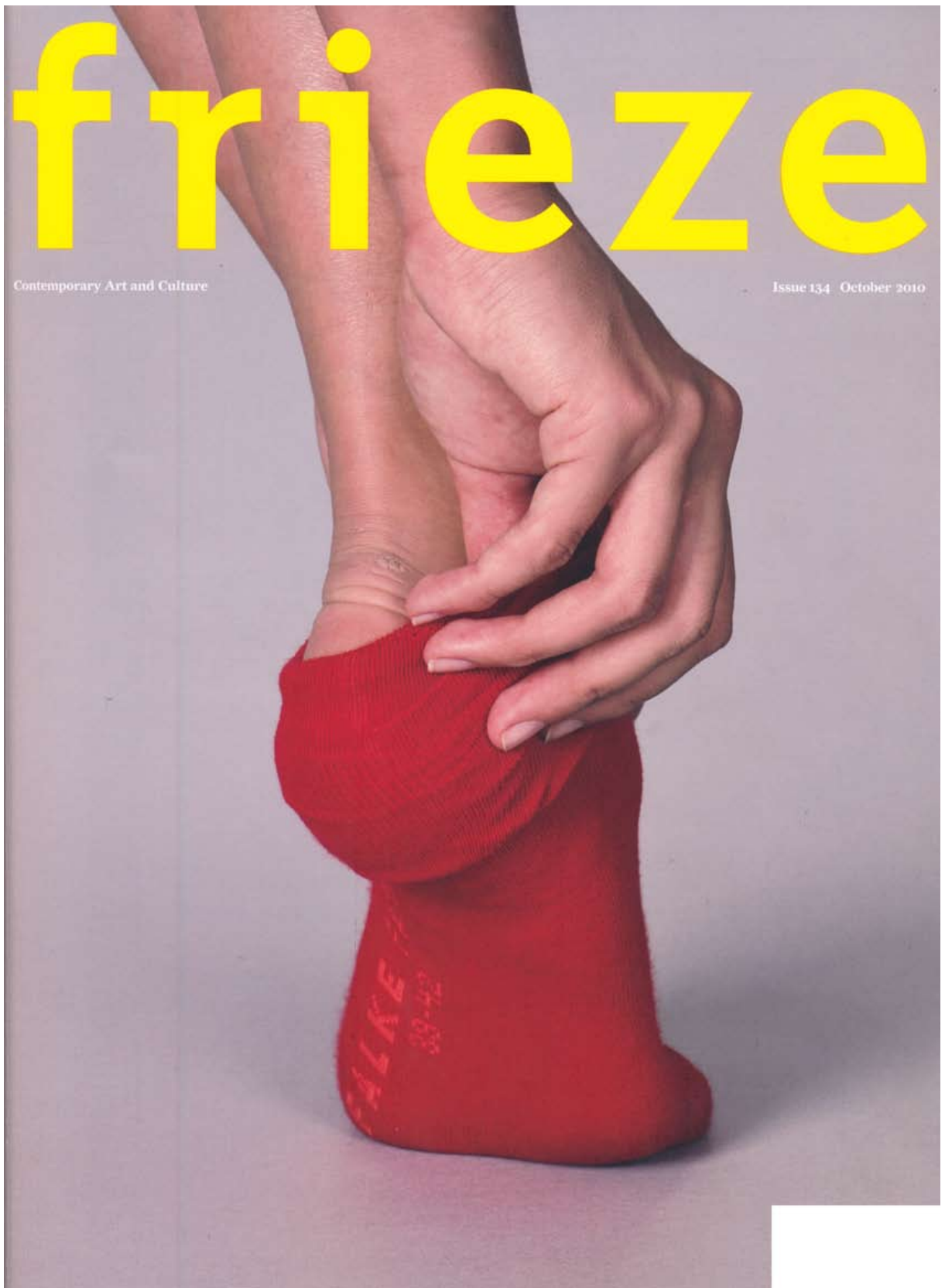


Frieze
frieze.com
October 2010

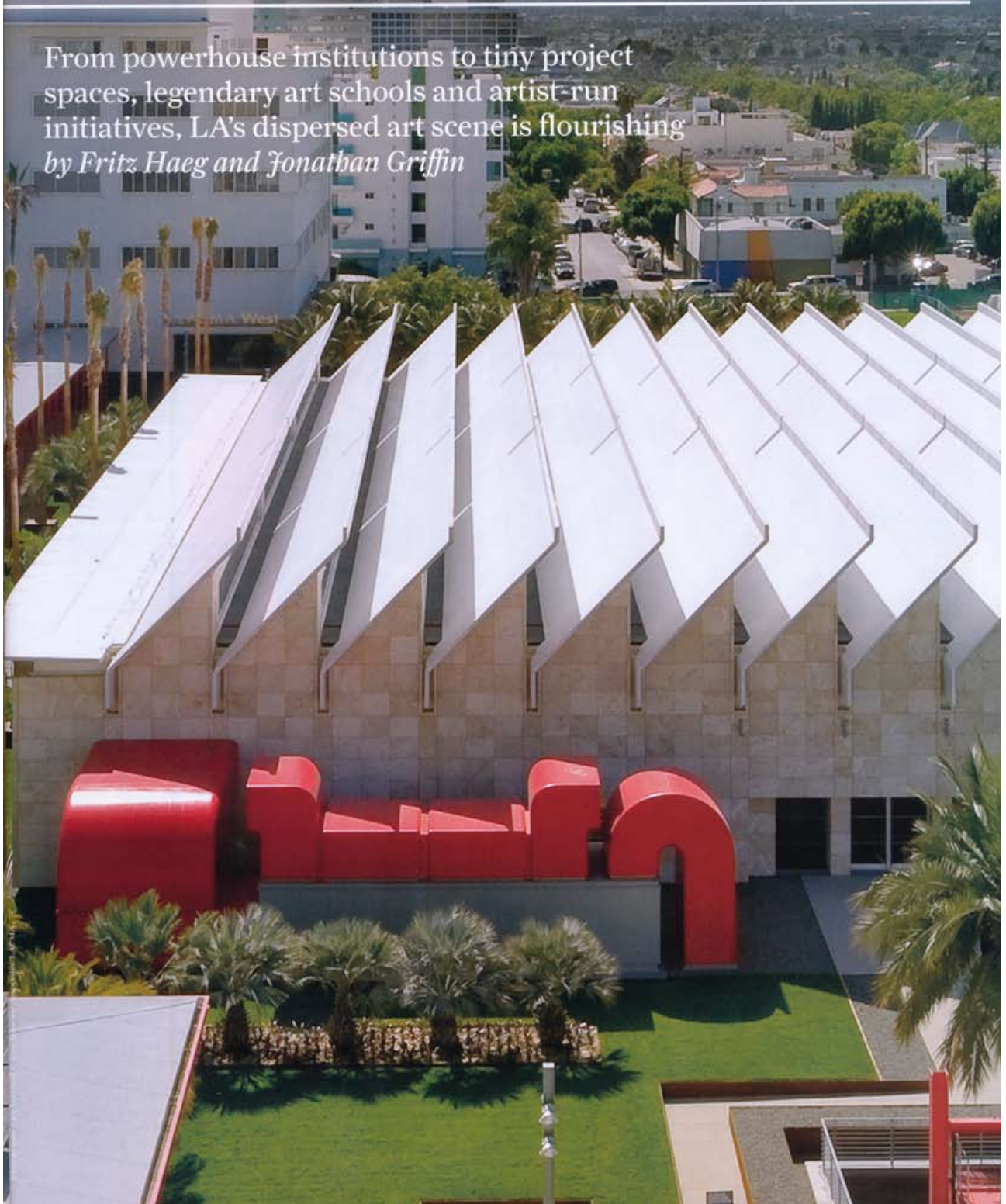




Left: The Broad Contemporary Art Museum (BCAM) 2008
Right: The newly opened Lynda and Stewart Resnick Exhibition Pavilion Los Angeles County Museum of Art 2010
