

READING CALIFORNIA: ART, IMAGE, AND IDENTITY, 1900-2000



Edited by
Stephanie Barron
Sheri Bernstein
Ilene Susan Fort

Preface by
Stephanie Barron

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

University of California Press BERKELEY • LOS ANGELES • LONDON

This book was published in conjunction with the exhibition *Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900–2000*, organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The exhibition was made possible by a major grant from the S. Mark Taper Foundation, founded in 1989, a private family foundation dedicated to enhancing the quality of people's lives. Additional support was provided by the Donald Bren Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, Bank of America, Helen and Peter Bing, Peter Norton Family Foundation, See's Candies, the Brotman Foundation of California, and Farmers Insurance. Primary in-kind support for the exhibition was provided by FrameStore. Additional in-kind support was provided by KLON 88.1 FM, Gardner Lithograph, and Appleton Coated LLC.

Exhibition Schedule

Section 1:

October 22, 2000–March 18, 2001

Sections 2, 3, and 4:

October 22, 2000–February 25, 2001

Section 5:

November 12, 2000–February 25, 2001

Copublished by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California, 90036, and University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London.

© 2000 by Museum Associates, Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without the written permission of the publishers.

Library of Congress

Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Reading California : art, image, and identity, 1900–2000 / edited by Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, Ilene Susan Fort.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-520-22766-2 (cloth : alk. paper) —

ISBN 0-520-22767-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Arts, American—California. 2. Arts, Modern—20th Century—California.

3. California—In art. I. Barron, Stephanie, 1950– II. Bernstein, Sheri, 1966– III. Fort, Ilene Susan.

NX510.C2 R43 2000
306.47'09794—dc21

00-055971

Director of Publications: Garrett White
Editors: Nola Butler and Thomas Frick
Designer: Scott Taylor
Production coordinators: Rachel Ware Zoon and Chris Coniglio
Supervising photographer: Peter Brenner
Rights and Reproductions coordinator: Cheryle T. Robertson

Printed by Gardner Lithograph, Buena Park, California, on Appleton Utopia Two Matte Text

The typefaces used in this book, Minion (Adobe) and Tarzana (Emigre), were designed in California. The title font, based on the letterforms on a 1940 California license plate, was created for the exhibition.

Front cover, details, from left to right:

Crate label for Rose Brand Oranges, Redlands Orange Growers' Association, c. 1910. The McClelland Collection

Will Connell, *Make-Up*, from the publication *In Pictures*, c. 1937, gelatin-silver print. Photographic History Collection, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, © Will Connell Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography

Carlos Almaraz, *Suburban Nightmare*, 1983, oil on canvas. The Buck Collection, Laguna Hills, California, © The Carlos Almaraz Estate

Back cover, details, from left to right:

Underwood and Underwood Publishers, *Yosemite Valley*, 1902, printed c. 1905, stereograph. Collection of David Knaus

Millard Sheets, *Angel's Flight*, 1931, oil on canvas. LACMA, gift of Mrs. L. M. Maitland, © Estate of Millard Sheets

Roger Minick, *Woman with Scarf at Inspiration Point, Yosemite National Park*, 1980, dye-coupler print. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kesner Gallery, © Roger Minick

Pages 2–3

Eileen Cowin, photographs from *Yearning for Perfection II*, 2000, billboard installation created for *Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900–2000*. Courtesy of the artist

CONTENTS

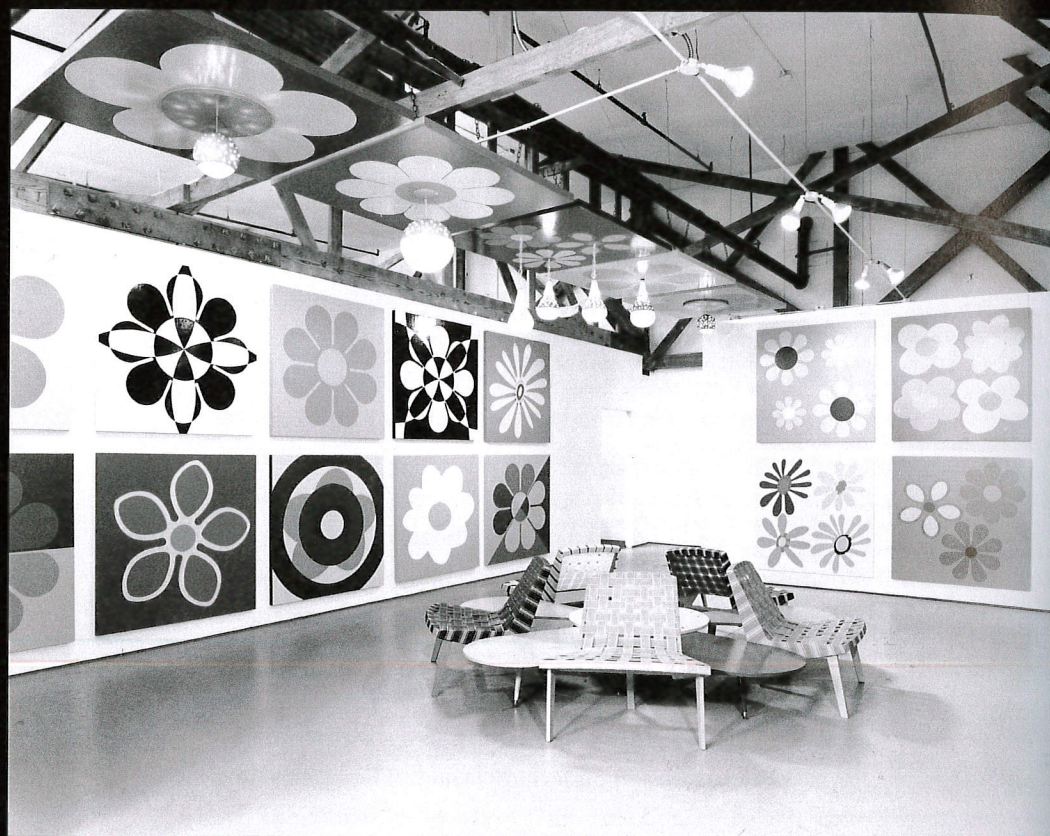
- 7 Preface and Acknowledgments
Stephanie Barron

THE WORLD MET ITSELF IN CALIFORNIA

- 15 Carey McWilliams's California: The Light and the Dark
Kevin Starr
- 31 Altered State(s): California Art and the Inner World
Ilene Susan Fort
- 51 Landscapes of Consumption: Auto Tourism and Visual Culture in California, 1920–1940
John Ott
- 69 California Welcomes the World: International Expositions, 1894–1940, and the Selling of a State
Carolyn Peter
- 85 Art School Sketches: Notes on the Central Role of Schools in California Art and Culture
Paul J. Karlstrom

WE HAD COME, WITHOUT KNOWING IT, TO OUR INEVITABLE PLACE

- 113 All about Eden
Blake Allmendinger
- 129 California through the Lens of Hollywood
Dana Polan
- 153 Music, Migration, and Myth: The California Connection
George Lipsitz
- 171 On Location: The Placement (and Replacement) of California in 1930s Photography
Sally Stein



Jim Isermann, *Flowers*,
installation view, 1986
Photograph © Anthony
Cunha, courtesy of
Richard Telles Fine Art

Lynn Zelevansky

A PLACE IN THE SUN: THE LOS ANGELES ART WORLD AND THE NEW GLOBAL CONTEXT

*A faint mist cast gauzy nets across the horizon heralding another perfect day.
It was Christmas again, another balmy golden California Christmas.*

Raymond Chandler, quoted by Alexis Smith, *Sea of Tranquillity*, 1982

It has often been said that, because of its inextricable ties to Hollywood, Los Angeles is a city of fantasy and imagination, experienced—even by those who know it intimately—through the illusory filter of its image in novels, films, and television. These constructions of L.A., with their connection to personal vision and folly, may exacerbate a tendency to romanticize the past. When as a relatively new arrival (I had been here four years) I first contemplated this essay, a friend cautioned that people see L.A. history from the perspective of their moment of entry—the point when they actually took up residence here.¹ Her warning implied that memory and experience could be obliterated with particular ease in this beautiful, seductive, and often fictionalized city.

