.

WORDS: [Julie Baumgardner](#)
Dec 4, 2023

For a dealer, getting into Art Basel Miami Beach means getting the chance to introduce your program to the most powerful figures in the American and Latin American markets. This year, the outpost of Switzerland's finest fair franchise, which runs from Dec. 6–10, is welcoming a brand new crop of international outfits. All of the galleries listed below have roots outside the well-trafficked art capitals of New York and Los Angeles. And while many got their start at smaller fairs in the city, 2023 marks their ascension to the big leagues: the Miami Beach Convention Center. Without further ado, meet the freshman class of ABMB 2023.





Ed Boreal, *CHARGED with Disturbing the Peace*, 1998. Image courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

Elizabeth Leach Gallery

Location: Portland

Founded: 1981

Founder: Elizabeth Leach

Section: Survey

Vibe: Overlooked Pacific Northwest stalwarts

The gallery is presenting historic work by Ed Boreal, an 86-year-old artist known for his confrontational assemblages who describes himself as a political cartoonist. Still creating dynamic new work today, Boreal has been receiving overdue recognition; next year, he will be included in publications from both the Whitney Museum and the Smithsonian. Boreal has become a West Coast hometown hero of sorts, a towering renegade who also taught art at Western Washington University. His work is emblematic of the “gallery's mission is to create a dynamic dialogue between the local community and the global art world,” says Daniel Peabody, the gallery’s director.



EXXON: Five Horsemen of the Apocalypse, 2011–2019

APEX: ED BEREAL

Conversation with Grace Kook-Anderson and Ed Bereal

GKA: *Immortal Beloved* is unusual in the exhibition because it's an apolitical piece. You started it early in your career, in 1962, and then it rested in your studio for many years, until you finished it in 2015. There's assemblage in this work, there are aspects of light and space and finish fetish, and there is evidence of your skills as a craftsman and a draftsman. Can you talk about that formally in what this object means to you and what it has meant putting all these elements together?

EB: I was kind of a rebellious kid and I had a problem with the restrictions that categories would place on you, particularly, if they were restrictions that I didn't agree to. It's called: "Oh, you are an abstract expressionist, therefore, you exist within these boundaries. Or, you're an assemblage artist, so rust and junk and recycle this and that, that's your realm. Or you're a finish fetish person so you're polishing your one version of another Ellsworth Kelly." I've found that

those kinds of categories, and thus restrictions, would get in the way of what I wanted to say. And so I would reach into whatever medium, or whatever category, I had to, to do what I wanted to get done, and say what I wanted to say. And I would leave the definition to others. Plus, I really like the aesthetics of cross referencing—I like an illusionary aspect of an assemblage piece which also includes a little rust, a couple of nuts and bolts, and highly polished plastic. It's just kind of my way of doing things. It pretty much says what I want to say.

GKA: The most recent work in the exhibition, *Five Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, again brings together all of these aspects of your working style: assemblage, funk, light and space, optical illusion. Traditionally, it's the four horsemen of the apocalypse, but you added the central figure. And the figure on the left is Donald Trump holding a bible upside down. It's uncannily similar to Trump's photo-op at St. John's church in Washington, DC, in June 2020. However, you made this a year before that moment happened.

EB: This piece evolved while I was working on it. I wanted to say something about climate change, the threat of fossil fuels, and the reason I went from four horsemen of the apocalypse to five is because Exxon was five letters. Using a graffiti font, I got E-X-X-O-N. And once having that, I went, okay, who was the first horseman, the second, the third, the fourth? And I had to have one more, which I made corporate capital, because I think that's the source of a lot of our problems. So it was now a matter of how I illustrate those different issues. And inside each letter is some kind of illustration or symbol for that particular horseman or problem.

Ultimately, this is the largest piece I've ever done. And about now, I'm going, why did I do it that big, because you guys are going to ship it back to me, and I've got to figure out where I'm going to put it. (laughs) So, that's kind of it. It kind of took on a life of its own.

The first is Donald Trump as the antichrist. The second is war. The third is corporate capital. The fourth is plague, famine. And the fifth is death. Represented by the various images that I thought best illustrated that. I particularly like famine and plague being illustrated by Ronald McDonald. Of all of them, that might be my favorite.

