

EVENINGS
FOR
EDUCATORS
2012–2013

LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART
5905 WILSHIRE BOULEVARD
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90036
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

LACMA

Art and Architecture



KEN PRICE
United States, 1935–2012
Zizi, 2011

Acrylic on fired ceramic, 16½ x 24 x 17 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by the
Modern and Contemporary Art Acquisition Fund and gift of Matthew Marks (M.2011.96)
© Ken Price, Photo © Fredrik Nilsen

“A craftsman knows what he is going to make and an artist doesn’t.”

—Kenneth Price, 1993¹

*“I don’t know where you cross the line between architecture and sculpture.
For me, it is the same. Buildings and sculpture are three-dimensional objects.”*

—Frank O. Gehry, 1996²

THE EXHIBITION *KEN PRICE SCULPTURE: A RETROSPECTIVE* (September 16, 2012 – January 6, 2013) presents more than one hundred works, a number of which were created in Los Angeles and exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. This retrospective charts the late artist’s fifty-year career, a tireless inquiry into the medium of sculpture that challenged preconceived notions about clay. Price’s inventive use of clay – which traditionally had been defined as a “craft” material for creating pottery or handheld, utilitarian objects – expanded conceptions of sculpture and, to an extent, painting as well.

Although his early works reference forms traditional to the medium of ceramics (i.e., pots and cups), Price’s works are studies in abstraction rather than function. Many recent artworks, such as 2011’s *Zizi*, are anatomically amorphous and clad in skin, reflecting an architectural concern for both structure and surface. They invite comparison with the curvaceous, free-form buildings of Frank Gehry, Price’s lifelong friend and the LACMA retrospective’s exhibition designer. The two shared intellectual processes marked by experimentation that crossed boundaries within and between their respective disciplines. Both came of age around the same time, and they met in and were shaped by the landscape of Los Angeles.

An L.A. Story

Kenneth Price was born in West Hollywood in 1935. He spent his early childhood living in a trailer on the Santa Monica Beach while his family built a home at the foot of the Santa Monica mountains in the then-undeveloped and sparsely populated Pacific Palisades. The house sat across the street from a cliff over-looking Rustic Canyon, the nation’s first experimental

forestry station. Price recalled scaling the hills of Eucalyptus trees as a child, roaming the canyon, and watching the mountain wildlife. Price noted that this early experience with nature influenced much of his work.³

In 1949 Price enrolled at University High School in West Los Angeles (now commonly referred to as “Uni”). While a junior in high school, he received a scholarship to attend summer school at the Chouinard Art Institute (now the California Institute of the Arts), where renowned artists from the 1920s to the 70s got their starts. Price took classes in life drawing and cartooning and spent weekends surfing by the Santa Monica Pier. Following his graduation from Uni, he enrolled in Santa Monica City College, where he took his first ceramics class and discovered his fascination for clay.⁴ He took this newfound passion to the University of Southern California to study under Susan Peterson, a ceramicist and scholar of American Indian pottery. Road trips to Taos, New Mexico and surfing adventures in Baja California led him to folk shops that fueled his admiration for southwest pottery and the glazing traditions of Oaxacan ceramics.⁵

Price continued to dabble in courses at other L.A. institutions, such as the L.A. County Arts Institute (now the Otis College of Art and Design), where he learned from Peter Voulkos, an Abstract Expressionist ceramist. Price later described the experience: “...[Voulkos] was unknown to us [Price and his peer, Billy Al Bengston]. So we went to see him and were completely amazed. He worked directly – better and faster than anything we had expected. He was open and powerful but loose and relaxed and he worked in large scale with ease. We were drawn to his approach. He opened the whole thing up for us.”⁶ Voulkos often

modeled his sculpting techniques for students. His artistic process differed from that of a traditional ceramist in that he worked on a potter's wheel of exceptional scale to create massive earthenware sculptures in abstracted forms. Price developed his early practice under Voulkos, while also taking courses at L.A. City College, where he met his friend and future collaborator, Frank Gehry.