I moved to L.A. in late February 1995, after a lifetime in New York and following a succession of cataclysmic events that deeply affected Southern California. Los Angeles was recovering from an economic recession, the riots of 1992, the fires of 1993, and the Northridge earthquake of 1994. The economy dictated low real estate values and, perhaps because of their relative youth, gave major cultural institutions a tenuousness unknown on the East Coast.² I had been coming to L.A. regularly for about ten years and thought I knew the city; in fact, I was familiar only with Santa Monica, West Hollywood, Mid-Wilshire, and the area of downtown that houses the Museum of Contemporary Art. Similarly, I thought I had some knowledge of the art scene here but quickly discovered that I was aware of only a single, thin layer of it.

Despite the difficulties of the recent past, as I arrived the Los Angeles art world was becoming an international force. This young but vital scene had long produced disproportionate numbers of compelling artists, but the city had lacked the artistic infrastructure to draw an aspiring avant-garde on a scale that Paris did before World War II and New York did afterwards. In the 1980s, many of L.A.'s most exciting younger artists still felt the need to move to New York for the sake of their careers. There, the national enveloped the regional and they were identified simply as "American." As the decade wore on, however, a few who elected to stay were able to develop and maintain international profiles from a Southern California base.³ In the nineties, a strong contingent of artists who remained in L.A. achieved prominence on the East Coast and abroad.⁴ Others began to move here, seeing Los Angeles as a viable alternative to New York.⁵ Although still low on powerful commercial galleries and critical press, L.A. was recognized in international exhibitions, catalogues, and articles as one of the most exciting places in the world for the production of contemporary art.⁶ The essay that follows is an attempt to understand this complex and continually changing cultural dynamic.

ACCORDING TO THE CHILEAN ART CRITIC Nelly Richards, for modernists unifying philosophical and aesthetic truths were synthesized "at the centre [New York and the Western European capitals], which radiated the light of wisdom and knowledge towards a periphery shadowed in deficiency."⁷ The periphery she addresses is Latin America, but the idea applies equally well to California and other cultural enclaves. Provincialism in the arts for a long time has connoted a reworking of out-of-date trends that originated in Paris, Berlin, or New York and were only partially digested by distant communities. The irony of Richards's statement lies in the simplistic analysis that she parodies, which assumes that information flows exclusively in one direction. Like certain other regional hubs, Los Angeles has not, for a long time, fit the traditional model.⁸

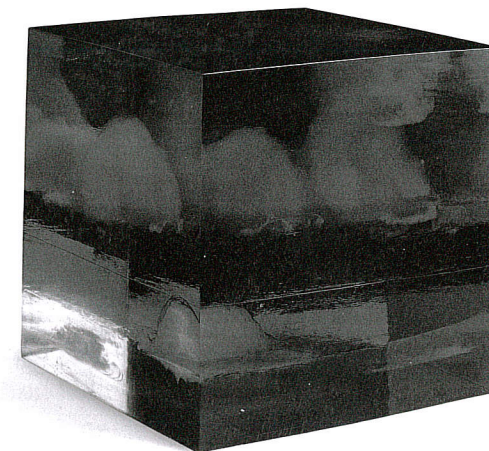
Even during World War II, emissaries from east of the Mississippi, such as Museum of Modern Art curator Dorothy Miller, traveled to the West Coast to bring back works to show.⁹ By the 1960s, Los Angeles art was identified by certain trends originating here, notably the L.A. Look (or Finish Fetish) and Light and Space. Both were associated with the Southern California climate and landscape. Light and Space artists created often exquisitely beautiful, ethereal installations that explored the effects of light on three-dimensional surfaces. Finish Fetish artists shared an involvement with technological

processes and materials with many of their New York counterparts, but they expressed this concern differently. Their use of brightly colored industrial plastics and paints referred to local sociocultural phenomena such as the ubiquity of automobiles and the popularity of surfing. What the venerable curator Henry Hopkins termed the "clean side" of the city's aesthetics came to epitomize Southern California.¹⁰

However, the range of art produced in Los Angeles during the 1960s and 1970s was actually quite diverse. The flip side of Finish Fetish was California Assemblage, represented in L.A. by figures such as Edward Kienholz, Wallace Berman,¹¹ George Herms, and Llyn Foulkes. Deliberately dark and messy and made from the detritus of daily life, it was part and parcel of Beat and hippie culture and often carried a political or social charge. However, while Assemblage has been a vital tradition in L.A., it has also been associated with Dada in Europe and neo-Dada in New York and is as much a product of Northern California as Southern.¹² Similarly Conceptualism, feminist art, and body or performance work were international art trends to which Los Angeles made significant contributions.¹³ The work of Light and Space artists such as Robert Irwin and James Turrell was sometimes conflated with the Finish Fetish group and sometimes understood as a spin on New York Minimalism.¹⁴ Only Finish Fetish was called the "L.A. Look," a term that simultaneously suggested the superficial world of fashion and underscored its connection to the city.¹⁵

In the 1960s, when curator Anne Ayres moved to Los Angeles, she found it to be "a stupendous Pop art tableau."¹⁶ It makes perfect sense then that L.A. became identified artistically with work of that decade. Ayres describes "Finish Fetish" as "those glossy, glamorous, 'stylish' objects . . . [whose] astonishing mix of Pop and Minimalism . . . seemed perverse in [its] blatant hedonism."¹⁷ Certainly the L.A. Look's unabashed pleasure in materials and color and its inclination to meld nature and geometry, metaphor and object, was in sharp contrast to the systemic rigor and purposeful "difficulty" of New York Minimalism. To take one instance: Clouds float within the pure outlines of a ten-inch resin cube from 1966 by Peter Alexander. Blue and gold tones within the plastic suggest that we are looking not at a seascape but at an actual piece of California, a bit of sunset that

Peter Alexander,
Cloud Box, 1966
© Peter Alexander,
private collection



miraculously has been captured and preserved. It is as if Alexander had conflated the rigorous forms of New York Minimalism with one of those souvenirs that purports to contain air or sand from a sacred site. Today the idea that we are looking at a piece of Southern California from the sixties imparts the sweet, sad resonance of a vanished moment.