GKA: I'm going to jump to two paintings: *Location, Location, Location*, which points to our war in the Middle East, and *Separate But Equal*, which speaks to immigration and the refugee crisis. Can you talk about the iconography in these paintings, and again, the very different styles that you bring into one work?

EB: In *Location, Location, Location*, I started with Ed Ruscha's *Standard Station* series, which I thought was kind of an homage to corporate capital. And I went, whoa, wait a minute. Maybe we could do another version of that. So, I took his illustration of *Standard Station*, and in front of it I put what I thought was the essence of the battle for fossil fuels and energy: we have an American soldier defending the fossil fuel industry, and we have a little Iraqi; with racism and so forth, I did him as a kind of cartoon character. What is kind of an interesting subtext for this piece is the American soldier's got his gun, the Iraqi has got a Molotov cocktail, which is a Coke bottle, which basically pits Coca-Cola against Standard Oil. And I thought, that's really a kind of funny situation.

I like the symbol of the cross, or an X. And it will turn

up in my work periodically. In this case, the cross works like a magnifying glass: you have a manacle around the soldier's ankle, and the chain goes through the gas pump and again manacles the Iraqi's leg together. Ultimately, this is about oil. The blood on the bottom of the painting is oil and it reflects the cross. And in spite of the rap that we're putting out there, as far as patriotism and freedom and justice and all that, it's about oil. I wanted to make that fairly clear.

GKA: In *Separate but Equal*, what stands out for me is the terror in the children's faces. The American flag is just falling apart, becoming untethered. And there's this sort of robotic hand, part of a kind of zombie robot or nightmarish Lady Liberty coming forward. Can you talk about some of that recurring imagery?



Immortal Beloved, 1962/2015

EB: That—as a Lady Liberty—is my version of Miss America. I'm affected by a lot of different bodies of work, a lot of different imagery, a lot of different media, and so forth. One of the people that has influenced me is Norman Rockwell, not so much artistically, but ideologically. He kind of does America on the sunny side of the street. So when I was coming up with Miss America, I wasn't raised on the sunny side of the street, I was raised on the shady side of the street. And what does America look like from the shady side of the street? And I came up with this particular image.

I'm also influenced a lot by music. My parents, and my family on both sides, were all musicians. My brother and I are probably the only ones that weren't. But I heard music, and I think it came in through my pores because it was always around whether I was thinking about it or not. And I could always see it. I could see sound. I could see music. And I could see compositions and how they moved and how they transitioned from one mood or from one color to another. One of the things that inspired this particular flag was Jimi Hendrix's version of the national anthem. Have you heard that?

GKA: Oh, yeah.

EB: It's kind of scary. He just kind of blows it up in a way that music can do quite wonderfully. Well, I wanted to see if I could translate that into a visual. And I found that I do that quite a bit. There are compositional lessons that I learned from music that I employ visually. I got this incredible lesson from John Coltrane's one tune called *Olé*, because he's playing a soprano saxophone in it, and he's doing what that medium can do really wonderfully, and he's kind of skywriting. He's being very lyrical, and he's moving around. And at one point, he takes the melody and hands it to another instrument. So, here's the saxophone doing this, and at one point the melody's doing something else, and you go, whoa, wait a minute! That's not a saxophone. It's a bass viol that's being bowed. And the sound is very close, but the melody is now free to do some things because it's being carried by a bass viol, which it couldn't do as a soprano saxophone.

So I go, whoa, how do I take one medium, pass the idea of the piece to another medium, and imperceptibly, so that you can't see it, but now you're going from metal to plastic, or you're going from opaque to transparent. And, wow, that's



Untitled (Bodacious Buggerilla, photographic documentation), ca. 1968-1975



Untitled (Bodacious Buggerilla, photographic documentation), ca. 1968-1975



Untitled (Bodacious Buggerilla, photographic documentation), ca. 1968-1975



Separate but Equal, 1988-99

a kind of interesting idea. And I love it, and let's play with that for a bit.

GKA: You've said that your experience with the Watts Riots in 1965 shook you up, and you stopped creating objects. Can you share a little bit about that moment, and how *Bodacious Biggerilla* came to be?

EB: One night in 1965, I was coming home from Barney's Beanery, a bar in Hollywood where all the artists would come to drink and laugh and talk to each other about whatever. If you ever wanted to see a colleague, then you'd go to Barney's Beanery, and you'd eventually run into them.

