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Wallace Berman

Wallace Berman

Born in 1926 in Staten Island, NY, USA. Died in 1976 in Topanga, CA, USA.

Education

- 1944 Attended Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles, CA, USA
- 1944 Attended Jepson Art School, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Solo Exhibitions (selection)

- 2022** « *Lyrical Cool : A Tribute do Shirley Berman* », Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
- 2019** *Wallace Berman : Singles 1964-76*, Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Wallace Berman, galerie frank elbaz, Art Basel Feature, Basel, Switzerland
- 2018** *Wallace Berman - 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, Zwitterland
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
- 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

Group Exhibitions (selection)

- 2018** *La luz negra*, Centre de Cultura Contemporania de Barcelona, Barcelone, Spain
- 2017** *Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason 1950 - 1980*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
White Trash, Luhring Augustine, New York, NY, USA
The Rat Bastard Protective Society, Susan Inglett Gallery, New York, NY, USA
Screen Memory, Simon Lee, London, UK
Holy Barbarians: Beat Culture on the West Coast, Menil Collection, Houston, TX, USA
- 2016** *Collaborative Mysticism*, galerie frank elbaz, Art Basel Feature, Basel, Switzerland
Beat Generation, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany
- 2015** *Lost in the Flood*, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France
Cameron: Cinderella of the Wastelands, former Deitch Projects space, New York, NY, USA
I See, So I See So. Messages From Harry Smith, Temporary Gallery, Köln, Germany
The West Coast Avant-Garde: 1950 – Present, Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Wallace Berman, Jeff Davis, Matthew Langan Peck and Sophie Stone, Shoot The Lobster, New York, NY, USA
- 2014** *Walls and Words*, organized by UNTITLED Gallery, Eldridge Street Synagogue, New York, NY, USA
- 2013** *Serialize*, Peres Project, Berlin, Germany
Into the Mystic, Michael kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
An Opening of the Field: Jess, Robert Duncan and Their Circle, curated by Michael Duncan: traveling exhibition beginning at the Crocker Art Museum,

- Sacramento, CA, USA
- 2012** *LA RAW: Abject Expressionism in Los Angeles 1945-1980: From Rico Lebrun to Paul McCarthy* curated by Michael Duncan, The Pasadena Museum of California Art, Pasadena, CA, USA
- Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A., 1945-1980*, Getty Center, Los Angeles, CA, USA; Martin Gropius-Bau, Berlin, Germany
Être sauvage de Rousseau à nos jours, ESAAA, Annecy, France
- 2011** *All of the Above: Carte blanche à John M. Armleder*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France
Speaking in Tongues : The Art of Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, CA, USA
25th Anniversary Show, Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Radical Jewish Culture : The New York Music Scene Since the 1990s, Jewish Museum, Berlin, Germany
Infernal Instincts, In Situ Fabienne Leclerc, Paris, France
Aether curated by Christophe Keller, Espace 315, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
Greetings from L.A.: Artists and Publics 1945-1980, The Getty Research Institute at the Getty Center, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Berlin-Paris, galerie frank elbaz at Wentrup Gallery, Berlin, Germany
- 2010** *C'est la vie ! Vanités de Caravage à Damien Hirst*, Musée Maillol, Paris, France
Radical Jewish Culture: The New York Music Scene Since the 1990s, Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, Paris, France
- 2009** *California Maximalism*, Nyehaus, New York, NY, USA
She: Images of Women by Wallace Berman and Richard Prince, Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Sight Vision Revisited, Anglim Gilbert Gallery, San Francisco, CA, USA
- 2008** *Traces du sacré* curated by Jean de Loisy, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany
Looking for mushrooms: Beat Poets, Hippies, Funk and Minimal Art: Art and Counterculture in San Francisco 1955-1968, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany
Time & Place: Los Angeles 1957-1968, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2007** *Semina Culture: Wallace Berman and his Circle*, Grey Art Gallery, New York University, New York, NY, USA
Pioneers, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, CA, USA
- 2006** *Los Angeles 1955-1985*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
L.A. Object and David Hammons Body Prints, Tilton Gallery, New York, NY, USA
Semina Culture: Wallace Berman and his Circle, The University of California, Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA, USA; The Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Utah State University, Logan, UT, USA; The Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Wichita, KS, USA

- California Modern*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport, RI, USA
- 2005** *Semina Culture: Wallace Berman and his Circle*, Santa Monica Museum, Santa Monica, CA, USA
Looking at Words, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- Assemblage and Collage in California in the 1960s*, 871 Fine Arts Gallery, San Francisco, CA, USA
- 2004** *Lost but Found: Assemblage, Collage and Sculpture, 1920-2002*, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA, USA
Subway Series - The New York Yankees and the American Dream, Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, NY, USA
Evidence of Impact: Art and Photography 1963-1978, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, USA
Collage, Bloomberg Space, London, UK
- 2003** *Between Art and Life: From Joseph Cornell to Gabriel Orozco*, Miami Art Museum, Miami, FL, USA
Some Assembly Required: Collage Culture in Postwar America, Everson Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA; Pla Museum of Art, Lakeland, FL, USA; Madison Art Center, Madison, WI, USA
- 2002** *Ferus*, Gagosian Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- 1999** *Group Show*, Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- 1998** *World Artists for Tibet*, Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, CA, USA
- 1990** *Contemporary Assemblage: the DADA and Surrealist Legacy*, L.A. Louver, Venice, CA, USA
Words as Image: American Art 1960-90, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI, USA
- 1989** *Collage/Assemblage: Nine Points of View*, California State University, Hayward, CA, USA
The Junk Aesthetic: Assemblage of the 1950s and early 1960s, Whitney Museum of American Art at Equitable Center, New York, NY, USA
Forty Years of California Assemblage, Wight Art Gallery, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, USA
- 1988** *The Art of George Herms and Wallace Berman*, Herron Gallery, Indianapolis, IN, USA
Poetic Objects, San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, TX, USA
- 1985** *Twentieth Century: The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Collection*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, USA
- 1982** *The Americans: The Collage*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX, USA
- 1981** *Art in Los Angeles: Seventeen Artists in the Sixties*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, USA
- 1977** *California Painting and Sculpture: The Modern Era*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, USA
- 1974** *Poets of the Cities: New York and San Francisco 1950-1965*, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas, TX, USA; San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco,

CA, USA; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, USA
1966 *Los Angeles Now*, Robert Fraser Gallery, London, UK

Public Collections

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

Wallace Berman – Visual Music

Curated by Sophie Dannenmüller
September 8 - October 11, 2018

Opening on Saturday, September 8, 2018

4:30 pm – Exhibition walkthrough with the curator, followed by a Q&A session with the son of the artist, Tosh Berman

6-8 pm – Opening Reception & Bebop Concert by the Bobby Rangell Band

galerie frank elbaz is pleased to present *Wallace Berman – Visual Music*, the artist's third solo exhibition in Paris. The catalog essay and exhibition examine the connection between sound and image, music and visual art, in Berman's artwork and show the extremely important role music played in Berman's artistic approach. His dual love of music and art often fused in pieces that reveal both musical and visual qualities.

Music was inseparable from Berman's life and work. The artist always kept strong ties to the music world and kept track of the latest developments with an insatiable curiosity, exploring the avant-garde beyond California and taking notice of innovative, unusual, and sometimes confidential productions. Berman's love of music wasn't limited to one particular genre but embraced many styles. Jazz, however, always remained his great love, especially bebop. Berman was a regular at Tempo Records in Los Angeles, a shop connected to the Dial label which was created to promote bebop. His drawings were chosen for several Dial leaflets and for the cover of the two-volume album *Be-Bop Jazz with All the Stars of the New Movement* released in 1947 and 1948. Berman often frequented Los Angeles' underground black jazz clubs, where jazz legends such as Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, and Billie Holiday would perform. Thus his early works are inevitably rooted in jazz, which offered him a unique and genuine source of inspiration and emotion.

