Some paintings give me diamonds, some paintings, heart attacks
Some paintings I give all my bread to, I don't ever want it back
Some paintings give me jewelry, others buy me clothes
Some paintings give me children I never asked them for.

—Jagger/Richards/Harvey

Painting is dead. Painting isn't dead. Painting is dead! No, it isn't!
Yes, it is! Isn't it? Shut up shut up shut up shut up shut up!! Okay, now that we have that out of the way...

Painting isn't the denial-plagued zombie elephant in the room — art theory is. It's one of the lines Leonard Cohen left out: Everybody knows a work of art that doesn't speak for itself is a failure as a work of art. Fortunately, in spite of the best efforts we critics have mustered to impose Artforum's Rules of Order on the rabble, art — and particularly the medium non grata of painting — just won't shut up.

Painters in the contemporary art world, particularly those from L.A., have to maintain a chameleonsque indeterminacy about their artistic intentions — be all things to all people — or face ghettoization. Is this an abstract painting? Or a painting of a painting of an abstract painting, winkle winkle? It's the emperor's new clothes all over. The ultimate irony is that the emperor is actually decked out in an Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat — the plausible deniability cultivated by painters for the social sphere creates a temporary autonomous zone in the studio wherein a thousand flowers have blossomed. No one can pin them down, so they can get away with anything. The psycho art-market bubble hasn't hurt production either.

So the question that generated "Some Paintings," the third L.A. Weekly Annual Biennial exhibition, isn't whether or not painting is a dysfunctional plastic category, or what makes painting relevant in today's global-a-go-go art world, or even "How can curating a painting show make me seem clever?" It is, simply, "What would it look like to have a broad-spectrum sampling of contemporary L.A. painting in one space?" We just got tired of waiting for some high-profile museum to put it together. How difficult could that be? Pretty difficult, as it turns out. The hardest part has been the narrowing down. With an initial list of more than 300, and a dream of whittling the list down to a 60-something precise (which ended up closer to 90 under 90), the shuffling and reshuffling of possible permutations — looking for correspondences and polarities, designating redundancies, and trying to orchestrate a multiplicity of often-dissonant artistic voices into some vague coherence — was just the prelude to the grim task of making the necessary cuts.

I don't even know how many painters are in this show anymore, but it...
dreamlike space of unsettling enigma.

LYNE BERN OR has been rediscovering her painterly roots with a series of cool but frantic bruise-colored geometric abstractions on aluminum and delicate swarms of watercolor marks derived from research trips to Bosnia or a “film tour” of Austria — fourth-dimensional snapshots.

Gifted multimedia narrative populist SANDOW BIRK’S amazing “Depravities” show at Cal State Long Beach in December used up his store of new Iraq-war paintings, but he dug out an early ’90s collaboration with graffiti artist Devin “Relm” Hynm for “Some Paintings.”

STEVE CANADAY crams grotesque eroticism and cartoon hot-rod nihilism into increasingly concealed Modernist geometric structures, establishing unsuspected common ground between Frank Stella and Big Daddy Roth. The Monsters of the Working Class, stripped of their exoticism, overrun the academy.

CAROL CAROOMPAS’ punkadelic patchworks of archetypal gender conflicts played out by glamorous rock stars, clip-art domestics and B-movie exotics over eye-boggling textile patterns bring Pattern and Decoration through the looking glass of experimental narrative semiotics into the 21st century.

KAREN CARSON has come a long way from the austerity of her 1970s interactive minimalism zippered wall hangings to arrive at her recent spate of spectacular giant-Pegasi-in-the-sky-over-oblivious-us tableaux. I’d follow her anywhere.

Reconstructing his epic dysfunctional family history (alcoholism, CIA, lost candy fortunes) from fragments of Norman Rockwell illustrations, SCOTT CASSIDY has hit upon a deeply personal and visually inventive vehicle for his old-master chops and droll humor.

With an uncommon and seemingly effortless spatial complexity, MIKE CHANG’S recent translations of ’80s pinball-machine designs into Abject Expressionist totems propose an unholy marriage between the new Geo-slaerkerism and Pop.

A couple of years ago, BRIAN COOPER’S creepily metastasizing site-specific upholstery sculptures were cropping up everywhere. His recent move to incorporate this iconography of containment and release into painting has resulted in works like Interiority, which manages to convey a hypnotically self-contradictory sense of place.

While a UCLA grad student, DANIEL CUMMINGS churned out a ton of huge hard-edge abstractions on paper. The size has been reduced and the edges have been blurred, but the dynamic spatial qualities and unorthodox palette remain undiminished.

