

LOS ANGELES "MADE IN L.A."

HAMMER MUSEUM, LAXART AND THE LOS ANGELES MUNICIPAL ART GALLERY

"Made in L.A.," the ambitious biennial co-organized by the Hammer Museum and LAXART, provided undeniable proof (should any be required post-PST) that the city has arrived as an international art center. The exhibition boasted five curators: Anne Ellegood and Ali Subotnick of the Hammer, and Lauri Firstenberg, Malik Gaines and Cesar Garcia, all of LAXART. Although the Orange County Museum of Art has hosted the California Biennial since 1984, "Made in L.A." is the first biennial to exclusively feature artists who live in Los Angeles. The 60 artists range in age from 20 to 80 (though most were born in the 1970s) and work in video, sculpture, painting, photography, installation and performance.

The prevailing sensibility, particularly at the Hammer, was one of fragmentation and disarray, which perhaps reflects a crumbling economy. Most of the works were groupings of odd and inscrutable objects cobbled together and/or found. Notable among these was a mixed-medium table by Joel Otterson. *Tableau Vivant: Burned and Scarred* (2008-12) has spindly green legs on wheels and an ornately shaped wooden top that is carved with graffiti. Kathryn Andrews offered a more minimal assembly. Simple yet deeply compelling is her *Rainbow Successor* (2011), a clown suit hung at a rakish angle within a metal cage; the duel between play and imprisonment serves as a mirror of the city, where the spectacle of Hollywood glitters alongside one of the most infamous prison systems in the nation.

Pieces that were less sprawling and disjunctive tended to attract attention at the Hammer. Roy Dowell and Ruby Neri each displayed sculptures that playfully poke at modernism—the former with paper, cardboard and acrylic abstractions and the latter with ceramic figuration. Other standouts were Morgan

View of works by Joel Otterson, including *Tableau Vivant: Garden Table* (left), 2011, and *Tableau Vivant: Burned and Scarred* (right), 2008-12; at the Hammer.



Partial view of the Propeller Group's *TVC Communism* (foreground), 2011, five-channel video installation, 5¼ hours, with (background) Nery Gabriel Lemus's *Until the Day Breaks and Shadows Flee #2*, 2012; at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery.

Fisher's brightly elegant minimalist painting on an exterior wall of the museum and Meleko Mokgosi's multi-canvas painting fusing imagery from the U.S. and Africa.

At LAMAG, the curators took advantage of the historic public gallery's large spaces and high ceilings, exhibiting larger works and video projections. Viewers were greeted by *Trance Plant* (2003), a Suessian tree by Ry Rocklen made of copper pipe "branches" set in cement and draped with leafy ribbons of audiocassette tape. Videos were some of the strongest works here, including Michele O'Marah's charming and poignant piece that explores the life of fashion icon Isabella Blow, and Michelle Dizon's *Civil Society* (2008), which investigates memory, power and subjectivity through her experience as a teen during the 1992 L.A. riots. The Propeller Group (Phunam Thuc Ha, Matt Lucero and Tuan Andrew Nguyen) showed a two-part project titled *TVC Communism* (2011), for which they collaborated with an advertising firm (TBWA/Vietnam) to rebrand communism in a positive light for U.S. audiences. Five flat screens installed in a circle presented the ad team's brainstorming sessions at the agency's offices. Also on view, here and at the Hammer, was the feel-good commercial itself.

Overall the curators tended to neglect the eclecticism characteristic of art in Los Angeles in favor of an aesthetic that could be called "global contemporary." One hoped to see a wider breadth and depth of perspectives. The inclusion of the collective Slanguage, founded in 2002 by Mario Ybarra Jr. and Karla Diaz, countered this inclination. The grassroots group has been empowering youth through art in the underserved area of Wilmington for the past 10 years while simultaneously bringing international artists to their storefront space. Their truly community-based endeavors give agency to the participants rather than themselves. At LAXART, in addition to presenting a survey of their past work, Slanguage held various workshops and painted a mural on the facade.

Although the full range of L.A. artists' cultural and economic diversity was not represented, this biennial offered one view. And in two years another will surface. In the meantime, the Hammer and LAXART provided plenty of public events and panels to address these issues.

—Annie Buckley