An L.A. Transplant

In 1929 Frank O. Gehry was born Frank Owen Goldberg. His mother, Thelma Caplan, was a conservatory graduate who played for the local Yiddish theatre in Toronto, where Gehry was first exposed to music and the arts.⁷ He credits his maternal grandmother as an influence as well. The day before preparing her weekly meal of gefilte fish, a traditional Jewish dish, she would bring a live carp home from the market, fill the bathtub with water, and let it swim overnight. Gehry recalls countless hours spent at the foot of the tub, watching the fish travel a sinuous, cyclical path. This creature later became his muse—which he viewed as a perfect, kinesthetic union of form, movement, and space.

In 1947 Gehry moved to L.A., the golden city of opportunity in post-war America. His family shared a two-bedroom apartment at 9th Street and Burlington Avenue in Westlake/MacArthur Park. The eighteen-year-old Gehry found employment at a manufacturing company and funneled his energy into night classes at community college and, later, USC. His first art class was ceramics. "I made stuff that was ridiculously funny, so I became an architect instead," he said.⁸ After meeting Raphael Soriano, a noted Modernist architect whom he visited on a real, working job site, Gehry switched from a fine arts to an architecture major. After class and on weekends, he visited the city's Case Study Houses (a series of Modernist homes designed by the most

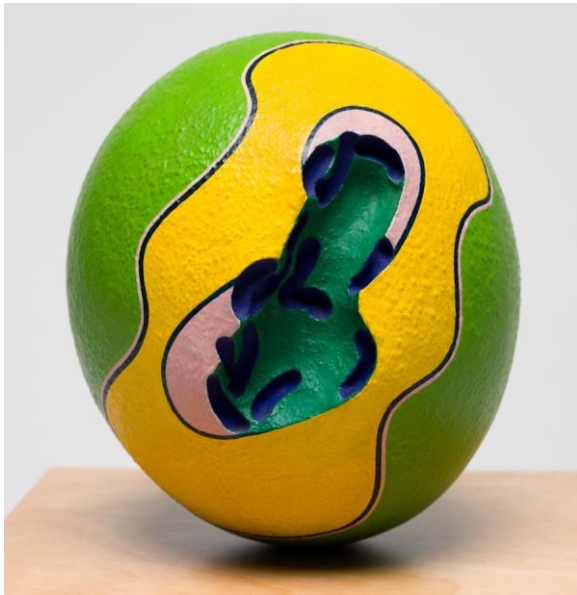
innovative architects of the time). Boxlike, geometric buildings made of raw materials like glass and steel characterized much of the architecture—characteristics that Gehry would eventually appropriate and challenge in his most iconic works.

Art of 1960s L.A.

In the 1960s, L.A. was home to a number of influential artists who were working across visual arts media. Ed Ruscha produced prints and paintings inspired by contemporary advertising motifs. Light and space artists like Robert Irwin explored art and perception in the form of immersive installations. Many of these artists, including Price, were working in the Westside area of Venice, while artists such as Betye Saar and John Outterbridge, who used found materials to create assemblage sculptures, were working in Watts to the south. All were drawn to L.A. as an artistic refuge removed from the confines of the fine arts market and its institutions.⁹

Before LACMA became a fixture on Wilshire Boulevard (in 1965, after separating from the larger Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art in Exposition Park), an artist-led exhibition space called the Ferus Gallery, on La Cienega Boulevard, nurtured the talents of local artists. The gallery offered Price his first solo show in 1960 following his return from the esteemed ceramics program at Alfred University in New York. (Gehry, who was travelling abroad, returned to L.A. a year later to open his own firm, Frank O. Gehry and Associates, Inc. in nearby Santa Monica.) Price exhibited mounds—large, dome-shaped sculptures in colorful glazes.¹⁰ Similar in form to a mountain (wide at bottom, narrow at top), each piece came with a tiny lid atop its peak that made the object anything but a typical utilitarian vessel. These mounds signaled Price's break from creating traditional, functional ware and stimulated an early sculptural series.

