

Press Release

Larry Bell & John Chamberlain

4 August – 2 October 2022
Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles
South Gallery



Los Angeles... Great friends as well as pioneering artists of the American postwar period, Larry Bell (b. 1939) and John Chamberlain (1927-2011) each forged history-making careers by harnessing the new technologies of their time to transform everyday industrial materials into works of art that expanded the definition of what sculpture can be. Yet the formative dialogue between these two titans – an intensive artistic and intellectual exchange that helped shape their respective practices and the wider language of 20th-century art – has yet to be fully explored. Opening 4 August 2022, Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles will present the first ever exhibition to focus upon Bell and Chamberlain's defining dialogue as revealed through a series of iridescent plexiglass sculptures, coated glass cubes, and rare works on paper.

About the exhibition

In September 1962, Larry Bell and John Chamberlain met by chance at the famed Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles. Soon thereafter Bell introduced Chamberlain to fellow Light and Space artists Robert Irwin and John McCracken, among others, who were living and working near his studio on Marine Street in Ocean Park close to Venice Beach. Over the following years while both shuttled between the artistic circles of New York and LA, Bell and Chamberlain formed a close friendship predicated upon a mutual penchant for technical innovation, and an intensive cross-pollination of ideas and discoveries.

In the late 1960s, Chamberlain moved back to Los Angeles and lived with Bell, sharing his studio space on Marine Street, until he moved into Bell's nearby Market Street studio. Working side by side, the men pushed one another to expand the material and formal possibilities of their respective practices. 'John proved himself to be one of the most human creatures I have ever met,' Bell recalls. 'His ability to be improvisational with his materials astounded me; I had a totally different concept of studio activities.'

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'Larry Bell & John Chamberlain' is the first exhibition to focus on this period of reciprocity and explosive creativity, bringing together seminal works developed by the two artists via the industrial technologies available after World War II. In the '60s, Los Angeles was the center of the aeronautics industry that had burgeoned during the war, and Bell was one of the first artists to apply its commercial manufacturing processes to his work. One of the signatures of his artistic approach is its use of a vacuum deposition chamber, which Bell first acquired in the late '60s. Called 'The Tank,' this tool permitted him to coat sheet glass in specific ways that alter how absorbent, transmissive, or reflective it appears to the eye. With the aid of 'The Tank,' both Bell and Chamberlain explored the possibilities of form, materiality, and color – experiments that resulted in the exceptional artworks on view in the exhibition.

A suite of Bell's iconic glass cube sculptures, including 'Orange Blue' (1969/2022) and 'Golden' (1969/2022), display surface treatments achieved through thermal evaporation technology developed for cutting-edge aeronautics and optics – a process the artist began using in the '60s and is still refining in his work today. This technology deposits films of vaporized metallic and non-metallic substances onto glass panes without altering the fundamental nature of the glass itself, rendering a chimerical visual effect of space and form. Testament to Bell's tirelessly inventive sculptural practice, four of the works on view are rare examples of cubes realized for the first time, presenting an historic culmination of projects he began in the late '60s using original materials and plans from the era.

Further illuminating Bell's expansive technical process, a selection of large-scale 'vapor drawings' were created through the application of his signature industrial coating process to paper. In these works, thin layers of aluminum and silicon monoxide are vaporized onto the paper's surface in variable degrees of thickness, accruing in layered images. In 'VF 9' (1978) and 'VF 65' (1978), alternating bands of gradients create abstract compositions with rainbow-like refracted light to stunning optical effect.

In dialogue with the atmospheric properties of Bell's cubes, the glossy reflective surfaces of 'Hano' (1970), 'Gallup' (1970), and 'Luna, Luna, Luna (In Memory of Elaine Chamberlain)' (1970) showcase Chamberlain's constant experimentation with new media. The examples on view from this significant series represent the outcome of an historic seven-year period of intensive investigation and development in which the artist deliberately shifted his focus from working with his signature materials like steel. To create these works, Chamberlain exposed plexiglass

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boxes to varying degrees of heat so that they melted for just a few minutes, arriving at irregular, contoured forms. He then annealed the resulting sculptures for up to twelve hours in order to preserve the integrity of the material's structure as it cooled. Using a vacuum tube, Bell helped Chamberlain apply a mineral coating to the surfaces of the works, amplifying their reflective properties. This exhibition reconstitutes six pieces from this pivotal series which were first shown at Leo Castelli gallery in 1971, offering viewers the unprecedented opportunity to experience these works together, and is made possible through loans from Dia Art Foundation, Sonnabend Collection, and important private collections in New York and Los Angeles.

