

galerie frank elbaz.

Wallace Berman

Art Basel Feature

galerie frank elbaz
Hall 2.0 Booth J9

Messe Basel, Basel, Switzerland
June 13-16, 2019

Wallace Berman

Born in 1926 in Staten Island, USA.

Died in 1976 in Topanga, CA.



Wallace Berman © Dennis Hopper
Courtesy of The Hopper Art Trust

Born in Staten Island, Wallace Berman moved to Los Angeles as a child. He enrolled at the Jepson Art Institute and at Chouinard Art Institute, but did not finish studies at either; instead he became entrenched in the city's jazz and Beat scenes. Wallace Berman held his first solo show at the Ferus Gallery in 1957, but the exhibition was closed prematurely by the L.A. Police Department's vice squad. According to Dennis Hopper, «he affected and influenced everybody seriously involved in the arts in Los Angeles in the 1950's. If there was a guru, he was it – the high priest, the holyman, the rabbi.» Berman and his family relocated to the Bay Area and between 1953 and 1965, his small house on Crater Lane was the center of a community of artists. He established the makeshift Semina Gallery in Larkspur and continued his loose-leaf magazine Semina, before returning to L.A. in 1961. In 1964, Berman began to make Verifax collages, embarking on a path that he would follow for over a decade, until his death in Topanga Canyon in 1976.



In the *Shuffles* the artist deliberately breaks all the codes he had himself put in place in the main *Verifax Collages* series. While carefully laid out next to each other in the grids, the meticulously cut-out hand modules are now partially overlapping in a fan shape on a colorful background. Aware of Berman's interest in card games and gambling, the onlooker might naturally read this arrangement as the stroboscopic motion of a hand swiftly dealing cards. But the polysemous title could also be a nod to the dance performed by James Brown, whom Berman admired. Moreover, it appropriately self-describes the method the artist applied to switch from the strict order and quietness of the monochromatic grids to the contrasting casual arrangement and vibrancy of the multicolored *Shuffles*.

