

*(Cherry and Martin archive - Cherry and Martin is now Philip Martin Gallery.)*

## **Carl Cheng**

Nature is Everything - Everything is Nature

May 28 - July 16, 2016

Cherry and Martin is proud to present Carl Cheng's first Los Angeles solo exhibition in over 20 years. For more than five decades, Cheng (b. 1942) has produced pioneering works in a range of media, exploring as critic Mark Johnstone writes, "technology and nature as levers, one applied to the other, in order to discover and reveal the beautiful wonders of each."

As the exhibition title suggests, Carl Cheng takes a holistic approach to humans and their environment. His sculptures, photographs and interactive installations view natural processes by way of their oft-assumed opposing term: technology. Cheng inverts traditional ideas of nature vs. human; in particular, the idea that humans and their products are somehow separate from - and in control of - nature. Cheng's work connects to Asian philosophies, as well as to day-to-day life in the constantly changing landscape of Southern California, with its planned — and unplanned — interactions between humans and their environment.

In the late 1950s, Cheng began his studies in art and design at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). There he worked with professors like Don Chipperfield, who emphasized material exploration, problem-solving and cross-pollination. In 1964, Cheng received a fellowship to study at the Folkwang School of Art in Essen, Germany. In Essen, Cheng had a chance to experience a post-Bauhaus pedagogy that placed art and design in a context that included dance, theater and music. Cheng's experience in Germany also gave him his first exposure to life outside Southern California, as well as a viewpoint on racial and cultural politics in the United States that has stayed with him his entire life. When Carl Cheng returned to UCLA in 1965, he began graduate work in sculpture, and also studied with Robert Heinecken, who had only just established the photography department at the school. At UCLA, Carl Cheng worked alongside fellow students like Pat O'Neill — with whom he shared a studio and has often exhibited.

In the mid-1960's Cheng began experimenting with fabricating plastic as a basis of making sculpture and photography. "Landscape Essay" (1966) presents Malibu's Point Mugu as an unstable and serial location. "V.H." (1966), a molded plastic and photographic sculptural film piece, critiques the treatment of America's veterans during the early years of Vietnam War. In 1970, Cheng was one of only a handful of Los Angeles-based artists included in curator Peter Bunnell's landmark 1970 Museum of Art exhibition, "Photography into Sculpture," described in its original wall text as "the first comprehensive survey of photographically formed images used in a sculptural or fully dimensional manner."

Around this time, Cheng also produced his first 'nature machines.' These works, Cheng writes, "model nature, its processes and effects for a future environment that may be completely made by humans." "Erosion Machine" (1969) is a microwave sized mechanism, built from off-the-

Philip Martin Gallery

shelf materials — and materials specifically engineered by Cheng — in which a human-made rock is subject to constant water erosion. Cheng's landmark solo 1975 exhibition at Cal Tech's Baxter Art Gallery, "Erosions & Other Environmental Changes," included a selection of these nature machines as well as an entropic environment complete with insects, live plants and various 'specimen' viewing and delivery devices. Cheng's 'nature machines' push the boundaries of post-minimalism, and break open the assumptions of systems art.

Carl Cheng also has long-questioned the role of individuals in a mass media society driven by corporate interests. His alter-ego John Doe Co., which he established in 1967, has worked as both means by which to engage and critique corporate culture. Cherry and Martin's exhibition will include ephemera related to John Doe Co., such as promotional images, literature and product reports. These product reports market artworks like "Table Model Specimen Viewer" (1970). John Doe Co. literature embeds its products in the absurdist visual discourse of American consumerism.

Carl Cheng's work has appeared in such exhibitions as "The Photographic Object 1970" (2014, Hauser and Wirth, New York, NY); "The Photographic Object 1970" (2013, Le Consortium, Dijon, France); "Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974-1981" (2013, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA); "Proof: Los Angeles Art and the Photography 1960- 1980" (1992, Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, CA); "Photography into Sculpture" (1970, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY); and "Vision and Expression" (1969, George Eastman Museum, Rochester, NY). Solo exhibitions included LIST Visual Arts Center (Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Boston, MA); Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum (Santa Barbara, CA); Capp Street Projects (San Francisco, CA); and ASG Foundation Gallery (Nagoya, Japan). Reviews of Cheng's work have appeared in the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Art News, Art in America, Art Forum and other publications. Publications include "Carl Cheng/John Doe Co.: Twenty Five Year Survey" (1991, Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barbara, CA); "Mr X-acto: Photographs by Carl Cheng and Pat O'Neill" (1998, University of Nevada, Reno, NV); and "John Doe Co. Invites You to a New Exhibition of Products by Carl Cheng" (1970, Esther Robles Gallery, Los Angeles, CA).

Philip Martin Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 11am-6pm and by appointment. For further information and images please contact the gallery at +310-559-0100 or [info@philipmartingallery.com](mailto:info@philipmartingallery.com).

Philip Martin Gallery  
2712 S. La Cienega Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90034  
+310-559-0100  
[info@philipmartingallery.com](mailto:info@philipmartingallery.com)