

artillery

vol 1 no 6 summer 2007 FREE

killer text on art



RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW: Art in Los Angeles

Art School Rules
Rubell Family Collection
MADE IN L.A.:
Michael Dee,
Samantha Fields,
Kasper Kovitz

LOS ANGELES

RY ROCKLEN AND NICK LOWE Black Dragon Society

FOR FANS OF THE BUSHES, the rapper duo of Ry Rocklen and Nick Lowe, it's no surprise the gallery gave over their two spaces to each of them at the same time.

Pieces of junk rarely have such great second lives than in Rocklen works. What looks like minimal intervention is often gained via hours of combining. In one his many "Untitled" pieces, he balances a clown head on bare umbrella ribs, mimicking a long neck "ruffle." In another, he balances water-filled thrift store drinking glasses on the upper face of a long 4 x 4, the ends of which go through crude cement (thankfully, braced) wheels. In *Refuge*, Rocklen has dropped thousands of small nails, points down, through the tiny holes of a screen covering the wire skeleton of a box spring; the heads shimmer when you move your hand along the nail tips. A small, partly painted medallion hangs down into the space's back doorway. When you look up at the string on which it is strung, you see that Rocklen has made a "necklace" for the entire room: the string is threaded through eye hooks along the room's perimeter. Rocklen always surprises with his whimsical approach. His pieces are the charming residue of creative acts. Watching him combine and recombine items in his thrift store/dumpster stash is always completely absorbing, as with his live art. He chooses his elements for their poignancy, and the intensity of their impact increases with the combinations.

What is Nick Lowe doing in his new set of paintings? That's not immediately obvious. These works seem to be a kind of new Impressionism. However, Lowe uses the familiar Impressionist stubby brushstrokes only sparingly. Rather, his color strokes are shaped like glass shards. Perhaps this is because he first drew the images using a computer tablet, printed the results onto clear acetate, traced their projection onto the canvases, and painted from there. His surfaces are a riot of squiggles, outlines, and meshes, crisscrossed with diagonals delineating a subverted grid. He leaves some of the traced lines unpainted, and the resulting white canvas adds to the surface glitter. Sometimes he uses varying shades and intensities of a given color to define an area, but more often, there seems no rhyme nor reason to the choice of colors or even light-dark values. His underlying figures are solid: broadly drawn, flattened and stretched into caricature or



Nick Lowe, *Yellow Face* (2007).

naive rendition; they are never obscured by the shimmering surface beneath which they hover. The result is a strange but rich, painterliness that sucks you beneath the surface. Never content to sit still, Lowe is constantly trying out new approaches to art making. He's known for his intricate drawings, and he's just done some over-the-top wall-sized tape works, but his foray into painting makes this writer hope he does some again, so we can see something new added to painting's lineage.

If Rocklen and Lowe are huge influences on each other, it's only obvious when they work in the same medium. Here, they are growing masters of their own separate universes.

—Kathryn Hargreaves

ECHOES Orange County Center for Contemporary Art

"ECHOES: Women Inspired by Nature" at OCCCA complements the national re-investigation of feminist art work spearheaded by the WACK! show at MOCA. Curated by Betty Ann Brown and Linda Vallejo, to focus on women who have been inspired by nature, "Echoes" brings together an eclectic group of nature-inspired work, ranging from celebrations of mother nature in her glory to apocalyptic notes on her decline. Call me a cynic, but I found the work the most interesting on this latter end of the spectrum. In fact, I would say that this sub-category work is not so much *inspired by nature* as it is inspired by the unnatural, particularly with respect to man's effect on the environment.