The dominance of Finish Fetish had its negative side. John Baldessari recalls a time when the L.A. Look so pervaded the Southern California scene that there was little room for anything else. During the late sixties and seventies, he used his position as a professor at California Institute of the Arts to create a supportive milieu for alternative forms, inviting like-minded artists from elsewhere (most of them conceptually oriented) to teach at or visit the school: "We were such an island here; I made a point of hiring New York and European artists to complicate the mix. I felt there had to be more than plastic in L.A."¹⁸ He made certain that his students heard about artistic developments in other places and encouraged them to move to New York upon graduation, because he believed that there would be no support for them here.¹⁹ One of his students created and ran an exhibition space at the school called Gallery A402, after the room it occupied. Dan Graham, Art and Language, Daniel Buren, Lawrence Wiener, Joseph Kosuth, and Hans Haacke were among those who showed there. Baldessari does not believe that most of those artists otherwise could have exhibited in Los Angeles at the time.²⁰

The association of Finish Fetish with L.A. was so enduring that, more than a quarter of a century after those artists had emerged, the Museum of Contemporary Art's chief curator Paul Schimmel mounted his 1992 exhibition *Helter Skelter* in perhaps inevitable opposition to that type of work. By this time, some of L.A.'s most internationally prominent artists—Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, for example—were emphasizing the turbulent underpinnings and psychosexual energies roiling beneath the surface of this Edenic locale. The exhibition included somewhat varied aesthetic approaches, but its title made reference to the Beatles' song and the murderous rampages of Charles Manson and his gang that it inspired, emphasizing violence and emotional dislocation.²¹ Schimmel wrote in his catalogue essay that much of the work in the show manifested a "sense of psychological alienation, dispossession, and disorder..."²² He wanted the exhibition to demonstrate that Los Angeles had an authentic culture of its own and that, "in this case, 'regional' art need not bear the burden of provincialism."²³ His strategy worked; in New York and elsewhere, *Helter Skelter* marked the beginning of a new level of recognition of Los Angeles as a vital center for contemporary art.

While disputing one clichéd notion of Los Angeles art, *Helter Skelter* unwittingly supported another provincial stereotype. Embodied in the juxtaposition of Finish Fetish and Assemblage, this was the idea that Los Angeles could be reduced to oppositions between beauty and ugliness, Hollywood fantasy and gritty social reality, emotional heat and hipster cool. Exhibitions of the eighties and nineties such as *L.A. Hot and Cool*, mounted at MIT's List Visual Arts Center in 1987, and *Sunshine and Noir*, conceived and executed at the Louisiana Museum in Denmark ten years later, perpetuated the same construction. Such unnuanced dichotomies are by nature false,²⁴ but the contrast between continual sunshine and emotional and intellectual darkness is especially difficult to counter because it is tied to entrenched images of Los Angeles.

The title *Sunshine and Noir* was taken from the name of a chapter in Mike Davis's influential treatise on Los Angeles, *City of Quartz*.²⁵ Davis, himself a mythologist of false dichotomies, excels at evoking familiar but compelling images: Inextricably linked to Hollywood, characterized by physical beauty and idyllic weather as well as a lack of breeding and an inordinate hunger for money, Los Angeles "has come to play the double role of utopia and dystopia for advanced capitalism."²⁶ He describes in familiar terms "the destruction of intellectual sensibility in the sun-baked plains."²⁷ Seduced by the promise of economic reward, talents are wasted, trivialized, destroyed: "Fitzgerald reduced to a drunken hack, West rushing to his own apocalypse, ... Faulkner rewriting second-rate scripts, Brecht raging against the mutilation of his work."²⁸ Davis's book, first published in 1990 and issued in paperback two years later, was perfectly timed, as was the exhibition *Helter Skelter*, which opened in January 1992. Given the natural and social disasters that occurred here between April 1992 and January 1994, dystopic images seemed to predominate in Los Angeles during the first half of the nineties.

If all these notions about Los Angeles and its art are now and always have been far too limited to convey the nature of the city and the breadth and depth of work produced here, their persistence may be the result of L.A.'s unique origins. A complex social environment with a rich multicultural legacy, it was defined from its development in the late nineteenth century onward by the boosterism of real estate interests.²⁹ Built after World War II to resemble the suburban mecca (or consumer utopia) that it later mythologized in television comedies such as *Ozzie and Harriet* and *Leave It to Beaver*, it has long been perceived as lacking culture and history.

And in fact Los Angeles is an anomaly—a world city without a significant publishing industry. Consequently, a broad-based and consistent record

of its rich intellectual and cultural life has been lacking.³⁰ Even today, there is little art press, and galleries have a difficult time surviving.³¹ In New York, Paris, London, or Tokyo the myriad newspapers, news and fashion magazines, and cultural journals that regularly air opinions on art see themselves as national or international. However, they actually have a strong local bias, acting as boosters for their city's culture. In contrast, L.A.'s dominant contribution to communications is made through the entertainment business, which, with its truly global market and the transient lifestyle of much of its top talent, has no motivation whatsoever to think locally.

In contrast to the paucity of critical activity, L.A.'s major art institutions, including the J. Paul Getty Trust, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the UCLA Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, have enjoyed considerable growth in recent decades.³² This development has broadened and deepened the city's cultural profile and created a generally more sophisticated, art-friendly environment. The institutions involved with contemporary art have supported Los Angeles artists through exhibitions and acquisitions programs, although often not to the extent desired.³³ It seems logical that young Los Angeles art institutions, situated on the western edge of the North American continent and eager for global recognition, at times may have emphasized their international profile over the need to serve their immediate communities. Through the 1980s they would have been keenly aware of the stigma that, everywhere but New York, was attached to "local" (read "provincial") art and designed their programs accordingly.³⁴

But even under the best of circumstances, museums only provide part of the support needed for contemporary art. In the absence of a diverse critical press and a strong art market, since the 1920s the schools have been the glue that has held the Los Angeles art world together. According to critic Michael Duncan, writing as early as 1994, "L.A.'s resurgence is attributable to the competitive nature of the five strong art schools (CalArts, Otis, UCLA, the Art Center, and Claremont) and to the fact that so many younger artists now move here rather than New York for cheap studio space."³⁵ In Los Angeles many of the best-known artists teach (which is not the case in New York), and it is still true that most artists in town can trace their roots back to one of the schools here. The schools employ artists, supply social cohesion, and populate and enliven the scene. In the face of a lack of published criticism, they have offered a sophisticated theoretical discourse. Of course, institutions' philosophical and aesthetic agendas can be oppressive in their own right, and the

schools in Los Angeles have as frequently provided principles against which to react as they have structures within which to create.³⁶ Nevertheless, they remain the art world's most significant sites of argument and community.

Although the scarcity of critical press of necessity limits the variety of opinions expressed, artists have found freedom in the remove from what photographer Judy Fiskin terms the "thick dialogue" of New York.³⁷ Alexis Smith for one finds the lack of a broad audience positive for artists and their work. She sums up the situation succinctly, saying, "What we do really well is produce art. What we don't do well is what you do with it after it's made—write about it, collect it, believe in it."³⁸ Despite whatever orthodoxies the schools may have propounded, and perhaps because neither commerce nor criticism impact its art world that strongly, Los Angeles has accommodated idiosyncrasy extremely well. Artists outside the mainstream often have been able to sustain their work and maintain a public life here. Their visions have made a more exciting mix of aesthetic possibilities.³⁹ Through the 1990s the city offered the time necessary to develop and deepen an artistic vision, away from the insistent demands of the New York and European markets.

