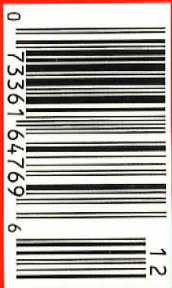


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L.A. '94/African Altars
Maya Lin/Report from Holland

L.A. Rising

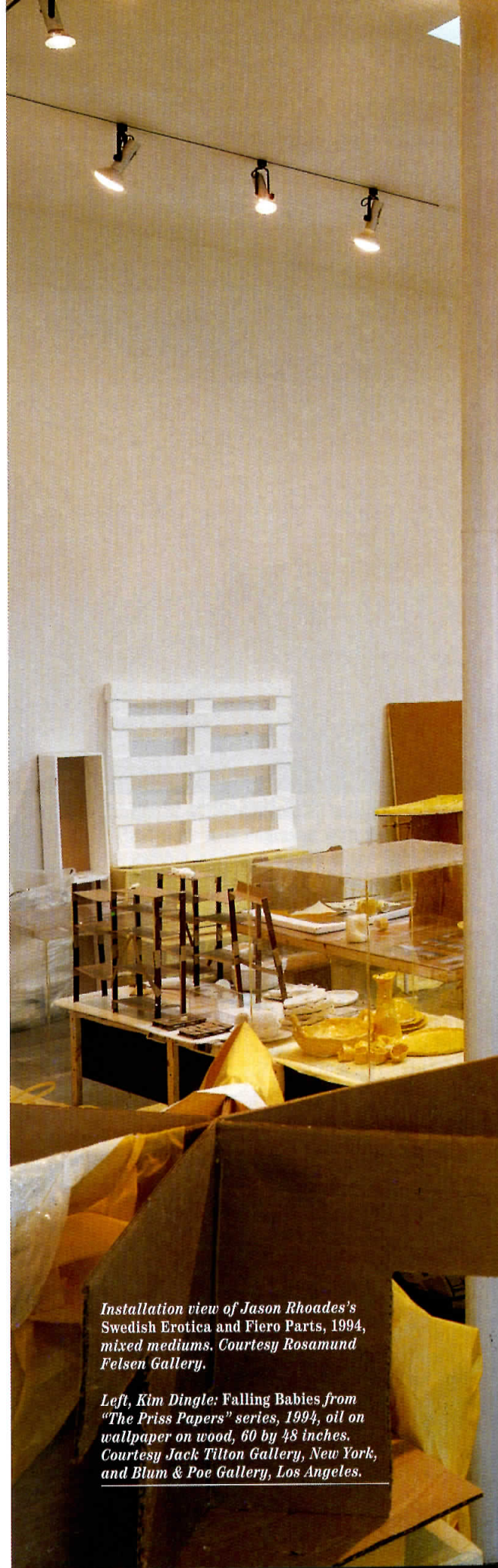
With a lively crop of innovative artists and a host of new galleries, Los Angeles promises—yet again—to become a powerhouse of contemporary art-making. Below, a guide to L.A.'s grass-roots art scene.



BY MICHAEL DUNCAN

Los Angeles is currently experiencing one of its periodic art booms, marked by the city's most intense outpouring of interesting work since the late 1960s. Peter Plagens, in *Sunshine Muse*, his 1974 account of the California art scene, attributed the on-again, off-again spurts of productivity in Los Angeles to the absence of an artists' community large enough to regenerate art modes, to split into factions, to lend real weight to one or the other esthetic direction. For a variety of reasons, this is no longer true. Today L.A. boasts a hyperactive art scene, one swarming with young artists and as factionalized as the rest of the current art world.

L.A.'s resurgence is attributable to the competitive nature of the five strong local art schools (Cal Arts, Otis, UCLA, the Art Center and Claremont) and to the fact that so many younger artists now move here rather than to New York for cheap studio space and the chance to show in alternative venues. Unlike in the old days,

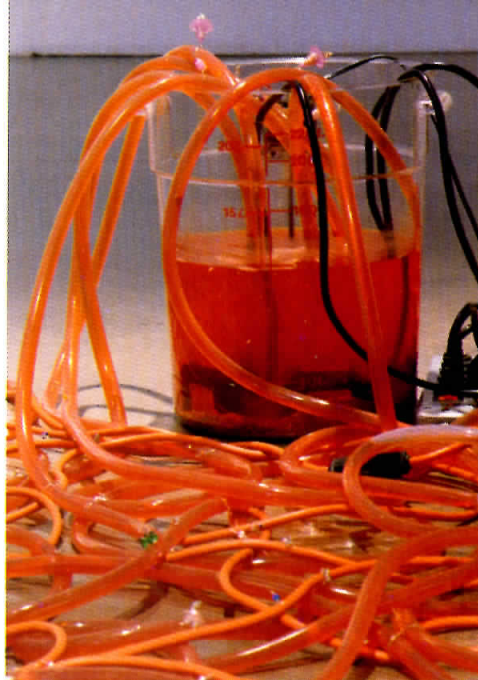


Installation view of Jason Rhoades's Swedish Erotica and Fiero Parts, 1994, mixed mediums. Courtesy Rosamund Felsen Gallery.

Left, Kim Dingle: Falling Babies from "The Priss Papers" series, 1994, oil on wallpaper on wood, 60 by 48 inches. Courtesy Jack Tilton Gallery, New York, and Blum & Poe Gallery, Los Angeles.

The most successful L.A. shows are “maximal” extravaganzas, delivering wild formal experiments with manic energy. Sculpture is the preferred medium of the moment.

