

ROBERT IRWIN

KENNETH PRICE

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An exhibition organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in cooperation with the Museum's Contemporary Art Council. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Lytton Gallery, 1966

This exhibition presents a selection of the recent painting and sculpture of two major Los Angeles artists. I am grateful to Robert Irwin and Kenneth Price, and to their dealer, Irving Blum of Ferus-Pace Gallery, for their cooperation and assistance. My assistant, Mrs. Betty Asher, helped in the preparation of the exhibition; Ed Cornachio took all the photographs.

—Maurice Tuchman

LENDERS

L. M. Asher Family

Irving Blum

Mr. and Mrs. Donn Chappellet

Mr. and Mrs. Donald Factor

Sterling Holloway

Ferus-Pace Gallery, Los Angeles and New York

ROBERT IRWIN

Under the testing of modernism more and more of the conventions of painting have shown themselves to be dispensable, unessential. By now it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness . . .

— Clement Greenberg

There is just one art, one art-as-art.

— Ad Reinhardt

Why it became the mission of modernism to determine “the irreducible essence of pictorial art” is seen by Clement Greenberg to have been a kind of backlash of the Enlightenment. “A more rational justification had begun to be demanded of every formal social activity.” Unless painting could provide itself with such a justification, it could not expect to be taken, simply on faith, as an activity of more intrinsic worth, say, than acrobatics or juggling:

At first glance the arts might seem to have been in a situation like religion’s. Having been denied by the Enlightenment all tasks they could take seriously, they looked as though they were going to be assimilated to entertainment, pure and simple, and entertainment itself looked as though it were going to be assimilated, like religion, to therapy. The arts could save themselves from this leveling down only by demonstrating that the kind of experience they provided was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from any other kind of activity.¹

To demonstrate why it, and it alone, could provide an experience “not to be obtained from any other kind of activity” art began that intensive search for what was unique to it which has continued down to the present day. The task involved repeated discoveries that what was thought to be essential was in fact superfluous, until “every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art” was eliminated.

It was the stressing, however, of the ineluctable flatness of the support that remained most fundamental in the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism . . . Flatness, two-dimensionality, was the only condition painting shared with no other art, and so Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else.²

Whether founded in certain pressures brought to bear by the Enlightenment or not, it would be difficult to disagree with Mr. Greenberg that the main direction of modernist painting has been toward the affirmation of the flatness of the picture plane and the elimination of those effects which tend to conceal or disguise this flatness. The fundamental standard by which successive generations of artists have evaluated and reacted to the work of their predecessors appears to have been, most consistently, their success or failure in further clarifying the rock-bottom elements of the medium. Mr. Greenberg, along with a goodly number of younger critics, has been considerably involved over the years in filling out the details of this general picture, analyzing, from generation to generation and from artist to artist, the manner in which each has responded to the efforts of the other in bringing painting as a whole into line with the demands of the standard of utter fidelity to the nature of the medium.

What is new, and has been new since at least the beginning of this decade, has been the consciousness with which a considerable number of artists have also become involved in filling out the details. Hyper-conscious of the situation in which modernist art has found itself, the artists of this decade have been remarkably hesitant in taking the risks that might be called for to loosen the stranglehold of a more and more intensified commitment to flatness, falling back instead upon more and more rarified explorations of "the delimitation of flatness." The result has been that the nerveless spectre of Critique has goaded the inspiration of more recent paintings than has the search for "the kind of experience not to be obtained from any other kind of activity." In short, Critique has become inspiration; the means have become the end. But Critique is not art, necessary as it has been and may continue to be to art.

The satisfaction that has attended the explorations of the best painters of this decade has been this: that whatever esthetic response can be elicited by paintings completely consistent with flatness and the delimitation of flatness is a response which comes from the art of painting alone, unsweetened by the qualities of any other activity. This knowledge has been their triumph. But, as recent abstract painting came to place itself more and more in the service of a technical intellectuality, it became inevitable that certain artists would emerge who would make clear their willingness to take whatever risks are necessary to reaffirm the fact that the function of a painting is to convey the experience of art. Among these, Robert Irwin is perhaps the most audacious.