With the Beat generation of the late 1950s, the boundary between art, poetry, and jazz blurred, particularly on the West Coast. A major figure of the Beat movement in California, Berman was not only a devotee of jazz and poetry, but also actively encouraged their bonding. In his handcrafted magazine *Semina*, published from 1955 to 1964, references to jazz and musical citations share space with poems. He invited jazz bands to play during art openings at the Semina Gallery (1960-1961), a rather unconventional art venue he founded while "in exile" in the Bay Area.

After returning to Los Angeles, Berman began his series of *Verifax Collages*, named after the brand of copier he adopted as a main tool for his art-making in the mid-1960s. He always composed these collages while listening to music. As a result, sound, specifically music, infuses the artist's artwork. Explicit or implicit, metonymic or formal, musical references abound in the *Verifax Collages*. For instance, portraits of singers such as Janis Joplin, Neil Young, Joan Baez, Marianne Faithful, and Bob Dylan are featured in several *Verifax Collages*.

Berman's pieces usually bear no individual titles – although two are tellingly named after popular songs of the time. *You Lost That Lovin' Feelin'* takes the title of a 1964 song by Phil Spector and the Righteous Brothers, while *Papa's Got a Brand New Bag* (1966) borrows that of James Brown's famous tune. Another series of *Verifax Collages*, which also steps away from the monochrome grids, bears the generic title of *Shuffle*, which resonates with the shuffle rhythm and Brown's celebrated dance step. The titles of the two major subsets of the *Verifax Collages* – *Sound Series* and *Silent Series* – deal more directly with the notion of auditory perception. In these regularly arranged collages the artist arguably introduces a spiritual dimension in keeping with his well-documented interest in the Kabbalah – a Jewish mystical tradition transmitted orally. Omnipresent in the *Verifax Collages* is the image of the portable radio, which unequivocally refers to the sense of hearing, the audible, and music, bringing sound into the visual realm by metonymy. Pictures of human ears recur frequently in the *Verifax Collages* and invite viewers not only to look at the artwork, but to listen, to be "all ears" to the evident messages as well as to potential secret meanings.

The *Verifax Collages* grids propose a dense sequential visual reading of American society, alluding to politics, current events, history, and culture, set against an undisclosed musical background. Music and art are never disconnected from their context, even if it is left up to viewers to bring in their favorite inner music to go along with the images Berman culled from various printed materials. In his own way Berman expanded on the work of John Cage. Just like Cage's *4'33"* is a visual work, the *Verifax Collages* give a visual form to the recorded music transmitted through the transistor, as if sounds came out of the device together with accompanying imagery. It is not clear if Berman experienced true perceptual synesthesia, but it is likely that listening to music prompted various images in his mind. The *Verifax Collages* therefore offer more than a mere illustration or visual interpretation of a song's lyrics or title. Whereas sound broadcasting, particularly with the radio, exclusively emphasizes the audio element, these artworks draw attention to the visual dimension of music, giving it a different materiality.

Berman was very interested in codes, in systems of signs and symbols, and in their transposition between media, as in Kabbalistic permutations. The grids of the *Verifax Collages* could easily be read as a unique system of notation indicating musical patterns and rhythms. The repetitive component of the hand holding a transistor radio provides the formal structure, the rhythmic basis within which different variations can develop, like a jazz improvisation using riffs on an existing tune. Furthermore, the orderly structure of the grids entices the viewer to peruse the aligned images as a score visually representing a piece of music's time signature, phrases, measures, and tempo.

By and large the *Verifax Collages* can thus be regarded as "visual music", which designates the translation of sound, music, or other aural arts into visual art and also denotes the use of musical structures in visual imagery. Musicians seem to always have been drawn to Berman's artwork, no doubt because of the countless musical overtones. But perhaps they were also drawn in because they could intuitively recognize and decode the musical form and substance of Berman's art. Or possibly because they could hear sounds and melodies when they looked at his collages. It seems only fair that the music world would pay homage to the artist in one of the most famous albums of all time: Berman's likeness appears with those of other world celebrities on the second row of the cover of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album.

Sophie Dannenmüller

Wallace Berman (1926-1976) was an iconic figure of the California Beat movement. His personality and multifaceted body of work deeply influenced several generations of artists. His practice resonates with jazz, Jewish mysticism, and poetry that accompanied and inspired his work. 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." Walters Hopps recalled "his magical touch of wit" – a magical touch still operating on younger generations who discover Berman's work today. Berman had a strong relationship with his peers, for instance with Jay DeFeo who stood several times in front of the lens for him. Between 1953 and 1965, his small house on Crater Lane was the center of a community of artists; Charles Brittin described Berman's home as a kind of artistic dissemination center. It was in Berman's living room that the seeds for Semina Culture were sown. Berman's body of work includes collages, photography, graphic design, drawing, sculptures, and film.

Wallace Berman – Visual Music

Sous le commissariat de Sophie Dannenmüller
8 septembre - 11 octobre 2018

Vernissage le samedi 8 septembre 2018

16h30 — Visite commentée avec la curatrice suivie d'une séance de Q&A avec le fils de l'artiste, Tosh Berman

18h-20h — Vernissage & Concert Bebop avec Bobby Rangell Band

La galerie frank elbaz est heureuse de présenter « Wallace Berman – Visual Music », la troisième exposition personnelle de l'artiste à Paris. Conjointement à l'essai du catalogue, cette présentation examine le lien entre le son et le visuel, la musique et l'image dans le travail de Berman, et met en évidence le rôle essentiel de la musique dans la démarche créative de l'artiste. Sa passion pour la musique et son amour de l'art fusionnent volontiers dans des œuvres qui se révèlent à la fois musicales et visuelles.

La musique faisait partie intégrante de la vie de Berman. L'artiste a toujours entretenu des liens étroits avec le monde de la musique ; il traquait les derniers développements avec une curiosité insatiable, explorait les avancées musicales bien au-delà des frontières californiennes et détectait les productions innovantes et originales, mêmes confidentielles. Pourtant il conservera toujours un fort penchant pour le jazz, notamment le bebop. À Los Angeles, Berman fréquentait régulièrement Tempo Records, une boutique de disques associée au label Dial qui avait été créé afin de promouvoir le bebop. Plusieurs dessins de l'artiste figurent dans des brochures de la marque ainsi que sur la couverture des deux volumes de l'album *Be-Bop Jazz with All the Stars of the New Movement* (1947 et 1948). Berman était un habitué des clubs de jazz underground de la ville, où se produisaient des légendes telles que Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie ou Billie Holiday. Ainsi ses premières œuvres puisent inévitablement leurs racines dans le jazz qui lui offrait une source unique d'inspiration et d'émotions.

Avec la Beat Generation de la fin des années 1950, la frontière entre l'art, la poésie et le jazz s'estompa, en particulier sur la Côte Ouest. Figure majeure du mouvement Beat en Californie, Berman fut non seulement un passionné de jazz et de poésie, mais contribua concrètement à leur rapprochement. Dans *Semina*, un magazine entièrement confectionné de sa main (1955-1964), les références au jazz et les citations musicales s'unissent aux poèmes. Il invitait également des groupes à jouer pendant des vernissages de la Semina Gallery (1960-1961), une galerie d'art atypique qu'il avait ouverte lors de son « exil » dans la Baie de San Francisco.

