

Pacific Standard Editions



Reflecting on over 40 years of graphic experimentation at Gemini G.E.L.

by Constance W. Glenn

forty-five years ago, a pair of USC friends and fraternity brothers walked into the small Los Angeles atelier of printer Kenneth Tyler—who had trained at the legendary Tamarind Lithography Workshop—and together with Tyler proceeded to establish one of the city’s most important and enduring arts institutions. Today’s rich visual arts stew that assures L.A.’s status as a number-one art world destination is, in no small part, the result of Sidney Felsen and Stanley Grinstein’s recipe for success at the shop that became Gemini G.E.L. (Graphic Editions Limited) in 1966.

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PHOTO

David Hockney during the proofing session for the series “Friends.”
photograph | Sidney B. Felsen © 1976
courtesy | Gemini G.E.L.



During the 1960s and 70s, the legendary rare-book seller and art dealer Jake Zeitlin—who then presided over the last of his famous emporiums in the midst of the La Cienega art galleries, the Big Red Barn—often opined that, culturally, New York was at least a decade behind Paris, and L.A. trailed New York by a similar margin. After all, he said, it hadn't been that long since it took a week to cross the Atlantic by ocean liner, plus another week to link New York to Los Angeles by streamliner. The resulting communications gap is unimaginable in the age of Facebook and Twitter, but during the New York art boom following World War II, L.A. was still firmly in the outback. Several generations of artists abandoned our coast to make careers in the city where the action was.

However, by 1966, the city of Los Angeles at last had a freestanding art museum (LACMA, 1965), a briefly resident art journal

(*Artforum*, 1965–1967), and a handful of world-class galleries—notably Ferus, Dwan, Nicholas Wilder, and Felix Landau. Still, our emerging artists had little fruitful connection to the Pop Art/Minimalism explosion that was rocking New York, except through *Artforum* or shows like Irving Blum's introduction of Andy Warhol at the Ferus Gallery (1962). Then along came the intrepid Gemini gang.

"I was instrumental in bringing East Coast artists out," Blum remembered, "but they came in a flood after Gemini established itself. The big lithography workshop brought out Frank [Stella], brought out Jasper [Johns], brought out Claes Oldenburg, brought out Bob Rauschenberg, brought out Ellsworth Kelly, and on, and on, and on."

With the sixties art world expanding at a ferocious pace, a growing number of artists became interested in investigating the creative opportunities offered by prints and sculpture in multiple original editions and, within a year or two of its founding, Gemini became the West Coast destination for innovative printmaking, the place where the artist was never told "no, it's not possible," and invitations to work in the shop were eagerly sought after. As both the fabricator and publisher of groundbreaking editions, the earliest example of Gemini can-do was no doubt

PHOTO

Robert Rauschenberg having an early-morning cycle ride around the Gemini parking lot after an all-night session proofing the 'Stoned Moon' series. photograph | Sidney B. Felsen © 1969 courtesy | Gemini G.E.L.



the shop's first (1967) collaboration with Robert Rauschenberg, which required his full-body, life-size x-ray (impossible in a single film) and custom-made outsize paper to realize the (then) largest art print ever made: *Booster*, a 72-inch tall lithograph/silkscreen self-portrait that permanently altered the boundaries of printmaking in the 20th century.

Equally remarkable collaborations followed with artists who made Gemini and Los Angeles an important part of their working and social lives. Stella, Oldenburg, Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, and Richard Serra, among many, were regulars at the workshop, where they formed friendships with such Gemini locals as Vija Celmins, Ken Price, Bruce Nauman, Sam Francis, and ex-pat David Hockney. Ultimately, the adventuresome shop and tight ship that Felsen ran became not simply an American destination but the worldwide headquarters of graphic experimentation. Just last season, Gemini hosted—at the iconic Frank Gehry

facility on Melrose—Daniel Buren and Sophie Calle of France, Ann Hamilton of Ohio, Richard Serra of New York, Julie Mehretu of Ethiopia via New York, and Gehry and John Baldessari of L.A.