In Robert Irwin's most recent paintings one is confronted by what at first appears to be an immaculate white picture plane, about seven feet square, and nothing more. Some time

must pass — a minute, or two, or three — before the viewer becomes fully aware of an indistinct, irregularly-shaped mass which seems to have emerged out of the white plane (or is perceived within it, or behind it), roughly centered. The coloration is so subdued that there is no possibility of defining what one sees in terms of it, but rather in terms of what it suggests: a quality of energy, an energy, one feels, which will tend, ultimately to dissolve itself uniformly on the picture plane in a kind of entropic dissipation. The rest — after the elements of the painting have, so to speak, “emerged” — is a history of hypnotic involvement between the viewer and the elements of color and whiteness before him. Upon the quality of this involvement, the entire success or failure of the picture is staked: Irwin has systematically refrained from offering anything more than the conditions which make this involvement possible. This is to say that Irwin has left himself nothing to fall back upon: if what the viewer is experiencing is not art, there are no substitute gratifications to get him by.

To this extent, then, at least, Irwin affirms the logic of Clement Greenberg's understanding of the history of modernist art — that a painting must deliver an esthetic experience which only it can deliver, uncontaminated by effects of a lesser nature. If, in these paintings, Irwin runs the risk of a calculated “impurity” of presentation, it is because the risks of painting as Critique have come to appear to him as even more forbidding. In short, for Robert Irwin, the choice of deliberately curving the canvas to help “drop away” the framing edge is not half so questionable as is making a painting solely to draw attention to its presence. The response “How logical!” is not a response to art.

In Irwin's painting, the point of modernist art shifts from an exploration of the elements essential to the medium to the elements essential to the conveying of the experience of art, which is to say, away from Critique and back to the point of it all. The framing edge, for example, is not seen as a conditioning factor, strongly to be affirmed, the necessary source of many decisions within the painting itself. Instead, the precise weight it is to have in the total scheme of things is measured and balanced, and, because its intrusive presence in these paintings is not to be emphasized, Irwin chooses to curve the canvas in such a manner as to leave its curvature virtually invisible from the proper viewing distance, to effect the most subtle playing down of the edge, so that it appears virtually to “drop away,” out of the viewer's consciousness. This “invisible curve,” designed primarily to integrate the edge into the total effect of the work without making the solution the work of art in itself, is perhaps the most successful single aspect of Irwin's recent paintings.

The color-energy which emerges from the white surface of these paintings is as neutral of

associative overtones as any presence on the canvas can conceivably be. All elements extraneous to the evocation of an esthetic emotion and no other emotion have been eliminated with a fanatic's thoroughness. Because any mass has distracting associations, the mass here is at last dissolved into a haze of color-energy. Because any edge has connotations of shape, there is not a distinct edge anywhere in the painting. Because incident of any kind tends to distract, incidents of strong coloration, of horizontality, verticality, texture or contrast have been eliminated. What is left is an experience of space and of light.

It is worth noting that even this simple description of what the paintings look like (and it is as feeble, from the point of view of communicating what the paintings are about as the photographs to which Irwin so categorically objects) indicates a series of risks which Irwin has taken in these latest works, risks which would seem utterly senseless were it not possible to discover, behind each of them, a conception of art which not only makes all of them understandable, but, indeed, inevitable if that conception is to be put to the test at all. That conception involves, first of all, the dedication of the work of art to the creation of an immensely human esthetic encounter between viewer and painting, and second, a complex disassociation, in Irwin's mind, between art and the art-object.

First of these risks is the introduction of, and insistence upon, the element of time, which would appear to impose, quite arbitrarily, a sequential structure on an art form to which such a structure is not native. But what Irwin manifestly wishes to do is slow the viewer down, prepare him, in effect, for an encounter. A certain measurable duration of time is necessary before one can even see what there is to be seen, so that the viewer will either see the painting the way Irwin wants him to see it or he will not—quite literally—see the painting at all. This double risk—that of seeming to impose a distracting and irrelevant time sequence on the one hand, or of losing entirely the viewer who will not adjust to Irwin's tempo on the other—is taken not in the name of looking at a picture, but of experiencing art. The name of the game, after all, is Art, not Looking at Pictures, and these latest paintings of Robert Irwin's, time after time, deliberately risk losing presence as an art object for the sake of gaining presence as art.

The second risk involves the reintroduction of an ambiguous, atmospheric space which modernist painting has, for most of this decade, been at pains to banish in the interests of non-illusionism. The space, for example, in which the halation of color-energy in Irwin's paintings manifests itself would be unthinkable in a painting by Stella, Noland or Barnett Newman, and was not permitted to himself even by Robert Irwin in his previous paintings.

What we are dealing with is the calculated reintroduction of an element whose potentialities for mischief are so thoroughly understood by the artist, that he offers it only under the most exacting of circumstances, ridding it of as many of its previous connotations as possible. The "integrity of the picture plane as a two-dimensional surface" is violated, but in such a way as to suggest that such violations may be possible once again.