It is significant that Los Angeles's artistic importance has coalesced when the didacticism characteristic of much influential art of the eighties has—at least for the moment—come to seem stodgy: overly proper in its adherence to an explicitly postmodern or politically correct agenda. At the same time, many younger artists in Europe and the United States are giving priority to the visual as opposed to the conceptual and demonstrating an interest in what was once denigrated as "formalism." In the last five to seven years, art in Los Angeles has been critically apprehended through an internationally influential discourse on beauty, pleasure, and sentiment. Notions such as these, implicitly considered suspect, generally were not entertained in the 1980s.⁴⁰ An early exhibition to explore such themes was *La Belle et La Bête: Un Choix de Jeunes Artistes Américains*, presented at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1995. In her catalogue essay, curator Lynn Gumpert notes that the seventeen artists in the show "share a fascination with both the beautiful and the grotesque" and that "they are not alone; beauty is once again a subject of interest and heated debate in American contemporary art circles. Banished from critical discourse in the 1970s and 1980s, beauty is being contemplated anew, often in conjunction with its opposite, ugliness."⁴¹

That same year, Klaus Kertess organized the Whitney Biennial around the notion of metaphor, in purposeful opposition to the literalness that was fundamental to Minimalism, Pop art, and much that came after them.



Lari Pittman, *Spiritual and Needy*, 1991-92
Courtesy of Alice and Marvin Kosmin

("Literalness" in this sense implies that the physical object is the exclusive site of meaning, rejecting metaphor, illusionism, and the artwork's traditional role as a representation of the actual world.)⁴² Regarded as an antidote to the much-maligned "multicultural blitzkrieg" of the 1993 biennial, this exhibition stressed an attribute every bit as amorphous and romantic as beauty: "sensibility."⁴³ Fatigue with the excesses of theoretically based art is evident in critic Ken Johnson's comments that the theme of metaphor countered "the discipline imposed by some of the scholars of Babel," and that in their efforts to extract sociopolitical content from art, such theorists too often have eliminated "the needs, desires, and metaphorical ambi-

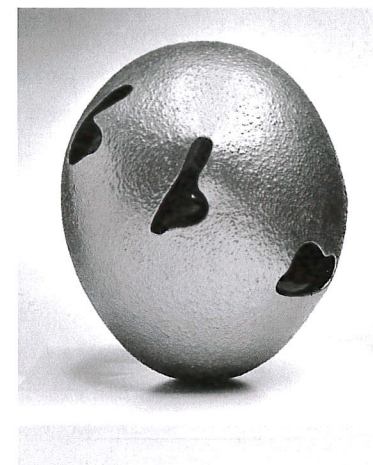
guities from art's body, causing a kind of hermeneutically induced anorexia."⁴⁴ Johnson noted that the show exhibited a "New York-centric pluralism" despite the inclusion of artists from Canada and Mexico and from "such *outlying art centers* as Los Angeles, Chicago, and Austin [*italics mine*]."⁴⁵ He also remarked on the presence of more traditional work, notably painting.⁴⁶

Los Angeles would have to wait until 1997 to be highlighted in a Whitney Biennial. According to critic Brooke Adams, that exhibition's "emphasis on photography, installations, film and video, its showcasing of L.A. artists both established and emerging, and its cooled-out, laid-back tempo, . . . broadly conform[ed] to the new rhythm of creation in the decentered, off-on-your-own 'nineties.'" Further illuminating the way that prevalent notions about Los Angeles dovetailed with fashion in art at the time, the show was thought to be sparked by "a post-PC attitude of laissez-faire fluidity toward issues of sex, gender, race, and nationality."⁴⁷

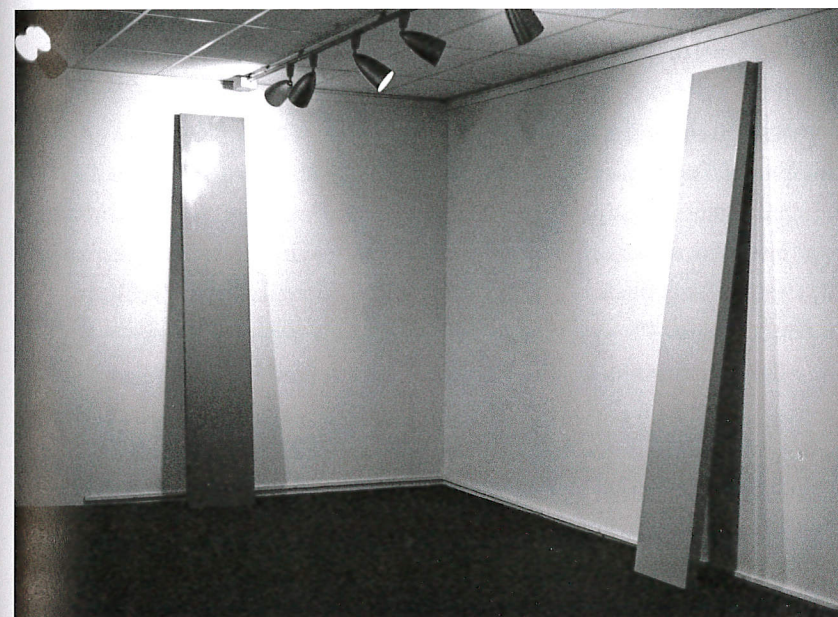
The association of Los Angeles with visual gratification seemingly unattached to social and political concerns (visual hedonism, if you like) in a sense simply updates the cliché of L.A. as the home of slick, colorful Finish Fetish art. Much of the most compelling work emerging in New York in the middle nineties—lush and accessible paintings by John Currin, Elizabeth

Peyton, and Lisa Yuskavage, for example, or unabashedly beautiful, even lyrical objects and photographs by Gabriel Orozco—embrace visual gratification and sentiment as much as any work from L.A., but Los Angeles has been seen as a hub of such concerns. Formally engaging and sophisticated paintings by Lari Pittman, Laura Owens, Monique Prieto, and Kevin Appel have become emblematic of this aesthetic, as have furniture and housewares cum sculpture created by Jorge Pardo and Jim Isermann. Isermann's frequently handmade, brightly colored, and exuberant objects pointedly refer to L.A.'s long association not just with design but also with craft. Blurring the distinction between fine and applied art, they recall 1960s ceramics by Kenneth Price as well as John McCracken's wood planks of the same decade, coated with shiny plastic in Pop colors such as bubble-gum pink.

Los Angeles artists have been thought of as—and in some cases looked down upon for—"doing rather than thinking."⁴⁸ They have been seen as lacking the intellectual backbone of East Coast artists, just as L.A. itself lacked the intellectual infrastructure of New York. Since in New York the understanding, appreciation, and promotion of new art have depended greatly on the analysis that surrounded it, it follows that the perception of superficiality in relation to



Ken Price, *Gold*, 1988
© Ken Price, photograph © Museum Associates/LACMA



John McCracken, *The Absolutely Naked Fragrance*, 1967
© John McCracken, photograph courtesy of L.A. Louver Gallery

L.A. art has been due, in large measure, to the lack of critical press here. It is thus highly significant that the ideological framework for the contemporary focus on the visual—the first critical trend to highlight Los Angeles—has come not from Europe or New York, but from the western United States. It is an approach that, by (somewhat defensively) endorsing ideas of visual pleasure and popular entertainment, makes a virtue out of what was seen, in the corridors of power, as a vice.