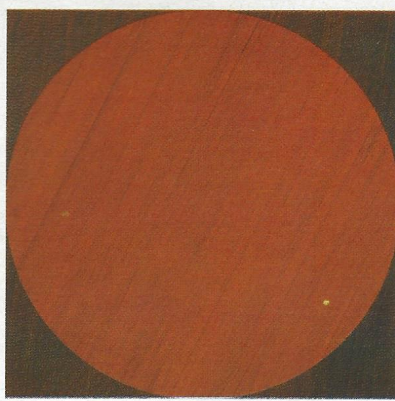
Take for instance Kim Abeles' "Presidential Commemorative Smog Plates." In the early '90s, at a time when global warming was commonly regarded as a kind of hoax orchestrated by left-wing

radicals, Kim Abeles was quietly creating art using LA city smog. Abeles placed stencil cut-outs of US presidents' faces on china plates, and left them on her rooftop, letting the smog do its work. Combined with piercing quotes from each president that reflect their administrations' impact on the environment, Abeles' work is even more trenchant and timely in 2007 than it was 14 years ago. A brilliant piece of political, environmental work, Abeles' work should be on permanent display in a major US venue.

Another artist in the show whose work is inspired by the unnatural effect man has on nature is Yaya Chou. *Joy Coated* and *Chandelier* are both sculptures that go past the merely unnatural and into the synthetic. *Joy Coated* is more didactic, a child-size mannequin coated in Gummi Bears that melt at the child/doll's extremities, having/becoming the jousissance of childhood obsession: candy. The highly saturated, surreal colors of the Gummi Bears underscore this sense of humor and unease, evoking our nation of obese children, poisoned by toxic, synthetic food. *Chandelier*, also made from Gummi Bears, emits an eerie amber light with an attractive/repugnant smell of dusty, hot, gelatinous High Fructose corn syrup, akin more to the nauseating sweetness of bug spray than to the enticing aroma of butter cream frosting.

There are other notable examples of the unnatural in the show, including Linda Frost's creepy "The Tortured Souls" series, digitally manipulated photographs commenting on the use of animals in testing, and Pamela Grau Twena's *Protecting the Seeds*, a circle of bronze cast barbed apples that warn of the consequences of man messing with nature. Set in a circle protecting a few desiccated grapes, Twena's thorny apples evoke other fabled apples (Eve's, Helen's, Snow White's). Except in this case it is not just woman who is punished for her transgression, but rather all mankind if our machinations with bio-agriculture produce the kind of monstrous fruit that Twena imagines.

Samantha Fields' *In the Belly of the Beast* is the most apocalyptic of the group, and also the one that brings us from a meditation on man's unnatural effects on the environment to nature's enflamed responses. Depicting the hills of LA on fire, her somber acrylic painting is both a vision of hell and a warning. The LA area chaparral needs fire as part of its cycle



Channa Horwitz, *Pink to Burgundy Circle Variance no.7, 2007*

of growth, but sprawling over-development combined with global warming's drought and flood pattern redistribution make it so that fire is increasingly lethal. Fields' piece seems to say that nature will have the last word, even if it means the end of us.

—Carrie Yury

CHANNA HORWITZ Solway Jones

A ROW OF CIRCLES increases in size and density as it calmly stretches across the wall. Beneath it hangs a second row, each painted with a looping palette of colors shifting from one end to the other. Emanating from repetitive angled lines, the forms resemble woven cloth but closer inspection reveals them to be the result of painstaking and measured lines of paint laid down in deliberate layers. The grays, browns and greens of the lower row are made from eight colors, starting at each end and meeting in the middle, while the upper row uses a striking combination of white and orange that transforms into the deep red of a harvest moon in a blackened sky by the last image. The works brim with the cool intensity of commitment so when I meet artist Channa Horwitz coincidentally in the gallery on the day of my visit, I am charmed, if not surprised, at her enthusiasm for her favored technology, something called a ruling pen that Horwitz finally draws for me in my notebook when explanations fall short.