L.A.'s best artists all teach, including the now internationally recognized stars of the Museum of Contemporary Art's 1992 show "Helter Skelter" [see *A.i.A.*, Nov. '92]: Chris Burden, Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Lari Pittman, Nancy Rubins and Charles Ray. That group's



Terri Friedman: Co-Mingling Without Ever Exchanging (detail), 1994, water, glitter, tubing, electrical cord, beads, pumps, mixed mediums, 13 by 13 feet overall. Courtesy Sue Spaid Fine Arts.

in common with L.A. expatriates Allen Ruppersberg and Jonathan Borofsky than with such previous stylistic forces as Finish Fetish, Light and Space, Michael Asher-style conceptualism or the media-based work of John Baldessari.

Acolytes of these earlier fashions have proved largely disappointing. The concerns of Finish Fetish and Light and Space continue to be recycled in the overly precious works of minimalist and process artists such as Fandra Chang or Maxwell Hender. A generation of neo-conceptual followers of Baldessari—including Stephen Prina, Christopher Williams, Meg Cranston and Cindy Bernard—still shows regularly, with a new set of clones breeding at 1301 Gallery. But these artists have veered away from Baldessari's visual play and humor into ponderous minimalism or one-line gimmickry. Very much visible on the scene (and frequently shown in Europe), this self-referential art revels in its own obscurity and conceptual hauteur.

Irrespective of its Manson-tinged bad-boy theme, "Helter Skelter" did mark L.A. art's turn away from conceptual concerns and back to the materials of the real world. With surveys of the work of both Kelley [see *A.i.A.*, June '94] and Ray currently touring Europe, a LACMA survey scheduled for Pittman in 1995 and international commissions for Rubins and McCarthy, the group's energy has hardly slackened. Yet there is a host of lesser known but promising L.A. artists who, like the "Helter Skelter" bunch, are exploring varied forms and mediums with willful, eccentric energy. These include the past year's amazing set of newcomers, a strong generation of artists in their 30s, midcareer women artists left out of the MOCA show and an extraordinary group of painters.

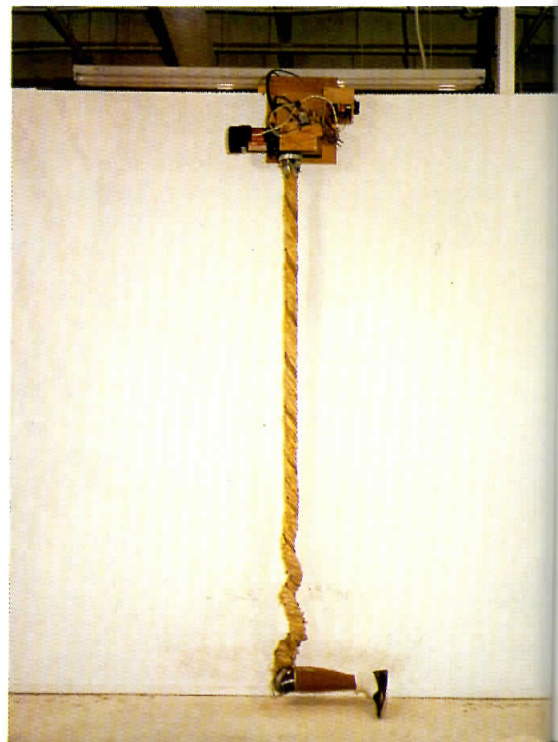
L.A.'s New Grass-roots Scene

Now that 1980s New York art stars such as Salle, Schnabel and Halley have lost their stranglehold on the art press, the new L.A. art is much less likely to be influenced by East Coast sources than by local heroes like Burden, Rubins, Kelley or McCarthy. For example, L.A. painters such as Pittman, Roy Dowell, Linda Burnham and Nancy Evans are much more important here than New York painters like Jonathan Lasker, Mary Heilmann, Matthew Weinstein or Philip Taaffe, whose works aren't often seen on the West Coast.

Despite this boosterish atmosphere, economic problems have kept the L.A. art world in a state of constant flux, with nearly every month witnessing another gallery closing, reconfiguration or move to a more affordable location. The projected openings in early 1995 of L.A. branches of Pace Wildenstein and Gagosian galleries have put a bizarre spin on everyone else's lowered market expectations. Much more relevant to the local scene is the recent opening of Bergamot Station, a beautifully converted, 5½-acre industrial complex in Santa Monica, where greatly lowered rents have attracted some of the city's best galleries, including Shoshana Wayne, Patricia Faure, Burnett Miller as well as Rosamund Felsen, which has been especially involved with emerging artists.

L.A.'s economic uncertainty and the intensified competition among galleries seem to have enhanced the quality of work on display. Furthermore, while LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) underwent its protracted relocation from downtown to Hollywood, a grass-roots gallery scene sprang up that stole its "alternative" thunder. New venues like Food House, TRI, Dan Bernier Gallery, Bennett

Martin Kersels: Twist, 1993, motor, rubber bands, wood, prosthetic leg, 10 by 2 feet. Courtesy Dan Bernier Gallery.



Sally Elesby: Hung, 1994, wire, colored glue, unbaked clay, glitter, felt and rhinestones, 20 by 12 by 15 inches. Courtesy Food House.

success has proved the viability of L.A. for artists, despite the city's notoriously lackluster reputation for sales.

In retrospect, the significance of "Helter Skelter" was less in the allegedly "noir" sensibility of its artists than in the accumulative, object-oriented nature of their work. Raymond Pettibon, Manuel Ocampo, Megan Williams and Jim Shaw are all generous-spirited amassers of images and objects. As eccentric iconoclasts, they have more