

Adriane Colburn, *To and Fro*, 2005, paper and ink, 42" x 13-1/2" x 6", at Traywick Contemporary, Berkeley.

graphy and sculpture, and discovered fresh and surprising ways to depict the self and the world.

Four of the artists work in the 2-D world of drawing, collage and photography. Karen Kimmel makes abstract drawings with rounded organic collaged elements that suggest fruits and flowers; to my eye their lyrical simplifications hark back to Matisse and Ellsworth Kelly, but Kimmel's imagery is more elusive and ambiguous. What does suggest floral imagery, however, is the pieces' slow opening out to the viewer's gaze, their emanation from the implied space of the paper into our air space. Lena Wolff's painting-sized collage, *Twilight Gathering*, takes as its starting points the traditional handicrafts of silhouette cutting and quilting. Cutout stylized drawings of animals and plants are mounted on a background plane coated with graphite. Delicately pinpricked borders and swags accentuate the implied theme of harmony in nature, but the decentered composition and the visual/emotional heaviness of the metallic gray (less otherworldly Byzantine gold than lugubrious Anselm Kieferian lead) suggest a state of nature that is vulnerable if not actually inaccessible.

Marco Breuer burns, abrades and punctures photographically treated print-making papers to create weathered, decaying surfaces suggestive of desolate industrial topographies seen from the air: ruined columns or piers jutting from the rubble, they also invoke the corroded walls you might find at such a location down at ground level. These pieces find a subtle beauty in nature's entropic dissolution of the manmade, a modern romantic nostalgia. Similarly elegiac are Dennis Begg's poignant photographic collages, arrays of scavenged portraits of anonymous persons digitally blended with faded letters and postcards and buried under sedimentary layers of beeswax. *88 Lives* might be a universal class photo for every generational cohort on its march through time, waxing and waning just as the images and text waver in and out of focus.

The other four artists here explore new sculptural uses of paper. Adriane Colburn's exquisitely detailed wall sculptures enlarge the decorative cut-paper craft tradition to the scale of the human

body. They depict networks that are normally invisible to us and thus out of mind: the pathways of blood coursing through our bodies, the probing fingerlings of root systems, the visually mad but mathematically methodical mazes of piping design. She manifests what most of us would consider utilitarian "negative" spaces, and finds a hidden beauty in the humble sublime of fluid dynamics or gaseous exchange or capillary action. Susan Martin also finds beauty in anonymous found objects, specifically, rolls of commercial paper. These she alters with wax and paint to create silent icons of indeterminate meaning: Spinning suggests movement and industrial might (think of film montages of train wheels spinning or presses rolling), but also the eye, sections of tree trunks, ripples of vibration, and atomic or planetary orbits. Her *Wound* and *Spinning Unspun* house yards of randomly unrolled paper; they're Plexiglas reliquaries for industrial excess, beautiful in their aleatory calligraphy yet verging on aesthetic absurdity like Duchamp's standard stoppages mechanized or indecipherable tickertapes.

Kelsey Nicholson's deconstructed *Camouflage* dioramas too explore absurdity (the gap between real and ideal). Faux birds fashioned of cardboard covered (or plumed) with wallpaper patterns (clouds, grass, foliage, or bark) perch atop similarly faux branches before faux skies. Marrying Magritte and the Brothers Grimm (the mechanical songbird versus the real nightingale), these pieces comment on our estrangement from nature, which is less picturesque and orderly, and our eager acceptance of its conveniently consumable simulacra from the happiest and other places on earth.

Ann Weber's large sculptures made from woven strips of cardboard synthesize ancient and modern, craft and high art. The biomorphic gourd shapes suggest traditional basketry, but also, with their human size, their open grids and peepholes, pre-industrial coffins or cages, and their probing necks (or smokestacks of chimneys), they're imbued with life and as anthropomorphic as Giorgio Morandi's bottles.

Regardless of their starting points—traditional crafts or industrial products—all eight *Paper* artists have expanded the boundaries of drawing, collage, photography and sculpture, infusing an ancient medium with contemporary aesthetic concerns, and discovering fresh and surprising ways of depicting the self and the world.

—DeWitt Cheng

Paper closed in December at Traywick Contemporary, Berkeley.

DeWitt Cheng is a freelance writer based in San Francisco.

