

ARTFORUM

Robert Mallery

THE BOX

977 Chung King Road

February 6–April 3

This exhibition, the first showing of Robert Mallery's art in Los Angeles since 1954, proves that his work is less about privileging trash than about man's ability to sublimate it. Known for his incorporation of found materials in his neo-Dada and "junk art" pieces from the early 1960s, Mallery's assemblages, which recall works by artists such as Kurt Schwitters and Joseph Cornell, are well represented in this solo show. Several of his signature distorted tuxedos stretched over steel frames are on view, including *Jouster*, 1960, which was a centerpiece in MoMA's 1961 exhibition "Art of Assemblage."

Assemblage, which descended from Cubism by way of collage, defines a wide range of practices, from the output of Robert Rauschenberg and Ed Kienholz to the more subtle hard-worn pieces by Mallery. Sculpture and painting intersect in Mallery's wall pieces: Carved grooves reveal cement's pockmarked skin in *Lethe*, 1959, and carefully lodged orbs of polyester, resin, sand, and dirt in a plywood crevice play against the brutish detritus in *Incubus*, 1959. Mallery's preference for gritty abstraction is most vivid in *Trek*, 1958–59, in which resin—a toxic substance that he eventually stopped using because it made him seriously ill—drips onerously down a sand- and gravel-paved surface. After the artist moved to New York in 1959, his work with newspaper and envelopes forwent the obfuscating measures of enamel and resin. The equanimity of material that resulted in the artist's smaller, delicate pieces from the 1980s, though less extravagant than the earlier, larger works, more closely strikes at the heart of assemblage's concerted championship of forgotten objects.



Robert Mallery, *Jouster*, 1960, wood, steel, cardboard, tar paper, dirt, polyester resin, 8 1/2 x 4'.

— Janine Armin

All rights reserved. artforum.com is a registered trademark of Artforum International Magazine, New York, NY