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FORCE BLEUE
hygiène et propreté
sans javel

2 ENDLESS SUMMER

by Stephen Berens

3 THE EAGLE ROCK SHOW

by Michelle Grabner

3 LA PARTICLES AND WAVES

by Timothy Barth

3 ARTIST PROJECT

by Kevin Sullivan

1 LETTER

2 from Dave

(book)

1 SHOWCASE

3 Jey's Fajitas & more 207 tout votre linge

20

0.02

90

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X·TRA

- [About](#)
- [Issues](#)
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Fall 1997

Volume 1 Number 3

- [Buy Now](#)
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- [Find a Bookstore](#)

Table of Contents

Features

- [Endless Summer](#) Stephen Berens

- [LA Particles and Waves](#) Timothy Martin
- [Letter](#) Dave Bailey

Reviews

- [The Eagle Rock Show](#)
Eagle Rock Community Cultural Center
Los Angeles
Michelle Grabner
- [Show: Case #1](#) Stephen Berens

Artist's Project

- [A Guide to Public Sculpture: Glendale/Pasadena California](#) Kevin Sullivan

Issue Archive

- Volume 18
 - [Number 4](#)
 -
 - [Number 3](#)
 -
 - [Number 2](#)
 -
 - [Number 1](#)
 -
- Volume 17
 - [Number 4](#)
 -
 - [Number 3](#)
 -
 - [Number 2](#)
 -
 - [Number 1](#)
 -
- Volume 16
 - [Number 4](#)
 -
 - [Number 3](#)
 -
 - [Number 2](#)
 -
 - [Number 1](#)
 -
- Volume 15
 - [Number 4](#)
 -
 - [Number 3](#)
 -
 - [Number 2](#)
 -
 - [Number 1](#)
 -
- Volume 14
 - [Number 4](#)
 -

Table of Contents

Issue Archive

Features

. **Endless Summer**

Stephen Berens

. **LA Particles and Waves**

Timothy Martin

. **Letter**

Dave Bailey

Reviews

. **The Eagle Rock Show**

Eagle Rock Community Cultural Center
Los Angeles
Michelle Grabner

. **Show: Case #1**

Stephen Berens

Artist's Project

. **A Guide to Public Sculpture: Glendale/
Pasadena California**

Kevin Sullivan

- Volume 18
- Volume 17
- Volume 16
- Volume 15
- Volume 14
- Volume 13
- Volume 12
- Volume 11
- Volume 10
- Volume 9
- Volume 8
- Volume 7
- Volume 6
- Volume 5
- Volume 4
- Volume 3
- Volume 2
- Volume 1

- Number 5
-
- Number 4
-
- Number 3
-
- Number 2
-
- Number 1

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The Eagle Rock Show

by Michelle Grabner

August 30/September 26, 1997

Eagle Rock
Community Cultural Center
2225 Colorado Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90041
213 226 1617

Mrs. Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced Bouquet) appreciates proper English etiquette and will go to outrageous comic extremes to live out her quotidian upper middle class life in rigorous good fashion. As the main character in the British sit-com titled "Keeping Up Appearances," Mrs. Bucket regularly hosts candlelight dinners for her friends and acquaintances as reminders of her impeccable decorum. Halfway around the world and half the age of Hyacinth Bucket, Laura Owens also appreciates the importance of keeping up with appearances.

Alex Slade (foreground) and Laura Owens, ERCCC, 1997.



However, unlike Hyacinth Bucket, Owens substitutes Pardo design for Royal Dalton, she dons retro ski-wear instead of flower printed misses wear, makes abstract paintings rather than tea and organized The Eagle Rock Art Show—complete with readings, performances, a cake walk, a recipe exchange and film screenings—instead of a candlelight dinner.

Arranging various types of 'artist socials' in a community center smartly appointed with hip art made by you and your



Volcano cake by Anne Faison, Giovanni Jance and Claire Crespo, ERCCC, 1997.

friends may smell a bit like Hyacinth Bucket's self-indulgent kidney pies—especially if you weren't one of the twenty-some artists invited to participate in the exhibition—but it also marks

an important mis-step in the rigid art world hierarchy. An exhibition driven by friendship and amusement (both aesthetic and social) with no pretense of being anything else is simply fresh indifference to the authority of the official institution of art; dealers, museum curators, collectors, etc. What makes this unmindful observation of the art apparatus food chain convincing is the participation (including Owens herself) of the celebrated I-don't-need-this-group-show-to-further-my-career crowd. Not that the works by Jorge Pardo, Sharon Lockhart and Benjamin Weissman are any more successful than the works by Mary Clare Stevens, Bia Gayotto or Susan Lutz, but the mere fact Owens elects to synchronize aesthetics and acquaintances instead of artist profiles confounds the political routine of 'the group show.'