This is the first time that an internationally influential art ideology has emerged from California. Even in the sixties, when *Artforum* was (for less than two years) published in Los Angeles, the mode of analyzing Finish Fetish used by its then contributing editor, John Coplans, bore the unmistakable stamp of the East Coast. In order for Californians to be taken seriously, Coplans apparently felt the need to use the stripped-down style, concentration on phenomenological description, and specific language characteristic of writings by artist and theorist Donald Judd.⁴⁹

Today's advocates of visual gratification no longer feel the need to describe art from Southern California in the theoretical terms of New York or Europe. Rather, they place Los Angeles in the forefront of current practice, putting the formal and sensual attributes of a work before its extra-art implications. The most eloquent voice for this position is Dave Hickey, whose timely 1993 book *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* set the parameters for the discussion internationally. Hickey proclaimed that "in images, . . . beauty was the agency that caused visual pleasure in the beholder; and any theory of images that was not grounded in the pleasure of the beholder begged the question of their efficacy and doomed itself to inconsequence."⁵⁰ A group of writers shares his agenda, among them *Los Angeles Times* critics Christopher Knight and David Pagel and the editor of *Art Issues*, Gary Kornblau, whose press published Hickey's book. Knight, in the introduction to an interview with Kornblau, credits Kornblau with helping to ignite "the surprising recent debate about the once-taboo subject of beauty's role in contemporary art."⁵¹

This emphasis on "beauty" is often accompanied by a national and regional chauvinism that is not wholly unexpected, given the historical dominance of Europe and New York. Hickey tells us that "Europeans (who no longer have any concept of cool) do irony best, while Americans (who are only now learning to dissemble with aplomb) are best at cool."⁵² He suggests that "the [unhappy] fate of cool American art in the nineteen seventies, after its apotheosis in the sixties, may be attributed to the European turn of critical

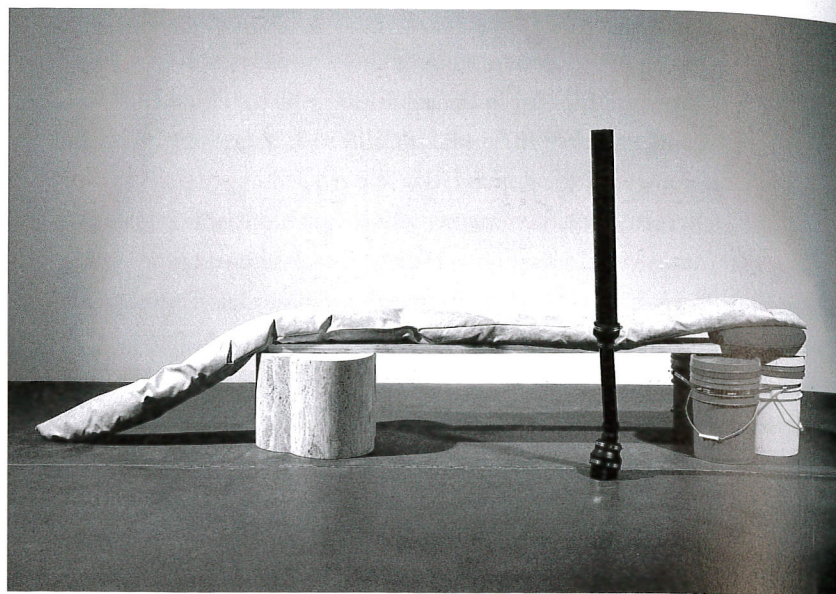
fashion during those years."⁵³ Gary Kornblau adds a Southern California spin in reviewing an ambitious presentation of Conceptual art at MOCA: "It's not surprising that much of the art in the exhibition which still holds us was made by artists who worked in Southern California . . . for here creativity is primarily the domain of the popular, not fine arts."⁵⁴

The writers in question never actually define beauty. To explain it as the agency that causes visual pleasure, as Hickey does, is almost tautological and reveals nothing: What gratifies one person visually may leave another cold. As *New Yorker* critic Peter Schjeldahl tells us, "Beauty is not a concept . . . [It is] in the eye—and the brain and the gut—of the viewer."⁵⁵ Notions such as beauty or sensibility are intellectually suspect precisely because, by definition, they appeal to a realm that can only be validated individually. Therefore, a rhetorical flourish is all that is required to justify them. Once justified rhetorically, they are malleable and can be linked to ideologies from democracy to fascism.⁵⁶ In the art arena, if there is no standard against which the concept of beauty can be measured, then power in the hands of the critic is unchecked. His or her authority—presumably based on heightened taste and sensitivity (connoisseurship)—can, like a belief in God, be questioned but logically cannot be denied. The situation is particularly problematic in Los Angeles, where Knight, Kornblau, and their associates occupy most of the very few critical platforms available. Hickey himself made this point when, fostering his image as an iconoclast, he recently came out against consensus in art, stating that "if two art critics agree, there's no reason for one of them to be there."⁵⁷

Given the city's unique and long-standing relationship to the issue, it is not surprising that the debate on beauty is nowhere more politicized than it is in Los Angeles. The artistic population of L.A. is more diverse than ever, and recently some artists and their supporters with other points of view have begun to critique the notion of beauty put forth by Hickey and his colleagues. Philosopher Sande Cohen cautions that, for the writers associated with Hickey and *Art Issues*, "works of art are not subject to economic categories, most especially commodification. One of the chief premises of this . . . criticism is that evaluative language and economics are brought together as categories that a work of art *refutes* in its very 'objectness.'"⁵⁸

Margaret Morgan has characterized the current discussion of beauty as an "ideological shift away from a visual arts culture in which intellect, activism and analysis are deemed worthwhile to one in which localized and depoliticized arguments about taste and beauty dominate." She adds, "In historical cycles of even the past thirty years, it is easy to trace the fashionability of ideas

Jason Rhodes and
Jorge Pardo, *#1 Nafta
Bench*, 1996
Collection of Rosa and
Carlos de la Cruz



and the machinations of a market more interested in blandness, sensation and decor.”⁵⁹ While ultimately this may be accurate, it is also true that all influential trends—even the most intellectual—exist as part of the same market-driven dynamic. If today the market is invested in sensation, tomorrow it may turn to some new form of theory, as it has in the past.

In addition, even relatively recent experience demonstrates that shifts in artistic trends are rarely as extreme in retrospect as they appear at the time they are happening. (Consider the now-evident relationship between Abstract Expressionism and early Pop art⁶⁰ or the fact that the seeds of post-Minimalism were present in Minimalism from the beginning).⁶¹ The current swing of the pendulum has been characterized as a return to formalism.⁶² However, formalism never disappeared. Take as examples from the 1980s the visually exacting work of L.A. Conceptualist Stephen Prina or the graphically punchy combinations of words and images by New Yorker Barbara Kruger. Similarly, consciousness of precedent, which characterizes much postmodern production of the 1980s and early 1990s, is not absent today.⁶³ It is just less dominant in current art than it was ten years ago. For instance, the elegant and moving films and photographs of L.A.’s Sharon Lockhart refer to such diverse sources as Renaissance portraiture, Japanese prints, and French New Wave cinema. Her most ambitious projects, done in Brazil and Japan, are both visually and theatrically compelling in their own terms, but they also explore form and meaning in reference to ethnographic film. Thus the change we are seeing is

one of emphasis; it is a question of the relationship between aesthetic and intellectual components within a work.

