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SEPTEMBER 18 –
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LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

43 WEST 57TH STREET / NEW YORK
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EXIT

DRUGS

POP SCULPTURE POP CULTURE

BY SHIVA BALAGHI, PH.D.
October 2014

“What is Pop Art?” In the fall of 1963, the critic Gene Swenson posed that question to a number of artists associated with the emerging Pop Art movement. Robert Indiana responded: “Pop is everything art hasn’t been for the last two decades. It is basically a U-turn back to a representational visual communication, moving at a break-away speed...It is the American Dream, optimistic, generous, and naïve...”

Pop art emerged within and against the ebullient post-war consumerism of the West. Beginning in Britain in the 1950s and finding its ultimate resonance in New York in the 1960s, Pop Art drew on images of mass media, advertising, comics, and consumer products. It was the visual counterpoint to the cultural revolution and the protest movements of the time. As an artistic movement, Pop rebelled against the dominance of Abstract Expressionism characterized by the painterly drips of Jackson Pollock and brushstrokes of Willem de Kooning. Pop, Robert Indiana explained, “springs newborn out of a boredom with the finality and over-saturation of Abstract-Expressionism which, by its own esthetic logic, is the END of art...Stifled by this rarefied atmosphere, some young painters turn back to some less exalted things like Coca-Cola, ice-cream sodas, big hamburgers, super-markets and ‘EAT’ signs. They are eye-hungry; they pop...”¹

The exhibition, *Pop Sculpture, Pop Culture*, mounted by Leila Heller Gallery re-examines the Pop Art movement’s influence from a trans-generational and trans-regional perspective. Curated by Alexander Heller, the show exhibits iconic objects created by the movement’s most influential artists alongside works by contemporary artists inspired by the spirit, ideas, and techniques that characterized Pop Art.

Familiar objects became the focus of Pop Art, which fed off the visual noise of everyday life. Lines between the museum and the street blurred as the distinction between high art and popular culture was intentionally broken down. Speaking to an incredulous reporter from Time magazine in May 1962, the artist Roy Lichtenstein spoke of his decision to paint “a cartoon that looked like a cartoon...It brings up the question ‘What is art?’ ”²

Pop was in essential ways deeply reflective though appearing spontaneous and referential though seeming to rebel against a staid artistic tradition. Robert Rauschenberg’s “combines” reconfigured Marcel Duchamp’s idea of the ready made. For Jasper Johns, Duchamp’s work was the “field where language, thought and vision act on one another.”³ Jasper Johns’ flag paintings were a bold statement, recontextualizing images to make us re-examine how we see art altogether.

Andy Warhol, who was greatly influenced by Rauschenberg and Johns, became perhaps the most prominent artist of the Pop Art movement. Indeed, art historian Neil Printz counts him as perhaps the most influential artist of the 20th century. Warhol was, Printz observed, “a touchstone of the culture we live in, a touchstone for the entire culture of the postwar period...If we needed to find a visual form to just distill what it’s like to have been alive in the last fifty years, the image would come somewhere from the corpus of Andy Warhol.”⁴ And the image most closely associated with Warhol is the Campbell’s soup can. Having seen Warhol’s first exhibition of his soup can paintings in Los Angeles in September 1963, the young writer John Coplans became “one of the first to recognize the importance of serial imagery.”⁵

In 1964, Warhol’s *Brillo Box* was first exhibited in New York’s Stable Gallery. Seeing Warhol’s wooden sculpture stenciled to resemble a Brillo Box was, for the philosopher Arthur Danto, a revelation. What differentiated Warhol’s *Brillo Box* sculpture from a cardboard Brillo Box one could buy in a store? The difference between the two was indiscernible to the eye—that had been Warhol’s intention. Pop caused some to ask: “What is art?” For Danto, Warhol’s art raised a more complex question. If two things look exactly alike, and one is considered art and the other is just an ordinary object, what explains the difference? In positing the question in

this manner, Danto understood that Warhol was not just an artist, but a thinker whose work carved new terrain in the philosophy of art. For Danto, Warhol’s approach to Pop Art called into question the very nature of a work of art and the art world that ultimately gave meaning and value to that work.⁶

Warhol’s Soup Can and his *Brillo Box* both appear, in a manner, in the exhibit *Pop Sculpture, Pop Culture*. Among the most prized objects in the show is a sculpture by Warhol titled, *Campbell’s Soup Can (Chicken with Rice)*, dating from 1966. But the *Brillo Box* appears in a different guise, re-appropriated by the Italian artist duo Bertozzi and Casoni. Their work, *Cover* (2003), is a ceramic adaptation of the *Brillo Box*, torn and fallen on its side, filled with debris. Warhol’s *Brillo Box* is a repeated motif in their art as is the notion of decay. Bertozzi and Casoni noted that decay offers “a very intense vision of the world...the true essence of things can be found in decay, in everything that has been rejected, in junk, in rubbish.”⁷ So in their art, Warhol’s *Brillo Box* is recast once again, imbued with a different artistic resonance.

