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Celebrating 175: Wallace Berman, Assorted Material, circa 1960-2010

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[[image]] go Wallace Berman Joan Brown (1958)

DECONSTRUCTION ZONES

Gordon Wagner, Wallace Berman

Long a favored technique for the young and/or disaffected, assemblage was the medium of choice among the Bohemian artists of postwar L.A. And they were rather more numerous, and diverse, than we now readily acknowledge. Gordon Wagner, quiet formalist in among the wild ones, could construct elegant, almost architectural structures out of distressed metal and weathered wood and junkyard objects. Playing Felix to George Herms' expansive Oscar, Wagner formulated poised, even symmetric compositions that still left their elements about as discrete and funky as they were found. Wagner's classicism seems incongruent with the physical feel, not to mention the legendary ethos, of assemblage. But that's what gives his work its kick: The imposition of logic on illogic is a deliberately awkward fit, finally serving assemblage's anarchic purpose by exposing entropy even in synergy. Wallace Berman, patron saint of Wagner's Boho generation, invested his own assemblages with no less care; but, then, Berman was making not just composite objects but meta-objects. Furthermore, Berman's unique mastery of the Verifax, a proto-photocopy technology, kept his major work on paper - appropriate enough for an artist as committed to the word as he is to the image. The present show's main thrust is paperwork - in particular Berman's photography, a facet of his talents that was little known until the recent Berman-scene museum show. The display answers the hunger (admittedly as prurient as it is poignant) that show induced in us for more. Some very cute, very naughty, very sincere and very young folks cavort and ruminate before Berman's camera, displaying a romantic self-reflection that sustains to this day. Gordon Wagner at Tobey C. Moss, Gallery, 7321 Beverly Blvd., L.A.; Tues.-Sat, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.; thru Dec. 29 (323)933-5523. Wallace Berman at Michael Kohn Gallery, 8071 Beverly Blvd., L.A.; Tues.-Fri 10 a.m.-6 p.m. & Sat, 11 a.m.-6 p.m. (closed for the holidays until Jan 2); thru Jan 19. (323)658-8088

-Peter Frank



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