On my way home, I smelled smoke and I watched police cars going all over the place, and people running and so forth.

I didn't realize it, but it was the beginning of the Watts Riots. I got in the middle of it, and had my life threatened at one point, and I realized that the art world as I knew it was not nearly as exciting or relevant as what was going on in the streets outside my studio. And I began to also realize that I had left a great deal of my own culture behind me as I entered the art scene. There was a time when I prided myself on knowing what's going on, particularly in the ghetto, because I keep up with what the street is. Well, I didn't in this case. A gigantic statement was being made that I didn't know very much about.

I decided at that point that I needed to get more involved in the sociopolitical aspects of what was going on in this country, and so I left the Dwan Gallery, which represented me at the time. They were paying me to stay home and make

art. I decided to leave the gallery and get back to Riverside, California, where I was raised.

I made a piece called *America, A Mercy Killing*, which is at the Smithsonian right now. I tried to work out my own personal ideological position. That piece was really a play that I was trying to write at the time, when I was also teaching at UC Riverside in the Black Studies Department. We started doing little skits to dimensionalize some of the issues we were dealing with.

I got kicked out of UC Riverside, and a lot of my students followed me to L.A. And that's where the *Bodacious Biggerilla* was born. It consisted of a lot of people who had never done performance before, but were naturals. The *Bodacious* turned into this creative engine that was so powerful that they were able to do exactly what I'm doing now: take an issue, make it visual. Give it words, give it sound, give it costumes, and present it to an audience that absolutely understood what we were talking about and the kind of criticism we were making about the sociopolitical world we were being assaulted by.

The Black Panther Party used to—at the end of our productions—come in and do a criticism of what we were doing, whether we were accurate, whether we were being misinformed, or we were misinforming our audience. It was quite an experience. I think it was over about four years or so ago. We were performing in prisons, on college campuses, primarily though, the group wanted to stay within the ghetto whenever we could, so we did a lot of festivals and so forth. It was an absolutely incredible experience.

GKA: I'm so glad that there's documentation around this, too, because I think it is so reflective of where we're at now. And, I have to say, *Pull Your Coat* is wonderfully put together. It really feels like a kitschy game show. (laughs)

EB: Well, for a lot of people, "pull your coat" means, for example, if some guy is hitting on your girlfriend, and he happens to be 6' 4" and 300 pounds, and you're 5' 11" and 160, and you're going to kick his butt, someone grabs you by the coattail and says, "If I were you, I would think that out again." You just had your coat pulled.

So, naming a quiz show, that's basically pulling the audience's coattail and letting them know, particularly because the questions and answers all relate to sociopolitical issues of the day, and you do it in a very satirical way. Satire



Location, Location, Location (Iraq/Afghanistan), 2006

is also a weapon. And we use it as such in *Pull Your Coat*. Public television got what we were doing right away, and again, we got closed a little early. Because we were being a little too raw, a little too direct, and we were pulling too many coats.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Immortal Beloved, 1962/2015

Mixed media
34 1/2 x 18 3/8 x 8 inches
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: courtesy of Harmony Murphy Gallery, Los Angeles

Five Horsemen of the Apocalypse, 2011 – 2019

Mixed media and found objects
8 x 40 x 3 1/2 feet
Courtesy of the artist

The Birthing of the American Middle Class, 1999

Oil on composite material
80 x 50 inches
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: courtesy of David Scherrer

Separate but Equal, 1988-99

Oil on composite material
42 x 54 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Location, Location, Location (Iraq/Afghanistan), 2006

Oil on composite material
72 7/8 x 42 1/2 inches / 74 3/8 x 43 3/4 inches framed
Courtesy of the artist

Bodacious Buggerrilla, ca. 1968 – 1975

Photographic documentation and video footage
Courtesy of the artist

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Los Angeles in 1937 as a war baby and having studied at Chouinard Art Institute, Bereal has created work that carries a breadth of visual range, from assemblage sculptures to expertly drafted illustrations and to performative works with *Bodacious Buggerrilla*, a political guerrilla theater group he co-founded in 1969. A lifelong educator, Bereal taught at the University of California, Irvine's School of Fine Arts from 1969 to 1993. During that time, Bereal was also teaching in the black studies department at the University of California, Riverside, in the late 1960s. In 1993, Bereal joined the College of Fine and Performing Arts at Western Washington University until his retirement in 2007. Bereal maintains his studio on his farm in Bellingham, Washington, and was most recently celebrated with a retrospective at the Whatcom Museum organized by curator Amy Chaloupka in 2019, titled *Wanted: Ed Bereal for Disturbing the Peace*.