The third risk—and this would seem to involve the most far-reaching implications about the nature of the art-object itself—is the complete open-handedness with which Irwin permits the entire illusion to dissolve upon close inspection of the painting itself. At optimal viewing distance, which begins at about ten feet and may extend to as much as forty feet from the painting, all is light and space. One must come to within a foot or two of the canvas to observe that the sensation of perceiving an indistinct mist of color-energy is produced by the meticulous application of tiny dots of color over a given area. At a distance of two or three feet what had appeared to be flat is seen to be bowed, and what had appeared to be an evanescent haze of energized color is seen to be merely an uninteresting array of specks of red and green pigment, lacking even that mysterious tactility and sensuousness which, say, a Seurat, seen close, might have. Up close, the painting is an empty stage.

What Robert Irwin is insisting upon, these paintings seem irresistibly to declare, is that the medium is not the message. They explore a division, as absolute as can possibly be demonstrated, between the art-object and the art, between the painting and the experience of art. What stays in the museum is only the art-object, not valueless, but not of the value of art. The art is what has happened to the viewer.

— Philip Leider

¹Clement Greenberg "Modernist Painting," in The New Art, edited by Gregory Battcock, New York, Dutton, 1966, pp. 100-110.

²ibid.

ROBERT IRWIN

No title, 1963-1965. Oil on canvas, 82½" x 84½".

Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery.

No title, 1963-1965. Oil on canvas, 82½" x 84½".

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No title, 1963-1965. Oil on canvas, 82½" x 84½".

Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery.

No title, 1965. Oil on canvas, 42" x 43".

Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery.

No title, 1965. Oil on canvas, 42" x 43".

Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery.

Robert Irwin was born in Long Beach, California in 1928. He has had one-man exhibitions at the Felix Landau Gallery in 1957; at the Ferus Gallery in 1959, 1960, 1962, 1964; at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1960. He resides in Los Angeles.

At the request of Robert Irwin no photographs of his work are included in the catalog.

