

Ken Price: Works on Paper

June 5 – July 31, 2021

“Drawing is a way of seeing what you’re thinking about.” – Ken Price

Los Angeles, CA. Louis Stern Fine Arts is pleased to present *Ken Price: Works on Paper*. Price (1935-2012) is best known for his ceramic sculptures: whimsical biomorphic figures and amiably subverted classical forms which were instrumental in elevating clay from a craft to a fine art medium. In addition to his sculptural work, the artist also cultivated a lifelong daily drawing practice, beginning from a young age with an interest in comics and animation. Drawing provided Price with a limitless playground for his imagination, an opportunity to take risks and visualize fantastical objects that strained the boundaries of three dimensionality.

The works on display provide a tantalizing conduit to the artist’s observations, environment, and state of mind, blurring the lines between seductive and alienating, banal and bizarre. Working drawings for uncanny, vermiform sculptures scheme out surface color possibilities alongside reminders about Friday’s gas hook-up and a dwindling supply of Q-Tips. Schematics for craggy cups resembling rock formations mirror the rugged landscape and stepped Pueblo architecture of Taos, New Mexico, where Price resided and worked for many years. The artist also played with functional decorated objects inspired by Mexican ceramics from Tonalà and Oaxaca, produced mostly in association with his 1970s *Happy’s Curios* series. Examples of these ceramics are on view alongside preparatory drawings, rehearsals done on paper to ensure perfect execution of his compositions on the glazed objects.

Especially affecting are drawings made in and of Price’s hometown of Los Angeles, where he lived intermittently throughout his life. Price moved back to L.A. for a few years in the early 1990s, after a long period spent in Taos and New Bedford, Massachusetts. Drawings from this period picture endless traffic blanketed in smog, belching smokestacks, and suburban sprawl silhouetted against orange skies and black wildfire plumes. Affable yet lonesome vessels and amoeba-like objects inhabit sparse, chic apartments with views of Downtown L.A. visible through the windows. While infused with price’s characteristic humor, these works are tinged with sadness as well, conjuring that peculiar melancholy of feeling ill-at-ease in a familiar place.

Ken Price earned a BFA in 1956 from the University of Southern California and took ceramics classes at the Chouinard Art Institute and Otis College of Art and Design, where he studied under Peter Voulkos. Price earned an MFA in 1959 from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University and had his gallery debut at Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles just a year later. The artist exhibited extensively until his death in 2012, the same year a major retrospective of his work, on which he collaborated with friend and architect Frank Gehry, was staged at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, Texas. Works by Price are held in numerous museum collections, among them The Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the National Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.