Untitled (Bodacious Buggerrilla performance still, Ed Bereal as Uncle Sam), ca. 1968-1975

APEX

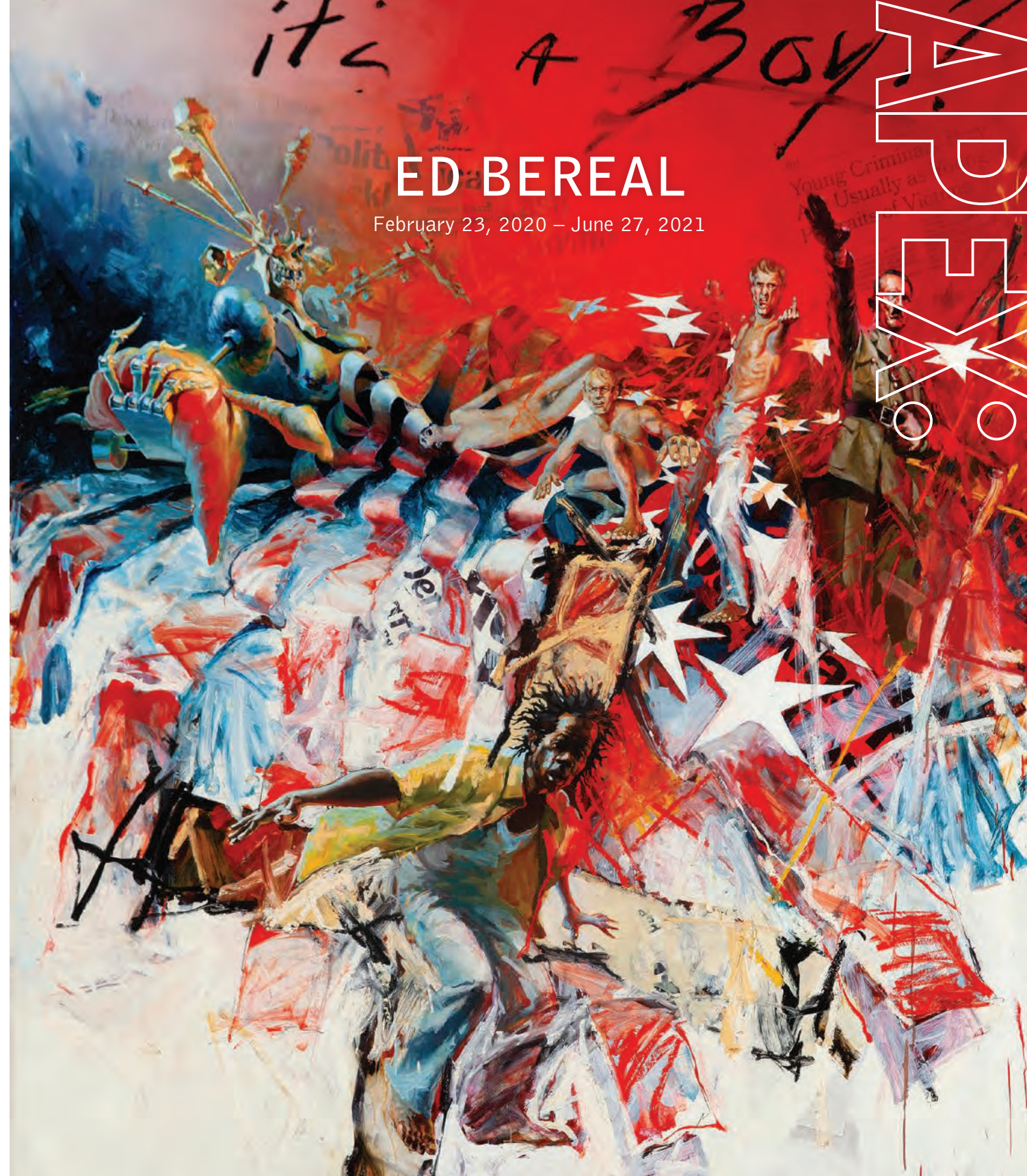
An ongoing series of exhibitions featuring emerging and established artists living in the Northwest. Presenting contemporary art in the context of the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Center for Northwest Art, this program continues the Museum's 129-year commitment to exhibiting, collecting, and celebrating the art of the region. APEX is supported in part by The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Endowments for Northwest Art.

