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Sidney Felsen and the Artists at Gemini G.E.L.
First Came a Friendship: A Celebration of the Community
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by Jody Zellen



Gemini G.E.L. is a Los Angeles-based print shop founded by Stanley Grinstein and Sidney Felsen that opened in the 1960's. Best friends and fraternity brothers at USC, they were also art collectors who wanted to work with artists and establish friendships. They joined forces with lithographer Ken Tyler and opened what was to become one of the most respected printmaking studios in the world. Over many decades, Felsen photographed the studio and the artists at work. It is his images and insightful documentation of the art that was created and the people involved at Gemini that is the focus of this evocative and historically significant exhibition.

Felsen's archive of more than 70,000 photographs are contained in the Getty Research Institute's collection and through the discerning eye of curator Naoko Takahatake, viewers can travel through time looking at images of a range of artists at work. While the list of artists includes those still working as well as some who have passed on — ranging from Claes Oldenburg to Richard Serra, Roy Lichtenstein, John Baldessari, Elizabeth Murray, David Hockney, Ann Hamilton, Julie Mehretu, Jasper Johns, Ed Ruscha, Tacita Dean and Analia Saban — what becomes apparent is how much they enjoyed what they were doing.

While questions about whether Sidney B. Felsen was or even wanted to be an artist surface, that is hardly the point. What Felsen did was create a visual history of a certain place as it grew and evolved over time. While there are numerous images of artists in the process of creation, there are also pictures of parties, adventures and just plain fun. The images are intimate as Felsen had the trust of these people. He was not an outsider looking in, but a friend and a peer of those he photographed. Gemini became an extended family.

Across the walls are not only images Felsen made documenting the artists and their printing processes, but also photographs of him with his family, as well as of the Los Angeles environment that he shared with EastCoast artists to entice them to come to

L.A. Annotated calendars with notes and pictures illustrating the goings-on both at Gemini and in the city itself are personal and informational details that expand and inform the intimacy of the exhibition.

Noting the recent passing of Richard Serra, the exhibition becomes a trip down memory lane where viewers can smile knowingly at pictures of John Baldessari, Ellsworth Kelly and Elizabeth Murray and wonder what they'd be creating now, as well as delight in Gemini's embrace of younger artists working today like Julie Mehretu, Tacita Dean and Analia Saban. The exhibition is not a history of the prints made at Gemini (nor does it claim to be), but rather is a celebration of the community Felsen and his pals created: one that continues to evolve and inspire to this day.

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