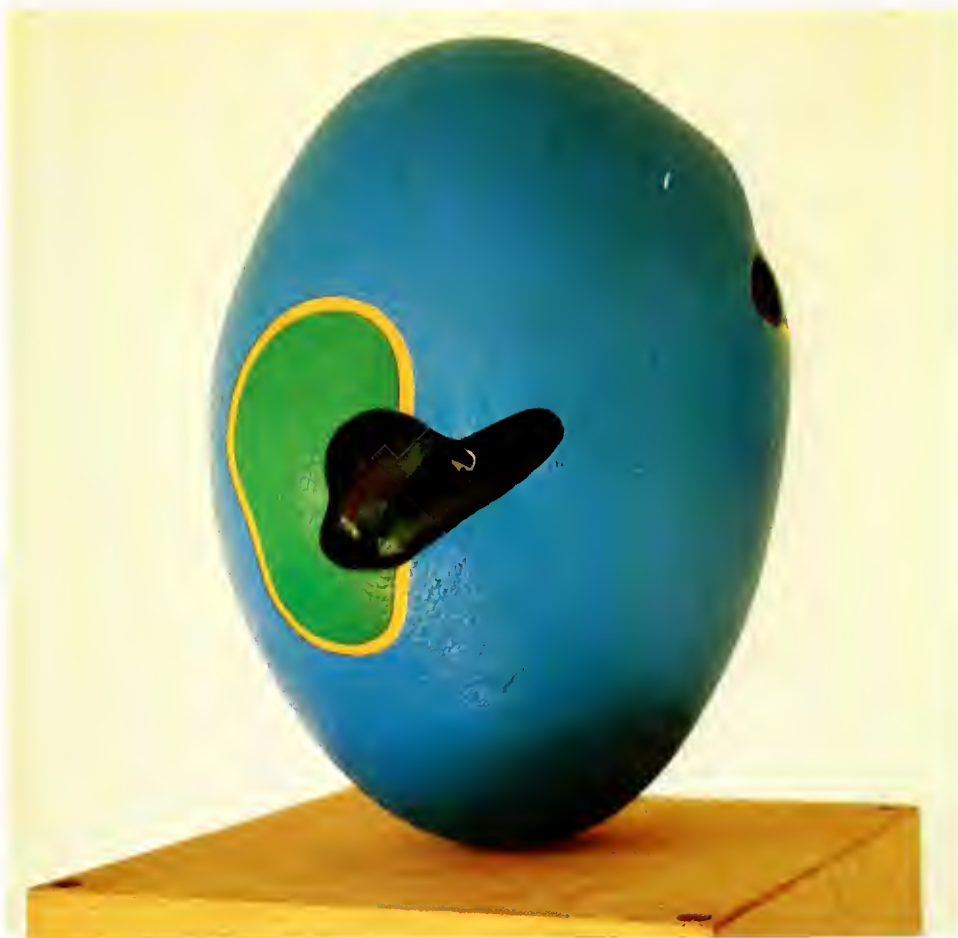
KENNETH PRICE

1. Silver, 1961. Fired and painted clay, H. 12"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by Irving Blum.
2. Red, 1961. Fired and painted clay, H. 19"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Factor.
3. Black, 1961. Fired and painted clay, H. 11½"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by Sterling Holloway.
4. M. Green, 1961. Fired and painted clay, W. 13"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by L. M. Asher Family.
5. S. Violet, 1963. Fired and painted clay, W. 11"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donn Chappellet.
6. B. T. Blue, 1963. Fired and painted clay, H. 10"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by L. M. Asher Family.
7. G. G. White, 1963. Fired and painted clay, H. 10"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by Sterling Holloway.
8. G. L. Green, 1964. Fired and painted clay, H. 7"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by Irving Blum.
9. Specimen C1103.20, 1964. Fired and painted clay, W. 2½"; total W. 13".
Lent by L. M. Asher Family.
10. Specimen CJ1303, 1964. Fired and painted clay, W. 2½"; total W. 12".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Factor.
11. Specimen B1520.06, 1964. Fired and painted clay, W. 3"; total W. 15½".
Lent by the artist.
12. Specimen CJ2421, 1965. Fired and painted clay, W. 2½"; total W. 12".
Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery.
13. L. Violet, 1965. Fired and painted clay, H. 5"; H. with stand 17".
Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery.
14. M. Violet, 1965. Fired and painted clay, H. 5½"; H. with stand 14".
Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery.
15. D. Violet, 1965. Fired and painted clay, H. 6"
Lent by the artist.
16. S. O. F. Violet, 1966. Fired and painted clay, W. 6¾".
Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery.
17. C. R. C. Green, 1966. Fired and painted clay, W. 6¾".
Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery.

Kenneth Price was born in Los Angeles in 1935. He has had one-man exhibitions at Ferus Gallery in 1960, 1961 and 1964. He resides in Los Angeles.



1. Silver, 1961 Fired and painted clay, H. 12"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by Irving Blum



6. B. T. Blue, 1963. Fired and painted clay. H. 10"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by L. M. Asher Family.



2. Red, 1961. Fired and painted clay, H. 19"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Factor.



3. Black, 1961. Fired and painted clay, H. 11 1/2"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by Sterling Holloway.



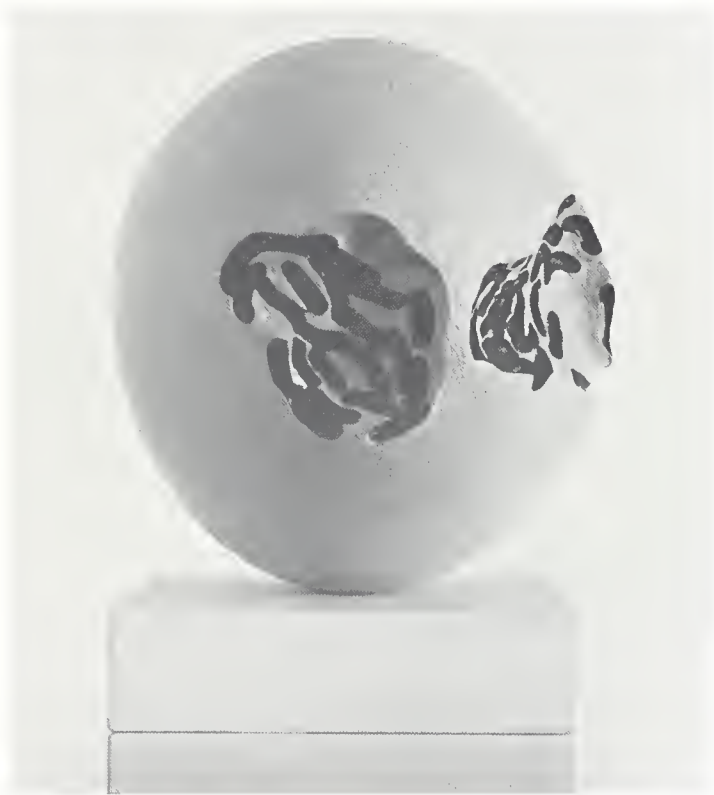
4. M. Green, 1961. Fired and painted clay. W. 13", H. with stand 70".
Lent by L. M. Asher Family.



