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A N D

N E O - D A D A .

(THE ART OF THE FOUND OBJECT)

By

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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Alan Lambert 1992

C O N T E N T S:

L I S T O F I L L U S T R A T I O N S

I N T R O D U C T I O N

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

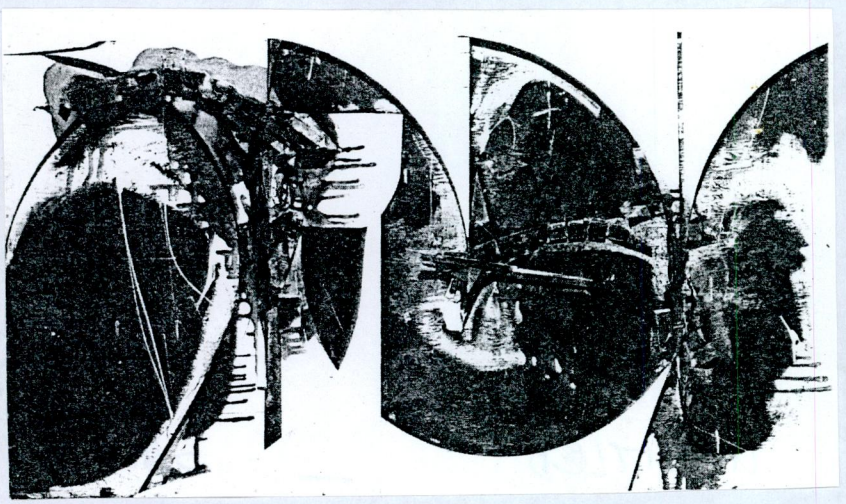
Edward Kienholz was born in Fairfield, a small farming town in north-east Washington, in 1927. He had his first real exposure to art in 1951 when he visited a Rembrandt exhibition at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

He recalls:

> "You know, I thought, 'Geez, If that's a Rembrandt, and he's such a hot shot, you know, there might be a chance for me'. I had the intention of becoming an artist, and an artist makes art, and that was good enough for me". 1

Then 24, he had little knowledge of what had gone before in terms of art. He saw his first serious modern art gallery, the Felix Landau, in 1954.

At that time Kienholz had thought of himself as a painter. He painted on relief surfaces made from chunks of plywood and used the crudest of brushes to make expressionist 'anti-gestures' as he called them. He was working in a small studio on Ventura Boulevard in the San Fernando valley. A good example of his work from this period is an untitled painted wood construction from 1955. (Ill. 1)



ONE: Kienholz. 'Untitled'. Painted wood. 1955.

Felix Landau had no interest in showing Kienholz's paintings, nor did Paul Kantor or Esther Robles, the other two prominent dealers in Los Angeles at the time. Kienholz sometimes had to collect the deposits on beer bottles just to get enough money to eat. But in 1956, at the All-City Art Festival at Barnsdale Park, Kienholz met Walter Hopps, who co-owned the Syndell Studio in Brentwood, a few miles away.

Hopps had a thorough knowledge of modern art history and contemporary art. He had learned much from Walter Arensberg, a member of the original board of the Society of Independent Artists in New York, who had handled Marcel Duchamp's notorious Readymades in 1917. Arensberg's collection had allowed Hopps to view works by Duchamp and the Surrealists.

Kienholz and Hopps took a liking to each other and signed a contract on a hot dog wrapper at a stand on La Cienega Boulevard. It read:

" We will be partners in art for five years." 2

A year later they opened the Ferus Gallery, named by Hopps after a school friend who died at the age of 14 or 15. The Ferus has since acquired legendary status in the history of west coast art.

During the next two or three years Kienholz worked in the Ferus Stable, which was a series of studio spaces behind the gallery. His constructions were gradually growing more elaborate until they became free-standing. This was a critical juncture for Kienholz's work as he was beginning to include junk and everyday discarded objects in his assemblages. He was later to call them Tableaux. When he moved to the Dwan Stable, owned by collector Virginia Dwan, his artistic environment expanded.

The Dwan Gallery and Stable played host to prominent artists of the 'Neo-Dada' and 'Pop' persuasions, such as New Yorkers Oldenburg and Rauschenberg and a European contingency of Arman, Yves Klein and Jean Tinguely. Kienholz and Tinguely quickly became friends. They shared an interest in society's castoffs and spent much time together in the early sixties sifting through thrift shops and junk yards in Los Angeles.

Kienholz describes Tinguely's working method:

"... He was like a kid with scrap metal and junk.
He was just arranging stuff and then looking at
it and then stepping back and studying it ...
in a sort of classical dance." 3

If Tinguely had ever been asked why he used scrap metal for his sculptures he probably would have replied:

" Because it's beautiful." 4

Scrap keeps abstraction and decorative effects at bay. This was a strong current in 'Neo-Dada'. For Tinguely scrap is beautiful because it once had a different existence, when it had a use

and a significance. Pieces of junk are poor, discarded parts which once belonged to human life in some capacity. Tinguely felt that by using them in kinetic sculptures, allowing them to move again, he was injecting them with new life in a different form. This made them even more pathetic, as if they had refused to die, to lie still.

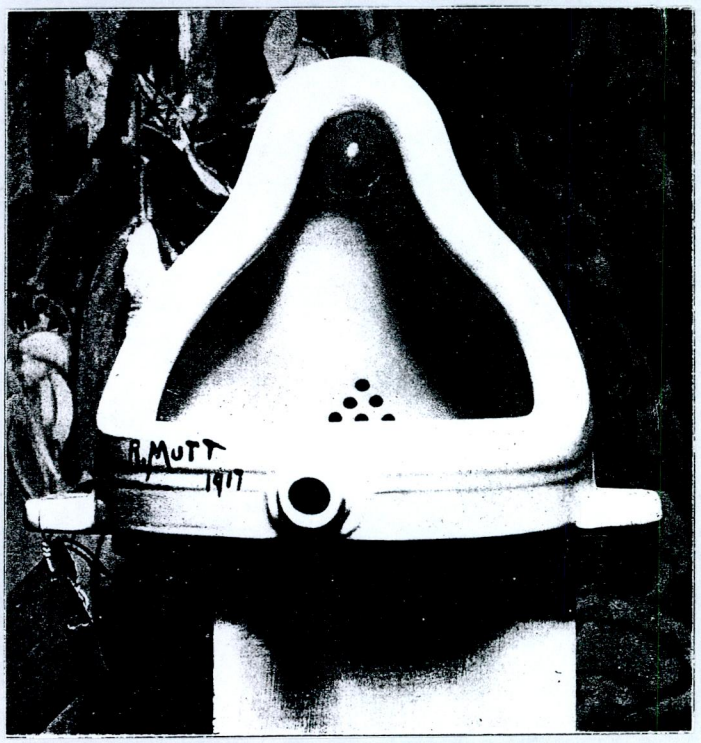
Tinguely's work was a very general reflection on the transcience of human society and the life which persists after our efforts have passed. This is the tragedy inherent in his work.

Kienholz shared this penchant for the tragic, but his concerns were more immediate, more directly relevant to his own life. The found object assemblages which he was beginning to produce forged a distinct, individual approach to specific sociopolitical criticism.

C H A P T E R O N E

AN AMERICAN DADA ARTIST ?

The art of the found object, or 'Objet Trouve', has it's origins in Dada, the true spirit of which can be best seen in the Readymades of Marcel Duchamp. A good example is a urinal which he entered for an exhibition at the Society of Independent Artists in New York in 1917, under the euphemistic title of 'Fountain'. (Ill. 2)



T W O: Duchamp. 'Fountain'. Found object. 1917.

It is a lavatory urinal chosen by Duchamp and left completely intact and unembellished save for the famous 'R. Mutt' signature.

'Fountain' is one of the most infamous objects in the history of modern art. The literature on the subject is vast but riddled with gaps and often completely contradictory in interpretation and criticism. We cannot consult the original object, as it is lost, and we cannot even be sure that Duchamp was the real artist, as he once attributed it to a friend. Even Duchamp's own comments on the object are often self-contradictory.

Some critics accept it as art but deny its significance, some deny that it is art but believe it is significant for the history of aesthetics. A few assert that it is both art and highly significant and some believe it is of no consequence whatsoever.

Given the consternation caused by an object whose whereabouts, purpose and creator are either unclear or self-contradictory, one is reminded of the Dada calling to revolt against art.

A reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement, when faced with the extraordinary diversity and contradictory currents within Dada of the early 1920's, wrote:

> " ... How is one to define, let alone confine, a movement which cannot be identified with any one personality or place, viewpoint or subject, which affects all the arts, which has a continually shifting focus and is moreover intentionally negative, ephemeral, illogical and inconclusive ? " 5

Tristan Tzara, one of Dada's impressarios, wrote in the early 20's that the true Dadas were against Dada.

As soon as the slogan of Dada had been absorbed the Dadas set out to sabotage any attempt at categorizing their movement by mischievously contradicting themselves. Subsequently, the leading Dadas have baffled the efforts of critics and historians to codify their project by publishing mutually incompatible accounts of the significance to be attributed to their exploits.

Considering this, the mysterious history of 'Fountain' personifies the true nature of Dada.

Dada represents artists appalled by developments in contemporary society, who, having recognized art, its theory and history in particular, as a product and reflection of that society, must revolt against art.

However, the earliest interpretation of the nature of the Readymades themselves and their immediate effect on the board members of the Society of Independent Artists in New York in 1917 can be found in the diary of Beatrice Wood, who was Duchamp's working companion during the hanging of the exhibition. She recorded a conversation between Walter Arensberg and George Bellows on the subject of the urinal:

Saturday: April 7th. 1917.

Bellows : " We cannot exhibit it."

Arensberg : " We cannot refuse it, the entrance fee has been paid. "

Bellows : " It is indecent."

