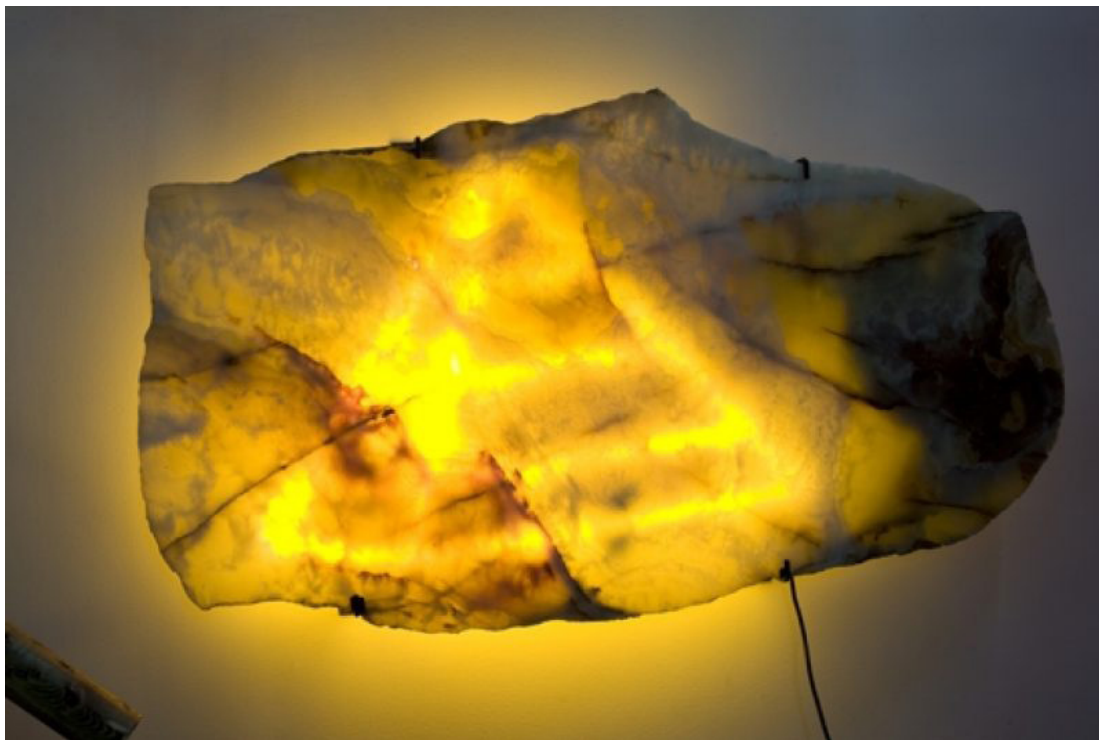


## *BOMB*

# Chris Lipomi by Kathryn Andrews



Mako Hloki (Pyramid), 2007, onyx and neon with transformer, 36 x 48 inches. Courtesy of Renwick Gallery.

