



Claes Oldenburg
Double-Nose/Purse/Punching Bag/Ashtray, 1970
(CO70-2003)

Edition sculpture of leather, bronze, and wood, with deerskin-covered book
10" x 20" x 8" (25.40 x 50.80 x 20.32 cm)
Edition of 75

For Immediate Release

Claes Oldenburg - Selected Works
Opening Reception Saturday, April 7, 2018, 4-7pm

Gemini G.E.L. is pleased to present an exhibition of selected lithographs, screenprints, and sculptural editions dating as early as 1968 by Claes Oldenburg on view in both the main and Frank Gehry building galleries. Also on view is the short film "*Sort of a Commercial for an Icebag*," created by the artist and Gemini G.E.L. in 1969, and which documents the conception and installation of Oldenburg's giant Icebag sculpture.

A leading figure in the Pop Art movement, Claes Oldenburg first began working at Gemini G.E.L. fifty years ago during a two-month stay in Los Angeles. Gemini's portfolio *Notes* (1968) presents lithographs that resemble notebook pages with trompe l'oeil pieces of tape holding torn newspaper ads, photographs, and other scraps of paper onto the page. Within each work, the artist portrays different ideas for fantastical, surreal, and monumental architectural structures that alter the landscape and critique traditional memorials and public sculptures. Many images from the *Notes* series feature enlarged everyday objects situated in the L.A. landscape. For example, in *P.O.P.*, Oldenburg envisions an ironic war memorial for Santa Monica's Pacific Ocean Park that takes the shape of an enormous hydrogen bomb explosion. Sometimes the images are satirical and in other instances playful; in *Body Buildings*, two large buildings form a cropped torso and legs of a woman. There is also a sketch of a restaurant shaped like a human knee, and an early design for a tunnel freeway entrance in the shape of a nose, through which cars would enter and exit in and out of the nostrils. Oldenburg was interested in the surreal and psychological connections that could be made via free association, and are demonstrated here by clever groupings of shapes, words, and images.



Oldenburg's interest in the human nose continued in *Double-Nose/Purse/Punching Bag/Ashtray*, a multilayered Gemini sculpture started in 1968 and finished in 1970. In a small, limited edition book that accompanies the sculpture, Oldenburg relays that "Noses had become something of an obsession," and how the sculpture is "a three-dimensional pendant" to the flat *Notes* series. As he describes, *Notes* juxtaposes different images on the page while the Double-Nose bag literally incorporates different concepts together into one sculpture. These related ideas include: a nose, a punching bag, an ice bag, a skull (which has no nose), a purse, coins that go inside the purse, and an ashtray. Oldenburg was inspired by a friend who had been mugged in her apartment building, and thus conceived of a functional purpose as well: using the purse with a heavy bronze sculpture inside to hit an assailant in the nose.

Other prints and sculptures in the show provide wonderful examples of Oldenburg's exceptional talent for drawing and illustrate his lifelong practice of transforming objects from our consumer world into sculptures with new meanings, anthropomorphized characteristics and movement. In the late 1950s, Oldenburg began building "soft sculptures" which radically changed the concept of three-dimensional artwork. Inspired by sewn costumes and props for his performance art, *Happenings*, and using modern materials like vinyl and plastic, Oldenburg designed large objects that were soft and saggy, and could be shifted and changed as desired. By providing movement, Oldenburg also imbued the objects with emotions and personality —often lively, funny or erotic, sometimes sad and depressive. Gemini's *Extinguished Match* lithographs are wonderful examples of these psychologically charged works, featuring a single burnt match poised vertically, a slouched figure that bends with age. Many of the works in the show display objects at the end of their lives: a squashed cigarette butt, apples eaten down to the core, and a slumped light bulb, the weight of the world pressing down on it. Other works present playful anthropomorphized forms like the upbeat *Profiterole*, the loving *Musical Hearts*, or the *Perfume Atomizer* series, which suggests an elegantly dressed woman who is also sexy and provocative.

The *Notes* and *Double-Nose/Punching Bag* are not the only works that relate to Oldenburg's experiences in Los Angeles. The *Sneaker Lace in Landscape* series, which poses a sneaker whose laces form a palm tree trunk and frond, was inspired by the street fashions and landscape of L.A. The *Geometric Mouse* sculpture, one of the artist's most recognizable images, also saw its beginnings in Hollywood. The ears of the mouse resemble film reels resting on a film projector, and in one early sketch Oldenburg had depicted the figure slipping down the side of the Hollywood Hills.

Born in Sweden in 1929, Claes Oldenburg was raised in Chicago and studied literature and art history at Yale University and the Art Institute of Chicago. After moving to New York in the late 1950s, he created some of the first performance artworks before gaining recognition as one of the earliest Pop artists. In the 1980s and 90s Oldenburg collaborated with his wife, Coosje van Bruggen, on large-scale projects such as the monumental *Spoonbridge* and *Cherry* at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; *Cupid's Span* along the Embarcadero in San Francisco; and many other iconic sculptures in the United States and abroad. His most recent survey traveled to The Museum of Modern Art, NY in 2013, after retrospectives at the Whitney Museum in 2009 and the Guggenheim and the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC in 1995.

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