

Myers, Terry R., "Made in L.A. 2012," *The Brooklyn Rail*, July-August 2012

BROOKLYN RAIL

Made in L.A. 2012

by Terry R. Myers

HAMMER MUSEUM, LA><ART,
AND THE LOS ANGELES MUNICIPAL ART GALLERY
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Last year, in Chicago, for the first time anywhere, I taught a course on 20th and 21st century Los Angeles art, a survey that started with artists from the 1920s. I was confident that the early stuff would be a revelation, if only because of how much effort is still put into maintaining the notion that everything started at the admittedly vital Ferus Gallery. This mythic birthplace likely sticks so well because of its stylish photographic documentation, making it appear as if it took until the late 1950s for L.A. art to have a local audience, and a fabulous one at that. That conclusion is far from accurate, but it contributes to the larger legend that proclaims, when it comes to homegrown in L.A. art, that production has always far outweighed consumption, at least until just a few years ago.

Nonetheless, maybe things *are* different now, especially if we buy the title of the catalogue introduction to this comprehensive biennial exhibition: "Los Angeles is everywhere." "Yes, okay," I thought when I read the essay written by the five curators. After all, every important gallery off the top of my head has at least one L.A. artist in its roster. More importantly, every cliché that has been attached to what has made Ferus-and-after L.A. art L.A. art (whether that be with material labels like "finish fetish" or exhi-



Cayetano Ferrer, "Quarter-Scale Grand Entrance," 2012.
Installation view at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.
Photo: Brian Forrest.

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bition titles-as-themes like "Helter Skelter" and "Sunshine & Noir") can be found in the work of artists who will never live here, or even visit. Skipping past the largely persuasive prose, the variety of art works from the 60 artists included in this show confirms that Los Angeles art is everywhere because Los Angeles artists have never been required to be Los Angeles artists. Put another way, I'm not the only person to claim that Mike Kelley, the artist to whom this biennial is rightly dedicated, remained a Detroit artist from brilliant beginning to tragic end—and that was not only okay, but also essential to building what is by almost all accounts a vibrant scene that L.A. could claim.

What we're faced with, more often than not, then, are art works that simultaneously fulfill the single requirement of the exhibition—made in L.A.—while stretching the boundaries of location, as well as those of production and consumption, in order to make all of that elasticity a key component of the work itself. A particularly compelling work is Vishal Jugdeo's "Goods Carrier" (2012), an installation that integrates video filmed in Mumbai (with actors playing out portions of inexplicable arguments) with props in the space that, on occasion, are remotely activated. For example, as someone picks up paper in the video, a sheet of paper moves across a wire strung across the gallery space; after moving to take a closer look I was able to read it: "Change the room/Change the view/Change the words/Change the world." Perhaps it's inevitable that for every successful work like Jugdeo's, there is another of a similar type that fails: In this instance, Michele O'Marah's disappointing video installation "Blow Me" (2012), that purports to expand upon the tragic arc of the life of fashion expert Isabella Blow—a subject with tremendous potential—but only manages to get tripped up by a cast of emerging L.A. artists struggling with its clumsy script.

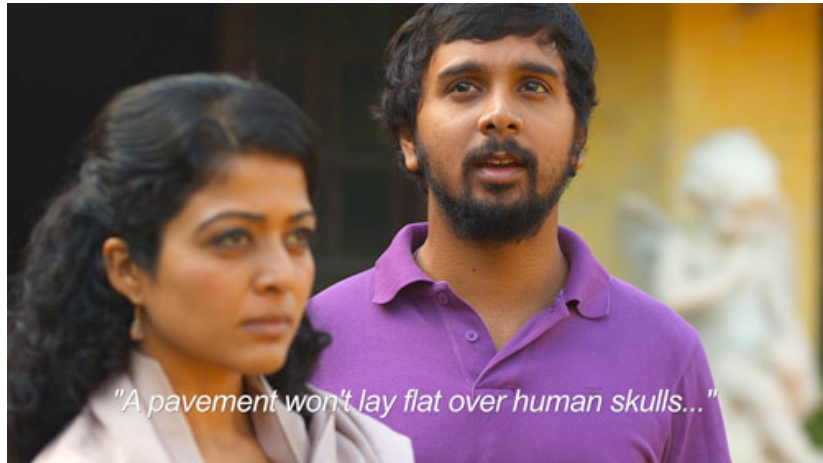
In other instances the success/failure split happens in the work of a single artist: Cayetano Ferrer's "Quarter-Scale Grand Entrance" (2012) is one of the most joyfully visual works in the show—a Las Vegas/video game-inspired light projection comprising an entryway carved with ornamental patterns brought to life by spinning and blinking candy-colored motifs. His "Swatch for Remnant Recomposition" (2012), a floor-based crazy quilt of casino carpet scraps, suffers greatly by comparison:



"Slanguage," 2012. Facade mural. Courtesy of the artist and LAXART, Los Angeles. Photo: Brian Forrest.

without any significant transformation of its material, it's pedestrian. Some of the best presentations are more focused and/or self-contained. Koki Tanaka's video installation "Beholding Performer, Performing Beholder" (2012) zeroes in on two marimba players and several suspended round mirrors (the work is also scheduled to activate audience members in a live performance in August). The ten-year survey of Slanguage, the collective enterprise of Mario Ybarra Jr. and Karla Diaz, has been uprooted from L.A.'s Wilmington district to LAXART in Culver City for a full presentation of the range of its meaningful community-based activities. **And Kathryn Andrews's witty sculptural interventions, such as "Clown Rack" (2010), manage to sandwich John McCracken with Bruce Nauman, add a bit of Cady Noland, and make it not derivative.**

Other works aren't as nimble as Andrews's. Fiona Connor's "Lobbies on Wilshire" (2012), a reproduction of a section of the Hammer's marble staircase installed against the windows of its lobby, is a slim slice of the too-soon-forgotten work of the late Glen Seator, who was based in New York, but produced important work in L.A. Zach Harris's constructed paintings owe too much to Agnes Pelton. (The strongest emerging and under-recognized painting in Los Angeles is not in this exhibition, but given the unspoken rules of biennial-type shows, it's an achievement that any painting is here at all.) And Dan Finsel's "The Space Between You and Me" (2012), a "reinterpretation" of the infamous Keith Edmier/Farah Fawcett LACMA collaboration from 2000, does little more than add insult to injury.



Vishal Jugdeo. Stills from "Goods Carrier," 2012. Mixed-media installation with HD video projection and multichannel sound track. Dimensions variable. Runtime not yet determined. Courtesy the artist and Thomas Solomon Gallery, Los Angeles.

I'm left with the assessment that the ratio of strong to weak work is better here than in most of the Whitney Biennials I've seen over the past 25 years, not to mention the regional exhibitions that have returned to New York. So, then, the point of this biennial—Los Angeles's first one, incidentally—has been made, and that is a positive thing, but only for a moment. Not even Los Angeles is everywhere for good.