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Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961 - 1976 brings two seminal yet under-studied Los Angeles artists into close conversation with one another for the first time. Never before has their artwork been shown together in a tightly focused two-person exhibition. Organized by the curatorial team of Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon, with supporting research by Carolyn Peter, this exhibition examines how these two artists bridged modernist and emerging post-modernist trends by ushering in the use of photography as a key element of contemporary avant-garde art. Focusing on language and the creation of new visual codes, as well as on the little-known friendship between the Berman and

Heinecken, their works are explored within the unique cultural milieu of 1960s and 1970s Southern California, as it fueled and amplified each artist's highly original creative approach to making images.

"Very few people are aware that Berman and Heinecken even knew each other, let alone that they shared a creative outlook that was highly influential for future generations," notes curator Sam Mellon. Through an interdisciplinary display of original art works and ephemera, the exhibition captures the spirit of irreverence and innovation that permeated this important era in Southern California art.

Wallace Berman (1926-1976) was born in Staten Island, NY and came to Los Angeles with his parents when he was four years old. In 1955 he founded the small but influential mail art publication *Semina* – a brilliant, loose-leaf compilation of the most advanced artists and poets of his time, including William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Jess (Collins) to name a few. Today, Berman is best known for his Verifax collages, softly sepia-colored works created with a forerunner of the photocopy machine. Influenced by surrealism, assemblage, and contemporary artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, and Andy Warhol, Berman produced multi-layered works that combined the picture of a hand-held transistor radio with images culled from newspapers and popular magazines.



Robert Heinecken (1931–2006) was born in Denver, CO and moved with his parents to Southern California as a youngster. He studied at the University of California, Los Angeles, earning a masters degree in art in 1960 and founding the department of photography there three years later. From early on in his career, Heinecken deployed unconventional processes and an irreverent attitude toward the photographic image that flew in the face of everything the medium was supposed to be. He rarely used a camera, relying instead on appropriated imagery gathered from newspapers and illustrated magazines. Like Berman, he refused to treat art works as autonomous creations, focusing instead on “found images” that he manipulated to often witty and sarcastic effects, using techniques like lithography, etching, camera-less exposure, and photo emulsion on canvas. His perhaps most influential portfolio *Are You Rea* of 1964-68 was made by passing light onto photographic paper through the pages of an illustrated magazine instead of a negative.

Works in the exhibition will include some of Berman’s earliest experiments in composite imagery, such as his individual verifax collages of hands holding a transistor radio with inlaid photographs, and his explorations of the interstices between image and text. It also shows Heinecken’s *Are you Rea* portfolio, his early projection pieces and collages of pin-ups, which articulated his desire to excavate cultural meaning through multi-layered imagery. In addition examples of Berman’s mail art and *Semina* publication will be exhibited, as well as Heinecken’s magazine interventions and photo sculptures, *Le Voyeur/Robbe-Grillet* and *Cliché Vary* series, among others.