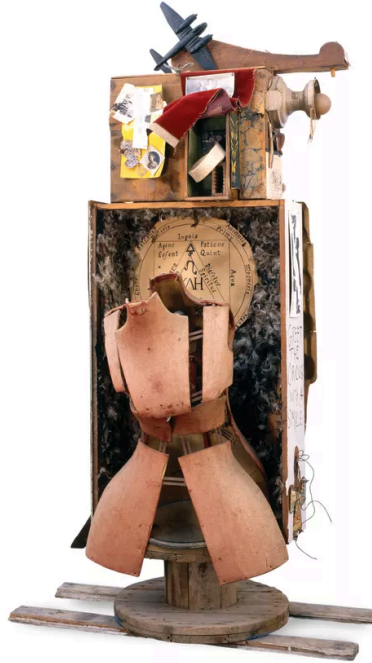


# Houstonia.

## At the Menil Collection, the Beat Goes On

Seldom-seen counterculture art takes the overdue spotlight in *Holy Barbarians*.



**WITH APOLOGIES TO JACK KEROUAC** and Allen Ginsberg, the Beat Generation created other things besides literature. The anti-conformist movement that materialized along the California coast after World War II was also the domain of visual artists, and of late, they've been the subject of a resurging interest, with exhibitions of their work mounted in Paris and LA. Now, it's Houston's turn.

The Menil Collection's *Holy Barbarians: Beat Culture on the West Coast* will feature relatively unknown works—and, in some cases, never-seen pieces—created between 1955 and 1970 by the likes of Wallace Berman, Jay DeFeo, George Herms and other overlooked iconoclastic heavy hitters from the counterculture's heyday. These include spontaneous and anti-establishment statements in a variety of mediums. "As I usually am, I was inspired by works in the collection," says museum associate curator Clare Elliott. "Then we received a Wallace Berman, and I started to learn more about him."

That untitled piece, donated by the widow of Walter Hopps—who got his start as a Beat-oriented gallerist before eventually becoming the Menil’s founding director—features Hebrew characters overlaid on parchment paper that Berman, known to many as the father of assemblage art, made to look like ancient paper.

It was the starting point for the exhibition, which includes 30 works, including a recycled and repurposed DeFeo piece that Elliott says has never been displayed, and a human-sized assemblage by Herms (pictured below), the only living artist in the show, known for his intricate sculptures made from dirty and discarded objects.

This retrospective, much like The Getty Foundation’s *Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980* and *Beat Generation* at Paris’s Centre Pompidou, highlights lesser known contributors to the now-famous movement, giving the Beatniks their due as real artists, not just a fly-by-night group of so-called weirdos who lived close to the Pacific Ocean.

“This counterculture movement was in response to Disney’s manufactured culture in the ‘50s,” says Elliott about the discontent artists felt about cookie-cutter America. “The exhibit should be interesting—and surprising—for viewers.”