5 S. Violet, 1963. Fired and painted clay, W 11", H with stand 70"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donn Chappellet



7. G. G. White, 1963. Fired and painted clay, H. 10"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by Sterling Holloway.



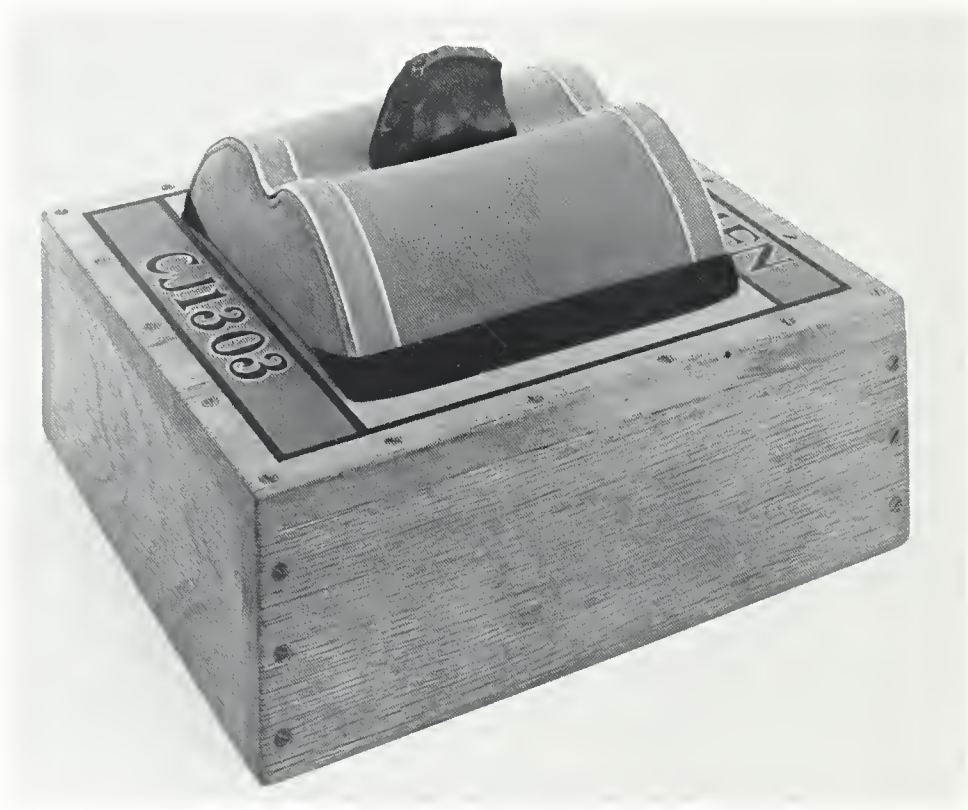
8. G. L. Green, 1964. Fired and painted clay. H. 7"; H. with stand 70".
Lent by Irving Blum.



17. C. R. C. Green, 1966. Fired and painted clay, W. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery



9. Specimen C1103.20, 1964 Fired and painted clay, W. 2 1/2"; total W 13".
Lent by L. M. Asher Family



10. Specimen CJ1303, 1964 Fired and painted clay, W. 2½"; total W. 12".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Factor.



11. Specimen B1520.06, 1964 Fired and painted clay, W 3"; total W. 15½".
Lent by the artist.



12. Specimen CJ2421, 1965 Fired and painted clay, W. 2½"; total W. 12".
Lent by Ferus Pace Gallery



13. L. Violet, 1965. Fired and painted clay, H. 5", H. with stand 17"
Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery

14. M. Violet, 1965. Fired and painted clay, H. 5 1/2", H. with stand 14"
Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery



15. D. Violet, 1965. Fired and painted clay, H. 6"
Lent by the artist.



16. S. O. F Violet, 1966. Fired and painted clay, W. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ ".
Lent by Ferus-Pace Gallery.

KENNETH PRICE

It is a fact rather than a value judgment that no one else, on the east or west coast, is working like Kenneth Price. He is involved in a peculiarly contemporary dialectic, but he has deliberately read himself out of the vanguard race for innovation. His pace, like his morphology, is his own. He has chosen an idiom central to modern art in which the working decisions are flexible instead of fixed. There is in his work that simultaneous commitment and detachment identified with the increasingly oriental cast of Western thought, an unsentimental respect for the shiny armoured surfaces of a luxury civilization as well as a precise and delicate awareness of the most elusive bonds between man and nature. These are not contradictory but complementary aspects of modern life.