Price's Early Works



KEN PRICE
United States, 1935–2012
G. L. Green, 1964
Fired and painted clay on a wood base, 6¼ x 5 x 5 in.
Betty Lee and Aaron Stern Collection
© Ken Price, Photo © Fredrik Nilsen

Price always gravitated towards working in loose series, or bodies of related works that explore similar themes. During the 1960s, he concurrently produced two series, one of egglike forms and another of cup constructions. “It’s the most enjoyable way to work,” he said. “It’s a lot more satisfying than taking a single piece to completion before you begin the next one...You get a lot more feedback, there are moments of linear progression that make you think your work is improving.”¹¹

Process versus Product: Think about your own teaching practice. What types of lessons (writing-, discussion-, performance-based) do you usually design for your students? Is there balance in teaching and assessment between the content of the lesson, process(es) that students explore (i.e., introspection, collaboration, critical thinking), and the culminating product (i.e., quiz, test, presentation)? How could you reorganize lessons so that they not only build on, but influence one



KEN PRICE
United States, 1935–2012
Snail Cup, 1968
Ceramic, earthenware, 2½ x 5¼ x 2½ in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Art Museum Council Fund
(M.83.230.60), © Ken Price, Photo © Fredrik Nilsen

another? Use the four-week lesson-planning template enclosed on this CD to help you chart two concurrent projects. Plan for checkpoints at weekly or daily milestones that encourage student reflection. If you are a middle or high school teacher, consider brainstorming with a colleague to plan a unit that crosses more than one subject area.

Price’s “egg” sculptures were relatively small, about five to ten inches tall, and created during a time when most artists valued the quality of clay as a raw, unadorned material. Price covered his eggs in bright, bold hues. He painted stripes around the body on some, and on others he outlined tectonic cracks in color. Sometimes worms protrude through the cracks and offer a glimpse into the void inside. Could something live inside the murky interior, or is it made of solid mass? Price’s play on interior and exterior space tempts the viewer and tricks the eye.



Oaxaca, Mexico (Zapotec)
Vessel with Hummingbird Rattle, 1300–1500
 Slip-painted ceramic with postfire application of Maya blue pigment
 $4\frac{3}{16}$ x $6\frac{5}{8}$ x $5\frac{1}{8}$ in.
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art
 Gift of the 2003 Collectors Committee (M. 2003.44)
 Photo © 2012 Museum Associates/LACMA

While making his “eggs,” Price similarly employed bold colors and organic (or curvy) shapes in his series of cups. Although constructed from an everyday form—a simple cup with a handle and base—they are whimsically decorated with snails, turtles, frogs, and other creatures. These works offer a Surrealist point of comparison to the Oaxacan pottery tradition that inspired him. Compare, for instance, Price’s *Snail Cup* (1968) and *Vessel with Hummingbird Rattle* (1300–1500) from LACMA’s permanent collection. Both works emerge from the typical cup form to become playful sculptural objects.

From the beginning, Price’s objects blurred traditional distinctions between clay and sculpture in that his display of the objects explored spatial reasoning in distinct and unusual ways. He built customized pedestals for exhibiting his eggs in the best possible light and crafted small wooden boxes to house his cups (akin to the assemblage works of artist Joseph Cornell). He even placed his snail cups in wooden sandboxes, as if the slugs were basking in the sun. It was Price’s careful attention to the cup as an object, the object’s environment, and its relationship to light and space that revealed his sculptural practice.

Cup as Catalyst



KEN PRICE
United States, 1935–2012
Slate Cup, c. 1972
Fired and painted clay, 4½ x 7½ x 6½ in.
Collection of Joan and Jack Quinn, Beverly Hills
© Ken Price, Photo © Fredrik Nilsen

