

# JOHN BERNHARDT, EDWARD KIENHOLZ AND GORDON WAGNER: ASSEMBLAGE

September 9 through November 6, 2004

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**Edward Kienholz** (1927-1994), **Gordon Wagner** (1915-1987) and **John Bernhardt** (1921-1963), are three prominent figures in the California Assemblage movement. United by a probing curiosity, a sense of bizarre humor and a scavenging 'fever,' the artists boldly recycled cast-offs, shoreline debris or commonplace objects in challenging contexts.

From a beginning in the abstract expressionist tradition, Kienholz's assemblages, grew out of his passion for social criticism and for collecting "junk." In the *Old Rugged Double Cross* (1963), Kienholz used scrounged deer antlers, wood and metal to create an arresting work of art.

Wagner, the "grandfather" of the California Assemblage movement, invested wit and folklore into discarded objects. In *Seven Actors* (1952), an early exploration of assemblage, Wagner gives a new identity to a fragmented gracefully curved bannister detail with seven knobs. To create *Mojave Freight Yard* (1963), Wagner scavenges discarded train spikes and timbers.



**John Bernhardt** 1921-1963  
*Discriminating Plastic User* 1960  
Assemblage: metal parts on painted wood  
17 x 9 x 2 1/4 inches (43.1 x 22.8 x 5.7cm)  
Collection of Scott Schaefer, Los Angeles, CA



**Gordon Wagner** 1915-1987  
*Seven Actors* Assemblage 1960  
30 1/2 x 8 x 11 inches (77.4 x 20.3 x 27.9cm)

Bernhardt began his artistic career as an abstract expressionist painter and printmaker. When he moved to Santa Barbara in 1959, his predilection for collecting discarded objects became his full focus. He was fascinated by mechanical workings. In *Discriminating Plastic User* (1960), he arranges perforated metal straps, rusted hinges and a latch in a formal composition.

Matisse once wrote that the ability to see the world through the eyes of a child was indispensable to the true artist. Gordon Wagner, Edward Kienholz and John Bernhardt have that power.



**Edward Kienholz** 1927-1994  
*The Old Rugged Double Cross* Assemblage: wood, metal, horns 1963  
21 3/4 x 16 1/4 x 13 inches (55.2 x 41.3 x 33.0cm)



**Gordon Wagner** 1915-1987  
*Mojave Freight Yard* Assemblage: wood, nails 1963 GW.190  
54 x 19 x 18 inches (137.2 x 48.2 x 45.7cm)