

tion to his own considerable accomplishments, should be seen as foreshadowing the many contemporary artists—Kiki Smith, Juan Muñoz, Antony Gormley, and Robert Gober among them—who work with the cast human figure. Although Segal was a charter member of the Pop group (largely because of his interest in the artifacts of vernacular culture), he never fit seamlessly into the movement. His straightforward, often rough-hewn productions are devoid of the irony so commonly found in his colleagues' work, and unlike them, he displayed no interest in either celebrating or critiquing the media world. Instead, he made psychologically attuned art full of human feeling and passion, as well as social commitment—not Pop's strongest suit. This put him closer to earlier American realist painters like Thomas Eakins, George Bellows, John Sloan, Reginald Marsh, and Edward Hopper. These artists, like Segal, paid attention to the jobs that people did, to the ordinary pleasures they took, and to the quotidian, unglamorous,

often scruffy urban life that surrounded them.

Segal's realism is complex and disjunctive. His settings seem to be transferred directly from the workaday world. Here is a real park bench, there is an actual street sign or a genuine bus seat and grab bar. On the other hand, the cast plaster or bronze figures are much less specific. Their features are blurred, passive, almost submerged. They seem to be a kind of screen on which to project our thoughts and feelings. Segal is very aware of the spaces between things—the unoccupied seats in *Three People on Four Benches* (1979), the subtly charged distance that separates the three figures in *Chance Meeting* (1989), or the uncomfortable proximity of seated and standing riders in *Bus Passengers* (1997). Since the elements of a Segal piece are all life-sized, it is inevitable that we insert ourselves into the tableau, become part of a frozen performance.

The performative aspect of Segal's work is noteworthy. Early connections with the composer and avant-garde muse, John Cage, interactions with the Fluxus artists associated with nearby Rutgers University (Segal lived in the New Brunswick, New Jersey, area for his entire professional life), as well as close association with Allan Kaprow and his Happenings put Segal's work into a broader context of avant-garde experimentation of the time. In addition, sharp-eyed engagement with the ordinary world sets up a dialogue with photographers like Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, and Segal's friend, Robert Frank. Like these classic American street photographers, Segal was looking for a revelation of humanity in the telling moment, the cropped section of time and place that allowed feeling and form to combine for the greatest impact. And like these photographers, Segal allowed his formal abilities to play a key role in his work. His subject

matter was indeed powerful, but composition, texture, and degree of finish, scale, color, and spatial interplay make the sculptures work. This is especially evident in the sculptures that do not feature the human figure, for example, the subtle and evocative *Morandi's Still Life* (1983)—a plaster and wood still-life of four bottles and a pitcher that strikingly re-imagines the painter's work. The L&M exhibition, inclusive, carefully chosen, and beautifully installed in the gallery's elegant townhouse space, showed Segal's work to real advantage. It seems that the artist, too long confined to the restrictive context of Pop Art, is now moving out into a wider world.

—Richard Kalina

## NEW YORK George Segal L&M Arts

George Segal's recent large-scale show at L&M Arts came on the heels of a 2008–09 traveling exhibition, "George Segal: Street Scenes," organized by the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art. Both shows have brought renewed attention to one of the major figurative sculptors of the postwar era, who in addi-



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