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| **Hopps, Walter (1932-2005)** |
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| [Enter an **abstract** for your article] |
| Walter Hopps was an American art dealer and curator of modern and contemporary art. Best known for organising the first museum retrospective of Marcel Duchamp in 1963 at the Pasadena Art Museum (now the Norton Simon), Hopps was a pioneering example of the independent, creative curator, a model that emerged in the 1960s in the U.S. From his start as an organiser of unconventional shows of California painters on the cultural fringe of conservative, Cold War-era Los Angeles, Hopps became one of the most respected, if unorthodox, curators of his generation, holding a dual appointment at the end of his life as twentieth-century curator at Houston’s Menil Collection and adjunct senior curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Some of his noted exhibitions include: in Pasadena, a 1962 group show that helped to define pop art, “The New Paintings of Common Objects”; the first U.S. retrospectives of Kurt Schwitters (1962) and Joseph Cornell (1967); Robert Rauschenberg retrospectives in 1976 and 1997 at the National Museum of American Art and Menil Collection, respectively; a 1996 survey of Edward Kienholz for The Whitney Museum of American Art; and a James Rosenquist retrospective in 2002 at the Guggenheim.  Hopps was born in Glendale, CA, a suburb of Los Angeles, and was oriented towards science and math from an early age as the home-schooled son of physicians. On a high school trip to see the nearby modern art collection of Walter and Louise Arensberg (now at the Philadelphia Museum of Art), however, Hopps became fascinated by the avant-garde and Marcel Duchamp in particular, whose work was owned in depth by the Arensbergs. Befriending the Arensbergs, Hopps educated himself about modern European art as a teenager and, after gaining some experience putting on local jazz concerts with his friends while still a student, by his early twenties Hopps was organizing exhibitions of some of the most advanced paintings of the 1950s from San Francisco and Los Angeles. A 1955 show of Abstract Expressionist work installed in a makeshift space surrounding the Merry-Go-Round on the Santa Monica Pier included paintings by Richard Diebenkorn, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, and Jay De Feo. Hopps co-founded the Ferus Gallery with assemblage artist Edward Kienholz in 1957, which had a crucial impact on the development of the Los Angeles art world by providing the first professional space for the exhibition of local vanguard art. The gallery gave a start to the careers of artists such as Larry Bell, Wallace Berman, Robert Irwin, and Ed Ruscha. Hopps’s 1963 Duchamp retrospective was noted not only for its innovative presentation of the artist’s work, but the stage it offered to Duchamp himself, who was famously photographed playing chess with a naked female friend of Hopps’ in the exhibition. Hopps described art exhibitions as akin to experimental laboratories and compared the role of the curator to that of the orchestra conductor. He was often praised for his eye and an intuitive sense of exhibition design, but his eccentric personality inspired both fierce loyalty and great animosity among artists and the museum colleagues with whom he worked over his long career.  File: Wasser\_Duchamp\_and\_Hopps.jpg  Figure 1: Julian Wasser, *Marcel Duchamp and Walter Hopps at the Opening Reception of the Duchamp Retrospective, Pasadena Art Museum* (1963). Copyright info available at: <http://www.craigkrullgallery.com/Wasser/index2.html>. |
| Further reading:  (Tompkins)  (Obrist)  (Strauss) |