

Staff, "Announcing George Herms: Xenophilia (Love of the Unknown)", MOCA's THE CURVE, 21 June 2011.

Announcing George Herms: *Xenophilia (Love of the Unknown)*
Tuesday, June 21st, 2011



George Herms, *Xenophilia*, 2011, collage, 22 x 28 in., courtesy of the artist, © George Herms

MOCA Pacific Design Center July 10–October 2, 2011

Also featuring works by Rita Ackermann, Kathryn Andrews, Lizzi Bougatsos, Robert Branaman, Dan Colen, Leo Fitzpatrick, Elliott Hundley, Hanna Liden, Nate Lowman, Ari Marcopoulos, Ryan McGinley, Melodie Mousset, Jack Pierson, Amanda Ross-Ho, Sterling Ruby, Agathe Snow, Ryan Trecartin, Kaari Upson, Aaron Young

The Museum of Contemporary Art presents *George Herms: Xenophilia (Love of the Unknown)*, showcasing the work of legendary West Coast assemblage artist George Herms alongside the work of a younger generation of Los Angeles and New York artists, bringing new energy to the assemblage tradition. The exhibition also features the work of Herms's longtime friend and colleague Robert Branaman.

Ever since he first started exhibiting in Los Angeles in the late 1950s, George Herms has been a central figure in the development of the West Coast assemblage aesthetic. Influenced by the Beat generation more attuned to the musical nuance of the everyday than the modernist requiem to order, Herms's commitment to counterculture is expressed through his repurposing of used materials and his rejection of compositional structures in favor of loose associations of objects and ideas. Herms salvages elements from the trash heap of popular culture, combining them with words and phrases to create final entities that are neither pure thought, nor pure object—they are both prop and proposition. At times, Herms has been associated with landmarks of the developing L.A. art scene—Wallace Berman and Semina, Walter Hopps and the Ferus Gallery, Dennis Hopper and the film culture of *Easy Rider*—but his art has refused any singular identification. An advocate of all things free—spirit, material, and love—Herms is the spiritual godfather to an art of the unknown, forging something out of nothing, which continues to be a driving compulsion of artists today.

In 2008, Herms was invited to Florence by designer Adam Kimmel who was being celebrated by the Italian fashion event organizer Pitti Immagine. It was there that he got to know the curator of this exhibition, Neville Wakefield, as well as a group of younger New York-based artists, including Rita Ackermann, Lizzi Bougatsos, Dan Colen, Nate Lowman, Ari Marcopoulos, Ryan McGinley, and Jack Pierson. Herms's predilection for privileging the found over the made and for using the raw materials around him as the stuff of his art immediately dovetailed with the raw, unfiltered, and anti-art establishment tendencies of a group that came of age when ever-higher production values corresponded with auction records and spiritual bankruptcy. Like the open dialogue that fueled the Semina collaborations of Berman, Herms, Hopper, Edward Kienholz, and others, this is a group for whom the free trade of ideas and art blurs the boundaries, not just of authorship, but also of distinctions between art and the everyday.

George Herms: Xenophilia: (Love of the Unknown) embraces these tendencies. Exploring the notion of assemblage from both material and conceptual viewpoints, the exhibition displays Herms's signature junk art of the past six decades and recent collages alongside the work of a group of younger artists from both coasts. The opportunity to reconsider not just the centrality of Herms's role but also the spiritual and material legacy of his improvisational aesthetic is offered out of the chaos.