Meanwhile, avant-garde artist Yayoi Kusama plays on seriality, which became a hallmark of Warhol’s art, in her *Narcissus Garden* (2004). An installation made of 500 stainless steel balls, the highly reflective mirrored spheres form what she calls a “kinetic carpet.” The work is a

playful and visually stunning reflection on narcissism and self-absorption. In recent years, artist Rachel Hovnanian has also probed the boundaries of obsession, intimacy, and narcissism in her work, exploring the kinds of social pressures that can turn the female body itself into an object to be desired or derided. Her sculpture *Body Armor* (2009), an oversized reflective bathing suit made of cast marble and fiberglass, extends Pop’s proclivity to use irony and humor as modes of social commentary.

Richard Pettibone signals Duchamp’s seminal influence on the pioneers of Pop Art with his work, Marcel Duchamp, “*Bicycle Wheel*”, 1913-1964 (2013) which is featured in the gallery’s exhibition. As critic Roberta Smith noted, “Pettibone helped set the stage for the 80’s appropriation art by beginning to recycle the pop culture appropriations of Pop Art almost before the term was even out of the oven, much less cooled.”⁸

Perhaps more than any other artist, it is Jeff Koons who is identified with the Neo-Geo movement of the 1980’s and its propensity for appropriation. Koons draws on the Duchampian tradition and the spirit of Pop Art “to reflect the commercial systems of the modern world.” Koons extends the Pop inclination to elevate the every day object further toward monumentality. Included in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, “his vacuum

cleaners encased in Perspex were classified as monuments to sterility.”⁹ The current exhibition includes a work from this series, featuring three Hoover Deluxe Shampoo Polishers encased in Plexiglass and lit with fluorescent light—as though they are precious sculptural art objects. While his work clearly has a sense of parody, explained art historian Paula Burleigh, Koons’ art presents a fundamental critique of the body of imagery of our times. Given the culture of media saturation in which we are embedded, Koons asks, is it possible any longer to be original?¹⁰

Pop sensibility—its use of experimental form to elevate everyday objects into art—had an impact on artistic production across time and space. Iran’s most prominent artist, Parviz Tanavoli, has in the past decade remade his iconic sculpture sign, *Heech*, into fiberglass. *Heech* first came to Tanavoli in 1964. It was the artist’s protest against two trends in Iranian art at the time that were disturbing to him. One was the propensity to mimic the latest international art fads. The other was a fixation on calligraphic painting. Tanavoli decided he was going to limit himself to one word—*heech*, the Persian word for nothingness. The critic, artist, and architect Kamran Diba has argued that there were art historical parallels between Pop Art and Saqqakhaneh art in Iran, which drew on traditional Iranian and Islamic iconography, recasting it into modern artistic forms. Diba evocatively dubbed this a kind of Spiritual Pop Art.

Keith Haring’s dancing figures appear in two works featured in *Pop Sculpture, Pop Culture*. First appearing in the subway drawings Haring made in the 1980s, the dancing figures became one of contemporary art’s most iconic images. Throughout his career, Haring continued to make art in galleries and in the streets. In 1987, he painted a mural at a public swimming pool in New York’s West Village. The mural features a dancing figure as a self portrait—in one hand it holds a dripping paint brush, the other hand is raised as a fist. The image poignantly portrays Haring’s playful use of Pop Art to convey political messages with mass appeal. “Art is for everybody,” Haring said.

By extending the temporal and spatial frame of Pop Art, the curator suggests that Roy Lichtenstein’s chair relates to Tracey Emin’s suitcase and to Shiva Ahmadi’s oil barrel. Lichtenstein turned the painterly brushstroke itself into an object on which we can sit. Emin tapped into pop sensibility to make a fun object that deals with love, passion, and lost intimacies. For Ahmadi, an everyday object in the Middle East—an oil barrel—became the canvas for her paintings on war and strife in the region. *Pop Sculpture, Pop Culture* is a brilliant exhibit that conveys the fun and witty character of Pop and the ways it has been used to make commentaries about the nature of art and its role in society.

