



*No Pressure*, 1963, Oil on canvas, 40" x 30"

**Vern Blosum: "Out of Order, Paintings 1962-1964" at TOMWORK and Assembly**  
by jody zellen

Vern Blosum is the pseudonym of an abstract painter. The name, derived from the botanical term vernal blossom, was used by this artist in the early 1960s to create a suite of paintings in the Pop Art style. Conceived in order to understand what Pop was all about, the paintings served simultaneously as both a critique and an embrace of a then growing movement. Looking back, it is easy to see Blosum's captioned realistic depictions of ordinary things found on a city street and understand their place in the rubric of Pop and Conceptual Art. However, at the time they were made they were anomalies in their flat-footed reproduction of the ordinary. Blosum was unofficially associated with the Leo Castelli Gallery and his paintings were included in a number of exhibitions devoted to Pop Art and even acquired by the Museum of Modern Art. But because the museum was unable to verify Blosum's biographical data the works were put into storage and little was heard about him in the decades that ensued. Blosum, or rather his paintings, are suddenly having a resurgence being presented in simultaneous gallery exhibitions in Los Angeles and New York. The modest-sized oil paintings on view in Los Angeles, at TOMWORK gallery (the new space founded by Tom Jimmerson, formerly of Cardwell Jimmerson) depict the top half of parking meters, stop signs as well as mailboxes and fire hydrants, each isolated against a white background. Beneath the realistic and competently painted objects are black hand-lettered captions. With phrases like "OUT OF ORDER," "FIFTEEN MINUTES" or "TIME EXPIRED" (not in this exhibition) leading to his final work, *Stop*, it is now possible to read Blosum's captions in relation to the trajectory of conceptual art moving from Warhol's notion of fifteen minutes of fame to Baldessari's *Wrong*.

Some of Blosum's image text juxtaposition are poignant commentaries--"NO PRESSURE" below a fire hydrant, "ALARM" beneath an old-fashioned fire alarm and "OUT OF ORDER" below a parking meter with more than ample time remaining. The works refer both to the object and to its intended (dis)function; a common conceptualist's strategy. Who Vern Blosum was (or is) remains a mystery. Yet his works, perhaps made in the 1960s as a critique of Pop Art, toy with ideas of authorship and the readymade. As Andy Warhol remarked, "You should always have a product that is not you."