

EDWARD KIENHOLZ

FIVE CAR STUD *1969-1972, Revisited*



Introduction

Stephanie Barron
Senior Curator of Modern Art
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Five Car Stud (1969-72), Edward Kienholz's powerful tableau, graphically depicts the hatred and violence expressed by many Americans toward racial minorities and interracial partnerships. It is undoubtedly his most important work addressing civil rights.

The artist was born in Fairfield, Washington, in 1927 and grew up on a farm, where he learned carpentry, metalwork, and mechanics from his father. He attended college briefly but received no formal artistic training. After working many jobs and traveling throughout the western United States, he moved to Los Angeles, where he began to make artworks assembled from urban detritus. He became involved with the emerging L.A. art scene, opening the Ferus Gallery with Walter Hopps in 1957. Kienholz's assemblages often included figures cast from life—at times vulgar or gruesome—that confronted the viewer with questions about human existence and the inhumanity of society. His intense sculptures addressed political and societal issues, attracting national and international attention. In 1966 LACMA mounted his first museum show, which provoked significant controversy.*

Five Car Stud was Kienholz's most ambitious work to date. He documented the creation of the piece, the casting in plaster of friends and family, and the assembly of the scene. In 1972 he published an account of its creation in a limited edition.

In this horrifying, though invented, environment, four automobiles and a pickup truck are

arranged on a dirt floor in a dark room with their headlights illuminating a gruesome scene. Four white figures are in the process of pinning down a black man in order to castrate him; presumably they have accosted the interracial couple in the pickup truck and are exacting their punishment on the black man. As Leigh Raiford notes in her text in this brochure, Kienholz taps into a long history of white-on-black lynching, and transports us back to the late 1960s and early 1970s when outright violence, hatred, and racial prejudices were all too common. Today viewing *Five Car Stud* reminds us that demonstrations of racial inequality have not disappeared.

Kienholz worked on the piece from 1969 to 1972. There were plans to include it in *11 L.A. Artists* at the Hayward Gallery in London, but ultimately the cost of shipping prevented its exhibition there. Curator Harold Szeeman, who was organizing the international contemporary art exhibition *documenta 5* in Kassel, Germany, learned of the work and made a commitment to show it there beginning in June 1972. *Five Car Stud* subsequently traveled to the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, and the Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf. It was then acquired by a Japanese collector, and remained in storage for forty years. Only recently was this powerful work taken from storage and sent to the Kienholz studio in Hope, Idaho, where it was painstakingly restored under the supervision of Nancy Reddin Kienholz, the artist's widow and collaborator. This is the first time the tableau has been seen publicly in the United States.

* www.lacma.org/back-seat-dodge-38

I would like to thank Nancy Reddin Kienholz for working closely with us on this installation. I would also like to thank the following individuals for their help and support: Sam Adams, Keith Berwick, Peter Goulds (L.A. Louver Gallery), Lisa Jann (L.A. Louver Gallery), Lyn Kienholz, Anders Kold (Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark), Margo Leavin, Andrew Perchuk (The Getty Research Institute), and Leigh Raiford (University of California, Berkeley). At LACMA, I would like to thank Michael Govan, Brooke Davis Anderson, Lauren Bergman, Jane Burrell, Ilene Fort, Thomas Frick, Amy Heibel, Zoe Kahr, Franklin Sirmans, and Jin Son. Additionally, we are grateful to the Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art for lending *Five Car Stud*.



Edward Kienholz: *Five Car Stud* 1969/2011

Leigh Raiford
Associate Professor, African American Studies
University of California, Berkeley

Edward Kienholz's *Five Car Stud* (1969-1972) remains as powerful and disturbing, overwhelming and irritating, as it was when it first appeared in Germany. So shocking was this debut—a testimony to its challenge to the racial politics of the moment—that the piece was subsequently shelved in a Japanese storage facility for nearly four decades. In this interregnum, history continued to move, challenging and correcting the violent wrongs depicted in this piece. While *Five Car Stud* slept in its crates, we have witnessed the end of Jim Crow segregation and the extension of democracy to all US citizens, and we have celebrated the end of Apartheid in South Africa and the election of a mixed-race black man as president of the US. Yet in the same decades we have built the largest system of mass incarceration in history—with 2.3 million Americans behind bars, the majority of them black or brown (far more men of color than attend college)—and witnessed the rise of a race-baiting political party that questions Obama's legitimacy as an American. *Five Car Stud* in its return to its country of origin at once transports us back to a time of unambiguous violence, hatred, and racial divisions, while alerting us to our own current crises.