Arensberg : " That depends upon the point of view."

Bellows : " Someone must have sent it as a joke. It is signed 'R. Mutt'. sounds fishy to me."

Arensberg : (Feeling the surface and pausing in thought for a moment)
" A lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose, therefore a man clearly has made an aesthetic contribution."

Bellows : " We can't show it, that is all there is to it."

Arensberg : " This is what the whole exhibit is about; an opportunity to allow an artist to send in anything he chooses, for the artist to decide what is art, not someone else."

Bellows : " You mean to say if a man sent in horse manure glued to a canvas that we would have to accept it ?"

Arensberg : " I'm afraid we would. If this is an artist's expression of beauty, we can do nothing but accept his choice. If you look at this entry objectively you will see that it has striking, sweeping lines. This Mr. Mutt has taken an ordinary object, placed it so that its useful significance disappears, and thus has created a new approach to the subject."

Bellows : " It is gross, offensive! There is such thing as decency."

Arensberg : " Only in the eye of the beholder. You forget our bylaws." 6

These acute observations by Walter Arensberg correspond to the interpretation most widely accepted today. The hanging commitee ultimately rejected the urinal on the grounds that it was plagiarism and a plain piece of plumbing.

Duchamp himself, fortifying Arensberg's remarks, replied :

" ... Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the 'Fountain' or not has no importance. He chose it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its usual significance disappeared under the new title and point of view -- created a new thought for that object." 7

This reconstitution of the everyday object is a fundamental aspect of Dada as it appeared in America.

Edward Kienholz's relationship with Dada is a problematic one to say the least and Harvey West's statement, reflecting a widely held view, that Kienholz is an 'American Dada Artist' is a highly debatable one.

Kienholz holds Dada views in part at least when he remarks:

> " ... I can't imagine going into the Louvre and standing in front of a painting and having a vicarious experience with this painting or that artist. It's too pristine; It's too properly hung; It's too perfect; ... It isn't as easy as walking into 'The Beanery'." 8

'Easy', as Kienholz puts it, reflects the directness which he desired to give his work impact.

'The Beanery' (1965) is a recreation of one of Kienholz's haunts, Barney's Beanery. (Ill. 3)

T H R E E : Kienholz. 'The Beanery'. Environmental Tableau.1965.

The bar contains seventeen plaster cast punters, clad in everyday clothes and props, all of whom, save Barney himself, posses clocks in place of their faces. All the clocks are stopped at ten past ten and taped sounds of a bar add immediacy to the work.

This element of frozen time and the stillness of the figures, when juxtaposed with the continuous sound of clinking glasses and endless indecipherable conversation, heightens our awareness of time passing.

As Kienholz remarks:

> " ... A bar is a sad place, a place full of strangers who are killing time." 9

In this work he clearly empathizes with the loneliness of these archetypal characters and situations.

When quizzed on the aesthetic qualities of 'The Beanery', he replied:

> " ... I don't know if it's art, but I don't give a damn." 10

Comparing Kienholz's above statement to the Dada's revolt against art as a product of the society they detested, while bearing in mind the human concerns expressed in 'The Beanery', a simple but fundamental difference can be seen ; Kienholz is disillusioned with the state of his environment, not with art as a product of that environment, so he revolts directly against society and social criticism is his main concern, over and above artistic concern.

J O H N D O E

In 1961 Kienholz gained national attention when he was included in the 'Art of Assemblage' exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Organized by William Seitz, this landmark exhibition reviewed the course of mixed-media, collage and found object art in the twentieth century.

'John Doe' and 'Jane Doe' were given their own small carpeted, windowed room in the exhibition and for the first time Kienholz's personnages joined the company of such artists as Duchamp, Schwitters, Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns.

'John Doe'(Ill. 4) is an assemblage consisting of the head and torso of a mannequin resting on a baby stroller. In place of a heart he possesses a cross in his chest and red paint drips down his face and body. 'John Doe' possesses a phallus, hidden in a compartment at the back of the torso.

He represents a ruthless attack on the archetypal American male and is the first of Kienholz's aggressor figures. Through juxtaposing the baby stroller and the macabre mannequin he comments on the infantile present in everyone. The cross in place of his heart and the dripped paint create a disturbing aura of religion and violence.

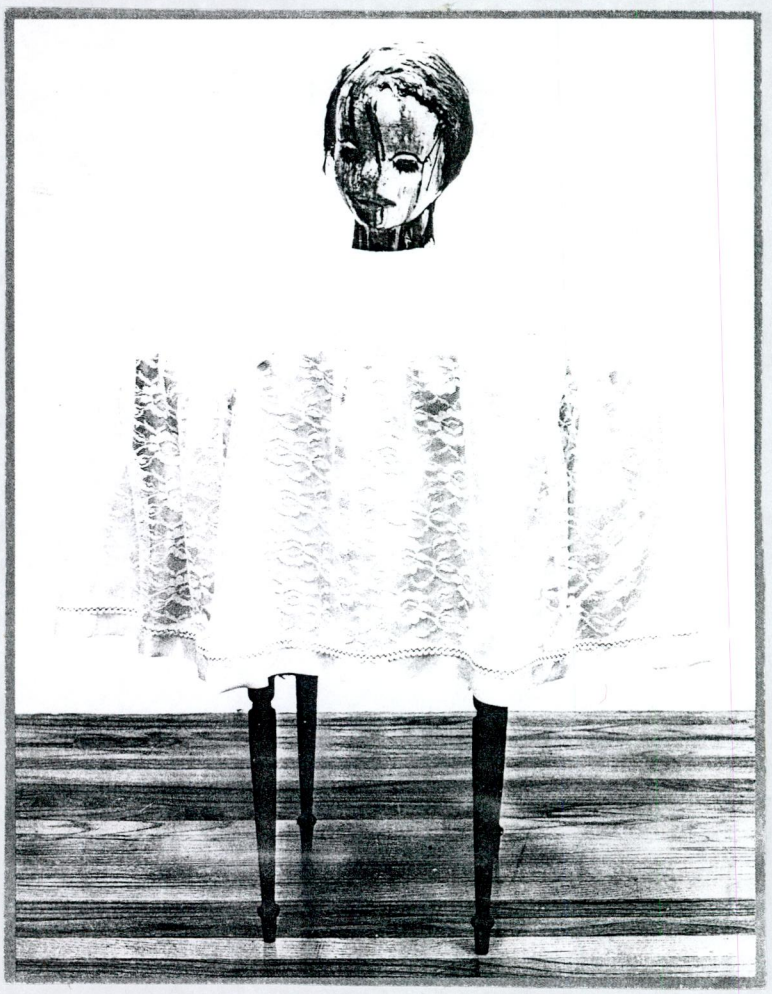
The hypocrisy expressed in these combinations is perhaps deepened by the suggestion of impotence in the hidden phallus; victim becomes victimizer. These elements culminate in a strong sociological portrait of a generic type; the aggressive male.

F O U R: Kienholz. 'John Doe'.Found object assemblage. 1959.

This was a pivotal work for Kienholz, creating a vent for the disgust and estrangement he felt towards his society.
He said:

" ... Adrenalin producing anger carried me through that work." 11

'John Doe' dates from 1959 and in 1960 Kienholz created a counterpart for 'John Doe' entitled 'Jane Doe.'(Ill. 5)
His method of using objects whose meanings work together to create an overall sociological critique, as seen in the baby-stroller and mannequin of 'John Doe', are more crystallised in 'Jane Doe'. He employs objects which assert that the female, from the vantage point of her aggressive male partner, is herself a mere object.
On a straight-forward level he communicates this by attaching a female doll's head to a cabinet of drawers and covering the sculpture up to her neck in an ornate bridal gown.



F I V E : Kienholz. 'Jane Doe'. Found object assemblage. 1960.

If one lifts the gown the drawers can be opened to reveal objects and trinkets which act as metaphors for her emotional and sexual secrets. Like the hidden phallus in 'John Doe'.these secrets suggest impotence and the necessity for these archetypal characters to conceal their intimate feelings. This theme is dramatized by the fact that the viewer must act to reveal those secrets and in doing so we make her the passive recipient of whatever attention we chose to give her. We are forced to become the aggressor when confronted with her passivity. The objects employed in this work are appropriate in relation to 'Jane Doe's' own lifelessness and the sculpture as an object becomes a surrogate for the woman as an object.

Created in the same vein in 1961,'Boy - son of John Doe' is a grotesque outgrowth of his parents. His father's baby-stroller is replaced by a toy car, attached at waist level to a tall mannequin. Like the stroller, the toy car can be seen as a reference to arrested development. In the trunk of the car can be found artifacts of American adolescence; playing cards, a Coor's beer can, a condom, a pack of Pall Mall cigarettes, assorted litter and a cheap paperback book entitled 'The Impotent Fear Through The Erogenous Zones'.

This reaffirms the cost of male domination and female victimization as a central theme in the 'Doe' trilogy, which dramatizes Kienholz's dark vision of American society and shapes his socially critical art to come. The fact that the viewer is not allowed to be an innocent bystander and must harness the everyday use of certain components, such as the trunk and drawers, to become participants, emphasizes Kienholz's identification with and defense of the victim.

Kienholz articulates his ideas by focusing on the meanings and associations of found objects. An everyday baby-stroller, when placed in context in 'John Doe', is rendered heavy with significance. Teenage paraphernalia, when placed in the trunk of a toy car, becomes strongly metaphorical. By careful arrangement of chance finds Kienholz has effectively rendered the 'Doe' family impotent. This manipulation of established meanings is another difference between Kienholz and the Dadas, as the essence of the Readymade is to negate established meanings.