Price is, of course, something of a Surrealist, something of a purist, something of an expressionist, something of a naturalist. Obvious, if irrelevant precedents for the so-called egg shape (it is rarely that regular) for which he is known can be found in Moore, Miró, Brancusi, Arp, Ernst, Flannagan, Picasso, and the Japanese art of bonseki, though exposure to these prototypes came, if at all, after his own direction was firmly established. Price's ideas, formal and evocative, are universal. Images that stem from the very sources of natural or common experience have a broader base than the art-historical experience. Egg and dome are basic shapes that could have been selected by anyone, anywhere. Like geometry, biomorphism is simply an available means for an individual absolute. In Price's case the egg form seems to have come from a long interest in zoology and a logical evolution from the last of the conical or mound-shaped pots he made around 1959. In addition, one tends to forget that the west coast is usually isolated from the influences that swell and diminish the New York or Parisian scene. Now that Los Angeles can claim its own place in the international scheme, there has been a tendency to group its past with the pasts of other, more cosmopolitan art centers. Price was raised and largely educated in Southern California but the only influence he concedes (with Picasso) is the sculptor Peter Voulkos, whose great individual and professional vitality contributed to the rejuvenation of the Los Angeles art world, and who was instrumental in the liberation of ceramic from its craft orientation. Price, John Mason and Billy Al Bengston worked with him at the County Art Institute in 1956-57, making up at that time a unique group of ceramicists who could be considered progressive artists first and foremost. Price took this aspect of his training still further when he got a Master's degree in Fine Arts from the most respected ceramic engineering school in the country, at Alfred, New York.

Yet despite biographical ties to the area, there is little reason to link Price with specific attitudes or stylistic trends in Los Angeles. Highly skilled execution should not be considered special to Southern California even if constructional expertise may be taken for granted here more than elsewhere. Price's occasional industrial enamel or lacquer surfaces and acid color schemes are matters of conceptual convenience, while a certain perversity that might be related to the sociological peculiarities of Hollywood and environs can also be attributed to the 1960's in general. Price does not, for instance, subscribe to a "fetishist's" reverence for materials as such. The shells of his sculpture are always clay, the tendrils clay or wood, but the surfaces can be oil, lacquer, enamel, glaze, grainy, shiny, pitted, dented or scored, streaked or nuanced, matte or chatoyant, and are wholly determined by formal concept. The clearcut, strongly colored outer form conveys a toughness and modernity while the dark, glassy orifice and tendrils, with their suggestion of a teeming, damp, cool substratum, bring to bear most strongly the organic metaphor that is responsible for the sculpture's extra-formal fascination. Immediately recognizable, if not nameable, the protruding finger-stamen-bud-pod-root-phallus-fungus-visceral-larval-germinal shapes reflect a shared experience, an archetypal fact that is doubly provocative because the highly charged allusions are so impassively protected and contained.

Price's work suffers from reproduction more than most sculpture because continuous contour is more important than silhouette. It should not be read frontally; the lobed bands, or elongated, freely flowing images, can follow, transform or contradict the gentle outer curve, as well as creating a middleground between surface and aperture or countering the directional thrust of the tendrils. The apertures are not holes, but recesses, glimpses of an hermetic core that in the recent work has pushed its way close to the surface, or beyond. These recesses break both surface and contour, while the bands are binding agents, leading the eye around the form, lifting the weight from its base or asserting it by establishing a low center of gravity. The strong focal effect of the aperture can be modified, de-emphasized, by the painted figures, or intensified, the surface contracted around the opening. Actually, the serial aspect of Price's work has been stressed to the neglect of its great variety. Since 1958 he has developed steadily, the various phases marked not by sudden stylistic change, but by a continued tightening up, assurance and sophistication. The generalized, self-contained outer form has become the vehicle for an increasingly inventive range of painted and sculpted interaction. The monochromatic M. Green, 1961, (cat. no. 4) for example, with its coolly glowing enamel surface and broad, undeviating band, employs the image to enclose the outer form, hold back the groping tendrils, while the brilliant B. G. Red, 1963, uses the crisply outlined, rapid parallel figures to contradict obliquely the vertical axis, to sharpen

the complex exchange between actual and implied space and movement. If Price has never been interested in the flat rectangularity of a canvas, his color—saturated, self-assertive, sometimes harshly atonal—is as specific and highly tuned as that of most painters. The example could have been provided by Voukos' polychromy, by California painters like Lorser Feitelson or by the color fields of Barnett Newman or Ellsworth Kelly, but it is more likely that Price evolved his color as intuitively as his form. Its sun-drenched quality and industrial associations may not be coincidental, but they are incidental.