Both buildings designed by Renzo Piano Building Workshop

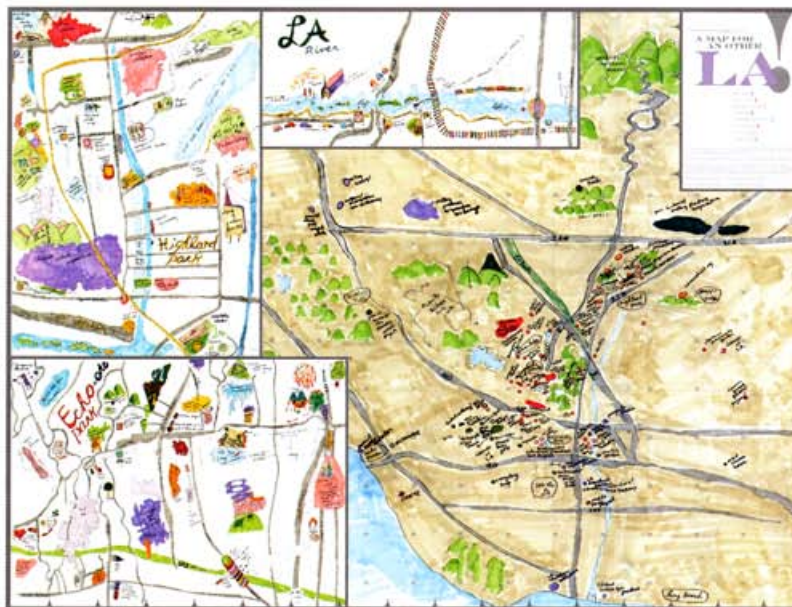
LOS ANGELES

From powerhouse institutions to tiny project spaces, legendary art schools and artist-run initiatives, LA's dispersed art scene is flourishing
by Fritz Haeg and Jonathan Griffin





