

"You should always have a product that is not you." Andy Warhol

"Every refutation is a mirror of the thing it refutes--ad infinitum." Robert Smithson

Assembly and Tomwork (Tom Jimmerson, formerly of Cardwell Jimmerson Contemporary Art) present "Vern Blosom: Out of Order," an exhibition of Blosom's paintings from the early and mid nineteen sixties. The show is on view from September 7 to October 26. Artist's reception is Saturday, September 7, 6-9 pm. Exhibition hours are Wednesday through Sunday, noon to 6:00 pm. Assembly is located at 2045 S. La Cienega Blvd. Ample parking is available in the lot adjacent to WSS Shoe Warehouse at the same address.

When Pop Art emerged and flourished in the years between 1961 and 1965, Vern Blosom was an active participant in the New York art scene. He moved in social circles that included artists such as Adolf Gottlieb and Tony Smith, Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. It was however the art dealer Ivan Karp, then working for the Leo Castelli Gallery, who managed to insinuate Blosom's hauntingly enigmatic and anodyne paintings into the rapidly developing critical and commercial network that came to be known as Pop. Examples of Blosom's work appeared in early and important exhibitions including "Pop Art USA," (1963, San Francisco and Oakland) and "The Popular Image," (1963, Washington D.C.) and were documented as well in Lucy Lippard's book on Pop Art published in 1965. Blosom was thus part-and-parcel of Pop Art, or at least its first iteration. Prescient collectors such as Robert Scull, Larry Aldrich, Burton Tremaine and Betty Asher agreed. As did the Museum of Modern Art which acquired an artwork for its permanent collection. Realized at more or less actual size in a palette of mostly black, white and gray, MoMA's "Time Expired" (1962) was simply the painted image of an expired parking meter sitting above two painted words spelling out "Time Expired."

This is where the now familiar rediscovery narrative--"another deserving if little remembered sixties-era artist attracts fresh attention"--takes a peculiar turn. For soon after its acquisition Alfred Barr, then MoMA's director, chose to have "Time Expired" removed from public exhibition and put into storage. He did so because the museum was unable to verify any of Blosom's biographical data, according to documents passed back and forth between MoMA and the Castelli gallery. By Barr's exacting journalistic standards, Blosom was judged a "fraud." Good instincts. For a fact not known then was that the name Vern Blosom, derived from the botanical term "vernal blossom," was the pseudonym adopted by a young and committed abstract painter who, by his own modernist high-culture standards, considered Pop Art itself to be fraudulent. But for Blosom, Pop Art was not just simply a fraud but also a complex social system which he sought to understand and reproduce; this

both despite and because of his antipathy to it. The resulting "product that is not you" (Warhol) and "mirror of the thing it refutes" (Smithson) was then recirculated--via the good offices of Karp and Castelli--back into the Pop Art system to be consumed in turn.

Like MoMA's "Time Expired," the artworks presented by Tomwork at Assembly are depictions of the routine instruments of urban administration, each consisting of a painted image sitting above a simple descriptive text. Together, they are as unsettlingly ordinary as the following checklist suggests: "Zero Minutes," 1962 (parking meter), "Out of Order," 1962 (parking meter), "Fifteen Minutes," 1962 (parking meter), "Giant Expiration," 1963 (parking meter), "Abgelaufen," 1963 (German parking meter), "No Pressure," 1963 (fire hydrant), "Mueller," 1963 (fire hydrant), "Homage to Ivan K.," 1963 (fire hydrant), "Alarm," 1964 (alarm box), "Telephone," 1964 (pay phone), "Not for Deposit," 1964 (postal box), "Zip Code," 1964 (postal box), "Stop," 1964 (stop sign). Appropriately, "Stop" was Blossum's final painting.

It didn't, however, fully stop there. Rather, Blossum's work from the nineteen sixties was even then oriented "toward an imagined future" (TJ Clark's words from another context); pointing in the direction of Conceptual Art and with it an emerging critique of advanced capitalism associated with some of the conceptualists. Indeed, while Blossum focused his ire on Pop, his project was equally directed against an art market dependent on the presumptively inseparable connection between (a real) artwork and (a real) artist that Blossum so willfully sundered. To be sure, others have similarly challenged received notions of authorship and authenticity. But coming as it did after R. Mutt and Rrose Selevy and yet before Sturtevant, Sherrie Levine, John Dogg and the Bernadette Corporation, the full meaning of the Blossum story may be available to us only now. How will we know? Warhol insisted that even in art, the economic marketplace provides the sole measure of value, a sentiment Blossum deplored but observed to be coming true before his eyes. The exhibition "Vern Blossum: Out of Order" is thus respectfully resubmitted to that marketplace for its judgement.

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