

MICHAEL KOHN GALLERY

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It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing): 100 Years of Wallace Berman

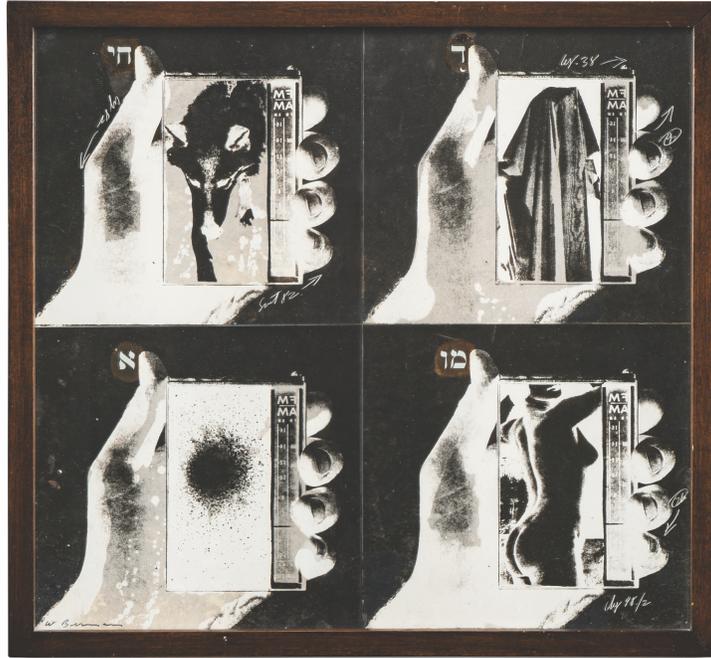


Image: Wallace Berman, *Untitled (A1-Wolf)*, 1964-76, 4-part negative Verifax collage, 11 ¾ x 12 ¾ in.

Los Angeles, CA (January 12, 2026) – Michael Kohn Gallery is proud to present *It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)*, a highly significant exhibition of Verifax collaged works that commemorates the centennial of the birth, and the semicentennial of the death, of one of the most unique and influential artists to emerge from Los Angeles during the second half of the Twentieth Century, **Wallace Berman**.

Curated by the artist's son, Tosh Berman, **the exhibition opens on February 18, 2026**—the day of Berman's birth and untimely death in a vehicular accident. In the new publication that accompanies the show, Tosh embarks on a personal account and iconographic decoding of Wallace Berman's enigmatic oeuvre: "100 years ago. Fifty years

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ago. Born a century ago, gone for a half century...," begins Tosh's text; he proceeds with deliberate and detailed insights into Wallace Berman's astonishing body of work.

In 1963, Berman received a gift of a Verifax machine (a type of early Xerox machine that produced photographic images) that he utilized to invent his photo-based pieces. Initially, the artist employed this expedient reproductive process to create modest, semi-abstract works that resembled a soupy mixture of cut-up photographs. By 1965, he had settled on a more standardized manner to re-present the world of photographic images.

While leafing through Life magazine, Berman came across a print advertisement for the hand-held Sony AM/FM transistor radio. He altered the ad by excising the geometric metallic speaker of the Sony, a magical voice that could emanate worldly knowledge from the ether, the oracle of the hand-held machine. Berman repurposed the visual center into an empty frame that could be populated with any image, from any source, from any location, of any subject, of any size; and he would repeat the process as often as he wanted. The juxtaposition of images and interpretations was countless. The possibilities were infinite.

Wallace Berman's Verifax works were rarely shown in public, a deliberate decision the artist made after his arrest in 1957 during his inaugural Ferus Gallery show. Instead, Berman directly contacted Los Angeles collectors whom he had met through the art world and sold just enough work to pay his monthly bills. In 1966, he was part of a group show at Robert Fraser Gallery, London, where he met the artist Peter Blake; Berman was subsequently included on The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album cover by Blake. He was an underground artist, yet Berman's works are in numerous museums worldwide. Despite only a few gallery exhibitions in his lifetime, his life and work have influenced artists from Ed Ruscha to Richard Prince. The latter's work was shown in the two-person exhibition "She: Images of Women by Wallace Berman & Richard Prince" at Michael Kohn Gallery in 2009.

This important exhibition brings together rare, large-scale 56-part works, along with stunning examples of 25-part, 16-part, 9-part, 4-part, and individual Verifaxes found in the

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artist's studio after his death. This is a critical, massive group of works that may never be shown together again.

By many accounts, Berman had the soul of a Surrealist poet, a Kabbalah mystic, and a pool hall hustler, but most importantly, that of an artist. Tosh Berman writes, "Wallace transformed the mass-produced into something intimate and enigmatic. By refusing the personal snapshot, he preserved the mystery, leaving room for poetry."

Wallace Berman: *It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)* opens February 18, 2026 at Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Wallace Berman was an American artist - a self-taught modernist, hipster, and poet-mystic, who worked at a time of extraordinary socio-political and cultural change. Born shortly before the Great Depression, he came of age in the aftermath of World War II, when the horrors of global warfare, the Holocaust, and atomic bombings lingered vividly in people's hearts and minds. Far from the traditional centers of art and culture, Berman matured as an artist in Los Angeles, on the creative frontier of the American West. His was a reality bifurcated by the clash of an old world and a new, in which lifestyles born of war and deprivation coexisted with unparalleled prosperity, economic growth, and technological innovation. In the 1950s and '60s, Berman witnessed the rise of the enthusiastic consumerism and militarized bureaucracies of Cold War America, soon to be challenged by the countercultural revolutions of the civil rights, antiwar, and women's rights movements. He died before the global information age had fully formed, his prolific career cut short by a drunk driver on the eve of his fiftieth birthday in 1976. In the half-century of his all-too-short life, America - and, indeed, the world - transformed dramatically, rushing to the brink of a new technological era that few could have envisioned or anticipated.

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ABOUT MICHAEL KOHN GALLERY

Since its establishment in 1985 by Michael Kohn, Michael Kohn Gallery has presented historically significant exhibitions in Los Angeles alongside exciting contemporary artists, creating meaningful contexts to establish links to a greater art historical continuum. Michael Kohn Gallery represents important West Coast artists with long careers and rich histories such as Joe Goode, Lita Albuquerque, and Sharon Ellis, as well as the Estates of Bruce Conner, Wallace Berman, John Altoon, and Martha Alf. Michael Kohn Gallery boasts an expanding roster of emerging and mid-career artists including William Brickel, Alicia Adamerovich, Chiffon Thomas, Heidi Hahn, Jinbin Chen, Nir Hod, Siji Krishnan, Li Hei Di, Sophia Narrett, Shiwen, Rosa Loy, and Mark Innerst. Visit kohngallery.com for the latest information on upcoming exhibitions.

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