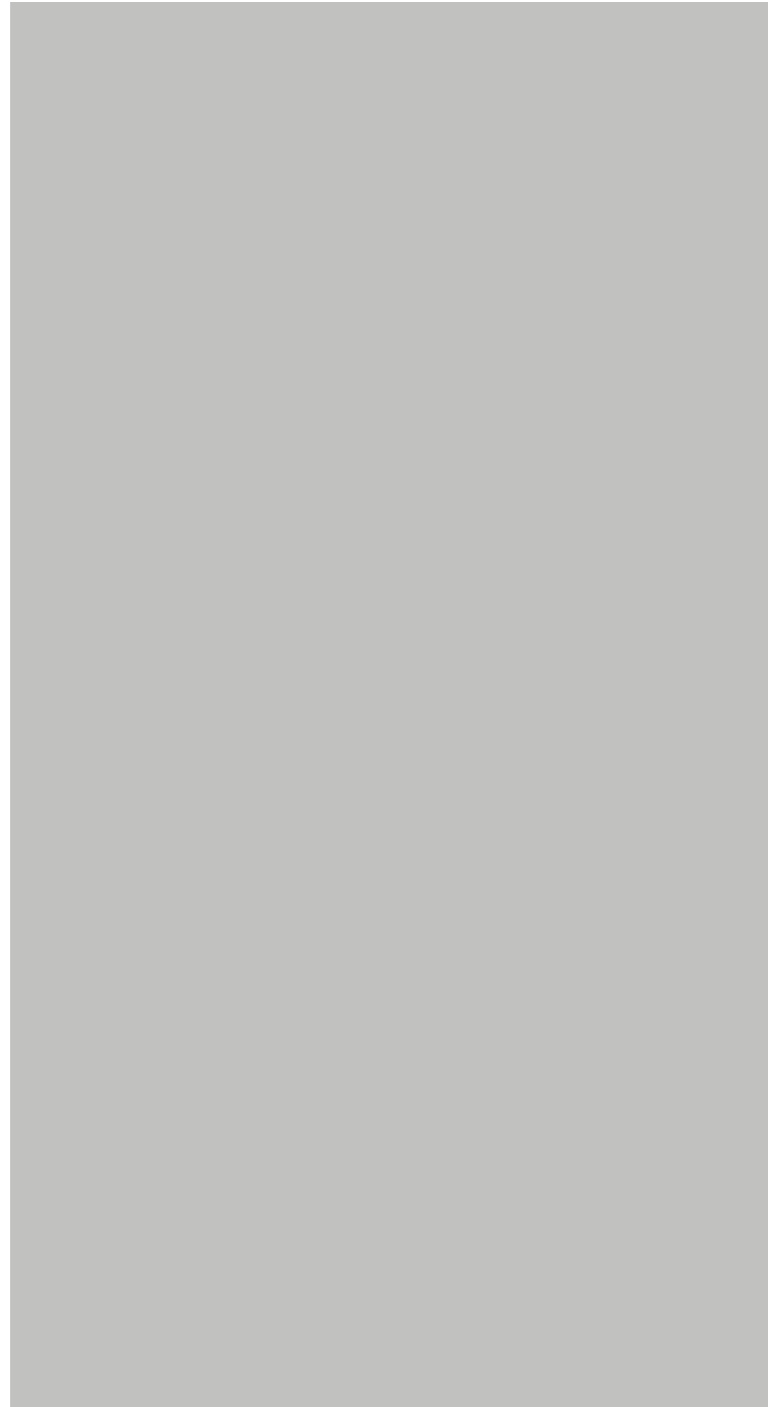


Charles Ray: "Unpainted Sculpture", 1997 Regen Projects, Los Angeles



I drove my sun-bleached gray Chrysler Le Baron through Hollywood to West Hollywood's North Almont Drive, the home of Regen Projects. It was an unremarkable October day with an overcast sky. I finally found a parking space and walked the two short blocks to see Mr. Ray's new exhibition. When entering the space—which might actually be a former garage—I passed Chris Burden discussing the merits of gray with Dan Graham.

Parked within the white walls and upon the gray cast concrete floor was Unpainted Sculpture.

The press release states: "Over the past two years, Ray has reconstructed a crashed car out of fiberglass, casting and assembling each piece to match the bent and twisted forms of the original."

The crashed car in its broken and busted completeness had been perfectly reconstructed out of gray fiberglass and strange paint. This massive undertaking freezes an all too common moment from the freeways of Los Angeles and beyond. I'm not sure if this is true, but a story circulating during the preview was that someone died in the crash this sculpture was modelled after, a gruesome reminder of our reality in the late 20th century. Another quote from the press release states that: "In its muted gray recreation, the car examines the tautological versus the actual and appears as almost pure form; the physical result of two opposing forces." The moving and the stationary collide.

I thought of Ray's hero Anthony Caro's use of flat painted and twisted steel and of Ray's early sculptures of balanced objects and gray painted bodies (his own).

The emptiness of the gallery space added to the power of the piece—sitting alone as a solid unmovable lump; a serious counterbalance to Ray's Firetruck from 1993 that takes a child's toy and enlarges it to life-size. When I saw it parked outside the Whitney Museum in New York some years ago it was incredibly powerful and frighteningly realistic—a toy made actual.

A similar force is present in Unpainted Sculpture—the clean edges and perfect flatness mask the grime of the real object. Oil, gasoline and blood forcefully mixed together and flooded into the car and out onto the gray tarmac of the freeway.

Drive carefully.