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GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE ACQUIRES ARCHIVE OF MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY

The GRI has purchased the complete records of the prominent Los Angeles gallery, spanning 1970-2013


“In recent years the Getty Research Institute has demonstrated a strong commitment to the preservation and study of recent art in Los Angeles,” said Thomas W. Gaehgtgens, director of the Getty Research Institute. “Margo Leavin has been a tremendous force in the art world, profoundly shaping the Los Angeles art scene and selling, both figuratively and literally, Los Angeles art to the international art world. It is our imperative to preserve this exceptionally important material and make it available for study.”

In 43 years of operation as one of the most prominent art venues in Los Angeles, Margo Leavin Gallery presented more than 500 exhibitions, 400 of which were solo shows. The gallery showed a mix of works by cutting edge artists from New York and Los Angeles, beginning with an emphasis on Pop and Minimalism, then becoming a premier venue for Conceptualism, helping to bring key Conceptual artists from Los Angeles to national prominence. Margo Leavin Gallery represented Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Claes Oldenburg, Alexis Smith, John Baldessari, Sherrie Levine, Allen Ruppersberg, the Estate of David Smith, William Leavitt, and Christopher Williams among many others. The gallery placed numerous works at the world’s top museums, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the National Gallery, Washington D.C; the Tate Modern, London; The National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; and the Museo Tamayo, Mexico City.
“Margo Leavin’s influence, especially her contribution to the international acclaim of Los Angeles Conceptual art, is indisputable,” said GRI curator Glenn Phillips. “Through her creativity, strong relationships, high standards, and provocative exhibitions she created one of the most successful and substantive galleries ever to exist in L.A., establishing numerous important art careers. Her professionalism is evident in the quality of this archive, which will no doubt be invaluable to art historians and artists for years to come. ”

The records of Margo Leavin Gallery comprise a comprehensive view of business dealings, involving some of the foremost U.S. artists, including provenance, histories of installations, brochures, reviews, and photographs and slides of decades of artists’ works. John Baldessari, Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, John Chamberlain, the Estate of Tony Smith, Robert Morris, and Richard Serra are among the artists represented in depth in the archive.

In nearly 200 linear feet of records, the archive includes correspondence with collectors, foreign and domestic art dealers, and museums as well as exhibition files, photographic documentation of exhibitions, and annotated auction catalogs noting prices and buyer information. There are more than 80 works on paper or unique ephemera created by such artists as Hannah Wilke, H.C. Westermann, Billy Al Bengston, Claes Oldenburg, Sherrie Levine, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, William T. Wiley, Andy Warhol, and many others.

Margo Leavin Gallery was one of the longest running, most successful galleries in Los Angeles. As such, the archive corresponds with the growth of the L.A. art scene and reflects important moments in that history. For example, the archive touches on the founding of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and the building of the museum’s collections and efforts to expand the base of serious collectors and philanthropists who support art institutions in Los Angeles.

Margo Leavin Gallery opened on Robertson Blvd in 1970. As a young, female dealer, opportunities to represent major artists were not easy for Leavin to come by. Her 1971 exhibition of Oldenburg, for which she produced the artist’s first catalog raisonné, was an important milestone for the gallery. The gallery mounted important early exhibitions by Southern California artists such as Billy Al Bengston, Joe Goode, Ed Moses, and Tom Wudl. Leavin went on to represent several important artists from New York, including Ellsworth Kelly, John Chamberlain, and Dan Flavin. Early on, Leavin established a successful strategy of alternating shows of East Coast artists with shows of Los Angeles-based artists. Female artists who emerged in the 1960s—for example, Lynda Benglis, Agnes Martin, and Hannah Wilke—were also part of the gallery’s stable from the first decade on.

From Minimalist and Pop beginnings, the gallery gradually moved into Conceptualism with the additions of Alexis Smith and John Baldessari in the early 80’s. Sarah Charlesworth,
Joseph Kosuth, Roni Horn, and Dan Graham showed at Margo Leavin Gallery in the early 90’s, presaging a full roster of concept-oriented artists that decade with Stephen Prina, Larry Johnson, Tony Oursler, Christopher Williams, Sherrie Levine, Allen Ruppersberg, and William Leavitt.

In 1985, Wendy Brandow joined the gallery as Director and Partner, and she was active in all aspects of the enterprise, from conceptualizing and organizing exhibition to managing business affairs. Brandow, who previously held positions at the National Gallery of Art and the Corcoran Gallery in Washington D.C., initially worked at Margo Leavin Gallery from 1976-1980 before relocating to Indonesia, and then returning to the U.S. to earn her law degree in 1985. In addition to their long-standing relationships with artists, Leavin and Brandow were associated with many important Los Angeles collectors and placed numerous works with prominent collectors around the world.

"I am very pleased the gallery archives will be preserved and overseen by the Getty Research Institute, enabling the legacy of the gallery and its relationships with artists, collectors, and institutions to live on in Los Angeles" said Leavin.

The Margo Leavin Gallery records, 1970 -2013 will be cataloged and digitized at the GRI and made available to researchers.

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through residencies, fellowships, online resources, and a Research Library. The Research Library—housed in the 201,000-square-foot Research Institute building designed by Richard Meier—is one of the largest art and architecture libraries in the world. The general library collections (secondary sources) include almost 900,000 volumes of books, periodicals, and auction catalogues encompassing the history of Western art and related fields in the humanities. The Research Library’s special collections include rare books, artists’ journals, sketchbooks, architectural drawings and models, photographs, and archival materials.

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