

Exhibition: *Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery, 1959–1971*

On View: March 19–September 10, 2017

Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Image credits on page 6)

(Los Angeles—March 6, 2017) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery, 1959–1971*, an examination of the storied history of Dwan Gallery, one of the most important galleries of the postwar period in the United States. Virginia Dwan (b. 1931), gallery owner, art patron, and collector, was one of the greatest champions of avant-garde art and artists of the mid-20th century. During her more than 11 years as a gallerist, Dwan’s Los Angeles and New York galleries were among the first bicoastal spaces dedicated to showcasing contemporary art in America. As an arts patron, Dwan was a pivotal figure in the Los Angeles art scene, often providing artists with stipends, studio space, and housing, in addition to giving many artists their first solo shows. At the time, the exhibitions presented at Dwan Gallery were at the forefront of postwar avant-garde art. Dwan organized one of the first Pop art exhibitions in the United States, *My Country 'Tis of Thee* (1962), and she was one of the earliest and most ardent supporters of Minimal Art and Earthworks.

Founded in 1959, Dwan Gallery first opened in a storefront in Westwood, Los Angeles. The gallery presented groundbreaking exhibitions of New York artists such as Philip Guston, Franz Kline, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Ad Reinhardt, and Larry Rivers as well as the Los Angeles-based artist Edward Kienholz. In 1962, Dwan relocated her gallery within Westwood to a larger, more open space that she co-designed with architect Morris Verger and which featured high ceilings and arches after the V.C. Morris building in San Francisco. The expansive new space allowed her to present ambitious installations and monumental sculptures. In 1965, she opened her second gallery in New York City. Smaller and less distinctive than her Los Angeles space (which she continued to operate until 1967), the New York gallery was a fitting setting for the Minimal Art Dwan

would exhibit there. The Los Angeles gallery was notable for introducing East Coast artists to West Coast audiences, and in turn, the New York gallery presented exhibitions of work by Los Angeles-based artists, such as Kienholz.

The exhibition comprises a selection of works from the 134 shows presented at Dwan Gallery between 1959 and 1971. On view are more than 120 objects, by 52 artists, and representing all media, including paintings, drawings, photographs, sculptures, films/videos, conceptual art pieces, and representations of earthworks. Unique to LACMA's presentation are 27 works that were not on view in the Washington D.C. presentation. The exhibition includes numerous works from LACMA's collection such as Mel Bochner's *Language Is Not Transparent*, Marcel Duchamp's *From or by Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy (The Box in a Valise)*, Philip Guston's *The Room*, Kienholz's *Back Seat Dodge '38*, Claes Oldenburg's *Baked Potato #1*, and Charles Ross's *Six Prisms from the Origin of Colors*.

Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery, 1959–1971 was organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. on the occasion of Virginia Dwan's historic gift in 2013 of 250 works of art from her collection to the museum. The exhibition was curated by James Meyer, associate curator of modern art, National Gallery of Art, and curatorial and academic advisor, Dia Art Foundation. Stephanie Barron, senior curator of modern art at LACMA, is the coordinating curator of the Los Angeles presentation. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, co-published by the National Gallery of Art and the University of Chicago Press.

“Since its inception, LACMA has been committed to championing Southern Californian art and artists,” said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. “Through her gallery and patronage, Dwan played a major role in shaping the art history of the sixties. *Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery, 1959–1971* is a continuation of LACMA's dedication to recent and historical art from Southern California, and enriches our understanding of the period.”

“Despite having organized groundbreaking exhibitions and being a leading patron of earthworks, Dwan and her gallery have received relatively little attention in art historical scholarship,” said Stephanie Barron. “We are excited to join the National Gallery of Art in recognizing Virginia Dwan for her notable contributions and reexamining the important history that she helped shape. The exhibitions mounted at Dwan Gallery introduced viewers in Los Angeles and New York to the most ambitious art practices of the time.”

Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery 1959–1971 is organized chronologically, and its structure is based on distinct moments in Dwan's trajectory as a gallerist in Los Angeles and New York. A central theme to the exhibition is the increasing mobility of the art world during the late 1950s and 1960s as a result of new modes of transportation, including jet aviation and the construction of the interstate highway system. This new mobility shaped the creation, transport, and display of art, allowing artists, dealers, and works of art to move more swiftly between the coasts and western Europe with growing regularity and ease.

