KEN PRICE (1935 - )

California native Ken Price represents the ceramic artists who came out of the revolutionary West Coast movement in the 1960’s. His work reflects the excitement and brashness of the California culture as well as his love for the ocean and marine life. His free experiments and explorations push the limits of ceramic technique and embody the sheer joy he finds in his art. Price is also well known as a graphic artist and has illustrated several books.

ARTIST’S STATEMENT – KEN PRICE

“I don’t know what to call new pieces: sculpture, objects, ceramics? I just make them; somebody else can decide what they’re called.”


RESUME – KEN PRICE

1935 Born, Los Angeles, California
1953-1954 Chouinard Art Institute
1956 B.F.A., University of Southern California
1957-1958 Los Angeles County Art Institute (now Otis College of Art and Design); studied with Peter Voulkos
1959 M.F.A., New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, Alfred, New York
Present Studio artist: Venice Beach, California, and Taos, New Mexico

BIOGRAPHY – KEN PRICE

Born in Los Angeles in 1935, Ken Price studied at the Chouinard Art Institute and the University of Southern California, receiving his B.F.A. in 1956. The following year he studied at the Los Angeles County Art Institute (now Otis College of Art and Design) with Peter Voulkos. He completed his studies at the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, Alfred, New York, receiving an M.F.A. in 1959.

He returned to his native California and became part of the West Coast ceramic movement centered around the Ferus Gallery. These artists were redefining artistic identity, insisting that their leisure activities – surfing and car customization - formed part
of the foundation of their artistic personas. Price, along with Ed Ruscha, Billy Al Bengston, Larry Bell and others, brought the energy and attitude of Los Angeles in the 1960s into the emerging California art scene. Renowned artists all, they are equally renowned in the unique LA culture. Price, aka “Greenwater” in the surfing world, used his image on a board on a gallery poster; many of these artists, including Price, participated in “Art for the Oceans,” a collection of surfboard art produced for the Surfrider Foundation and showcased at the Milk Studios in New York City; and Price was recently featured in an article in *The Surfer's Journal* where he was described as “…the hottest surfer of the bunch, with a flamboyant style and a quiver full of classic poses.”

The influence of Voulkos became apparent in Price’s work as he broke with the American tradition of ceramics and experimented with rough edges and bright splashes of color. He took traditional forms and deconstructed them, producing abstract, often surrealist forms that were both startling and unsettling. Unlike Voulkos, however, Price worked in small scale, making variations on such common forms as the cup and vase as well as egg shapes that featured tendrils and strange but compelling cavities and caves. In addition his highly colored pieces, often painted rather than glazed, contrasted with the somber, rough finishes of Voulkos. His pieces beg to be touched, and Ken Price wishes you would. “The tactile sense is a lost aspect of sculpture,” he stated. “When people stick their fingers inside, they become much friendlier with the piece.”

As his work evolved, his pieces, while remaining small, took on more influence of natural forms, lumpy and lobed, but exquisitely finished. He worked in series, moving from his “slate” sculptures in the 1960’s into “geometrics” in the 1970’s and then to the more widely known bulbous, perforated forms from the 1980’s. He continued to rely on paint rather than glaze for his finishes, building up layer upon layer which are then often sanded down to reveal patterns of color. The technique likely owes something to the LA fascination with customized auto painting where auto body workers uses multilayers of paint to achieve a finish.

Price’s newer works still pay homage to his love for the sea, undulating but dynamic, almost as if they have been frozen in full movement. They suggest and imply but never state, leaving the viewer to be drawn in and to explore. The colors have become more subtle, less splashy, but no less compelling. Reviewer Peter Schjeldahl describes it as “…neither pretty nor visceral, sweet nor sour. It belongs to the works as matter-of-factly as eye color belongs to the eyes of somebody you happen to be mad about.” There is also a shift in size; for the first time, Price is working larger, as large as 7’x7’ in one instance, signaling, perhaps, the next direction his work is headed.

In a world that often requires the artist to be serious and conventional, Price’s work is an exercise in sheer joy. He brings wit and humor – his blobby beings carry such affectionate names as “Oofus” and “Long Tall Dexter” – and while very much earth-bound in their blobbiness, they are at the same time very much alive.

In addition to being a ceramic artist, Price is also well-known for his graphic art works, some of which have been done in conjunction with his ceramic works. Price has also illustrated several books, among them *The Plain of Smokes* by Harvey Mudd and *Heat Wave*, by Charles Bukowski, both books of poetry published by Black Sparrow Press. Over the years he has made a number of works on paper working with Gemini G.E.L
and Cirrus Editions in Los Angeles, and Tamarind Workshop in Los Angeles and Albuquerque, New Mexico.


**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY – KEN PRICE**

**Books and Catalogs**


**Periodicals**


“Greenwater and Biomorphs.” The Surfer’s Journal 14, no. 5 (Fall 2005).


GALLERY REPRESENTATION – KEN PRICE

Matthew Marks Gallery, 523 W. 24th Street, New York, NY 10011

LA Louver Gallery, 45 Venice Boulevard, Venice, CA 90291

Gemini G.E.L., 8365 Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90069

James Kelly Contemporary, 616-1/2 Canyon Road, Santa Fe, NM 87501
WEB SITES – KEN PRICE

http://www.kenprice.com
Official web site for Ken Price

http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/4aa/4aa3.1.htm
“Surf Culture” – commentary on exhibition at San Jose Museum of Art of artists who surf and surfers who make art.

http://www.artfacts.net/index.php/pageType/exhibitionInfo/exhibition/6318
Review of “Out of L.A.- Six California Artists”

http://artscenecal.com/ArticlesFile/Archive/Articles2001/Articles0101/KPriceA.html
Review of Price’s work at L.A. Louver Gallery in Venice, CA, by Jody Zellen

Ken Price web site at LA Louver Gallery

http://www.artezine.com/archive/20031201/kenprice.htm
Discussion of Ken Price work at Matthew Marks Gallery by Robert Sievert

“Go Ahead – Touch It” article about Ken Price that appeared in July 27, 1998, issue of Forbes Magazine

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