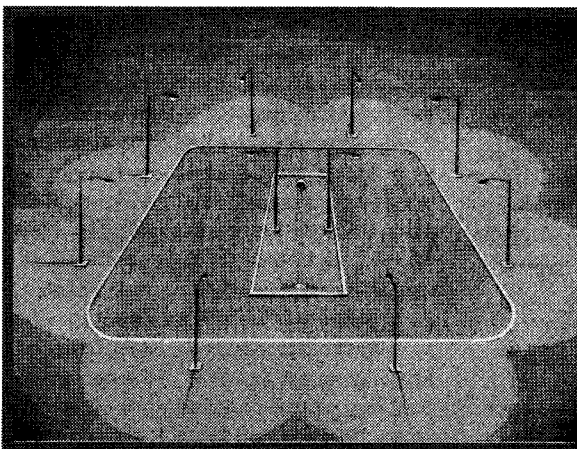
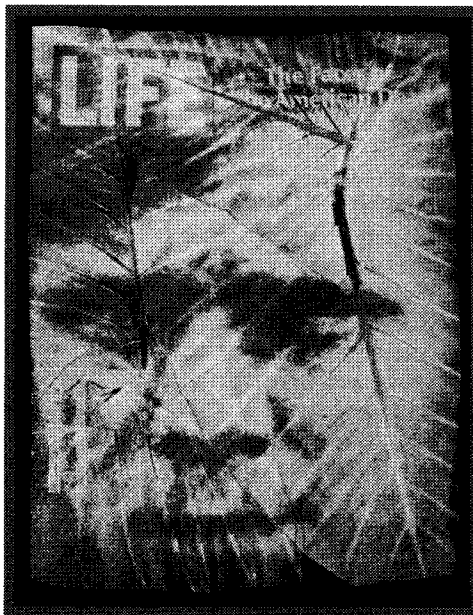
Southern California

'California Biennial' at OCMA

If there is a reigning theme in the 2006 *California Biennial* at the Orange County Museum of Art, it is this: Give an artist an inch and he'll make an installation. Including more than 150 artworks by thirty-one artists using materials as diverse as fabric batting, bronze, Formica, luster prints and red velvet sofas, the *Biennial* underscores the difficulty of staging multiple installations in small, interconnected spaces. Whereas they are unmistakably autonomous, the installations tend to compete with each other and distract visually and audibly from the hanging work.

The notable exception is Shana Lutker, whose work is so engrossing and complete that nothing else matters. Her

Top: Binh Danh, detail of *Selections from LIFE: One Week's Dead* series, 2006, chlorophyll print, resin; bottom: Chris Ballantyne, *Untitled, Parking Lot (Landing Strip)*, 2005, acrylic, graphite on panel, at the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach.



installation is a comfortable space where visitors are encouraged to engage with the work through tactile means, thumb through books in which she's recorded two years worth of dreams or peruse her collection of full-page ads from *The New York Times*. Lutker's series *Art that I Dreamt that I Made*, an outgrowth of an earlier series on Freud and the unconscious, is accessible and unpretentious. She lays her art-making intentions and motivations bare in this space that feels as much like her private studio as it does a collection of curiosities.

Chris Ballantyne, Sergio De La Torre and Lordy Rodriguez's works inhabit a serene gallery, a quiet respite between crowded and hyperkinetic spaces on either side. This well-curated gallery looks at the construction of place, through the literal paintings of Ballantyne's suburban spaces to Rodriguez's jumbled interpretations of United States maps. The irony of Ballantyne's *Parking Lot*, an empty island of a parking lot lit by an excess of tall street lamps, is balanced by the subtle danger implied by *Labyrinthe*, a geometric maze of chain link fence topped by barbed wire.

Next door, a wall of Walead Beshty photographs, which could've been plucked out of the Société Anonyme archives, forms its own small exhibition, a mini-retrospective that illustrates how incredibly prolific this artist has been in only the past two years. The images from his photogenic drawings series (photographic paper manipulated and exposed to chemicals and light) are elegant and fascinatingly simple. Beshty makes his presence felt even in these cameraless prints through the barely visible whorls of his fingerprints in the emulsion.

Binh Danh's hauntingly ephemeral series of chlorophyll prints on grass and leaves gives poignant life to the nightmare of the Vietnam War. Portraits of young American soldiers printed on grass come in and out of focus, an uncanny reproduction of the experience of seeing figures hidden in dense foliage. Never has the memento mori been a more visceral experience than on these walls. The cover and two-page spread from

LIFE magazine printed on large dried leaves bears the title "The Faces of the American Dead" and one gets the feeling in this dimly lit gallery that this may be the last time we see these ghosts, that when the chlorophyll prints fade away, the leaves too will give up their last vestiges of life.

