

Wallpaper*

Right price: a rare showing of Ken Price's groundbreaking ceramics opens in LA

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An ambitious show – surveying a career that spans from 1961 to 2008 – deserves an equally lengthy incubation period. Franklin Parrasch, curator and co-director of Parrasch Heijnen Gallery, who last week inaugurated their new space in Los Angeles with a rare, expansive exhibition of works by beloved Californian artist Ken Price, has been thinking about it for two decades.

‘Sometime in the 1990s I once told Ken, "You know, I have an idea for a show that I’ll do one day." This came up in the context of discussing the inter-relationship of this work and how understanding any one piece is best approached with an exposure to many of Ken’s works from all periods of his career. I have had in mind specific pieces that I’ve known of over the years and imagined how they might inform each other if they were ever to meet up in one room.’

Parrasch then set about persuading the owners of the 24 sculptures presented in the exhibit to lend him their pieces. All of them agreed. It clearly means a great deal to Parrasch to be able to present the works in Price’s hometown of Los Angeles, where he was one of the originators of the city’s art scene as it kicked off in the 1960s, as part of the ‘Finish Fetish’ movement of ceramicists.

‘One of the first people to preview the show was Ken’s longtime friend and fellow Angeleno, Peter Alexander. Peter came in and immediately responded to all the intensity and nuances in the work I was hoping the exhibition would reveal. This is the view of an artist and colleague – someone who was around Ken and who was certainly affected by him. I think having the show in proximity to the artists who knew Ken best – Peter, Billy Al Bengston, Tony DeLap – is what feeds the show with an energy it wouldn’t be able to absorb anywhere else.’

Long before the current taste for ceramics, Price was creating works that still look funkier than anything being made today. His clay works – biomorphic, architectural, erotic and psychotropic – gesture viscerally towards so many experiences, from the movement of surfing (something Price did every day for 15 years) to the synergy of Eastern and Mexican cultures in Southern California. It is something that is easily felt when you look at them, less so when expressed in words.

Parrasch concurs. ‘I’ve always felt that Ken channeled some kind of atavistic source of energy. The best of his work connects on some kind of pre-human level.’



Almost 20 years in the making, Parrasch Heijnen Gallery has opened an exhibition dedicated to the career of LA ceramicist Ken Price



The expansive exhibition spans the period 1961–2008 and includes 24 sculptures



Price was one of the 1960s originators of the LA art scene, and was part of city's 'Finish Fetish' movement of ceramicists



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