C H A P T E R T W O

PUBLIC INTEREST

During the first flush of serious recognition Kienholz was generally seen as one of the more problematic and controversial artists of his generation in America. For example, in 1966, Maurice Tuchman, curator of modern art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, engaged Kienholz for a large retrospective of his tableaux. Days before the exhibition was set to open, supervisors Kenneth Hahn and Warren Dorn visited the museum and immediately held a press conference to have the exhibition stopped.
Dorn commented:

" My wife knows art: I know pornography." 12

In a letter to Edward W. Carter, President of the Board of Trustees at the museum, Supervisor Dorn wrote:

" ... While certain of the objects or creations are quite meaningless, others are most revolting and, I feel, pornographic in nature. In particular I find the scene in the automobile (Back Seat - Dodge '38) and the House of Prostitution (Roxy's) most repugnant." 13

Two days before the opening, the director of the museum, Kenneth Donahue, tersely replied to Supervisor Dorn's letter of condemnation:

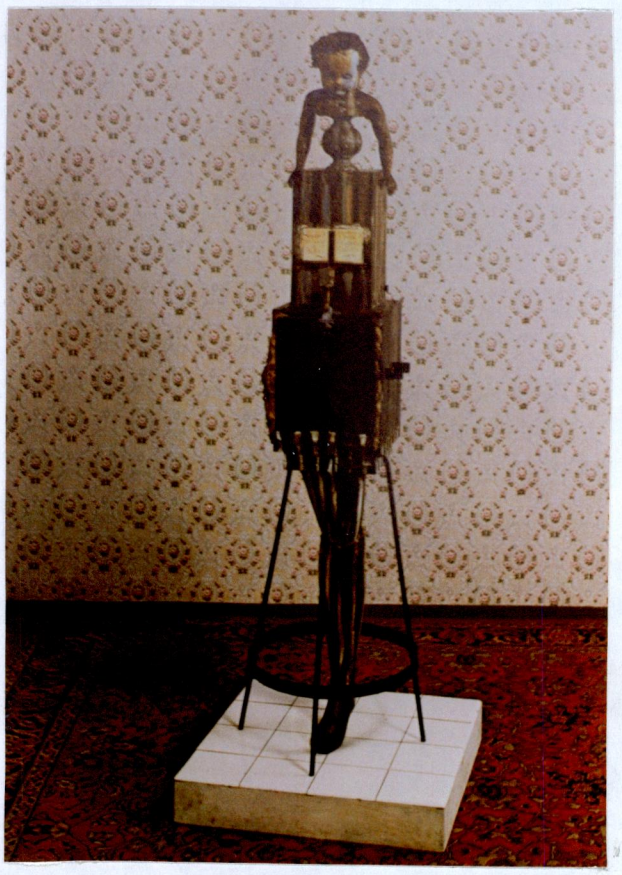
" ... The Kienholz exhibition will open as scheduled, Wednesday, March 30th, 1966." 14

R O X Y ' S

The House of Prostitution was entitled 'Roxy's' and developed from 'A Lady Named Zoe',(Ill. 6) which Kienholz created in 1961. Born of the same random inventory of found objects that resulted in the 'Doe' trilogy, she is a tall vertical assemblage consisting of a doll's head and torso placed on a coin dispensing machine, which serves as an abdomen, with one leg of a mannequin for her lower half. Again dripped paint enhances the macabre effect of the doll and mannequin.

Conceived as the figure of a prostitute, she, like 'Jane Doe' is the resigned recipient of society's aggression. The doll tells us again of the infantile but also suggests that her life has been arrested, which turns her childishness into that of a victim rather than the victimizer seen in 'John Doe'. The coin dispensing machine is perhaps a metaphor for her resignation to the whims of the consumer, turning her most definitely into an emotional and sexual object.

' A Lady Named Zoe' was originally intended as an individual piece, but she led to the creation of 'Roxy's', Kienholz's first real departure into environmental tableaux.



S I X : Kienholz. 'A Lady Named Zoe'. Mixed-media assemblage.1961

First installed in the Ferus Gallery in 1962,'Roxy's'(Ill.7) is a meticulous recreation of a brothel. A June 1943 calender is posted in the waiting room. All the furniture, clothes and the titles on the jukebox are carefully chosen to correspond with the time period, right down to a portrait of General MacArthur. For this piece Kienholz created a series of figurative assemblages, each with a generic name:

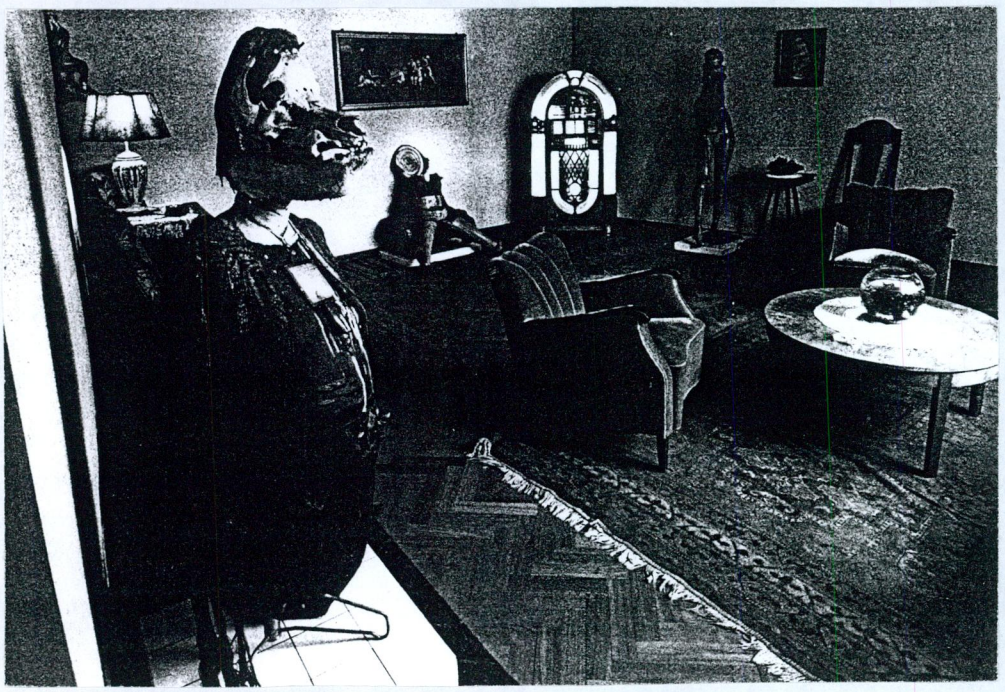
Ben Brown, Miss Cherry Delight,
Fifi - A Lost Angel, Cockeyed Jenny,
Diana Poole - Miss Universal,
Five Dollar Billy, A Lady Named Zoa,
and the Madame.

'A Lady Named Zoa' was an identical replacement for 'Zoe, who had been bought by Virginia Dwan, who refused to sell her back.

They are not fully realized individual characters, but metaphors for one social reality: the dreary life of prostitution.

Kienholz recalls:

> " ... I went back in memory to going to Kellog, Idaho, to a whorehouse when I was a kid, and just being appalled by the whole sitation - not being able to perform because it was just a really crummy, bad experience; a bunch of old women with sagging breasts that were supposed to turn you on and, like I say, it just didn't work."
> 15



S E V E N : Kienholz. 'Roxy's'. Environental Tableau. 1962.

Even if the above recollections influenced and informed the work, 'Roxy's' offers not so much an autobiographical work but a work which has allowed Kienholz's personal experience to inform the expression of an archetypal experience as a social critique. 'Roxy's' also displays a change in Kienholz's working method, as he is beginning to select specific items in accordance with a preconceived idea.

This can be seen in perhaps the most distinctive of the prostitute figures, 'Miss Cherry Delight'(Ill. 8).

E I G H T : Kienholz.'Miss Cherry Delight'.Figurative Assemblage. 1962.

She consists of a dressing table, scattered with resin encrusted bric-a-brac and the disembodied head of a mannequin hanging in the mirror frame. In the half open drawer of the dresser there is a letter rich in implications which allows us to imagine the path of her life :

> Dear Sis,
>
> How are you? We are fine except Momma has her dizzy spells yet. Poppa got the crops in but he says it doesn't look too good this year, what with the dry spell and all. By the way, Poppa said to thank you for the $ 20.00 as it came in real handy. Poppa says you must have a real good job to be able to spare that kind of money. I have to go back to school this fall. I'll be a senior this year and then maybe I can come to the city and get a job too, huh? Things are about the same in this place. Fulton's barn blew down and last week the Guthmillers cow had

twin calfs. It's all so dry and dull here. If only I could be there with you and see all there are to see. Carl Rathburn asked after you again and wanted to know when you were coming home, so I told him, Huh, that'ed be a pretty day! I got to quit now and help Momma with the chores.

Love 'till I see you.
Sis.

P.S. Write soon as we haven't heard from you in quite a spell.

16

Thus Kienholz gives the 'girls' narrative lives of their own and yet they remain archetypal, perhaps because they share a common tragedy by their very trade. The information found in the letter works in conjunction with the arranged objects of the sculpture to provide the viewer with the chance to piece together a tale from the visual and verbal clues. It's not often, however, that Kienholz gives a great deal of biographical information.
The objects themselves, he says, reveal :

" ... All the little tragedies ... evident, and all the things that have happened to people." 17

As Robert L. Pincus wrote :

" ... In (Kienholz's) art, objects function as a sort of pictorial vocabulary." 18

In 'Roxy's' this pictorial vocabulary works on many levels. The furniture and props used to create the brothel environment are presented purely for what they are -- creating a context for the furniture and props of the assemblages themselves to fully convey their symbolic qualities towards the social comment.

