

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

ARTSY

### Artschwager! at Hammer Museum: Senior Curator Anne Ellegood Talks to Artsy

Christine Kuan



*LA Lifeguard Headquarters by Chisa Hughes.*

The Hammer Museum presents “Richard Artschwager!” a survey of the late artist’s long and influential career. The Hammer, LAND (Los Angeles Nomadic Division), and The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas also present a Los Angeles-wide installation of Richard Artschwager’s blps - a word coined by the artist (pronounced “blips”) in the late 1960s which consists of black lozenge-shaped marks meant to inspire focused looking and draw our attention to the places and things around us that often go unnoticed. Anne Ellegood, Senior Curator at the Hammer Museum, talks with me about the exhibition on view now.

**Christine Kuan: The last retrospective of Richard Artschwager was in 1988 at the Whitney Museum. What inspired the Hammer, the Whitney, and Yale University Art Gallery to do a retrospective of his work now?**

Anne Ellegood: The show was initiated by Jennifer Gross, curator at the Yale University Art Gallery, who was the curator for the exhibition. Jennifer said that one reason she was drawn to doing a retrospective of Artschwager’s work was that for many years it had mystified her. She said she actually didn’t like the work very much at first, but it had grown on her and she wanted to explore it more and try to understand it because she found it so perplexing, and therefore, interesting. I think everyone involved with the exhibition felt that it was time for people to see the arc of Artschwager’s career again since he was an artist who was always experimenting and trying new things. Since 1988, he had made a lot of work, some of it quite distinct from his work up to that point. At the Hammer, we felt it was important to bring Artschwager’s retrospective to Los Angeles because so many artists live here and we believe it is an important exhibition for

young artists, who perhaps have not experienced a lot (or any) of the work in person before, to see it.

**CK: Often Artschwager is listed among the "giants"—Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Cy Twombly. What has been his impact on young artists practicing today?**

AE: While Artschwager had a very solid career and is certainly considered an incredibly important American artist, he's not as well known as the artists you mention, or others of his generation like Andy Warhol or Roy Lichtenstein, or the Minimalists that he was sometimes associated with like Donald Judd or Dan Flavin. Artschwager never had a completely recognizable style, despite his experimentation with specific materials for which he became widely known, like Formica, Celotex, and rubberized horsehair. He continuously tried new things and would come out with sometimes quite surprising new bodies of work. I think it is this sense of experimentation and discovery that inspires young artists. And his willingness to put things out in the world that were truly strange, difficult to categorize, even difficult to look at. I also think his incredible craftsmanship—his acuity with materials and with making—is a very encouraging to young artists.

**CK: What is one surprising thing you discovered while curating this exhibition?**

AE: I was very taken with how much of the work I actually did not know, or at least know well. There are quintessential Artschwager works—*Description of a Table*, the Destruction painting series, the exclamation points and blps—that I knew and loved. But there is so much more. I was very excited by the later work and his continued commitment to collapsing the categories of painting and sculpture. And I love the drawings for their incredible detail and ability to pull you in.

**CK: What is your favorite piece in the show and why?**

AE: That is a very difficult question to answer. I honestly don't have a favorite. I love *Double Dinner* (1988) because it is one of the most bizarre works in the show and it has an intensity and an emotional tenor that I respond to. I love *Triptych (with Nude)* (1966) for the way that the painting protrudes off the wall and for how Artschwager breaks up the image with the middle panel of swirling orange-ish formica, thereby disallowing a completely voyeuristic relationship to the nude. And *Description of a Table* (1964) is a classic, a succinct and highly intelligent object that encapsulates much of what drove Artschwager as an artist. It is one of the most important sculptures made by an American artist during that period.

*"Richard Artschwager!" on view at the Hammer Museum and throughout Los Angeles through September 1, 2013. This exhibition was co-organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art and Yale University Art Gallery and surveys the artist's long and influential career (Artschwager passed away February 2013). All blp photos of LA Lifeguard Headquarters by Chisa Hughes.*

*Anne Ellegood is the Senior Curator at the Hammer Museum. Prior to joining the Hammer, Ellegood was Curator of Contemporary Art at the Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden. Previously, she was the New York-based Curator for Peter Norton's collection of over 2400 works of international contemporary art. From 1998-2003, she was the Associate Curator at the New Museum.*