

# The Telegraph

## Modern art's Hollywood moment

David Hockney, Andy Warhol, Ed Ruscha... The world's hottest artists all gathered in 1960s Los Angeles to work hard and play even harder. And art would never be the same again.



Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas, 1963 Medium: Oil on canvas Photo: Ed Ruscha/ Hood Museum of Art



By [Lucy Davies \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/lucy-davies/\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/lucy-davies/)

8:00AM BST 16 Oct 2011

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In 1963, a 35 year old Andy Warhol arrived in LA in a station wagon driven by his beat poet friend Taylor Mead and fellow artist Wynn Chamberlain. He didn't know how to drive, and had never ventured west of Pennsylvania, so sat in the back with his studio assistant Gerard Malanga, recording his thoughts on tape. "The farther we drove" he found "Pop was everywhere....We were seeing the future and we knew it for sure."

The quartet had driven non-stop for three days to arrive in time for an exhibition of Andy's work in Los Angeles, and spent their first night in the city with Andy's new friend Dennis Hopper, who had bought a Mona Lisa silkscreen on a trip to New York the previous year. At the actor's West Hollywood home he danced and smoked with Peter Fonda, Troy Donahue and Robert Dean Stockwell until the early hours. "This party was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to me" Warhol said.

The exhibition of his Elvis and Liz Taylor silkscreens the following day was at a small gallery called Ferus on La Cienega Boulevard, where he had had his first ever show just the year before, with 32 Campbell Soup flavours. Warhol later said he was overawed by the macho contingent of artists who came to his private view, but he loved the art they were making.

Ferus was the hub for the first generation of Southern California artists determined to forge a way out of the suffocating cocoon of conformity left by the McCarthy era. The organising energy behind the gallery - Walter Hopps, the artist Ed Kienholz and later Irving Blum - became the chief forces leading the city's artistic ascent.

The same week of Warhol's show, Hopps had opened the first ever retrospective of Marcel Duchamp, at the Pasadena Museum of Art, where he was also curator. Warhol stayed on to attend, mingling with artists Ed Ruscha and Craig Kauffman. Dennis Hopper stole a hotel sign that he said reminded him of one of Duchamp's paintings. Duchamp signed it (it sold last year for almost \$400,000). "California" said Duchamp had become "a white spot in a gloomy world."

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['Unseen' Warhol portrait sells for £10.8m \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-news/8330688/Unseen-Andy-Warhol-portrait-sells-for-10.8-million.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-news/8330688/Unseen-Andy-Warhol-portrait-sells-for-10.8-million.html)

[Unseen Andy Warhol self-portrait \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/artsales/8251140/Unseen-Andy-Warhol-self-portrait-goes-on-sale.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/artsales/8251140/Unseen-Andy-Warhol-self-portrait-goes-on-sale.html)

[Andy Warhol: he got the picture \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/photography/7429937/Andy-Warhol-he-got-the-picture.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/photography/7429937/Andy-Warhol-he-got-the-picture.html)

[The many layers of David Hockney \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8782275/The-many-layers-of-David-Hockney.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8782275/The-many-layers-of-David-Hockney.html)

[Is Hockney Britain's greatest living painter? \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/8750424/Is-David-Hockney-Britains-greatest-living-painter.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/8750424/Is-David-Hockney-Britains-greatest-living-painter.html)

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Dealers from New York began booking flights out to see for themselves how a town previously considered the domain of “nuts who diet on nut-burgers” as one critic memorably put it, had begun producing vital work unlike anything on the east coast, or in Europe.

Their early groundswell is the subject of almost 70 exhibitions opening across the city over the next few months, under the heading [Pacific Standard Time \(http://www.pacificstandardtime.org/\)](http://www.pacificstandardtime.org/). “We have a history of ignoring our history” says Joan Weinstein of the [Getty Center \(http://www.getty.edu/\)](http://www.getty.edu/), who founded and funded the initiative. “People usually come here to reinvent themselves, so it’s interesting for many of us to find ourselves looking backwards.”

Unlike many civic-minded projects that have been about ‘what will the public want’, the initiative has been led by ‘what don’t we know about ourselves?’ “These were a group of artists working together as friends, riffing off each other” says curator Rani Singh, whose show *Cross Currents in Painting & Sculpture* at the getty features many of the well-known names of the period. “We asked these artists - ‘who were you looking at, at the time; who might we have we forgotten?’”

At heart, the Ferus artists were a group of friends, who were happy to find other artists and people sympathetic to what they were trying to do. Irwin: “We basically supported ourselves...and gave ourselves the kind of milieu that allows you to operate as a free flowing person without doubting yourself...The idea of a career wasn’t an issue for any of us, because if it had been we would’ve left and gone to New York, like all the generations before us. That’s where careers were made. The reason our generation of artists is so seminal to LA is because it was the first one that didn’t leave”.

Kienholz “The approach was anarchic. It was an alternative route. It was a place where other things could be tried.” Having drawn up his Ferus contract with Hopps on a paper wrapper from a hot dog stand outside the gallery on La Cienega, the duo hired their artists according to unusual criteria. Of John Altoon, Kienholz said: “He walked in, he liked us; we liked him. We all went up to Barney’s [bar] and, you know, drank for a month or so, and he was part of the gallery.” Billy al Bengston was allowed to join when he impressed them by jumping in front of a car, which they thought was “neat...he wasn’t afraid...and that qualified him somehow.”