Size and scale are often confused in descriptions of current art. Large size interpreted as "presence" has been misused to disguise formal poverty. Yet scale is relative and Price's intent can not be confused with the landscape measure of, say, a Newman painting or a David Smith sculpture. Like them it has a solemnity that holds the viewer at a distance, but this is accompanied by an intimacy in keeping with the content. Except for a group of large (around 5' in diameter) fiberglass pieces in progress for several years now, all of Price's work is small in size, very small compared to the gigantism of most contemporary sculpture, the largest being around a foot high. Price determines scale by form, by color, contour, figuration and by subtle textures which, as John Coplans has observed, slow down the visual scan;¹ more translucent surfaces can "float" the volume by means of reflection from the light-toned base. He does all he can to control the space in which his sculpture will be seen. Each piece has a pedestal designed by the artist—an expertly carpentered pillar that establishes the breadth of surface and viewing height. Until recently these were often unexpectedly tall, with eye level directed at the middle of the form (since a downward view of many shapes diminishes scale) and at the apertures (perhaps because the involvement is more immediate that way). The base's surface is larger for a horizontal volume that needs more breathing space than a vertical, and the smallest pieces are isolated in boxes so they are less likely to be left around on book cases as bric-a-brac or, worse still, little "feelies." Despite their size, and because of their scale, tall pedestals, alert stances, brilliant colors and hard surfaces, Price's work imposes an atmosphere of detachment, even hostility. There is nothing self-effacing about them however vulnerable they may seem. "Like the geometric redness of the Black Widow's belly or the burning rings of the Coral Snake," Henry Hopkins has written, "these objects announce their intent to survive."²

Occasional detours have been made into special groups. The bump, or mound shape which developed from the general classic form of a pot invested with a vocabulary drawn from nature rather than function, is less abstract, less neutral than the egg shape. The mounds are firmly grounded where the eggs balance lightly on a single point or rest weightily on

their sides. Because the bump is more asymmetrical it is likely to be more allusive, as in Red, 1961, (cat. no. 2) where the painted bands move like pink tongues around the swelling surface, over and out of the dark orifices whose protrusions are truncated like cut stems, as though the outer form had overcome or emasculated the growing shoots. Some irregular, pebble-like pieces lie on beds of sand or in painted, papered or collaged boxes. These, and the few cups Price still makes as an avocation, can diverge into a playful, sometimes precious direction that has more in common with California Surrealism and assemblage than do the major pieces. Some are perfectly abstract, or functional, while others afford a broader scope to wit and fantasy, incorporating fantastic animals, numbers, trade signs or emblems. A series of six or eight strange Specimens, made around 1964, are more exquisite and more personal. The very small matte blue and red "mushroom-egg" in the Asher collection rests majestically on a velvet pillow and a low columned platform, like a combination of crown jewel and heir apparent to some mythological potentate.

Price may like the work of several leading Surrealists, but his esthetic position and use of an allusive imagery is post-Surrealist. Though independent of literal symbolism and distinctly committed to the non-objective (which is foreign to the anti-esthetic and anti-abstraction program of official Surrealism), he is occupied with the unique rather than the commonplace, the dispassionately personal rather than the aggressively impersonal of prevailing modes. With the possible exception of Arp, whose fantasy is more playful and whose inclusion in the Surrealist ranks is more a matter of association than style, there has been no purer fusion of abstraction and poetry. Unlike Arp's, Price's "purism" has a dark, even unpleasant side that comprises his most convincing link to Surrealism. Despite their beauty and an undercurrent of melancholy, these small entities are potentially dangerous. Their delicate balance emulates that of nature. Some of the Specimens may be whimsical, the larger sculpture seldom is. Its natural reference is so clear that it sheds clichés and both demands and repels participation. Like all intuitive art, it is difficult to generalize except on its own non-verbal terms. The most Surrealist characteristic is the sensuous element that pervades each piece in spite of the protective shell. The extended tendrils, limp or erect, the rounded but never totally regular contour, the minute variations of surface texture or patina, harsh or luxuriant colors, intimate scale and disturbing aloofness elicit more than ordinary visual involvement of the spectator's senses. The extent or existence of erotic suggestion is as difficult to discuss as to gauge, since sensuous reactions of any kind are unquestionably subjective. Price himself defines eroticism in a strict sense and sees no such content in his art; on the other hand there are viewers who find it hard to get past the biological implications to broader values. Certainly this sculpture is not obscene, but there is an element of growth, pain, emerg-

