

For Immediate Release

**L.A.'s Finish Fetish**

**Selected works by Peter Alexander, Larry Bell, Billy Al Bengston,  
Craig Kauffman, John McCracken, Ken Price, Ed Ruscha  
September 16 - October 11, 2003**

"Let the mind unshackle; set it free. Let it stroll, run, leap,  
laugh in gardens of crystal motion and sun and reality.  
Weave and paint with the hand of your imagination, with  
the fingers of your body, brush of fiberglass."

-Bob McTavish (surfboard shaper and innovator of the "shortboard")

The Finish Fetish movement developed as a direct reaction to a specific time and place. Los Angeles in the mid-1960's was unique in its confluence of desert, ocean, and highway topography. The invention of the shortboard revolutionized surfing and L.A. became its mecca. Hot-rodders indulged the surfaces of their vehicles with all the finesse and passion of artists. These activities became integrated into the still-nascent Los Angeles art scene.

In its early experimental stages, the "L.A. Glass and Plastic" group and the "Cool School" referenced the movement that would eventually be known as Finish Fetish. The growing industrialization of the West Coast also influenced many of these artists to produce objects that were completely handcrafted, yet were so seamless and streamlined that they seemed to be machine-made, thus removing the focus from the artist's handling of the materials and placing it on other aspects of the viewing experience.

"Gone were the emotion-laden brushstrokes and thickly layered abstract surfaces that spoke of serious art world issues," art historian Borton Colburn once stated. "These were replaced by cool, smooth, transparent finishes rife with references to California culture and environment." The artists included in the exhibition represent a cross-section of those sharing these expressive ideas, technical information, and even materials, primarily working in Venice and Los Angeles in the 1960's and 70's.

In the late 1950's, Ken Price and Billy Al Bengston attended the Otis Art Institute (having studied with Peter Voulkos) and established studios at 110 Mildred Avenue in Venice. Shortly after, they began exhibiting at Ferus Gallery. While both were surfing fanatics, it was the car culture and its hot-rod finishing that directly influenced the work they produced at the time. Bengston created shaped and dented metal sheets air brushed with sheer veils of auto lacquer for his acclaimed *Dento* series. Price, using highly specialized car enamels with metallic and pearlescent finishes, applied chatoyant finishes to his small, enigmatic forms.

By the mid-1960's Larry Bell and Craig Kauffman had both made use of a vacuum machine in creating their objects. For his translucent glass cubes Bell coated the interior sides of glass (using the vacuum machine) with a thin translucent metallic film. Contained in a chromium cube frame, these veiled layers of smokey hues became the vehicle for the formal exploration of the space (air) inside the glass. Kauffman produced vacuum-formed, convex Plexiglas shapes, then airbrushed the interiors, creating a sense of ambiguity in both the depth and density of the object.

In 1966, Ed Ruscha developed a method of layering acrylic on canvas he referred to as the "rainbow roll." These gradated applications of color and texture were most effectively used in his renditions of sunsets and dramatic atmospheric effects, which sometimes incorporated the additional element of text.

Peter Alexander cast geometrically shaped translucent forms by pouring molten resin in carved wood molds. At various stages in the hardening process, he would inject pigments, infusing a patinated effect within the cast resin. The result was a trapped, misty translucence of astonishing visual ambiguity. John McCracken also focused on geometric shapes, building a form out of plywood upon which he applied slick monochromatic layers of fiberglass and lacquer. These minimal monochromatic forms absorb light in a manner that also disorients the viewer's perception of depth.

By appropriating newly available plastics, auto enamels, and resins, the artists of the Finish Fetish movement referenced their surroundings in forms that reflected the angular surfaces of the built environment. By acknowledging light and space as part of their art works, they effectively removed the boundaries between painting, sculpture and architecture.

This exhibition runs through October 11, 2003. Gallery hours are Tuesday - Saturday, 10-6 p.m. For images of works or further information, please contact the gallery at (212) 246-5360.