In fact, today’s art world diverges from the recent past less in its concern for form than in the nature of its pluralism—the fact that artists who paint, sculpt, photograph, or practice updated types of Conceptualism or installation can exhibit comfortably in the same space. Theirs is a post-postmodernism (or a late postmodernism) that rejects orthodoxy and “takes pleasure in the confusion of boundaries.”⁶⁴ These artists do not just embrace collaboration, they have no qualms about melding very different aesthetics. Thus, *#1 Nafta Bench* (1996) combines Jorge Pardo’s sleek, quasi-modernist designs that straddle the line between furniture and sculpture with Jason Rhoades’s accumulations of commonplace objects. Conceived by an Anglo and a Latino, it was made of parts created by craftsmen in Mexico and by industrial processes in the United States. Formally compelling and playful though it is, political and theoretical dimensions are evident in its title, which underscores and illuminates the work’s mode of fabrication, its satirical content, and its implicit rejection of heroic notions of the individual creator.

#1 Nafta Bench addresses certain issues that were current a decade or two ago, but it approaches them with a very different attitude.⁶⁵ In the 1980s and early 1990s much of the most influential art demanded a theoretical analysis informed by feminism, multiculturalism, queer theory, or Marxism (often expressed in the artist’s keen awareness of the commodity-based system within which she or he functioned).⁶⁶ It is that didacticism—the insistent connection to specific theoretical issues—that has, for the moment, come to seem old-fashioned. Today, even the postmodern notion that all values are contingent and changeable, rather than universal and enduring, can be seen as an important tenet of what—ironically—became its own pervasive orthodoxy. The desire on the part of some younger artists to fully and openly embrace formal issues seems to be a stand not just against the oppressive aspects of eighties political correctness but against dogmatism of all kinds. For them, fervent theoretical positions, even those advocating the lack of fixed meanings, hold little sway.

The multifaceted pluralism of the current crop of artists is also a reflection of an increasingly contingent and fragmented environment. Art writer and professor Kobena Mercer warns against “the seductive attraction of abstract polarities like the local and the global because they give an illusion of theoretical mastery over an unstable world of risk and uncertainty.”⁶⁷ (The same could, of course, be said about “sunshine and noir”). In addition, in

contemporary discourse there is a tendency tacitly to elevate the global above the local. With these caveats in mind, it is nevertheless the case that in the last two decades, many people have become increasingly migratory. In addition, the development of a seemingly borderless electronic communications network has intimately and profoundly affected huge populations. The art world has seen a proliferation of biennial and triennial exhibitions in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America that have made a whole class of artists into nomads. As artists travel more and more to make work and advance their careers, curators, dealers, and collectors follow. The truth is that few of us in the art world are as tied to a local milieu as we once were.

This globalization has affected Los Angeles, sending its artists and art professionals abroad in greater numbers and with increased frequency, and making the city's aesthetic production more accessible to those who live at a distance from it. It is not just that ease of travel and communications have made the world smaller; it is that global trade and media have brought notions of world culture to our television and computer screens. Locations at a remove from our own have become more broadly intriguing, and we are more likely to act on our interest. Like other "outlying centers," Los Angeles has become a newly important stop on the world art tour.

Globalization also makes it increasingly clear that centrality is itself a construction, since every location is marginal to someplace else. Today, New York is more a crucial marketplace for art than an essential location for its production. The shared and growing realization that art can come from anywhere to an economic clearinghouse is probably at the heart of much of the current traffic in culture. That said, it is also true that Los Angeles's physical distance from other intellectual centers continues to shape its art and life.

IT WAS ONLY AFTER I MOVED TO LOS ANGELES that I was forcefully struck by the city's geographically imposed cultural insularity. Suddenly I felt isolated. Breaking news of international artistic trends was not, and still is not, as readily available here as it was, and is, in New York. Oddly enough, in my years of visiting Los Angeles it did not occur to me that the second most important city for contemporary art in the United States was in some ways as remote as Havana or Johannesburg. This may have been because, under certain circumstances and in some cosmopolitan centers, the periphery can be good for art making. For artists in Southern California there has been a combination of freedom and visibility that would have been impossible where economic and critical imperatives were more pressing. Indeed, L.A.'s

successful accommodation to marginality is one of the attributes that makes it ideally suited to the emerging global culture.

So it is not accidental that Los Angeles has been recognized as one of the most important locations worldwide for contemporary art in the era of globalization. The city's artistic moment has been defined by wide-ranging, high-quality art making, associations with beauty and pleasure, institutional maturation, and even the presence of an ideology to support some of its more high-profile production. All of this has occurred in a locale that manifests a "posturban" sensibility, where "subjectivity is rendered heterogeneous, nomadic, and self-critical."⁶⁸ Today, technology threatens to replace public space with virtual space. In such a situation, centers and peripheries equally would become portals or transfer points. Los Angeles, on the western edge of the North American continent, far from other cultural hubs, a decentralized metropolis whose intellectual life is diffused, taking place in a hundred different pockets of activity within the region, is almost designed to function in this way. Already a "vagabond environment . . . that refuse[s] the common-places of hearth and home,"⁶⁹ it is probably the ideal cultural matrix for the twenty-first century.

Lynn Zelevansky is curator of modern and contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. She was co-curator of *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958–1968* (1998) and curator of *Robert Therrien* (2000).

1 My thanks to Judy Spence for this observation.

2 In the early 1990s many museums were in serious financial straits. The Brooklyn Museum, the Detroit Art Institute, and the Whitney Museum of American Art come immediately to mind. However, in New York there was a sense (right or wrong) that the powers that be would never allow these museums to falter. In my experience, there was less confidence of this in Los Angeles.

3 This had also been the case for a handful of earlier artists, John Baldessari, Chris Burden, Robert Irwin, and Ed Ruscha among them. Internationally prominent artists of the 1980s who worked in L.A. include

Jonathan Borofsky, Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, and Charles Ray.

4 For example, a look at *Art in America's* yearly exhibition summary for 1998 reveals that two younger generations of Los Angeles artists were well represented in New York, often in the city's better-known galleries.

5 Jacob Hashimoto moved here from Chicago in 1997, for example, choosing Los Angeles over New York because he believed it was "kinder to young people." He also admired work by L.A. artists such as Laura Owens, Francis Stark, and Jorge Pardo and wanted to be part of the "cultural atmosphere that made them think that way." Telephone interview

with Jacob Hashimoto, Dec. 1, 1999.

6 In summer 1997 the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebaek, Denmark, organized *Sunshine and Noir: Art in L.A., 1960–1997*. The exhibition traveled to the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg in Germany and the Castello di Rivoli in Italy before finishing its tour at the UCLA Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Culture in L.A., where it was largely reconfigured.

7 Nelly Richards, "Postmodern Decenteredness and Cultural Periphery: The Disalignments and Realignment of Cultural Power," in Gerardo Mosquera, ed., *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America* (London

and Cambridge, Mass.: Institute of International Visual Culture and the MIT Press, 1996), 265.

⁸ I am thinking especially of the São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro axis, which, in the second half of the twentieth century, has had a remarkably sophisticated and influential art scene.

