

THE MERRY-GO-WORLD OR BEGAT BY CHANCE  
AND THE WONDER HORSE TRIGGER  
**KIENHOLZ**



# EDWARD & NANCY KIENHOLZ



THE MERRY-GO-WORLD  
OR BEGAT BY CHANCE  
AND THE WONDER HORSE TRIGGER

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LOUVER

VENICE, CALIFORNIA  
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# FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that we are revisiting *The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance* and *The Wonder Horse Trigger*, 27 years after its inaugural presentation at L.A. Louver in Venice, California. It is also with equal sadness that Nancy Reddin Kienholz, who authored this work, will not be with us for this celebration. Following a prolonged illness, Nancy died this summer in Houston, Texas.

I worked with Ed Kienholz for 14 years and with Nancy Reddin Kienholz and Kienholz for 39 years.

Completed in 1992, *The Merry-Go-World* was one of the last full-scale tableaux made by Kienholz. It is in this arena of theatrical sculpture that Ed and Nancy distinguished

themselves and cemented their place in the story of American Art of the 20th Century. In so doing, they produced many of the greatest visual icons of their time. As with all great works of art, its impact, importance and significance is relevant to the moment not only in which it is made, but where and when the work is encountered by new audiences who bring their own unique perspectives to the viewing experience. In 2019, as we prepare to exhibit this sculpture for the second time, we face an ever-growing international migration crisis and are forced to contemplate and consider the broader contextual meaning of *The Merry-Go-World* with its call for our attention.



Ed Kienholz and Peter Goulds  
Louver Gallery, New York, 1992



Peter Goulds and Nancy Reddin Kienholz  
Venice, Italy, 2011

In 1987, the gathering of materials got underway as Ed and Nancy traveled the world, bartering for goods with locals and at international flea markets. As such, the commentary regarding the accident of one's place of birth was buttressed by the individuals they encountered and the realities of their lives. For instance, Nancy related the story of how the mother of Tank, the poor girl living in a shotgun house in Houston, Texas, offered to sell her young daughter for a pack of beer. Ed and Nancy came to recognize the richness of family in Africa—how a proud Maasai tribeswoman could be comforted, surrounded by all the generations of her family, her wealth strung around her neck. For the Maasai, cattle served as important capital, with even the dung providing the family with warmth for the hut in which they lived with pride of purpose. Fresh from the experience of assembling and exhibiting *The Merry-Go-World*, Ed and Nancy marveled over these comparisons.

I am always grateful to my colleagues at L.A. Louver for their dedication to the work we undertake on behalf of the artists we represent and celebrate. Kimberly Davis and I have directed L.A. Louver for 35 years, along with the tenacious leadership of Elizabeth East, with whom we have worked for over two decades.

Never more so than on this endeavor should collegial support be acknowledged for their individual achievements. The accompanying essay and editorialization of Ed and Nancy's "voices" have been brilliantly written and presented by Lisa Jann, our Managing Director, with whom I have had the pleasure to collaborate on numerous projects over the last 15 years. Under Lisa's guidance, the next generation of colleagues at L.A. Louver has absorbed Kienholz into their being. This document has been edited and developed by our multi-talented Communications Manager Christina Carlos. Ella Andersson, filmmaker and Archivist of our research library, oversaw photography and film production. Exhibition Manager Chris Pate and Senior Preparator Stephen Kugelberg have taken special care to install this exhibition with clarity of purpose. Our Registrar, Kate Callahan, together with the Kienholz Studio crew, have brought the works of art to Venice, California, from Hope, Idaho.

Through important international survey exhibitions mounted by museum and private institutions over the last 15 years, and our return to *The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance* and *The Wonder Horse Trigger*, Ed and Nancy Kienholz's legacy has been passed on to a new generation of curators, writers, museum directors and artists, in whose hands the influence of these American artists is widely and openly celebrated.

The art of Kienholz is a timeless indictment of the loss of our moral compass as we traveled the 20th century into the 21st.

I miss Ed and Nancy; my hope is that now, they have been reunited. Thank you both for this great ride.

In Peace.  
Be Love.

Peter Goulds  
Founding Director, L.A. Louver

# INTRODUCTION

“How can you be an artist and not reflect the times? That to me is the definition of an artist.”  
– Nina Simone<sup>i</sup>

Reflecting the times has always been at the fiercely beating heart of the work of American artists Edward Kienholz and Nancy Reddin Kienholz. Emerging in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Los Angeles, autodidact Ed Kienholz reimagined found objects, imbued with the ghosts and vibes of cultural memory, first as “constructions,” then assemblage sculptures, then environmental tableaux that squared off with an unflinching moral imperative, coerced empathy, and snarked with dark mischief. From the get-go, Kienholz discomposed viewers with abstract creations that ravaged the idea of figuration with mannequin and dummy parts – heads, torsos and limbs ripped away from the capitalist front lines of post-war America’s New Frontier – slammed and screwed together with alley scrap and flea market spoils. Later, figures were created by plaster-casting people who entered Kienholz’s circle, the corporeal forms resonant with the humanity of those who lent their bodies to the work. No matter what the scale, all works by Kienholz are amalgamated into relief with the final, illuminative, painterly act of a dripping coat of resin.

Ed Kienholz met his match in Nancy Reddin Kienholz, who became his collaborator, creative partner and fifth wife in 1972. Her background in photography and their fiery intellectual and emotional chemistry paved the way for an evolution of making, and alchemized a lifetime of co-authorship in all facets of their lives – art, their combined family of three children, global travel, and homes/studios in Idaho, Berlin, and later, Houston. The works created up to 1972 are Ed’s solo endeavors; all those made thereafter are total collaborations by Ed and Nancy Kienholz.

As Nancy’s eye and devotion entered the studio, so did a new integration of photographic image and portraiture. The work of Kienholz expanded rapidly in conceptual range, compositional complexity, and sheer production – four hands (and oftentimes

10 hands or more, when their children and/or assistants worked in the studio) proved more capable than two. Together, the Kienholzes went on to create hundreds of works (tableaux, assemblages, drawings and editions), until Ed’s death in 1994.



