

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Judith Bernstein: 1966-2009**

**May 9<sup>th</sup> –June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Opening Reception: May 9<sup>th</sup> from 6 to 8pm**

**Panel Discussion with the Artist: June 6<sup>th</sup>, at 7pm**

*"The line between the personal, the political and the artistic is illusionary."*

-Judith Bernstein, 2009

The Box presents the work of Judith Bernstein in her first solo exhibition in Los Angeles. Bernstein has become most well known for a series of phallic screw drawings started in 1969, which have evolved and transformed into huge presences that encompass and provoke. Bernstein's work should not only be seen through the lens of political statements, they hold profound personal relevance both for the artist and the viewer. Bernstein's art holds a much broader context, dealing with many metaphors and multiple layers that emerge and empower the viewer with a newfound cognizance.

These screw drawings, one (*Big Horizontal Plus #3*, 1975) being as large as nine feet high and twenty-six feet long, create strong visual statements that empower the female artist while addressing the often aggressive nature of men. Earlier drawings also depict images of phalluses in relation to political conflict. One of the most powerful of this series that is in this exhibition, *Vietnam Garden*, 1967, depicts a graveyard of coarsely drawn penises with American flags coming off their tips. While Bernstein's work has often been defined as feminist and political, with the quote above, one can understand that her art, her life and her politics meld into one another, creating a series of work that confront the body, impress the senses and rectify thoughts.

Another of Bernstein's earlier pieces, *Supercock*, 1966 is also included in this exhibition. This piece is part of a series of works that were inspired by graffiti in the men's restrooms at Yale University, which Bernstein attended as a graduate student from 1964 through 1967. During this time there were only 3 women in her entire graduate class at the Yale School of Art. This drawing depicts a superhero flying through the air with a penis three times the size of his body and limericks and lyrical text floating in the surrounding air. This piece alludes to the idea that the power many men yearn for is in some way connected to their sexual selves. Never seen early works included in the exhibition are collages that Bernstein did in 1967 with cut-up pieces of American flags and poignant clippings from newspapers and magazines that reflect on the complex political climate of the time. One such piece, *Are you Running with Me Jesus?*, 1967, the title of which is a direct quote of Malcolm Boyd's book of the same title, evinces the anger that Bernstein felt about how the African-American youth of the time were simultaneously being disenfranchised and criticized by mass culture. These collages show diversity in Bernstein's works; by bringing together images, text, objects and media she was able to comment on the political turmoil around her.

As Bernstein worked through these collages, she began to explore the use of the image of the American flag in her work. She began doing flag drawings that enabled her to further consider America's involvement in the Vietnam War. In these pieces, as was seen in her earlier graffiti work, language was a key element and the vernacular was often scatological and full of rage. One such piece *Jack off on U.S. Policy in Vietnam*, 1967 is titled after the statement that is brutally sketched over a drawing of the American flag with two penises making an "X" where the stars should be. What developed out of this language play was Bernstein's interest in the screw, coming from the oppressive verb 'screwed.' The image of the screw became symbolic not only as a representation of those in power oppressing others, but of Bernstein taking the power back as a woman.

Bernstein's images of the screws began clean, almost geometric in shape and gradually developed into thick, hairy presences with a tactile quality. In this exhibition there are two of her most iconic screw pieces, *Horizontal*, 1973 and *Big Horizontal Plus #3*, 1975. In 1974, *Horizontal* was censored from the exhibition, *Focus* at the Museum of Philadelphia Civic Center. This piece measuring nine feet high and just over twelve feet in length depicts a burly, stubby image that evokes power and strength. A jury of women, that included Anne D'Harnoncourt, Adeline Breeskin, Cindy Nemser, Marcia Tucker and Lila Katzen, curated this exhibition. John Pierron, the Executive Director of the Philadelphia Civic Center who believed this piece had "no redeeming social value," censored it from the show. A formal petition letter was issued in protest with an impressive list of artists, critics, and curators such as Lawrence Alloway, Clement Greenberg, Linda Nochlin, Elizabeth C. Baker, Lucy Lippard, Peter Frank, John Perreault, Louise Bourgeois, Alice Neel, and many others.

Also included in the exhibition at The Box are *Angry Bitches/Birth of the Screw*, 2009 and two pieces from the *Dick and a Head* series of 2009. This new work of Bernstein continues to explore the screw and its phallic friends. In the two pieces *Dick and a Head #3* and *#5*, Bernstein's vigorous, gestural strokes shows three large dicks that appear to be erupting out of a head. The image that is at first funny pictorializes the power image of the phallus coming out of the brain, alluding to the idea that the power we have inside us, comes from our minds.

Judith Bernstein, who has lived and worked in NYC for 40 years, had a solo show in 2008 at Mitchell Alpus Gallery in NYC and has been included in multiple group shows many with a feminist focus; however, she wasn't included in WACK!. Bernstein's work at the Mitchell Alpus Gallery received extraordinary acclaim from Holland Cotter, New York Times, Jerry Saltz, nymag.com, Nick Stillman, Artforum, Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen, Artforum.com, and an article by Robert Berlind, Art In America. She is also a key figure in many important arts organizations in New York, such as A.I.R. gallery, Art Workers Coalition, Fight Censorship and other well-known groups.

If you have any questions please contact Mara McCarthy, Director of The Box at [mara@theboxla.com](mailto:mara@theboxla.com) or 626 463 8144.