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COVER: *The Birthing of the American Middle Class*, 1999



PORTLAND ART MUSEUM



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.

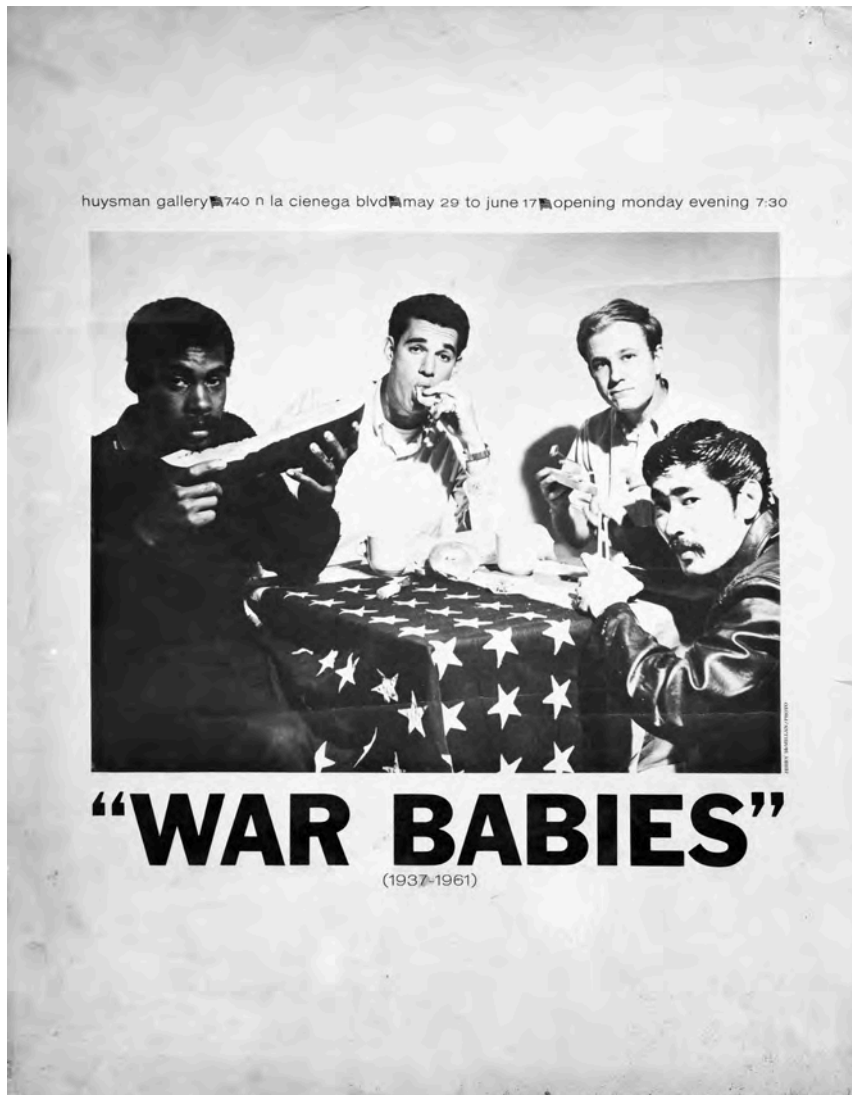
Creating new work for his politically charged exhibition "[WANTED: Ed Bereal for Disturbing the Peace](#)" raised some eyebrows in this predominantly white coastal city 20 miles from Canada. There was the foundry, Mr. Bereal said, where the staff was hesitant to serve him until a friend who happened 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: The Most Important Activist-Artist You Don't Know

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

Alexandra Vlask
Cipolle

August 26, 2020

Articles

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



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

At 83, Boreal 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 Boreal. "I'm painting the *socio-political* landscape."

