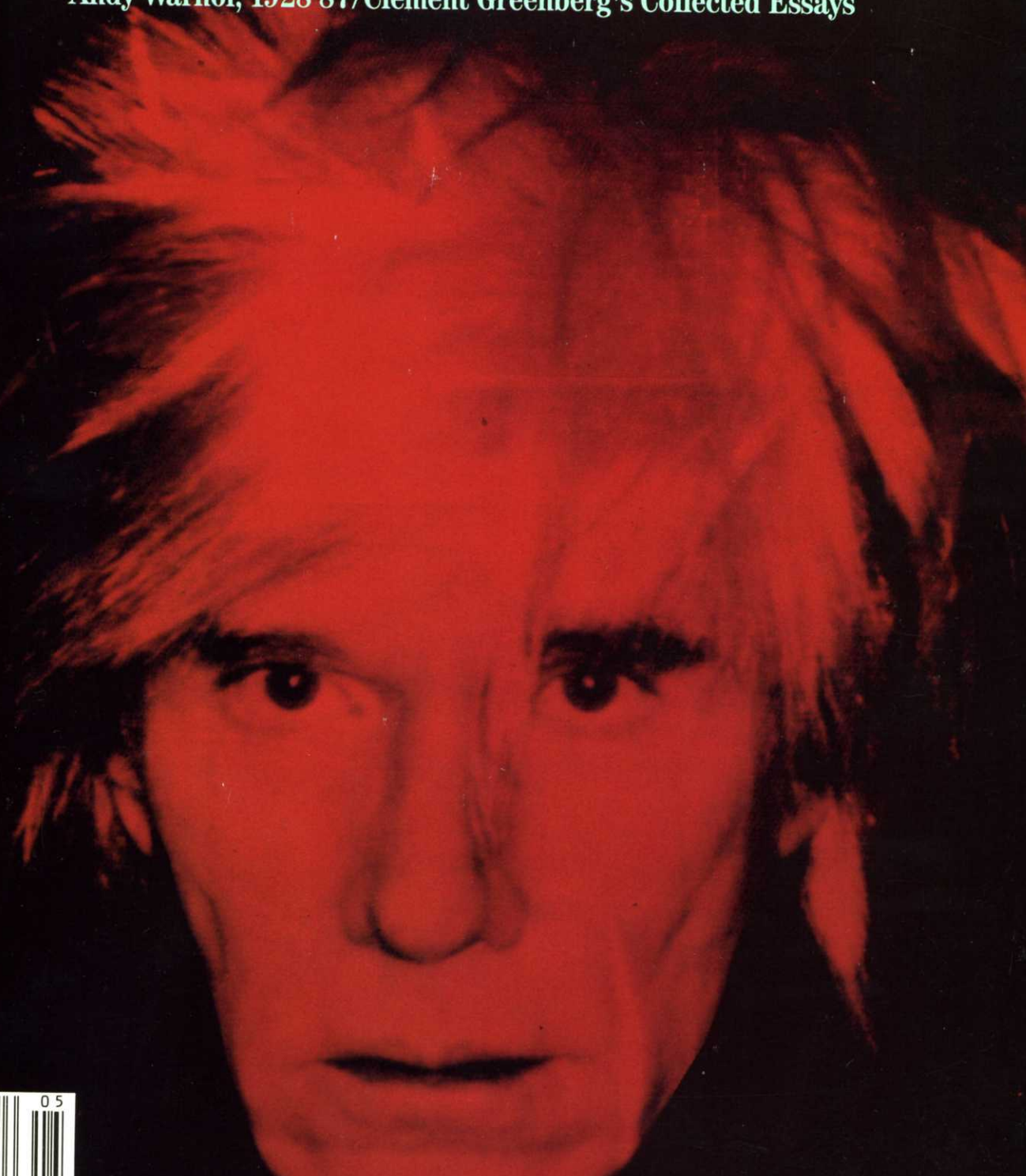


Art in America

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Los Angeles '87: New Museums, Opening Shows/8 Artists Interviewed
Andy Warhol, 1928-87/Clement Greenberg's Collected Essays





Al Held: *Taxi Cab IV*, 1959, acrylic on paper mounted on canvas, 107 by 268½ inches; at Robert Miller.

