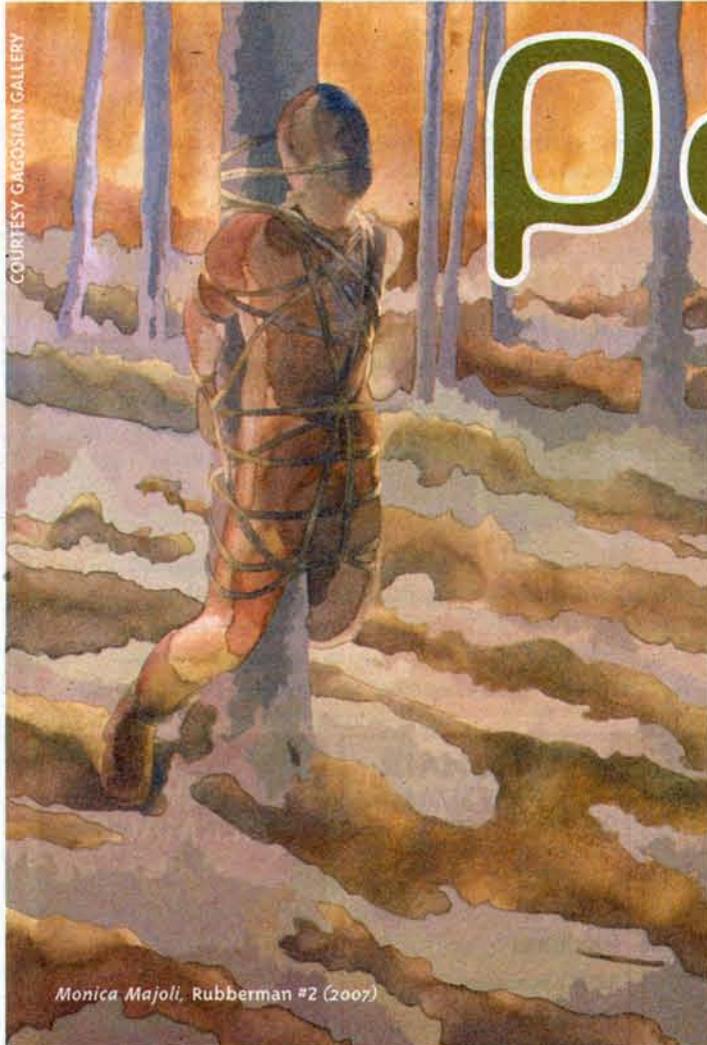


Some

The artists in the third L.A. Weekly Annual Biennial *****
CURATED AND WRITTEN BY DOUG HARVEY

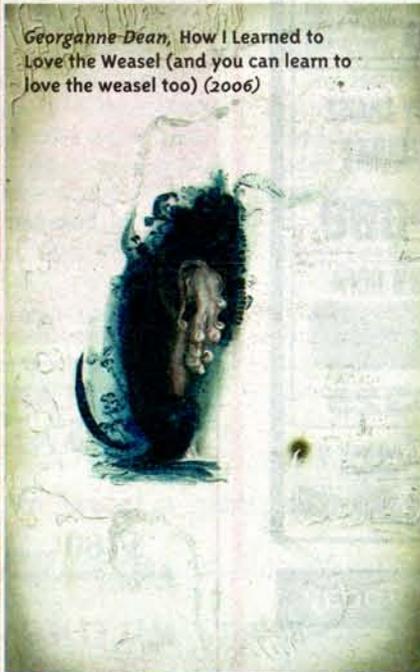
Paintings

COURTESY GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Monica Majoli, *Rubberman #2 (2007)*

Georganne Dean, *How I Learned to Love the Weasel (and you can learn to love the weasel too) (2006)*



*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! Is! 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 chameleonesque 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, wink wink? 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 précis (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



Brad Eberhard, *Let's Have Another Baby (2007)*

***** An exhibition featuring the work of these artists runs Jan. 12–Feb. 16 at Track 16 Gallery in Bergamot Station. Opening reception is Sat., Jan. 12, 7–11 p.m., with refreshments and performances by the Spirit Girls, Wounded Lion, John Kilduff of *Let's Paint TV*, and more.

Allison Schulnik, *Greeting (2007)*



Todd Hebert, Bubbles and Snowman #2 (2007)



amused me that at the point I began to write these capsule profiles, there were 78 — the same number as there are cards in a tarot deck, a pictorial system that condenses all the possibilities of life into one set of archetypes. Past, present, future — all will be revealed! Perhaps there's room for interpretation after all. Just cross my palm with silver.

In the past decade, **LISA ADAMS** has gone from smart and sweet formalist abstraction to carefully rendered, spiritually and politically infused natural-history symbolism, building a deeply authentic interdependence of form and content.

