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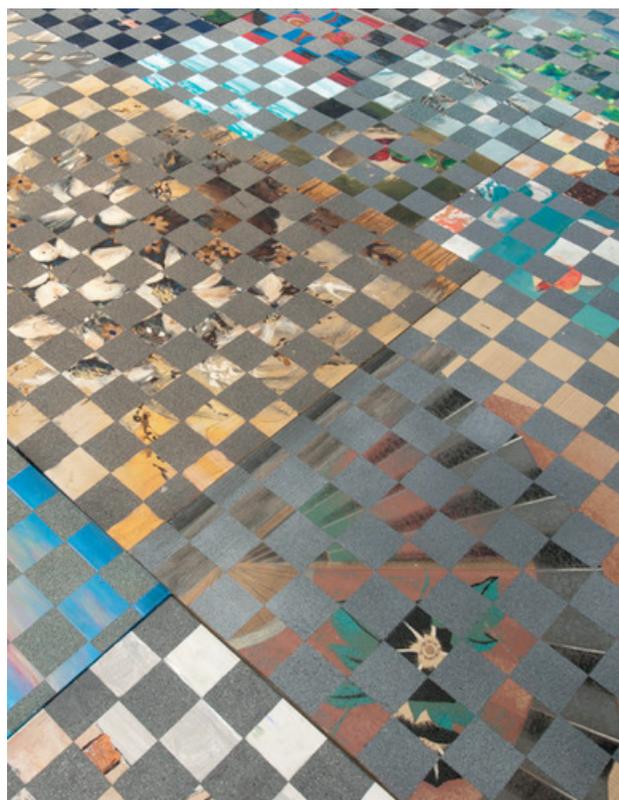
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OCTOBER 2012

## Made in L.A. 2012

HAMMER MUSEUM, LAXART, LOS ANGELES MUNICIPAL ART GALLERY

Michael Ned Holte



Ry Rocklen, *Painting Tile Floor* (detail), 2011–12, found paintings, concrete, wood, spray paint, dimensions variable. Installation view, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Art Park.

**HAVE YOU SEEN** “The Californians,” the *Saturday Night Live* sketch in which Fred Armisen, Kristen Wiig, and Co. play bleached, surf-drawing dimwits whose soap-opera interactions always lead to discussions about the best way through the traffic-clogged thoroughfares of Los Angeles? The acerbic parody makes *Portlandia* seem like a swooning love letter, but of course, as someone with his own deeply held opinions about how (not) to drive from Westwood to Hollywood to Culver City, I’m biased. At first glance, the regional purview of Made in L.A. 2012—on view this past summer at the Hammer Museum and LAXART as well as the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery at Barnsdall Art Park—might easily have suggested collective SoCal navel-gazing comparable to the scene at the end of each of the SNL skits, when the characters come together to stare into a mirror in a surrealistic act of group narcissism.

Lost on nobody was the fact that this energetic survey of sixty artists and collectives—organized by Anne Ellegood, Lauri Firstenberg, Malik Gaines, Cesar Garcia, and Ali Subotnick—capped nearly a year of the exhibitions and festivities making up “Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980,” as if to say, “Hey, this is what’s going on *now*; you probably missed it while you were out getting your art-history lesson.” Yet, while Made in L.A. appeared as diverse and sprawling as the city whose art it presented, it might also be argued that the bulk of the work on view extended four familiar (and familial) lineages of Los Angeles art that were well represented in “PST”: hard-edge abstraction (represented here in paintings by Brian Sharp and Alex Olson and painterly objects by Lisa Williamson and Brenna Youngblood), found-object assemblage (in the work of Liz Glynn, Ry Rocklen, Henry Taylor, and Erika Vogt, among others), eclectic performance practices (including live pieces by Math Bass, Kenyatta A. C.

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Hinkle, and Ashley Hunt, as well as the collective Slanguage's array of community-based works at LAXART), and film and video projects that pointed, more or less, to the looming shadow of Hollywood (e.g., Miljohn Ruperto's *Seven and Five*, 2012, which includes multiple remakes of a 1961 episode of the TV show *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, and Dan Finsel's *The Space Between You and Me*, 2012, for which the artist restaged Farrah Fawcett and Keith Edmier's decade-old roll in the clay). But thankfully, other narratives emerged, too.

Despite its boosterish tone, the title of the show also brought into play the idea of import/export—approaching a thesis that, if teased out, would imply that the Southern California art world operates as a center for cultural production in way that simulates (rather than counters or negates) the machinery of the entertainment industry: Stuff gets made here, lots of it, in order to be sent out into the broader culture. Indeed, a number of works in the show enacted or called attention to notions of manufacture, distribution, and mediation. Take, for example, Nicole Miller's untitled 2012 installation focusing on Darby Jones, one of the first African Americans to work in Tinseltown; Scott Benzel's performance *Threnody/A Beginner's Guide to Mao Tse Tung*, 2012, which is built around photographs of actress Sharon Tate posing as a Maoist rebel; and Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst's *She Gone Rogue*, 2012, a transgender updating of familiar "Hollywood" narratives (with a nod to Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid's 1943 short *Meshes of the Afternoon*—also made in LA). Accompanying these ideas of production and consumption was a tacit understanding that while the local product is highly visible, it is frequently underappreciated. The biennial was pitched as a stage for the underrecognized, though it was unclear who, exactly, wasn't doing the recognizing they should have been. Local cognoscenti? An imagined general public? The global art market?

The show's title also pointed, more obliquely, to Los Angeles as a major hub for contemporary artists—many of whom first landed in Southern California to pursue an MFA. Artists in Made in L.A. were born in Angola, Botswana, Canada, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Scotland, Spain, and Vietnam, among other countries, as well as in various American cities. Several effectively called attention to the cultural distance experienced in adopting Los Angeles as "home." In *El Pedón*, 2012, Camilo Ontiveros presented an empty shipping pallet that had been intended to transport a one-meter cube of soil from Mexico to the US—along with documentation revealing how the task ended up becoming a logistical and legal impossibility. *Civil Society*, 2008, an affecting three-channel video by Michelle Dizon, the daughter of Filipino immigrants, directly addresses cultural displacement in a narration that accompanies devastating images of the 1992 Los Angeles riots as well as footage of the 2005 uprisings in the suburbs of Paris. Two performances by Hinkle, a Kentucky native, showcased music and related cultural products of "Kentifrica," a continent the artist conceived in 2008 for an ongoing project of the same name. Indeed, Kentifrica formed a useful parallel for the layered mythological construct that is LA.

Of course, not all works in the show stood in such a compelling relationship to their context. Overall, one was left wondering what, exactly, made this exhibition "LA" beyond the mailing addresses of its artists. Would the stamp of the region be so readily visible on these works if they were shown elsewhere? A biennial focused on the art made here undoubtedly offers a way of propelling the careers of many emerging local artists, as well as giving greater visibility to established ones—but won't much the same be true of the California-Pacific Triennial, being launched next year at the Orange County Museum of Art? The first edition of Made in L.A. left open the question of whether the city really needs such a determinedly local biennial. But either way, the exhibition may be considered prime evidence for the Hammer's increasing importance at a notoriously tumultuous moment for this city's institutions. It has already begun scripting a sequel.

*Michael Ned Holte is a frequent contributor to Artforum.*

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