In the first half of his career, Ed Kienholz began his interrogations of the human condition, and scrutinized society’s inexorable ethical failures through the lens of his own biography. In the second half of the oeuvre, the Kienholzes revisited many of the same issues “unstuck in time,”<sup>ii</sup> but realized through the tandem experience and negotiation of the world as a couple. On one hand, the recurrence of themes speaks to the ubiquity of inherent societal afflictions: racism, misogyny, war, economic victimization, political corruption, religious bankruptcy, mass media. On the other hand, Ed’s and Nancy’s readdressing of these issues, time and time again, traced the development and maturation of their personal beliefs from outrageous reaction into ethical wisdom. In both senses, their work contemporaneously described the times in which they lived, both within and without.

For instance, Ed’s first environmental tableau, *Roxys* (1961–62) captured his unnerving experience as a young man visiting a Nevada brothel – the tatty salon is filled with perversely degraded female forms – all sex, machine, contraption and gimmick. Decades later, sex work took on a different character in *The Hoerengracht* (1984–88), which was inspired by Ed’s and Nancy’s trips to Amsterdam. Having observed the plight of women in the prostitution trade, they painted a sensitive portrait of sex workers and their environs, while implicating viewers in the abetting roles of predatory client and spectator.

*The Illegal Operation* (1962) is a gut-wrenching horror show that viscerally depicts the aftermath of a black-market abortion; under the glare of a dilapidated floor lamp, the shabby domestic tableau



Edward & Nancy Kienholz  
*The Hoerengracht*, 1983–88  
mixed media tableau  
120 x 520 x 280 in. (304.8 x 1320.8 x 711.2 cm)

yawps with abhorrence at this brutal injustice. *The Commercial* (1971–73) is itself a pro-choice campaign. Plastered over the screen of a TV set in a living room, a bold red bumper sticker simply demands, “LEGALIZE ABORTIONS.” Over 10 years, the issue moved from the parlor of an abortionist’s home, and straight into yours. This shout for reproductive justice cannot be ignored or unseen. (*Roe vs. Wade* was handed down by the US Supreme Court in January 1973; as I write from September 2019, this central precedent protecting women’s reproductive rights continues to be at risk, with the legislation of 20 states severely restricting abortion access.)

Kienholz works addressing racism and racial violence span the entirety of their career, including *Conversation Piece* (1959), which represents “the stuffed remains of an Indian girl raped by frontiersmen;”<sup>iii</sup> *It Takes Two to Integrate*, *Cha Cha Cha* (1961), a pair of checkered black and white baby dolls separated in a bifurcated box; *Five Car Stud* (1969–72), the harrowing tableau that places visitors in the middle of the gruesome attack and castration of a black man by five white, spook-masked vigilantes; and *Holdin’ the Dog* (1986), which depicts two hooded figures, hidden behind crosses and waving American flags, brandishing bigotry and violence in a victorious pose with an animal trophy.



Edward & Nancy Kienholz  
*Holdin’ The Dog*, 1986  
mixed media assemblage  
81 ½ x 67 x 24 in. (207 x 170.2 x 61 cm)  
Collection of Mandy and Cliff Einstein  
Partial gift to The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Edward Kienholz  
*Five Car Stud*, 1969–72  
 mixed media tableau  
 dimensions variable  
 Collection of Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy



War, war, and always, always war, relentlessly weaves through the work. *History as a Planter* (1961) is a quiet, forceful meditation on the Holocaust; the disembodied mushroom cloud of doll heads in *The Future as an Afterthought* (1962) challenges the nuclear bomb. Made during the span of the Vietnam War, *The Portable War Memorial* (1968) criticizes American imperialism and all foreign wars, while *The Eleventh Hour Final* (1968) captures the grim voyeurism of death and genocide broadcast on TV; *The Non War Memorial* (1970), an unrealized *Concept Tableau*, aspired to poignantly and powerfully illustrate the human scale of military losses in Vietnam. *The Volksempfänger Series* (1975–76) explored Nazi Germany’s grip on its society through propaganda. *The Big Double Cross* (1987–89) is a minimalist, visual poem that describes the inseparable coupling of war and religion. The Reagan Era’s assurance of safety through missile defense is mocked in the small assemblage *War Stars* (1988). The interminable march of American troops – particularly during

the repetition of invasion and loss in the Middle East – is captured in both *Still Dead End Dead I* and *Still Dead End II* (1987), and essentialized in *Soldier X* (1990), a haunting field tombstone of helmet and shovel.

Political corruption and theater were writ large by Ed and Nancy, with disgust and uproar. A raucous, dystopian masterpiece, *The Ozymandias Parade* (1985) is a menacing cavalcade of government malfeasance. A blindfolded leader of a country charges forth, wielding a sword, while saddled to the rearing underbelly of a steed. The second in command rides off in the opposite direction on a beheaded stallion. Meanwhile, a general with a detonator burdens the back of the “overtaxed payer,” an elderly female wraith stooped and bearing his full weight. Scattered across the boisterous, mirrored stage is the detritus of their power plays and war games: green plastic army men, a barrel brimming with pork, the mournful gazes of intellectual and cultural figures, while figurines symbolizing dispossessed populations look helplessly on. *My Country ’Tis of Thee* (1987) guffaws at four

goofy-faced politicians gripped in a symbiotic circle jerk around a barrel, an American flag streams proudly overhead, and red, white and blue lights jauntily illuminate their willing caucus. (For the past decade, *My Country ’Tis of Thee* has had pride of place in the Idaho studio, in a direct line of sight from Nancy’s table. She particularly insisted that “The Politicians” be visible during election seasons, oft saying, “Being able to see them just makes me feel better. It’s true!”)

And so on and so forth – the Kienholzes made works over the course of 40 years that examined and reexamined any number of concerns of their age and ages: female identity [*The Tiptoe Widow* (1975), *The Rhinestone Beaver Peep Show Triptych* (1980), *The Gray Window Becoming* (1983–84), *The Bronze Pinball Machine with Woman Affixed Also* (1980)]; religion [*The Nativity* (1961), *76 F.C.s Led the Big Charade* (1994)]; media [the *Televisions* series<sup>iv</sup>, *All Have Sinned in Rm. 323* (1992)]; aging [*The Wait* (1971), *Sollie 17* (1981), *Portrait of a Mother With Past Affixed Also* (1983)]; marriage [*While Visions of Sugar Plums Danced in Their Heads* (1964), *Bout Round Eleven* (1982–83)]; and the existentialism of random violence [*Still Live* (1981)]. The headlines of our day reflect the draconian cudgel of strategized political chaos, racist and xenophobic legislation, fearmongering, victimization, the destructive suspension of regulation and legal safeguards for social, economic and environmental resources, and global destabilization. As we face the same ills and perversions of our humanity in yet another cycle, these are the times that the Kienholzes still reflect, and to which they continue to respond with such contemporary awareness.



