

Lyrical Cool: A Tribute to Shirley Berman

July 25, 2022 [Guest](#) [Leave a comment](#)



*Buzz art contributor and photographer [Megan Derry](#) recently visited [Lyrical Cool: A Tribute to Shirley Berman](#), now on display at the [Kohn Gallery](#), 1227 N. Highland Ave. The exhibit includes “never-before-shown portraits of Berman, as well as original works drawn from her private collection, including Wallace Berman, Charles Brittin, Bruce Conner, George Herms, Lun*na Menoh, Dean Stockwell, Edmund Teske, and others.” It runs through September 10.*

Shirley Berman.

Wife. Mother. Muse.

The beating heart center of cool in Los Angeles during the 1950s and '60s.

Married to Wallace Berman, the celebrated collage and assemblage artist, Shirley Berman financially supported her husband's career but, more importantly, was instrumental in nurturing a cadre of independent thinkers, musicians, artists, film makers and photographers working and living on the West Coast. People like Dennis Hopper, Dean Stockwell, Russ Tamblyn, Michael McClure, Allen Ginsberg and countless others. The Berman home was a nexus of free spirits and avant garde artists working across many media, and Shirley kept the door of their home wide open and welcoming.

Neither an artist nor a model herself, Berman nevertheless deeply understood the artist's gaze and was able to let herself be expertly interpreted by several photographers...her husband initiating the infatuation with her wide-eyed visage by taking a first photograph of her in 1954 when she turned towards him at the end of a particularly long day. The result is a haunting portrait of a woman thoroughly exhausted but made more beautiful by it.

The current show at the Kohn Gallery presents a wide array of iconic photographs of this legendary muse...taken by Wallace Berman, Edmund Teskle and Charles Brittin.

Whether gazing directly into the photographer's lens, or averting her haunting kohl-rimmed eyes while her delicate fingers dangle a lit cigarette, Shirley Berman exudes a singular preternatural quality of classic California chic.

*"Perhaps that is why the photos come out so cool because she is cool."
- Tosh Berman - on the occasion of his mother's 87th birthday.*

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