Wallace Berman

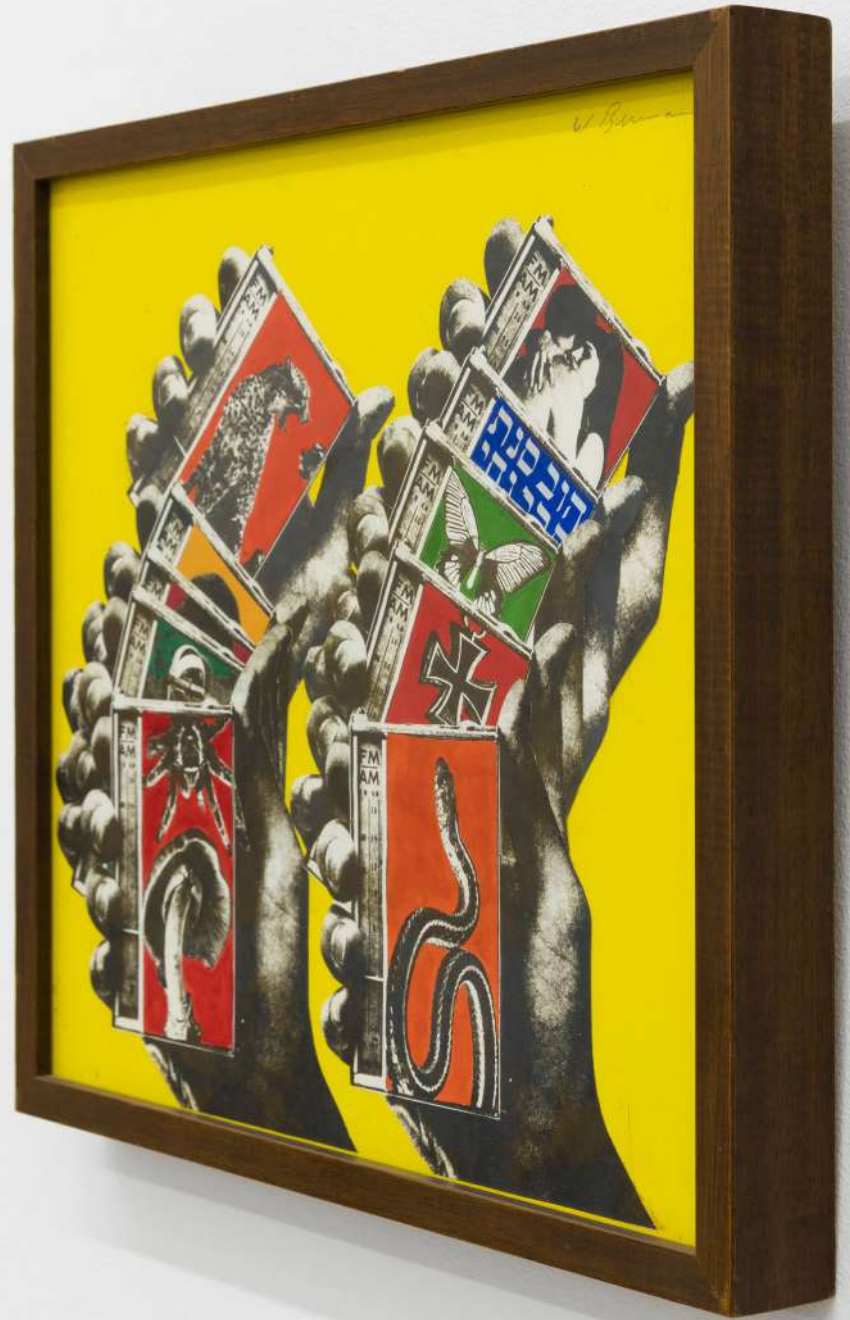
Untitled, 1970

Acrylic paint and verifax collage

32,5 x 35,1 cm

12,8 x 13 7/8 inches

BER1970-1714





This was an important work to the artist, and as such was given to his wife as a special personal gift. This untitled *Verifax Collage* has very seldom been exhibited and has hung in Shirley Berman's living room until recently. The large size, the diversity and quantity of pasted images (49), the disrupted grid layout in four strata and the addition of a line of Hebrew characters at the top, make this a major *Verifax Collage*. As with other pieces containing letters, the text doesn't make sense even though it looks like a sentence that might have concealed meaning. The image replicated twenty-eight times in the four bottom rows, is a photo of a mountain range that Berman found in a magazine and turned on its side, making it unrecognizable and puzzling.

Wallace Berman

Untitled, c.1968

Verifax collage and transfer letters, original
wooden frame by the artist

124,5 x 116,8 cm

49 x 46 inches

BERc.1968-1849



This work literally and metaphorically fuses together the multiple meanings of the word 'stone' that interested Berman. He used the word in reference to altered state of consciousness in his 1960 poem, when he confided: «[...] Stoned in black corduroy I continue / To separate seeds / From the bulk» («Boxed City», SEMINA 7) Likewise, choosing the name «Stone Brothers» (instead of 'stoned') for the workshop he opened with Bob Alexander is quite explicit. At the same time, it confers holiness to the two associates, as the spelling of 'stone' in Hebrew combines that of 'father' and 'son'. In the three-dimensional artworks mixing letters and real stones, Berman might have literally followed the instruction found in Deuteronomy 27,7: «And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this Torah very plainly.» Giving the work a solemn and mysterious quality like some priceless relic in display, the found rock is laid out on a wooden stand bearing a brass plate engraved with its title. The numbers 80.10 correspond to the numerical value in Gematria of the two Hebrew letters inscribed at the top of the undecipherable text. The iron chain that completes the composition is always kept loose, with the two ends separated and never attached together, perhaps to stress the importance of linkage and transmission throughout history.

