

ENGLISH VERSION

Allen Rippersberg

One of Many

— Origins and Variants

The Institut d'Art Contemporain (IAC), at Villeurbanne, is holding a major retrospective of the work of Allen Ruppertsberg, an atypical American artist who has taken part in the principal conceptual art events since the 1960s, and also had an unusual career, while still being shown in major international exhibitions.

One of Many-Origins and Variants, produced jointly with the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle-with the IAC marking the last stage- brings together 50 pieces dating from 1968 to 2005: existing works and works produced specifically or re-invented for the exhibition, based on the growing dimension which hallmarks Allen Ruppertsberg's approach.

Allen Ruppertsberg

Allen Ruppertsberg was born in 1955 in Cleveland (Ohio), and moved to Los Angeles to study at the Chouinard Art Institute (nowadays known as CalArts), first of all in the publicity illustration department, and then in the art department.

Allen Ruppertsberg belongs to the first generation of North American artists to have used language as a fully-fledged means of expression, drawing in a critical way from all the various features of the mass media and the consumer society. He has indeed contributed to the history of Conceptual art since the 1960s, but Allen Ruppertsberg is still an artist who is hard to pigeonhole, and «hard to grasp»-elusive both figuratively and literally. His work has also been fuelled by the Beat Generation and the various intellectual movements that have come into being in California.

Allen Ruppertsberg's work also draws from many different literary sources and from the components of popular American culture, while at the same time being permeated by autobiographical references. So the places where the artist has lived-and the interpersonal relations they can give rise to-are very significant in his production: Los Angeles and New York, first and foremost, but various European cities as well.

Allen Ruppertsberg simultaneously explores different operational methods which really do posit acts that are part and parcel of specific time frames (reading, writing, copying, collecting, and being a collector...). One of the basics of his work thus involves the transposition and recycling of his own works, or bits and pieces thereof. Allen Ruppertsberg's forms of expression are highly diversified as a result: installation, performance, multiple, painting, sculpture, drawing, books, photography, video, etc.

Similarly, the bulk of his output is based on the idea of multiplicity, with the creation of multiple works stemming from the existence of an original, or else by using methods of large-scale reproduction to create «original» works and «one off prints» (like the hand-made copies). So Allen Ruppertsberg's works are hybrid and cross-disciplinary, constructing, as the artist so desires, a «more democratic art object genre».

Allen

One of Many - Origins and Variants Exposition

The exhibition's explicit title underscores Allen Ruppertsberg's approach and method, endlessly creating a special relationship between each piece and his oeuvre as a whole, and turns each exhibition into an opportunity to revisit all his work, by questioning his presentational methods.

Allen Ruppertsberg thus subjects each of the simple artefacts in his vast filing system (*One of Many*) to a process of artistic adaptation, and variation (*Origins and Variants*), in the direction of decontextualization.

One of Many-Origins and Variants sheds light on, and endlessly duplicates, Allen Ruppertsberg's collector's passion (books, posters, press cuttings, obituaries, postcards, educational and documentary films...) and the on-going filing it gives rise to a storage process that is the raw material of his works.

4

The installation ***These Fragments... 1968-2003*** (4), made specifically for this exhibition, is symbolic of one of the basic principles of Allen Ruppertsberg's praxis-creating, assembling, extracting, moving, shifting, reassembling, involving both the works themselves and their «component parts». The installation *These Fragments... 1968-2003* offers a sweeping overview of his work through «presentation» (by way of items of theatre furniture created by the artist in 2003) of multiples and originals of works that are both old and recent. As a kind of huge filing system of the artist by the artist, this installation, which spans more than three decades of work by Allen Ruppertsberg, marks the significance for him of relations between everyday life and artistic creation, between private

realms and public places, between the construction of a make-believe and the production of the real.