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

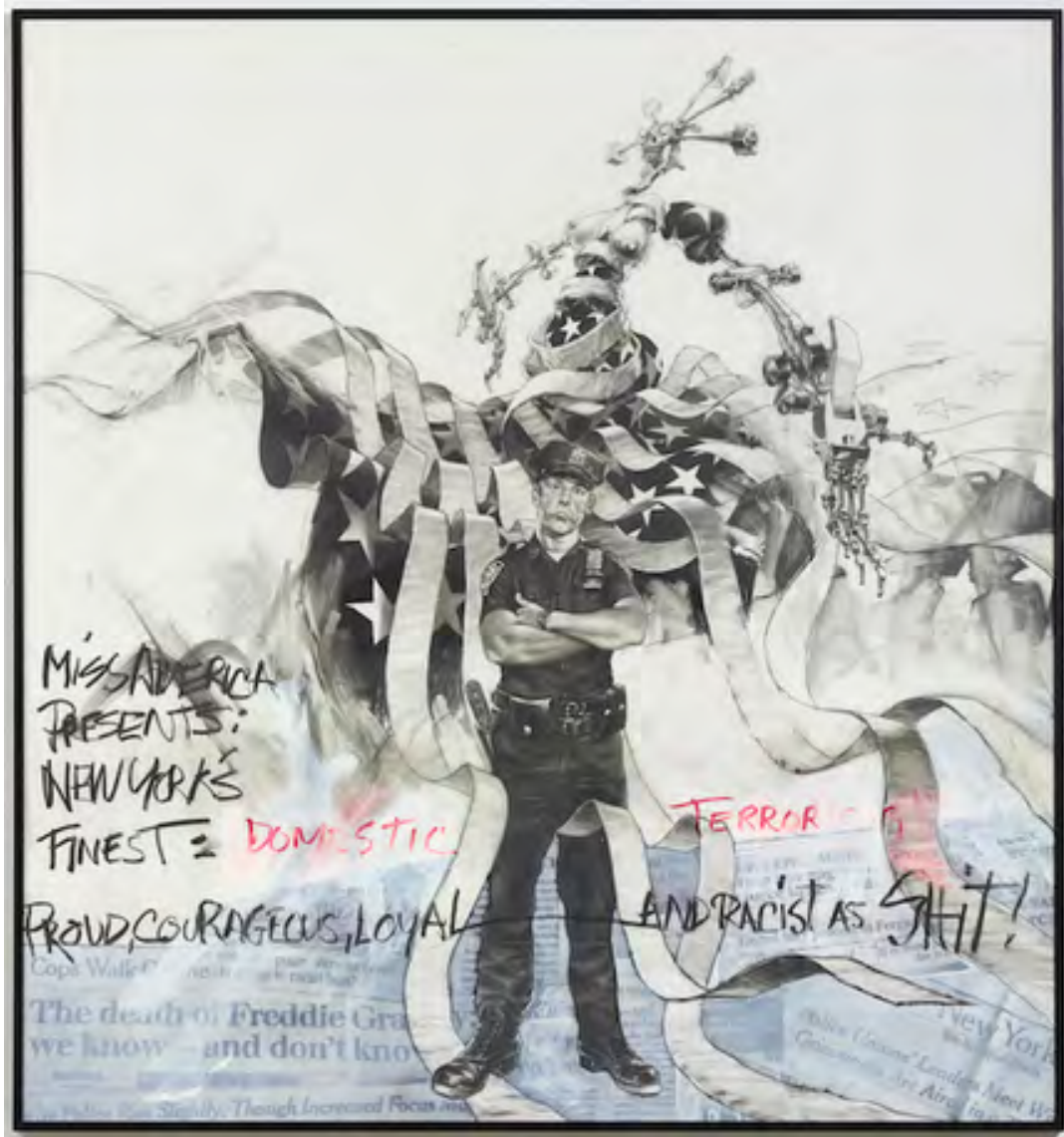
“It does feel different. I don’t know why it has taken this long to produce this kind of reaction. That’s beyond my understanding,” Bereal says. “I’m hoping it’s real and that it’s deep.”

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.*

HYPERALLERGIC

EVENTS

ArtRx LA

Matt Stromberg

April 5, 2016



Ed Bernal: Disturbing the Peace

When: Closes Saturday, April 9

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

Ed Bernal 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).