Wallace Berman

Untitled (80.10), c.1970

Stone, acrylic, metal, wood

21,6 x 26,7 x 29,2 cm

8,5 x 10 1/2 x 11,5 inches

BERc.1970-1716







Emblematic of Berman's grid series, the regular pattern of this *Verifax Collage* accentuates the mechanical process, as well as it emphasizes the artist's repetitive creative ritual, akin to a meditative trance. In the grids, the material encounters the mystical; repetition meets uniqueness; uniformity clashes with disparity; the ubiquitous hand holding a radio vies with the varying images it frames. The lay out naturally prompts the viewer to «read» the work like a book page, like a comic strip, from frame to frame, and to examine the details up close. However, frequent black rectangles attract the eyes randomly and break the regularity, acting like visual pauses similar to silences in music, to punctuation marks in a text. The linear reading is further disturbed by arrows pointing nowhere, impenetrable scribbles, and Hebrew letters (read from right to left) that don't spell any words.

Wallace Berman

Untitled I-III, 1975

Negative verifax collage

76,8 x 83,8 cm

30 1/4 x 33 inches

BER1975-1715







This four-hand *Verifax Collage* is characteristic of the *Silent Series*, in which left hands (negative Verifax photocopies) are neatly juxtaposed on a dark background. The mise en abyme of hands in the bottom left quarter – one holding a transistor radio inside which two dancing female hands are placed – is a formal technique often used in this series. Arrows showing opposing directions and obscure symbols drawn by the artist, as well as perfectly controlled blotches, typically appear throughout these works. The handmade wooden frame held in place with screws piercing through the composition displaces the mark of the artist's hand from the center to the periphery of the artwork, further questioning the traditional classification of the arts and crafts.

Wallace Berman

Untitled, c.1974

Negative verifax collage,
original wooden frame by the artist

33 x 35,6 cm

13 x 14 inches

BERc.1974-1230





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The artist sent this piece of mail-art to Dean Stockwell when his friend was visiting Paris (c.1964). It bears Berman's signature image of a hand holding a small portable radio, although in this case no image was inserted in place of the speaker as in most *Verifax Collages*. As a result, the three postage stamps and the handwritten messages on the edges are brought to attention as essential elements of the mailed composition. Issued in 1964 the stamps labeled "American Music" celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers, and are based on an 18th-century vignette, featuring instruments from America's early days. With these stamps, the artist pays homage to American music in a visual work.

Wallace Berman

Verifax collaged mailer, c.1964

Verifax collage on cardstock, stamps, ink

15,2 x 15,2 cm

6 x 6 inches

BERc.1964-1321



Hero/Lil is one example of Berman's continued collaboration with poets, even after the last issue of *SEMINA* in 1964. This collage was created specifically for the cover of *Hero/Lil* (1973), a book of poems by his friend David Meltzer, who acknowledged that Berman's design was in perfect resonance with his text. Not unlike a compass rose with cardinal directions, four oversized flies surround



Hero/Lil, Noel Young
for Black Sparrow Press, 1973

a carefully centered Shemhamphorash. These insects are a symbol of mortality and the mundane, often associated with dying and death, whereas the magical mandala, inscribed with the 72 names of God, refers to the dialectically opposed notions of the magical and the eternal – thus forming a sort of vanitas or memento mori.

Wallace Berman

Hero/Lil, 1972

Collage, Verifax photocopies on cardboard

48,3 x 38,1 cm

19 x 15 inches

BER1972-142



Berman's early works are rooted in jazz, which offered him a unique and genuine source of inspiration and emotion. The artist attended Charlie Parker's famous recording of "Lover Man" in 1946 at Dial's studio in Los Angeles. This great jazz moment might have been the inspiration for his surrealistic portrait of Charlie Parker. The drawing was featured in several Dial leaflets and on the cover of two albums that introduced Be-Bop Jazz to the public.

