A walkthrough of the exhibition

It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles 1969–1973 demonstrates the ways in which several groups of artists who were associated with Pomona College between 1969 and 1973 engaged with the art of their time in Southern California and contributed to a transformative moment for art history both in Los Angeles and internationally.

Chris Burden

Untitled sculpture, 1967
Lacquer paint on plywood
6 × 6 × 6 ft. (1.8 × 1.8 × 1.8 m)
Courtesy of the artist
Photo credit: Chris Burden
A consistent element of the three exhibitions will be the installation of Chris Burden's 1967 untitled six-foot cubic sculpture in the courtyard adjacent to the museum. The simple but irregular striped pattern covering the surface of this sculpture causes the structure to appear either as a cube or as a series of columns depending on the angle from which it is approached. Created during Burden's undergraduate years at Pomona, this work will act as a conceptual preface to the project, and will provide productive juxtapositions with all three exhibitions.

Significantly, as Burden has attested, this piece had a seminal influence on his decision to expand his art practice into the realm of performance. In part, this insight developed because of the manner in which the piece physically unfolds for viewers through their actual encounter with it. As such, the sculpture embodies many of the concerns of Minimalism and functions as an historical gateway for the concerns developed through the “It Happened at Pomona” project. The perceptual effect of this sculpture is very much in line with the sculptural installations shown at Pomona by Hal Glicksman, and featured in the first exhibition.

The sculpture's relation to Burden's move to performance is further elucidated in the second exhibition, which includes documentation of Burden's 1972 Match-Piece, presented at Pomona by Helene Winer. The third exhibition will feature additional student work by Burden in the context of work by other students and faculty at Pomona, revealing a cross-generational artistic community that was collectively struggling with the relationship between performative and Minimalist sculpture.

The point of departure for the first exhibition is in 1969, when Hal Glicksman left a preparator’s position assisting Walter Hopps at the Pasadena Art Museum to become the director of Pomona College's museum. Today, Glicksman jokes that he was hired because he had a good tool-box and he knew how to put things together. Seen from another perspective, one might say that Glicksman recognized a profound shift in artists’ approach to creating work, and the potential that this process held for transforming how art functioned in the museum.
Shortly after arriving at Pomona, Glicksman installed a Robert Irwin “disc” painting in a gallery at the Museum, and the work remained on view throughout the 1969-70 academic year (which was the extent of Glicksman’s directorship). Elsewhere in the Museum, Glicksman launched a series of exhibitions called the “Artists Gallery,” which served as a residency allowing artists such as Michael Asher, Michael Brewster, Ron Cooper, Tom Eatherton, Judy Chicago, and Lloyd Hamrol to create new, room-sized installations. The first exhibition at Pomona will recreate a small selection of the site-specific works shown at Pomona College during Glicksman’s tenure, along with documentation of other projects that cannot be recreated.

The highlight of this exhibition will be the creation of a new work by Michael Asher in response to his landmark 1970 installation at Pomona College, and the re-creations of seminal installations by Lloyd Hamrol and Tom Eatheron. Asher’s 1970 architectural intervention dramatically altered two of the museum’s adjacent galleries (the South and West Galleries), transforming them into two triangular spaces joined by a narrow opening that severely restricted the flow of light into one space while keeping the other space permanently open to the street outside. Asher is presenting a new piece that demonstrates how the concerns of his original piece continue to operate, altered, in the contemporary discourse. In doing so, Asher will help to bridge the historical gap between the aesthetic concerns of the late sixties and the present day. The new Asher piece expands on his 2010 Whitney Biennial installation. For Pomona College, in 2011, Asher’s piece will entail having the Museum open all day and all night during all of “Part I: Hal Glicksman at Pomona.”

Asher’s 1970 opening of the museum to the elements has led the work to be widely seen as a key work in the Conceptual Art practice known as institutional critique, and one of the most important artworks produced in the United States during this period. However, the modulation of light within the piece also places it squarely in dialog with phenomenology-based post-minimalism and Light and Space art, and original viewers of the piece were equally struck by the amplifications and distortions of both air pressure and ambient sounds created by the peculiar structure of the space. This makes the work a superb introduction to an additional interpretive goal for this project, which is to demonstrate how a set of related themes and insights developed across what are typically seen as discrete artistic movements in Southern California.
Today, the group of artists shown by Glicksman could hardly be viewed as a cohesive group, but during the time their work was featured at Pomona, all of these artists shared a phenomenological sensibility that overlapped with the concerns of the Light and Space work that emerged at the end of the 1960s in Southern California. In this sense Robert Irwin’s disc painting, on view as all of these projects were created, was a touchstone for Glicksman’s “Artists Gallery” series, and a disc painting will hold a central place in the group exhibition filling Pomona’s Main Gallery and Lobby. The exhibition will include reconstructions of installations by Lloyd Hamrol and Tom Eatherton, work by Ron Cooper and Lewis Baltz, as well as documentation of the site-specific work, “Atmosphere” by, Judy Chicago.