With *Five Car Stud*, Kienholz tapped into the long history of white-on-black lynching in the United States. An extralegal practice since the earliest

days of the republic, lynching emerged after the end of the Civil War (1861-1865) as a means to control newly emancipated African Americans through sheer terrorism. Between 1880 and 1930, the apex of white supremacy in American life and politics, more than three thousand men, women, and children were lynched across the United States, mostly, though not exclusively, in the south. This is an average of well over a lynching a week somewhere in America for more than fifty years. Most of these victims—nearly 90%—were black. Many lynchings were grotesque spectacles of unimaginable torture and humiliation, with victims suffering beatings, burnings, dismemberment, and castration, as well as hanging at the hands of white mobs that could sometimes number into the tens of thousands. Only a handful of lynchings was ever brought to justice.

Defined as the murder of an accused person or persons by a mob without a trial or even evidence, lynching found its greatest proponents in whites motivated by fears of interracial sex, and specifically of the mythical brutal black rapist. Faced with a newly freed population seeking the rights of full citizenship, many white Americans in the years following the Civil War perceived black quests for racial equality as attempts at domination. White fears of black economic autonomy and political equality found supreme expression in perhaps the greatest fear of all, miscegenation, or race mixing. The era's belief in biologically based white supremacy and black inferiority meant that in order to maintain racial supremacy sexual boundaries had to be policed.



Students at the lunch counter of Woolworth's; photo © 1960 *Greensboro News & Record*, photo by Jack Moebeas

Lynching projected a new generation of white men to positions of unassailable supremacy by demonizing every black man as a sexual menace, while restricting white women to a protected and supposedly privileged position within the domestic sphere. Further, lynching and its narratives completely silenced and erased black women, leaving them without political protection and thereby vulnerable to sexual violence outside of the pub-

lic eye. In these ways lynching is imbued with the pornographic, the white man's sexual fascination with and repulsion by a fictionalized or projected black sexuality that enables, indeed necessitates, the very real savagery of the vindicating mob.

Lynching is nothing less than an act of terrorism. It is intended not to achieve "justice," but to create a spectacle and set an example that blacks could claim no rights when accused of crimes against whites. Lynching's terror circulated through word of mouth, through newspapers, and through the proliferation of photographs. Amateur photography grew exponentially during the same period that lynching saw its peak, and cameras became an integral part of the lynching spectacle, extending the experience to those not in attendance. For professional photographers, lynchings spawned a cottage industry in which picture makers conspired with mob members and even local officials for the best vantage point, constructed portable darkrooms for quick turnaround, and pedaled their product "through newspapers, in drugstores, on the street—even...door to door."¹ In lynching photography's earliest manifestations, whites were meant to identify with the power of the photograph's white participants, mob members who brazenly and triumphantly surround their victim. So, too, were blacks meant to identify with the dehumanized and powerless figure at the center of the image's frame. Photography etched the lynching narrative in memory, repeating in visual form the story of black subordination to white supremacy.



Filmmaker Keith Berwick being cast in plaster while interviewing Kienholz for the documentary *Speculation: The World of Ed Kienholz*, 1971; © Kienholz, from *Documentation Book for Five Car Stud Tableau and The Sawdy Edition*, photos by John Romeyn, Bob Bucknam, Malcolm Lubliner, and Adam Avila

modern civil rights movement, following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision outlawing "separate but equal" racial segregation, there came a prevailing sense of racial optimism.

It is significant, then, that Kienholz made *Five Car Stud* in the turbulent period of 1969 to 1972. Though the era of formal lynching was over, racial relations were no less volatile. The civil rights movement had achieved a number of modest victories, but the power to vote or to public accommodations meant little without truly representative candidates, adequate education, or basic economic security. The emergent Black Power movement expressed the needs and moods of African Americans caught between the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the catharsis of Watts, Newark, and the urban uprisings of more than one hundred inner cities by 1968.



Five Car Stud on view at *documenta 5*, Kassel, Germany, 1972; © Kienholz

Set against white anxiety around black power, amid riots, and internationally a growing alliance of anticolonial struggles, *Five Car Stud* reminds us of the violence that undergirds all racial hierarchies. The fight for equality is not merely a matter of rights, marches, or even the establishment of separate institutions; rather this struggle marks an exposure of and challenge to the long and deadly history of racial subjugation that serves as the foundation of the present crisis. Lynching's absolute and abject disregard for black life lay at the heart of the Jim Crow system of segregation, a system that had only begun to be dismantled in the decade prior to *Five Car Stud*'s debut. "If six to one is unfair odds in my tableau," Kienholz wrote in 1972, "then 170 million to 20 million is sure as hell unfair odds in my country."