De retour à Los Angeles, Berman commença la série des *Verifax Collages* (d'après le nom photocopieur qui devint son principal outil de travail à partir du milieu des années 1960). Il réalisait ces collages en écoutant toutes sortes d'œuvres musicales. En conséquence, les sons et la musique imprègnent ces compositions. Explicites ou implicites, formelles ou métonymiques, les références à la musique abondent dans les *Verifax Collages*, où apparaissent par exemple des portraits de chanteurs tels que Janis Joplin, Neil Young, Joan Baez, Marianne Faithful ou Bob Dylan.

Les œuvres de Berman n'ont généralement pas de titre individuel. Malgré cela deux d'entre elles sont nommées d'après des tubes de l'époque : *You Lost That Lovin' Feelin'* de Phil Spector and the Righteous Brothers (1964) et *Papa's Got a Brand New Bag* (1965) de James Brown. Une autre série de *Verifax Collages* qui s'éloigne des grilles monochromes porte le titre générique de *Shuffle*, faisant écho au rythme shuffle ou au célèbre pas de danse de Brown. Les titres *Sound Series* et *Silent Series* des deux principaux sous-ensembles des *Verifax Collages* font explicitement référence à la notion de perception auditive. Dans ces compositions régulières, l'artiste introduit une dimension spirituelle qui découle sans aucun doute de son intérêt notoire pour la Kabbale, une tradition ésotérique du judaïsme transmise oralement. Omniprésente dans ces séries, l'image du transistor radio renvoie sans équivoque au sens de l'ouïe, à l'audible, à la musique, introduisant ainsi le son dans le domaine visuel par

métonymie. Des images d'oreilles humaines apparaissent de façon récurrente dans les *Verifax Collages* et invitent le regardeur non seulement à contempler, mais également à écouter l'œuvre en étant « tout ouïe » et réceptif aussi bien aux messages explicites qu'aux possibles significations occultes.

Les grilles des *Verifax Collages* proposent une lecture visuelle dense et séquentielle de la société américaine, riche d'allusions à la politique, à l'actualité, à l'histoire et à la culture, sur une bande son qui reste inaudible. La musique et l'art ne sont ainsi jamais dissociés de leur contexte, même s'il revient aux regardeurs d'imaginer leur propre musique intérieure pour accompagner les images sélectionnées par Berman dans diverses sources imprimées. À sa manière, l'artiste a développé le travail de John Cage : de même que le *4'33"* du compositeur constitue une œuvre visuelle, les *Verifax Collages* donnent une forme visible à la musique enregistrée transmise par le transistor, comme si les sons sortaient de l'appareil enrichis de leur imagerie. Rien ne permet d'affirmer que Berman ait fait l'expérience de perceptions synesthétiques, mais la musique provoquait sûrement chez lui l'apparition d'images mentales. Les *Verifax Collages* proposent donc bien plus qu'une simple illustration ou interprétation visuelle du titre ou des paroles d'une chanson. Alors que la transmission, notamment radiophonique, fait ressortir uniquement la dimension sonore, ces œuvres font voir la dimension visuelle de la musique et lui donnent de la sorte une matérialité différente.

Berman s'intéressait aux codes, aux systèmes de signes et de symboles et à leur transposition entre divers médiums, à l'exemple des permutations kabbalistiques. Les grilles des *Verifax Collages* pourraient ainsi se lire comme un système de notation singulier qui indique les motifs et les rythmes de la musique. Tels des riffs improvisés sur une mélodie préexistante, l'élément répétitif de la main tenant un transistor offre la structure formelle ou la base rythmique à partir de laquelle différentes variations peuvent se développer. Qui plus est, la structure des grilles incite le regardeur à lire les images alignées comme une partition représentant visuellement le rythme, les phrases, les mesures et le tempo musical.

Dans l'ensemble, les *Verifax Collages* peuvent donc être qualifiés de « musique visuelle », une expression qui désigne, d'une part, la transposition des sons et des arts sonores tels que la musique dans l'art visuel et, d'autre part, les imageries visuelles élaborées à partir de structures musicales. Les musiciens semblent avoir toujours été attirés par le travail de Berman, assurément en raison des multiples connotations musicales qu'il contient. Peut-être aussi en raison de leur capacité à reconnaître et à décoder intuitivement la forme et la substance musicale de l'art de Berman. Ou peut-être entendent-ils des sons et des mélodies en regardant ses collages? Il semble ainsi tout à fait approprié que le monde de la musique ait rendu hommage à l'artiste dans l'un des albums les plus célèbres de tous les temps : un portrait de Berman figure au deuxième rang, aux côtés d'autres célébrités mondiales, sur la pochette de l'album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* des Beatles.

Sophie Dannenmüller

Wallace Berman était une icône de la Beat Generation, un mouvement littéraire et artistique californien. Sa personnalité et sa production aux facettes multiples eurent une influence profonde sur plusieurs générations d'artistes, qui se ressentent encore aujourd'hui. Son travail entre en résonance avec d'autres disciplines qui l'accompagnèrent et l'influencèrent tout au long de sa carrière : le jazz, le mysticisme juif et la poésie. Comme l'affirme Dennis Hopper, « il marqua et influença toute personne sérieusement impliquée dans le monde des arts des années 1950 à Los Angeles. S'il y avait un gourou, c'était bien lui ». Berman avait une relation forte avec ses pairs, par exemple avec l'artiste Jay DeFeo qui posa plusieurs fois devant son objectif. Entre 1953 et 1965, sa résidence de Crater Lane devint le centre d'une communauté d'artistes ; ce fut dans son salon que la culture Semina vit le jour. Le travail de Berman comprend des collages, des photographies, des dessins, du design graphique, film et sculptures.

Wallace Berman — *Verifax collages*

Text by Sophie Dannenmüller

A legendary figure of the California Beat movement, Wallace Berman is generally remembered as unassuming, mystical and exceptionally charismatic. 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 holy man, the rabbi.” Walters Hopps recalled “his magical touch of wit” – a magical touch still operating on younger generations who discover Berman’s work today. For the first solo exhibition of the artist ever organized in France, the Galerie Frank Elbaz presents a selection of grids and *Shuffles* from his pioneering copy art works, the *Verifax Collages*.

The collages

Berman started using the Verifax photocopier around 1964. It remained his main artistic tool until his accidental death in 1976. Given his fascination for the power of words, the name “Verifax”, meaning something like “True Facts”, must have held a symbolic significance. It recalls for instance the titles of earlier works, *Factum Fidei* (1957) and *Veritas Panel* (1952-57), featured at the Ferus Gallery in 1957 – a legendary show closed by the police on grounds of pornography. With the Verifax, Berman was able to fuse several mediums that had long interested him, i.e. photography, collage and printing. The two-step gelatin dye transfer process of the Verifax is very similar to that of photography, although entirely automated. The original to be copied was placed on the Verifax glass plate and photographed; a negative image of the original was produced and needed to be re-introduced in the machine, before being discarded, to allow the final positive copy to be printed.

In the *Verifax Collages*, Berman made extensive use of an image of a hand holding a transistor radio, taken from an advertisement for a small 1963 Sony transistor, probably found by chance in a magazine. Berman covered the text of the ad with white paint, retaining only the image, and then cut out the rectangular space of the speaker to replace it with various other images, found in the press or in books. The artist worked directly on the Verifax plate, without creating an actual pasted down composition beforehand. In other words, there is no “original” collage in the ordinary sense: the *photocopy* of the ephemeral piece is the original work of art. Berman experimented with the process, varying the required dosage of activator baths, as well as the development and exposure times. He also incorporated the negatives into finished works instead of disposing of them. Furthermore, the printed photocopies were usually not simply left in the form they came out: chemicals applied on the still wet paper produced degrees of highlights, shades of sepia, as well as spots and splashes that look like accidents. As a result, exactly identical “copies” of any one “original” were never obtained.