ence, fulfillment that can elicit genital or anal processes. Because the imagery is so abstract, and less anthropomorphic than vegetal in character, the sexual reference is far more refined than it is in the near-abstract Surrealists like Miró, Masson or Ernst. Since 1961 the apertures and tendrils have been progressively de-emphasized, further restraining such evocative effects. It may be that Price has become more aware of the necessity to combat or control the spectator's free associations, or this may have been an incidental by-product of developing formal schemes.

Potential metamorphosis, a tension born of holding back, marks the ovoid and mound pieces. There is no reason to believe that Price is consciously following a natural evolutionary cycle or that spreading, animate form will replace the present vehicle, but in the last year or so some sort of transformation, far from complete, perhaps temporary, has begun. Apertures and tendrils have surfaced, flattened and emerged as exterior forms pitted with elliptical imprints. In A. C. Green, 1963, the painted yellow image dominates, from one angle, the green ground, splitting and peeling away the surface down to a flesh-colored patch and then to a layered concave area of green and black, with impressions of vestigial tendrils. The yellow figure is crisply bordered in black; the outer form is nearly perfect, though the surface is roughly grained. The sculpture as a whole displays an open, self-assured specificity that differs from the closed, secretive aura of the works where the aperture is a focal point. L. Violet, M. Violet and D. Violet, 1965, (cat. nos. 13, 14, 15) go one step further; the extruding areas are now virtually independent of the mass, as though in the process of growth they had violated the shell with a will to move and change. The substitution of multiple seed-like pits for a few hard, pressing tendrils, piled-up for buried forms, a square or spreading shape for the restrained egg, a concave or convex area for the painted figure, indicates an expansion of the metaphor as well as of its formal possibilities. The two 1966 pieces shown here—C. R. C. Green and S. O. F. Violet, (cat. nos. 16, 17) are still more original solutions. Now fluid images dominate rather than alter the contour. The forms are less centrally contained than in all the earlier work. Tendrils and egg have fused, taken on the color and texture of the shell and become something else.

The ovoid is a proved and accepted sculptural form. The new pieces move into a more idiosyncratic province and challenge certain existing ideas about sculpture, and about the difference between sculpture and "object." The object is by current art definition a Dada-Surrealist offspring; the word is used, sometimes pejoratively, to cover a multitude of minor sins and decorative extravagances as well as the validly advanced work of Lucas Samaras, or a small Kienholz. It is most often used to describe assemblage, or three-dimensional art containing

identifiable articles, and as such is separated from sculpture. In another guise, the object esthetic is used to describe the Primary Structures of Judd, Morris, McCracken or Hamrol. Entirely non-objective, these planar, unitary, deadpan sculptures are conceptual descendents of recent painting rather than of the sculptural mainstream; thus they too are separated from sculpture. Recently there have been signs that a third kind of "object" is occurring independently to younger artists in the East (Viner, Hess, Kuehn) and in the West (Nauman, Potts). They share with the Structurists a painter's eye, a concern with unitary form rather than the multiple, additive premise of assemblage and mainstream sculpture, and because the form is single, the scale of such compact works often seems larger than normal. Like Price, these artists refuse to forego the sensuous effects of form first explored by the Surrealists, but reject direct Freudian or figurative allusion in favor of an anti-expressionist aloofness.

Price's new forms are non-sculptural in these senses because they abdicate the monolithic solidity of the egg shape (without sacrificing its weight) and claim an unexpected dignity from a fluid awkwardness foreign to traditional idioms. Until now, true biomorphism has been limited almost entirely to painting. Brancusi, Arp and Moore never wholly abandoned the gestural or anthropomorphic stance implicit in modern sculpture. As Price's sculpture becomes less and less ingratiating, it acquires a beautiful and rather horrible strangeness that appeals both to the mind and to the senses. With his unique approach to polychromy and to small, low-slung forms, he is in the process of discovering one alternative to the restrictions of conventional sculpture.

— Lucy R. Lippard

¹John Coplans, *Five Los Angeles Sculptors*, Art Gallery, University of California, Irvine, 1966, p.3

²Henry Hopkins, "Kenneth Price," Artforum, (vol. 2, no. 2), August, 1963, p. 41

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