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Jeremy Mora
Hollywood
 2006
 Richard Heller Gallery



Mounir Fatmi
Save Manhattan
 2007
 Shoshana Wayne



Viewers watching Oliver Michaels' video
 at Shoshana Wayne



ToroLab
Síntesis
 2006
 Galeria OMR

LA LA LAND

by Ben Davis

There it was, right there, right when you walked into the second annual **L.A. Art** in New York, Feb. 23-25, 2007 -- the tiny diorama of the Hollywood sign by tiny diorama artist **Jeremy Mora**. The work greeted you at the entrance in the booth of **Richard Heller Gallery**, alongside fare by **Ernesto Caivano** and **Marcel Dzama**.

Mora's piece nicely situated the viewer with regard to this event, an incursion of 23 mainly L.A.-based art dealers into the core of the Big Apple's fair week -- not just in the way the tiny sculpture flashed its L.A. ID, but in the way it bottled Angelino essence and introduced it in miniature, as if that city's art community were self-reflexively viewing its own self with outside eyes, through the wrong end of a telescope.

Arguably even more emblematic, however, was **Mounir Fatmi's** *Save Manhattan* (2007) at the space of **Shoshana Wayne**. The Morocco-born artist, currently the subject of an exhibition at the gallery's L.A. space, presented a sort of 9/11 book fair, a table laden with tomes ranging from **Noam Chomsky's** thin political treatise to the beefy *9/11 Commission Report*. An ingeniously rigged light caused the books' shadow against the wall to resemble the New York skyline, with two ornately bound sets of the Koran standing as the erstwhile Twin Towers.

Priced at \$22,000, *Save Manhattan* nicely lent itself to a variety of conflicting interpretations about the power of symbols, place and politics. In context, however, it seemed more a tip of the hat to New York City's power as an icon in the international imagination, for good or ill. Indeed, certainly the most intriguing thing about L.A. Art is what the endeavor had to say about local identity in this go-go global art fair world. Here you had L.A. dealers consolidating their own commercial profile -- by coming to New York.

Certainly, plenty was on offer. Again at the Shoshana Wayne booth, bemused crowds frequently gathered to watch **Oliver Michaels'** charming video of a conveyor belt running objects beneath a rickety contraption made of a rubber ball wobbling in a bucket. As the stream of everyday objects passed beneath it, they were smoothly transformed from blank shapes to fully colored objects, through the magic of split-screen editing.

But is there a stylistic alternative on offer to go with the region-defining frame of this L.A.-themed fair (Michaels, after all, is a veteran of **PS1's** "Greater New York")? "When I think of the L.A. esthetic, I think of a **Jason Rhoades**, **Paul McCarthy**, punk kind of thing," said dealer **Pamela Echeverría** of Mexico City's **Galeria OMR**, one of the few non-L.A. exhibitors. "That's not really what we have here."

What we did have, at least at OMR's booth, was a slew of works by eye-catching Latin Americans, ranging from an installation featuring broken mirrors and print-outs of distorted black-and-white images by **José León Cerillo**, to a military-looking white on black diagram from



Thomas Wrede
Settlement in the sun
 2005
 Paul Kopeikin Gallery



Veronika Kelindorfer
Los Feliz, 1962 Glencoe Way
 2003
 Christopher Grimes Gallery



Olivo Barbieri
Seascape #1, Night, China, Shenzhen
 2005
 Barcolini Grimaldi Arte Contemporanea



Installing a painting by Tom
 Chamberlain at Kontainer
 Gallery/Chung King Project

ToroLab (a.k.a. **Raúl Cárdenas**). The latter was \$18,000, and detailed the daily paths between the U.S. and Mexico traversed by a series of individuals living in the Tijuana border area (captured via sets of custom-designed, sensor-embedded tracking pants the artist fitted his subjects with), showing visually the permeability of border-defined identities.

Given the issues of place embedded in the whole L.A. Art enterprise, it's probably significant that a large number of works riffed precisely on issues of placelessness and dislocation. At **Paul Kopeikin Gallery**, German artist **Thomas Wrede** photographed uncanny, placeless landscapes, impossible to read in terms of scale or location. They were priced in the high \$5,000s. At **Christopher Grimes Gallery**, a large photo by **Veronika Kelindorfer** pictured a view through a seemingly barren interior space, looking out over a balcony to a smoggy boulevard. The already haunted feeling of the image is augmented by the process the artist has used, screening ink directly onto the back of glass, giving it the look of a fading newspaper photograph. It was \$15,000.

Adding to all this playing around with context was **Brancolini Grimaldi**, a gallery based in Florence and Rome, which chose L.A. Art to present a video by Italian artist **Olivo Barbieri** about China. Fittingly, it had the some of the same quality of photographic suspended animation, with its high-contrast night-vision images of crowds at leisure on a beach in Shenzhen, China, filmed so that moving figures were reduced to jerky, strobing blurs, while people pausing to contemplate the action around themselves were brought into sharp focus -- it was like watching a long, bracketed montage sequence by Hong Kong film maestro **Wong Kar-Wei**. The piece was \$40,000, in an edition of six.

Kontainer Gallery/Chung King Project presented a series of monochromes by UK artist **Tom Chamberlain**, large, densely labored paintings-about-painting that embodied the context of no context. **Bruce Conner**, the veteran artist and filmmaker who really does embody a true-blue L.A. "punk" style, was showing at **Michael Kohn Gallery** -- but under the pseudonym of **Emily Feather**. A striking composition by "Feather" featuring elegant, enigmatic glyph-like rows of symbols was \$14,400.

Finally, at **Roberts & Tilton**, **Jimmy Baker's** cool oil portrait of a woman clad in white with white iPod ear buds, standing against a white background, conjured the decontextualized and airless look of advertising. A closer investigation revealed, however, that the surface of the piece is etched with distorted architectural schematics, and that the painting comes from a larger series by Baker playing on sci-fi myths of the near future, such as **George Lucas' THX 1138** (set to debut at the R&T later in '07) -- it all did all come back to Hollywood, in a fittingly oblique and coded way.

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Jimmy Baker
The Future is Clean (Jil)
2007
Roberts & Tilton