⁹ Dorothy Miller began her important series of "Americans" shows in 1942. This was the period of the WPA, the Depression-era government agency that gave work to artists around the country. The currency of regionalism in the art world of that time is reflected in the title of the first exhibition: *Americans 1942: 18 Artists from 9 States*. There were no New Yorkers in the show, which raised hackles locally. Los Angeles artists included were Rico LeBrun, Helen Lundberg, and Knud Merrill. See my essay "Dorothy Miller's *Americans*, 1942-63" in *Studies in Modern Art 4, The Museum at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994).

¹⁰ See interview by William R. Hackman with Henry Hopkins, *Sunshine and Noir* (Humblebaek, Denmark: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 1997), 146-47.

¹¹ Berman, who was a highly influential figure in Los Angeles into the 1960s and 1970s, moved to San Francisco in 1957 after his Ferus Gallery exhibition resulted in a conviction and fine for obscenity.

¹² See *The Art of Assemblage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961).

¹³ Teaching at the California Institute for the Arts, Conceptualists John Baldessari and Michael Asher had a major impact on the development of visual art nationwide; Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago founded a feminist art program at CalArts in 1970, a year after Schapiro had formed the

first such curriculum at Fresno State College in Fresno, California; and Chris Burden and Bruce Nauman explored the implications of performance.

¹⁴ In her essay "Overcoming the Limits of Matter," Rosalind Krauss explicitly distinguishes Irwin and Turrell from the New York Minimalists. She dubs Light and Space the "California Sublime" in *Studies in Modern Art 1: American Art of the Sixties* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1991): 131, 133.

¹⁵ Occasionally I have seen other forms of 1960s art (principally Light and Space) referred to as the L.A. Look. However, I am using Anne Ayres as my authority. See Anne Ayres, "The Long Haul," in Lars Nittve and Helle Crenzien, *Sunshine & Noir: Art in L.A., 1960-1997* (Humblebaek, Denmark: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 1997), 164.

¹⁶ Ayres, "The Long Haul," 161.

¹⁷ Ibid., 164.

¹⁸ "Plastic" is a reference to Finish Fetish. Notes from telephone conversation with John Baldessari, Nov. 29, 1999.

¹⁹ Baldessari's students at CalArts included Ashley Bickerton, Barbara Bloom, Troy Brauntuch, Kate Ericson, Mel Ziegler, Eric Fischl, Jack Goldstein, Matt Mullican, and David Salle.

²⁰ Notes from telephone interview with John Baldessari, Nov. 29, 1999. Baldessari remembers that Gallery A402 would appear on the resumes of prominent European artists, and people would assume that it was a prestigious art venue.

²¹ Other artists in the show were Chris Burden, Meg Cranston, Victor Estrada, Llyn Foulkes, Richard Jackson, Liz Larner, Manuel Ocampo, Raymond Pettibon, Lari Pittman, Charles Ray, Nancy Rubins, Jim Shaw, Megan

Williams, and Robert Williams.

²² Paul Schimmel, "Into the Maelstrom: L.A. Art at the End of the Century," in *Helter Skelter: L.A. Art in the Nineties* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992), n.p.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Anne Ayres's essay for *Sunshine and Noir* lists numerous prominent L.A. artists just from the 1960s who do not fit into either category (Ayres, 161-69).

²⁵ Davis's chapter heading is actually "Sunshine or Noir," underscoring the dichotomous nature of the idea.

²⁶ Mike Davis, "Sunshine or Noir," in *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 18. Davis notes that Bertold Brecht thought that Los Angeles symbolized both heaven and hell.

²⁷ Ibid., 15.

²⁸ Ibid., 18.

²⁹ In 1945 author Carey McWilliams drew a comparison between the Gold Rush in Northern California and "the real-estate-oil-and-motion picture boom" that shaped Southern California between the 1880s and the 1920s. Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land*, as cited in Sam Hall Kaplan, *L.A. Lost and Found: An Architectural History of Los Angeles* (New York: Crown, 1987), 63.

³⁰ Over the years L.A. has hosted publications such as (very briefly) *Artforum*, *LAICA Journal*, and *Visions*, but all of them have come and gone (*Artforum*, of course, to New York). We now have *Art Issues* and the North American edition of *Art and Text*, as well as energetic smaller efforts such as *X-Tra*, but these journals are few and are limited in scope.

³¹ Commercial interests, including some wealthy and

powerful dealers, bolster the New York art world, while Los Angeles's galleries, which number about a quarter of those in New York, are comparatively modest operations. Interestingly, the actual number of public dealers in Los Angeles was almost unchanged from 1989 to 1998 despite the increased commercial viability of the work produced here. According to the *Art in America* annuals for 1989-90 and 1998-99, there were 113 galleries in 1989-90 and 109 in 1998-99.

³² MOCA opened in 1983 in a downtown warehouse renovated by Los Angeles architect Frank Gehry. The structure, now known as the Geffen Contemporary, was conceived as a temporary facility but, due to its popularity, was made permanent. In 1986 MOCA opened its more formal main building on Grand Avenue. The same year, LACMA inaugurated the Robert O. Anderson Building for twentieth-century art, and in 1988 LACMA opened its Japanese Pavilion. Also in the eighties, the J. Paul Getty Trust established its various institutes, which were all fully operational by the end of the decade. The Armand Hammer Museum and Cultural Center opened to the public in late 1990. UCLA assumed management of it in 1994 and, under the university's auspices, it has had an eclectic program with a strong contemporary component. In late 1997 the extravagant new Getty Center opened to great fanfare.

³³ L.A. dealer Rosamund Felsen recalls that MOCA was formed in response to the demise of the Pasadena Art Museum as well as to a perceived lack of support for contemporary art in general and L.A. art in particular at the Los Angeles County

Museum of Art (conversation with Rosamund Felsen, Santa Monica, Nov. 27, 1999). Collector Ruth Bloom, who ran galleries in Los Angeles from 1987 to 1995, believes that the situation continued into the 1990s. She remembers a meeting between local dealers and LACMA's curators at which gallerists expressed disapproval of the institution. Their response, she says, was "really about the museum disrespecting the value of what was happening locally." Bloom believes that the meeting, called by the museum, took place in 1994. Bloom ran Meyers Bloom Gallery from 1987 to 1992 and Ruth Bloom Gallery from 1992 to 1995 (notes from conversation with Ruth Bloom, Los Angeles, Sept. 21, 1999).

The Museum of Contemporary Art began with a strong representation of art from Los Angeles. In 1983, one out of the museum's two shows was Los Angeles based; in 1984, six out of twelve featured artists from L.A.; in 1985, five out of six did the same. Almost all of the museum's early series of one-person shows, "In Context," featured local artists. By the end of the decade, with the opening of the Grand Avenue building, the percentages had shifted. In 1988 approximately six out of twenty shows involved local artists; in 1989 one out of twelve; in 1990, three out of sixteen; in 1991, none of the fourteen exhibitions that the museum mounted were by L.A. artists. Between 1990 and 1997, MOCA averaged two to three exhibitions a year by Los Angeles artists out of approximately sixteen shows, a fairly strong representation.

From 1980 to 1997, LACMA averaged two exhibitions out of approximately twenty-five a year on Los Angeles art.

³⁴ The very term "local artist"

was pejorative and it was not only museums that resisted it. Internationally known artists such as Ed Ruscha, who worked in L.A., also resented the label. He notes "a fear among artists, and I think rightly so, of being characterized by the city . . . Some artists wince when they're described as L.A. artists . . . I feel that most artists would be doing the same work if they lived . . . anywhere else in the United States" (quoted in Amy Gerstler, "Art Attack," *Los Angeles* magazine, Nov. 1998: 102).