T H E B A C K S E A T D O D G E '3 8

Like 'Roxy's', the 'Back Seat Dodge '38', from 1964 (Ill.9) is informed by Kienholz's personal experience and also comments on archetypal characters. Remembering his own early sexual experiences of 1944, in his father's 1938 Dodge car, Kienholz was determined to find a 1936, '37 or '38 model which matched the car of his memories.
The sculpture consists of the modified body of a '38 Dodge whose back seat is occupied by a couple in the throes of sexual passion. The body of the male is made of chicken wire and the female is partially clad cast body parts. They share one faceless head.

For Kienholz, the creation of these characters becomes an intense emotional involvement.

He recalls the props found in a thrift shop which named the figures:

> " ... It was a three dollar watch when it was brand new and engraved on the back of it was, 'To our son Harold', and anybody that would engrave a cheap watch with that kind of sentiment -- the engraving costs three times what the watch costs new -- I couldn't beleive it. And in the same tray was a little pin that said 'Mildred'. So that named the figures immediately." 19

He goes on to express the heightening of his emotional involvement through the transgression of the character's privacy by the viewer:

> " ... I really felt almost like crying because Harold and Mildred became real in the process of making them -- real enough that I felt like I betrayed them by making them subject to the will of anybody that wanted to take the handle and open the door." 20

N I N E: Kienholz. 'Back Seat Dodge '38'. Mixed-media Tableau. 1964.

The other props in this tableau are true to the Dodge '38 era. There is a racoon's tail attached to the car aerial and an Olympia beer bottle from the time lies just outside the car on a piece of astroturf.

These specific references to a period, similar to the historically faithful recreation of 'Roxy's', work in a curiosly contradictory way -- emphasizing the typicality of the scene -- thus expressing the universal through the particular. This aspect is reinforced by the car radio which is always tuned into local contemporary stations.

This literal and often narrative approach and his concern for the suffering of society's victims, his need to expose and dramatize hypocrisy and injustice in the most graphic terms possible, and the element of shame in his pornotropic portaits-touched with a mute compassion for the sordid, the derelict, the unspeakable -- all suggest an affinity with contemporary literature more than visual art.

Barabara Rose expressed this dilemma in a 1963 review of 'Roxy's' when she wrote:

> " ... Kienholz obviously has something to say, but why has he chosen to express himself visually and not verbally ? " 21

Perhaps this can be answered by referring back to the aggression and anger which fueled Kienholz during this period. The sheer physical effort of constructing 'Roxy's',or the 'Back Seat Dodge '38', reflects how genuine his feelings were. These feelings were heightened by the realization of Harold and Mildred as three-dimensional figures, which gave them a kind of presence which is impossible in words. He strove to acheive a palpable immediacy which would convey his message in the most graphic form, being accessible and vivid at once.

In the short time between 1959 and 1962, Kienholz had developed a wide range of uses for the found objects in his work -- from the chance finds which conceived the 'Doe' trilogy, to the entire environment of 'Roxy's'. He utilizes the covert meanings of objects, whether found or specifically selected, to make an entire work, as well as its individual components, function metaphorically. Again, this expresses the basic difference between Kienholz's literal brand of 'Objet Trouve' and the abstract flavour of Duchamp's.

The strongest contemporary parallels for Kienholz's aggressor figures, victims and archetypal experiences can be found in texts that express the Beat sensibility of the late fifties and early sixties. A passionately critical view of American society can be found in such writings as Allen Ginsburg's 'Howl And Other Poems'(1956),William Burrough's 'Naked Lunch'(1959), 'Soft Machine'(1961), and 'The Wild Boys'(1969), as well as Norman Mailer's 'White Negro : Superficial Reflections On The Hipster'(1957).

Kienholz shared with these writers a penchant for horrific images and strove to reveal the sordid nature of American society.

Ginsburg wrote, at the outset of his poem 'America'(1956):

" ... America I've given you all and now I am nothing.
America two dollars and twenty seven cents,
January 17, 1956 / I can't stand my own mind /
America when will we end the human war? / Go fuck
yourself with your atom bomb." 22

This direct, uncompromising expression of overwhelming disillusionment and underlying satire very much reflect the horrific flavour of such tableaux as 'Roxy's' and the 'Doe' trilogy.
Similarly, in 'The White Negro', Mailer writes:

" ... No wonder then that these have been the
years of conformity and depression. A
stench of fear has come out of every
pore of American life and we suffer from
collective failure of nerve. The only
courage, with rare exceptions, that we
have been witness to, has been the
isolated courage of isolated people." 23

Kienholz shared the strong distaste that the Beats had for post-war American society and he reflects:

" ... Back at the time of Kerouac, there was a
change in the air; you could feel a change
coming. " 24

It is this need for direct expression of disgust with society that placed him close to the Beat sensibility, but also set him aside from his contemporaries in the visual arts.
Duchamp's metaphysical reticence is very much at odds with Kienholz's methods of harnessing the specific associations of objects. Yet Kienholz shares the Dada flair for social disruption. Supervisor Dorn's perception of the Los Angeles retrospective as a " Moral Outrage! " recalls George Bellows' view of the 'Fountain' as " Gross " and " Offensive! ".
The public interest, fuelled by the attempts to suppress the exhibition, was poetic justice for Kienholz. He had bugged the exhibition himself, to tape people's reactions, and had caught such remarks as:

" ... Why It's a moral outrage. Can you imagine
women and children seeing that? I can't
believe it." 25

This tape left a distinct impression on Kienholz, although he later destroyed it.
Critics who started addressing Kienholz's work, from the time of 'The Art Of Assemblage' exhibition, never seemed to be able to find a way to reconcile his intense social concerns with what they saw as 'Neo-Dada' tendencies. The furore of the Los Angeles retrospective puts one in mind of the rebellious activity

of European Dada almost forty years previously, the controversy itself reflecting an anti-art stance.

In his work Kienholz manages to synthesize the techniques of Abstract Expressionism -(through the resin and encrusted paint, with which he actively christens his tableaux), Dada* -(through his social satire and anti-art feelings), and Surrealism -(through the use of visual metaphors), and combines all these with explicit social concern and outrage. Thus being neither lyrically abstract, nor Pop, nor representational - He stands apart.

However, the cumulative effects of Duchamp's Readymades and the introduction of the found object was to inspire the upcoming generation of artists in America to create art that was more like the real world than any art that came before it.

* The reference to Dada, in this instance, may seem contradictory, given the earlier discussion of the 'Fountain'.But it refers to European Dada (as opposed to American Dada), which took a path very different to the Readymade's. In the twenties, Dada in cities such as Berlin and Cologne became strongly political and revolutionary.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

CONTEMPORARIES

Edward Kienholz said in 1962:

> " ... Everybody lumps us together and says, ' Oh well, It's just the rebirth of Dada', which is not true. The need is different. There's no Dada need. It's just a thing of this time. The thing now is social protest. The show down at the Ferus Gallery right now, the Andy Warhol show -- the Campbell's Soup show -- is social protest." 26

The Campbell's Soup cans (Ill. 10), which express the supermarket blandness of American culture and re-assess the factory standard image in the context of art, are not truly a form of social protest. Kienholz's misreading of Warhol's Ferus Gallery exhibition suggests a misunderstanding of his fellow artists. One is reminded of his affinity with the Beat sensibility and the repugnance he felt towards American society. The voyeur-participation of 'The Back Seat Dodge '38', the biographical information of 'Roxy's' and the plastic realisation of archetypal victims and victimizers in the 'Doe' trilogy, all constitute an anguished social outcry. His use of found objects, whether literal or metaphorical, forms a pictorial vocabulary through which he can express his social drama. It is this social drama that is at the heart of his work. Given the anger which fuelled this strong human interest, the elegance and witt of Warhol may have appeared obsolete to Kienholz. Hence his view of Dada as a thing of the past. However, the Campbell's Soup cans appear to continue the work of Duchamp's found objects, in the form of the found image.

Kienholz's work is not about the objects, or the images, but about the stories they tell. While Warhol takes care to preserve the maximum of mass-media triviality, Kienholz expresses deep emotional involvement in his objects.

Jorn Merkert relates an anecdote:

> " ... One day (Kienholz) showed me a photograph of an elegant, well dressed gentleman in a fur-collared overcoat -- which allows for speculations as to his wealth -- with snow covered trees in the background. It had a brass frame, richly ornamented, but no glass. The man's face was blurred in a peculiar way, as if rubbed off. The only thing still visible of the woman next to him was part of her dress. The face had disappeared, now there was a pale, rough and dirty spot.

Kienholz asked me what I thought of it. I began to tell him something about the cliche of the well to do capitalist typical of the Weimar Republic, people of the kind George Grosz had portrayed. Then he asked me about the history of this picture. I didn't know what to say. So he told me his story of the picture.

The man must have died before the woman and this woman must have loved this man very much. One day the picture had fallen down, -- possibly during an air raid? -- the glass had broken and wasn't replaced. The woman must have taken this picture up in her hands very often, as Kienholz demonstrated for me. His thumb came to cover the woman's face, which explained why this part had been destroyed. And what did she do? Naturally she kept kissing it lovingly -- which in turn explained the blurred face of the man." 27

T E N: Warhol. 'Campbell's Soup Cans'. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas. 1962.

This shows Kienholz's explicit stance on moral and human issues and his emotional involvement.

If it is social criticism which sets him apart from the American Dada that came before him, then it is this emotional involvement which sets him aside from 'Neo-Dada'.

N A P L E S

Joseph Cornell is a native American artist who also played a large part in anticipating the art of Kienholz's generation. Cornell, born in 1903, was many years Duchamp's junior, but the two men interacted regularly in New York.

One day Cornell showed Duchamp Culvier's theory of reconstructing a dinosaur from one bone, to which Duchamp replied:

" ... It's a romantic vapour." 28

This shows the huge awareness of history which Cornell found in objects, much to the opposition of the Readymade. In his early work Cornell drew much from the Surrealists.His 1932 collage, depicting a victorian woman lying under a flowering sewing-machine, echoes Lautremonts famous passage:

" ... Beautiful as the chance meeting of a sewing-machine and an umberella on a dissecting table." 29

This was adopted by the Surrealists as their motif.