Wallace Berman

Bebop Jazz, 1947

Album (including original Vinyl records)

31 x 26,5 cm

12 1/4 x 10 3/8 inches

BER1947-865



BEBOP JAZZ

by Ross Russell

Thirty years ago Louis Armstrong, one of the founders of the New Orleans jazz style, remarked that "jazz is a way of playing anything" and New Orleans jazz was a "way of playing" marches, spirituals, blues and stompers. The New Orleans style profoundly influenced and gave way to the Chicago style (Cotton, Muggsy, Mezzrow) and Chicago jazz in turn created and gave way to the Mid-Thirty "swing" of Goodman and Basie. That's all part of our proud and tumultuous jazz history. Bebop jazz is the natural heir and development of those giant styles. But it is not history. The same ferment of forces and contribution of numerous talents that have periodically appeared and at work shaping bebop in these exciting and hectic times. Bebop is a way of playing anything from a chord progression of *I Found a New Baby to The Gypsy*. Bebop is a new way of playing jazz.

Hop tastes always run well ahead of non-musicians and the public. Bebop has captured the imaginations of most of the serious young musicians working today. There is hardly a name band without its bebop insurgents ready to burst out the seams of orthodoxy. DIAL'S 1947 BEBOP JAZZ ALBUM is a serious effort to present a balanced definitive anthology of this new music. Throughout 1946 DIAL recorded every important musician in the field, and the six sides presented herein not only represent a who's who of bebop but peak performances by these artists. The 1947 BEBOP ALBUM is therefore a landmark in jazz discography.

The derivation of the word *bebop* need baffles no one. Years ago Armstrong invented "scat" singing to express musical phraseology and today Dizzy or Parker resort to the same vocal device to express musical ideas. Because the new phrasing has many explosive periods the word "bebop" or "bebop" occurs frequently as the onomatopoeic equivalent of the musical sentence. Since bebop is short, striking and easy to remember this cleavage is apt to remain in vogue for a long time.

Basically the new jazz is distinguished from earlier schools by its use of extended harmonies. From a technical standpoint bebop was a revolt against the thrashy forms of the late Thirties. A new generation of musicians set about to explore fresh harmonic fields—minor fifths, raised tonics, major sevenths, whole tone scales—and, shortly, by a sort of

TOP: ROSS RUSSELL AND "GABRIEL"—BEBOP TRUMPET KING

process of spontaneous combustion, so often encountered in history, a new form was born. It was born mostly at an uptown after-hours spot named Minton's in the early forties, and the men who molded it included Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie "Yardbird" Parker, Howard McGhee, and an obscure pianist named Thelonious Monk.

If new harmonies, long anticipated by modern classical composers, were the sole historical contribution of the beboppers their school might be speedily discarded. But bebop has its roots in the American jazz tradition. In its pure form, bebop is a collectively improvised, polyrhythmic, polyphonic music just like the classic jazz of Armstrong's Hot Five, Cotton's Chicagoans, or Benny Goodman's fabulous quartet. And jazz will always remain a spontaneous and rhythmic music, dependent upon the inspiration and ability of individual performers playing in a group.

With the sole exception of *Corbin's Scuffle*, for which Shorty Rogers wrote out lead sheets, "paper" has been conspicuously absent at DIAL recording sessions. All of the music in this album is spontaneously played from head arrangements. For the uninitiated *Corbin's Scuffle* is recommended as an appetit course to DIAL's bebop language. Here the good swinging beat and clean musicianship of the predominantly Woody Herman group (Berman, Harris, Phillips, Burns, Lamond) serve up bebop ideas in a very palatable and listenable form.

The keynote side, *Bebop*, is presented with a word of warning. It was the last recorded by Charlie Parker when that great altoist and one of the founders of the movement was greatly fighting off mental collapse which followed this date by a matter of hours. Bird's fight against time, the resultant tension on his fellow musicians and the insane tempo selected produce a savage and unbalanced tide which will move the listener one of the coldest records of jazz. Here bebop ideas are belched forth raw, like screaming lava from a volcano. Only McNeely's terse disciplined trumpet and a water-tight rhythm section keep this side this one from flying into a thousand fragments.

