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Catalogue for Allen Ruppersberg's "You and Me or The Art of Give and Take"



Installation view of "Allen Ruppersberg: You and Me or The Art of Give and Take," 2009  
Santa Monica Museum of Art  
Photo by Bruce Morr



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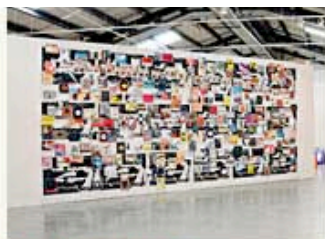
## RUPPERSBERG TIME

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

*Guest Informant*, that slim local guidebook for tourists found in many hotel rooms, is the basis of the catalogue for the **Allen Ruppersberg** exhibition "You and Me or The Art of Give and Take" at the Santa Monica Museum of Art. The particular *Guest Informant* that he appropriates is more than 50 years old, dating from 1956 and covering all of California and Las Vegas. It bears a big black label warning that "this volume must not be removed from the premises." We are thus notified at the outset that the artist has broken the rules and we are accessories after the fact. It is a minor crime, as crimes go, with an esoteric pay-off: finding oneself immersed in a rapidly fading past, a past that is painstakingly preserved throughout Ruppersberg's work.

The original spiral-bound guidebook, purloined at some point from the Mark Hopkins in San Francisco, comes from Ruppersberg's extensive archives, as does the rest of the material in this exhibition. Everything was reproduced in the context of Ruppersberg's contention that copies are equal to if not superior than originals. Ruppersberg altered the catalogue's cover to feature a postcard from one Memory Motel. The interior pages, charming with their 1950s advertisements for the likes of Finocchio's, a nightspot with the "World's Greatest Female Impersonators," or airline flights to L.A. for \$9.99, are collaged with the artist's own postcards and snapshots documenting sites and events that constitute his memories. Memories that occasionally jibe with our own. Excellent essays by guest curator Constance Lewallen, John Slyce, Greil Marcus and others are superimposed on top of the original pages of the book.

The catalogue is a portable version of the concepts in the exhibition. In the center of the museum's main gallery, a pegboard wall divides the two installations. One side is titled *The Sound and the Story/The Hugo Ball Award for 20th Century Graphics*, referring the poet of the Dada movement whose random combinations of words and images exemplified their esthetic. (It also lampoons the annual "Hugo Boss Award" in contemporary art.) On one side hang laminated photo-copies of fliers and album art by rock and punk bands from the 1960s and



**Allen Ruppersberg**  
*The Sound and the Story/The Hugo Ball Award for 20th Century Graphics*  
2009  
Courtesy of the artist  
Santa Monica Museum of Art  
Photo by Bruce Morr



**Allen Ruppersberg**  
*The Never Ending Book Part Two/Ar and Therefore Ourselves*  
2009  
Courtesy of the artist  
Santa Monica Museum of Art  
Photo by Bruce Morr



**Allen Ruppersberg**  
*The Never Ending Book Part Two/Ar and Therefore Ourselves (detail)*  
2009  
Courtesy of the artist  
Santa Monica Museum of Art  
Photo by Bruce Morr



**Allen Ruppersberg**  
*Twins*  
1989  
Courtesy of Mike Kelley  
Photo by Bruce Morr



**Allen Ruppersberg**  
*The Gift and the Inheritance (Les Fleurs du Mal)*  
1989  
Collection of Christine Burgin  
Photo by Bruce Morr

'70s, while the other side is adorned with the homely homilies of sheet music for songs, recipes and photographs from the earlier decades of the 20th century.

A second installation titled *The Never Ending Book Part Two / Art and Therefore Ourselves* is a sequel to *The Never Ending Book Part One*, which was shown at Art Basel in 2007. As in that event, Ruppersberg has filled cardboard boxes with photocopied images from his archives that date back to the turn of the 20th century, a time when his grandparents owned a general store outside of Cleveland, where he was born. Viewers do not know which pictures are personal and which are documents of someone else's lost history, photographs documenting indecipherable events in phantom locations.

The audience is invited to take home these photocopies to help complete the never-ending book (six pieces only please). The interactive aspect of the installation recalls the Happenings of **Allan Kaprow**, and Ruppersberg is spending several days during with museum visitors rearranging his installation. On the walls are hung giant vintage banners advertising the circus, which bring to mind a bygone era. In fact, his subtitle for the installation is *Songs, Recipes, and the Old People, Echoes of the Past Vol. 2, Wave Goodbye to Grandma*.

In the 1960s, as a student at L.A.'s most progressive art school, Chouinard Art Institute (now Cal Arts), Ruppersberg was aware of the Beats, collage and assemblage, the thumb-nosing installations and contracts of **Ed Kienholz** as well as **Ed Ruscha's** language-based Pop art. It was a groundbreaking period, and Ruppersberg's own first exhibition was at the Eugenia Butler Gallery, which showed another of L.A.'s early Conceptual artists, **John Baldessari**. One of Ruppersberg's earliest exhibitions was not held in a gallery but in a downtown restaurant that he renamed Al's Café, where he acted as chef of a fanciful menu offering such fare as pine cones and cookies. The 1969 event was interactive, surreal and poetic, the very qualities that would continue to materialize in his art. However, Ruppersberg's unique stature among the Conceptualists derives, I believe, from his determined and consistent use of literature. In 1974, he wrote the text of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a novella about a painting and the passage of time, in longhand across panels of white canvas. It was a substantial work, giving a notable autobiographical spin to theoretical avant-garde gesture.

Books have been a recurring concern throughout his oeuvre, as seen in the small survey of drawings from 1985 to 1989 included in the show. Each pencil rendering of a book from the artist's own library -- from *Fleurs du Mal* to *Tick Tock Tales* -- when purchased by a collector came with the assurance that the book itself would



**Allen Ruppertsberg**  
*The Gift and the Inheritance (Tick  
Tock Tales)*  
1989  
Collection of Lisa Lyons and  
Richard  
Grossman  
Photo by Bruce Morr

be bequeathed to collector after the artist's death. Consequently, the show offers much to read and digest, which takes time. But that is the point really -- the pathos of time's passage. The catalogue is an extraordinary artist's book unto itself that transcends and extends the exhibition, and is accompanied by a 33 rpm vinyl LP record of songs, hymns and spoken word read by poet Bill Berkson. Has *Guest Informant* ever been put to better use?

Allen Ruppertsberg, "You and Me or The Art of Give and Take," Sept. 12-Dec. 19, 2009, at Santa Monica Museum of Art, Bergamot Station G1, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, Ca. 90404

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