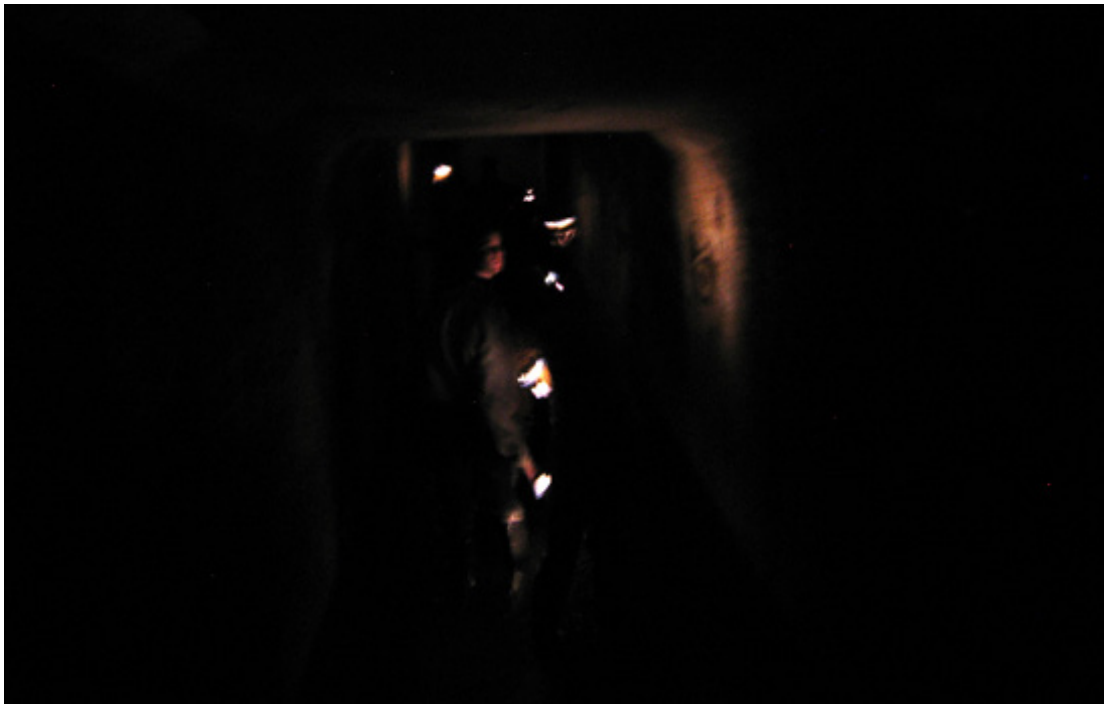
Each January, Los Angeles endures torrential rains that cleanse its concrete riverbeds of graffiti and force Hollywood to move its operations indoors while anticipating a return to business as usual. In the Los Angeles art world, this year's business as usual constituted simultaneous retrospectives by Japanese Pop artist Takashi Murakami—whose exhibition at the city's Museum of Contemporary Art culminated in a designer-goods-store-cum-artwork showcasing his signature Louis Vuitton bags—and Michael Asher at the Santa Monica Museum of Art, where the California conceptualist erected walls that physically mapped that institution's history of exhibitions, reminding how museums' facades of objectivity (and, by implication, endorsement) enable artists like Murakami to flourish.

In a nondescript neighborhood between Murakami and Asher's shows, a third, unaffiliated retrospective was mounted—illegally—by the young Los Angeles-based artist Chris Lipomi, whose sculptures, paintings, installations, and performances poke and prod at constructs of artistic mastery. Titled *Uzihektaka Wakipi* and casually referred to as the Cave Project, Lipomi's self-made exhibition required curious viewers to meet the artist at his flat. After presenting a laptop slideshow, Lipomi ushered small groups under the cover of darkness and umbrellas into a nearby abandoned city tunnel filled with knee-deep water. There, with the assistance of handy battery-powered lanterns, participants could illuminate the tunnel's ceiling, which was covered in Lipomi's absurdly simplistic Lascaux-style renderings of his entire body of previous works—the same ones that he had shown minutes before on a computer screen.



Uzihektaka Wakipi, installation view in underground tunnel, Los Angeles. Photo by Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer.

Advancing Asher's position by going where the museum dare not, *The Cave Project* radically revealed how established exhibition contexts—with their liability-proof remove from the artist and his environs—limit what art can be. At the same time, the cave retained a place for a Murakami-esque enshrinement of the object: it memorialized Lipomi's early works that themselves appropriate artworks from the 20th century Western canon. Its riddling timeline—a "retrospective" of "new" art—conformed to Li-



Uzihektaka Wakipi, installation view in underground tunnel, Los Angeles. Photo by Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer.



Installation view of webik: okori wakipi, 2007, Renwick Gallery, New York.  
Courtesy of Renwick Gallery.

pomi's frequent collision of the postmodern and the "primitive." (His 2007 exhibitions in New York, Los Angeles, New Zealand, and Germany set reinterpretations of Warhol, Basquiat, Koons, McCarthy, and Mike Kelley works into environments teeming with constructed tribal masks, finger paintings, wooden stakes, rocks, ponds, and vegetation.) *The Cave Project's* mix of forgery and crude rendering techniques, while raising complex questions concerning mediation and originality, destabilized (in contrast to Asher's critique of the museum) the institution of the *artist* himself.

Ultimately, the retrospective's self-reflexivity evoked what may be Lipomi's primary concern: how the artist's name and attendant value as designated by the marketplace grossly limit perception. As the artist's name is branded, the improvisational aspect of viewing art for the first time is diminished—recognition is privileged over cognition. Lipomi responds not by condemning the machinery of the art world per se, but rather by exposing how the mind's record and replay of history informs the viewing experience. By hyperactivating these antics of the mind, Lipomi alludes to what cannot be found: a contemporary art object free of reference.

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