Shiva Balaghi is a cultural historian who teaches Art History and History of the Modern Middle East at Brown University.

¹ Swenson’s interviews were reposted by Artnews in 2007. “Top Ten ArtNews Stories: The First Word on Pop,” November 1, 2007, <http://www.artnews.com/2007/11/01/top-ten-artnews-stories-the-first-word-on-pop/>

²“The Slice of Cake School,” Time, May 11, 1962.

³ As quoted in Nan Rosenthal, “Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968,” Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, http://www.met-museum.org/toah/hd/duch/hd_duch.htm.

⁴ Neil Printz, from Andy Warhol: A Documentary Film, Directed by Ric Burns, 2006.

⁵ Hunter Drojojowska-Philp, *Rebels in Paradise: The Los Angeles Art Scene and the 1960s* (NY: Henry Holt, 2011), p. 2.

⁶ Arthur Danto, “The Art World Revisited: Comedies of Similarity,” in *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 37.

⁷ As quoted in Press Release for Bertozzi and Casoni exhibit, “New Sculpture,” Sperone Westwater, New York, April 2005.

⁸ Roberta Smith, “Imitations That Transcend Flattery,” New York Times, July 15, 2005.

⁹ “Koons, Jeff,” Oxford Art Online, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/public/page/GAO_free_Koons.

¹⁰ Paula Burleigh, “Jeff Koons and the 1980s,” lecture at the Whitney Museum of Art, July 14, 2014.



SHIVA AHMADI
Oil Barrel #9, 2009
 Oil on steel
 4.5 x 23.5 x 23.5 in / 11.4 x 59.7 x 59.7 cm



RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER
Hair Box, 1990
 Rubberized hair, wood
 10 x 15 x 5 in / 25.4 x 28 x 13 cm



BERTOZZI & CASONI
Cover, 2003
 Glazed ceramic
 15.5 x 16.5 x 22.75 in / 39.4 x 41.9 x 57.8 cm



CAROL BOVE
Woman, 2010
 Steel and peacock feathers
 43 x 12 x 6 in / 109.2 x 30.5 x 16.3 cm



BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION

ATM, 2009
Plaster, terracotta
75 x 21.5 in / 190.5 x 54.6 cm



JOHN CHAMBERLAIN

Baby Tycoon Series: Fasting Pansy, 1991
Paint and chromium plated steel
7.25 x 9.375 x 7.625 in / 18.3 x 24 x 19.05 cm



DAN COLEN
M&M, 2012
 Rock and acrylic paint
 3.25 x 5.5 x 5 in / 8.9 x 14 x 12.7 cm



ALEX DA CORTE
Triumph, 2008 – 2012
 Eero Aarino Puppy chair, Nokia cell phone, hand chair,
 rubber bubblegum, phone stand, spray paint, packing tape
 70 x 50 x 36 in / 178 x 127 x 91.5 cm



DAN COLEN / NATE LOWMAN

Decidious Tree, 2011

Metal rack with postcards

67 x 12 in / 170 x 30.5 cm

Lean on me, 2008

Aluminum rims, straps, clamps and saxophone cleaner

23 x 91 x 11 in / 58.4 x 231 x 28 cm





TRACEY EMIN

International Woman Suitcase, 2004

Mixed media, hand-drawn Longchamp logo, wool applique, cashmere, felt letters, leather handles and flap, and canvas lining
14.5 x 19 x 6.37 in / 36.8 x 46 x 16.1 cm



RICHARD JACKSON

Big Pig, 2009

Stainless steel, wood
30 x 24 x 18 in / 76.2 x 61 x 45.7 cm





KEITH HARING

Untitled, 1983
Spray enamel on plywood
96 x 48 in / 244 x 122 cm

Untitled (TV Head), 1986
Spray enamel on wood
103 x 56 in / 261.6 x 142.2 cm



Untitled (Love Ball Trophy), 1989
Plastic
46 x 6 in / 116.8 x 15.2 cm

Untitled (Two Dancing Figures), 1989
Polyurethane enamel on aluminum
18.25 x 24 x 18 in / 46.3 x 60.9 x 45.7 cm
Edition of 10
Stamped with signature, number and date on base



RACHEL LEE HOVNANIAN
Body Armor, 2009
 Cold cast marble, fiberglass, lacquer,
 55 x 28 x 20 in / 139.7 x 71.1 x 50.8 cm