An early artistic period covered the late 1960s and early 1970s, with works like *Al's Café* (1969) and *Al's Grand Hotel* (1971)- « flats », signs, photographs,..., ephemeral installations that Allen Ruppertsberg designed in non-artistic places, respectively a cafeteria and a hotel, which the artist used to display his work for a given period of time. In the heyday of Conceptual art, Allen Ruppertsberg applied these projects (as an extension of *Location Piece*, 1969) which already asserted their interest in the daily round, and meeting-places, and involved his output in the borderline area between art and life.

In *Al's Café*, Allen Ruppertsberg offers a menu of «artistic» specialities, which he used himself, in a setting decorated in the manner of a traditional American café (calendars, photos of movie stars and sports celebrities).

Visitors to *Al's Grand Hotel* were able to rent one of the thematic bedrooms furnished by the artist for a nominal sum of money.

Al's Café and *Al's Grand Hotel* may make art top-ple over into reality, but they also nurture the art of the real. So these places transformed by Allen Ruppertsberg into a «real» café and a «real» hotel have been nothing less than meeting places for the Los Angeles art community (Allan Kaprow, Robert Rauschenberg, Allan McCollum...)

Included in *These Fragments... 1968-1003*, the artist's books *23/24 Pieces* (1968-69) also belong to this period, crystallizing Allen Ruppertsberg's soft spot for places and moments of daily life (public parks, hotel rooms, meals...), and ushering in what would subsequently underpin all his work: the book and its different forms.

5

The year 1972, when Allen Ruppertsberg took part in Documenta V at Kassel (curated by Harald Szeeman) marked a turning point in his career, with a major work ***Where's AI? (5)***. It was the physical disappearance of the artist that gave rise to the work, based on the construction of a mysterious and open-ended narrative, in the style of a detective plot, with its clues and snippets of information.

Made up of a set of 160 photographs taken by an Instamatic camera, and 100 typed index cards, *Where's AI?* presents imaginary dialogues and characters, who seem, from one image and one message to the next, to speculate about the possible or vague whereabouts of their chum AI. The photographs depict anonymous people (*He / She - Il / Elle*) in daily leisure-oriented situations—at a restaurant, on the beach, in the games room, in moments of interaction, and in deserted places. The cards used by the artist are actually library cards, except that instead of listing a bibliographical catalogue, they present brief dialogues which draw up a kind of inventory of absence.

There is talk of AI, he is talked of in the third person, just as the characters are named in the third person.

Interplay of tracks, narrative with clues, identity puzzle... *Where's AI?* is a decisive work in Allen Ruppertsberg's method, which would explore at length the relations between reality and make-believe, the auteur concept, the appropriation of texts, as well as issues to do with time frames connected to different acts of creation and life (reading, writing, copying, travelling...).

7

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1974) (7) is a fine example of this. Made up of 20 pictures (measuring 183 x 183 cm each), the work is the complete handwritten transcription, using a felt-tipped pen, on blank canvas, of Oscar Wilde's book *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Shown for the first time at the Claire Copley gallery in Los Angeles, in 1974, where the actual space could not accommodate a linear mural exhibition of the 20 canvases, it was first of all shown in the form of object/panels set one against the other, with just the very last one remaining «readable». At once visible in its spatial presence and its pictoriality, and readable in the recopied literary text which it unfurls, this Allen Ruppertsberg work is an extremely rich one, both within his work as a whole and in the history of art spanning these past few decades. Allen Ruppertsberg gives material form here to a powerful time-related experience, which passes by way of an almost «Proustian» tempo, the time taken to write something, as a copyist or transcriber, involving the time of the reading of the text, based on a literary work which is itself an extraordinary story about the universal fantasy of stopping time, and the muffled intricacies between «real life» and creation. Allen Ruppertsberg duplicates the spectacular aspect and the already abyssal scope of Oscar Wilde's novel, by creating an object that is at once unique and multiple, which absorbs into itself and reinstates types of expression (painting and literature), personal acts (reading and writing), production statuses (original and copy) and author's gestures (writing a novel; re-writing and reproducing a text; creating a visual work). Not forgetting that the work-like the original from which it is inspired-deals in an intense way with the issue of the «secret of life and death» (title of another Ruppertsberg work produced in 1977).