Upon entering the exhibition, visitors are invited to sit on 'Wiley's Island II' (1997), a couch by Chamberlain made from carved foam and draped in canvas. It is an example of Chamberlain's interest in furniture making, and further illustrates his tireless appetite for investigating how people interact with materials and form. Examples from this series have previously been shown at Dia Art Foundation in Beacon NY and the Chinati Foundation in Marfa TX. As the artist wrote, 'The idea of the couch is essentially to alter your sitting consciousness, to sit around like you did when you were eight.' The exhibition also presents a selection of large format photographs taken by Chamberlain using the Widelux camera given to him by Bell. A rarely exhibited portrait of Larry in front of one of his mirage paintings is featured alongside the couch.

Two vitrines located on the gallery's mezzanine contain photographs, ephemera, and other archival materials that provide historical context illuminating the exchange between these towering figures of American art.



About Larry Bell

Larry Bell (b. 1939) is one of the most renowned and influential artists to emerge from the Los Angeles art scene of the 1960s, alongside contemporaries Ed Ruscha and Robert Irwin, and had garnered international repute by the age of 30. Known foremost for his refined surface treatment of glass and explorations of light, reflection and shadow through the material, Bell's significant oeuvre extends from painting and works on paper to glass sculptures and furniture design.

Bell's understanding of the potential of glass and light allows him to expand visual and physical fields of perception, and his sculptures to surpass traditional bounds of the medium. He has said: 'Although we tend to think of glass as a window, it is a solid liquid that has at once three distinctive qualities: it reflects light, it absorbs light, and it transmits light all at the same time.'

Bell's use of commercial industrial processes in his studio, located in Venice, California since the 1960s, demonstrates his unparalleled skill and dedication in each step of his sculptures' fabrication. Since 1969, his studio has managed its own high-vacuum coating system that allows him to deposit thin metal films onto his glass surfaces, harnessing a little-known technique developed for aeronautics to create an unprecedented body of work.

About John Chamberlain

John Chamberlain (1927 – 2011) was a quintessentially American artist, channeling the innovative power of the postwar years into a relentlessly inventive practice spanning six decades. He first achieved renown for sculptures made in the late 1950s through 1960s from automobile parts – these were path-breaking works that effectively transformed the gestural energy of Abstract Expressionist painting into three dimensions. Ranging in scale from miniature to monumental, Chamberlain's compositions of twisted, crushed, and forged metal also bridged the divide between Process Art and Minimalism, drawing tenets of both into a new kinship. These singular works established him as one of the first American artists to determine color as a natural component of abstract sculpture. From the late 1960s until the end of his life, Chamberlain harnessed the expressive potential of an astonishing array of materials, which varied from plexiglass and paint, to foam, aluminum foil, and paper bags.

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Caption and courtesy information:

John Chamberlain and Larry Bell at the motorcycle races, Bridgehampton NY, 1966.

© Larry Bell. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Barbara Brown

Larry Bell
Old Timer
1969

Coated glass with chrome edging
31 x 31 x 31 cm / 12 1/4 x 12 1/4 x 12 1/4 in

© Larry Bell
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Jeff McLane

John Chamberlain
Dot-Klish
1970

Mineral-coated synthetic polymer resin
47 x 59.7 x 49.5 cm / 18 1/2 x 23 1/2 x 19 1/2 in

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Photo: Jeff McLane

Larry Bell
Light Knot M 3.3.17
2017

7mm polyester coated with aluminum silicon monoxide
132.1 x 55.9 x 25.4 cm / 52 x 22 x 10 in

© Larry Bell
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: JR Doty

John Chamberlain
Gallup
1970

Mineral-coated synthetic polymer resin
63.5 x 139.7 x 111.8 cm / 25 x 55 x 44 in

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Dia Art Foundation, New York
Photo: Jeff McLane

Larry Bell
MS 23
1978

Aluminum and silicon monoxide on vellum
120.7 x 99.7 cm / 47 1/2 x 39 1/4 in

© Larry Bell
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Jeff McLane



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