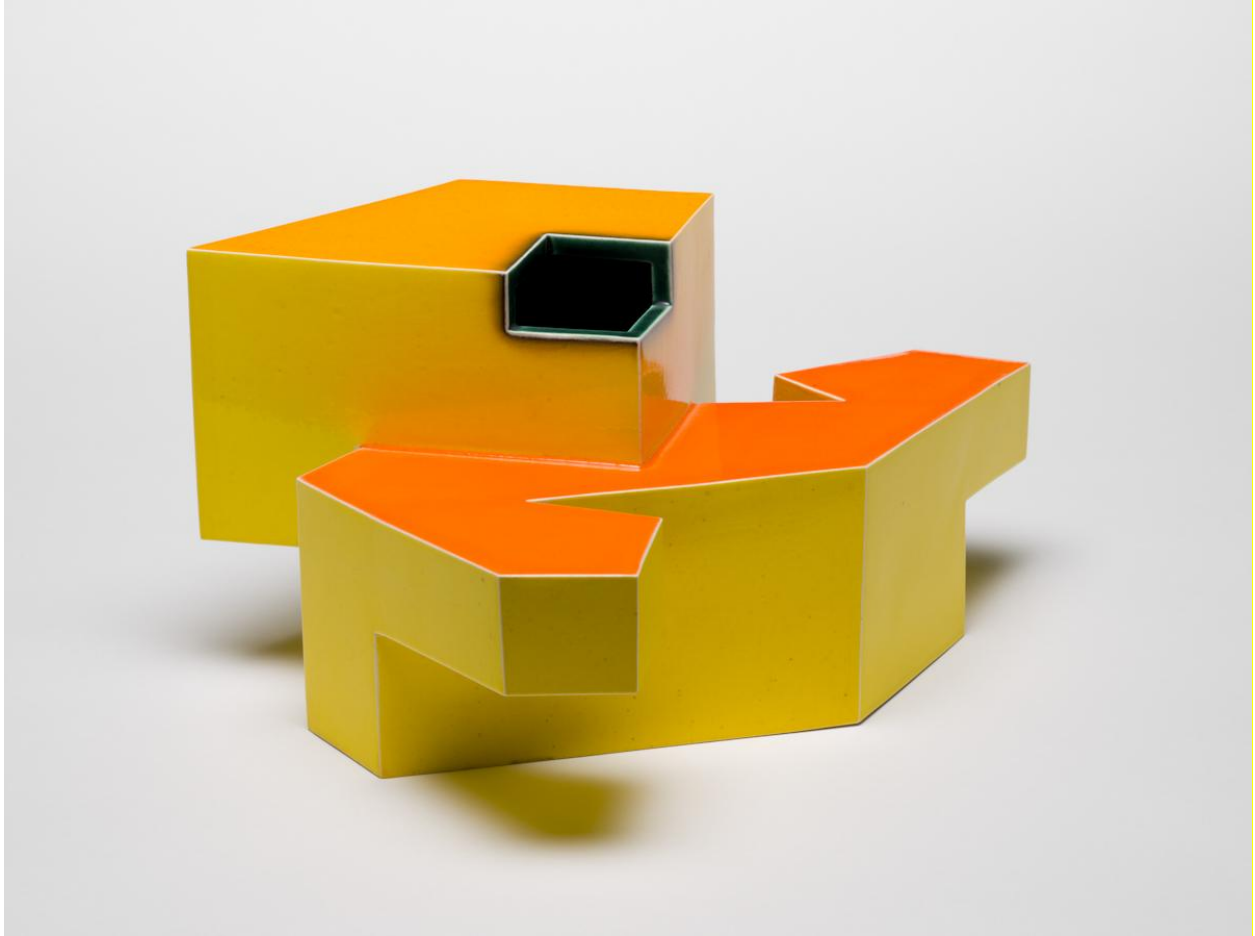
Through the 1970s, Price's interest in cups evolved in form, including an angular, geometric series in vibrant glazes. In 1971 he moved to Taos and later noted, "Coming to New Mexico influenced my work right away."¹² He spent five years immersed in the project *Happy's Curios* (1972–77), a monumental installation of pottery that he called a "statement about growing up in Los Angeles"¹³ and an homage to Mexican and American Indian ceramics. The installation consumed his studio and, eventually, the galleries at LACMA, where it was exhibited in 1978. The work was organized and displayed in units (or cabinets) and represented a variety of ceramics—from plates to bowls to plenty of cups (even tiny ones for mezcal). He fitted the displays with decorative wall hangings made of wool, giving the installation an aura of faux curio shop, like the ones he grew up visiting in Tijuana.