In the same year Julian Levy held an exhibition of small shadow boxes by Cornell, entitled 'Minutiae, Glass Bells, Coupe D'Oeil, Jouets Surrealists'. The boxes, the largest being five inches by nine inches, were complemented by thimbles propped on needles, bisque angels, miniscule silver balls under glass bells, cut up engravings of fish and butterflies, coloured sand and brass springs, all moving freely in small round boxes like compass cases. Yet the containers and objects varied little from their original state. they were transformed in the manner of the Readymade. His visual vocabulary of objects and images conveyed the deep, subconscious dreamworld of the Surrealists, with whom he empathised -- like the collages of Max Ernst or George Grosz, or the quirky objects depicted in the paintings of Magritte.

At this point, by way of manipulating the associations of his selected objects, in a Surreal, but, none the less, illustrative manner, Cornell's work held strong parallels with Kienholz's work to come. But in the decade to follow, he was gradually to eradicate this illustrative penchant, eliminating everything but the exact object or texture. The structure and arrangement of these elements was to increase in importance. He was bridging the gap between Dada and Surrealism and tracing a path towards the minimal but expressive use of the object.

In 1942-43 Cornell produced an assemblage subtitled 'Naples' (Ill. 11), which is a fine example of his object association as a method of symbolically evoking historical tales or myths.

'Naples' is a box construction containing a goblet anchored to a laundry line by a baggage ticket, marked with Naples on one side and a hotel address and vista of a smoking Mount Vesuvius on the back. It is set against the backdrop of an old Italian street.

E L E V E N: Cornell. 'Naples'. Found Object Assemblage. 1942-43.

In this context the goblet becomes a ship bearing Cerrito back from her world travels to visit her birthplace. Cerrito was born in 1817 and lived in a typical Neapolitan street similar to the one in the backdrop of the assemblage. Legend has it that she

was the reincarnation of Parthenope, who was washed up on the Naples shore after throwing herself into the sea on failing to seduce Ulysses with her beautiful voice. Naples is said to have grown from 'The Siren City' as a kind of urban cenotaph to Parthenope, a prefiguration of Ondine.

By the 1950's Cornell was orienting most of his objects in this way -- towards a dreamworld history, yet the personal qualities of the objects had been eradicated, which prefigured much of the Kitsch art of the sixties in its aesthetic.

Thus Cornell seemed to divide the path of 'Objet Trouve', by introducing a metaphorical imagery, originally drawn from Surrealism, while retaining a certain amount of aesthetic purism from Duchamp. Yet it was the aesthetic qualities which seemed to be adopted by the upcoming generation of artists.

Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns were amongst those of Kienholz's generation that were most profoundly involved with Duchampian and Cornellian preoccupations. They closely associated with both men in New York.

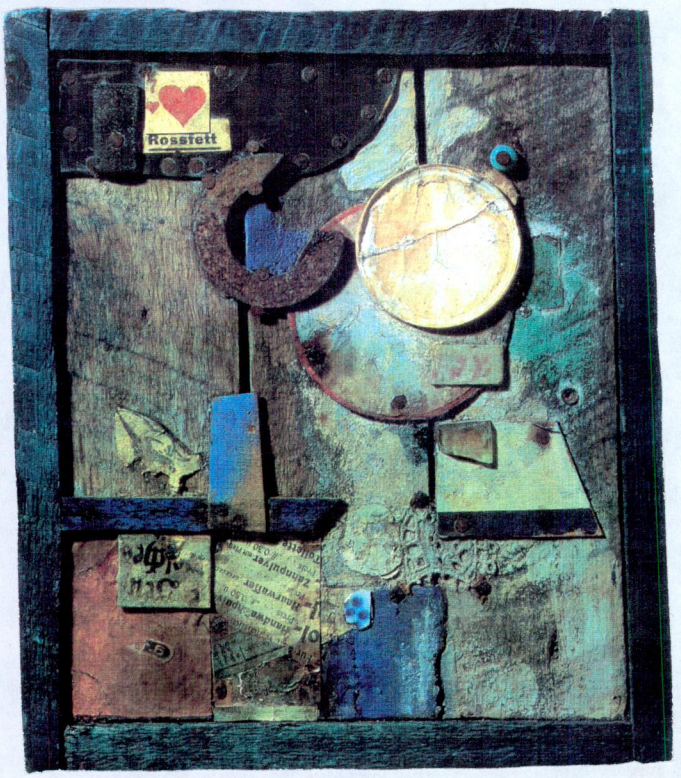
Their mentors' introduction of the ordinary object into art had been subsumed into their painterly concerns and expanded their medium rather than negating it. Both Rauschenberg and Johns use fragments of the real world on a scale and intent that parallel Duchamp's or Cornell's approach to assemblage. When Rauschenberg saw Duchamp's 1912 'Bicycle Wheel'(A wheel mounted on a stool), in 1953, he said it was:

"`... The most fantastic piece of sculpture
I had ever seen." 30

Critics have often compared Rauschenberg's work to the Dada collages of Kurt Schwitters from the 1920's. When Rauschenberg first saw Schwitters' work, which was not until five years after he began making found object collages of his own, he said:

" ... I felt like he made it all just for me." 31

Kurt Schwitters worked in Hanover in Germany in the 1920's. Through a disagreement with Huelsenbeck, who deemed him unfit to join the Berlin Dada club in 1919, he formed his own interpretation of Dada, naming it 'Merz'. He explored the destruction/creation dialectic of Dada in his abstract assemblages. Collecting a variety of litter off the streets -- ticket stubbs, paper wrappers, old letters, labels, advertising leaflets and tin lids -- he glued and nailed them together and then added colour. He created a long series of harmonious compositions, with a sensibility in choice of materials and a subtle eye for design and colour. The 'Merzbilder', as he called them, aswell as holding abstract qualities, evoked the fleetingness of life with both humour and pathos by preserving the fragile remnants of everyday reality. A good example is his 'Rossfett'(Horse Fat), from 1919 (Ill. 12).



T W E L V E: Schwitters. 'Merzbild Rossfett'(Horse fat).
Mixed-media assemblage. 1919.

In ways, the nature of Rauschenberg's and, to a lesser degree, Johns' work seems closer to that of the 'Merzbilder' than to Cornell's and Duchamp's assemblages. Probably because of its continual awareness of its immediate environment. The fleetingness of life expressed by Schwitters recalls the tragi-comic aspect of Tinguely's Kinetic sculptures.

However, the metaphorical use of objects evident in 'Naples' is reflected very much in Kienholz's tableaux and is perhaps the only area of Dada/'Neo-Dada' through which Kienholz has definitely passed.

'The Wait'(Ill. 13), dating from 1964-65, is a tableau which displays strong metaphors. Kienholz constructed it entirely from found objects.

It depicts an old woman, in a chair, passing away the remaining years of her life in reminiscence. Her head consists of a jar, inside which is a deer's skull -- heavily symbolic of age, death and the passing of time. Her limbs too, are mere bones protruding from her dress. It has a palpable, immediate sense of decay. Attached to the front of the jar is a framed sepia photograph of a youthful face -- either her memory of, or present image of, herself.

Around her neck she wears a necklace of glass jars containing trinkets and objects that are symbolic of her memories

and sentiments and on the tables and wall around her are collected photographs and portraits of an imagined family. She clings to a stuffed cat in her lap - the only real part of her world left.

T H I R T E E N:Kienholz.'The Wait'.Found Object Tableau.1964-65.

The use of the framed photograph for her face anticipates certain aspects of Kienholz's work to come, for it establishes the work as a kind of melancholy portait rather than a social outcry. This aspect is furthered by the composition of the tableau, which is as carefully composed as a painting or a studio photograph.

'The Wait' is one of the purest examples of his found object work from this period, as, without invented biographical information, period reconstruction or voyeur-participation, it conveys the expressive potential of the banal or discarded object by creating a context in which its multiple implications become apparent. Recalling 'Naples', this element of pure object association owes much to Cornell.

However, the formal composition of 'The Wait', as opposed to the environmental flavour of 'Roxy's'or 'The Back Seat Dodge'38', also draws parallels to the work of one of Kienholz's more prominent contemporaries, George Segal.

Segal, born in 1924, is a New York artist who shares Kienholz's literary viewpoint, to a degree, but his work also incorporates abstraction. He casts ordinary figures, in everyday posture, in plaster and then reconstructs a familiar environment to support them. However, they do not express the anguish of Kienholz's tableaux. They serve as a kind of melancholy reflection on society with a strong feeling of the spiritual, But also as an arena for abstract formality.

Segal explains:

" ... There's as much happening with abstract formality as there is with the literary or psychological ... I'm trying to weave them together until they can't be separated." 32

In his early days in New York, in the 1950's, Segal came to believe that pure abstraction was impossible for him and he was determined to preserve the world around him by objectifying it in art. His choice of the figure gave vent to his own feelings and experiences, but harmonizing this with tenets of abstraction became a personal struggle.