After completing a series of single photocopies, actual collages were composed by gluing down on a board from 4 to 56 different “hands”, side by side in a square grid pattern or overlapping in a “shuffle”. This is in fact the only time a real collage takes place, with visible joints between the fragments – this of course doesn’t happen with photocopying, which neutralizes all of the colors, paper qualities, layers and junctions. The so-called *Verifax Collages* (like today’s digital art) are hardly collages in the sense of cutting and pasting materials to a surface, but rather disparate visual elements blended by a quasi-magical operation. The visuals resulting from the automated process, fortuitous incidents and controlled hands-on manipulations were many times removed from the images placed in the Verifax at the beginning of this creative routine, in which artist, chance, and machine alternately took the upper hand.

The hand

The use of a hand as a primary image is emblematic. It manifests the way Berman played on many levels with multiple meanings, be they literal, visual or symbolic. A

persistent theme in the history of art, the hand was a key symbol for the Surrealists, whom Berman admired. It took a particular meaning in the 1960s, when Pop Art challenged Abstract Expressionism and dismissed the importance of the mark of the artist's hand on the work of art. Berman selected a commercial, life-size picture of a man's hand, which, as he undoubtedly intended, was often mistaken for his own. Thus, the hand of the artist is reintroduced in a mechanically (re)produced original work of art precisely replicating the motif of a hand. Recurring images of hands inside the handheld radio further accentuate the *mise en abyme*. Rays of light emanating from a hand in several grids, as in much religious iconography, allude to an all-pervading Divine Presence. All thumbs up, the hands of God, of Chance and of the artist are fused in this allegorical representation of the act of creation.

The radio

The small transistor radio, conversely, is a product of the time. The association of the radio and of the supernatural hand creates a tension between the transcendent and the trivial, the unforeseeable and the expected, the timeless and the contemporary. By metonymy, the radio adds sound to the *Verifax Collages*, and thus to the act of creation, as stressed by references to music throughout the collages. Berman significantly gave the titles Sound Series and Silence Series to the grids of positive and negative images respectively. The radio, as well as the recurring pictures of receptive human ears, symbolizes the transmission and reception of sound-waves and of words through space, as implied in the title *Radio/Aether*. This suggests a visual transposition of the tradition of the Kabbalah, which, in Hebrew, precisely means "to receive", since it has been allegedly transmitted orally from Abraham, verbally handed down so to speak. Berman's interest in the Kabbalah is well known, particularly in Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia's meditation method based on the permutation of letters (Tseruf), which the artist would draw on also for the assemblages of stones, chains and letters he made in the 1970's.

A cosmology of the 1960s

The dozens of images inserted in place of the radio speaker remain perfectly identifiable in the collages, even in the negatives, although their specific origins and dates are unknown. Most, like hands and ears, recur regularly in various forms. A mysterious draped figure appears repeatedly, recalling that of *Temple* (1957), also destroyed after the Ferus exhibition. Some are unique, such as portraits of people Berman admired: Marcel Duchamp, Kenneth Anger, the Beatles and others. Overall they coalesce to propose a personal interpretation of the 1960s, augmented by universal symbols that transcend any temporality. A classification of the imagery reveals themes representing different levels of existence. Christian crosses, Semiphoras, the Pope, or Buddha stand for the spiritual world. Skies, clouds, Earth and Moon, as well as magic mushrooms, symbolize diverse states of consciousness. Nature is represented by animals, flowers or trees, and the human body appears as female nudes, dancers, baseball players, or runners. Motorbikes, planes, cars, and rockets illustrate the modern material world. Finally, as in an updated vanitas, interspersed pictures of watches, guns, or skulls remind us of death, of the transience of life, and that all rests in superior hands.

Grids and Shuffles

The grid pattern typically implies continuity ad infinitum beyond the picture plane, geometrically linking all the pieces of the series, and giving it monumentality. The regular rigid pattern underscores the mechanical process. At the same time, the sheer quantity of pieces reveals the obsessive behavior of the artist, inexorably reiterating his creative ritual as in a meditative trance. The grid *Verifax Collages* look at once all the same, yet noticeably different. In the grids, repetition meets uniqueness; uniformity clashes with disparity; the unchanging 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, to examine the details up close. But recurring 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,

offering a blank to be filled by the viewer's imagination. The linear reading is further disturbed by arrows pointing nowhere, by impenetrable scribbles, as well as by Hebrew letters that don't spell any words – possibly following Abulafia's rule that the letters needn't have any "meaning" for the purpose of meditation.

With the *Shuffles*, Berman broke out of the grid pattern in order to avoid, as always, being caught in a system, albeit his own. Instead of being neatly juxtaposed, the hands are now carefully cut out and arranged in a fan shape, partially overlapping, on a brightly colored background. This arrangement suggests the stroboscopic motion of a hand swiftly dealing cards. The title's reference to card playing finds its source in the fact that Berman had at a time made a living through gambling and was notoriously unbeatable at many games. The casual arrangement, bright hues, and animation in the *Shuffles* contrast with the strict order, monochromatic background, and stillness of the grids. With the same basic visual elements, the two series develop diametrically opposed variations on a theme, demonstrating how Berman sought to dialectically reconcile contrary notions.

Is there a code to decipher the *Verifax Collages*? Do they tell cryptic stories heard in the Aether? Do they announce prophetic messages, metaphysical truths or mystical revelations? The artist would surely have refused to answer, always choosing not to explain his work. Wallace Berman left the viewers free to read what they desired in these polysemous puzzles of poetic images and associations, leading by the hand those who want to follow him on a mysterious journey in this magical mindscape.

Published in the catalogue *Wallace Berman*, published by Galerie Frank Elbaz on the occasion of the exhibition *Wallace Berman – Verifax Collages*, Paris, 2009.

Works



Wallace Berman

Untitled (Shuffle), 1969

Verifax collage on board, mounted to wood (original frame by the artist)

29 x 33 cm / 11 3/8 x 13 in., Pièce Unique



Wallace Berman

Silent Series, 1965, 4 images Verifax négatives sur panneau (cadre original fabriqué par l'artiste), 33 x 35,6 cm, Pièce unique

Silent Series, 1965, 4 image negative verifax collage, with original artist frame, 13 x 14 in., Unique



Wallace Berman

Verifax collaged mailer, c.1964, Collage Verifax sur carton, 15,2 x 15,2 cm, Pièce Unique

Verifax collaged mailer, c.1964, Verifax collage on cardstock, 6 x 6 in., Unique



Wallace Berman

Untitled, 1960's, Collage Verifax sur carton monté sur bois, (cadre original fabriqué par l'artiste), 29 x 33 cm, Pièce Unique

Untitled, 1960's, Verifax collage on board, mounted to wood (original frame by the artist), 11^{3/8} x 13 in., Unique



Wallace Berman

Untitled (First Pass on Verifax), 1964

Verifax Collage

5 1/2 x 7 in. / 14 x 17,8 cm



Wallace Berman

Hero/Lil, 1972, Collage de copies Verifax, 48,3 x 38,1 cm, Pièce unique

Hero/Lil, 1972, Collage of Verifax copies, 19 x 15 in., Unique



Wallace Berman

Radio/ Aether, 1966-74, 15 pièces: 13 collages encadrés de 4 copies Verifax, 1 alphabet hébreu encadré, 33 x 35,5 cm (cadre en bois original de Sid Zaro pour Wallace Berman), 1 boîte imprimé, Pièce unique

Radio/Aether Series, 1966-74, 15 pieces: 13 framed collages of 4 Verifax copies, 1 Framed Hebrew alphabet, 13 x 14 in. (original wooden frames by Sid Zaro for Wallace Berman), 1 printed cloth covered box, Unique



