

LIBERAL ARTS ROXBURY

Cy Wagner: Crushed Cans

September 4-October 10, 2021



LIBERAL ARTS ROXBURY is pleased to present the second solo exhibition of former Roxbury resident Cy Wagner (1926-2016). *Cy Wagner: Crushed Cans* opens Saturday September 4, 2021, with a reception at the gallery from 4-6pm. The event is free and open to the public.

Cy Wagner worked as a career architect and urban planner in San Antonio, Texas, and Washington, DC, and taught architecture and design at the University of Texas, Austin, and Cornell University. Yet in tandem with his career, he was a passionate draughtsman and painter, exploring various artistic subjects and styles, ranging from still life to Pop art and geometric abstraction.

Crushed Cans is an early series by Wagner, dating from his years as a young architect. Referencing the catchy imagery and sloganeering of Pop art, Wagner also plays with the brand names in relation to the smashed cans. For example, a Crush soft drink can,

LIBERAL ARTS ROXBURY
53525 State Highway 30, Roxbury, NY 12474 info@liberalartsroxbury.com

LIBERAL ARTS ROXBURY

physically crushed, forms a minimalist poem with cryptic metaphorical nuances, viz., to have one's feelings crushed—by a person or one's career ambitions—or, conversely, to have them excited in the form of a “crush.” The series also makes use of the Surrealist trope of the *informe*, Georges Bataille's provocative valuation of “formlessness,” a counter to modernism's relentless pursuit of rational, functional form. Brassai's *Sculptures involontaires* [Involuntary sculptures] of the 1930s, comprising photo-documents of chewing gum and wads of paper, elevate the abject for aesthetic contemplation. Similarly, Irving Penn's photographs of cigarette butts, taken several decades later, find beauty in detritus, considering them just as worthy for contemplation as the fashion models and haute-couture gowns he normally photographed. Like his artistic predecessors, Wagner's choice of subject matter suggests a meditation on the curious seduction of commercially manufactured objects and the even more curious seduction of those objects once they've outlived both their function and form—they ascend from utility to art, he seems to be saying, only when their purpose is to be looked at and their meaning weighed.

LIBERAL ARTS ROXBURY is open Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays noon-4pm, and by appointment. Contact the gallery at info@liberalartsroxbury.com for more information.