

For Immediate Release:

**Fran Herndon**

Organized by Lee Plested and Kevin Killian

September 8, 2011—October 29, 2011

Opening reception September 7, 2011

Altman Siegel Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of work by Fran Herndon. This will be Herndon's first exhibition with the gallery and amounts to a retrospective in miniature of a formative time in the artist's development. The show opens September 8<sup>th</sup> and continues through October 29<sup>th</sup> 2011.

In *Fran Herndon*, curator Kevin Killian has worked with the artist to assemble a survey of the early work from the 1950s and 1960s when, as a young artist new to San Francisco's bohemia, she began experimenting in a variety of media. The exhibition focuses on works created side by side with the California poet Jack Spicer (1925-1965), the man who urged Herndon to enroll in art school as a way to make magic. The lithographs she created for his 1960 masterwork *The Heads of the Town Up to the Aether* bring to life shared themes of alienation, discovery, ruin, apocalypse and mercy. In her "sports collage" project of 1962, she scissored general circulation magazines like *Sports Illustrated* and *Life*, applying watercolor, gouache, and assemblage techniques to create an unparalleled window into Cold War USA via its mass produced patriotic portrayals of organized sport and other large public events of the day, including the death of Marilyn Monroe.

Born in 1929 in Oklahoma, Herndon left the USA in the early 1950s, seeing her homeland as "no place for a brown face." (She is of Native American heritage.) In France she met and married the California teacher and writer Jim Herndon, and came to California to find herself in a welcoming host of painters and poets, chief among them Robin Blaser, Jack Spicer, Jess and Robert Duncan. In 1959, while maintaining a wide and varied art practice, she became the art editor of the poetry/art magazine *J*, often credited as the first journal of the "mimeo revolution" and the harbinger of hundreds of successors in the 60s and 70s. Herndon showed at the experimental "poets' galleries" of the period (the Peacock Gallery, Buzz). In the 1970s, as contemporaries like Jess, Bruce Conner, Jay DeFeo began finding fame, Herndon put aside art for personal reasons, and when she returned to painting she did so in a deliberately low key, unheralded way. But in that period a coterie of admirers from many disciplines has grown vocal, and through a sprinkling of small but important exhibitions, interest in her work has reached a new height.

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