

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Wallpaper\*  
February 4, 2018

## A 'blind date' between two Californian artists reveals surprising shared sensibilities

Art / 4 Feb 2018 / By Charlotte Jansen



Sculptures by Alma Allen outside of his former Joshua Tree studio.  
*Photography: Lisa Eisner. Courtesy of Palm Springs Art Museum*

'I like to think of "Allen/Blunk" as a blind date,' says curator Brooke Hodge of the new two-artist exhibition at Palm Springs Art Museum Architecture and Design Center she has organised, exploring the fleshly and fantastic works of Alma Allen and JB Blunk. The exhibition is the first in an ongoing series at the museum, bringing two artists from different generations into an imagined conversation through their work.

The two Californian artists never actually met, (Allen continues to work, recently relocating from Joshua Tree to Mexico City; Blunk passed away in 2002) yet the resonances between their practices are uncanny: corporeal curves, cheeky, prodding phallus shapes, curls of bronze, marble, ceramic and wood that make their materials look soft, malleable and sensual.

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*Alma Allen in his former Joshua Tree studio. Photography: Lisa Eisner. Courtesy of Palm Springs Art Museum*

This natural affinity between the two artists is perhaps in part down to the fact that both preferred to work far from the madding crowds, with studios in remote locations, inspired by the natural colours and materials of their surroundings. For Blunk, it was the redwoods of Northern California, where he built a house in a nature reserve. Allen, meanwhile, worked out of a scintillating dome in the desert.

Not only did both artists dabble in furniture design, sculpture and homewares, but they both designed their own working and living spaces too, their environments in symbiosis with their practices. Documentation of this is included in the exhibition – alongside pieces borrowed from Blunk’s house in Inverness – considered his key work. In particular, portraits of both artists’ carefully-arranged, earthy-hued kitchens hint at more personal, connections between their lives and art.

A shared interest is revealed not only through their aesthetic sense and tastes – but also in their purposeful playfulness. Blunk’s bulbous ‘Penis Stools’ pair perfectly with Allen’s bronze series, *Not Yet Titled*, carved visual puns alluding to everyday objects, domestic items—and genitals. It seems neither one took themselves too seriously.

They were both unafraid of experimenting with scale: outside the Architecture and Design Center at the museum are two more recent imposing stone sculptures by Allen. Equally, Blunk was as happy making jewellery as he was going monumental – in 1969 he created a work, ‘The Planet’, made entirely of one ring of redwood, 13ft in diameter. Quite a feat considering both artists are self-taught.

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*Not Yet Titled*, 2014, by Alma Allen. The exhibition features new work in bronze and stone made by Allen especially for the occasion as well as a number of his early pieces in wood, marble, and stone.  
*Courtesy of Palm Springs Art Museum*



*Stool*, by JB Blunk. The artist (1926–2002), who was based in Inverness, CA, began making work in 1962 and his practice encompassed ceramics and furniture and sculpture in redwood and cypress.  
*Courtesy of Palm Springs Art Museum*

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