However brutal and hard-hitting as the most incisive and scathing of the Kienholzes’ works can be, there is one we felt necessary to re-experience now – perhaps their timeliest and most timeless tableau for our current moment.

*The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance and The Wonder Horse Trigger* (1988–92) was shown for the first time 27 years ago at L.A. Louver in Venice in 1992. In a letter to Peter Goulds, Founding Director of L.A. Louver, and other friends, Ed described the genesis of the work:

*It was Nancy’s idea, and she and I had long discussions working out the details. The thrust of the piece was to be the random accident of birth, the mystery involved, and the importance of all life. A wheel of fortune would be spun by the viewer, lights would flash, and as you entered the darkened interior of the work, one light would illuminate your “chance of birth.” Not only could any of us have been born to other parents anywhere in the world, one little sperm “made it,” and produced each of us to the exclusion of thousands of brother and sister sperms. Further, to make the two mating parents, you need four such accidents and on and on into a dizzying past of chances and possibilities.<sup>v</sup>*

(In the next few pages, Nancy will describe in her own voice how this tableau came to be.)

Over four years, the Kienholzes traveled across five continents, meeting people and collecting materials and stories for the artwork. Construction of the tableau took place in both the studios in Berlin and Hope, Idaho. Like all Kienholz works, *The Merry-Go-World* was built to travel and to be exhibited worldwide, and has been shown 15 times throughout the US, Europe, Australia and Asia.

Appearing as an exuberant, richly detailed carousel, with carnival music, flashing lights and encircled by brightly colored animal figures, the viewer is asked to spin a wheel of fortune and enter the tableau’s dark inner chamber, only to be immersed in one of eight identities, each born into different cultural and socioeconomic realities. You can be placed in the life of an impoverished Oglala Sioux couple in South Dakota, a chairmaker in Egypt, a street barber in Bombay, a young Maasai woman in Kenya, a Houston child living



Edward & Nancy Kienholz  
*The Ozymandias Parade, 1985*  
 mixed media tableau  
 152 x 349 x 180 in. (386.1 x 886.5 x 457.2 cm)

in abject poverty, a Chinese taxi cab driver in Beijing, a wealthy woman in Paris, or a little girl from a hillside favela in Rio de Janeiro.

To distribute the fortunes of the individuals in the tableau, Ed and Nancy “determined that if you divided the world into eighths by monetary considerations, you would end up with one section wealthy, two parts middle class and five sections poor or extremely poor.” The Kienholzes’ calculations in the late 1980s hew very close to today’s international economic realities, although according to current global income data, it could be argued that Elle, the affluent French woman, is a disproportionate representation of the 1% of global wealth, and could be replaced by another international birth far below poverty.<sup>vi</sup>

In confronting and illustrating the “chance of birth,” *The Merry-Go-World* harnesses the power of empathy to orient one’s personal experience within a larger understanding of humanity. Although we may choose to define ourselves by means of border, nation, economy, culture, tribe or family, we are everyone together, and we could also be anyone. It is a call for humility, to understand the randomness of our fortune and misfortune as beings on an increasingly crowded and taxed planet.

The tableau also speaks to the most essential of life experiences – the non-experience of birth.

Only later in our lives do we awaken into the reality of what childhood we’ve been dealt, how our nascent culture might shape us, and the enterprise of entering into, grappling with, and ultimately relenting to consciousness.

*The Merry-Go-World* is one of the Kienholzes most deeply personal works, one that they could only execute together, as a full expression of their intimacy and creative partnership.

Nancy invested deeply of herself in the tableau, as it was born out of her concept and inspiration – even allowing the title to refer to her autobiographically. As Nancy herself said, “I was born in Los Angeles and grew up...when the sky was blue and the ocean was clean... [We] rode horses in Malibu... Which, you know, is quite a nice beginning.”<sup>vii</sup> Urbane, yet full of the West, Nancy came of age comfortably in the wealthy L.A. neighborhood of Hancock Park. A particular horse that she saddled on those perfect beaches was a Hollywood animal actor – one of Roy Roger’s trick horses that played Trigger on stage and screen. Owned by a family friend, Trigger would be commanded to lower himself to allow five-year-old Nancy to mount him, and on this magical equine, she learned how to ride. *The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance and The Wonder Horse Trigger* announces this self-awareness, of Nancy’s acknowledgement of her fortunate place in the world.

The work is also Ed’s love letter to Nancy – he considered it a gift to them both, the realization of the lifelong desire to travel to parts of the world unknown to them. (What is quietly known is that Ed was diagnosed with diabetes in 1987 – certainly, he must have harbored a desire to globetrot with Nancy while he was still hale.) For those many years, they embarked on epic journeys side by side to the unfamiliar, bearing tandem witness to the wonder and magic in parallel with the hardship and disparity of the world; bartering and scavenging with locals to harvest the materials required for the creation of the tableau itself, as well as the prototypes, drawings and monoseries (published by Gemini G.E.L.); making new stories, and enjoying their time together on the road.

Upon first encounter, *The Merry-Go-World* may not punch you in the eye with the same force as the most visceral works in the oeuvre; however, it aims to land a heart blow, and to jab you in the gut with another kind of winding and wincing power. Just beneath the charming kaleidoscopic details, noisy gaiety and fun sense of play lies a critical meditation on self-awareness, and personal responsibility. The work beseeches you to recognize your own random place and that of 7.7 billion others, in a world formed equally by miracle and injustice.

Among the most “Kienholz” works by Kienholz, *The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance and The Wonder Horse Trigger* demands our wholehearted empathy, requiring our undivided attention to look at the world beyond our individual experience, and at that which we must always continue to try to overcome.



Peter Goulds and L.A. Louver had been planning with Nancy toward the exhibition of *The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance and The Wonder Horse Trigger* for the greater part of a year. After making the case for its timely significance in our current political, social and

cultural moment, she permitted us to exhibit the work this autumn. Long-cherished and held by Nancy in her collection, *The Merry-Go-World* will be shown at L.A. Louver and in Los Angeles once again. With typical Kienholzian serendipity, Nancy also pointed out to me that we were to open the show within days of October 23, which would have been Ed’s 92nd birthday.