Claremont grad student WALPA D’MARK’S mythically (if ambiguously) charged, hypersaturated, densely packed conjecture landscape series epitomizes the best

The unconditional wealth of subtly nuanced pleasures from color, surface, scale, and compositional choices in DAVID AMICO’S industrially derived work reflects the eye of an artist who has lived in a Skid Row studio for decades and managed to keep actually looking.

I knew MICHAEL ARATA as a sardonic, community-building, public wiener-cooking daddy-o before I recognized his quirky conceptualist takes on painting (creating google-eyed entities from the negative spaces of lingerie models, for example) as one of the most original — and funniest — voices around.

JOSH ASTER continues to apply his light but masterful touch to a luscious, colorful world of soft geometry. His recent work broaches the digital/natural schism, building layered planes of feral data, swarms of pixels and splashes of chaos into edgy infotainment that defy resolution. Or your mattress is free.

HILARY BAKER’S pop-archetypal landscapes have a cartoon theatricality that goes beyond jauntiness to embrace mystery, paranoia and alienation. Her recent works have become less and less populated by her cleaned-up Gustonesque eyeball entities — opening an even more

with graffiti artist Devin “Relm” Hynm for “Some Paintings.”

The elegant Modernist formalism of WILLIAM BRICE’S work from the past few decades is rendered blessedly free of quotation marks through a rare legitimate claim to a manifest destiny of the American imagination — he came west to Chouinard during the Great Depression and never looked back.

HEATHER BROWN’S work trembles on the brink of rightness, like a Bizarro

World Matisse — flat, brutal renderings of figures in landscapes threaten to engulf the viewer in fragments of colored light. And once you’ve been transported to Bizarro World, “right” is never the same again.

Having made her name with destroyed domestic interiors, KRISTIN CALABRESE has gone on to produce one of the most idiosyncratic painting oeuvres anywhere over the past decade, ranging from faux-muralist social commentary to near-surrealist symbolism to stacks of colored boxes posing as geometric abstraction.
imminent apocalypse-pre-emptive quartering of reality — since being contacted by an orbiting entity known as DsUr in 1995.

TOMORY DOGGE’s blatantly painterly landscapes reconfigure the better aspects of ‘90s British and German romanticism into something utterly local, and the images’ recent rapid fragmentation only makes them seem more familiar.

MARK DUTCHER’s skanky, sumptuous noir candy canvases seethe with giddy anguish articulated in a rapidly disintegrating pictographic language — belying the artist’s exhilarating evolutionary momentum over the past five years or so.

Wounded Lion front man and Svengali BRAD EBERHARD ditched his old-school Squidism for fields of luminous jostling shapes that seem to be cohere briefly into partially unfolded schematics of the world — room interiors, furniture, landscapes — before moving on to rejoin the stained-glass Void.

How can you not trust the work of a guy who gave up a successful career in slick, beautiful geometric abstractions — with a material and finish fetish only an L.A. surfer-abstractionist can authentically muster — to produce verging-on-thrift-store paintings of circus animals crashing through the surf? You can’t. So when TIM EBERNE recently morphed back into an abstractionist, I was right there with him.

NANCY EVANS has been producing gorgeous, clever deconstructions of the Modernist grid and its figure/ground complications for years. Recently the figures have taken on a life of their own as gnarly bronze sculptures, but Evans still finds time to produce beautiful stains.

It’s hard to keep up with AMIR FALLAH’s rapid-fire stylistic shifts, but his ability to forge an individual identity by absorbing the polyglot visual din of the contemporary art world reflects his roots in the accelerated metabolism of graffiti culture.

The amazing thing about LYNN FOULKS is that in spite of his clear-eyed righteous indignation about the corporate degradation of human life, he is able to continue producing his luscious and quixotic Pop-Dubuffet relief paintings. He may be the only same man in the L.A. art world.

I never got how CHARLES GARABEDIAN fits that “Bad” painting category — complex arrangements of sophisticated chroma, draftsmanship and mythic/political content, often on an epic scale. If half the artists in L.A. could paint this bad, I could fill Track 16 three times over.

The symmetrical cropping and shallow field in TODD HEBERT’s dreamy, cinematic airbrush landscapes of snowmen, water bottles, plastic owls, igloo coolers and other prosaic landscape elements result in a potent, unlikely hybrid of photo-realist technological fetishism and spiritualism-inflected Modernist abstraction.

STEVE HURD has consistently used his considerable painting chops against the blaat and bullshit that prop painting up as a meaningful activity in this complex and troubled society. His recent work turns his sardonic deconstructive wit on the mother of all blaat and bullshit — politics — to equally spectacular effect.

Even while reaping the rewards of the ‘80s Neo-Expressionism boom, ROGER HERMAN was always operating in a more detached conceptual mode — undermining grandiose scale and conspicuous paint application with often-arbitrary choices of subject matter and color.