He says:

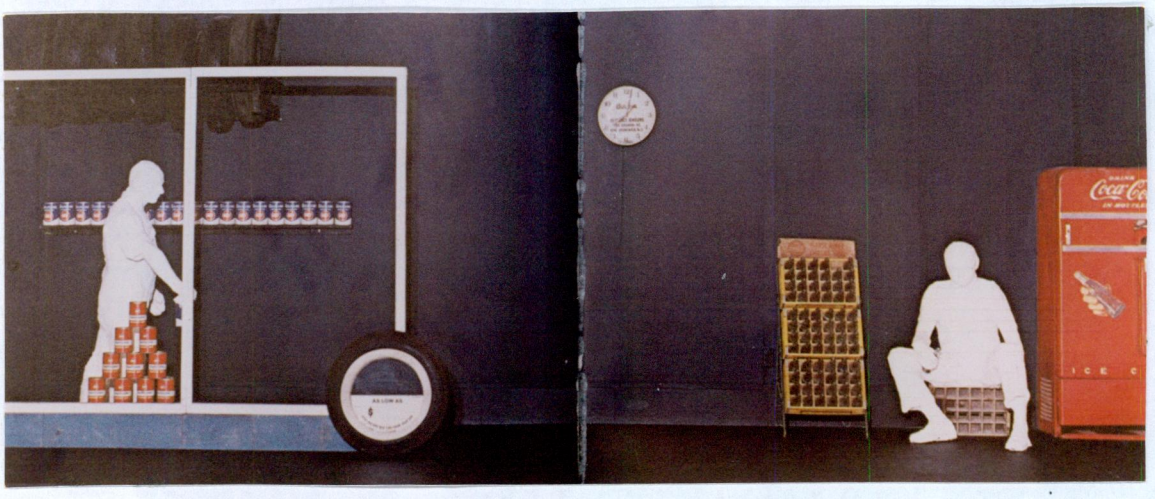
" ... Expressions of the spirit are completely dependant on the flesh. One thing can't be substituted for the other. Both are aspects of the same thing, which is why, in the face of Abstract Expressionism, which staggered and impressed me, I felt I honestly couldn't perform without referring to my physicalness." 33

This need to retain the figurative relates very much to Kienholz's need to acheive graphic immediacy, but the abstract element steered Segal in a different direction.

T H E D I N E R

Between 1958 and 1960 Segal interacted closely with Allan Kaprow, who had known Kienholz in his early days on the West-Coast. Kaprow was working towards a series of 'Happenings'. They discussed the creation of a new art, which would be a total experience of movements, sounds and even smells of everyday life. Kaprow, and subsequently Segal, was greatly influenced by John Cage, who also played a large part in the lives of Rauschenberg and Johns. Cage insisted on the use of common, perishable, non-art materials -- reflecting the desire, since Duchamp, to blur the boundaries between art and life.

However, Segal gradually rejected the Cage/Kaprow sensibility in order to intensify his own experience. An example of his efforts to synthesize abstract and descriptive, figurative elements can be seen in one of his tableau from 1963-64, entitled 'The Gas Station'(Ill. 14). It consists of two ghostly white plaster figures set amongst a pyramid of oil cans, tires, a stack of crates and a Coca-Cola machine. Like 'The Wait', it is carefully ordered to the format of a painting in a shallow space. In this reconstituted reality, familiar elements, set against unmodulated backgrounds, become new focal points. This reflects aspects of the Readymade, but also communicates an empathy with the individual, however minimal its expression might be.



F O U R T E E N: Segal.'The Gas Station'.Plaster and Found Object Tableau. 1963-64.

Similarly, in 1966, Segal completed 'The Diner'(Ill. 15)-- two plaster figures in a reconstructed cafe setting.

F I F T E E N: Segal. 'The Diner'. Plaster and Found Object Tableau. 1966.

Segal says, of 'The Diner':

> " ... I don't care about any specific soap opera that might be taking place. You can imagine 48 different plots." 34

This reluctance to specify any particular narrative draws parallels with the archetypal experiences and generic characters of Kienholz's tableaux from the same period. However, for Segal, social criticism never took over -- simply preserving contact with the world remains the crux of his work, rather than making a social analysis or condemnation of it.

Segal relishes the factory standardization of mass produced design. When asked about the forms in his work, he says he uses them;

> " ... Because the materials come that way." 35

This puts him close to Warhol in certain respects and recalls the everyday qualities of the 'Merzbilder'.

Similarly, art critic Leo Steinberg asked of Jasper Johns:

> " ... Do you use these letter types because you like them, or because that's how the stencils come? "

To which Johns replied:

> " ... But that's what I like about them, that they come that way." 36

F L A G

Jasper Johns rose to fame in the late fifties with distinct, idiosyncratic paintings, such as 'Flag', from 1955 (Ill. 16).

S I X T E E N: Johns. 'Flag'. Encaustic on Canvas. 1955.

Johns' earlier work was reminiscent of Cornell, much of which he destroyed in 1954, but with 'Flag' he embarked on a direction of work which subsumed, in a painterly manner, the central concerns of the Readymade.

Describing 'Flag' and 'Target'(another of his distinct paintings from 1958), he says:

> " ... They're both things which are seen and not looked at, not examined, and they both have clearly defined areas which could be measured and transferred to canvas." 37

They are Readymade images. By painting these images in heavily worked encaustic, transporting them from their normal setting, they become both familiar and unfamiliar and so, worthy of notice.

This reconstruction of the Readymade as the found image, like Warhol's soup cans, was widely excercised by artists such as Roy Lichtenstein. Lichtenstein selected fragments of everyday comic-strips -- love stories, war comics, etc. -- and meticulously enlarged them ten-fold on canvas.

1956 and '57 saw Johns' first use of objects attached to the surface of the painting. E.G. 'Canvas'.(Ill. 17)

S E V E N T E E N: Johns. 'Canvas'. Encaustic on canvas and object. 1956-'57.

Historian Michael Crichton observes:

> " ... The fact that the attached objects are painted over, as if they are part of the original surface, draws attention to and throws doubt upon the meaning of the surface in a disturbing way." 38

At this time Johns was sharing a studio with Rauschenberg, the 'enfant terrible', as the popular press had named him.

C H A R L E N E

One of Rauschenberg's most prominent works from this period is the nine foot high red canvas entitled 'Charlene', from 1954 (Ill. 18). It is covered with mirrors, bits of cloth and wood, parts of shirts and undergarments, flattened umberellas, post-cards, comicstrips, cheap reproductions of old master paintings and it's own built in light source, by way of an unfrosted electric bulb. It's composition reflects a Zen influence from John Cage and recalls the 'Merzbilder'. He is careful to place his materials so that none is subservient to another, yet each part retains its own history.

E I G H T E E N. Rauschenberg.'Charlene'. Mixed-Media. 1954.

Frank O'Hara, of the Art News, said it was an;

" ... Ecstatic work by a serious, lyrical talent."

While Stuart Preston, of the New York Times, said there was:

" ... No point in taking it too seriously." 39

'Charlene' expressed an awareness of an objects history, which is a fundamental difference between Rauschenberg and Johns, who remained faithful to the eradication of an object's meaning.

Rauschenberg had, however, passed through the realm of the Readymade as, a year previously, he had exhibited a piece called 'Music Box'(Ill. 19), in the Stable Gallery in New York.

N I N E T E E N: Rauschenberg. 'Music Box'. Found Object Construction. 1953.

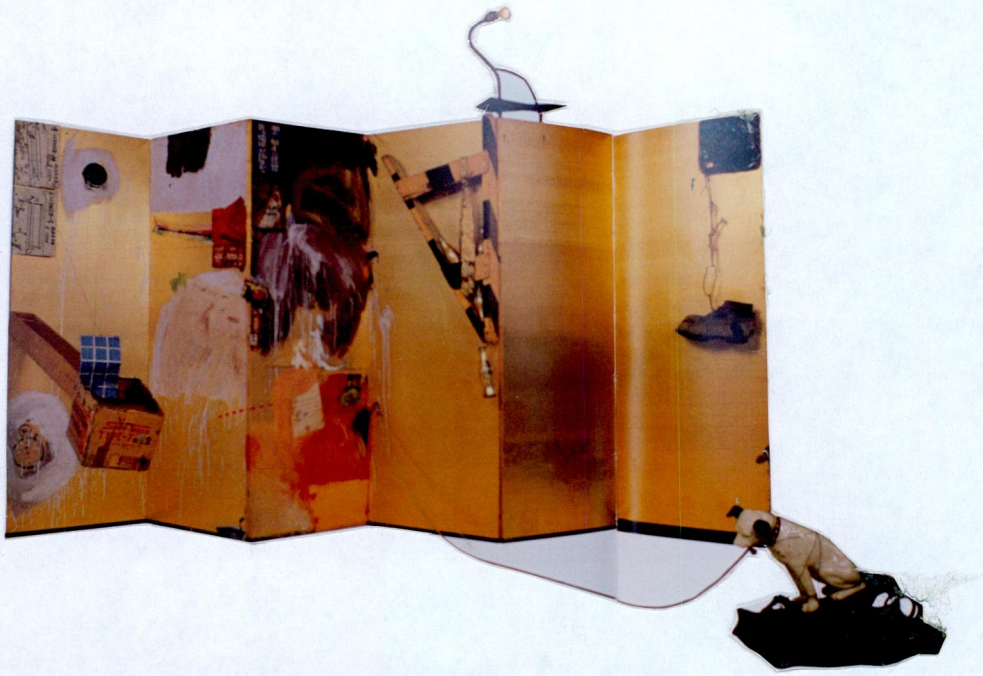
The box was designed to be picked up and shaken so that stones would run across the nails that lined the inside of the box to create sounds. When Duchamp visited the gallery he told Rauschenberg:

" ... I think I've heard that song before." 40

In the same year he erased a De Kooning drawing and called it ' Monochrome Non-Image'.
As he explained years later:

" ... I was trying both to purge myself of my teaching and at the same time excercise the possibilities." 41

Over the following decade Rauschenberg and Johns worked in close proximity, seeing each others work daily. They forged a distinct aesthetic in the form of assemblages like Rauschenberg's 'Gold Standard' from 1964 (Ill. 20), and Johns' 'Out The Window No.2' from 1962 (Ill. 21).



T W E N T Y: Rauschenberg.'Gold Standard'. Mixed-Media. 1964.