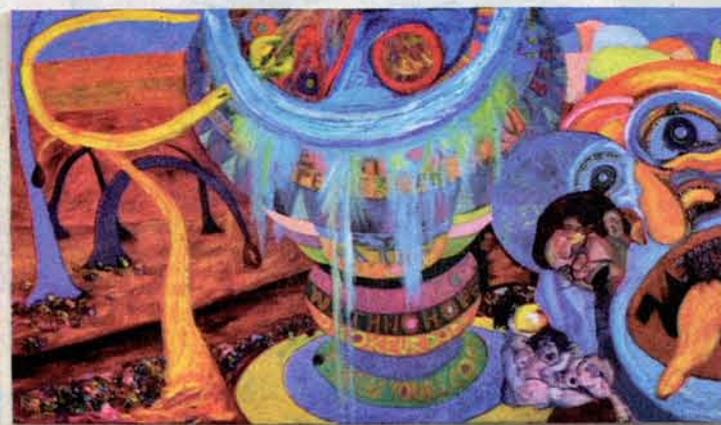
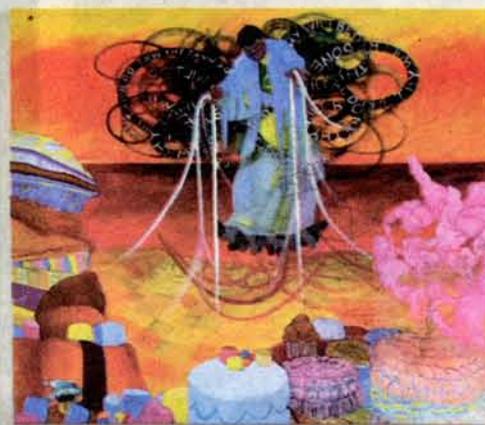
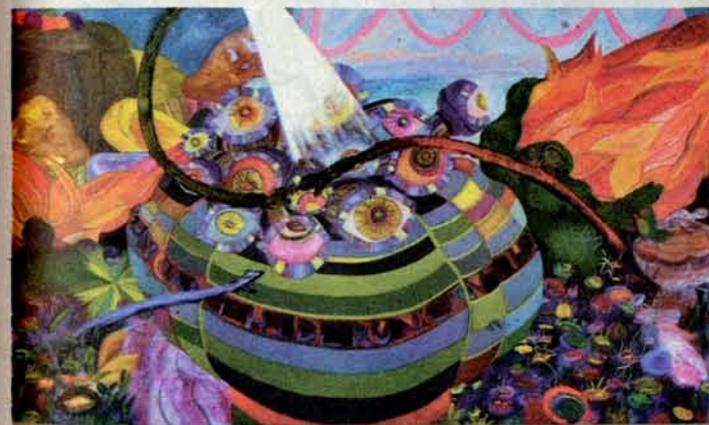
dreamlike space of unsettling enigma.

LYNNE BERMAN 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

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.



Walpa D'Mark, Do What Thy Wilt, Thy Wilt Be Done (2007)

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 washy, 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 infotainments that defy resolution. Or your mattress is free!

HILARY BAKER's pop-archetypal landscapes have a cartoon theatricality that goes beyond jaunty antics 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



Robin Mitchell, Ululation (2007)

with graffiti artist Devin "Relm" Flynn 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

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 minimalist 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-slackerism 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** chummed 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.

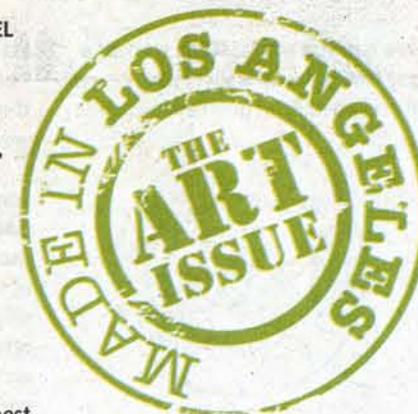
Claremont grad student **WALPA D'MARK**'s mythically (if ambiguously) charged, hypersaturated, densely packed confectionery landscape series epitomizes the best

of the recent neopsychedelic trend in painting.

There are many painters who rely on computers as a tool or arbitrary gimmick, but the recent striated abstract paintings of **LINDA DAY** translate digital structures into painting language in a seamless way that embiggens both.

Exploring the dark, glittery underbelly of the feminine, **GEORGANNE DEEN**'s curdled sweets marry underground comix to high fashion with a finely decorative impulse that shatters the distinction between surface and depth.