The first “Supersonic” show, in the Caltech wind tunnel, was a glut — the only real relief was the installation of DIY paint-scuplty things by GUSTAVO HERRERA, whose work continues to offer an offhand abundance of scraggly-ass beauty and humor.

Nobody seems to know where DAVID HOCKNEY lives, but his deceptively easy, light-filled representational paintings and his affinity with improvisational approaches like plein-air landscapes figure about 98 percent Southern California, 2 percent northern England to me.

Artists often go to great pains to conceal the limited repertoire of strategies from which they assemble their range of products, but DENNIS HOLLINGSWORTH has honed his deliberately minimal stock of elaborately sculptural wet-on-wet oil-paint applications to a virtuoso facility that disappears out of sheer gorgeousness.

CHARLES IRVIN’S multimedia tide of adolescent psychedelia is like a post-ironic version of Jim Shaw’s “Belly” project, resulting in a considerably higher WTF quotient. Check his Web site for “Tim Allen’s Republican Nightmare” and you’ll know what I mean.

Since Modernism’s forward momentum petered out, artists have become unglued in time. Compressing elements of Klimt, Schiele, Kupka, Rousseau, Hockney and O’Keeffe, RAFFI KALENDARIAN matches up opulent art nouveau stages for his languidly rendered figures to inhabit.

CHARLES KARUBIAN’s vision of the world is soft, brown and weird. Rendering his recent, increasingly surreal tableaux in a carefully retro palette of umbers, ochers and pinks, he stimulates a sense of nostalgia for scenes no child would ever want to remember.
Local public-access star JOHN KILDOFF (let’s Paint TV) has spent the past few years as a grad student at UCLA, expanding his vision and already-formidable improvisational paint-handling skills in preparation for total global domination... with blended drinks.

The intricate clusters of illustrational and decorative fragments that make up the recent, quirky epic experimental narrative paintings of TOM KNECHTEL are rooted in earlier, simpler, but no less startling canvases.

Recently emerging from Cal State Long Beach, JOHN KOLLER has been burning through the history of Modernist painting, incorporating what works for him and moving on to the next idiom. His recent ganny architectural abstractions are his most well-synthesized to date.

DAVID KORTY’s washy, optically tweaked urban snapshots rank among the most compelling and successful attempts to revitalize the landscape-painting tradition in the past decade.

The complex, chunkily layered landscape paintings of ANNIE LAPIN reflect an awareness of the ways in which visual attention has been altered by the Information Age — without the familiar preachiness or disinterest in the medium.

The fast, supple scenes rendered by JASMINE LITTLE are torrents of visual information that collapse or dissolve into impossible spaces while turning an especially acute focus on unlikely and mundane details.

UCLA grad student SPENCER LEWIS depicts hazy, light-filled clusters of phenomena derived from unlikely collisions of information, using a sumptuous palette and an uncommon but perfectly suited dry-brush technique.

With an onslaught of tangled Impure Pop for Then People, NICK LOWE skipped grad school to emerge with one of the most convincing voices of the new millennium’s spate of drawing-based neopsychedelia.

Having spent years perfecting a Renaissance-type oil-glazing technique to depict the feisty carnivalscape in various unconventional sexual tableaux, MONICA MAOLO had something of a breakthrough with her recent serene monochromatic color depictions of male figures completely encased in rubber.

Landscape sampler CONSTANCE MALINSON has been exploring a variety of hallucinatory recombinant strategies for a couple of decades, ranging from jarring postmodern patchworks of conceptual reference to Arcimboldo-like allegorical figuration to seamless, impossible aerial vistas.

I’m not sure for what highfalutin reason DANIEL MENDEL BLACK paints his sumptuous, bordering-on-terrifyingly-plain abstracts, but he digs Larry Cohen movies and Starcrash and hates the government, so whatever it is, it’s okay by me.

Bicoastal Impasto fiend SAM MESSER bears the stamp of someone who figured out his reason for painting early on and just kept going. His repeated depictions of Paul Auster’s manual typewriter, a praying monkey and various friends and family produce an oddly populist framework for his Soutinesque schmeer.

Brian Cooper, Art in Public (Man of Steel) (2007)

A curious omission from MOCA’s “WACK!” exhibit, ROBIN MITCHELL has recently been painting vibrant, scintillating abstractions that confute the pulsing insectoid transmissions of digitized data transfer with the harmonious Om of Western spiritualist abstraction à la Agnes Pelton.

Combining traditional graffiti style with new innovations, MAN ONE has managed to parlay his street cred into an actual living, including running his own Crewest Gallery and co-organizing the shamefully painted-out Meeting of Styles L.A. River mural.