12

The appropriation of linguistic and narrative elements and reflection about the acts of reading and writing would hallmark a large part of Allen Ruppertsberg's output in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1979 he produced the work **Raymond Roussel Falls to the Floor (Discovering Art)** (12), composed of 34 pencil drawings on paper and three panels of text. It was inspired by the French poet Raymond Roussel (1877-1933)-from his biography, and from one of his books *Locus Solus*, as well as from his writing processes, espoused and greeted as roundly by the Surrealists as later by the Structuralists, and then the writers belonging to the Oulipo group (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle).

16

Still in the vein of literary texts deployed in space, Allen Ruppertsberg produced a work titled **Le Mot Juste** (16) in 1983, a poem by the artist divided into seven canvases. Words remain at the heart of all his work, and permeate, in a significant way, both the titles of his works and the objects and shapes which form them.

16

11

Included in *These fragments... 1968-2003* and already belonging to the artist's New York period, the work **Reminders: Novel, Sculpture, Film (1991)** (11) draws from one of the artist's collections of American educational films from the 1930s to the 1960s. The installation consists of sixteen book titles piled on a table and cardboard boxes containing other copies of these books which are unsold (i.e. «remainders»). Bearing in mind the presentation of books in bookshops, it summons the public to consult and handle books. With different appearances, the books actually all have the same list of contents, made up of 16 chapters whose titles are those of 16 films chosen from the collection referred to. Only the inside and back of the jackets bear any text, a sole narrative that links all the books together. The text of a film script from 1967, «LSD-25», was designed as a deterrent of sorts for teenagers of the day. The content of the books is made up entirely of pictures: 32 photograms taken from films, and assembled differently from one book to the next (with some images being repeated up to 24 times), thus producing sequences (of the «flip-book» type) and frozen images.

In addition to the texts encountered, Allen Ruppertsberg's life places go to make up his art praxis, to the point of modifying its forms. Allen Ruppertsberg had many a stay in New York from 1970 onwards, but in 1985 he actually settled in the city—the year when the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles held a retrospective show of his work—and would stay there until 2000. This prompted him to travel to different European cities where he produced public artworks. He would thus become more and more attached, during the 1990s, to the history of cities and to the notion of memorials, creating installations involving a plural memory: personal memory (autobiographical) and collective memory, the memory of contemporary society.

1

Evening Time is Reading Time (1991)(1) is an in situ installation in the city of Utrecht (Netherlands) which ushered in a series of works connected to the urban space and commemoration.

Produced at the time of the *Nightlines* exhibition organized by the Utrecht Centraal Museum, it is made up of sixteen round illuminated publicity signs (to do with drinking habits in the Netherlands), whose signs and imagery are appropriated by Allen Ruppertsberg, and juxtaposed with the repeated words «Evening Time is Reading Time»: an invitation addressed to inhabitants to get back to their private spaces for this very special time, when everyone can read.

6

In 1993, Allen Ruppertsberg produced the work **Siste Viotor (Stop Traveller) (6)** for the Sonsbeck Biennial in Arnhem (Netherlands). As an arena of military operations during the second world war, Arnhem lost more than 8,000 soldiers during the battle of Arnhem and the failure of the Allies in September 1944. Allen Ruppertsberg got to know about those events after seeing the Hollywood film *A Bridge Too Far* (shot in 1977 in the Arnhem region). For him the memory of the war and the shooting of the film are overlaid, one upon the other, creating, among inhabitants, a form of unique collective memory, a mixture of fact and fiction, history and popular culture».