The first section presents abstract expressionist, assemblage, and pop art works Dwan exhibited in the gallery's early years, with examples of works by John Chamberlain, Philip Guston, Franz Kline, Claes Oldenburg, and Robert Rauschenberg, as well as an area dedicated to work by Edward Kienholz. The second section presents works of art created by French artists active in the *Nouveau réalisme* (New Realism) movement, a counterpart to pop art that frequently incorporated found objects. The artists whose work is on view include Arman, Yves Klein, Martial Raysse, Niki de Saint Phalle, and Jean Tinguely. The third section highlights a variety of works that were on view in the 1964 Dwan Gallery exhibition titled *Boxes*. This group show explored the format and prevalence of the box in 20th century art, for example Marcel Duchamp's modernist *Boîte-en-valise* (The Box in a Valise), Daniel LaRue Johnson's *The Big N*, and Andy Warhol's three *Brillo Box* sculptures, which were exhibited for the first time at Dwan Gallery Los Angeles. In this section, LACMA will present a number of works unique to the Los Angeles presentation. The fourth section is devoted to conceptual art, specifically from four annual exhibitions that Dwan organized on the theme of language. Artists represented in this section include: Eleanor Antin, Mel Bochner, Rosemarie Castoro, Nancy Holt, Joseph Kosuth, and Robert Morris. The fifth section of the show presents artists closely associated with minimalism, many of whom were included in the seminal exhibition *10* (1966), among them Carl Andre, Jo Baer, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, and Agnes Martin.

In between the minimalism and earthworks sections of the show is a space dedicated to two important works: Robert Grosvenor's abstract geometric sculpture *Untitled (yellow)* (1966/2016) and William Anastasi's *Issue* (1966/2017). Grosvenor's piece was first shown at Dwan Gallery Los Angeles in 1966, and subsequently in LACMA's exhibition *American Sculpture of the Sixties* (1967). The piece is composed of a dramatic cantilevered form that hovers a foot above the floor, dynamizing the architectural space in which it is viewed. Anastasi's *Issue*, first shown in 1966 at Dwan Gallery New York, is a site-specific work that involves gouging a floor-to-ceiling strip of plaster from the wall. By emphasizing the architectural space of the gallery as the medium of the work rather than

as a neutral backdrop for art, the piece is inextricably bound to its setting, much like many of the remotely located earthworks that Dwan later sponsored.

Finally, the sixth section of the exhibition is dedicated to Land art. This section includes objects that were on view in Dwan's 1968 *Earthworks* exhibition, a number of works by Michael Heizer, preparatory drawings and a film documenting Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), and four photomurals representing major earthworks projects funded by Dwan: Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969), Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, Walter de Maria's first lightning field *35-Pole Lightning Field* (1974), and Charles Ross's *Star Axis* (1971–ongoing).

Exhibition Highlights

Notably, many of the works in the exhibition have not been on public view for decades, and others have never been exhibited, including Charles Ross's immersive installation *Six Prisms from the Origin of Colors* (1970/1988), in LACMA's permanent collection. The exhibition also presents iconic works such as Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* sculptures (c. 1964) and Robert Morris's *Battered Cubes* (1966), among others. Additional highlights from *Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery, 1959–1971* include:

Edward Kienholz, *Back Seat Dodge '38* (1964): This is one of Edward Kienholz's best-known works and is part of LACMA's permanent collection. The sculpture depicts two figures made of plaster and chicken wire inside a truncated Dodge coupe, which is parked on a plot of fake grass strewn with beer bottles. The couple is shown engaging in sexual activity, set to a soundtrack of 1940s music. Originally exhibited at Dwan Gallery Los Angeles, the work caused an uproar. An anonymous complaint was filed with the police, and detectives from the vice squad appeared at the gallery to investigate. The case was dropped, but when the work was exhibited at LACMA in the 1966 Kienholz retrospective, the L.A. County Board of Supervisors demanded its removal, citing its "pornographic" nature. LACMA's board of trustees refused, and the museum eventually negotiated a compromise—the car door would remain closed, only to be opened upon request by docents and if no minors were present. Dwan continued to show Kienholz's work both in Los Angeles and New York, often drawing attention and large crowds.