Wallace Berman

Vue de l'exposition *Wallace Berman - Visual Music*, Commissaire de l'exposition Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, France, 2018

View of the exhibition *Wallace Berman - Visual Music*, Curated by Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France, 2018



Wallace Berman

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View of the exhibition *Wallace Berman - Visual Music*, Curated by Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France, 2018



Wallace Berman

Vue de l'exposition *Be-Bop Kabbalah*, Commissaire de l'exposition Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, France, 2010

View of the exhibition *Be-Bop Kabbalah*, Curated by Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France, 2010



Wallace Berman

Vue de l'exposition *Be-Bop Kabbalah*, Commissaire de l'exposition Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, France, 2010

View of the exhibition *Be-Bop Kabbalah*, Curated by Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France, 2010



Wallace Berman

Vue de l'exposition *Be-Bop Kabbalah*, Commissaire de l'exposition Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, France, 2010

View of the exhibition *Be-Bop Kabbalah*, Curated by Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France, 2010



Wallace Berman

Vue de l'exposition *Be-Bop Kabbalah*, Commissaire de l'exposition Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, France, 2010

View of the exhibition *Be-Bop Kabbalah*, Curated by Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France, 2010



Wallace Berman

Vue de l'exposition, 2009, Frieze Art Fair, Londres, UK
View of the exhibition, 2009, Frieze Art Fair, London, UK



Wallace Berman

Vue de l'exposition, 2009, Frieze Art Fair, Londres, UK
View of the exhibition, 2009, Frieze Art Fair, London, UK



Wallace Berman

Vue de l'exposition *Verifax collages*, Commissaire de l'exposition Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, France, 2009

View of the exhibition *Verifax Collages*, Curated by Sophie Dannenmüller, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France, 2009

Texts

"Wallace Berman, beatnik kabbalistique", Emmanuelle Lequeux, *Beaux Arts Magazine*, October 2018

GALERIES | EXPOSITIONS

Nos coups de cœur

Galerie Thomas Bernard
Cortex Athletico

Karina Bisch sur le fil du modernisme

C'est une peinture sur le mode invasif que pratique Karina Bisch : ses abstractions joyeuses débordent volontiers du cadre pour glisser vers la sculpture, l'installation, le carré de soie, voire le parapluie. Manière, pour la jeune femme formée aux Beaux-Arts de Paris et à Amsterdam, de mettre à l'épreuve du réel le projet moderniste avec lequel elle a grandi, celui du Bauhaus et des pionniers de la pure géométrie picturale. De costumes bigarrés pour ballets mécaniques en foulards et coussins chamarrés, l'artiste peint sur un fil, alliant mode, danse et irrévérence. E. L.

© Karina Bisch - Les Figures of the Modern

jusqu'au 10 octobre • 13, rue des Arquebusiers • 75003 Paris
01 75 50 42 65 • galerie.thomasbernard.com



Les Tableaux vivants (1), 2018

Galerie Marian Goodman

Les illusions tendues de Fred Sandback

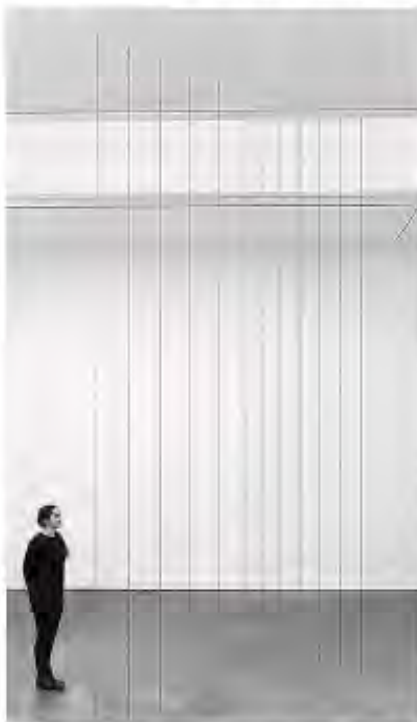
Ce n'est rien, ou si peu... Tout juste un fil dans l'espace, à peine perceptible. Et pourtant, dès qu'on l'aperçoit, il obsède l'œil, parvenant à lui faire croire à l'illusion d'un volume qui se dessine dans l'espace. Variant du rouge au noir, ne dérogeant jamais au principe de la ligne droite, les aériennes sculptures de Fred Sandback sont familières aux visiteurs de la Dia Beacon, merveilleuse fondation proche de New York qui conserve nombre de ses œuvres. Mais peu en France les connaissent. Disparu en 2003, l'artiste n'est plus là pour les mettre en scène. La galerie Marian Goodman s'offre à leur

minimaliste évanescence. Stupéfiants trompe-l'œil, que Sandback évoquait ainsi : « En aucun cas mon œuvre est illusionniste. L'art illusionniste vous renvoie à quelque chose hors de son existence factuelle. Mes œuvres sont remplies d'illusions, mais elles ne renvoient à rien. » Un rien qui nous remplit de bonheur. E.L.

© Fred Sandback

La 19 d'Octobre
jusqu'au 27 octobre
79, rue du Temple
75003 Paris
01 40 27 81 37
www.mariangoodman.com

Untitled (Sculptural Study, Twelve-Part Vertical Construction), vers 1982-2016



Untitled (Ray Charles, This is the Card that Reads 7), 1965



Galerie Frank Elbaz
Wallace Berman, beatnik kabbalistique

Comment faire rimer be-bop avec kabbale, jazz avec mystique, beatnik avec musique ? Wallace Berman (1926-1976) fit de ce dialogue le cœur de sa vie. Dans les années 1950, il écumait les clubs de jazz de Los Angeles pour écouter Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie ou Billie Holiday. Il s'en souviendra quand il deviendra l'un des piliers du mouvement beat californien et fondera *Semina*, magazine handmade, vibrant de collages où se marient références à la musique et sombres poèmes. Quelques années plus tard, ses *réfix Collages* font apparaître, avec toujours la même image de fond (une main tenant une radio), des motifs kabbalistiques, des objets du quotidien et des portraits de Janis Joplin, Marianne Faithfull ou Bob Dylan. Voilà le fil choisi par la galerie Elbaz, qui a révélé en France ce talent oublié, pour la troisième exposition personnelle qu'elle lui consacre. C'est James Brown fait image. E. L.

© Wallace Berman - David Hassen jusqu'au 11 octobre
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HYPERALLERGIC

ART

How the Fusion of Photography, Collage, and Printing Present a Portrait of Wallace Berman

A small exhibition of Wallace Berman's Verifax collages and photographs from the mid- to late-1960s operates like music in establishing a theme and exploring it through several variations.

