



Whistler vs. Ruskin, 1992, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 in. (152.4 x 152.4 cm)
© R.B. Kitaj Estate

R.B. KITAJ

10 OCTOBER - 11 NOVEMBER 2013
Opening reception: Thursday, 10 October, 6-8pm

Venice, CA – L.A. Louver is pleased to present an exhibition of paintings and drawings by the late artist R.B. Kitaj (1932-2007). Including almost 30 works created between 1992-2007, this is the artist's first exhibition in Los Angeles since his solo show *R.B. Kitaj Passion and Memory* at The Skirball Cultural Center in early 2008.

"I paint in a library in which the history of art and other histories intervene every day in my painting." – R.B. Kitaj

Kitaj's subject matter weaves learned knowledge with lived experience. A voracious reader and self-proclaimed bibliophile, Kitaj took inspiration from his extensive personal library where he pored over books that reflected his varied interests: literature, art history, film and Jewish texts. *Whistler vs. Ruskin*, 1992, is a direct compositional reference to American painter George Bellows' *Dempsey and Firpo*, 1924, and alludes to the infamous libel suit between painter James McNeill Whistler and critic John Ruskin. Russian director Abram Room's 1927 film *Bed and Sofa* is reimagined in *Bed and Sofa (After Abram Room)*, 1998; and *A Modern Potato Eaters*, 2006-2007 reinterprets Vincent van Gogh's seminal work *The Potato Eaters*, 1885.

As much as Kitaj's pictorial universe emanated from his library, it was also infused with autobiography and narrative – which found their ways onto his canvases in equal measure. The *Los Angeles* series (5 of which are included in this exhibition) are among the most personal and emotively charged paintings in the show. Created between 2001-2004, the works capture the extraordinary romance between Kitaj and his late wife Sandra Fisher. In these paintings, Kitaj portrays the two of them longingly embracing and consumed in heated desire.

"Sandra and I became Lovers again, after her death, in my old age in Los Angeles, The Angels. I could make love to my angel with my paintbrush, fondle her again, caress her contours." – R.B. Kitaj

Central to the works from this period is the dominance of drawing as a principal component of painting: Kitaj made pronounced gestural lines with oil paint, which he pressed firmly into the rough weave of the canvas, and either filled with blocks of vibrant colors, or left sparse with short repetitive strokes of pigmentation. This practice is most evident in the later paintings, such as *1906*, 2007 that depicts artist Paul Cézanne (whom Kitaj greatly admired), and which refers to the year of Cézanne's death. A number of self-portraits also proliferated during this time, including *Self-Portrait*, 2007, produced shortly before Kitaj's death in the same year.

R.B. Kitaj was born in 1932 near Cleveland, Ohio. He spent his youth traveling as a merchant seaman, before serving in the United States Army in Europe from 1956 – 1958. Settling in England, he attended the Ruskin School of Art, Oxford University, and in 1959 transferred to the Royal Academy of Art. Kitaj adopted London as his home for over 40 years. However, fazed by the barrage of negative press surrounding his 1994 Tate retrospective, and the sudden death of his wife Sandra Fisher at the age of 47, Kitaj relocated to Los Angeles in 1997. Kitaj remained in Los Angeles until his death in 2007.

Throughout his lifetime, Kitaj was recognized for his outstanding accomplishments, and in 1982 was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Three years later Kitaj became a Royal Academician – only the third American to be so honored in the Academy's history. In 1995, Kitaj received the Golden Lion Award, the grand prize for painting at the Venice Biennale, and a year later, Kitaj was awarded the Chevalier of Art and Letters from the French Government.



Self-Portrait, 2007, oil on canvas, 12 x 12 in. (30.5 x 30.5 cm)
Courtesy Marlborough Gallery, NY; Photo: Bill Orcutt
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Since 1962, Kitaj exhibited his work throughout Europe and North America. His paintings are included in numerous private and public collections including the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid; The Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; the Israel Museum, Jerusalem; the Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf; the Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek; the Museum Ludwig, Cologne; the Astrup Fearnly Museum of Modern Art, Oslo; the British Museum, the Royal Academy and the Tate, London; The Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Albright-Knox Museum, Buffalo; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Cleveland Museum of Art.

A fully illustrated catalogue will be published both online and in print on the occasion of this exhibition. The catalogue includes text by Tracy Bartley (director, R.B. Kitaj Studio) and Dr. Eckhart J. Gillen (Kultureprojekte Berlin), curator of the recent retrospective *R.B. Kitaj: Obsessions*, which traveled from the Jewish Museum, Berlin; to the Jewish Museum, London and Pallant House, Chichester, UK; and now on view at Hamburger Kunsthalle through 27 October 2013. For more information, please visit www.lalouver.com/kitaj.

R.B. Kitaj events at L.A. Louver:

Saturday October 19 at 11 a.m.

Kitaj's Art and Influence: An artists' conversation between Joe Biel, Rebecca Campbell, Tom Knechtel and Tom Wudl.

Monday October 28 at 7 p.m.

Kitaj's Life and Passions: Tracy Bartley, director of the R.B. Kitaj Studio, Derek Boshier, artist, and David N. Myers, professor and chair of the UCLA History Department, in conversation with Paul Holdengräber, curator, instigator and Director/Founder of LIVE at the New York Public Library.

The events are free, but reservations are recommended, please RSVP to rsvp@lalouver.com or 310-822-4955.

Concurrently on view at L.A. Louver, 10 October – 9 November 2013:

Second floor gallery

JASON MARTIN: *Serendipitia* - New monochromatic pigment paintings

Skyroom

ALISON SAAR: Two recent bronze sculptures

For more information and visuals, please contact Christina Carlos, L.A. Louver, 45 North Venice Boulevard, Venice, CA, USA, www.lalouver.com
tel: 310-822-4955; fax: 310-821-7529; e-mail: Christina@lalouver.com Gallery Hours: Tues - Sat, 10 - 6 PM; Validated parking available