Martin McMurray's acrylic on board or panel paintings, split between two sections of the exhibi-

tion, also reveal the faces of war, but to remarkably different effect. These highly stylized, forcefully naive paintings portray their subjects, the props and actors of war, with incredible accuracy. The *Procession* series shows military leaders in dress uniform gazing out of official state cars. Despite the anonymity of titles like *An Iranian, A Filipino, A Liberian*, each one of the characters in this series is actually a personality of political or military might. McMurray picks them out of the endless parade of history and forces them to stand on their own. Alone in McMurray's paintings, these once-powerful figures look sad and defeated.

The abundance of international themes in this year's *Biennial* comes as no surprise, as nearly one-third of the artists invited to participate were born outside of the United States. California, it seems, exerts a strong pull on the consciousness of young artists worldwide. With increased recognition from last summer's exhibition, *Los Angeles 1955-1985: Birth of an Artistic Capitol*, at the Centre Pompidou, California's golden glow is only just beginning to heat up the international art scene. The *2006 California Biennial* is a fine, if occasionally overwhelming, sampling of the richness and diversity of Golden State art and artists finally earning an enthusiastic welcome on the world stage.

—Kim Beil

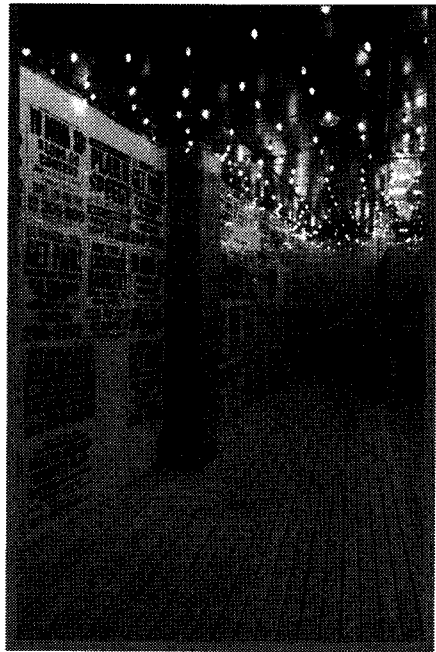
2006 California Biennial closed in December at the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach. Other artists in the exhibition included Andy Alexander, Jane Callister, Shannon Ebner, Ala Ebtekar, Brian Fahlstrom, Kianga Ford, Pearl C. Hsiung, Marie Jager, Christian Maychack, Joel Morrison, My Barbarian (Malik Gaines, Jade Gordon, Alex Segade), Kate Pocrass, Arturo Ernesto Romo, Sterling Ruby, Leslie Shows, Slanguage, Speculative Archive, Tim Sullivan, Hank Willis Thomas, Nicolau Vergueiro, Goody-B. Wiseman, Mario Ybarra, Jr., and Amir Zaki.

Kim Beil is a freelance writer based in Long Beach.

'Consider This ...' at LACMALab

This ambitious and rather cumbersome exhibition cannot be faulted for being something of a blunt instrument; the

LACMALab's *raison d'être* is to broaden the museum's appeal to younger and more culturally diverse audiences via topics and technologies salient to contemporary culture. LACMA also seeks to place its engagement with the avant-garde within a historical context, as its



educational purpose requires, and, in all these aspects, *Consider This...* succeeds. However, by the time this litany of concerns has been thoroughly addressed, the overall experience becomes diluted. But, taken individually, each aspect of the exhibition's curation, design and content makes an impact. Fortunately, the lofty spaces and keen exhibition design by iconic twentieth-century artist Barbara Kruger give the six artists plenty of room to work; yet, ultimately the result feels more like a string of solo installations rather than a coherent program.

Consider This... takes on issues of identity in a problematic global society, including but not limited to: the current climate of aggression, conflict and fear; the impact of information technology and fashion on young people; the downside of gentrification; pressures of ethnicity, gender and class. As designed by Kruger, the exhibition articulates these concerns through the prism of power structures—relationships of the artists to society and to the institution, of humans to the environment, of people to one another. Her single-word banners that drape the building and many flat surfaces inside the exhibition proclaim DOUBT/PAIN/ PLEASURE/ FAME and so forth; she casts Mary McCarthy's quote, "In violence we forget who we are," as a cornerstone of the signage. It's all visual-

Above: Mark Bradford, *Market>Place*, video installation; below: (foreground) Mario Ybarra, Jr., *The Belmont Ruins*, multimedia installation; (background) Bruce Yonemoto on informational video, at LACMALab, Los Angeles.



ly arresting, but has little direct connection to the work on display inside the galleries.