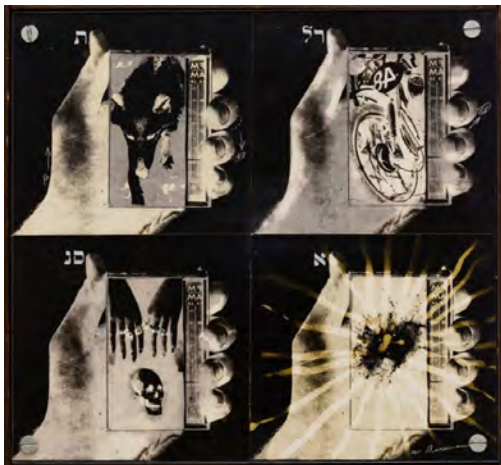
Joseph Nechvatal 2 days ago



Wallace Berman, "Untitled (Brian Jones in the T.A.M.I Show)" (1964/1999) gelatin silver print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm 11 x 14 inches (all images courtesy the Estate of Wallace Berman and Frank Elbaz gallery unless otherwise noted)

PARIS — Establishing a theme and exploring it through variations has long been an established musical method. This strategy pops up again in [Visual Music](#), the Frank Elbaz gallery's diminutive display of Wallace Berman's [Verifax collages and photographs](#) from the mid- to late-1960s. Omnipresent is an appropriated image of a hand holding a Sony transistor radio where the radio has been replaced by various graphic images — ambivalently referring to

auditory perception and the wide distribution, reproduction, and exhilaration of '60s [Pop Art](#) and music — thereby bringing sound into the visual realm by metonymy. Curated by Sophie Dannenmüller, this is a small but museum-quality show that highlights a series of such Berman images, usually arranged in grids, where an eclectic mix of art, pop, and countercultural images have been swapped with the radio — as if pictures were being broadcast as sound waves. These hands might also be interpreted as a holding [cassette tape](#) boxes with different insert covers (the cassette first appeared in 1962), but there is something more than a simple crisscrossing of visual and musical tropes going on here.



Wallace Berman, "Untitled (Silent)" (1968-69), 4 image negative verifax collage, with original artist frame 33 x 35,6 cm (photo: Claire Dorn)

These mono-prints comment on the glorified artist's hand, rendered absent through mechanical reproductive technology. Through the two-step gelatin dye transfer process of the Verifax Kodak copier, Berman was able to fuse several mediums that had long interested him into a precursor of digital painting and copy art: photography, collage, and printing merge into an alchemical graphic art about magical metamorphosis and theatrical transformation. Berman worked directly on the Verifax plate, without creating a pasted-

down composition beforehand. In other words, there is no "original" collage in the ordinary sense: The copy of the ephemeral piece is the original work of art.



Wallacè Bèřmaň ••Višúal Múšíc partial exhibition view, Frank Elbaz gallery(2018) (photo by Claire Dorn)

This makes sense for Berman, since he was deeply involved with issues of reproduction and dissemination in his work, being also the creator of the legendary, handcrafted cultural magazine *Semina* (published from 1955 to 1964) that contained a taste of the heady atmosphere of hip art, music, photography, poetry, and the out-of-the-mainstream, dissenting lifestyle he enjoyed deep in the California weeds. Berman

mailed this zine out to associates and friends and occasionally practiced an early form of Fluxus-like mail art, for example with "Verifax Collaged Mailer" (1964) that he sent to his actor amigo Dean Stockwell staying in Montparnasse on Rue de Tournon.

Berman's one and only art exhibition was in 1957 at the famous Ferus Gallery that had been established by artist Edward Kienholz, poet-artist Robert Alexander, and curator Walter Hopps that year. Somebody dropped a dime, and believe it or not, Berman's show was raided by the LAPD vice squad because of the small reproduction of a weird flagrante delicto drawn by Marjorie Cameron (who used the mononym Cameron) that was a small part of Berman's assemblage, "Temple" (1952-57), one of the principle assemblages in the



Wallace Berman, "Verifax collaged mailer" (c.1964) Verifax collage on cardstock 15,2 x 15,2 cm (6 x 6 inches)



Cameron, "Untitled (Peyote Vision)" (1955) (from Semina journal, no. 1), reproduction of ink drawing mounted on cardstock, 3 13/16 x 4 inches (courtesy of Cameron Parsons Foundation)

exhibition. As a result, Berman was arrested on obscenity charges, tried, and found guilty.

Berman was a member of a circle of Beat artists who regarded art not as a profession but as an integral part of their everyday lives that had little to do with the art market. Berman had an anti-establishment lifestyle, making assemblages and collages from everyday objects and thus was happy enough to leave the art gallery system. He was the abiding angel-headed hipster: an enigmatic, hermetic, bohemian collage artist who proved pivotal to the California Beat Generation scene.

An early enthusiastic Bebop jazz fan, his shredded, surreal drawing graces the cover of the Dial Records two-volume album *be*bop JAZZ* which opens the show. Symbolically charged by floating above the record cover, is a photograph Berman took in 1964 of Brian Jones intensely howling during the Rolling Stones's Teenage American Music International (TAMI) show performance with fuzzy bassist Bill Wyman in the background. As the times were a changin', Berman befriended Jones while Berman smoothly slid into the role of groovy

social duke of Topanga Canyon hippiedom – making a cameo as the commune’s seed-spreading dude in the film *Easy Rider* and appearing on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*.



Be*bop JAZZ (1948) album cover, 31 x 26,5 cm; 12 1/4 x 10 3/8 inches

Jazz and rock and soul music were inseparable from Berman’s life and working method. His only child, Tosh Berman, whose book *Growing Up in Wallace Berman’s World* is due out soon, told me that one of his dad’s favorite records to work to was the amazing trance LP *Brian Jones Presents the Pipes of Pan at Joujouka*, a recording of the Moroccan group Master Musicians of Joujouka in performance in 1968 in their village. The woolgathering trance theme of the LP is also felt in the repetitions of the hand image that, in this musical light, look like they are holding up personalized Tarot cards, à la Alejandro Jodorowsky (though they were never used as a Tarot deck). Similar “hand” works blended by a quasi-magical or alchemical operation appear in Berman’s marvelous underground film “Aleph” (1956–66), in which, as in the collages, he uses Hebrew letters (though he was not religious and did not read the language) to frame a hypnotic, rapid-fire noise montage that conjures up the gritty energy of the ‘60s underground.

To the right of the Brian Jones photo is an intriguing “Untitled (Ray Charles, this is The Card That Reads 7)” (1965) collage that mysteriously places Ray Charles in relationship to horses, a horseman, and the number 7.

The grids of the Verifax hand collages could also easily be read as a unique system of notation indicating musical patterns and rhythms typical of West Coast repetitive minimal music, like Terry Riley’s 1968 *In C*. The repetitive component of the hand holding the absent transistor radio provides the rhythmic basis upon which a wild array of variations appears. Furthermore, the orderly structure of the grids entices the viewer to peruse the aligned images as a musical score, visually representing a piece of music’s time signature,



Wallace Berman, "Untitled (Ray Charles, this is The Card That Reads 7)" (1965)
collage 31,8 x 21,6 cm (12,5 x 8 1/2
inches)

phrases, measures, and tempo, with the black monochromes representing rests, that is, silences.

Wallace Berman: Visual Music continues at Frank Elbaz gallery (66 rue de Turenne, Paris, France) through October 11. The exhibition was curated by Sophie Dannenmüller.

MORE FROM HYPERALLERGIC

Review Wallace Berman's Verifax art: Like Web surfing before the Internet

by David Pagel

MAY 13, 2016, 12:01 PM

At Kohn Gallery, “Wallace Berman: American Aleph” paints an intimate picture of the legendary artist who was at the center of the scene when Los Angeles came into its artistic own.

Beautifully organized and installed by Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon, the deeply engaging exhibition contends that it’s high time historians stop thinking of Berman (1926-76) as a California artist and start acknowledging him for what he is: an influential American whose potent works were not only in tune with the wild times in which he lived, but who also anticipated the major transformations that would take place with the development of communication technologies.

Like Andy Warhol’s best works from the 1960s and ’70s, Berman’s pointblank pictures combine the individual attentiveness of handcrafted objects with the implacable anonymity of mechanically reproduced imagery. Where Warhol turned to silkscreen, Berman used a Verifax machine — an early version of the photocopier — to print variously sized grids of similar but distinct images.

Both artists zeroed in on the content of messages and the media by which that content was conveyed. Too smart to think that the medium is the message, Berman and Warhol explored the thorny relationships between what was being communicated and how it was being communicated. Where individuals stand in relation to mass media — and one another — is their great subject.