Allen Ruppertsberg's memorial takes the form of a caravan-dating from before the war and found by the artist in the city cemetery-containing different objects to do with the battle of Arnhem, as well as stacks of books. These latter being five reissued bestsellers published between 1920 and 1944 in the four countries involved in the battle: Britain, the Netherlands, Poland and Germany, i.e. 20 titles. While the exhibition was up, a city bookstore sold re-issues of the 20 novels. Each book is marked with an ex-libris in the name of one of the dead soldiers. By thus attributing to the soldiers killed by the war the proprietorship of these popular novels, Allen Ruppertsberg in a way reinstates for them a part of their culture, with their supposed reading matter. Otherwise put, a part of their memory, their identity and their privacy.

of Many

14

Another «commemorative» monument, the work titled **Proofs (1994) (14)** is made up of seven canvases printed with press headlines describing catastrophes and other violent goings-on in the 20th century.

Set in storage-type units (of the «compactus» variety for pictures), they succinctly and punctiliously condense both the «proofs» of the extent of the victims, over and above any political, ethnic or geographical border.

2

In the vein of *Evening Time is Reading Time, The Best of All Possible Worlds (1997) (2)* is a work dedicated to the city of Münster (almost totally destroyed during the second world war) and inspired by Candide, that famous character created by Voltaire. In the form of illuminated city signs, and a travel guide, Allen Ruppertsberg imagines the return of Candide to his native city, 238 years after his departure from it, and attributes to him the role of tourist guide in the city of Münster, for its inhabitants. The proposed places visited (indicated by illuminated signs) are above all places containing individual stories, memories recounted, which the artist collected at an earlier date from the inhabitants. So the «best of all possible worlds» is refocused on what remains of an experience-essentially the narrative-and on gardens which might still be cultivated-the fragmented gardens of memory and imagination.

3

In 1998, while he was artist in residence at Basel, at the Laurenz-Haus Foundation, Allen Ruppertsberg produced the work ***You Are Here, You Are There*** (3), whose title rings out like a strange response, fifteen years later, to the emblematic *Where's AI?*

Allen Ruppertsberg used three official poster hoardings of the city of Basel, mounted as a sort of triangular sculpture installed in the public place, proposing a new vision of the city, a subjective portrait of Basel based on places he visited in the city, and enjoyed. Allen Ruppertsberg over-printed on each one of the panels a poster which perfectly conceals the existing tourist information (city plan, etc.) and creates a new urban mapping, more or less maze-like, more or less internal, linked with the artist's strolls, hikes and discoveries in this city.

Kunstkammer (cabinet of curiosities). This regularly renewed compilation has been fed by different productions which have, furthermore, managed to be separately exhibited. Things in the series *The Gift and the Inheritance* (where Ruppertsberg reproduces, as drawings, books « as objects ») are introduced for example into *Kunstkammer* as is the *Self Portrait as Hurd Hartfield as Dorian Gray*, a pencil drawing of the actor who played Dorian Gray in the 1945 film adaptation.

So *Kunstkammer* is a receptacle with porous borders and variable forms, which subtly broach the complex phenomenon of the act of collecting, which, among other things, involves-but always by going beyond them-operations of collection, selection and choice of presentation.

15

Allen Ruppertsberg went back to live in Los Angeles in 2001 to give some courses at UCLA. From the 1990s up to the present day he has been undertaking new projects which further bolster the process of recycling and storage for his own works, and invariably assert his creative output as being inseparable from the narrative of his life. It is hard to find the «right word» or «mot juste» to define Allen Ruppertsberg's works, which are sorts of evolving thesauruses and nested works which are forever shifting and altering their temporal boundaries and the categorization of their contents. ***Kunstkammer (1991-2005)*** (15) was started in 1991, during the artist's New York years, and is of this type.

Involved here is a compilation and assemblage of older works, including many graphic pieces (drawings, prints, illustrated press clippings..) framed and often working like series. Photograms, books and editions of popular literature, post-cards, comics, obituaries, commercial advertisements, and all sorts of collections are contained in

8

Good Dreams, Bad Dreams, What was Sub-Literature? (1996) (8) is a work that is part and parcel of the constant approach adopted by Allen Ruppertsberg, consisting in blurring the boundaries between classical literature and cheap books, between scholarly culture and popular culture (high and low), categories which, for him, are artificial, and considerably invalidated by the scope and range of his own collections.

