



» Previous Post | Culture Monster Home | Next Post »

With new artwork, Piero Golia says, 'L.A., I'm home'

April 9, 2010 | 6:00 am



At the *Artissima* art fair in Italy, he climbed a palm tree until a collector paid him to come down. At the *Site Santa Fe Biennial*, he created a diving board of sorts to plunge visitors into a gallery—and onto a crash pad. At *Art L.A.*, he crushed a 35-foot bus to fit into an art-fair booth.

As conceptual artists go, Piero Golia has a flair for theatrics.

And now the Naples-born, L.A.-based, hard-to-keep-track-of artist is making his mark on the Los Angeles skyline by planting a luminous globe on the top of the *Standard Hotel* in West Hollywood, meant to be visible from a couple miles away. A crane lifted the work into place Wednesday afternoon. Once the 5-foot-tall sphere is wired, it will light up whenever Golia is in town and go dark when he's not.

Golia says that the piece will be fully operational next week, but it's hard to know with certainty considering the history of permit and production delays on the project. The artist first had the idea seven years ago, before he moved to Los Angeles, while he was staying at the *Standard Hotel* and found himself mesmerized by the billboards on the Sunset Strip.

"I wanted to learn the sign language of L.A.," he says. "It's a city where signs are very powerful, where the Hollywood sign came before what we think of as Hollywood."

Golia started talking about the notion of creating his own sign with curator Michael Darling, then at the *Museum of Contemporary Art*. But after Darling moved on to the *Seattle Art Museum*, Golia began working with *LAX Art* as part of its public art program.

The project ultimately received permits from the city of West Hollywood and funding from the art collector and juice-fortune (Jumex) heir Eugenio López, who had bought Golia's crushed bus. (Production costs ran about \$50,000, according to *LAX Art* Founder Lauri Firstenberg.)

"Eugenio could have asked me to put this globe in his backyard, but that would have been a very different thing," says Golia. "I wanted the piece to look natural, fitting into existing city architecture, not like some weird art piece."

Recently many other L.A. artists have also attempted to infiltrate the public sphere without creating traditional public sculpture. Several have used billboards or digital displays as a way to reach the city's stream of commuters. "Urban Light," Chris Burden's installation of rewired Art Deco street lamps at LACMA, is likewise visible from the road.

Golia hopes that drivers will notice his globe just enough to be curious. "I hope it becomes part of their daily experience. Maybe drivers will think the light connects to the weather—that it turns on or off for sunny days. Though my friends will know that it's also a code for when I'm in town," he says.

Wouldn't it have been a lot cheaper to text his friends instead?

"Text messages, Facebook alerts and tweets don't have the magic of monumentality," he says. "It's the difference between a real neighborhood and a Web community."

--Jori Finkel

Photos: *Luminous Sphere*, 2010, by Piero Golia. Credit: *Daiana Feuer*