By this time, Price had mastered the cup—he had altered the parts, translated organic shapes into

geometric forms, all while retaining its structure. Antithetically, Price was also producing a series of "non-serviceable" (or abstract) cups. These works, like *Slate Cup* (circa 1972), challenged the cup's predetermined structure through deconstruction. Price used planes to create voids and experimented with texture and glazes in warm, fiery hues. These are somewhat reminiscent of the coastal cliffs and geological landscape of his youth.

Form and Non-Function: Price described the cup as a "vehicle for ideas," or a catalyst for challenging a set of formal restrictions. Brainstorm all of the traditional functions of a cup (a vessel for drinking, pouring, storing, etc.). If you were to create a utilitarian cup, what features would you include to maximize the cup's functionality (i.e., handles, spouts, lids)? Sketch or craft the cup, then divide its form into distinct and separate parts. Rearrange the parts to create a new non-serviceable cup or abstracted sculpture.

Art/chitecture



KEN PRICE
United States, 1935–2012
Hawaiian, 1980
Glazed ceramic, 5¼ x 11½ x 9½ in.
Betty Lee and Aaron Stern Collection
© Ken Price, Photo © Fredrik Nilsen



KEN PRICE
 United States, 1935–2012
Cityscape Bowl, 1986
 Ceramic, earthenware, 4½ x 6½ in.
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art
 Gift of Janis and William Westman (M.2000.103)
 © Ken Price, Photo © 2012 Museum Associates/LACMA

During the 1980s, Price's sculpture practice took an architectural turn. Planes transformed into walls, and voids into windows. Works like *Hawaiian* (1980) mirror pueblo cliffside dwellings. Others evoke mesa landforms characteristic of the New Mexican landscape that surrounded and influenced the artist. He also delved deeper into drawing, a technique he frequently used on the surface of the *Happy's Curios* ware. "I think drawing on pottery is almost always appropriate," he said. "In the early times, the only surfaces you could draw on were architecture and pottery."¹⁴

His drawings, like the one atop *Cityscape Bowl* (1986), were miniature studies in perspective and reflect the work of an architectural draftsman. They conform to the vessel's curves like the images ancient artisans drew to record their

respective cultures' history and place. Although Price stopped producing southwestern-inspired work at this time, he continued to look to ancient and cross-cultural sources for inspiration.

From Antiquity to Today: If you were an ancient artisan, what story would you record about your community or neighborhood? Write the narrative in words (including setting, characters, and action), then divide the narrative into a beginning, middle, and end. Using the storyboard template included on this CD, translate the text into pictures by sketching three distinct scenes that best describe your story. Next, draw the scenes on the roll-out template (on reverse) and add color with colored pencils. Lastly, cut along the dotted line and paste the roll-out on a recycled (or plastic) vessel.

Iconic Works



KEN PRICE
United States, 1935–2012
Big Load, 1988
Fired and painted clay, 12½ x 15½ x 17 in.
Stéphane Janssen, Arizona
© Ken Price, Photo © Fredrik Nilsen



KEN PRICE
United States, 1935–2012
Echo, 1997
Acrylic on ceramic, 12 x 26½ x 17¾ in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds
provided by Friends of Clay, Decorative Arts Council, and the
Modern and Contemporary Art Department (M.2000.25)
© Ken Price, Photo © Fredrik Nilsen

Price's attention turned to surface in the late 1980s. The exteriors of his geometric works became portals into "blobs" of organic mass. Then slowly but surely, portals transformed into orifices and blobs gave birth to what appear to be living, breathing organisms. Sculptures like *Echo* (1997) evoke gesture and movement like the snails that adorned his early works. With shiny skins of sheen, these objects seem to morph into otherworldly beings.

The Blob!: If *Echo* were alive, what would it think, what would it say? What would it sound and smell like as it slithers away? Give Price's *Echo* a name and fashion a story around this nonrepresentational character. Create a sculptural version of your own unique creature out of an air-drying clay (such as Crayola® Model Magic®). To add a colorful dimension, color the clay with markers or blend the colors as you knead the clay, then let it dry overnight.

