

Seven Los Angeles Artists

The Fellows of Contemporary Art October 15- December 17, 2011

Anonymous, Anonymous, Anonymous, Erin Cosgrove, Mark Hagen, Mike Kelley, Rodney Mcmillian, curated by Scott Benzel

The artists in this exhibition continue in the tradition of earlier generations of Los Angeles artists, employing strategies of appropriation and recombination to explore issues of political action, gender, autonomy, and race.

Anonymous' *Vaseline Muses or 'How I Got into Art'* -seen here in its first West Coast showing- is a series of photographs and a book by Anonymous, a male Los Angeles artist. Anonymous rephotographs iconic images of nude female performance artists through the (literally) Vaseline-covered lens of Hollywood glamour photography, infusing images of female power with a dose of adolescent male desire. Diedrich Diederichsen's essay in the book addresses the complex relationship between European left-liberal magazines and glamorized images of revolutionary women on their pages.

A second anonymous artist contributes a series of meditations on the relationship between aesthetics, radical politics, sport, and cheese in the works *Lost Continent of Mu / King of the Mountain* and *Frommage de Guerre*. Displayed in cases somewhere between museum vitrines and commercial displays, the works form a palimpsest of the radical politics and popular culture of the last several decades.

Erin Cosgrove's *7 Romance Novels* feature cover images of the artist paired with romance-novel cover star Fabio. Her use of Fabio's iconic image (she hired him for the cover shoots) and her "romantic" interactions with him are simultaneously an appropriation of his identity as mass fantasy object and a play on the "romantic" persona of the artist. *The Baader-Meinhof Affair* (one of the novels, also shown here in its recent German translation) literalizes the popular romanticization of the Baader-Meinhof gang and its' revolutionary violence by making it the subject of the romance novel.

Mark Hagen's *To Be Titled (Additive Sculpture, Stack #1)* and *Balearic Islands Great Ape Personhood Flag (proposed mock-up)* employ different conceptual and appropriative strategies to explore notions of hierarchy. *Stack #1* uses mass-produced consumer items -Gatorade bottles, etc.-as molds for its cast concrete components. The individual components comprising the stack can be repositioned, "de-hierarchizing" modernist notions of sculpture handed down from Brancusi and pointing to the reciprocal and mutual influence of commercial/industrial design and minimalist sculpture.

Balearic Islands Great Ape Personhood Flag (proposed mock-up) envisions a collaboration between Hagen and Kanzi, a Great Ape "painter" in redesigning the Balearic Islands' flag to commemorate the passage of recent Balearic Islands law extending personhood to Great Apes. This expanded conception of personhood points to an expanded definition of artist and collaboration.

Mike Kelley's video *Superman recites selections from "The Bell Jar" and other works by Sylvia Plath* features the superhero reciting lines from Sylvia Plath's classic book to a large bottle- at once bell jar and container of his birth city Kandor. Superman is

alternately ultra-masculine, morose, and hysterical as he recites. The recombinative effect of these two “classic texts” is jarring and hilarious, a reflection on gender, Utopia, isolation, and despair.

Rodney Mcmillian's video *Untitled (Michael Jackson)* from “*The Michael Jackson Project*” is simultaneously a virtuoso performance and an examination of gender, race, and voice. Wearing a white t-shirt and irregularly applied clown makeup, Mcmillian lip-syncs Gladys Knight singing “The Way We Were / Try To Remember.” The carefully rehearsed intensity of the performance suggests Jackson’s own perfectionism and intensity while the makeup and confusion between performer and voice address complex issues of race and gender.

Accompanying the exhibition will be “*Sublimated Los Angeles*”, a film series highlighting little-seen films either shot in or with strong ties to Los Angeles and suppressed for various reasons: *Play it as it Lays*, based on Joan Didion’s screenplay from her novel, was considered a failure, rarely screened after its initial release, and never released in either VHS or DVD form; Pot-smoking star Arnold Schwarzenegger attempted to suppress *Pumping Iron* prior to his campaign for governor of California; the 3-D version of Hitchcock’s *Dial M for Murder* was quickly pulled from distribution following the crash of the first wave of 3-D films; and *Let There Be Light*, Hollywood director John Huston’s (The Maltese Falcon) documentary featuring soldiers suffering from ‘psychoneurosis anxiety state’ was banned by the U.S. government for 30 years.

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