RICHARD HUDSON
Heart, 2006
 Polished bronze
 6.7 in / 17 cm



ROBERT INDIANA
AMOR, 1998
Polychrome aluminum
36 x 36 x 18 in / 91.5 x 91.5 x 45.7 cm

ART, 1972-1997
Polychrome aluminum
36 x 36 x 18 in / 91.5 x 91.5 x 45.7 cm





JEFF KOONS

New Hoover Deluxe Shampoo Polishers

Plexiglass, fluorescent light, 3 Hoover Deluxe Shampoo Polishers

56 x 36 x 15 in / 142.2 x 91.4 x 38.1 cm



MIKE KELLEY

Triple Ground, 1990

Mixed material

25.75 x 30.75 x 10.25 in / 65.4 x 78.1 x 26 cm



YAYOI KUSAMA
Narcissus Garden, 2004
Stainless steel balls
14 in / 35.5 cm diameter each ball



BJARNE MELGAARD

Allen Jones Remakes, 2013
Mixed media (fiberglass resin, leather, sheep skin, steel (base), acrylic, enamel paint, glass, lucite
58 x 30 x 32 in approx. / 147.3 x 76.2 x 81.2 cm



Allen Jones Remakes (Suite of 3 Figures), 2013
Mixed media (fiberglass resin, human hair, leather, sheep skin, steel (base), acrylic paint, enamel paint, glass
Lucite Table, 58 x 30 x 26 in / 147.3 x 76.2 x 66 cm
Chair, 27 x 40 x 33 in / 68.5 x 111.7 x 83.8 cm
Hat Stand, 52 x 15 x 61 in / 132 x 38.1 x 155 cm