Bruce Yonemoto's enormous and imposing *Birth Party* video installation towers just inside the entrance, a bold and bright and vaguely disquieting pixi-

lated close-up view on teenage-girl celebrations. At the far end, Mark Bradford's video installation *Market>Place* conflates teenage recreation in Cairo and LA neighborhoods and contextualizes the videos within a barrage of day-glow advertising signs for hair products, hip-hop concerts and the like. Though at opposite ends of the stylistic spectrum, these two works powerfully bookend the exhibition, by keeping the audience personally involved and resonating with the larger theme of constructing identity. Halfway between them in the center gallery resides Mario Ybarra, Jr.'s self-contained architectural installation *The Belmont Ruins*. Its imposing presence and array of interactive elements combine large-scale multimedia spectacle with an examination of the ancient Olmec society and the raucous graffiti crews that have both inhabited this famed, and now paved over, alt-culture landmark. It is an established trope that folk art and graffiti share much in terms of style and social function, and this artist is one of the most skilled traffickers in this hybrid idiom. Visitors are invited to paint the outside of the piece's Plexiglas walls in tribute to the defunct Belmont site, to exuberant albeit mixed results.

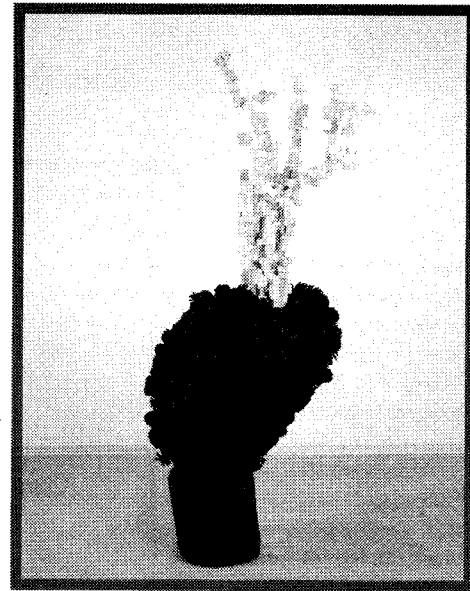
Dorit Cypis's sculptural installation *Sightlines* about the Juarez disappearances and Margaret Honda's *Hide Out* (a tented environment sheltering taxidermy animals, visible only to audience members unselfconscious enough to bend down and peer through holes in the tent) explicitly address political topics. So does Philip Rantzer's *The Five Continents* which poses a coded riddle through a series of elaborate figurative sculptures in vitrines arrayed on a plywood proscenium. Viewers are invited to use the cache of markers to write their "solutions" on the plywood walls of the stage. This kind

of humor and interactivity certainly create the engaging, unpredictable dynamic and ad hoc communion of strangers that the museum had in mind for LACMALab's experimental sensibility. While their formal potency falls short of this conceptual promise, on the whole the openness and risk-taking of *Consider This...* provides a vital point of entry for anyone freshly embarking on a life of visual connoisseurship.

—Shana Nys Dambrot

Consider This... closed January 15 at LACMALab, Los Angeles.

Shana Nys Dambrot is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.



Coleen Sterritt, *Pinecone Stack*, 2003-04, pinecones, wood, adhesive, 96" x 35" x 22", at d.e.n. contemporary art, Los Angeles.

Coleen Sterritt at d.e.n. contemporary art

In her recent solo exhibition, Coleen Sterritt probed the complex, often uneasy relationship between everyday objects, art and the natural world. These domains are fluid and difficult to define: Objects can morph from one category into either of the others, whether through human intervention, circumstance, or decay—and the exact moment of transformation is virtually impossible to isolate. Wood might be the ideal medium with which to explore the nature of these relationships: In the hands of humans, it has probably undergone more category shifts than any other material on earth, just as water shifts frequently between solid, liquid and gas. And trees, of course, have long been friends to artists, providing them paper, frames, supports, utensils, building materials, and something to carve, not to mention intriguing visual forms to represent and manipulate.

At a time when much art plays out on screens and paper is quickly losing ground to virtual communication, there is something particularly attractive about wood's familiar warmth and texture. Sterritt is clearly enamored of its properties: The three large, tactile sculptures in the exhibition are homages to wood's shape-shifting versatility. In the nine-foot-high *Domestic Fairytale* a mass-produced, Ikea-style blond-wood table and four stools combine with natural birch logs to form a spindly, tree-like sculpture. On one hand, a measure of dignity is restored to the dining set as it's reunited with its distant ancestor, an actual tree, and allowed to assume something of its original shape. On the other, having been pushed into the realm of art, it may be more distant from its natural state than ever. In *Daddy-O* (all of the sculptures might benefit from different titles), a profusion of wood scraps in various shapes and stain colors bursts from a piece of found furniture while a single strip of wood, embellished with bits of foam, shoots up seven feet from the