However, we could never have anticipated that this loving collaboration between Nancy and Ed would also become such a symbolic and timely tribute to her memory, now that we are poised to mount this exhibition in the wake of her recent passing on August 7, 2019.

With *The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance and The Wonder Horse Trigger*, we do celebrate “the importance of all life,” and particularly, Nancy’s.

Lisa Jann  
 Managing Director, L.A. Louver  
 Los Angeles, CA and Houston, TX  
 September 2019

<sup>i</sup> Nina Simone: *Great Performances College Concerts and Interviews*. Directed by Andy Stroud, Sound Dimensions, 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> Vonnegut, Kurt, Jr. *Slaughterhouse Five*. New York: Dell Publishing, Random House, Inc., 1969. Print.

<sup>iii</sup> Hopps, Walter, et al. *Kienholz: A Retrospective*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996. 72. Print.

<sup>iv</sup> Goulds, Peter and Lisa Jann. *Kienholz Televisions*. Venice: L.A. Louver, 2016. Print.

<sup>v</sup> Kienholz, Ed. *The Merry-Go-World or Begat by Chance and The Wonder Horse Trigger*. Venice, CA: L.A. Louver, 1992. 4. Print.

<sup>vi</sup> Alvaredo, Facundo, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, “World Inequality Report Executive Summary.” *World Inequality Lab*. Web. 2018. 13 September 2019.

<sup>vii</sup> Kienholz, Nancy Reddin. “The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance and The Wonder Horse Trigger.” McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX. 24 Feb. 2013. Lecture.

# NOTES ON MAKING

BY NANCY REDDIN KIENHOLZ

All photos:  
Ed and Nancy working on *The Merry-Go-World or  
Begat by Chance and The Wonder Horse Trigger*,  
Hope, Idaho, 1988–91

In 1983 we were at a conference in El Paso, Texas, that artist Philip Behymer organized. While there I took a trip across the Rio Grande to Juárez, Mexico, with artists Luis Jimenez, and Paul and Carol Sarkisian. I don't remember why Ed didn't go with us that day. Anyway, while sitting in a sidewalk café, lots of children came to me begging for money. I gave it to them. Later that day while walking along some street, I came across an old woman. She was sitting on the ground, wearing a once-white dress that now looked like a dishrag; in one hand she was holding a dirty cloth to her mouth and coughing blood into it, while she held the other hand out to me begging for money. She disgusted me. I did not give her any money. The memory of this woman preyed on my mind because I realized that beggars had to look a certain way for me. I was ashamed of my reaction to this poor woman. Over the next years, this image kept coming back to me, and the thought of the accident of birth, and one's destiny because of it, took shape in my mind.

So began *The Merry-Go-World*. After lots of discussions we decided on a wheel of fortune and a carousel to represent life's roll of the dice. (Ed was and I am a crap shooter.) We began construction in Berlin, with Ed and Tom Preiss engineering the floor panels of the piece. Since we used plywood,



the piece is actually a ring of eight trapezoidal units. We did research and figured if you took the population of the world and divided it by eight you would have five poor, two middle-class, and one rich person or people.

We began traveling around the world, first once, then twice, then a third time. With photographs and materials from these trips, we chose to use environments from Texas, China, India, Kenya, Egypt, South Dakota, Brazil and Paris.

Daryl Witcraft, a fiberglass expert, came to work for us at this time, and his sarcastic wit and humor have been entertaining us ever since. We bought a lion in Thailand, but it turned out to be solid teak, so Daryl made a cast of it.

As if we didn't have enough to do, Ed decided we should make an edition representing each one of the eight rooms. I remember when we were doing the Tank edition, Tom and Karin Herman-Preiss built the background and window, Ed attached the sink and pots and cans, etc., and I did the painting. Since I had to wait until dark to see the shadows, I worked at night. I still don't understand how Ed did it, but every day he made at least seven pieces, and I was always behind. Ed would stack up seven pieces to be painted and say – with that twinkle in his eye – “Nancy, you better get busy. You're behind.” Meanwhile, he was making more.



If you approach *The Merry-Go-World or Begat by Chance and the Wonder Horse Trigger* from the outside, it has music and lights and is fun. If you spin the wheel and enter the inside of the piece to see what your accident of birth might be, one of the eight interior rooms will light up. You could be a poor girl from Texas, or a barber from the streets of Bombay or...

Building this environment was an important life lesson for both of us. Most Westerners assume that things are the same for all. We know the words “Third World nations,” but have not smelled the shanty towns of Bombay. We believe that you need to have a TV, a washing machine and a car to be middle class, but if you have a few cows and a family, you do just fine in the Maasai Mara.

We did not only take from the poor to build this piece. For the last few years we have been educating children in Kenya, Texas, South Dakota, and Brazil. India is a bigger problem. I believe, and Ed believed, that education is the key to the future.

Published in Hopps, Walter, et al. *Kienholz: A Retrospective*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996. Print.



**STROOP**



Edward & Nancy Kienholz  
*The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance  
and the Wonder Horse Trigger*, 1988–92  
mixed media tableau  
115 x 184 in. (292.1 x 467.4 cm)

Kienholz Studio, Hope, Idaho  
August 2019

A selection of *J.C.s*, 1993–94 (left)  
*People Holding Bound Ducks*, 1989 (right)









Nancy Reddin Kienholz, *Face to Face*, 2007 (left)

24 *Berlin Reflection*, 1989 (right)



















WHOA!  
ONE PERSON AT  
A TIME ONLY



GOO

# ABU-BEN

EGYPT

Texts excerpted from Nancy Reddin Kienholz's lecture at the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas (2013) and Ed Kienholz's letter published in *L.A. Louver's The Merry-Go-World catalogue* (1992)

## NANCY

We went to Egypt, and we were traveling with our friends Monte and Betty Factor from Los Angeles. And of course in Egypt, you have these wonderful bazaars... One day, we saw these chairs. Ed was examining them and talking to the chairmaker, to see what kind of workmanship was involved.

He showed me how to make the chairs in case I needed another occupation, and I could do this.