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PHOTO
Artist Susan Rothenberg hard at work in the artist's workshop. photograph | Sidney B. Felsen © 1986 courtesy | Gemini G.E.L.

MUSIC SHELF

Dudamel x3

BRUCKNER: Symphony no. 9; **Sibelius:** Symphony no. 2; **Nielsen:** Symphony nos. 4 & 5. Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Gustavo Dudamel, conductor. DG 001587402

by Jim Svejda



I have no idea why Deutsche Grammophon published its latest album from Gustavo Dudamel as a three-CD boxed set. Sibelius, Bruckner, and Nielsen are strange bedfellows indeed. Each CD could stand on its own, but DG has it packaged such that if you want the Bruckner Ninth Symphony, you also get

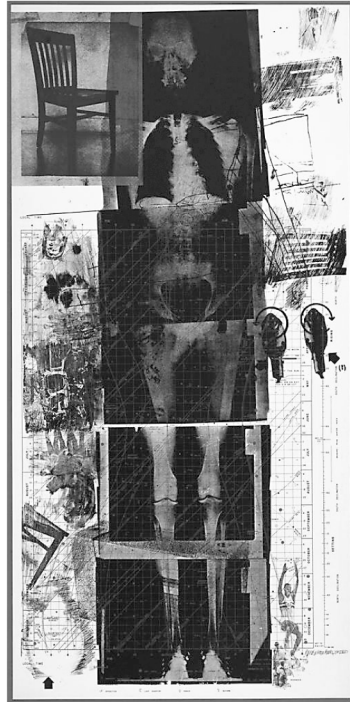
two Nielsen Symphonies and a Sibelius Symphony as a bonus. All are live concert recordings—you can tell by the many audible grunts from Dudamel. Three CDs. Three very different composers. One price: \$36.

I grew up on the Herbert Blomstedt/San Francisco Symphony recordings (Decca) of the Nielsen Symphonies and a few years ago fell in love with Osmo Vänskä's cycle with the BBC Scottish Symphony (Bis). So, I measure any new recording of the Nielsen Symphonies against those. For me, this one just doesn't have the imagination or excitement of either the Blomstedt or Vänskä performances. Strange, for a conductor whose brand is passion.

Dudamel's Sibelius Symphony no. 2 is perfect. Too many conductors try to make this symphony more than what it is and end up with an interpretation where the sense of scale is all wrong and, in the end, the musicians in the orchestra end up crumpled in a heap on the floor, licking their wounds. This finely balanced, unsentimental reading rises above the litany of those all-too-common sappy Sibelius Twos out there.

A few words about the oft-recorded Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra: the wind playing is phenomenal. In the Nielsen Fifth Symphony, the snare drummer steals the show. But what's missing from these performances is depth and warmth from the GSO string section—something that Dudamel has cultivated in remarkably short order from the LA Philharmonic. It makes me wish there were a few more CD recordings of Dudamel and the LA Phil to choose from.

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During the Getty's vast *Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980* project, Gemini is exhibiting—in two parts that began September 23—what Sidney Felsen fondly refers to as *Pacific Standard Editions*. Not unexpectedly, viewers have been treated to a capsule history of the shop's greatest hits and not-always-well-known masterpieces. Meanwhile, the house archives reside at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the Gemini family's gift to the nation.

Constance W. Glenn was one of the country's earliest young collectors of American Pop Art and has written widely on the field. In 1973, she became the founding director of the University Art Museum, CSULB, then the only museum in the California State University system. She remains director emeritus and professor emeritus. She is also chairman and editor-in-chief of ARTEExpress. She is the author of The Artist Observed: Photographs by Sidney B. Felsen (Twin Palms Publishers, 2003).

PHOTO

Robert Rauschenberg's *Booster* from the "Booster and seven studies" series, 1967.

Color lithograph, screenprint.

Robert Rauschenberg and Gemini G.E.L. © 1967
courtesy | Gemini G.E.L.

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Wagner: *The Flying Dutchman*

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