Their hangout was Barney’s Beanery, a white clapboard drinking den not far from the gallery. “We didn’t talk the art out” said Kienholz. “We talked about where we were going to get six dollars so we could buy gas for a car to go to the Valley and get drunk...I don’t know that I’ve ever talked to Bob Irwin about art in my life.” The architect Frank Gehry joined them in an impromptu rock band, called “Five Bags of Sh\*t”, playing bicycle handlebars with a bell attached.

“Unlike the Abstract Expressionists” says Hunter Drohojowska Philp, whose book *Rebels in Paradise* ([http://www.amazon.co.uk/Rebels-Paradise-Angeles-Scene-1960s/dp/0805088369/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1318610356&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Rebels-Paradise-Angeles-Scene-1960s/dp/0805088369/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1318610356&sr=1-1)) chronicles the Ferus years, and explores the artists' stories touched on here in greater detail, “they took a stand for optimism, humour and pleasure. They refused to adopt the sorrowful introspection and angst of the New York school”. Irwin: “there was no dark side, none of that struggle - everything was just a glow.”

There was also the weather: “I went to California because I knew it was sunny” David Hockney tells me. “I knew that from movies, especially Laurel and Hardy, as the shadows cast were deep and that meant bright light.” The British artist had escaped England in 1964 and set up camp in Venice Beach, then a popular hangout for artists and Beats.

“It was the first place I began to depict since I had left Yorkshire” he says. “At first some people said I'd come to a cultural Wasteland, but I never believed that...When I was there, they were still finishing some of the big freeways. I remember seeing, within the first week, a ramp of freeway going into the air, and I suddenly thought: my God, this place needs its Piranesi; Los Angeles could have a Piranesi, so here I am.”

Hockney didn't join the macho Ferus crew, opting instead for Nicholas Wilder a few blocks down on La Cienega. By then a number of other galleries had to opened on Ferus' doorstep, giving rise to Monday night art walks when all the galleries would stay open and serve wine.

Curiosity about contemporary art escalated amongst the well to do. In response Ferus teamed up with art historians to give slide lectures in private residences, most often collectors Fred and Marcia Weisman. In 1968, Hockney wrote to his London dealer Kasmin. “I've started a portrait of Fred and Marcia Weisman - I can't help calling them Fred and Marcia Flintstone. I went for lunch and all three of us were on diets, just meat and salad no potatoes and no milk. I was like a scene in a sitcom, except we were passing *Art in America* [magazine] and Sotheby's catalogues.”

By the time he finished the portrait, titled *American Collectors* later that year, the close-knit LA scene was beginning to unravel. Racial and class tension had been accumulating for years. The riots in Watts had destroyed the picture-perfect ideal of the city that Hollywood had spun.

The politicisation of young people around the world was gaining velocity, and new forms of art-making began to break the surface. Hopper had driven through the riot to photograph the devastation. Noah Purefoy collected its detritus to make assemblage sculptures that went on tour the following year. Up until the mid-1960s, the LA art scene was largely the domain of white men. Aside from the arts centre at Watts, the African American artists were forced to put on their own private shows at supporters homes - a memorable photograph of a pop-up show by a swimming pool shows the lengths to which some of the black community were forced to go to show their work. But in 1967, the Brockeman gallery and then the Suzanne Jackson gallery opened. Artists like Betye Saar, Melvin Edwards and John Outterbridge began to garner attention.

In 1966 Kienholz, Kauffman Hopps and others formed a group for coordinated political activism, and

commissioned the anti-war artist Mark di Suvero to build a peace tower to protest against the Vietnam War on a rented lot on the corner of La Cienega and Sunset. His 60 foot tall structure supported some 400 individual paintings by like Rauschenberg, Frank Stella and Lichtenstein. Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Andre Breton sent words of support.

On the home front, Hopps' wife left him for his previous partner Irving Blum. Hopps put himself into a psycho ward citing a chronic addiction to amphetamines. Blum and several other of the La Cienega galleries shut up shop and went to New York, leaving a tremendous sense of betrayal in their wake. As the artist and Ferus fixture Larry Bell put it: "We grew up...the circle fell apart...It put a lid on the good times that were happening."

As the art scene fractured, and folded back in on itself, it nevertheless provided "a decisive break with modern art" says Paul Schimmel, Chief Curator of the [city's museum of contemporary art \(MOCA\)](http://www.moca.org/) (<http://www.moca.org/>). "Minimalism and Conceptualism's lack of words and images were the last hurrah. How does something like that end? With nothing. But it blew apart the idea that one art movement had to follow another. It opened up the floor to the plural view we see today."

[pacificstandardtime.org](http://www.pacificstandardtime.org/) (<http://www.pacificstandardtime.org/>)

*Read a review of 'Pacific Standard Time' on [telegraph.co.uk/culture](http://telegraph.co.uk/culture) tomorrow.*