*Abu-Ben Monoseries #25, 1992*  
mixed media assemblage  
39 1/2 x 37 1/4 x 4 in. (100.3 x 94.6 x 10.2 cm)



## ED

One feature that Nancy and I focused on was the furniture and the crates that Egyptians build from the center spine of palm tree fronds. We finally tracked down where the stuff was made. Artisan Abu Ben was hunkered down over a stump "anvil" building crates to carry chickens to market. Because of our obvious interest, he made Nancy a small palm frond box to demonstrate how easy it was. He held the strips of wood with his two big toes and

whacked them to length with his machete. Next he punched a few holes, pounded in some split dowels and *voila!*, the crate was complete. Lapsed time — ten minutes. We wanted palm frond chairs, not the whole chair, but the profile of the chair. In other words, if a chair had the seat and back part cut out, you would then have two parts or profiles to use for drawings.

...in many problems,  
...I can remember—  
...but still  
...to take our land,  
...it!

Red Cloud



# ANGEL

SOUTH DAKOTA, USA



**NANCY**

We decided to go to South Dakota, and this is Pine Ridge. These people are the Oglala Sioux that got this barren piece of land.

**ED**

Driving into Pine Ridge, we spotted a broken-down trailer parked on a little knoll just off the road. Someone had propped up some old snow fencing to delineate the yard, which was littered with shards of everything from baby bottles to Moscatel bottles. We drove in and spoke with the man of the place. He said he had no objections to our photographing or to picking up the stuff in his yard. His (I assume) wife was confined to a wheelchair, and must have been addled, as she laughed like a child each time the camera flashed. The place wasn't much. The man said they were moving into a government-built apartment sometime before winter.

During all this traveling we had not seen Indian children who might be suitable for the "Indian" monoseries. At Billings, Montana, we decided to try once more by detouring north through Havre and cutting across to Browning on the east side of Glacier Park. We should be able to find something on the Blackfoot reservation. We stopped dozens of places, talked with families, made some photographs and all the while knew we were missing the mark.



*Angel Monoseries #23, 1990*  
mixed media assemblage  
71 1/4 x 30 1/8 x 4 3/4 in. (181 x 76.5 x 12.1 cm)



**NANCY**

As we were driving into Montana, just before we were leaving, Ed said, "Stop the car! Stop the car!" I said, "OK."

And I turned around, went back, we drove down the street, and there were a whole bunch of kids. It was getting late in the day, but I photographed these kids, and it just wasn't right. And I looked and there was this one little girl. I knelt down in the middle of the street and changed my film. The light was going, and I took two pictures. That was Angel.

A photograph showing a person's legs from the knees down. They are wearing a colorful, patterned dress with yellow, blue, and green floral designs and pink buttons. The person is also wearing light-colored, possibly pink or orange, sandals. The background is a wooden floor with a dark, possibly stained or polished, surface. The lighting is soft, and the overall tone is warm.

# CARMEN

BRAZIL

## ED

Rio is indeed a paradise of warm water, sunny skies and soft ocean breezes which make everything clean and beautiful. The beaches are wide, sandy affairs with many volleyball courts, playgrounds and other amenities. Thousands of people spend full days there, going home only in the cool of the evening to sleep. The rich live at sea level, and on the many mountains are perched the favelas of the poor. It seems backwards to me; I would opt for the panoramas myself. Two days before we were scheduled to leave, we were driving up the same hill we had driven the day before when we spotted a group of teenage boys and men standing in front of a crude portico,

*Carmen Monoseries #16, 1991*  
mixed media assemblage  
48 x 32 x 10 in. (121.9 x 81.3 x 25.4 cm)



which framed steps going down the side of the mountain. I said, "Whoa, stop here." Udo [our driver] said, "No, it's much too dangerous." I said, "Well, I guess we'll just have to find out." I explained to the men we wanted to photograph people in their homes in this favela, and we were willing to pay a reasonable fee for the privilege. Finally, one young man said, "Well c'mon I've got a house." This was all being translated by Udo, who decided he had best guard the car and not venture down the steps. Later on, Nancy told me that her thoughts as we followed the young men and children down the side of the mountain were that her mother was really going to be pissed when she found out that Nancy had died on a mountain top in Rio. The house we were about to enter was literally hanging out over the side of the mountain. The two rooms were 10' by 12', the first functioning as a living room; the other was for sleeping. Again, I never did understand where the bathroom was. We had the same trouble with the kids as always; everybody wanted to get into the act. When we developed the film, there almost always was an extra arm or leg or a shadow intruding onto the picture plane.



## NANCY

... There we found Carmen, who was this little girl. She never changed an expression, never did a thing, but you could just move her and she would do what she wanted. We went into the home her father had built. It was perfect. He built the sink. He built everything. I mean, it was clean and perfect.

## ED

We parked the car and sat down on the curb and waited for the normal collection of kids to show up. We offered a penny a piece for trash that had Portuguese writing on it. Candy wrappers, milk cartons, labels, anything interesting and colorful. We cleaned up the littered streets of that place in about twenty minutes flat. We left Rio at sunset.



# DWOWD

INDIA

**ED**

... In Bombay we hired Dwowd's taxi to show us his city. India is such a place of contradictions. The poor are helpless, the rich are fat with wealth. The country can grow anything, anywhere, and yet people lay in the streets starving. Cows roam the streets as deities. Dwowd showed us all. The municipal laundry was a city block-sized enterprise with a maze of concrete tubs, each with two or three people standing there washing clothes, beating clothes and hanging clothes up. Other people were delivering dirty clothes and carrying clean ones away.

Suddenly on a wall we saw two gigantic heads of Indian gods painted by an anonymous artist. Between the two faces was a small portable sunshade made from a scrap of burlap and held in position by two pieces of bamboo. A portable shelf was hung from two nail studs stuck in two small holes in the wall. A stool for the customer, and an outdoor barber shop was in place. At first, the barber didn't want us to photograph him or his customer, but then after we bought his business, lock, stock and barrel, he thought it would be fine if we took as many photographs as we wanted. We piled all the barber stuff as best we could into Dwowd's car.