ADRIAN DE LA PEÑA has been creating paintings (and assorted other artifacts) as one aspect of his large-scale, long-term visionary narrative "Netsuke" — about the





Roger Herman, Azusa (2006)

imminent apocalypse-pre-emptive quartering of reality — since being contacted by an orbiting entity known as Dsurl in 1995.

TOMORY DODGE'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 cohering 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 abstrac-

tions — 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 EBNER** 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 **LLYN FOULKES** 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 sane man in the L.A. art world.

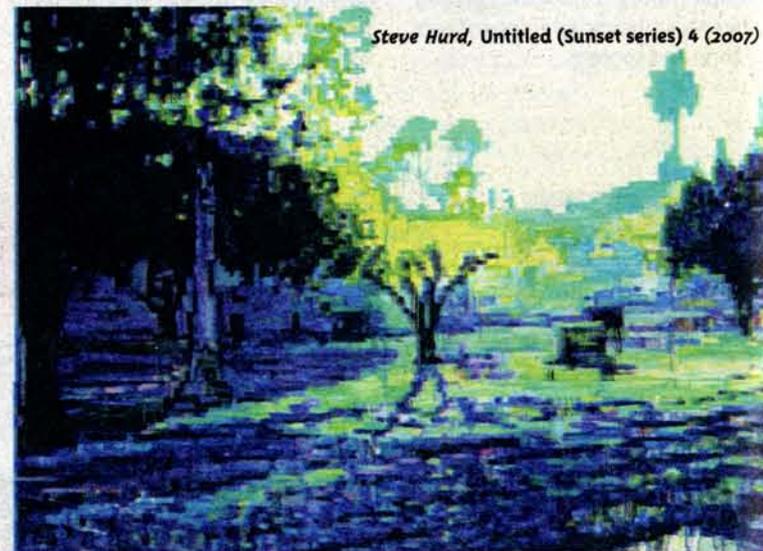
I never got how **CHARLES GARABEDIAN** fits that "Bad" painting category — complex arrangements of sophisticated chroma, draftsman-ship and mythic/political content, often on an epic scale. If half the artists in L.A. could paint this bad, I could fill Track 16 three times over.

The symmetrical cropping and shallow depth of 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.

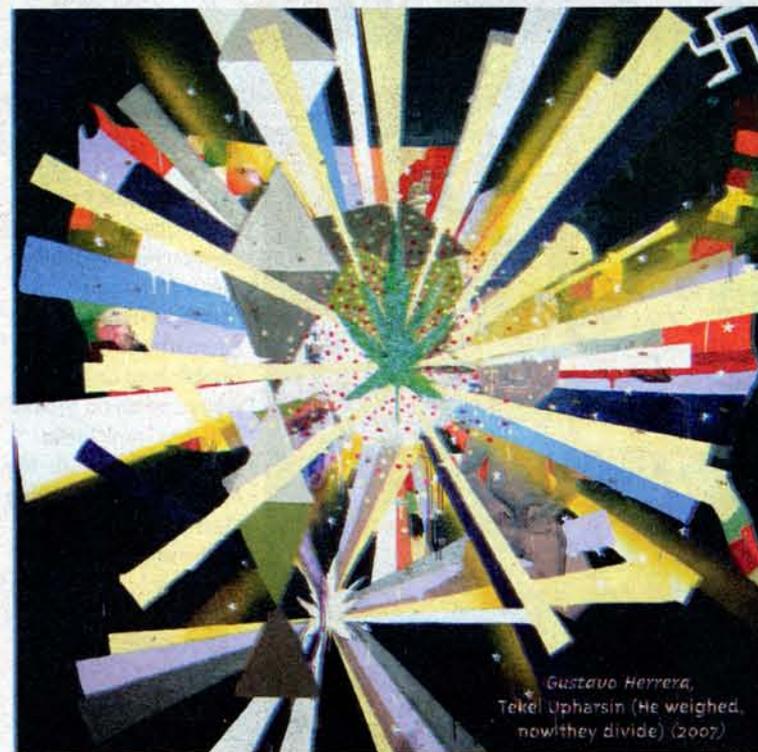
STEVE HURD has consistently used his considerable painting chops

The first "Supersonic" show, in the Caltech wind tunnel, was a glut — the only real relief was the installation of DIY painty-sculpty things by **GUSTAVO HERRERA**, whose work continues to offer an offhand abundance of scraggy-ass beauty and humor.

Nobody seems to know where the hell **DAVID HOCKNEY** lives, but his deceptively easy, light-filled representational paintings and his



Steve Hurd, Untitled (Sunset series) 4 (2007)



Gustavo Herrera, Tekel Upharsin (He weighed, now they divide) (2007)

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 virtuosic 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 "Billy" 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.

