

**BROOKLYN RAIL**  
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

## Deadeye Dick: Richard Bellamy and His Circle

BY DAVID RHODES | 2 NOVEMBER, 2017



In a 2002 interview with Judith Stein, the curator of *Deadeye Dick: Richard Bellamy and His Circle* and author of the recent, definitive Richard Bellamy biography, *Eye of the Sixties: Richard Bellamy and the Transformation of Modern Art*, Richard Tuttle said, “Dick was unbelievably sensitive, delicate and extremely refined. But he was strong—the strongest part of him was his belief in following his own way with art.” Together, Stein and Peter Freeman, who both knew Bellamy (1927–98), have put together a selection of works from artists either represented or otherwise supported by Bellamy over the course of his career as a gallerist—a term I use prudently, as he would have had no

problem acknowledging that he was not a model businessman. Nevertheless, his role in a still-emergent New York art world in the early 1950s, and then in its subsequent iterations through to the 1990s, was unique. Bellamy's contribution to this evolution is singular and, in the '50s and '60s in particular, impossible to overestimate. Like Picasso, he "started more Hares than he could catch." The exhibition represents extremely well the range of artists that Bellamy—who was intuitive, informed, and uncannily astute—was drawn to or discovered. Very often, this was at an early stage of their careers. The exhibition evinces no dogma and certainly no predictability from Bellamy.



Over forty artists, with works from the 1950s to the 1990s, are exhibited. The list is staggering—it includes Jo Baer, Mary Corse, Mark di Suvero, Michael Heizer, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Yayoi Kusama, Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, Larry Poons, James Rosenquist, Richard Serra, Tom Wesselmann, and others. And, from this list—there are still more artists that Bellamy's influence touched, not included here—it is possible to discern a sequence of "isms" in the making. Pop Art, Minimalism, and Conceptual Art, for example, all had first exposure at Bellamy's Green Gallery (humorously, not to mention ironically, named "Green" by Bellamy because that's the color of

money). At the Green Gallery, where he was the director from 1960 until its closure in 1965, Flavin, Judd, Morris, and Poons had their debut solo shows. Bellamy's Oil & Steel Gallery later supported Walter De Maria, Bruce Nauman, Alfred Leslie, and Neil Jenney, all included in this exhibition. On view are also rarely seen works and documents, such as Alex Katz's typically succinct 1960 portrait of Bellamy, a wonderful series of Lee Lozano graphite drawings (1964–67), and letters from Lozano to Bellamy, one of which effectively announces her sudden withdrawal from the art world. A poster advertising Oldenburg's *Store* (1961) is a reminder of an ahead-of-the-curve Green Gallery offsite project at 107 East 2nd Street (offsite projects are now common for galleries, but were not so in 1961).

Larry Poons's dot painting *Double Speed* (1962) looks fresh and immediate, not an Op Art piece in any way—no surprise that Poons's 1963 solo show at the Green Gallery was such a critical success. Alfred Leslie's four-panel painting *Pink Square* (1957–66) is a fine example of late-style Abstract Expressionism—its placement of color and use of drips precise. Bellamy's close friend Miles Forst's charcoal drawing *Portrait of Dick* (1957) is a Manhattanite's vigorous take on Matisse. Land Art artist Michael Heizer's *F.A.X* (1967) is a lean, shaped, large canvas, comprising a raw cotton duck rectangle surrounded by grey polyvinyl latex. Yes, Bellamy supported the Land Arts, too. He was instrumental, one way or another, in so many new aesthetic ventures—an essential bridge, enabler, and often friend to artists just setting out on careers that later became influential, such as Andy Warhol and Donald Judd to name just two more. His decades of dedication to giving the artists exposure through exhibitions, making introductions to collectors, and taking curators to their studios took art in new directions.