*Dwowd Monoseries #23, 1990*  
mixed media assemblage  
60 x 36 x 9 in. (152.4 x 91.4 x 22.9 cm)



**NANCY**

I was looking at one little kid, and I said, "Where'd you get that blonde hair?" And the driver said to me, "That's not blonde." But it was the closest word in English I could come up with. It was just colorless. He said, "That's not blonde, that's malnutrition."

ELLE

FRANCE



*Elle Monoseries #13*, 1991  
mixed media assemblage  
64 x 30 x 10 in. (162.6 x 76.2 x 25.4 cm)



## NANCY

Now Paris, we knew we didn't need too much. We had bought that head, it's actually a beautiful watercolor. I think it's made out of paper, it's an old one. And then the clock, the fancy table, the fancy dress— she's the rich one, so if you spin the wheel, go inside and get her, you go, "Phew. OK. I'm alright today."

## ED

We were preparing for the wealthy room of the French lady "Elle." We already had the mannequin, which we'd bought in a Paris flea market sometime in the middle '70s.



# METHENGE

KENYA



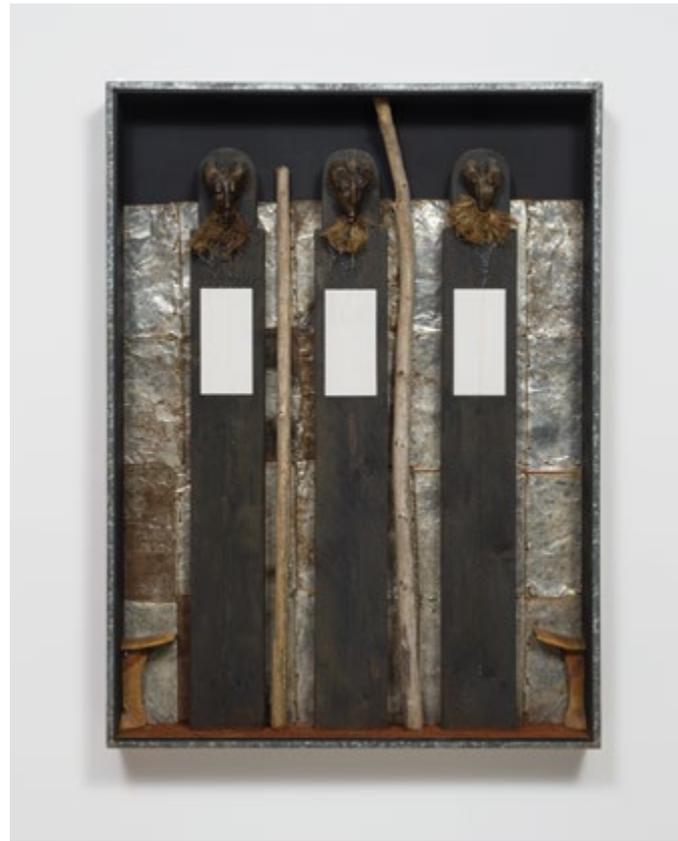
## NANCY

We started in Samburu, and this is Ed sitting in a hut in Samburu, and we were trying to trade different objects for things in the hut. And it was confusing with the languages, but in these villages, they usually educate one young boy to go to school, and he is the translator and makes the deal.

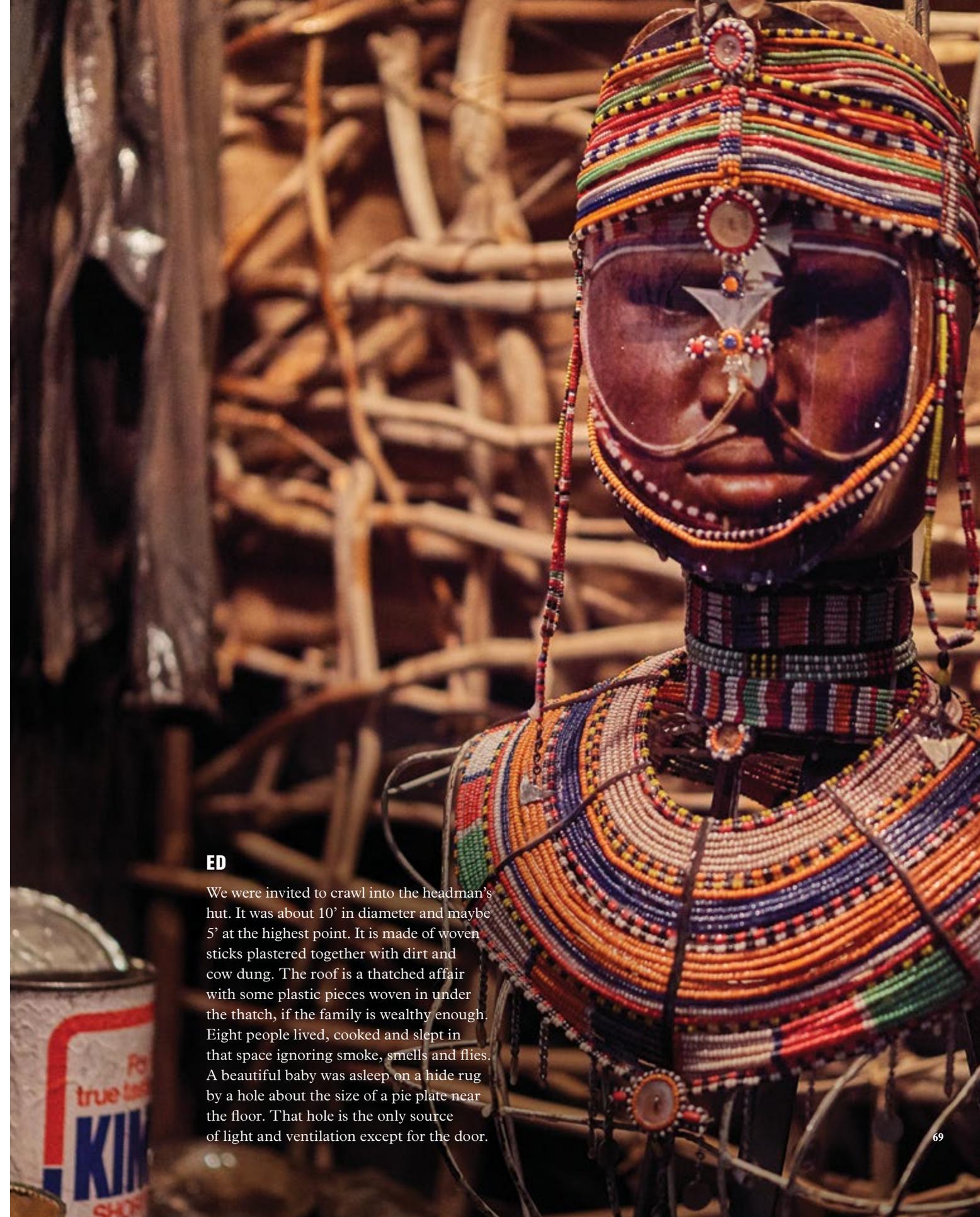
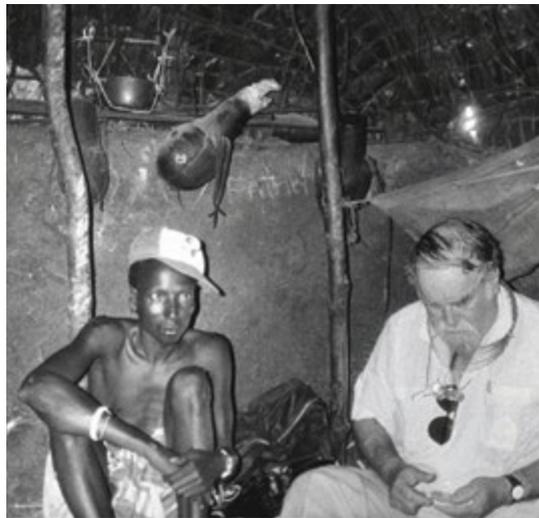
We bought this tin, and it's actually oil cans that are flattened out and sewn together with wires. They use them like wind breaks, and they're very beautiful.