The atomized clouds of inverted language in **ALEXANDRA GRANT**'s pictures are almost too gorgeous for their own credibility as art-theory surrogates. Thank God. Beauty will get you through times of no words better than . . .

JAMES HAYWARD reduces his practice to a handful of fundamental constituents — color, surface, scale, gesture, occasional composition — producing objects with Zen-like phenomenological suchness and the topological intricacy of a choppy ocean of delicious frosting. Transcendently delectable.

against the bloat 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 bloat 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.

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** mashes 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.





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-vertiginous plaid-ass abstractions, 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.

Local public-access star **JOHN KILDUFF** (*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, quirkily 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 gnarly 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, choppily 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 exquisite 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 fleshly carnivalesque in various unconventional sexual tableaux, **MONICA MAJOLI** had something of a breakthrough with her recent serene monochrome watercolor depictions of male figures completely encased in rubber.

Landscape sampler **CONSTANCE MALLINSON** has been exploring a variety of hallucinatory recombinant strategies for a couple of decades, ranging from jarring postmodern



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 conflate 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 steadfastly 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 OLODORT** 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 Humpty Dumpty 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 entranced art junkie with graciousness 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. 48



William Brice, Untitled (2007)

◀33 SOME PAINTINGS

In addition to his droll, lovely and marketable Modernist film-stock assemblages, **CARTER POTTER** has produced a skanky parallel oeuvre using partially denuded 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 lava-lampism 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 fame-evasive shifts in style and media, his own persistence is beginning to catch up with him. Last spring's OTIS 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!

Always an accomplished abstract painter, **MARIE THIBEAULT's** recent work teeters between jumbled, unintelligible, silkscreenlike geometric schema

worth of meat painting has run the gamut from tiny, ornately framed potroast icons to luncheon slice détournement of high modernism — always disturbingly beautiful.

Renaissance dude **STEVE RODEN's** multivalent work is imbued with a profound familiarity with Modernist design principles and an avant-gardist appetite for getting lost in translation. But it was his paintings that first caught my attention, and which never fail to dazzle and mystify.

The ostentatiously thick paintings of **ALLISON SCHULNIK** have a European theatricality to them that may owe as much to her education as an experimental animator as to her affinities with proto-expressionists like James Ensor.

The sprawling multimedia oeuvre of **JIM SHAW** makes us sometimes forget that his encyclopedic knowledge of popular and esoteric culture was initially (and still periodically) manifested through smart, accomplished painting and drawing.

The gauzy, atmospheric airbrush paintings of **BRAD SPENCE** tackle pop-culture representations of philosophical truth, life after death, the therapeutic value of art, the nature of

memory and shrimp cocktails in one of the historically freshest styles going.

Noted curator **TYLER STALLINGS** has also been steadily producing remarkable little oil and

and tumultuous postapocalyptic landscapes (that often strangely resemble a painting studio).

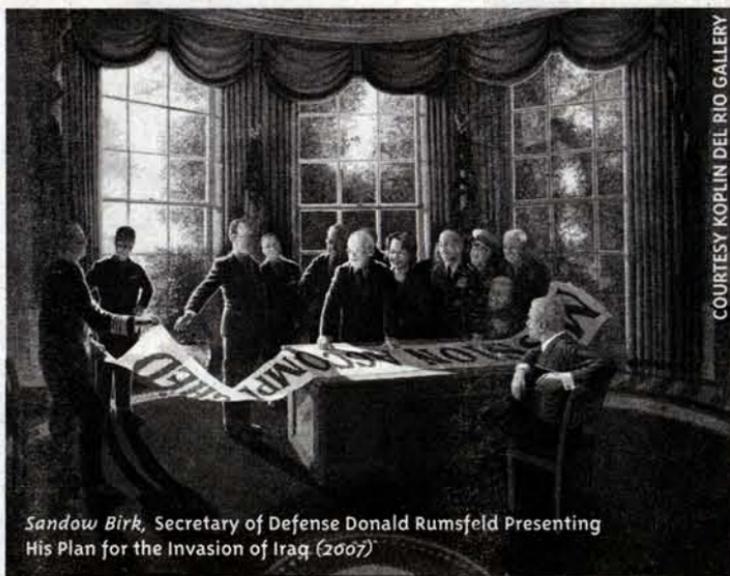
The unrepentant kitsch of psychedelia is nowhere as deeply and lovingly explored as in the work of **DANI TULL**, though his drooping stoners and hippie cavemen are only a fragment of his extensive multimedia oeuvre.

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 **TOM WUDL'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. ■



Sandow Birk, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld Presenting His Plan for the Invasion of Iraq (2007)

COURTESY KOPLIN DEL RIO GALLERY