I wandered into USC grad student DIANNA MOLZAN’s studio one night and liked what I saw: elegant formalist abstractions with a peculiar natural-history twist and a wobbly gravity.

The handsome rough-hewn paintings of REBECCA MORRIS possess a refreshing aggressiveness in their willingness to elbow enough room at the abstract counter to spread out, try things on for size, occasionally fall flat — and breathe!

Ferus Gallery original ED MOSES has been steadily producing interesting abstract painting for decades, but is only now experiencing the revival of interest his aleatory splashes and wonky grids deserve.

No one has been able to tell me if MICHAEL OLODORF still meets any of the criteria for this show — living, painting; in L.A. But I was so surprised and mystified when I came across his Humpy Dumpy paintings, I figured I’d give him the benefit of the doubt.

The marvelous three-dimensional trompe l’oeil paintings of KAZ OSHIRO are marvelous feats of painting craft, brilliant conversation pieces, representational conundrums and, sly, subtly detailed gibes at their own peculiar social mobility.

The muted, layered symmetries in CHRIS PATE’s burlap paintings would seem like ironic commentaries on abstraction’s descent into decorator-prop hell, except he’s just so damn good he makes you believe again.

The formal and narrative generosity of LARI PITTMAN’s work is staggering. Though he never lets anyone off the hook with tasteful design choices or one-dimensional punch lines, his work rewards the most casual gallery hopper and the most deeply entrenched art junkie with grace and wit.

In addition to several well-received bodies of work deriving from dog portraiture, M.A. PEERS (my spouse, but it took Don Suggs to persuade her to be in this show) has produced large-scale abstract collages, culinary mosaics, noncommissioned portraits of midlevel corporate executives, and painterly depictions of Yuppie-possessed teddy bears.


JANUARY 11-17 2008 LA WEEKLY 98
SOME PAINTINGS

In addition to his droll, lovely and marketable Modernist film-stock assemblages, CARTER POTTER has produced a skanky parallel oeuvre using partially demuded abandoned sofas and poured latex house paint, taking the medium's operative definition of paint applied to fabric stretched over a wooden framework to absurd literal extremes.

A couple of years ago, MONIQUE PRIETO abruptly reinvented her visual vocabulary from her familiar colorful biomorphic lavalampism into a more literal, literary and visually scrappy sensibility. The text takes the burden of nostalgia and ambiguity, and the visual is revitalized.

United by its subject matter and the artist's remarkable and ever-developing illusionistic technique, VICTORIA REYNOLDS' decade's alkyd riffs on realism for a decade, ranging from creepy variations on Margaret Keane's big-eye tradition to luminous unfinished domestic interiors to savvy multilayered deconstructions of the medium.

The recent exhibit of "Potion Paintings" by LINDA STARK was a prototype for an aesthetic based on the magical resonances of the materials, which alarmed some followers of her laboriously built-up, minimally imagist oil-paint reliefs — but no fear, her M.O. is to juggle multiple styles at once.

The monochromatic airbrush paintings of LAURIE STEELINK combine sweaty elements of tattoo design, heavy-metal fantasy art and van painting — and end up as cool and elegant as film noir.

Even though DON SUGGS seems to have spent most of his career making jameeves shifts in style and media, his own persistence is beginning to catch up with him. Last spring's QTIS survey (curated by me and Meg Linton) exposed the still center of the spinning Suggsian universe, and there's nowhere left to hide! Ha ha ha ha ha!

Always an accomplished abstract painter, MARIE THEBAULT's recent work teeters between jumbled, unintelligible, silkscreen-like geometric schema and tumultuous postapocalyptic landscapes (that often strangely resemble a painting studio).

The near-perfect kitsch of psychedelia is nowhere as deeply and lovingly explored as in the work of DANI TULL, though his drooping stoners and hippie cemeteries are only a fragment of his extensive multimedia oeuvre.

By insisting that their vernacular visual vocabularies are as valid as any other (and by looking just as good), the faux-outsider paintings of ESTHER PEARL WATSON beg the question of our condescension in assigning conditional significance to the work of folk artists.

The lightness of touch with which PATTY WICKMAN imbues her mysterious, simultaneously funny and spiritual allegorical realism is equaled only by the breathtaking virtuosity of her paint application, which tells a whole story in itself.

Young artists are just beginning to catch on to the breadth of work that gave L.A. international street cred in the pre-"Helter Skelter" '80s. Even though he was included in that landmark show, ROBERT WILLIAMS has continued to subvert the dominant hegemony with his meticulously rendered outlaw Americana cartoon surrealism.

I was surprised to discover that TONY KUDU'S busy allegorical pastiches are built from gradually accumulated layers of increasingly detailed improvisations, which make his intricately orchestrated, literate humanism just that much more extraordinary.