has been that it is more rewarding to look at than to think about, and while this was conceptually his densest piece yet, its similes of dispraise remained a bit undercooked. (As a site-specific work, *art, fashion, and religion* might also have benefited from a relocation: Ladda's work would have had even more point at the Met with its penchant for blockbusters and costume bazaars.) The fact is, though, that asking for subtlety of argument from the kind of work Ladda is doing may be asking for the wrong thing. Part of Pop's strategy was to make cartoons of fancy ideas as much as of received images—and Ladda does just that, with increasing draftsmanly acumen and an unerring sense of the theatrical.

—Holland Cotter

Lucas Samaras at Pace

With this exhibition, Samaras returns to the motif of the doctored chair, this time fashioned loosely from heavy coat hanger wire, and woven through with all manner of detritus including kitchen utensils, studio tools, colorful beads, plaster statuettes and metal sports trophies. This sort of junk assemblage enjoyed a burst of popularity in the East Village a few years ago as a statement about the perverse fascination of kitsch, or as an ironic commentary on postindustrial society conducted through the medium of its castoffs. More recently, domestic items, albeit now in a new and pristine form, have entered art as a celebration of the commodity fetish. None of this informs Samaras' assemblages. His work has

never admitted the kind of distance that would permit irony or social commentary. Instead, he offers images of obsession, a glimpse into the psyche of an artist for whom the world is never more nor less than the extension of his own intensely idiosyncratic mind.

As was the case with many earlier Samaras objects, the prosaic items out of which these sculptures are composed are all tinged with an aura of menace. Carving knives, strings of razor blades and open scissors, bound like prisoners to the wire chair frames, become embodiments of destruction. Forks spread their tines like arching fingers, whether of victim or victimizer

is never clear. An old shoe, bereft of sole and painted green, is stuck with nails, bringing to mind both the prickly self-protection of the porcupine and the arrow-riddled body of Saint Sebastian. Pencils appear in many of these works, sharpened to an angry point and bound together in bulletlike clusters, or blunt and broken and entwined within the wire armature. In one work, even a small tourist's replica of the Eiffel Tower becomes weaponlike, laid on its side and thrusting aggressively toward the viewer.

Each chair assumes a distinctive character. *Wire Hanger Chair (Beads)* is draped with colorful lengths of yarn, glitter-

flecked twine and strings of beads which envelop the armature like a harem girl's partially concealing costume. Near the bottom a pair of fingernail scissors impales a piece of tin embossed with a Chinese dragon, an apt reminder of the potential deadliness of the exotic. *Wire Hanger Chair (Bride and Groom)* can be read as a vanitas. One side is overgrown with fat plastic flowers, whose double connotation of wedding and funeral corresponds to the pairs of wedding couples and twin skeletons hanging from the exposed wire framework of the other side.

While the wire chairs made up the bulk of the show, there were two other categories of work on view as well. In the back room was an arrangement of objects—a real chair and table, several large bowls, a pair of high-heeled shoes perched on a platter—with all surfaces heavily encrusted with glittering glass beads, plastic buttons and rhinestones. These works extend Samaras's characteristic evocation of deadly allure, their sparkling skins suggesting at once the opulence of jewels and an accumulation of underwater organisms clinging tenaciously to sunken treasures. And finally, the gallery walls displayed a group of delicately stippled ink drawings which feature various portraits, figures inspired by classical sculpture and a good number of images of the artist's brooding face staring outward like a half-crazed Russian mystic.

As Gary Indiana points out in his catalogue essay, Samaras's work has never been reducible to any current trend. Instead, despite a wide variety of approaches and mediums, there is a remarkable continuity to his work centering on his preoccupation with the seductions of death, the dark side of sexuality and the frightening abyss of narcissism. Once again, he offers us his view from an edge few of us would wish to tread.

—Eleanor Heartney



Doug Ohlson: *Marker/Regatta*, 1986, acrylic on canvas, 60 inches square; at Ruth Siegel.

Al Held at Robert Miller

Held painted the four large pictures in this exhibition in 1959. Michael Brenson reported in the *Times* that Held packed them away in his studio in