Yves Klein, *Transfer of "Zone de sensibilité picturale immatérielle" to Michael Blankfort, Pont au Double, Paris, February 10, 1962* (1962): Writer and former LACMA trustee Michael Blankfort and his wife, Dorothy, met the artist Yves Klein during his solo exhibition at Dwan Gallery Los Angeles in 1961, and subsequently commissioned the "transfer" piece documented in these four photographs. The Blankforts acquired many works through Dwan Gallery, and donated their collection to LACMA.

Andy Warhol, *Brillo Box* (c. 1964): Warhol's iconic *Brillo Box* sculptures were exhibited for the first time at Dwan Gallery Los Angeles in the exhibition *Boxes*, purportedly arriving at the gallery with "the ink still wet." Closely resembling actual shipping boxes for the soap pads and produced in an assembly-line manner by Warhol and his collaborators at the Factory, the artist's New York studio space, the Brillo boxes raised the mundane household product to a subject worthy of art.

Robert Morris, *Untitled (Battered Cubes)* (1966): Robert Morris was a central figure in the Minimal Art movement of the 1960s, known for his sculptures of pared-down, often repeated geometric forms devoid of texture or expressive content. *Untitled (Battered Cubes)*, first exhibited at Dwan Gallery Los Angeles in 1966, is indicative of such work. Morris was also an artist in the seminal exhibition of minimalist art, *10* (1966), and was later included in Dwan's *Language* exhibitions, among other shows.

Mel Bochner, *Language Is Not Transparent* (1970): Beginning in 1967, Dwan staged four annual summer shows on the theme of art and language, the last of which included Bochner's *Language Is Not Transparent*. Inspired by graffiti slogans spray-painted by French students during the May 1968 protests, Bochner presents his statement on a rectangle of dripping black paint applied directly to the wall of the gallery space.

Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty* (1970): With Dwan's support, in April 1970 Robert Smithson leased 10 acres of land on the northern coast of Great Salt Lake in Utah, where he built *Spiral Jetty*, one of the most iconic examples of Land art. The earthwork is represented in the exhibition by a photomural, a film Smithson made documenting the project, an extraordinary group of preparatory drawings for the film, and by Smithson's groundbreaking sculpture *Gyrostasis* (1967), whose spiral form anticipated his earthwork.

Related Programming

Tuesday, March 14 | 7pm

LACMA | Bing Theater | Free; tickets required

Virginia Dwan in Conversation with James Meyer, Michael Govan, and Stephanie Barron.

Saturday, March 18 | 1pm

LACMA | Bing Theater | Free; tickets required

Exhibition Film Program: Dwan Los Angeles/Smithson and Holt

This program presents a number of artist-made films directly related to Virginia Dwan's galleries and the artists she championed.

July 2017

LACMA | Bing Theater | Free

Film Screening: *Brillo Box (3¢ off)*, an HBO Documentary Film written and directed by Lisanne Skyler. Running time: 45 minutes (approx.)

Saturday, September 9 | 1 pm

LACMA | Bing Theater | Free

Talk: West Coast, East Coast

Pamela Lee, Osgood Hooker Professorship in Fine Arts, Stanford University, revisits the history of the Dwan Gallery as a negotiator of two distinct but converging art cultures and the formative role Virginia Dwan played in bringing them closer together.

Please visit www.lacma.org for more information.

Credit:

This exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

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Image captions:

(Left): Arman, *Alarm Clocks (Reveils)*, 1960, alarm clocks in painted wood box, 23 1/2 x 47 5/16 x 5 in., Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, gift of Debra and Robert N. Mayer from the Robert B. Mayer Memorial Loan Collection, © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris, photo © Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

(Center): Mel Bochner, *Language Is Not Transparent*, 1970, chalk on paint and wall, 72 x 48 1/4 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Modern and Contemporary Art Council Fund (M.2004.61), © Mel Bochner, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

(Right Center): Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah, © Holt-Smithson Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY, Photograph Gianfranco Gorgoni © Gianfranco Gorgoni, 1970

(Right): Claes Oldenburg, *Study for Announcement for One-Man Show at Dwan Gallery—Mickey Mouse with Red Heart*, 1963, wax crayon and watercolor on paper, 16 1/2 x 13 3/4 in., Whitney Museum of

American Art, New York, Gift of the American Contemporary Art Foundation, Inc., Leonard A. Lauder, President, © Claes Oldenburg, digital image © Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes over 130,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles, which also contains the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum and the forthcoming Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles.

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