T W E N T Y O N E: Johns.'Out The Window No.2'. Mixed-Media. 1962.

The fundamental difference between these two artists can be seen by comparing two quotations.

A frequently cited passage from Johns' notebook reads:

" ... Take an object.
Do something to it.
Do something else to it.
" " " " " ."

Rauschenberg says, in a much quoted statement:

" ... Painting relates to both art and life.
Neither can be made. (I try to act in
the gap between the two)."

This relates very much to the 'Merzbilder' of Schwitters, in creating art from the remnants of modern environments. Johns' statement expresses a painterly respect for the Readymade.

George Segal's figurative awareness sets him aside from this 'Neo-Dada' activity, but his minimalist use of commonplace materials differs greatly from the intense drama of Kienholz's work.

W A R

Duane Hanson is a curious artist who had never seen any real 'Pop' or 'Neo-Dada' art, but had learned from magazines that it drew upon the utterly commonplace in life.

He said:

" ... It certainly spurred me on. Especially
when I saw the work of George Segal." 42

Like Segal, Hanson cast average, everyday figures, but worked realistically in polyester resin and fibreglass, polychromed in oil. His connections with Dada lie tenuously in his everyday subject matter, but social outcry is a strong element in certain of his works.

In 1967 he produced 'War'(Ill. 22),which consisted of five dead and injured soldiers, scattered in a frighteningly realistic manner, so that the viewer could walk around and amongst them and experience the terror and slaughter of the battlefield. It has a peculiar, awkward honesty.

Hanson says of 'War':

" ... It's an interpretation of life. It's
purpose is to call attention to war--
the grubbiness, the mud, the blood and
gore and fatigue, the futility of it all.
It's frightening, but it has a message." 43

Hanson's 'War' is one of the few parallels to the kind of anguish that fuelled Kienholz in this period. Graphic immediacy is also applicable to Hanson and archetypal characters are a central theme in many of his works. This would appear, at first, to place him close to Kienholz. However, in general, ('War' being one of the exceptions) his choice of subjects are deliberately

T W E N T Y T W O: Hanson. 'War'. Polychromed Polyester Resin and Fibre Glass. 1967.

bland and standardized -- tourists, shoppers, security guards, etc. This places him close to the 'Pop' sensibility.

Hanson's place in relation to 'Objet Trouve' can perhaps be reflected in a remark made by Duchamp towards Segal. In the catalogue of Segal's 1965 exhibition at the Sydney Janis Gallery Duchamp wrote;

> " ... With Segal it's not a question of the found object, it's the chosen object." 44

C L O T H E S P I N

The chosen object relates very much to Claes Oldenburg's proposals for monuments and buildings from 1965 to 1969. Oldenburg explains:

" ... When I flew to Chicago in October 1967, I took along an old fashioned clothespin, because I liked its shape. I also had a post card of the Empire State Building. I made a sketch, superimposing a clothespin on the postcard. Then I stuck the clothespin in a wad of gum I was chewing and placed in on the little table in front of my seat; and as our plane came over Chicago, I noticed that the buildings down there looked the same size as the clothespin. I made quick aketches." 45

T W E N T Y T H R E E: Oldenburg. 'Clothespin'. Monumental Scale Sculpture. 1967-'90.

He went on to explain in a later interview with Martin Friedman:

" ... Clothespins are a studio necessity for me,
... They are the instruments of connection which are so important in the fabrication of my work.
... My studio is full of clothespins. I handle these objects. After a while, I begin to see them as much larger structures,
... They have an architectural character." 46

These descriptions of a working method reflect the path of the Readymade as it is gradually absorbed into the artist's environment and, therefore, into his personal vision. Through his own awareness it becomes the chosen object. This particular chosen object and subsequent environmental sketches and plans led to the installation of a monumental scale sculpture of a clothespin in downtown Philadelphia(Ill. 23).

Oldenburg has repeatedly stated that he wants to:

" ... De-emphasize the subject,
... Neutralize meaning."
(That) it is the forms that count." 47

These views recall Arensberg's aforementioned comments on 'Fountain':

" ... A lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose."

Oldenburg's monuments glorify the artifact before its creator, thus, they function as a parallel to the Readymade in the form of the chosen object as a landmark.

Claes Oldenburg, like Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, alongside other artists such as Jean Tinguely, George Segal and Duane Hanson, formed the backbone of Kienholz's artistic environment. Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol too, constituted a parallel to the found object in the found image. Yet Kienholz stood apart from them, despite the strong 'Objet Trouve' flavour of his work, because of his unwavering, intense social concern.

To recap on the graphic immediacy of Kienholz's tableaux, which is at such odds with the subtlety and introverted witt of much of the 'Pop' and 'Neo-Dada'art, one of his most uncompromising statements of injustice can be seen in his 1962 tableau entitled 'The Illegal Operation'(Ill. 24).

Recreating the scene of the operating room for a back-street abortion, It consists of a lamp with a naked bulb which shines down on a shopping cart, altered to look like a surgical bed. On the bed is a sack filled with concrete. The concrete spills out of a gash in the bag.

The concrete form is vaguely figurative and evokes an aura of death, as in this context it is rendered more grotesque than a literal figure would be. The 'Illegal Operation' works in ways quite different to the 'Doe' trilogy or 'Roxy's' as it expresses an archetypal experience rather than a character. It is also purer and more direct because, without biographical information

T W E N T Y F O U R: Kienholz. 'The Illegal Operation'. Mixed-Media and Found Object Tableau. 1962.

or voyeur participation, all our attention is focused on the sack of concrete, which is symbolically charged by its place amongst the paraphernalia of the operating room.

The use of the shopping cart as the operating table, like the coin-dispensing machine in 'A Lady Named Zoe', suggests the cold world of the consumer, continuing the theme of the victims of an unfeeling society.

'The Birthday'(Ill. 25), from 1964, depicts a woman in the throes of labour and deals with her anguish and loneliness, as she has been abandoned in her time of need by an emotionally impotent husband. His absence is re-enforced by a note deposited in her suitcase, which reads:

> Dear Jane,
> I couldn't come down now because Harry needs me here. Ma says she might make it later. Keep a stiff upper lip, Kid.
> (Ha ha)
>
> Dick. 48

T W E N T Y F I V E: Kienholz. 'The Birthday'. Plaster and Found Object Tableau. 1964.

Although 'The Birthday','The Back Seat Dodge '38' and 'The Beanery' had introduced plaster casting in place of the dolls and mannequins used for previous figures, Kienholz was spending more and more time in flea markets and thrift shops, searching for objects useful to his art.

Kienholz told Jorn Merkert, later in his career:

> " ... I really begin to understand any society by going through its junk stores and flea markets. It is a form of historical orientation for me. I can see results of ideas in what is thrown away by a culture." 49

The underlying impulse in the new generation of American artists, generated by Duchamp, Schwitters and Cornell, was to subsume more of the real world into the arena of art and thus aestheticize more of the world. The fundaments of Duchamp's Readymades run parallel to the majority of work by Kienholz's contemporaries. Oldenburg, Warhol and Johns revolve around the theme of reconstituting our everyday environment -- negating the identity and function of images, objects and substances, thus allowing them to be freely absorbed into a new aesthetic. Rauschenberg celebrates his surroundings in a most extrovert manner. Segal and Hanson stand aside, in respect to their figurative awareness and the acknowledgement of social drama, but are quickly subsumed by their penchant for the commonplace.

In this respect, taking the Readymade as the true essence of Dada, the label of 'Neo-Dada' seems appropriate. But the

label of 'Neo-Dada' for the socially critical and emotionally involving tableaux of Edward Kienholz is wildly inaccurate.

C O N C L U S I O N

THE PERSISTENCE OF DADA

All of Kienholz's tableaux discussed so far were created between 1959 and 1965. With his 1966 retrospective in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which was so strongly objected to by the museum supervisors, he carved his niche in modern art. The collective tableaux indicated that, although Kienholz worked with everyday materials and found objects, the graphic immediacy and literal elements of his work greatly differed from the general supermarket blandness and media iconography which comprised so much of his 'Pop' and 'Neo-Dada' environment.

But after 1966 Kienholz began putting his energies into 'Concept Tableaux'. Constructing 'The Beanery' had been an exhausting task. He spent his weekends, sometimes accompanied by Maurice Tuchman (Curator of the Los Angeles Museum), travelling to swap meets to look for beer signs, cigarette lighters and other furnishings and props for 'The Beanery'. It took six months to complete and there were huge problems with storage and transport -- it proved almost impossible to move it down the seventy steps from Kienholz's house on Nash Drive.

Thus he began creating a series of works which consisted of a framed descripton of the concept and a bronze plaque inscribed with the title of the tableau. Kienholz felt that the tableaux could be collectable as concepts, perhaps because his working method had been so well established by his already realised tableaux. Future works could simply exist in text form and, thus, in the mind of the beholder. The concept would be built if the buyer wanted to pay for the artist's materials and wages.

An early 'Concept Tableau', entitled 'After The Ball Is Over #1'(Ill. 26), describes a domestic drama, to be re-constructed in a full environmental style, similar to 'Roxy's', but in an actual suburban house in Kienholz's hometown of Fairfield. The tableau would include the entire house and its contents, with theatrically arranged figures of family and pets.

These 'Concept Tableaux' help to clarify, even further, Kienholz's place in the art world. It was the aesthetic qualities of his completed tableaux, incorporating American cultural milieu into his art, which had him mistakenly associated with the 'Pop' and 'Neo-Dada' trend. His decision that the plastic realization of his concepts was not immediately necessary and his satisfaction with their existence purely as concepts should re-establish the literal, graphic expression of social situations as the crux of his work and, again, recalls his affinity with the Beats and socially critical literature.

