The Smithsonian Institution thanks all digital volunteers that transcribed and reviewed this material. Your work enriches Smithsonian collections, making them available to anyone with an interest in using them.

The Smithsonian Institution (the “Smithsonian”) provides the content on this website (transcription.si.edu), other Smithsonian websites, and third-party sites on which it maintains a presence (“SI Websites”) in support of its mission for the “increase and diffusion of knowledge.” The Smithsonian invites visitors to use its online content for personal, educational and other non-commercial purposes. By using this website, you accept and agree to abide by the following terms.

- If sharing the material in personal and educational contexts, please cite the Archives of American Art as source of the content and the project title as provided at the top of the document. Include the accession number or collection name; when possible, link to the Archives of American Art website.
- If you wish to use this material in a for-profit publication, exhibition, or online project, please contact Archives of American Art or transcribe@si.edu

For more information on this project and related material, contact the Archives of American Art. See this project and other collections in the Smithsonian Transcription Center.
He produced the journal from 1955 to 1964 on a mail-order hand press with the help of two friends, the artist and poet Robert Alexander and the photographer Charles Brittin. There were only nine issues. The print run was minute. The contents were mind-boggling.

The magazine, its pages randomly compiled, mixed Berman heroes like Antonin Artaud and Jean Cocteau with established American Poets like Robert Duncan and Allen Ginsberg, then added a slew of younger writers and artists - Philip Lamantia, Jack Anderson, Patricia Jordan, Kirby Doyle, Bob Kaufman, Aya Tarlow, Ruth Weiss, Michael McClure, the great gay poet John Wieners - all barely out of the starting gate. Sent, copy by copy, through the mail, Semina defined a distinctively trippy, sardonic West Coast surrealism. New York had hard, cold Pop; the West Coast had a woozy Peyote-Funk that prefigured the hippie era.

If the journal put Wallace Berman's name on the national countercultural grapevine, his personal influence was still transmitted through artists and poets who met him. And four dozen of them take brief, individual bows in a show - organized for the Santa Monica Museum of Art by two independent curators and critics, Michael Duncan and Kristine McKenna - that feels like both a slice of still-warm history and a reliquary.

Several of the artists are now far better known than Mr. Berman himself. Joan Brown (1938-90), Bruce Conner and Jay De Feo (1929-89) are textbook figures. Ms. Brown's fetishistic "Man on Horseback," a 1957 sculpture of rolled and tied cloth, is an eye-catcher. So are two sumptuously abject assemblages by Mr. Conner, who also has an outstanding show of early work at Susan Inglett Gallery in Chelsea.

And for relics, there's the pigment-caked footstool that Ms. De Feo used while creating "The Rose," a painting that grew so heavy with applied matter that, at 2,000 pounds, it has to be forklifted from her tenement studio.

More famous at the time were Hollywood actors like Dean Stockwell and Russ Tamblyn, who met Mr. Berman and started making art. Another was Dennis Hopper, who picked up photography and film directing. (He cast Mr. Berman in a small role in "Easy Rider."
And there was Billy Gray. A teenage heartthrob as Bud Anderson on "Father Knows Best," he started making stained-glass sculptures after a drug arrest in 1962 crippled his show business career.

Chemicals of all descriptions gradually pulled the Berman circle down. It comes as a dawning shock to walk through the show and see so many young faces accompanied by so many curtailed dates.

The Pop assemblagist Ben Talbert and the abstract painter Arthur Richer died of drug overdoses in their early 40s. The Hollywood child actor Bobby Driscoll, the voice of Peter Pan in the Disney film and the creator of four glorious little collages in the show, was taken out by heroin at 31. By the end of the 1960s, methamphetamines had ruined John Reed, another wonderful artist and poet; he died homeless, almost
all his work lost.

Three of these four, Richer being the exception, had little if any formal art training. They could be called outsider artists, except - well, except what? They weren't crazy enough, or poor enough, or "ethnic" enough, or in some other way picturesque enough to qualify for that exaltedly abject name?

Their work is interesting in large part exactly because it muddies market-driven aesthetic divisions instituted


1/26/2007
The mission of the Smithsonian is the increase and diffusion of knowledge - shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world. Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian is the world's largest museum and research complex, consisting of 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoological Park, and nine research facilities. Become an active part of our mission through the Transcription Center. Together, we are discovering secrets hidden deep inside our collections that illuminate our history and our world.

Join us!
The Transcription Center: https://transcription.si.edu
On Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/SmithsonianTranscriptionCenter
On Twitter: @TranscribeSI

Connect with the Smithsonian
Smithsonian Institution: www.si.edu
On Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Smithsonian
On Twitter: @smithsonian