³⁵ Michael Duncan, "L.A. Rising," *Art in America* 82, no. 12 (Dec. 1994): 72. Other important programs are at the University of California, Irvine, the University of Southern California, and the California State Universities at Long Beach, Northridge, and Riverside. The notion of the art schools cohering the L.A. art community has become something of a commonplace, although the way the schools function within the community is rarely analyzed. Recently, there have been several articles in the national press about this. See, for example, Andrew Hultkrans, "Surf and Turf," *Artforum* (summer 1998): 106-13, 146.

³⁶ For example, Rachel Lachowicz states that her strategies for art making developed partly as a defense against the classroom critiques at CalArts. See Lynn Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 21. Rubén Ortiz-Torres's work also is in part a response to CalArts, which he characterizes as "a fundamentalist and dogmatic conceptual art school that did not allow me to create the paintings I wanted to make" (David Pagel, "Rubén Ortiz-Torres," *Bomb*

[winter 2000]: 19).

37 Telephone conversation with Judy Fiskin, July 5, 1999.

38 Telephone conversation with Alexis Smith, Nov. 4, 1999.

39 For an example of this, see Lynn Zelevansky, "No Title: The Work of Robert Therrien," in *Robert Therrien* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2000), 77, n. 91.

40 See Dave Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993). Hickey claims that in the American art world of 1988, beauty signified "the corruption of the market" (12–13).

41 Lynn Gumpert, "Beauty and the Beast," in *La Belle et La Bête* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1995), 101. Gumpert included four younger L.A. artists in her show: Doug Aitkin, Martin Kersels, Sharon Lockhart, and Catherine Opie.

42 This idea, originating in early modernism, was important for many influential artists of the sixties. It was what Frank Stella meant when he famously said, "My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there is there . . . What you see is what you see." Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 158.

43 Jan Aviglos, "1995 Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art," in *Artforum* 33, no. 10 (summer 1995): 100.

44 Ken Johnson, "Big Top Whitney," *Art in America* 83, no. 6 (June 1995): 39.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 41.

47 Brooks Adams, "Turtle Derby," *Art in America* 86, no. 6 (June 1997): 35.

48 Peter Schjeldahl, "Ken Price's L.A. Edge," *Art Issues* 48 (summer 1997): 17. Schjeldahl's

take is positive; he finishes his thought: "and then, having done, realizing with pleasant surprise that every possible itch of thought has somehow been scratched." Nonetheless, it is remarkable how persistent this stereotype is.

49 Coplans's essay for *Five Los Angeles Sculptors: Sculptors Drawings/Los Angeles New York* (Irvine: Art Gallery, University of California, Irvine, 1966) is a case in point. It is very close in tone to Donald Judd's 1965 essay "Specific Objects" in *Art Theory*, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood eds. (Oxford, Eng., and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 809–13. Coplans claims that Finish Fetish artists are, like Minimalists, "without any group affiliation" or "programmatic bias," and that they do not draw inspiration from "earlier European geometric modes of expression." Like the New Yorkers, they suppress surface quality to the overall image, which is a single, sometimes repeated element. He also notes certain differences: the L.A. artists stress craftsmanship and create reflective surfaces that are "not renunciative as in geometric art, but highly sensuous and lyrical" (Coplans, Irvine, 3). Coplans says that the Californians' work is characterized by "an acute consciousness of the relationship between the observer and the locus of the art work" (Coplans, Irvine, 5). This idea actually anticipates Michael Fried's famous essay "Art and Objecthood," which appeared in *Artforum* in June 1967. *Artforum* was published in Los Angeles from Oct. 1965 to May 1967. Today Coplans is well known for his photography.

50 Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon*, 11.

51 Christopher Knight, "Crossroads/Gary Kornblau/

Looking at the Future with Influential Figures in the World of Arts and Entertainment," *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 7, 1999. The interview marked the tenth anniversary of *Art Issues*, a publication with which Knight had been associated since its inception.

52 Dave Hickey, "Simple Hearts: American Cool," *Art Issues* (Jan.–Feb. 1999): 12. This statement is but one example of Hickey's tendency toward polemical excess.

53 Ibid., 13.

54 Gary Kornblau, "1965–1975: Reconsidering the Object of Art," *Art Issues* (Jan.–Feb. 1996).

55 Peter Schjeldahl, "Beauty Contest," *The New Yorker* (Nov. 1, 1999): 108.

56 In her recent book *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) philosopher Elaine Scarry attempts to connect aesthetics with notions of ethics and democracy. However, as Stuart Hampshire notes in the *New York Review of Books* (Nov. 18, 1999), "justice is not open to the senses and is not material" and "there have been societies in which many beautiful things were created and enjoyed and in which republican values, and the rudiments of justice and fairness as we understand them, were unimaginable."

57 Hickey quoted in Todd S. Purdum, "Unsettling the Art World for a Living: A Critic Resurrects Beauty as a Standard and Finds It in Unexpected Places," *New York Times*, Sept. 4, 1999.

58 Sande Cohen, "Hide Your Commodification: Art Criticism and Intellectuals in Los Angeles or Language Denied," *Emergences: Journal for the Study of Media and Composite Cultures* 9 (1999): 357.

59 Margaret Morgan, "Theory in Practice," *X-TRA* 2, no. 4 (summer 1999): 20.

60 See Russell Ferguson, ed., *Hand-Painted Pop: American Art in Transition 1955–62* (Los Angeles and New York: Museum of Contemporary Art and Rizzoli International Publications, 1992).

61 See, for example, *Sense and Sensibility*.

62 See, for example, Lane Relyea, "Virtually Formal," *Artforum* 37, no. 1 (Sept. 1998): 126–33.

63 See James Meyer, "Nostalgia and Memory: Legacies of the 1960s in Recent Work," *Painting, Object, Film, Concept: Works from the Herbig Collection* (New York: Christie's, 1998). Meyer quotes Thomas Crow: "Consciousness of precedent has become very nearly the condition and definition of major artistic ambition" (32).

64 Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 150.

65 This approach could have been influenced by the previous generation, for whom postmodernism's critique of the author as an ideological construction (in the terms laid out by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault) and of modernism's quest for authenticity and originality was widely influential.

66 The work of numerous artists could be cited. Some examples are Sue Coe, David Hammons, Byron Kim, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Robert Mapplethorpe, Richard Prince, Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, Fred Wilson, and David Wojnarowicz.

67 Kobena Mercer, "Intermezzo Worlds," *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (winter 1998): 43.

68 Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), xiii.

69 Ibid.

Acknowledgments

David Joselit, Laurie Winer, and Paul Zelevansky read this essay in progress and made incisive comments. A number of individuals consented to be interviewed, lending their time and expertise to the project: I would like to thank John Baldessari, Ruth Bloom, Rosamund Felsen, Judy Fiskin, Peter Frank, Jacob Hashimoto, Martin Kersels, Paul Schimmel, Alexis Smith, and Judy Spence. I am also grateful to Carol Matthieu, curatorial administrator in LACMA's department of modern and contemporary art, who taxed an already busy schedule to provide crucial research, and to Thomas Frick, editor in the museum's publications department, who edited the essay with his accustomed skill and sensitivity.