These sides are the poles of our anthology. Occupying the middle ground, balanced and orderly, their creative flow relaxed and controlled, are two genuinely definitive pieces: *Confirmation*, with 32 bars of haunting solo born by the trumpet giant of bebop; and the chaste moody *Hard Love* with its finely-wrought chain of solos and Dodo's superb off-kilter chords under the voices. Parker's sad and misty *Lover Man*, and *Dialogue*, a happy little Ralph Burns improvisation on a theme found yet the anthology like most movements in a symphony. Here is an album for the collector, the musician, the serious listener to good music.

SIX GREAT SIDES

By the WHO'S WHO of BEBOP

BRASS

"Gabriel"
Bill Harris
Miles Davis
Sonny Berman
Howard McGhee

PIANO

Al Haig
Ralph Burns
Jimmy Bunn
Dodo Marmarosa

REEDS

Flip Phillips
Charlie Parker
Serge Chaloff
Lucky Thompson

DRUMS

Roy Porter
Stan Levey
Don Lamond

GUITAR

Arv Garrison
Chuck Wayne

PREVIOUS RELEASES ON DIAL

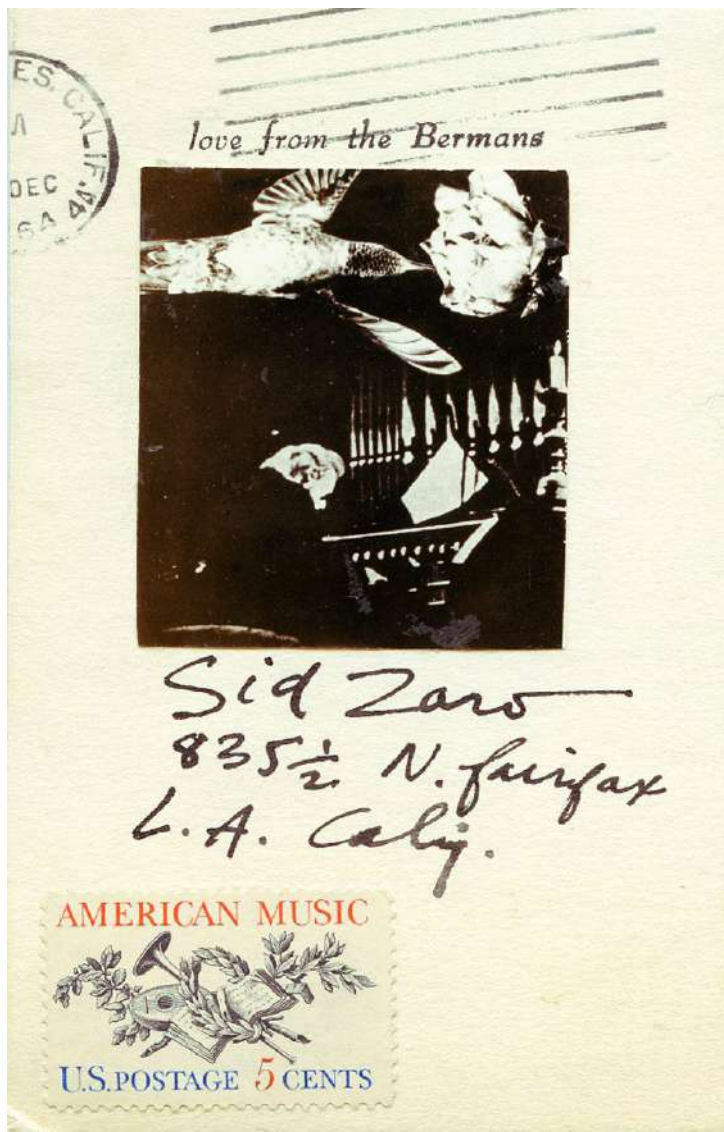
DIAL 1001 DYNAMO A—DYNAMO B
DIAL 1002 NIGHT IN TUNISIA—CENTROLOGY
DIAL 1003 YARDBIRD SUITS—ROUND ABOUT MIDNIGHT
DIAL 1004 MOOSE THE MOOCHIE—WHEN I GROW TOO OLD
DIAL 1005 DIGGIN' FOR DIZ—TRUMPET AT TEMPO





