



Andrea Bowers

It seems that almost everyone who moves to Los Angeles develops increasingly complex and out of control allergies; an aggravated sensibility, a feeling of being constantly undetermined by unknown forces, becomes the ruling condition of everyday life. Sunny optimism is darkened by the squally clouds of paranoia.

Hot Coffee

Selected by Thomas Lawson

Edward Weston's photograph of a crudely-made sign for a coffee shop stuck out in the California desert resonates with this disquiet and pathos—I almost sneeze just looking at it. A giant cup and saucer loom large in the foreground, yet are oddly lost in the vast landscape that rolls out to a distant mountain range. The sign is not very well made. Its edges are bashed and bruised by the wind, the lettering is not quite convincing. Its placement out in the inhospitable desert offers hope to the coffee-drinking traveler, despair to the coffee maker imprisoned under the open sky. Looking at this now, I still feel overwhelmed by the struggling, hopeless optimism it captures. The picture so eloquently expresses a weirdly hypnotic combination of confidence and delusion: setting down roots as convincingly as the tumbleweed.

The transient nature of Los Angeles has become something remarked too often; yet it is hard to deny the flux of the place. People come and go.

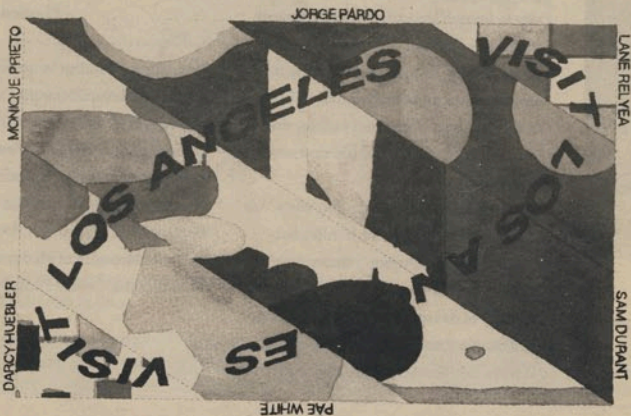
They come with fantasies and hopes, and find traffic management and gridlock. They rarely find a destination, only a rest stop, a coffee break. From the U.S. they come looking for the glamour of the entertainment industries, but from around the Pacific, and from Mexico and Central America, they come looking for jobs and security. As a result, cultures shift, merge, and split apart again, as does the ground beneath our feet. The persistent ambiance is one of distrustful spectatorship, the anomie of post-suburban life.

The one allergy I brought with me from New York is that activated by curatorial attempts to make thematic statements out of modest group shows. My organizing principle for any exhibition has always been driven by the simple desire to see artworks I like—that I find interesting, challenging, amusing—gathered together. The pleasure of a show like this is found in the discoveries made possible by the actual grouping of works.

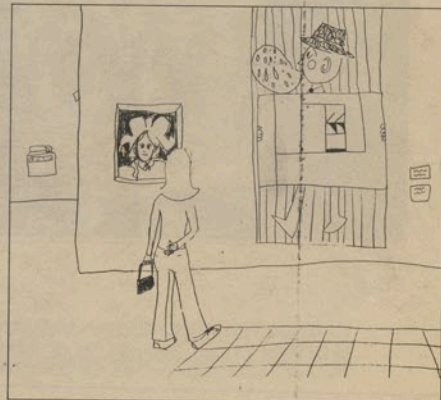
Having said that, I will go on to claim that the art selected here does share something more than the fact that it was recently made in Los Angeles. Mostly this is manifest in the hybrid sense of unease that animates the work, a kind of provisional, improvisational refusal to find closure, to make the big, destiny-defying statement. There is no particular allegiance to medium or category, but an openness to association, an interest in mixing material and information from familiar sources in mass culture, esoteric themes from academe, and insider references to contemporary art. There is an attempt to find a beauty, or at least the pathos of an ordering, in the clutter of rescued banality. In that attempt a whole range of interesting questions about aesthetics, spectatorship, class alienation and humor are thrown together to form a puzzle which can only be partially solved by recourse to the idea of "art from Los Angeles."

—Thomas Lawson

Thomas Lawson is an artist and the Dean of the School of Art at the California Institute of the Arts. He exhibited at Artists Space in 1977 and curated the show "Scottish Artists" at the gallery in 1979. From 1979 to 1991, Artists Space acted as the conduit for Real Life, a publication he co-founded with Susan Morgan. "Hot Coffee" is made possible in part by contributions from The Peter Norton Family Foundation, the Jerome Foundation, and the New York State Council on the Arts. Additional support was provided by Dean Valentine, Ruth and Jacob Bloom, Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Tina Petra and Ken Wong, and Barry Smooke.



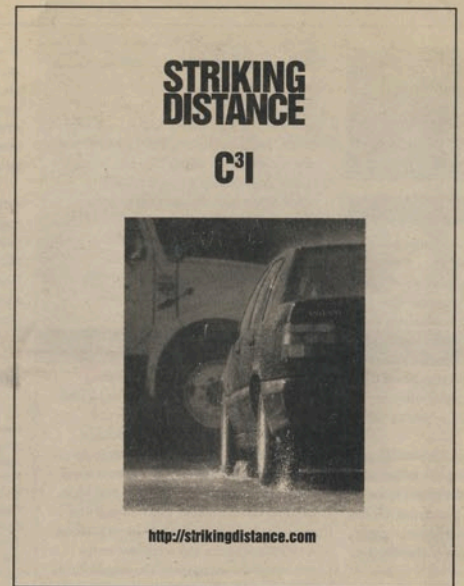
Dave Muller, *Visit Los Angeles: Six Abstract Details from the Microgeneration Immediately Preceding My Own*, 1996.



Laura Owens



Julie Becker, *Postersize Copy Machine*, 1996.



Kent Young, *Untitled*, 1996