

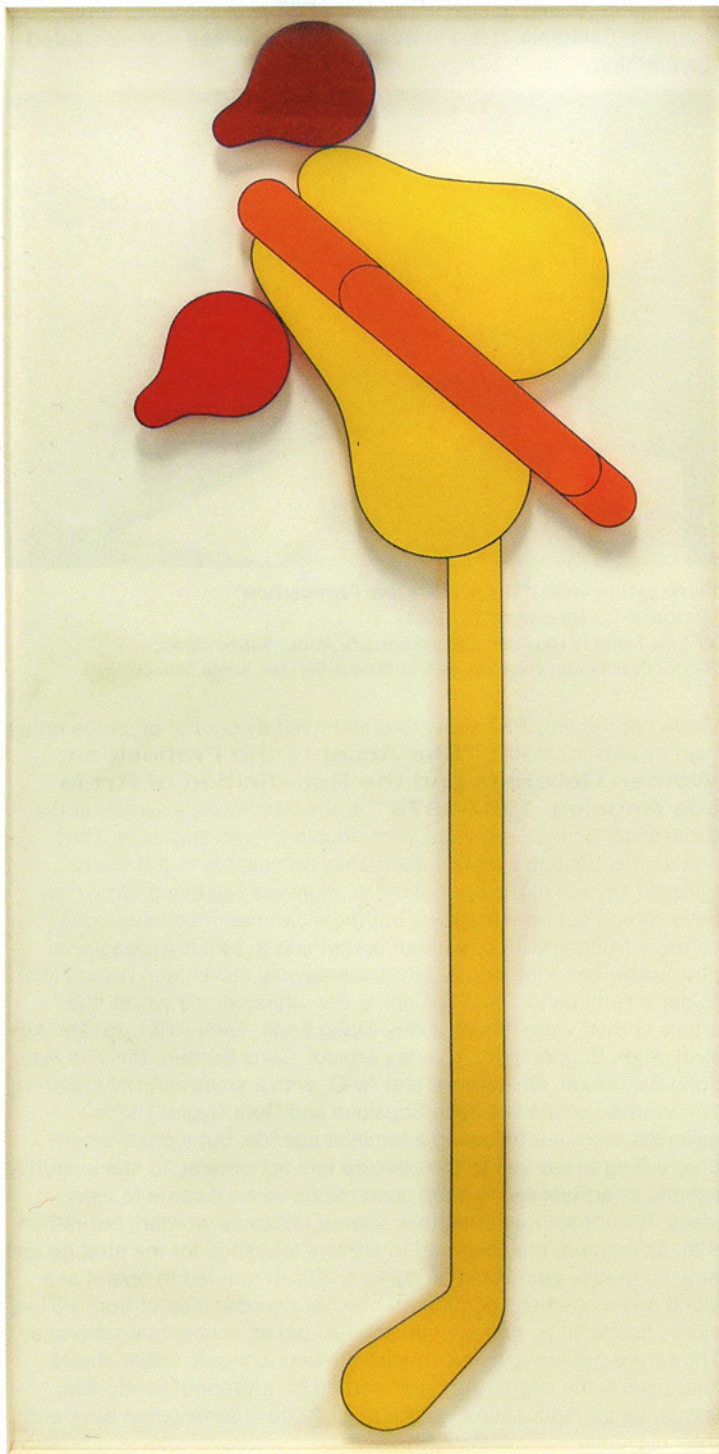
PST ROUND-UP: The Galleries

By George Melrod

To many museums around Los Angeles, Pacific Standard Time was like a Christmas morning that was long awaited and prepared for; their exhibitions, tied up in catalogues and bows, often represented years of assiduous planning and scholarship. For the galleries, by contrast, it was more of a mad scramble. Once the Getty announced that they'd be welcome to propose shows under the PST umbrella, LA gallerists dashed to throw together their ideas under the gun, like in one of those reality show cook-offs where the host announces, with an impish grin: "Your time starts... now!" Nonetheless, the galleries

had a liberty that the larger institutions did not, in their ability to present small, tightly focused shows based on individual artists. (And even a few surveys, such as Cherry & Martin's impressive restaging of the 1970 exhibition "Photography Into Sculpture.") A number of them exceeded expectation.

Topping the list would have to be the extraordinary and revelatory show, "**Craig Kauffman: Sensual/Mechanical**" at Frank Lloyd Gallery. Kauffman, who died in 2010 at age 78, is widely associated with the Southern California Light and Space artists, in its Minimalist / Finish Fetish, sculptural iteration. But Light and Space did not appear of thin air, and neither did Kauffman: before he established himself in LA, he had spent two years in Europe and was clearly impacted by European painting and the predominant styles of American abstraction. The exhibit at Frank Lloyd examines in particular Kauffman's work from 1958-1964, and the journey that he traces in those half dozen years is a stunning one. In 1958, Kauffman's ink on paper and oil on canvas abstractions still seemed to be wrestling with the expressionistic biomorphism of Gorky and Burkhardt; by 1962, he had distilled his forms into sensual, organic blobs, painted in some cases atop fetishistic high-heeled shoe advertisements. The work comes to fruition in three striking vertical paintings from 1963, made of acrylic lacquer on framed, clear plastic, with flat, Pop-y colors, depicting squirting, cartoony tubes and blobs, a "kind of sexual, biomorphic mixture of mechanical things," as he described. By 1964, Kauffman had already shifted to a new stage of his own artistic metamorphosis, as in the untitled, blue-on-blue vacuum-formed plastic work on display. As gripping as it is succinct, Lloyd's show makes a case for Kauffman as a true pioneer, years ahead of his time, who in half a decade had devised a new, plastic language of abstraction that no longer looked back to the agitated lexicon of the postwar era, but vividly proclaimed the future, parading it boldly like a ribald, abstract Thanksgiving Day balloon.



"No. 8," 1963, Craig Kauffman
ACRYLIC LACQUER ON PLASTIC, 80" X 42"
© THE ESTATE OF CRAIG KAUFFMAN
PHOTO: VICKI PHUNG SMITH
COURTESY FRANK LLOYD GALLERY, SANTA MONICA