The Filmmaker's Festival posters, and other non-commercial offset posters such as *RETARD PARA.33.*, *OPT.82.*, and *CMN / DENOMINATOR*, as well as the jazz records or poetry book covers that Berman designed show his interest in all categories of visual forms and techniques without discriminating between fine or applied arts. On the contrary, they manifest an aspiration to collaborate with other artists, to blur the boundaries between disciplines, to erase any hierarchy of genres and to disregard the distinction between high art and low art.

Wallace Berman
Second Los Angeles Film Maker's Festival, 1963
 Offset vintage poster
 44,8 x 31,5 cm
 17 5/8 x 12 3/8 inches
 BER1963-850



Wallace Berman

Collaged greeting card, 1964

Photo collage on cardstock, stamp, postmark, ink

12,7 x 8,3 cm

5 x 3 1/4 inches

BER1964-1845



Wallace Berman

Poster/Poem, 1967

Offset vintage poster, signed and numbered 90/100

63,5 x 55,9 cm

25 x 22 inches

Edition 90 of 100

BER1967-1844

Wallace Berman

Solo Exhibitions (selection)

2018 Visual Music, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France
2016 American Aleph curated by Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon, Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2010 Be-bop Kabbalah curated by Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France
Verifax, Anne Mosseri-Marlio Galerie, Zurich, Switzerland
Wallace Berman, Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York, NY, USA
2009 Verifax Collages curated by Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France
2008 Wallace Berman, Camden Art Center, London, UK Wallace Berman, Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2006 Semina Culture, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive BAM/PFA, Berkeley, CA, USA
2005 Aleph - A Film by Wallace Berman, The Jewish Museum, New York, NY, USA
Wallace Berman, Patricia Faure Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2000 Wallace Berman - Art Is Love Is God - une introduction, 1957-1976, Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland
1992 Support the Revolution: Wallace Berman, Institute of Contemporary Art, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
1990 A Gesture Involving Verifax Collage, Photographs, Text and Sculpture: Wallace Berman, Louver Gallery, New York, NY, USA
1988 Wallace Berman (1926-1976), A Retrospective, L.A. Louver, Venice, CA, USA
1982 Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, NY, USA
1979 L.A. Louver, Venice, CA, USA
1978 Wallace Berman, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, USA
Wallace Berman Retrospective, Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles, CA, USA; Fort Worth Art Museum, Fort Worth, TX; University Art Museum, Berkeley, CA; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA, USA
1977 Wallace Berman, Timothea Stewart Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
1974 Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, CA, USA
1973 One-day exhibition organized by Wallace Berman, Mermaid Tavern, Topanga, CA, USA

1968 Wallace Berman: Verifax Collages, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Wallace Berman: Verifax Collages, The Jewish Museum, New York, NY, USA
1967 Exhibition of Verifax Collages organized by Wallace Berman, Topanga Community House, Topanga, CA, USA
1965 Studio exhibition of Verifax Collages organized by Wallace Berman, Los Angeles, CA, USA
1957 Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Public Collections (selection)

LACMA - Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA
MOCA Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, CA, USA
MoMA, New York, NY, USA
Museum Of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL, USA
Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, East Logan, UT, USA
Norton Simon Museum of Art, Pasadena, CA, USA
Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, AZ, USA
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art - SFMOMA, San Francisco, CA, USA
The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, USA
The Jewish Museum of New York, New York, NY, USA
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, USA
Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
FRAC des Pays de la Loire, Carquefou, France
Fotomuseum Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland
Mamco - musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland
Berardo Museum - Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art, Lisbon, Portugal

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