Given the strides towards racial equity—including the near-disappearance of lynching and the growing rates of interracial marriage and intimacy—why should *Five Car Stud* still matter? And why is it still so disturbing? The size and form of the work offer one clue. Its circulation through primarily black and white photographs during the period of its exile only hinted at its scale. As a life size sculpture that is at once full of symbolism but unambiguous in its realism, *Five Car Stud* is a truly immersive experience: it surrounds us. Unlike most sculptures placed on a pedestal around which we walk, here we are immersed, implicated, and indicted.

Yet in its massive scale and in its many ironic subtleties, *Five Car Stud* serves as a harsh

reminder that this past—its images, its rhetoric, its forms of terror—may be forty years gone, but it continues to undergird our present racial order. Like the letters that float and recombine within the victim's torso, our racial past is always present and available for reinterpretation. As the letters move in slow and unpredictable patterns, we are alerted to the fact that "progress" isn't always linear; indeed "nigger" may appear just when we least expect it. With *Five Car Stud*, Kienholz has staged a tableau that inhabits the past and present simultaneously. The reappearance of the piece uncomfortably expands lynching's audiences, draws ever-widening circles of complicity, and forces us to reckon with lynching's legacies in the here and now.



Five Car Stud displayed inside an inflated dome at *documenta 5*; photo © Delmore E. Scott

1. Text from the *Without Sanctuary* exhibition at the New-York Historical Society, May 12, 2000.
2. Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 281.

Related Events

Representing Racial Violence: A Short History

September 8 | 7:30 pm

Leigh Raiford, associate professor of African-American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

Bing Theater | Free, no reservations

Artists Discuss Kienholz Then and Now

September 18 | 4 pm

Ed Bereal and Alonzo Davis in conversation with USC's Yael Lipshutz.

Art Catalogues Bookstore | Free, no reservations.

Seating is extremely limited.

Profiled: Race and Whiteness in Sculpture from Frederick the Great to Ed Kienholz

October 23 | 2 pm

A lecture by artist Ken Gonzales-Day, professor of art at Scripps College.

Brown Auditorium | Free admission; tickets required. Tickets available one hour before the lecture.

Gallery Conversations: Kienholz

September-January | Saturdays and
Sundays, 1-4 pm

Educators will be available in the exhibition to engage visitors.

Please see www.lacma.org for additional events as information becomes available.



Edward Kienholz: Five Car Stud, 1969–1972, Revisited
September 4, 2011–January 15, 2012

Checklist:

Edward Kienholz
United States, 1927–1994

Five Car Stud, 1969–72

Cars, plaster casts, guns, rope, masks, chainsaw, clothing, oil pan with water and plastic letters, paint, polyester resin, Styrofoam rocks, and dirt
Collection of Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art, Sakura, Japan; courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA, and The Pace Gallery, New York

Edward Kienholz
United States, 1927–1994

Documentation Book for Five Car Stud Tableau and The Sawdy Edition, 1971

Ink on paper, photographs, and newspaper; edition 41/75

Produced by Gemini G.E.L.

Collection of Margo H. Leavin

Speculation: The World of Ed Kienholz, 1971

16 mm film transferred to DVD

Total running time: 1 hour; selection: 9 min., 5 sec.

A KCET Production, produced by Price Hicks, directed by Allan L. Muir, interview by Keith Berwick

The Story of an Artist, 1967–72

16 mm film transferred to DVD

Total running time: 21 min., 58 sec.; selection: 4 min., 45 sec.

Produced and directed by William Kronick and

produced by David A. Wolper

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Ephemera related to *documenta 5*, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, and *Monumente* at Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, courtesy of Nancy Reddin Kienholz

Captions: Front cover: *Five Car Stud* on view at *documenta 5*, Kassel, Germany, 1972; © Kienholz; Back cover: Detail of photography contact sheet from *Documentation Book for Five Car Stud Tableau and The Sawdy Edition*, 1972; © Kienholz, photos by John Romeyn, Bob Bucknam, Malcolm Lubliner, and Adam Avila; Introduction: *Five Car Stud* on view at *documenta 5*, Kassel, Germany, 1972; © Kienholz

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