Sustained looking at Irwin’s disc paintings causes the object to seem to disappear, while simultaneously creating a pulsating sense of pressure within the viewer’s eyes. This unique perceptual effect has sometimes led Irwin’s work from this era to be shown in museums either as an anomaly, or else as a practice that relates only to other Light and Space artists. The Pomona exhibition will place Irwin’s work within a much broader range of practices related to performance, sound, and other forms of sculpture that were focused on perception as a physical, bodily activity. For instance, Tom Eatherton’s 1970 Rise, recreated in full, is a room-size, immersable installation that creates perceptual effects with each viewer as they walk through an apparently indeterminate, Ganzfeld-like space. Similarly, Ron Cooper’s film Ball Drop records in dramatic slow motion the shattering of a massive glass panel for his 1969 Pomona installation, allowing viewers to actually feel the movement of the image within their own bodies.

These works will provide an important reconsideration of how the distinct concerns of Southern California artists in the late sixties were informing each other and moving toward other insights beyond those developed in the Post-Minimalist discourses of the East. For if, as Howard Fox has suggested, there was “a brutal literalism, a relentless aggressiveness of materiality at the heart of East Coast Minimalism…” (Catalogue L.A. Birth of an Art Capital, 35), then there was an acute sense of the ethereal appeal of affect to the body that was fueling Los Angeles artists’ investigations of Post-Minimalist concerns. This project will build on the insights suggested in the first exhibition to demonstrate in the second exhibition how this concern specifically intersects with and develops differently in the post-conceptual work of a second group of Southern California artists working in the early seventies.

Whereas Glicksman focused on a group of artist who were producing phenomenologically-oriented abstract sculptures and environments, Helene Winer championed a group of artists who were channeling the experiential qualities of minimalist and post-minimalist sculpture into performance art, video, and, most significantly, conceptual photography featuring staged scenarios, realistic environments, and innovative uses of language. This transition has been specifically associated with the appropriation artists of the later 1970s, active in New York and often referred to as ”The Pictures Generation.” The second exhibition is to demonstrate the crucial link between Southern California artists in the early 1970s and the semiotically-informed investigations that would follow.
The influence of John Baldessari on the development of appropriation art in New York has been well documented; however, rarely is this influence explored in depth and across the horizon of the Southern California landscape. In fact, as Baldessari has acknowledged (in Richard Hertz’s *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia*), he regularly took his students to see the exhibitions that Helene Winer curated at Pomona College: “she would show work no one else was interested in.” This exhibition will open with two key early works by Baldessari, including the actual ashes from his landmark “Cremation Project.” Winer gave artists such as Jack Goldstein and William Wegman their very first solo exhibitions while providing important early exposure for artists such as Allen Ruppersberg, William Leavitt, Bas Jan Ader, Ger van Elk, and Wolfgang Stoerchle, as well as offering shows to more established figures such as Joe Goode, John McCracken, and Ed Moses. The second installment of the exhibition will document Winer’s curatorial vision and her recognition of a uniquely Southern California interpretation of post-conceptualism that would literally change the face of the art world.

Following on the structure of the first exhibition, which engages Burden’s large-scale sculpture as a historical gateway, the second exhibition will add a second metaphorical passageway in the form of Joe Goode’s conceptually-based staircase sculptures, which will be installed in the lobby of the museum. Goode’s work provides a powerful conceptual frame from which to encounter the works in the second exhibition, for it demonstrates how representations function as signs, but it achieves this through the use of sculptural forms.

Al Ruppersberg
*Summer Days, 1971*
3 black and white photographs, 8 × 10 in. (20.3 × 25.4 cm) each
3 pieces of bond paper with text, 11 × 8 in. (28 × 22 cm) each
Edition of three
Pomona College Collection

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This conceptualization of the image as a sculptural form provides an informative juxtaposition against William Leavitt’s seminal *California Patio*—essentially the construction of a “real” California-style patio inside the Museum—on display in the South gallery. Through this juxtaposition, Leavitt’s installation of actual rather than representational objects opens important questions about the role of representation in art—questions that will dominate the next generation of artists.