Wallace Berman's "Untitled (Multi-color Shuffle, A-4 Neil Young)," 1969, Verifax collage with acrylic. (Wallace Berman Estate and Kohn Gallery)

Berman’s go-to composition consists of a life-size hand (often the left) holding a small transistor radio. The face of the radio functions as a frame for images he has scavenged from newspapers and magazines.

Political figures, athletes and astronauts, as well as everyday objects, mystical symbols and musicians, not to mention religious icons, animals and nudes, appear in these vertical rectangles. No bigger than an index card, each is all the more potent for being a part of a larger — and potentially infinite — group. Nearly half of the 80-plus pieces in the exhibition follow this format. Many feature single images. The largest grids are made up of 56.

The experience these pieces generates recalls channel surfing, Web browsing or listening to a random selection of downloaded songs. If you want to make sense of things, you have to do that for yourself. Berman will not do it for you. Like the radio, he simply channels forces flowing through the ether. He leaves viewers free to figure out what it all means.

That DIY ethos runs to the heart of his art. It can be seen in his earliest pen-and-ink drawings, from the 1940s, which pay homage to masters of jazz improvisations while registering the risk of heroin addiction.

Sex and spirituality — often united in blissful instants of harmony — also go to the heart of Berman’s deeply bohemian art. That’s what distinguishes him from other artists interested in the effects — and affects — of mass-produced imagery. More cosmic than local, it shows Berman to be an American original.

Kohn Gallery, 1227 N. Highland Ave., Los Angeles, (323) 461-3311, through June 25. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.kohngallery.com

Wallpaper*

Life's work: Wallace Berman's controversial oeuvre at LA's Kohn Gallery

ART / 11 MAY 2016 / BY MICHAEL SLENSKE



LA's Kohn Gallery has been transformed into a replica of Semina, Wallace Berman's early gallery space, for a new retrospective of his work, entitled 'American Aleph'

From 1957 to 1961, Wallace Berman lived in the Marin County township of Larkspur, California, where he took over an abandoned house on Madera Creek and turned it into Semina, a private gallery space where he would host one-day art exhibitions featuring his own work (and those of his contemporaries). It's fitting then, that curators Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon have recreated the footprint of the space – 'a phantom Semina gallery' – inside LA's Kohn Gallery for 'Wallace Berman: American Aleph'.

'What we're trying to do is really create a survey from the moment he started until he passed away in 1976,' says Bohn-Spector. Though Berman is known mostly for his Verifax collages (made by placing cult and commercial images over the template of a handheld Sony transistor radio from a 1964 advertisement in *Life* magazine) and as the high priest of *Semina* culture – the visual language disseminated through the titular art and poetry journal that Berman published (with work by William Burroughs and Walter Hopps, among others) for a few hundred select individuals in the post-war Beat counterculture – the show begins with Berman's early drawings that he made as a teenager, inspired by jazz greats like Jimmy Durante, Louis Armstrong and Slim Gaillard.

These hang on the outside wall of the phantom gallery, while inside it there is a photo, which appeared on the ninth and final issue of *Semina*, capturing Jack Ruby assassinating Lee Harvey Oswald (altered with the Michael McClure poem 'Double Murder') as well as photos of the sculptural collages – *Temple* and *Veritas Panel* – that he created for his one and only one-person show in 1957 at the Ferus Gallery, back when Walter Hopps and Edward Kienholz were directing it.

'Everything was lost from that show except for the box hanging on that cross,' says Bohn-Spector, pointing to *Factum Fidei*, the mixed media combined with a faded photo of sexual penetration dangling off a white crucifix from a rusty chain. Mellon notes that Berman was arrested at the opening for an illicit drawing that Marjorie Cameron did for *Semina*, which was displayed on the floor inside one of the collages during the opening.

'Rumour has it that [Edward] Kienholz called the cops to make it controversial and they didn't even find the pornographic stuff,' explains Bohn-Spector. 'The vice squad ran right by it and came back. Finally, somebody had to point it out to them. It wasn't even his work. After the arrest, Dean Stockwell bailed him out and he felt like he had been backstabbed. So he left LA and went to San Francisco where he met Jay DeFeo.'

www.artforum.com

ARTFORUM

Wallace Berman

GALERIE FRANK ELBAZ

7 rue Saint-Claude

January 10–March 10

In 1964, Wallace Berman, the great saint of postwar American romanticism, began making collages using the Verifax photocopier. Almost as if constructing a hieroglyphic (or kabbalistic) code, he followed a simple formula: Each picture is based on a life-size photo of a man's hand holding a small transistor radio whose speaker has been replaced with an image—a cross, a Buddha, a snake, and a pistol, to name a few. These images could be displayed individually, like icons, but Berman also combined them in grids of four, sixteen, twenty-five, or fifty-six and in overlapping formations he called "Shuffles." Occasionally, he would paint the resulting collages or, taking advantage of the Verifax process, produce the images as negatives.

These Verifax collages *look* very contemporary, but they are, in fact, anything but. Whatever it was that Berman was touched with—and you can still feel it, radiating from these pieces like hard, cold fire—is no longer present in today's art world, which is probably not a happy place for a holy fool. To give a fuller sense of his achievement, exhibition curator Sophie Dannenmüller has included his 1956–66 film *ALEPH* (the title was given posthumously); also displayed is a selection of Berman's various literary projects, such as copies of his legendary journal *Semina*, and other illustrations, such as the 1974 image he provided for the first English translation of Mallarmé's *Igitur*.

In recent years, Berman's work has been exhibited widely; a retrospective was held in 2005 at the Santa Monica Museum, and a current exhibition at Michael Kohn Gallery features him in "dialogue" with Richard Prince. But there has been almost no opportunity to see the Verifax collages in France until now. Given how enamored Berman was of French cultural icons and how influenced he was in the 1950s by the legacy of Surrealism, it is gratifying to see these works in Paris. Berman was as American as they come, but with this exhibition a small part of his legacy—which we have just begun to recover—comes full circle.

— David Lewis



Wallace Berman, *Untitled*, 1975, collage of twenty-five Verifax copies on panel, 30 x 32 1/2".



Wallace Berman, étoile de la « beat generation »

Le plasticien qui influença Andy Warhol est présenté à la galerie Frank Elbaz

En ces temps où tous ne jurent que par Andy Warhol, la galerie parisienne Frank Elbaz a l'heureuse idée de rappeler à notre souvenir un de ceux qui l'ont certainement inspiré : Wallace Berman. Artiste aujourd'hui méconnu, ce Californien, proche de la « beat generation », fut l'une des grandes figures de l'art des années 1960 et 1970 de la Côte ouest.

Impossible de ne pas penser au « pape du pop » quand l'on découvre ses collages. Avec les négatifs produits par un prototype de nos photocopieuses, ce poète, fasciné par la kabbale, réalisait d'envoûtants photomontages, où se mêlent signes mystiques, formes érotiques ou macabres.

Regain d'intérêt

Partant d'une publicité montrant une main tenant une micro-radio, il y incruste mille motifs, serpent, fleur, flingue ou croix. Comme dans les sérigraphies de Warhol, chaque image, emportée dans la sérialité, semble la même tout en étant à chaque fois légèrement différente.

Créateur de l'éphémère revue poétique *Semina*, dessinateur de nombreuses pochettes de disques be-bop, Wallace Berman a, par ailleurs, réalisé des films, dont l'un – *Aleph* (1963) – est pré-

senté à la galerie : un travail de peinture sur films trouvés, qui laisse surgir, au fil des images, des codes énigmatiques.