Price achieved these aesthetic effects by applying almost a hundred layers of paint to his sculptures — a technique he appropriated in part from the centuries-long tradition of Japanese lacquerware.¹⁵ In the late seventeenth century, artists from Wakasa province began layering different colored lacquers on the rough ground of their ceramics (they added bits and pieces of egg shell or rice chaff to texturize the surface). On top of the lacquer, they applied a thin layer of gold or silver foil, embedding the foil into the grooves, then added a coat of transparent lacquer to polish and smooth the surface. For a variation from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, check out this lacquered incense box from LACMA's permanent collection on the following page.



Anonymous, Japan
Layered Incense Box, late 19th–early 20th century
 Lacquer, powdered gold makie lacquer;
 bottom level lined with copper, Diameter: 2 in.
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Miss Bella Mabury (M.39.2.553)
 Photo © 2012 Museum Associates/LACMA

Price likely discovered this technique on his extensive travels throughout Japan during the 1960s. He had used lacquer by then, but by 1994 his painting practice had matured through experimentation with a variety of paints, including acrylic, automobile paints, and translucent colors. He had perfected the process

by painting his sculptures, layer by layer, in a rainbow palette of colors, then painting the final layer in a coat of reflective paint. Carefully, he sanded the entire object until it revealed a galaxy of hues.¹⁶ “I wanted them to look like they were sort of made of color.”¹⁷



KEN PRICE
United States, 1935–2012

Zizi (details), 2011

Acrylic on ceramic, 16½ x 24 x 17 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by the
Modern and Contemporary Art Acquisition Fund and gift of Matthew Marks (M.2011.96)

© Ken Price, Photo © Fredrik Nilsen

Price's fascination with color brought painting to the forefront of his practice. By this time, he was working exclusively at the nexus of sculpture and painting. Works like *Zizi* (2011) represent true fusions of clay, form, and color and were some of the last works that he produced before his death in February 2012. While battling cancer, he created some of his most revolutionary sculptures.

They had grown not only in scale (almost five feet tall) but in mood. Today, most admirers describe Price's work as exuding a characteristic air of sensuality, wit, and whimsy. "Having some humor in the form is most effective, and hardest to pull off," he remarked. "I think humor works best when it's an element of serious work."¹⁸

Honoring Ken Price's Work



FRANK O. GEHRY
Canada, b. 1929, active United States
The Bubbles Lounge Chair, 1987
Corrugated cardboard, birch, and metal, 30 x 81 in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Robert H. Halff (M.87.302)
Photo © 2012 Museum Associates/LACMA



GEHRY PARTNERS, LLC
Walt Disney Concert Hall, 2003

After Gehry established himself in Los Angeles, he went on to create buildings that reformed architectural practice. He works in much the same way that a sculptor does — assembling and reassembling a composition of handheld building blocks, then sculpting materials (such as tinfoil, paper, and red velvet) around the blocks to create his characteristic curves.¹⁹ He even created a series of chairs, a diversion into construction and abstraction akin to Price's cups, through which he defied the properties of rigid materials like

cardboard and wood. These chairs, along with his buildings, share Price's fascination for organic form, his attention to precision and surface, and drive to experiment. When needed technology was unavailable, Gehry turned to aeronautical engineers to realize his architectural vision. Los Angeles' Walt Disney Concert Hall (2003), a monument of metal manipulated to produce texture, sheen, and gesture is reminiscent of his talisman, the fish, and of his friend Price's aesthetic.