Origins
and Variants

13

The New Five Foot Shelf (2001) (13) was produced by Allen Ruppertsberg in the year when he left New York and went back to Los Angeles. The artist himself has defined this installation as «a big biographical work». *The Five Foot Shelf of Books* is an encyclopaedia published in 1910 by the President of Harvard University (P.F. Collier & Son, New York, in the «Harvard Classics» collection), in «50 volumes, 418 titles, 300 authors and 76,000 references». This publication was very popular in the United States until the 1950s, and represented «what ought to be read» for an educated American. Unlike that standardizing vision, the «new encyclopaedia» proposed by Allen Ruppertsberg brings together, categorizes and sets up a body of texts, documents and photographs, based on variable methods, drawn from his own archives.

The collection of books from the original edition has pride of place in the middle of a table, solely in its representation, not to say simulacrum, because the content comes from the artist. Only the first volume is a facsimile of the 1910 introduction. The following volumes, each of 60 pages, are made up of five «narratives», which can be read simultaneously. The last volume contains a photographic reconstruction of the studio used by Ruppertsberg in New York until 2001. Enclosing this bibliophile's arrangement, photographs of the studio cover the walls and present an at once precise and varied vision of the countless books, films, magazines, postcards, etc. which fuel the whole work, and the artist's daily round.

Allen Ruppertsberg offers an extension of this highly metaphorical work by way of an on-line artist's project (<http://www.diacenter.org/ruppertsberg/>) which enables everyone to «visit» it in its entirety.

9

Like *The New Five Foot Shelf*, the installation **The Singing Posters Parts I-III (2003-2005) (9)** is part of *These Fragments... 1968-2003*, thus winding up, if such a thing were possible, Ruppertsberg's loop of «Borgesian» work.

Allen Ginsberg and his poem *Howl* is the central focus of *Singing Poster Part I*.

Singing Posters Parts II,III are presented like minimal sculptures, as piles of posters on the floor.

Since 1983, Allen Ruppertsberg has been producing installations based on posters which he retrieves from the Colby Poster Company: local advertisements typical of ordinary American life (fairs, rock concerts, property advertisements...), which he assembles in the form of poster walls.

In this installation, Allen Ruppertsberg reintroduces Allen Ginsberg's poem, a long work in prose, which was the ground-breaking text of the Beat generation, and as such censored when first published in 1956. Allen Ruppertsberg inserts the poem as fragments scattered over the whole wall surface, and phonetically transcribes it, based on a reading of it given by Ginsberg in 1959 in San Francisco.

Looking at this huge collage, the spectator is prompted to juggle visually with a kind of huge mural colour chart, and, almost out loud, read the texts which collide with each other, in order to grasp Ginsberg's «lines of breathing». Over and above its chromatic and textual impact, this work pays a vibrant tribute to friendship.

10

This is why this work may usually be presented with the work **Letter to a Friend (1997-2005) (10)**.

Produced for the first time for Portikus at Frankfurt, *Letter to a Friend* is a floor installation of variable dimensions, made up of squares of linoleum, associated with five drawings shown on the wall.

On the floor, in the form of a chequerboard, is written, with one letter per square, a letter (i.e. mail) addressed by Allen Ruppertsberg to his friend Terry Allen.