Il n'est donc pas étonnant d'apprendre que Warhol rencontra Berman et ses photomontages lors de son fameux voyage à Los Angeles, en 1963. Il le fit même tourner en 1964 dans son film *Tarzan and Jane Regained Sort of*, qu'il réalisa chez et avec l'acteur Dennis Hopper.

Mais Warhol ne fut pas le seul à regarder attentivement cette œuvre qui fait aujourd'hui l'objet d'un véritable regain d'intérêt, notamment depuis son exposition lors de « Traces du sacré » au Centre Pompidou, à Paris, en 2008. Ed Rousha et John Baldessari furent aussi influencés par cette figure charismatique, qui disparut en 1976, à l'âge de 50 ans, dans un accident de voiture.

Et pour toute la jeune génération d'artistes, ce plasticien est loin d'être un inconnu : en ce moment même, la star Richard Prince lui rend un vibrant hommage à Los Angeles. ■

EMMANUELLE LEQUEUX

« Wallace Berman », galerie Frank Elbaz, 7, rue Saint-Claude, Paris-3^e. M^o Saint-Sébastien-Froissart. Tél. : 01-48-87-50-04. www.galeriefrankelbaz.com/ Du mardi au samedi de 11 heures à 19 heures. Jusqu'au 10 mars.

Le Point

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By Judith Benamou-Huet

EN GALERIE

Wallace Berman

La galerie Frank Elbaz, dans le Marais, exhume un artiste américain radical : Wallace Berman. Mort à 50 ans, en 1976, dans un accident de voiture, il avait eu le temps de devenir une sorte de gourou de la Beat Generation, de figurer au générique du film « Easy



Rider» et de montrer ses œuvres dans la mythique galerie de Los Angeles qui exposera, plus tard, Warhol, la Ferus Gallery. Le travail de l'artiste ami du poète Allen Ginsberg et du chevaucheur de Harley Davidson Dennis Hopper est enfin montré à Paris. Il y use du processus de la répétition avec l'ancêtre de la photocopie, le Verifax. Des pièces uniques qui mélangent thèmes mystiques et profanes, coloriations et collages. Du pop historique des années 60 à vendre entre 15 000 et 130 000 euros. Jusqu'au 10 mars, Galerie Frank, 01.48.87.50.04, www.galeriefrankelbaz.com.

FIGARO SCOPE

Wallace Berman

*Galerie Frank Elbaz, 7, rue Saint-Claude (III^e). Tél. : 01 48 87 50 04.
Du mar au sam de 11 heures à 19 heures. Jusqu'au 10 mars.*

Artiste radical de la Beat Generation californienne, Wallace Berman, mort accidentellement à 50 ans en 1976, a laissé une œuvre qui a influencé les générations futures. Il a mis au point le *Verifax* (l'ancêtre de la photocopie), un processus dans lequel il mixe photo, imprimerie et collage.

♥♥ *Ce précurseur du pop art, disciple d'Allen Ginsberg, a laissé des pièces historiques qui ont fait école. Elles se vendent aujourd'hui entre 15 000 et 130 000 €.*

S. de S.



Beat generator

Redécouverte de WALLACE BERMAN, inconnu du grand public, mais vénéré par nombre d'artistes, de Dennis Hopper à Richard Prince.



Wallace Berman (1926-1976), courtesy Michael Kohn Gallery, Galerie Frank Elbaz

Peu de gens savent l'influence qu'a eue Wallace Berman (1926-1976) dans le monde de l'art. Et pourtant, ce pionnier de la scène californienne, qui gravita dans le cercle de la beat generation aux côtés de Ginsberg et de Kerouac, et que certains considèrent comme un précurseur du pop art, eut dès la fin des années 50 un rayonnement singulier auprès de l'avant-garde underground. Fréquentant la jeune scène hollywoodienne et les clubs de jazz de L.A., chef de file des beatniks qu'il publie dans sa revue *Semina*, ami de Kenneth Anger, de Stan Brakhage, Berman était littéralement vénéré par ses pairs mais inconnu du grand public. Cette célébrité paradoxalement confidentielle tient à sa personnalité secrète et marginale, à ses allures de shaman, avec longue tignasse et aspirations mystiques. Une icône immortalisée par Peter Blake en 1967 avec Karl Marx ou Marilyn sur la pochette de l'album *Sgt Pepper's* des Beatles. On comprend pourquoi Dennis Hopper, lors de son récent séjour à Paris, annula tous ses rendez-vous pour se rendre à la Galerie Frank Elbaz, qui lui consacre pour la pre-

➤ **Précurseur du pop art, Berman a eu dès la fin des années 50 un rayonnement singulier auprès de l'avant-garde underground.**

mière fois en France une exposition personnelle. On y voit ses *Verifax Collages*, série réalisée avec photocopieur Verifax, à partir d'un montage d'images mêlant clichés publicitaires, photos de presse, iconographie religieuse et signes kabbalistiques. "D'origine juive mais pas pratiquant, Berman était fasciné par la Kabbale, cette doctrine ésotérique prônant la méditation et l'étude des textes par la permutation des lettres hébraïques et la symbolique des nombres", rappelle la commissaire d'exposition Sophie Dannenmüller.

Ce système de libre association influençait déjà ses premiers assemblages d'objets trouvés. Puis vint le copy-art, dès 1963, où il joue encore sur la polysémie des images. En grilles ou en *shuffles* (éventails), les *Verifax Collages* déclinent l'image - tirée d'une publicité - d'une main tenant un transistor, où viennent se loger des images évoquant le cosmos, la nature, le corps humain, et des objets contemporains. On songe aux sérigraphies de Warhol, au recyclage pop de l'imagerie publicitaire. "Mais, objecte Sophie Dannenmüller, contrairement au père de la Factory, il n'y a nullement chez Berman de complaisance ou de connivence à l'égard de la société de consommation, dont il s'est toujours tenu en marge. Mais plutôt une réflexion sur le geste créateur, la spiritualité, l'humain, et la mort, à l'image des vanités rappelant la fugacité de la vie."

Nathalie Dray

Verifax Collages Jusqu'au 10 mars à la Galerie Frank Elbaz, 7, rue Saint-Claude, Paris III^e, tél. 01.48.87.50.04
/// www.galeriefrankelbaz.com

She - Works by Richard Prince & Wallace Berman Jusqu'au 7 mars à la Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles
/// www.kohngallery.com



Soline Delos, "Beat Boy" in *Elle*, January 17th, 2009

le **guide** culturelle



ART BEAT BOY

Mort à seulement 50 ans, l'artiste californien Wallace Berman (1926-1976) est un véritable mythe en plein retour sur le devant de la scène. Portrait.

Qui ? Un des artistes cultes de la Beat generation, ami d'Allen Ginsberg, de Jack Kerouac, fasciné par la kabbale et considéré comme un gourou par le Tout-L.A. underground des années 50. Preuve de son aura, il figure au milieu d'autres stars de son époque sur la fameuse pochette de l'album « Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band », des Beatles.

Sa marque de fabrique ? L'assemblage, dont il est un des précurseurs, et qu'il pratique grâce au Verifax, l'ancêtre de la photocopieuse. Résultat : des compositions à base de coupures de journaux, de comic books et de lettres hébraïques. Une de ses images récurrentes : une main tirée d'une pub qui, à la place du transistor initial, tient des symboles de la culture populaire, religieuse, érotique... Du pop art, la dimension rebelle en plus.

Ses fans ? L'artiste Richard Prince, Jack Nicholson ou encore Dennis Hopper, qui en parle comme d'un dieu.

SOLINE DELOS

■ « Verifax collages », à la galerie Frank-Elbaz, Paris-3* (www.galeriefrankelbaz.com). Jusqu'au 10 mars.