

Miss America

Ed Bereal

3 September – 3 October 2025

Gratin Gallery, in association with Elizabeth Leach Gallery and collaboration with Mitchell Algu, is pleased to announce *Miss America*, the first solo exhibition of work by Ed Bereal in New York, opening September 3, 2025. Described as “The Most Important Activist-Artist You Don’t Know” by Alex V. Cipolle on Hyperallergic, Bereal has engaged with a vast range of social, political and environmental issues across a career spanning seven decades. The works on view reflect formative experiences gained as an art student at Chouinard Art Institute in the 1950s and 60s, a young artist living and working in the greater Watts area during the 1965 riots, and a documentarian covering geopolitical shifts across the globe in the 1990s.

Miss America brings together works made between 1958 and 2003, beginning with three confidently rendered self-portraits dating from the late 1950s which demonstrate Bereal’s early strength in draftsmanship. These drawings, not intended as exhibition drawings, provide insight into Bereal’s thought process when developing a new idea or image. Collages from the late 1980s and early 1990s combine traditional symbols of America with darker elements which seem to lurk just below the surface. Central to the exhibition is Bereal’s Miss America figure, with her crown of nails, leering grin and mechanical limbs. Miss America reflects the artist’s view of the parts of American life that aren’t embodied by the work of Norman Rockwell or Walt Disney, and the experiences of the marginalized and repressed. Including elements of Bereal’s drawing practice and early assemblage works in which he combines disparate symbols and elements that depict the America he experienced, Bereal’s Miss America turns the traditional conception of “Miss America” on her head, drawing attention to the realities of life for most Americans.

Ed Bereal was born in Los Angeles, California in 1937. He attended the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles, from 1958 to 1962, without graduating. After Chouinard he studied independently with John Chamberlain, John Altoon and Peter Voulkos. In 1961, Bereal along with Ron Miyashiro, Joe Goode and Larry Bell were part of *War Babies*, a groundbreaking exhibition in Los Angeles at Huysman Gallery. The poster announcing the exhibition showed the four artists sitting at a table covered by an American flag, each holding an object related to a stereotype of their ethnic or religious identity to draw attention to the diversity of America during the second world war. WWII is the war that the war babies poster comes from, the stunt that ultimately led to the gallery’s closure.

Embraced by the Los Angeles art scene of the early 1960s Bereal began working with the legendary Ferus Gallery. Then, in 1965, stunned by the Watts Riots, the artist left the artworld’s commercial atmosphere to be closer to the people on the streets. In 1968 Bereal took his art to the streets, co-founding a political theater group called *Bodacious Buggerilla*. The group appeared in many places, except for commercial galleries, performing at universities, prisons, up and down the west coast, in the streets of Watts and Compton, as well as opening for Richard Pryor and Parliament Funkadelic. BB even had a 10-episode gig on PBS before it was cancelled.

Beyond his art practice, Bereal was a professor at numerous institutions, his final appointment being at the University of Western Washington where he taught from 1993 until his retirement in 2007. The artist continues to live and work in Bellingham, WA. His work is in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY); The Smithsonian Institute (Washington D.C.); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, CA); Museum of Fine Arts (Houston, TX); and The Brooklyn Museum (Brooklyn NY) among others. Recent exhibitions include the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, France) in 2006 and Moderna Museet (Stockholm, Sweden) in 2009; *L.A. Object & David Hammons Body Prints*, Tilton Gallery (New York, NY) in 2006; as well as participating in *Pacific Standard Time* at The Getty Museum (Los Angeles, CA) in 2011. His first museum retrospective, *Wanted: Ed Bereal for Disturbing the Peace* at the Whatcom Museum of Art (Bellingham, WA) in 2019 and Bereal’s recent APEX installation at The Portland Art Museum (Portland, OR) was on view February 23, 2020 through June 27, 2021.