Parallel with Guy Debord's secretive Parisian collective, the Lettrists/Situationists, who playfully and anti-productively worked to fuse culture with the terrain of everyday life, Owens and her fraternity are obliged—albeit with a very casual Southern California demeanor—to the social conditions of the everyday, forging gracious art-oriented entertaining and congeniality into the politics of display. However, let's not fool ourselves completely. Eagle Rock in 1997 is

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no post war Paris and soon Pardo is back on the plane to Europe, Weissman is headed for the ski lodge and David Hullfish Bailey is mailing slide packages to galleries.

Gathered under the allegiance of Sharon Lockhart's hand-stitched California state flag, a variety of work in the exhibition astutely dotted the interior and exterior spaces like curious cultural center garnishes and well appointed didactic arrangements. The savvy juxtapositions of work with the municipal spaces and the preexisting architecture homogenized the loquacious babbles streaming from perverted little collages, cardboard monsters, jute tomato plant cages, illusionary paintings and terra cotta effigies. So carefully woven into the communal spaces of the

David Hullfish Bailey, ERCCC, 1997.





Padraic Cassidy and Michael Coughlin, ERCCC, 1997.

cultural center, works like Owens' washy paintings lining the backs of built-in shelving units, David Hullfish Bailey's overanxious tomato garden and Susan Lutz's recipe exchange card files sitting at the information desk can hardly be distinguished from the daily activity common to the vocation of a cultural center.

The sculptural objects that occupied the prime middle-of-the-floor-space read like autonomous art objects and less like playful intervention into the physical and social makeup of a community center. This is not to suggest works like Dave Hughes' exquisitely crafted table-gone-amok construction, or Michael Coughlin and Padraic Cassidy's corrugated cardboard theater titled, "Nessie and the Man," were any less interesting as sculpture or installation, they were just obvious as 'art works.'

Many objects worked as both aesthetic artifacts and as conduits to the





Cake Walk poster by Lisa Anne Auerbach and Daniel Marlos, ERCCC, 1997.

social and physical constructs of the Eagle Rock community and its meek cultural mecca. For example, Jorge Pardo's pastel stained frosted lamp suspended from the ceiling by a long white cord displaced the viewers attention from the soft electrical glow of the light to the series of electrical outlets mapping the gallery. After four half-hour walks from his studio, Bia Gayotto's modest color photographs document where he ends up; a Chevron gas station, a field of succulents, an exit onto a highway and garbage day on an Eagle Rock street, resulting in a project framing a community profile through self-interest.

The big pink and brown mass-produced poster generated by Lisa Anne Auerbach and Daniel Marlos to advertise the Cake Walk event was the epitome of the exhibition. Looking like a cross between airbrushed cake frosting and a band

announcement, the poster was formally sexy, functional, and an extension of any cultural center's day-to-day life: promotion, fundraising and outreach. In addition to advertising the Cake Walk, the poster also acknowledged the several local bakeries and volunteers who contributed to the event as well as announcing the evening's entertainment, "Christina on Accordion."

At a time when art institutions are plagued with hall after hall of ironic art gestures, Owens and company, in good faith, pulled off an exhibition that compliments the local cultural center's modest edifying endeavors. Without compromising beauty and design and promoting pleasurable fellowship among artists in the community, "The Eagle Rock Show" is a great model for refining not only art production and installation craft but social skills and generosity. And as Mrs. Bucket already knows, keeping up with appearances locally is more advantageous than impressing friends in the Midwest.

Editor's note:

In addition to the artworks and cake walk Daniel Marlos and George Porker screened films, Noah de Lissovoy, Frances Stark, Dave Hughes and Lisa Anne Auerbach gave readings, Christopher Nyerges gave a lecture and Michael Webster made music.