In 1967 Kienholz produced a 'Concept Tableau' called 'The Cement Store #2'. For this he needed to purchase an entire office building in a town of no less than 50,000 citizens. The building would be left entirely intact, down to the tiniest detail of its contents, then filled with concrete so that it would be impossible to enter and its contents would be preserved.

AFTER THE BALL IS OVER #1 1964

This tableau is to be built in the town of Fairfield, Washington. It will be an existing two or three bedroom frame house with living room, kitchen, back porch, etc. It will have to have a driveway, walks, etc., and the yard will need perpetual care. All the windows are to be painted black or mirrored so the interior of the house is dark. The house will be furnished in 40's or 50's contemporary Sears and Roebuck farmer style. It will be complete and obviously functioning, with four people in the inhabiting family. They have a dog and a four-door sedan which is parked in the driveway. To withstand the weather, it will probably be a shell of just the metal parts, mounted on pipe standards or pylons, with concrete tires, concrete seats, all the windows painted black or mirrored, etc.

In the driveway is a second car which has pulled up behind the family sedan. The driver's side door is open and a dome light is on: it has obviously just arrived. (Again, concrete seats, tires, etc.)

Just inside the front door is a young man and his date (the girl from the family). They are standing close together, shyly intimate, but not actually touching or embracing. She is in a formal prom gown (corsage). He in a suit.

In one bedroom is the younger brother, sleeping soundly. In another bedroom is the mother, lying in bed stiff, listening. (Soft light illuminates the piece.)

In the kitchen, sitting at a table, under an unshaded light bulb is the father, tired, rigid, menacing. He has been teased into letting his daughter go to the dance (this is her first real date). He doesn't know why, but right now he hates the young man.

PRICE: Part One $ 15,000.00

Part Two $ 1,000.00

Part Three Land, materials and artist's wages

TWENTY SIX: Kienholz. 'After The Ball Is Over #1'. Framed Description of Concept Tableau. 1963-4

Both ' The Cement Store #2' and 'After The Ball Is Over #1' illustrate Kienholz's wish to create tableaux that merged with the manmade world. He wanted to construct art in and amongst elements of modern society and on a monumental scale, interacting with the landscape.

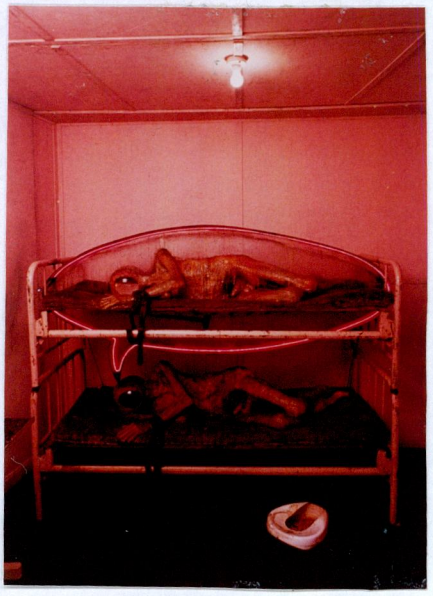
'Concept Tableaux' also served as a vent for ideas he could never expect to realize. In the concluding sentence of 'The Cement Store #2' he comments on the place his monument would have in the American landscape:

> The store will be left with little or no explanation, other than it is now some sort of art object and no longer subject to improved property taxes. 50

The above passage, describing his monuments as 'art objects', shows a change in Kienholz's concerns. Through the 'Concept Tableaux' he was beginning to plan grand-scale variations on the Readymade, which had been the virtual anti-thesis of his work up to this point. Monumental scale Readymades also draw strong parallels back to the giant clothespins and other proposed monuments of Oldenburg.

It seems that in this brief period from 1965 to 1967-'68 Kienholz's concerns mellowed and passed over into the realm of true 'Neo-Dada'.However, his 'Concept Tableaux' were short lived. Only two were actually purchased; 'The Office Building' and 'The Commercial #2'. Only the latter was realized.

He soon returned to his old method of producing tableaux with 'The State Hospital'(Ill. 27).



T W E N T Y S E V E N: Kienholz. 'The State Hospital'. Environmental Tableau. 1966.

It is a brutal representation of its stated subject. This tableau also revived the theme of his work between 1959 and 1965,

the victimization and degradation of society's marginal citizens.
After the interim of the 'Concept Tableaux', it appears he has returned to his established themes and social criticism remains his primary concern.

From 1970 Kienholz collaborated with Nancy Reddin, who became Nancy Reddin Kienholz in 1972. On the opening page of the catalogue for an exhibition entitled 'The Kienholz Women',he issued a statement;

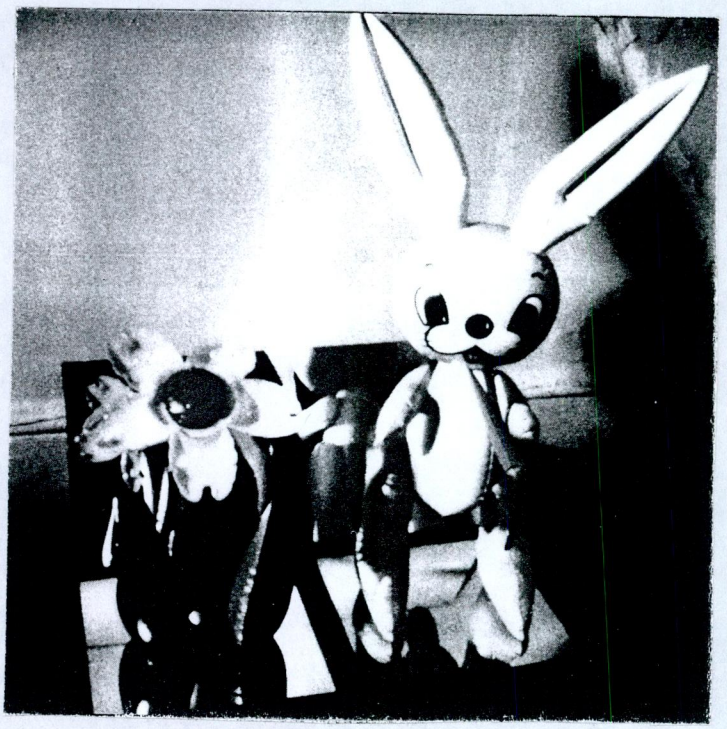
> " ... My life and art have been enriched and incredibly fulfilled by Nancy's presence and I wish to belatedly acknowledge that fact here. ... I further feel I no longer have a man's right to signature only my name to these efforts which have been produced by both of us. Hence, this exhibition is by Edward and Nancy Kienholz and is so signed." 51

All subsequent tableaux to date have been attributed to both Edward and Nancy Kienholz. Since 1973 they have divided their time between Berlin and their property in Hope, Idaho.

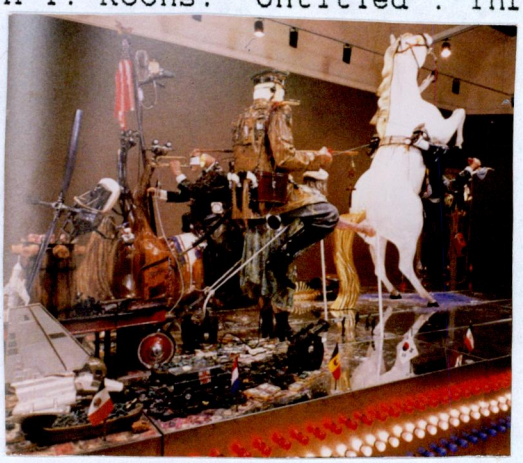
Dada still remains a prominent current in contemporary art. Leading American artist, Jeff Koons, staged an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, in 1988, which contained works with a strong Readymade flavour, such as a tea kettle jutting out from the wall, vacuum cleaners encased in plexiglass, basketballs in tanks of water and a rubber raft cast in bronze (reminiscent of Jasper Johns' cast beer cans).
Koons says;

> " ... I transform the content of a chosen object by putting it in a specific context. I control the new content through the support mechanisms. I use billboard ads, the juxtaposition of the object with other objects, as well as the actual process of transformation I put the object through. This recodifies the object so that it gives off the kind of information I would like people to view." 52

A curious rebirth of the Readymade. Koons uses the nature and mechanics of objects in a metaphorical way also. In 1979 he produced an inflatable flower and bunny (Ill. 28). They are objects whose forms are a result of the air that is breathed into them. As the air slowly departs, the objects wither and approach death.
This awareness of the transcience of life within an object recalls the junk art of Jean Tinguely and reflects the function



T W E N T Y E I G H T: Koons. 'Untitled'. Inflatable Toys. 1979.



T W E N T Y N I N E: Edward and Nancy Kienholz. 'The Ozymandias Parade'. Mixed-Media Tableau. 1985.

of objects in the metaphorical work of Cornell.

However, Kienholz has still not escaped the Dada tag. In 1985-'86 The Henry Gallery Association staged an exhibition called 'No! Contemporary American Dada'. The exhibition included the tableau 'The Ozyamandias Parade' from 1985 (Ill. 29).

Depicting official figures riding on the back of a skull-faced, over-taxed payer, its political and social implications are self-explanatory. It reaffirms, like 'The State Hospital', that, despite the 'Concept Tableaux' and a certain mellowing of the hard edge of Kienholz's 1959 - 1965 era, social criticism remains the central concern of his continuing work with Nancy Reddin.

Duchamp's Readymades have a traceable path from Cornell, through Rauschenberg, Johns, Warhol, Lichtenstein, Segal, Oldenburg and Hanson to Jeff Koons. All, with their own variations and interpretations, revolve around the central theme of reconstituting our everyday environment and blurring the divide between art and life. Although this new aesthetic has proved invaluable to Kienholz and has been a prominent aspect of his work, it is at most a working method which revolves around his own central theme of a horrific but often darkly humorous vision of the world.

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