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Robert Hudson + Ed Moses @ Brian Gross

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by [Julia Couzens](#)



Robert Hudson, Protractor, 1968/2017, enamel on steel, powder coated steel, industrial wheels, steel cable, 49 x 140 x 42 inches

It's rare to see work from a long-established artist whose output you think you know only to find out you've missed a significant chapter. That slap upside the head will likely be experienced by anyone walking into the main gallery of Brian Gross Fine Art where an array of Robert Hudson's sculpture from

1968-1971 awaits — all enticingly choreographed to emphasize the works' gleaming elegance, narrative restraint and interior mysteries. The exhibition offers exceptional moments of poetry, wit, reflection, poignancy and wonder, as well as the opportunity to assess, possibly for the first time, the artist's flirtation with Minimalism, undertaken before he became a well known exponent of Funk.

Hudson has long been a Bay Area icon. Since his first solo exhibition in 1961 at Batman Gallery, the seminal Beat generation venue on Fillmore Street, Hudson has created a prolific trajectory of work spanning Funk assemblage to ceramic sculpture. Using exuberant color and quirky compositions in welded steel, clay and junkyard gleanings, Hudson pulls and pokes at



Window, 1970, wood, cement, glass, steel cable, 64 x 120 x 56 inches

the formal conventions of three-dimensional space while muttering a patois of Surrealism, punning humor, with nuanced odes to blue-collar industry. Together with such artists as William Allan, Roy De Forest, Richard Shaw, and Jeremy Anderson, Hudson defines a prime time in Bay Area art history.

But this work, stripped of Funk tropes and virtually all of Hudson's encyclopedic pictorial references, emerges as a series of experiential entities that are almost unrecognizable as being his. With the exception of two pieces, none of the nine sculptures on view have been seen in almost 50 years since they were first shown in 1970 at the Michael Walls Gallery in Ghirardelli Square. When this work was made, Hudson was teaching at U.C. Berkeley where a warehouse

Hudson pulls and pokes at the formal conventions of 3D space while muttering a patois of Surrealism, punning humor and odes to blue-collar industry.

full of institutional detritus and obsolete industrial parts were available for his and other artists' use. Like all good scavengers, Hudson is a first-rate picker with an eye for things possessing qualities beyond their intended utility. Military-grade cartwheels, black rubber pads, plasticine modeling clay, steel cables, a human skeleton, an arc welder and plate glass are just some of the protean components that Hudson deployed to construct these inscrutable, yet weirdly talky works of art.



Color Cart, 1971, steel, stainless steel, industrial wheels, clay, 18 x 44 x 70 inches

Protractor (1968/2017), painted in Play-Doh hues, subverts the notion of a measuring tool by setting eggshell shapes joined by a cable to opposite ends of what looks to be a tower crane laid horizontally. The construction rests on three wheels, their alignment askew, as readied to perform a crab shuffle across the floor.

Working with one of the mainstay tenets of Minimalism, Hudson takes his materials as they come; yet at every turn he injects sly bits of humor – a quality that's abundant in Funk but notably absent from Minimalism. Fabrication is undisguised and without bravura displays of technical wizardry. Yet wizardry is afoot. *Window* (1970) positions two 10-foot lengths of lumber parallel to each other, like rude skis, over which a roughly 5-foot grid of cement and glass is balanced, stabilized only by guy wires bolted to the end of the lumber. Scanning the piece for meaning evokes absurd dysfunction, like some modernist catamaran destined to both float and sink.



Bill Allan's Dream, 1970, wood, aluminum, chrome plating, steel, thermometer, 41 × 168 × 23"

Bill Allan's Dream (1970) is a 14-foot length of chrome-plated lumber atop two sawhorses. A thermometer registering 55 degrees is embedded in the wood with the word "translation" engraved at

one end. Its economy is exquisite and points to ideas about taking the measure of things, to things vast and timeless, and to things signifying absolutely nothing.

Color Cart (1971), a crudely molded lump of multicolored plasticine clay bracketed by blue girders and mounted on a floor-level moving cart, suggests a human torso, a deadpan slab on its way to where, the morgue? Yet like Franz West's ambiguous plaster entities, it also telegraphs human pathos, vulnerability and deep feeling. The bipolar nature of it keeps meaning in motion, making the piece enticingly relevant and alive.

Showing in the adjacent gallery are six grid paintings by internationally acclaimed painter and L.A. legend Ed Moses. All were made in 2017, the last year of his life, which ended this past January at age 91. First championed by the celebrated Ferus Gallery in 1957, Moses achieved

recognition with other gallery artists such as Ed Ruscha, Robert Irwin, Ken Price, and Ed Kienholz. Driven by process and formal experimentation, Moses described himself as a "mutater," letting the daily practice of painting lead him to discoveries and new questions. He first began working with the infrastructure of the diagonal grid in the mid-1970s, and would return to the motif throughout his life.

Moses was resolute in his commitment to abstract painting. He was also restless and relentlessly searching. He vigorously shunned the development of anything that smacked of a signature style. He was invigorated by risk and sought the unfolding possibilities endemic to new and unknown territories.

In virtually all of the paintings on view, the gridded rigor of Moses's crisscrossing bands snaps as taut as a trampoline. The nimbly depicted layered space in *Womb Cage*, *Intersecting Womb*, and *Empty Womb*, is interwoven and revealed through the lattice-like armature of these intersecting bands. Moses scraped, slathered, troweled and washed away his pigments, threading and knitting paint into geometric patterns, much like a weaver; but rather than close off space, Moses' paintings open up into vertigo-inducing canyons.



Ed Moses, Womb Cage, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 60 × 48 inches

This brilliant pairing of work from two California icons, one operating near the beginning of his career, the other at the end, is a museum-quality exhibition, and should not to be missed.

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Robert Hudson: "Selected Works 1968-71." Ed Moses: "Last Grids" @ [Brian Gross Fine Art](#) through October 27, 2018.

About the Author:

[Julia Couzens](#) is a Sacramento-based artist and writer whose work has been widely shown, most recently at [Transmitter](#) in Brooklyn. Her hybrid objects will be the subject of an upcoming exhibition at [Patricia Sweetow Gallery](#) opening October 20. Her work is held in museum and public collections throughout the U.S. These include the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts; Berkeley Art Museum; Oakland Museum; Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina; and Yale University. She lives and works on Merritt Island in the Sacramento River delta.

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