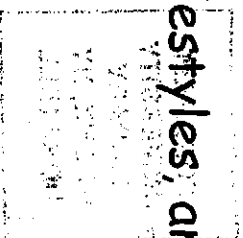


# Beat Culture

## Icons, Lifestyles, and Impact



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A B C  C L I O

Santa Barbara, California

Denver, Colorado

Oxford, England

(1960) suggests a human form, but it also appears to be a cluttered desk.

Like Herrns and Berman, Bruce Conner was part of the assemblage movement, but by using fabrics and cloths, he showed some connection to Robert Morris. *Couch* (1963) is a ragged daybed streaked with paint, but its former elegance and promise of human rest remain. *Portrait of Allen Ginsberg* (1960–1961) is a web of debris, and only the most imaginative viewer can draw a connection with the title.

Along with collage, assemblage art became the key manifestation of sculpture in the Beat era. With gatherings from everyday life, particularly with the reclaiming of items given up for trash, the assemblage artists showed the resourcefulness that World War II had demanded, but also revealed a critical perspective about the postwar focus on material satisfaction.

—William Lawlor

### Bibliographical References

- Beat Culture and the New America 1950–1965*, ed. Lisa Phillips, 1995, is an illustrated guide to the exhibition at the Whitney Museum, 1996. Included in this volume is Rebecca Soltit, "Heretical Constellations: Notes on California, 1946–1961," which comments effectively on major artists, including sculptors. Soltit is also the editor of *Secret Exhibitions*, 1990. Availability may be a problem, but one may want to track down George Herrns, *George Herrns: Then and Now: Fifty Years of Assemblage*, 2003. John Maynard's *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California*, 1991, comments on Berman and other artists.

See also Berman, Wallace; Painting; Herrns, George; Conner, Bruce; San Francisco

### Sea, The Beats at

The sea and transoceanic travel figured significantly in the lives of several Beat writers, whether they served in the U.S. military, worked in the merchant marine, or sailed the sea to see the world. Lawrence Ferlinghetti served in the navy during World War II, Gary Snyder sailed the Pacific to study Buddhism in Japan, and Jack Kerouac's mar-

itime experiences informed much of his writing. Other writers also found themselves at sea, some sailing to leave the United States after failed sexual relationships or to pursue literary activities.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti joined the U.S. Navy in 1941 and attended midshipmen's school in Chicago before being assigned to New York City's Third Naval District. After patrolling around New York Harbor and New England, Ferlinghetti worked as a signalman aboard the *Ambrose Lagship*, helping ships safely enter the port of New York. After working in 1943 on patrols into the North Atlantic, Ferlinghetti received an assignment that took him to Great Britain, where he worked as a messenger. Ferlinghetti was eventually named skipper of a ship sent to Liverpool to participate in the Normandy invasion of 1944. He eventually found his way back to the United States on his final assignment as a freighter navigator in the Pacific Ocean. It was then that Ferlinghetti witnessed the aftermath of the atomic attack on Nagasaki, just six weeks after the bomb was dropped there. Ferlinghetti was discharged from the navy when his freighter reached Portland, Oregon, a few days later.

Gary Snyder sailed with the Maritime Cooks and Stewards Union in 1948, visiting Colombia and Venezuela. In 1956 he sailed aboard a freighter to Japan, where he studied Zen Buddhism. A year later, in Yokohama, Japan, he boarded the *SS Sappa Creek*, working first as a firefighter and then in the engine room as a wiper. During his year-long assignment, he visited the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and several Pacific ports, before returning to San Francisco in 1958. Snyder wrote of his experiences on the *SS Sappa Creek* in letters to Will Peterson and Philip Whalen. In 1961, Snyder sailed to India with Joanne Kyger; in New Delhi they joined Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg had sailed to Dakar, Africa, earlier in 1947, after his breakup with Neal Cassady. Snyder's times at sea in form parts of *Earth House Hold* and *Passage through India*, both available in *The Gary Snyder Reader*.

