

Over a career spanning six decades, Michael Asher (1943–2012) played a pivotal role in developing conceptual art through site-specific interventions that made their surrounding context the active content of his work. Asher’s interrogations of these sites reveal the many ways art can critique and make visible the often unseen social, economic, and institutional structures that underpin the subjects it addresses.

This focused survey presents twenty works via their material elements, documentation, and an accompanying exhibition guide. While many of Asher’s projects left no trace, “fragments” exist for some, including distributed objects (household items, games, clothing, maps, and postcards) that were designed to circulate publicly. His practice also employed a broad range of twentieth-century media and utilized their conventions of production and distribution—including film, television, radio, magazines, publications, advertising, and graphic identities. Among his many engagements with institutions, Asher intervened in branding and signage, patronage, as well as educational and curatorial responsibilities.

Produced for a specific time and place, Asher’s work intrinsically questions both the possibility and value of retrospective display. This exhibition draws on documentation and other resources from the artist’s extensive archive, alongside loans from friends and peers. While much of Asher’s work cannot be reconstituted, his wide-reaching methods and models offer pathways for understanding art’s relationship with broader systems of meaning.

Asher lived his entire life in Los Angeles and made numerous works at its local galleries, alternative spaces, and museums, including MOCA. His critical engagement with the conditions of art also shaped his teaching; over nearly four decades at CalArts, his methods of questioning and analysis left a lasting mark on generations of artists.

To underscore Asher’s commitment to publications, documentation, and study as central modes through which his work is encountered, a selection of related publications will be made available in the galleries on the second Thursday of each month beginning in April—on April 9, May 14, June 11, and July 9—from 3:30 to 7:30 pm. For this hand library, facilitators from the Michael Asher Foundation will be present to support close reading and conversation around these materials.

A film by Michael Asher will be screened on Thursday, July 16 at 7:00 pm at REDCAT.

Audio interviews with curators and facilitators involved in Asher’s projects, conducted on the occasion of this exhibition, are available on MOCA’s website.

Michael Asher is organized by Artists Space, New York, and curated by Jay Sanders and Stella Cilman. The Los Angeles presentation is organized by José Luis Blondet, Senior Curator, with Emilia Nicholson-Fajardo, Curatorial Assistant, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

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