## ED

Nancy's ongoing ambition was to see Africa "before all the animals are gone." ... Methenge subsequently became our friend and driver... Bumpy highways, bumpy ex-highways, bumpy roads, bumpy ex-roads, trails with rocks and riverbeds.



*Methenge Monoseries #19, 1991*  
mixed media assemblage  
48 x 36 x 4 3/4 in. (121.9 x 91.4 x 12.1 cm)



## ED

We were invited to crawl into the headman's hut. It was about 10' in diameter and maybe 5' at the highest point. It is made of woven sticks plastered together with dirt and cow dung. The roof is a thatched affair with some plastic pieces woven in under the thatch, if the family is wealthy enough. Eight people lived, cooked and slept in that space ignoring smoke, smells and flies. A beautiful baby was asleep on a hide rug by a hole about the size of a pie plate near the floor. That hole is the only source of light and ventilation except for the door.



# TANK

HOUSTON, USA

## ED

The next important addition to *The Merry-Go-World* was in Houston, Texas. We were visiting for some art event (I think it was the opening of the Menil Museum). By happy chance we met and photographed Tank in a shotgun house she and her family lived in. The nickname “shotgun” is used for a house whose front door lines up with the back door so that when they are both open you can look straight through just like a shotgun. Not only could we look straight through Tank’s house, there wasn’t much to see when inside. A couple of chairs, a bed without sheets and blankets, a sagging curtain.



## NANCY

I mean there’s nothing. The kitchen had absolutely no food in it... And the cupboards were completely empty. I mean there wasn’t a cereal box. There wasn’t leftover ketchup. I mean nothing.



*Tank Monoseries #14, 1991*  
mixed media assemblage  
50 x 25 3/4 x 7 1/2 in. (127 x 65.4 x 19.1 cm)



YIP  
CHINA

*Yip Monoseries #20, 1989*  
mixed media assemblage  
82 1/4 x 25 3/4 x 6 in. (208.9 x 65.4 x 15.2 cm)

## ED

Our guide was named Yip. He spoke idiomatic English having been sent by the Chinese government to Queens, NY (of all places) to learn English. He had been trained by the government to include all of the usual places in a sightseeing itinerary. We dutifully looked at various tombs of various dynasties, and of course we saw Tiananmen Square, but we kept insisting that what we really wanted was to go into a house of some local Chinese. We wanted to see behind the inscrutable facade which is still China. Yip finally arranged through the Communist bureaucracy for us to go to an 85-year-old man's house. When we got there, there were two or three ladies present, a block warden and the man's grandson who also spoke English. We were received very politely, if not formally. The man would have to be considered middle class, as he owned his own house with a courtyard in front. The toilet was a hole in the floor in a back corner room, there was another room which I assume was an extra bedroom, and the kitchen was a small, separate space attached to the main house with a coal burning stove, which seemed the equivalent of camping stoves in public parks in America.



We flew Yip with us to Xian, where we saw the terra cotta armies and the tombs of the area. On the street, we spotted an old man with a beautiful little stool worn smooth from sitting. We bought it, and composed the monoseries pieces then and there. We next wanted some writing in Chinese that says, "Old brooms leave traces," so our next stop was to a Chinese scribe who wrote out in pen and ink on a scrap of newspaper what we wanted to say. His shop was fascinating. Traditional tea was offered, the room was 15' by 15'. A ladder in the corner led up to the main living quarters, which were entered through a hole in the ceiling. Numerous kids kept poking their heads down to peek at the strange foreign visitors while the man brushed out the letters on the newspaper. Back in Beijing, we collected 50 or 60 little red books from the time of Chairman Mao. We also collected 50 or 60 Coca Cola cans with Chinese characters, which were the same red color as the Mao books. We also collected 50 or 60 used brooms and dust pans which Yip collected in his neighborhood. The last acquisition was 50 or 60 more stools. It seems everyone has them. They range from very crude to quite beautiful and are mostly handmade.

## NANCY

Some years later, [Yip] wrote to us in America and said that he was interested in having a t-shirt shop. We sent him silk screening materials, and directions, and all that kind of stuff. I hope he's over there making t-shirts, and is part of a new movement.