Jack Kerouac also had significant maritime experience before his writing career became a priority to him. He served in the merchant marine in 1942 aboard the *SS Dorchester*, a stint that provided ma-

terial for the unpublished novel *The Sea Is My Brother*. In May of that year, Kerouac was honorably discharged from the navy after being diagnosed with an "indifferent character." A month later he sailed to Liverpool, England, aboard the *George Weems*. Kerouac wrote about his maritime experiences in *Vanity of Duluz*, and about the sea itself in *Big Sur*, which concludes with a long sound poem that recreates the rhythm and roar of the Pacific.

Kerouac joined Burroughs in Tangier in 1957, sailing from New York on the SS *Slovenija*. His trip across the North Atlantic included a dangerous storm, which he described in a letter to Joyce Glassman (now published in Jack Kerouac, *Selected Letters 1957-1969*, ed. Ann Charters, 1999: 9-10) as one of the most "awful" experiences he'd ever had at sea. This trip led to one of the largest overseas collaborations of the Beat movement, when in 1957 Kerouac, Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, and Alan Ansen traveled to Tangier to work on *Naked Lunch* with William S. Burroughs. Burroughs had settled in Tangier in 1954, after sailing to Europe and Africa late in 1953 when his sexual relationship with Ginsberg ended.

Bob Kaufman also spent time at sea, sailing around the world with the merchant marines. As a cabin boy, Kaufman read books that his supervisor recommended, and later in life Kaufman worked with unions that attended to sailors' issues.

—Rebecca Devers

### Bibliographical References

- Neel Cherkovski, *Ferlinghetti: A Biography*, 1979; Jon Halper, ed., *Gary Snyder: Dimensions of a Life*, 1991; Gary Snyder, *The Gary Snyder Reader: Prose, Poetry, and Translations 1952-1998*, 1999; Matt Theado, ed., *The Beats: A Literary Reference*, 2001; Steven Watson, *The Birth of the Beat Generation: Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters, 1944-1960*, 1995.

See also Ferlinghetti, Lawrence; Snyder, Gary; Kerouac, Jack; Ginsberg, Allen; Kaufman, Bob

### Selby, Hubert, Jr. (1928-2004)

Novelist Hubert Selby was one of the most drastic explorers and critics of such desolate aspects of

modern urban life as violence, addiction, prostitution, and poverty. Like the novels of William Burroughs, Selby's texts indulge in slang-ridden language and portray the unpredictable lives of outsiders and paranoids. Ultraviolent scenes of rape, fighting, and all varieties of humiliation accompany sardonic attacks on the corruption of modern society. Selby's novels of the sixties and seventies are distinguished by a tough moralism; the writer even called one of his books a modern morality play. At times, his work offers an irritating combination of Christian values, social criticism, and neorealism, from which Selby emerges as a bleak pornographic moralist.

Born on 23 July 1928 in Brooklyn, New York, the son of a coal miner, Selby left school at fifteen to labor as a dockworker and sailor, joining the merchant marine in 1944. Suffering from tuberculosis and addicted to morphine, Selby was discharged and subsequently held diverse jobs. Following the publication of stories in small journals, his novel *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964), a description of existence on the fringes of urban society, made Selby both well known and well censored. But although subject to obscenity charges, the book was praised as a powerful and authentic achievement. Selby's next novel, *The Room* (1971), describes the violent visions of an incarcerated psychopath, while *The Demon* (1976) satirizes the rise of an egotistical Manhattan Casanova. *Requiem for a Dream* (1978) unfolds the struggles of some heroin addicts whose failed dreams of success end in death, prison, and prostitution. Selby also cowrote the screenplay for the cinema adaptation of the book (2000). His final novel, *Waiting Period* (2002), is the inner monologue of a suicidal serial killer.

Until his death of pulmonary disease, Selby taught a writing course at the University of Southern California.

—Mike W. Malm

### Principal Works

- Last Exit to Brooklyn*, 1964; *The Room*, 1971; *The Demon*, 1976; *Requiem for a Dream*, 1978; *Song of the Silent Snow*, 1986; *The Willow Tree*, 1998; *Waiting Period*, 2002.