JOEL MORRISON

Disco Ball Caught in a Bear Trap, 2013

Stainless steel

28 x 30 x 36 in / 71.1 x 76.2 x 91.5 cm

The Studs, 2012

Nickel plated aluminum

58.5 x 14 x 1.5 in / 148.6 x 35.6 x 3.8 cm



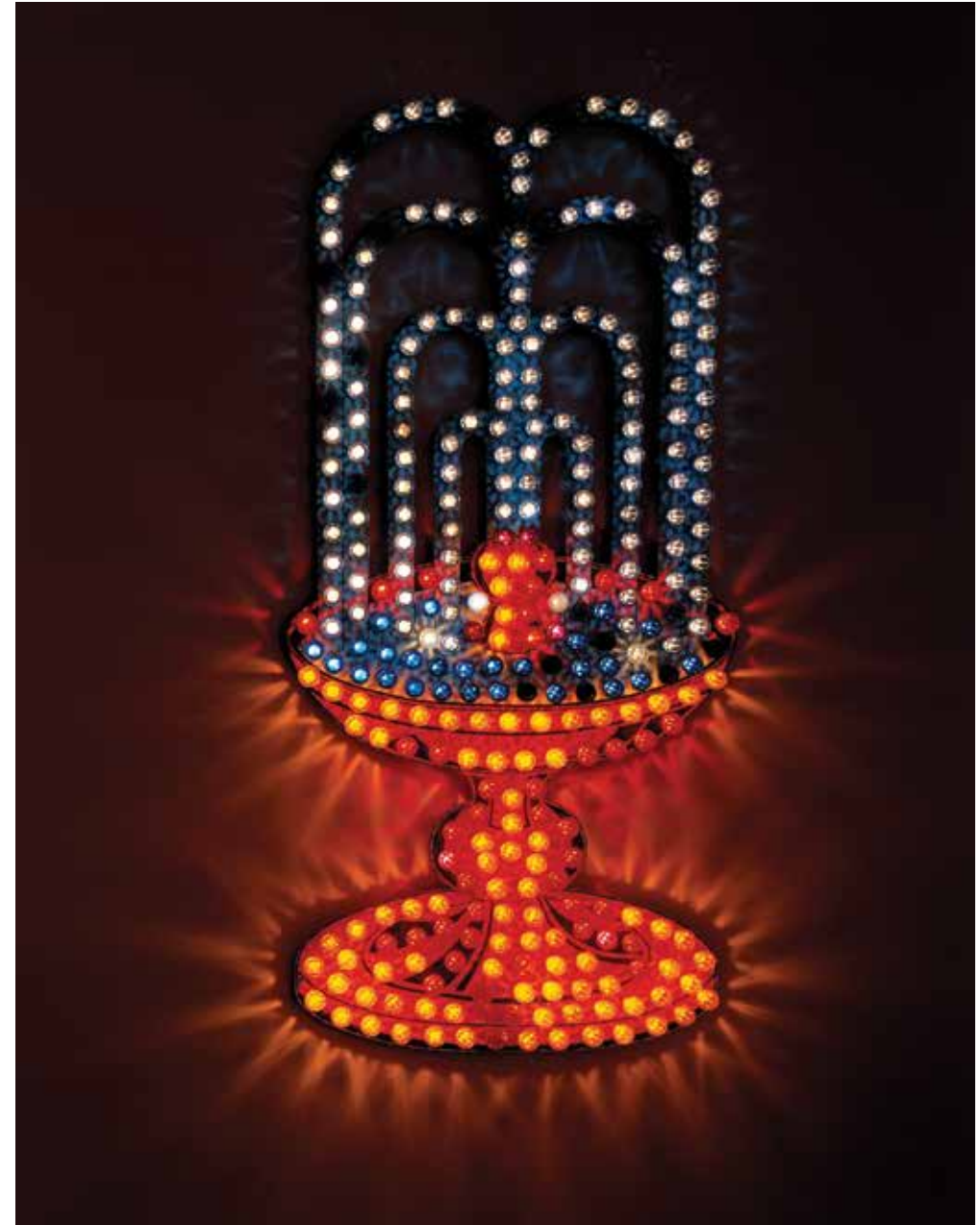


ROY LICHTENSTEIN

Brushstroke Chair & Ottoman, 1988

Painted wood, birch

70.7 x 18 x 27.2 in / 179.5 x 45.6 x 69.2 cm



TIM NOBLE & SUE WEBSTER

Excessive Sensual Indulgence, 1996

Colored UFO reflector caps, lamps, Foamex, electronic light sequencer

74.25 x 35.75 in / 188.6 x 90 cm



CLAES OLDENBURG
Ice Cream Display, 1964
 Pigment on plaster over wire mesh
 16 x 9 x 5 in / 40.6 x 24.1 x 12.7 cm



JACK PIERSON
Drugs (Pink and Orange), 2000
 Neon and transformer
 24 x 72 x 6.5 in / 61 x 182.9 x 16.55 cm



RICHARD PETTIBONE

Marcel Duchamp, "Bicycle Wheel", 1913-1964, 2013

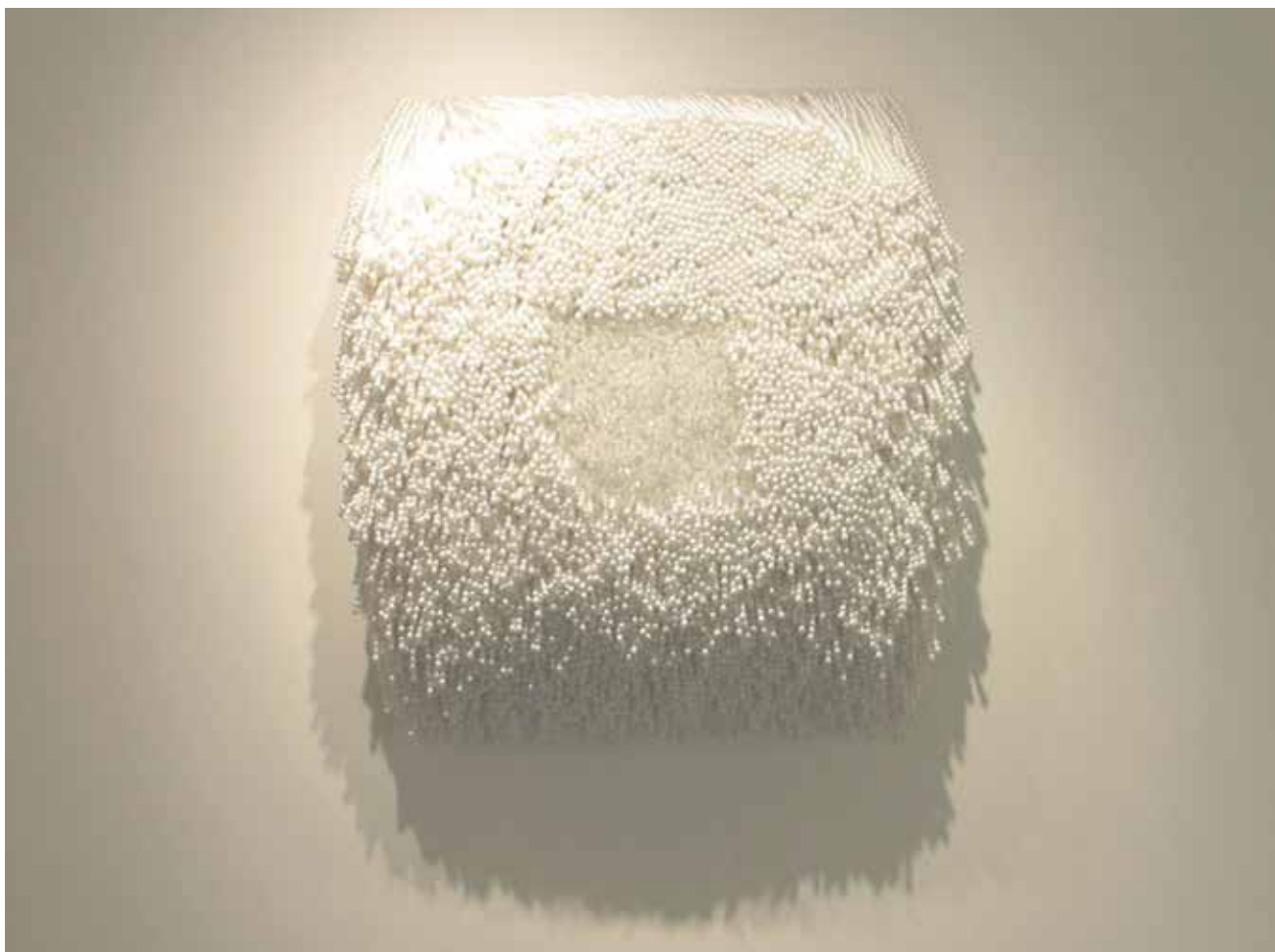
Wooden stool with metal bicycle wheel
53 x 25 x 17 in / 134.6 x 63.5 x 43.2 cm