Though Horwitz has been exploring her particular and finite choices in pattern, line, and shape, "since '68," as she says, there is something timeless about the simplicity and nuance of work that evokes cycles of the moon and the passage of time more quickly than it does the modernist painters with whom she shares an affinity for simplicity and limitation. The circle series are the most striking for their repetition of a circle embedded in a square, as well as for a powerful use of color. But each of the pieces in Horwitz's exhibition of this new body of work has a sense of certitude that feels equal parts mid-western and mystic, an odd combination that evokes a Buddhist monk in the body of a small woman with silver hair and an easy smile. Agnes Martin comes to mind, and Vija Celmins without the delicate specificity, but in Horwitz's work, color surpasses repetition and line lending the work additional emotional engagement and a sense of cheer. A bright green and blue series of squares expresses the joy of a day at the beach while the orange and white circle series evinces the eerie sensation of images crumbling into the

slow but inevitable passage of time.

Horwitz herself is relaxed but animated, offering a glimpse into work that is uncommonly steadfast and optimistic. Most compelling are the pieces where the series of angled lines that flow from her ruling pen are thinner and closer together, the colors shifting from one layer to the next in such subtle variations that one must lean in close to see them while, from further back, the effect is that of a moray pattern — perhaps waxing poetic about the moon.

—Annie Buckley



Yaya Chou, *Joy Coated*, 2007

ANDREA ZITTEL Geffen Contemporary Los Angeles

EQUAL PARTS LIFE-COACH, interior designer and architect, Andrea Zittel wears many hats — and uniforms. While proclaiming the transformative power of a simple life free of clutter and distraction, she positions herself precariously in the role of a multitasking C.E.O., head of A-Z Administrative Services, a bi-coastal corporation that caters to an elite clientele of art collectors and design aficionados. In the past, A-Z Administrative Services sent out newsletters profiling Zittel's endeavors and spotlighting the lives of her devoted fans. Like any great interior design house, A-Z works directly with clients to customize their products, making sure that each purchase says something poignant about its owner. And in true corporate form, Zittel brands each of her works with her signature A-Z logo.

Zittel is most effective when her work pushes corporate branding strategies and consumer marketing fantasies to absurd extremes. For

example, her *Deserted Islands*, solitary white shiny miniature ice flows, with folding white chairs perched in the center of each, seem to poke fun at romantic notions of escape and tourism. In what could be a comedic comment on global warming, each private iceberg is branded with the A-Z logo next to a silhouette of a palm tree. Here humor is deployed to effective ends, the butt of the joke being the person who would actually buy such an object on which to live out any sort of escapist desire.

Equally engaging is the *A-Z Breeding Unit for Averaging Eight Breeds*, an inverted triangle of empty cubicle breeding units, originally designed to cross-breed Bantam chickens (show birds prized for their decorative features) to create not prettier poultry, but instead a more "original" or average chicken. This is not only a wonderful comment on the legacy of modernist notions of purity (read Minimalism) and notions of progress in general, but also a calculated use of the mechanics of science in an art context, a shift of one academic field into the sphere of another. Unfortunately, most of the other works in the show are reiterations of an understood and worn-out design fantasy that has trouble coexisting with Zittel's corporate model.

In the early '50s, when designer Ken Isaacs created his 8' square *Living Structure*, a cube made with thin wooden beams and large decorated panels designating sleeping, eating, and reading areas, he did so out of a need to live with his wife in their cramped studio apartment. His personal domestic quarters, as well as his other innovative ideas like "micro houses," small portable living units that one could purchase and assemble at little cost, were featured in two issues of *Life* magazine and are currently revisited in this year's April edition of *Dwell* magazine. Like Buckminster Fuller, Isaacs was socially engaged to the point of evangelism, making it his life's mission to spread the gospel of "Nomadic Living," an eco-friendly existence, utilizing transportable and inexpensive housing. After seeing her retrospective, it seems that Zittel not only was inspired by Isaacs, but decided to borrow his designs as well.

The formal and conceptual similarities between Isaacs' structures and many of Zittel's living units are undeniable. For example, her *A-Z Management and Maintenance Unit Model 003* from 1992, a compact living space made with blond wood and metal beams separating kitchen, dining, and sleeping areas, looks stunningly similar to both Isaacs' 6' and 3' x 6.5' *Living Structures*. Both artists' designs have the same basic structural layout (but Isaacs' work is much more colorful). I have no problem with appropriating and repositioning others' works