

Drohojowska-Philp, Hunter. "Robert Overby at Marc Selwyn Fine Art," **KCRW**, February 19, 2015.



The first piece in **Robert Overby: Absence as Presence: Trace, Erasure, Eradication and Lack** is an acrylic portrait John Lennon's Head 16 May 1970. But the real question in this exhibition has to do with Robert Overby's head. What was going on there? The show at Marc Selwyn Fine Art through April 11 will raise more questions than it will answer, which is exactly as Overby would have wanted it.

The LA-based artist passes away at the age of 58 in 1993 and the show was organized by his widow, artist Linda Burnham. It includes highlights of a rich if not lengthy career including one of the latex architectural pieces for which the artist is best known, "Living Room, Paul's Place" (29 December 1971), a thin rubber cast of the interior of his brother's actual room with windows, wall heater and door that stands in the center of the gallery. Yet, the walls are slightly wobbly, even saggy, as though the life of the place had been drained. The artist often cast such elements of domesticity and the show includes edges of a door frame as well as a modest door stop, which he cast in chocolate in an edition of six. Apparently, the artist and his friends ate all but the original that is in the show but now the estate has produced a hundred new chocolate doorstops for sale in honor of this exhibition.



Much of the work in this show was produced during the dawn of Post-Minimal art. Despite formalist inclinations evident in a white on white serigraph, "White Power" (September 1969) and a number of small whitish paintings from 1978, Overby was far from clinical. Instead, he was concerned with evoking indirect feelings and latent emotions. By presenting the trace or residue of an event or object, he conjured memories or yearnings.

Overby was intent upon documenting that which was difficult to see, to measure, to comprehend and was unconfined by medium and style. Educated at the Art Institute of Chicago and Art Center in the 1950s, he worked as a successful graphic designer for a decade before deciding to commit himself to being an artist. He went back to school at Chouinard Art Institute and graduated with a BA in 1970. After making that commitment, his work departed wildly from any connection to commercial art. For instance, on a bed of grass lie three pale concrete shapes meant to be measurements, "Projected Space Between My Legs" (16 October 1970). He took sheets of PVC and stretched them so they represented the shape of the pulling.

Yet, his expertise in graphics, which he continued to practice on occasion, (even designing the logo used by Toyota to this day) was useful in his sophisticated manipulations of printing techniques such as off-set lithographs and Polaroids that he enlarged as black and white prints. Still, it is his sensitivity to surface and subtlety that emerges most strongly in this show.

That aspect of Overby's art led curator Allegra Pesenti to include two of his pieces in the delightful exhibition **Apparitions: Frottages and Rubbings from 1860 to Now** at the Hammer Museum. Pesenti, now curator at large for the Menil Drawing Institute in Houston, has brought together a range of work spanning centuries and regions to explore the technique of frottage, which means laying paper or fabric over a surface and rubbing it with charcoal or crayon to bring out the underlying patterns.

There are a number of stellar pieces by contemporary artists such as Michelle Stuart, Morgan Fisher, Matt Mullican, Giuseppe Penone and a gallery of Surrealist works including a number by Max Ernst, who coined the term frottage to describe the rubbing techniques he used to deploy texture. However, the first piece in the show, a rubbing of leaves, dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century while tomb rubbings are from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Pesenti explained, the show demonstrates the widespread "vocabulary of touch." It continues to May 31.