Frank Stella, "Ouray", 1961 Three Times, 2011

Oil on canvas
21.12 x 21.12 x 2 in / 30.8 x 53.6 x 5.1 cm







PAOLA PIVI
Untitled (pearls), 2005
 Plastic, plexiglass
 28 x 28 x 9.8 in / 71.1 x 71.1 x 24.8 cm



MARC QUINN
Microcosmos (Mirror Sphinx), 2008
 Painted bronze
 13.25 x 9 x 7.5 in / 31.1 x 22.9 x 19.1 cm



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K.Chain, 1998
Cardboard and Glue
17 x 5 x 2 in / 43.1 x 12.7 x 5.08 cm



SHELTER SERRA

Nine Fake Guns, 2014
Cast resin and gold paint
24 x 36 in / 61 x 91.4 cm



KAMBIZ SHARIF

Peace Weapon, 2011

Bronze and plastic

15.75 x 25.2 x 9.45 in / 40 x 64 x 24 cm

Taboo Breast, 2013

Bronze, wood, plastic

48 x 7.8 x 39.3 / 122 x 20 x 100 cm

Silence, 2013

Fiberglass

14.9 x 11 x 11 in / 38 x 28 x 28 cm





PARVIZ TANAVOLI
Heech, 2007
 Fiberglass
 37 x 17 x 11 in / 94 x 43 x 28 cm



TONY TASSET
Smashed Pumpkin, 2013
 Solid cast bronze and enamel paint
 20 x 14 x 14 in / 51 x 35.5 x 35.5 cm



ANDY WARHOL

Campbell's Soup Can (Chicken with Rice), 1966
Solid aluminum and silkscreen inks
4 x 2.75 x 2.75 in / 10.16 x 6.99 x 6.99 cm



TOM WESSELMANN

Still Life with Four Roses and Pear, 1993
Mixed media on cut out steel
21 x 21 in / 53.3 x 53.3 cm



AARON YOUNG

Bold Moves, 2011

Winterstone

5.5 x 75 x 61 x 13.9 x 190 x 154.9 cm



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Plexiglass, fluorescent light, 3 Hoover Deluxe Shampoo Polishers
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Robert Indiana © Morgan Art Foundation, Artist Right Society (ARS), New York

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Thomas Arnold
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Richard Hudson
Rachel Lee Hovnanian
Adam Lindemann
Barry Malin
Paul Morris
Howard and Maryam Newman
Marc Salama-Caro
Shelter Serra
Kambiz Sharif
Sperone Westwater
Parviz Tanavoli
Larry Warsh





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