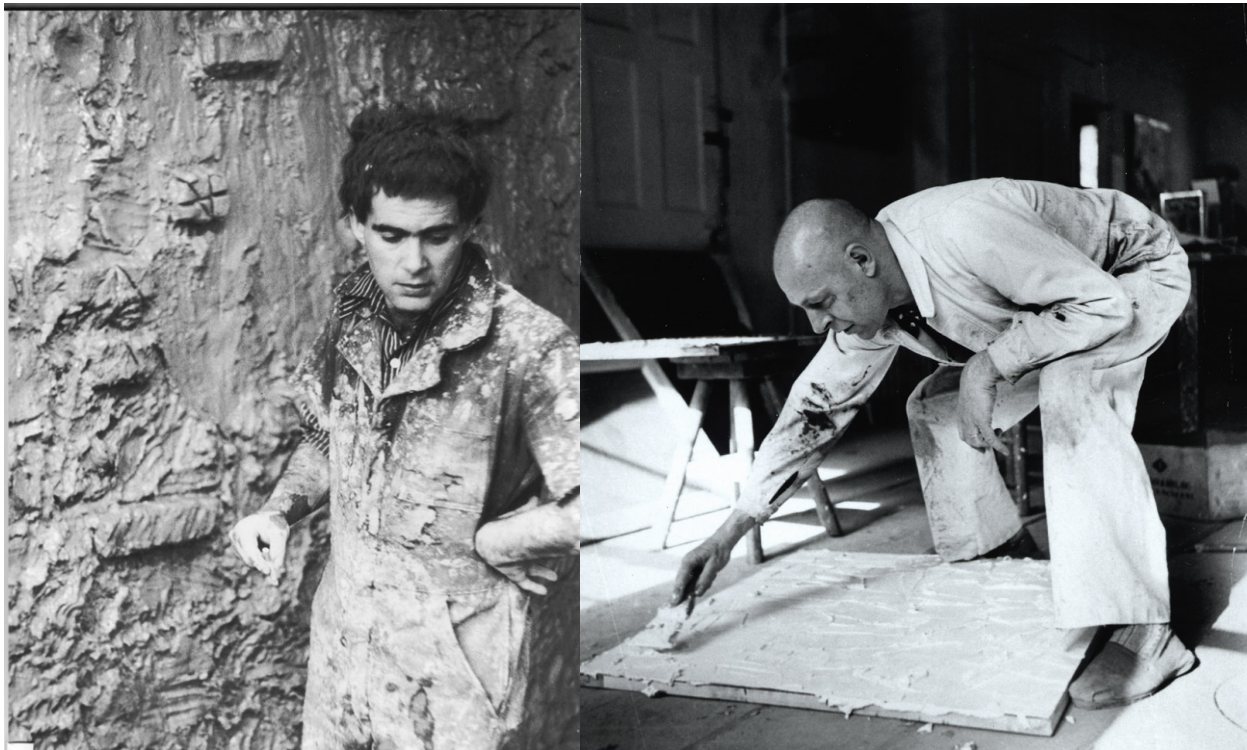


Jean Dubuffet and Larry Poons: Material Topographies

January – February 2017



(Left) Larry Poons,, photo by Stu Lisson (Right) Jean Dubuffet, New York, 1951-1952, photo by Kay Bell

Jean Dubuffet and Larry Poons: Material Topographies will explore the radical experimentation of both artists as they began to utilize unorthodox materials and reject traditional concepts of pictorial space in search of a direct, physical language. Though separated by more than a generation, their canvases share a rough urgency and a mistrust of unnecessary flourishes. Both artists stand as iconoclasts in the history of painting and cut their teeth as countercultural figures; Dubuffet in his Parisian avant-garde and Poons in the rough and tumble downtown scene of New York in the 1960s.

In 1951 after outlining his famous "Anti Cultural Positions" at the Chicago Art Club, Dubuffet became well known for decrying western conceptions of beauty in favor of a raw, uninhibited mode of making art. While Poons's conflict appears to be one of philosophical dimensions, wrought between him and the canvass, they have been described as "battle fields" by art critic Dave Hickey. Like Dubuffet, he has been praised for his ability to pay attention to instinct. Frank Stella once admiringly referred to him as "Mr. Natural."

Dubuffet's paintings employ dense sheets of oil paint that behave like a "mortar" in which the artist binds layers of dirt, sand, gravel, plaster, glass, string, hay, cement, and tar. The resulting surfaces invoke the facades of desiccated, cracking roadways and ancient walls that were known to fascinate the artist. Eschewing the traditional brush, he gouged, sliced, carved and wiped marks directly onto the canvas. Beginning in the late 1970s Larry Poons imbued the surfaces of his heavily wrought acrylic paintings with "pebbles" of thick latex foam. In the following years he assembled these surfaces with an increasingly dense armature of synthetic rubble until they began to heave with architectonic force. The unconventional materials in these works often include rubber, plastic, paper, tennis balls, and rope.

Viewed together, the paintings of Larry Poons and Jean Dubuffet offer a unique context in which to appreciate both the chaotic nature of radical action and the sense of openness and opportunity that can emerge as a result. These are ambitious, restless works that bypass symbolic meaning and plunge one directly into the realm of lived experience. The process of looking is thus consumed by a physical immediacy and bodily sensation akin to staring headlong into the full force of nature.