

# TEMPLON



Press release

22 November 2021

## ED & NANCY KIENHOLZ

13 January – 26 February 2022



*J.C. #17 (detail), 1994, mixed media assemblage, 76.8 × 52.1 × 11.4 cm*

As the exclusive representative of Ed & Nancy Kienholz's art in Europe, Galerie Templon is exhibiting work by the iconic figures of American pop art in Brussels for the first time.

The show offers a spectacular presentation of a series of installations produced between 1978 and 1994. Blurring the codes of sculpture, the pieces operate as three-dimensional tableaux made of assemblages of artefacts, plunging the viewer into the heart of a disturbing universe, both fascinating and repellent. The jointly produced works express fierce, engaged criticism of the dysfunctionalities of American society: unbridled consumerism, everyday racism, sexism, structural violence and religious hypocrisy.

The exhibition opens with *The Pool Hall* (1983) and *The Rhinestone Beaver Peep Show* (1978), two major works examining the exploitation of women and commodification of the body. In an America traumatised by the military interventions in Korea and Vietnam, they mount an equally ferocious attack on the use of young men as cannon fodder (*The Grey Man's Parade*). No topic is taboo. With *Useful Art no. 2 (cabinet & toaster)*, an old-fashioned cooking stove, dusty and frozen in time, they are denouncing the ideal of consumerism in an America mired in capitalism. And they use the J.C. series, mysterious, makeshift crucifixes, to condemn the blind religious devotion that marks a jaded society.

Although the Kienholz's work unveils a pitiless vision of a disillusioned nation, a vision that very much goes against the grain, behind the muffled rage the door is left open to a more subtle and elusive interpretation: "Kienholz made no attempt to sublimate the meanness and tragedy of life, its conditions of loneliness and triviality, but used them as a way of putting a shine on a low and popular universe, in which the wasted and the dirty, the depraved and the filthy represented a new and surprising beauty." wrote art critic Germano Celant.

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Edward Kienholz was born in Fairfield, Washington, in 1927. A self-taught artist, in 1957 he founded the legendary Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles with Walter Hopps. In 1961, after his first solo show at the Pasadena Art Museum in California, he was selected, with other West Coast artists, for the exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* at MoMA, New York. This now-famous show saw his work displayed alongside art by Picasso, Schwitters, Duchamp and Cornell. In 1966, his show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art stirred considerable controversy. In 1972, he met Nancy Reddin Kienholz, born in 1943 in Los Angeles. Ed and Nancy married that year and struck up a powerful artistic and intellectual partnership. In 1973, for predominantly political reasons, the couple moved from Los Angeles and made their home in Berlin, dividing the next twenty years and more between the German city and Idaho. All the works were co-signed by both artists until the death of Edward Kienholz in 1994. In France, their work has been shown at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1970) as well as at a major retrospective held at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (1977). Internationally, a major retrospective was held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (1995), then at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and the Berlinische Galerie in Berlin (1996-1997). In recent years, their art has been exhibited at an array of leading museums, including Fondazione Prada in Milan (2016-2017), Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt and Museum Tinguely in Basel (2011-2012), Los Angeles Museum County of Art and Louisiana Museum in Humlebaek (2011-2012), and ICA Miami (2017-2018).