

ARTFORUM

Vern Blosum

KUNSTHALLE BERN

Helvetiaplatz 1

June 6–August 3

The oeuvre of Vern Blosum manifests the limits of a persona. According to the press release of the artist's retrospective exhibition, the thirty paintings made between 1961 and 1964 on view are ascribed to Blosum, the pseudonym of the (said to be) still-working anonymous painter, who was awarded the highest symbols of acceptance of the mid-twentieth-century New York art scene: a solo show at the Leo Castelli Gallery and inclusion in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

Despite the latter having removed Blosum's work from its catalogue when the artist's identity could not be confirmed, the person operating under this enigmatic signature made a grouping of paintings that epitomizes early 1960s Pop art, both formally—with a flatness of surface and the use of primary colors and precise lines—and in content. For instance, Blosum rendered a blue fire hydrant at the center of one canvas, with its title, *Homage to Ivan K.*, 1963, inscribed directly beneath, indicating the significant Pop art dealer Ivan Karp. Elsewhere, Blosum's renderings of self-evident, everyday objects, such as his series of white-and-gray depictions of parking meters on white canvas, are here sensitively hung in simple format along the four tall main-room walls of the Kunsthalle Bern. Most paintings are titled as the time remaining on the depicted meter, such as *Ten Minutes* from 1962.

These explicit paintings of prosaic subjects are so typical of the era that curator Lucy Lippard cited a 1964 Blosum painting of a pay phone (*Telephone*) in her seminal book on the movement titled *Pop Art* (1966). The book is prominently displayed open to this page in a vitrine in the adjoining reading room, demonstrating the trajectory of a body of work independent of its author.



Vern Blosum, *Ten Minutes*, 1962, oil on canvas, 36 1/2 x 28 1/4".

— Mary Rinebold