

GREY ART NYU GALLERY

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California Funk Comes to New York in Major Exhibition on Wallace Berman and the Beat Generation Counterculture

***Semina Culture: Wallace Berman & His Circle*
on view at NYU's Grey Art Gallery January 16 through March 31, 2007**

New York City, November 10, 2006—"Realism mixed with demonic funk." That's how poet Jack Hirschman described West Coast artist Wallace Berman's photographs. A catalyst who moved through many different worlds, Wallace Berman (1926–1976) is a crucial figure in the history of postwar California art. *Semina Culture: Wallace Berman & His Circle* is the first major museum examination of Berman's work and that of the creative people who coalesced around him in the 1950s and '60s. On view at the Grey Art Gallery at New York University from January 16 through March 31, 2007, the show includes the complete run of *Semina*—a loose-leaf, hand-printed, free-form art and poetry journal that Berman published and personally distributed—along with paintings, sculptures, collages, photographs, and writings by those who belonged to the close-knit *Semina Culture* community.

Semina served as a brilliant compendium of work by the most interesting artists and poets of the time, including Berman himself, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Jess, Joan Brown, Robert Duncan, and John Altoon, among many others. Also featured are over fifty of Berman's own photographs, recently printed from vintage negatives. Shown for the first time, they shed light on the charismatic artist—his eclectic worldview and non-nine-to-five lifestyle—as well as on America's underground community of the 1950s and '60s. Both the exhibition and accompanying catalog offer rigorous scholarship and tantalizing insights about an emerging counterculture whose rich array of artistic voices contrasted with the chilling conformity of the Eisenhower era.

Co-curated by Michael Duncan and Kristine McKenna, *Semina Culture* has been organized by the Santa Monica Museum of Art. "Infused with nostalgia, lyricism, and feeling," Duncan observes, "the Beat writings and artworks in the show offer a sprawling alternative to the formal achievements of Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, and postmodernism, one that stands outside traditional art-historical narrative of 'progression.'" Based largely in California, but with significant ties to the East Coast, the artists, performers, and poets featured in the show were loosely connected to other important

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY GREY ART GALLERY 100 WASHINGTON SQUARE EAST NEW YORK NY 10003
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centers of American avant-garde production: Black Mountain College (Robert Duncan, Jess, Joe Dunn, John Wieners); the New York Poets and New York Poets Theatre (Allen Ginsberg, Diane DiPrima, Michael McClure, George Herms, Robert Duncan, John Wieners); avant-garde cinema (Bruce Conner, Larry Jordan, Paul Beattie, Toni Basil, Russel Tamblyn); and Andy Warhol's Factory (Jack Smith, Taylor Mead, Diane DiPrima). Other artists featured in the exhibition are: Robert Alexander, John Altoon, Ray and Bonnie Bremser, Charles Brittin, Joan Brown, Cameron, Jean Conner, Jay DeFeo, Kirby Doyle, Bobby Driscoll, Lynn Foulkes, Loree Foxx, Ralph Gibson, Billy Gray, Jack Hirschman, Dennis Hopper, Walter Hopps, Billy Jahrmarkt, Patricia Jordan, Bob Kaufman, Philip Lamantia, William Margolis, David Meltzer, Henry Miller, DiDi Morrill, Stuart Perkoff, John Reed, Arthur Richer, Rachel Rosenthal, Dean Stockwell, Ben Talbert, Aya (Tarlow), Edmund Teske, Alexander Trochhi, Zack Walsh, and Lew Welch.

"It is very refreshing at this particular moment to see work by this diverse group of artists for whom artmaking was not a career but a lifestyle," notes Lynn Gumpert, the Grey Art Gallery's director. "We are thrilled to be the only East Coast venue for this landmark and innovative show, which highlights the visual achievements of the West Coast Beat generation who have traditionally been overshadowed by the New York School."

About the Artist

Wallace Berman was born in Staten Island, New York, in 1926. His family moved to Los Angeles in 1936. Berman began taking photographs in the early 1950s, and his approach to the medium was unique—he often used his negatives to produce just a single print that might be cut up and pasted onto mailers and sent to friends. The bulk of his negatives were left unprinted. In 1955, Berman began publishing *Semina*, his limited-edition magazine, with the assistance of Charles Brittin and Robert Alexander. The first issue included contributions from Cameron, David Meltzer, and Alexander. Subsequent issues reflected the ever-evolving perspective of its creator, and the contents of the magazine were deliberately private and often mysterious. Berman, his wife Shirley, and their son Tosh, lived in Northern California from 1957 to 1961. Upon returning to their home in the Beverly Glen area of Los Angeles, Berman began working on his only film, *Aleph*, a work-in-progress that occupied him for the rest of his life. In 1964, Berman began creating what would prove to be his best-known body of work—his Verifax collage series—which was made with an early version of a photocopying machine. Anchored to the recurring motif of a handheld transistor radio, the Verifax works incorporated a vast vocabulary of found imagery that included 1960s Pop icons such as James Brown and Bob Dylan as well as sports photographs clipped from newspapers. In the Verifax collages, Berman also investigated Jewish mysticism and the Kabbalah. Berman premiered a selection of them in an exhibition at his Beverly Glen studio in October 1965. Two months later the Berman home was destroyed in a mudslide. Berman and his family then settled in Topanga Canyon, where Berman lived for the rest of his life. Over the next several years, his work was included in exhibitions at such venues as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and

The Jewish Museum in New York. In 1976, on the eve of his 50th birthday, Berman died in an accident caused by a drunk driver.

A comprehensive and lavishly illustrated 384-page catalog documenting the exhibition is published and distributed by the Santa Monica Museum of Art and DAP. *Semina Culture* originated at the SMMoA, where it debuted before beginning its national tour. The Grey Art Gallery at New York University is the show's final venue. The exhibition is made possible by Philip Aarons and Shelley Fox Aarons, LLWW Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Pasadena Art Alliance, and Writers Boot Camp. The presentation at the Grey Art Gallery is made possible in part by the Abby Weed Grey Trust. Public programs are supported by the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation and the Grey's Inter/National Council.

GENERAL INFORMATION

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Web site: <http://www.nyu.edu/greyart>

Hours:

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 11am–6 pm

OPEN LATE Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm

Saturday: 11 am–5 pm

Sunday, Monday and major holidays: Closed

Admission: Suggested donation: \$3; NYU staff, faculty, and students: free of charge

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