

GALERIE MICHELINE SZWAJCER

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG

OLD/NEW-NEW/OLD

10 May – 16 June 2012

“What can I do but enumerate old themes?”

—W.B. Yeats, as quoted in A. Ruppertsberg's *The New Five Foot Shelf*

“There's a disarmingly generous quality to Allen Ruppertsberg's recent work, from the installations of pop culture and found photographs from the Los Angeles artist's personal collection, to the walls, stacks and boxes of Day-Glo posters that give phonetic shape to a poem such as Ginsberg's *Howl* (1955) or issue advertisements and exclamations. Such works facilitate an inclusive environment, in part by collapsing classist markers for aesthetic taste (the artist confers as much worth to the laminated photo as the drawing, for example, and to a Duchamp or Elvis reference). They also solicit an engaged, almost synaesthetic spectator, who reads and sings the printed word, and upon viewing a photograph of an LP starts to hear its music. As a collector, Ruppertsberg is a memorialist, and his extensive work with musician and artist obituaries, for example, attests to his awareness of the responsibility to tap his archival materials for collective remembrance.”¹

For *OLD/NEW-NEW/OLD*, Ruppertsberg's fourth exhibition at Galerie Micheline Szwajcer, the artist reengages with certain cultural, biographical and urban histories that have formed the backdrop to his life and work. As the title indicates, each of the four installations on display incorporates a mix of past and present ideas. Sometimes quite literally, as a number of new works are based upon and reconfigure older ones, reaching back until the seventies. “At this age and over 40 years of working what else could one do?”, Ruppertsberg noted.

My Secret Life (1974/2012) is a large black and white photograph which is hung upside down and partially rolled up on the wall like a scroll, revealing only the bottom part of the image: the profile of a man (presumably Ruppertsberg) wearing blue jeans and cowboy boots. Its title is reminiscent of, and equally suggestive as, Ruppertsberg's publication *The Secret of Life and Death*, an entertaining meditation from 1977 on categorization and entropy, each statement beginning with “Some men...” and end with “Others do not.” (“Some men see things others should not and doubt what they hear. Others do not.” Or “Some men use the words of other men. Others do not.”) This structure alternates with

versions where the words have fallen out of a sensible order, such as "For cry the some past secretly men. Not do others."

The Rise And Fall Of Los Angeles (2012) features a series of 8 Photo/Object/Sculpture/Records displayed on a shelf in the main room. Alternating street scenes of a violin player cast in the shade of the bright Hollywood sun, with those of bus benches serving as billboards with a portable radio resting on it, these Photo/Objects juxtapose everyday icons of the city's cultural and commercial life during the early seventies. "The person playing the violin is me—playing while the L.A. I loved, disappears", Ruppertsberg clarified. Each of these multifaceted objects is accompanied by a DVD-video on a turntable so as to hear the recording engraved on it, thus forming an audio soundtrack to echo the visual road trip taken across the photographs.

In the installation *Who killed the Kennedys?* (2012) silk-screened pegboard panels are covered with various laminated color copies. The material that doesn't fit onto the pegboards is stacked into a cardboard box below, a visual reminder of the myriad of alternative narratives waiting at the periphery. The pegboards themselves hark back to an earlier time, when they were ubiquitous in hardware and five-and-dime stores. Finally, *Poem #1 Flashback Startover* (2001/2012), which takes up the second room, consists of a sequence of laminated panels. Each panel is one page of a tragic poem, which are extra large blowups from children's coloring books, hand colored by children of about 7 years old. Likewise, the untold pages are stored in a large hand built crate. As Tim Griffin stated: 'If ever there were an artist whose practice seemed premised on Jacques Ranciere's idea of the spectator who "makes his poem with the poem that is performed in front of him," it is Allen Ruppertsberg. [...] Ruppertsberg's own recasting of language is foregrounded at the same time as the act of reading is activated—the poem placed in the viewer's body, in effect, as one inevitably must mouth the words in order to recompose and decipher them for oneself.'

Allen Ruppertsberg belongs to the first generation of American conceptual artists that engaged critically with the means and methods of mass media. Since the late 1960s, he has developed a complex dialogue on the dialectics of high and low culture, public and private spaces and the relationship between art works, multiples and everyday objects. While his vast collection of early to mid-twentieth-century cultural ephemera—which includes calendars, snapshots, magazines, comic books, newspaper clippings, postcards, posters, and instructional films—reflects his middle-American roots (he was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1944), Ruppertsberg's artistic interests and sensibility have been indelibly shaped by the spirit and ethos of Southern California.

Ruppertsberg has participated in several of the early landmark conceptual exhibitions, such as Seth Siegelaub's 'March 1-31, 1969' (1969), and Harald Szeemann's 'When Attitudes Become Form' (1969) and Documenta 5 (1972). More recently, his work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Santa Monica Museum of Art (2009) and the Camden Arts Centre in London (2008). In 2013, 'Allen Ruppertsberg: The Birth and Death of Rock n' Roll' will open at the Art Institute of Chicago.

¹ Tyler Coburn, 'Allen Ruppertsberg: No Time Left to Start Again', *ArtReview*, 46, December 2010.