Moreover, exhibited alongside the conceptual work of Ger Van Elk and Bas Jan Ader, in the South gallery; and the performance work of Chris Burden, Wolfgang Stoerchle, John White, and Hirokazu Kosaka, on display in the main gallery, Leavitt’s installation begins to take up a more critical discourse that speaks to the power of framing and expression in generating meaning. These conceptual questions about representation, while familiar to contemporary audiences, are seldom traced back to this era in Southern California. The second exhibition is designed to not only indicate how this discourse was clearly articulated in these early works, but also to complicate that discourse by demonstrating how it developed within an era that was already quite cognizant of the complex and multiple ways in which artworks construct meaning.
Another highlight of the second exhibition will be the bringing together of multiple works of art from the original Pomona solo exhibitions of Jack Goldstein, William Wegman, and Allen Ruppersberg. In each case, works which have rarely or never been exhibited since their creation and works that have never been seen together since their original exhibition will be featured. For his solo exhibition at Pomona, Goldstein exhibited a series of geometric constructions composed of wooden planks, nails, glass, and photographic paper. Part of a larger body of works that were primarily composed in the studio solely to be photographed before being broken down and reassembled into the next work in the series, Goldstein’s sculptures provide a more temporal understanding of how compositional forms can allude to images that do not necessarily appear in their material expressions, but through subtle references become images in the minds of viewers.

While Goldstein’s sculptures have been all but forgotten, by his own testimony the sculptures were instrumental in shaping his approach to his films, which are seen as a cornerstone of the Pictures Generation a selection of films will be screened during the exhibition in Lyman Auditorium. The early photographic and video works by William Wegman will be featured in the smaller West Gallery with some work from Allen Ruppersberg’s solo exhibition. Together with the works in the Museum, these selections will bring out the dead-pan, language-based humor that would go on to characterize much of the Pictures Generation’s work, and that is traditionally associated with Baldessari’s influence.
The extraordinary works championed by Glicksman and Winer were shown within an equally extraordinary community of arts faculty and students at Pomona. The period covered by this exhibition roughly equates with a renaissance in Pomona’s arts community that can be traced to Mowry Baden’s hiring as chairman of the art department in 1968, and which ended, in 1973, with the mass resignation of the arts faculty in protest over, among other causes, Helene Winer’s dismissal from the Museum. During this period, Pomona faculty James Turrell was performing his first ganzfeld experiments, Lewis Baltz was creating his legendary Tract Houses series, and Mowry Baden was creating interactive sculpture that would have a profound effect on his students, among them Chris Burden.

Burden himself was transitioning from architecture to sculpture to performance, while fellow student Peter Shelton was experimenting with corrosion as a painterly medium—an experiment that would have a lasting effect on his eventual career as a sculptor. The final exhibition of the Pomona College project will highlight the work of a number of significant artists who were either faculty or students during the years of 1969–73. This exhibition is designed to expand the project beyond the artists exhibited in the gallery to show how the influence of these exhibitions contributed to what was a vibrant and intense atmosphere in which artists and curators were feeding off of each other’s ideas and developing what would become some of the most important aesthetic concerns of the late twentieth century.

Central to this group is the under-recognized work of Mowry Baden that will be featured in a solo exhibition in the South gallery. Baden’s concern for movement and its impact on perception clearly echoes many of the aesthetic concerns that informed works produced through Glicksman’s Artists Gallery exhibition program; however, Baden’s particular articulation of these concerns in works that require viewers to interact and physically operate the sculpture demonstrate an interest in bringing these concerns together with a more performative and collaborative approach to audiences.

The West Gallery will feature Michael Brewster’s Configuration 010 Audio Activity, which is based on a standing-wave, functions in the gallery as a sculptural form that is physically—but not visually—discernable as pools and waves of sensations. The Main gallery will include a presentation of all of Lewis Baltz’s “Tract House” photographs and a selection of Judy Fiskin’s 1973 “Stucco” photographs. The Main Gallery will feature additional works by Pomona faculty and students, including an early installation by Hap Tivey, additional works by David Gray, Peter Shelton, Chris Burden and Guy Williams, and documentation of flare performances by James Turrell.

Lewis Baltz

Gilroy 1967, 1967
Gelatin silver print
5 × 7 15/16 in. (12.7 × 20.1 cm)
Pomona College Collection

Laguna Beach 1968, 1968
Gelatin silver print
4 3/8 × 7 1 in. (11.11 × 19.69 cm.)
Pomona College Collection

Installation shot of 1969 exhibition at Pomona College
Photo by Frank J. Thomas. Photo courtesy of the Frank J. Thomas Archives.