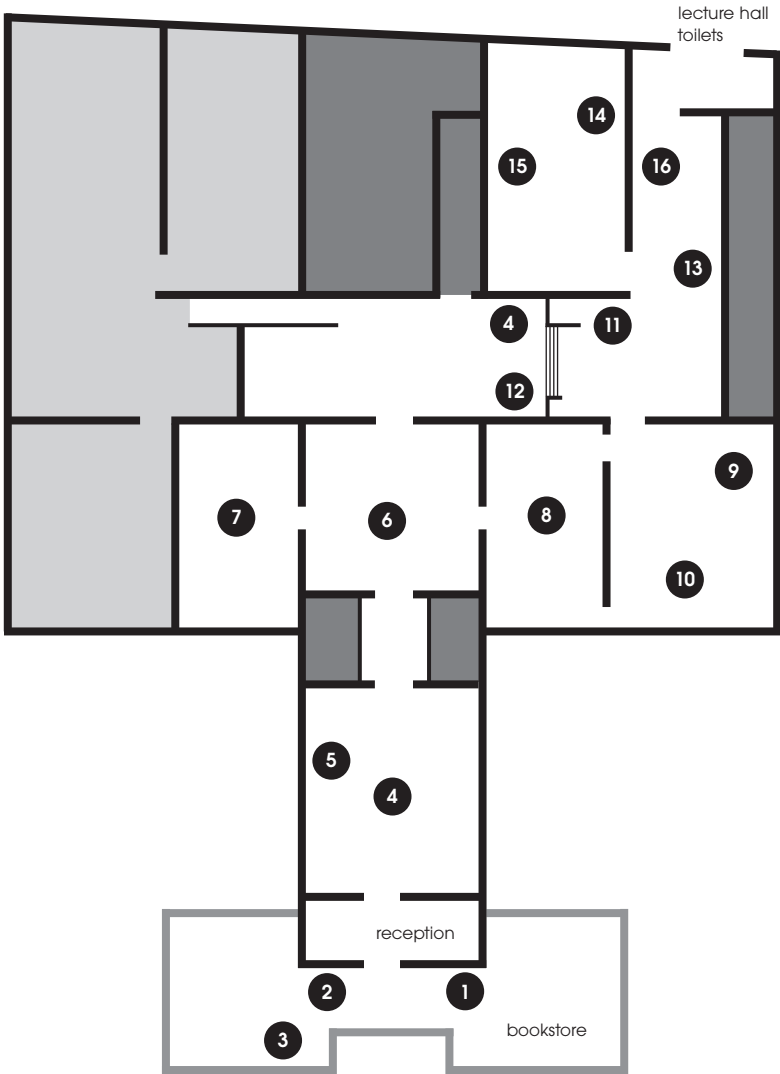
Starting like a traditional letter («Dear T.»), it then continues with a succession of names: friends of Ruppertsberg, who all died in 1997 (William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Douglas Huebler, Martin Kippenberger, Willem de Kooning, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Mitchum, Aldo Rossi...). The *Drawing Times* on the wall reproduce press cuttings: obituaries of people whose names are trampled on by the visitor, in an act that is in no way disrespectful, but rather in an almost familiar way (in the sense of demystified), which the artist invites from us: the way of mourning and memory. The game of death and life, materialized by an at once sober and monumental installation, which de-partitions with neither solemnity nor manners, but rather through a work about presence, the still public space and the truly private place.

Letter to a Friend, in its title alone, condenses the whole masterful trajectory of Allen Ruppertsberg, which is many-meaning'd and generous.

tour of the exhibition

- 1 *Evening Time is Reading Time*
- 2 *The Best of All Possible Worlds*
- 3 *You Are Here, You Are There*
- 4 *These Fragments... 1968-2003*
- 5 *Where's AI ?*
- 6 *Siste Viator (Stop Traveller)*
- 7 *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- 8 *Good Dreams, Bad Dreams.*
What was Sub-Literature
- 9 *The Singing Posters Parts I-III*
- 10 *Letter to a Friend*
- 11 *Remainders : Novel, Sculpture, Film*
- 12 *Raymond Roussel Falls to the Floor*
(Discovering Art)
- 13 *The New Five Foot Shelf*
- 14 *Proofs*
- 15 *Kunstkammer*
- 16 *Le Mot Juste*

■ Anthony McCall exhibition



USEFUL INFORMATION

Exhibition

from 16 November 2006
to 7 January 2007

Open from Wednesday
to Sunday from 1-6 pm,
late opening on Thursdays to 8 pm.

How to get there

bus no.1 (Cité-Nouveau Musée stop)
metro line A (stop: République)
velo'v station one minute away on foot
The Institut d'Art Contemporain is situated
near the TGV station at Lyon Part-Dieu



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