**THE MERRY-GO-WORLD  
OR BEGAT BY CHANCE  
AND THE WONDER HORSE TRIGGER**



Edward & Nancy Kienholz  
*The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance  
and the Wonder Horse Trigger*, 1988–92  
mixed media tableau  
115 x 184 in. (292.1 x 467.4 cm)

# EXHIBITION HISTORY

*The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance and The Wonder Horse Trigger*, L.A. Louver, Venice, CA, 26 September – 24 October 1992; traveled to Louver Gallery, New York, NY, 21 November 1992–2 January 1993; Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN, 13 February–3 July 1993; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX, 16 September–28 November 1993

*Of the Human Condition: Hope and Despair at the End of the Century*, Spiral/Wacoal Art Center, Tokyo, Japan, 1 February–20 February 1994; traveled to Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, Ashiya, Japan, 9 April–29 May 1994

*Humanity, The Environment and the Future: An Exhibition of Contemporary Art*, Sonje Museum of Contemporary Art, Gyeongju, South Korea, 24 June–21 September 1994

*The Merry-Go-World Or Begat By Chance And The Wonder Horse Trigger*, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany, 23 February–5 May 1996; traveled to Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland, 29 May–20 October 1996

*Kienholz: A Retrospective*, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, Germany, 7 February–31 March 1997

*The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance and The Wonder Horse Trigger*, curated by David Neuman, Sjöhistoriska (The National Maritime Museum), part of the exhibition series *Arkipelag*, Stockholm, Sweden, 16 May–12 July 1998

*The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance and The Wonder Horse Trigger*, Boise Art Museum, Boise, ID, 19 July–12 October 2003

*Kienholz*, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, England, 14 May–29 August 2005; traveled to Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia, 16 December 2005–5 March 2006

*Kienholz: Five Car Stud*, Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy, 19 May–31 December 2016

*The Merry-Go-World or Begat By Chance and The Wonder Horse Trigger*, L.A. Louver, Venice, CA, 24 October 2019–20 January 2020

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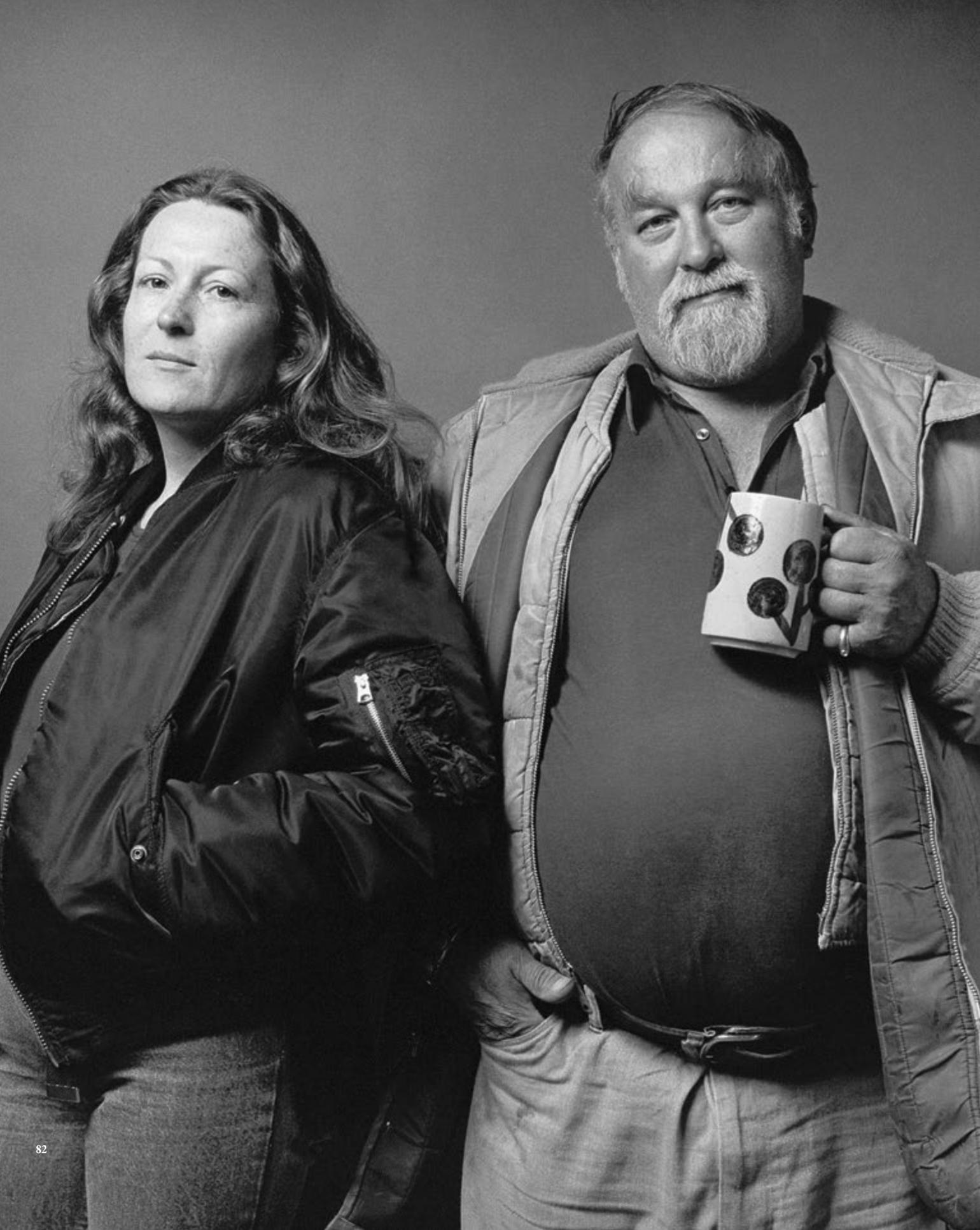
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Edward Kienholz (1927–94) and Nancy Reddin Kienholz (1943–2019) have been the subject of numerous major exhibitions worldwide. In 1995, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York organized a retrospective which traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and Berlinische Galerie, Berlin (1996–97). Recent museum exhibitions include *Kienholz: Five Car Stud* at Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy (2016–17); *Kienholz: The Signs of the Times* at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt and Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland (2011–12); *Edward Kienholz: Five Car Stud Revisited* at the Los Angeles Museum County of Art, Los Angeles and Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark (2011–12); *The Hoerengracht* at The National Gallery, London, UK and The Amsterdam Historical Museum, The Netherlands (2009–10); *KIENHOLZ* at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, UK and Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney, Australia (2005–06).

Their work can be found in public collections internationally. Select institutions include Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, Germany; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy; The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Museum Ludwig, Koln, Germany; Menil Collection, Houston, TX; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; François Pinault Collection, Venice, Italy; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.

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