Gehry Partners, LLC
Exhibition model (Oblique View Looking Southeast), 2011
 © Gehry Partners, LLC

LACMA curators naturally turned to Gehry when they conceived this exhibition of Price's work. Who better to design Price's retrospective than someone who knew and understood the sculptor's work best? Gehry was also one of Price's first patrons, having purchased a snail cup for just \$200 back in the 1960s. Now, many Price sculptures adorn the architect's home. "Early on I bought work from Kenny because I loved it," Gehry said. "Now I live with it. I can't imagine living in a room without his pieces...I can't imagine living in a place without a Ken Price."²⁰

Three Gehry-owned works are now on view in the exhibition. Although Price passed away just seven months before its opening, he was involved in every aspect of the exhibition's design. LACMA curators shipped the first exhibition model to Price's home in Taos, where he carefully analyzed, revised, and offered feedback on the design. Gehry traveled back and forth between New Mexico and

Los Angeles to help solidify every detail, from pedestal measurements and aesthetic display to gallery lighting and wayfinding. The retrospective, a cross-disciplinary collaboration between the artist and architect, not only honors Price's revolutionary work and prolific career but memorializes his life and legacy.

Curate the Classroom: Collect the nonserviceable cups, ancient vessels, and clay characters produced by students and decide, collectively and cooperatively, how you will display this work in the classroom. What themes emerged in Price's body of work? How might they help you organize the classroom display? Use the thinking map enclosed on this CD to brainstorm the main ideas of this essay, then adapt the themes to a framework that will help students categorize one another's work. Include the artwork reproductions printed in this curriculum in the classroom's exhibition then end with a gallery opening for classmates and families.

Name:

PROJECT CALENDAR

Project #1:

Project #2:

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

WEEK ONE

Goals:

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

WEEK TWO

Goals:

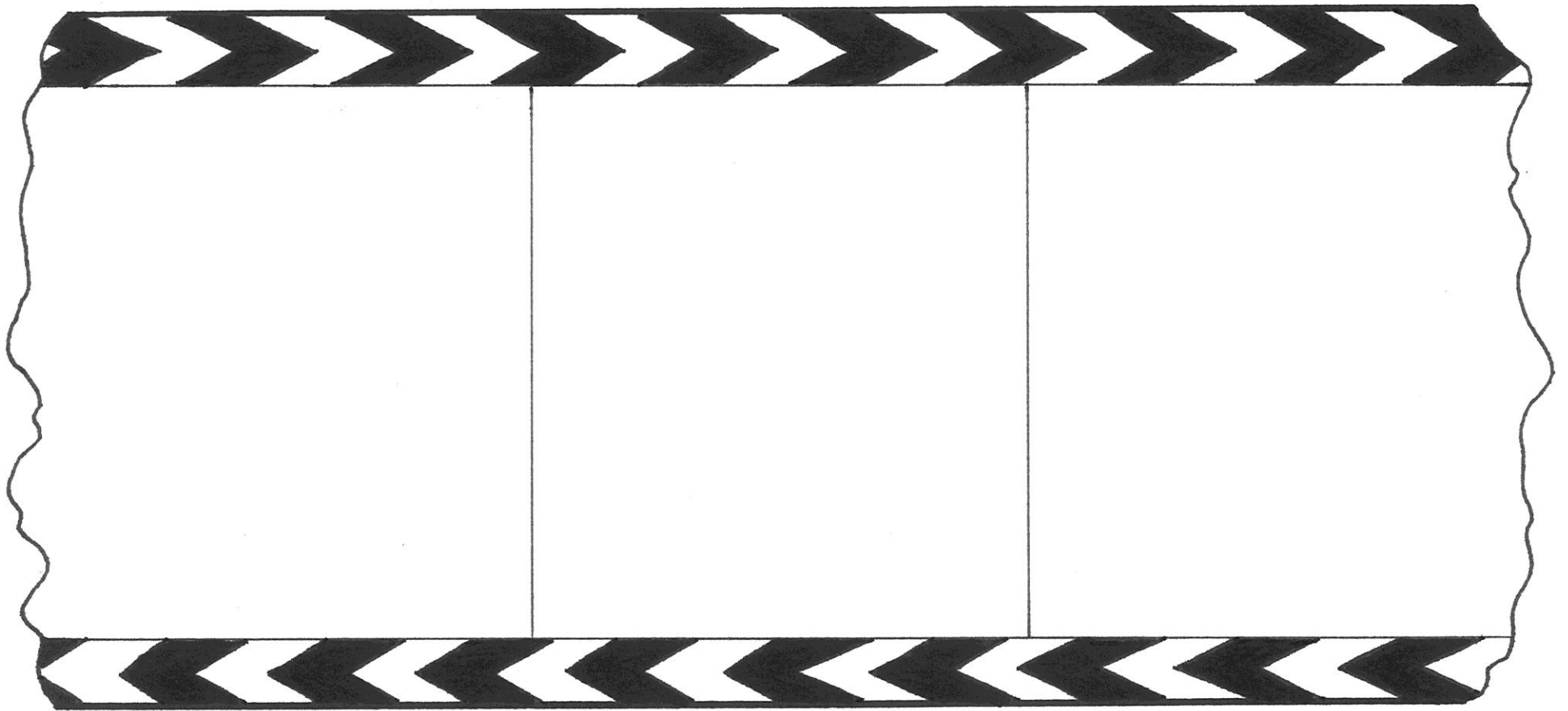
Name:

PROJECT CALENDAR									
Project #1:					Project #2:				
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
WEEK THREE									
Goals:									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
WEEK FOUR									
Goals:									

STORYBOARD

BEGINNING	MIDDLE	END

ROLL-OUT



MATERIAL

PROCESS

**KEN PRICE &
FRANK GEHRY**

INSPIRATION


INFLUENCE

Footnotes

1. Stephanie Barron, "Ken Price Sculpture: A Retrospective," in *Ken Price Sculpture: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: LACMA, 2012), p. 24.
2. Laurence B. Chollet, *The Essential Frank O. Gehry* (New York: Wonderland Press, 2001), p. 72.
3. Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, "A Life in Clay," *Artnet*, Oct. 22, 2008. 1 June 2012 <http://www.artnet.com>
4. "Innovative Ceramic Artist Ken Price Dies in Taos." *The Taos News*, Feb. 24, 2012. 1 June 2012 <http://www.taosnews.com>
5. Christopher Knight, Kenneth Price obituary: "Ceramics artist dies at 77," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 25, 2012. 1 June 2012 <http://www.latimes.com>
6. "Innovative ceramic artist Ken Price dies in Taos," *The Taos News*, Feb. 24, 2012. 1 June 2012 <http://www.taosnews.com>
7. Chollet, *The Essential Frank O. Gehry*, p. 10.
8. Frank Gehry, "I Can't Imagine Living in a Place without a Ken Price," in *Ken Price Sculpture: A Retrospective*, p. 3.
9. Holland Cotter, "When Art Happened to LA," *The New York Times* Aug. 19, 2011. 1 June 2012 www.nytimes.com
10. *Avocado Mountain*, in *Pacific Standard Time at the Getty Center*, exh. 2011. 1 June 2012 <http://www.getty.edu/pacificstandardtime>
11. Barron, *Ken Price Sculpture: A Retrospective*, p. 16.
12. Ibid., p. 21.
13. Maurice Tuchman, *Ken Price: Happy's Curios*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: LACMA, 1978), p. 9.
14. Douglas Dreishpoon, *Ken Price: Early Cups and Related Works on Paper* (New York: Franklin Parrasch Gallery, 2006), p. 8.
15. Barron, *Ken Price Sculpture: A Retrospective*, p. 32.
16. Dave Hickey, "The Price of Everything," in *Ken Price Sculpture: A Retrospective*, p. 173.
17. Barron, *Ken Price Sculpture: A Retrospective*, p. 15.
18. Dreishpoon, *Ken Price: Early Cups and Related Works on Paper*, p. 8.
19. Chollet, *The Essential Frank O. Gehry*, p. 79.
20. Gehry, "I Can't Imagine Living in a Place without a Ken Price," p. 4.

These curriculum materials were prepared by Jennifer Reid and Holly Gillette and designed by Jenifer Shell.
© 2012 Museum Associates/LACMA. All rights reserved.

The Rose Hills Foundation and the Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation.

Evenings for Educators is made possible by CHASE 

Education programs at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art
are supported in part by the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs,
the William Randolph Hearst Endowment Fund for Arts Education, and Rx for Reading.