LA Fog performing at
Human Resources
2010



Llano del Rio Collective
Map For An Other LA
2009
Offset Lithograph
on paper
46x61 cm



LA Urban Rangers
teaching participants
about public access
issues during a
safari on Malibu
Public Beaches
2010

Fritz Haeg

Lives and works in a geodesic dome in the Glassell Park hills of Los Angeles, which has been the site for Sundown Salon events, Sundown Schoolhouse meetings and the vegetable gardening that inspired his 'Edible Estates' project (2005–ongoing). He is currently in residence at the American Academy in Rome, Italy, on a Rome Prize Fellowship.

Close your eyes while I say 'Los Angeles'. What comes to mind? Your fantasy of the place is no less true than the diverse daily lives of its actual citizens, and part of the unique charge of this city happens when the quotidian and fantasy congeal.

It was without good reason that, in 1999, I impulsively moved from New York City to LA. Forced to explain the decision to confused family and friends (some of whom intimated that I was 'giving up' or 'going soft'), I might say that I was looking for an adventure. The truth – that I felt mysteriously beckoned by this wild beast of a city, that I was hoping it would be uniquely able to prompt new directions in my work – was not confessed at the time. I wasn't looking for the promise of happiness or comfort – in fact it was the comfort of New York that I was giving up. I wanted my nose pushed directly into the centre of the dystopian mess of early 21st-century urban life, with all of its accompanying discomforts, conflicts and contradictions. It was only later that the pleasures of the place would reveal themselves.

I had no immediate prospects there, and only three friends, all of whom had recently moved from New York themselves. In true immigrant style I stayed with one friend until another found an apartment for me in her neighbourhood. Comparisons between the two cities are

inevitable. Malik Gaines (who lives in Echo Park) of the performance art trio My Barbarian – esteemed anchors of a community of artists on the east side of town – puts it best:

'In New York, art is ART, dance is DANCE, theatre is THE THEATRE, and so on. These are disciplines with history, huge institutional support and entrenchment, impenetrable auras of high-art importance, and panic-stricken masses of up-and-comers hoping that if they live sufficiently horrible lives, they might become that one monstrously brilliant master whom they worship and despise. In LA, a lot of this making-it mania is relegated to Hollywood, which is basically trashy. The most celebrated artist, dancer or playwright is a nobody next to Tom Cruise or Halle Berry. Even schmuck TV actors get better service. It used to be that personal earthquake procedure included seeking the safety of a doorframe when the tremors began, but now the experts counsel that one should rather find a potential air pocket by lying beside a sofa or beneath a sturdy table. In LA, Hollywood's enormous structure provides a similar pocket of air where artists can breathe deep under the rubble.'¹

Yes, LA can be a delightful place for artists to disappear into. Many of them eschew the outward appearances of a down-and-out bohemia, and – instead of isolating into art ghettos – spread throughout the city as common citizenry. With artists as the perennial urban pioneers, their migrations should be carefully analyzed by anyone wanting to know where we are headed. In that spirit, I took a casual survey among a few local artist friends, enquiring 'Why do you live in LA?'

My Barbarian
The Only One
 2007
 Production still
 Costumes made in
 collaboration with
 Lara Schnitzer;
 filmed at the former
 house of Liberace



'Picture Industry, (Goodbye To All That)' organized by Walead Beshty, Regen Projects (works from left to right: Jeroen de Rijcke & Willem de Rooij, Manfred Pernice, Imi Knoebel)
 2010



A wildfire in the Hollywood Hills
 2007



In Los Angeles you do not have to wait for your big break – everyone creates their own, for themselves and for each other.

In 1923 Edgar Young, grandfather of Edgar Arceneaux (Pasadena), migrated to Los Angeles from Mississippi, evidence that there are LA artists who were actually born Angelenos. The fact that this is so important to note up front says something about the implied transience of today's artists and our preconception of the city as a mecca for self-(re)creation. 'I know where the bodies are buried,' is how Mark Bradford (Downtown) describes this condition of continuing to live among his family and friends in the city of his birth.

Others who didn't initially make the conscious decision to move here, came to study at one of the 12 graduate art schools in Southern California and then never left. A few even went on to found their own schools, such as The Public School's Sean Dockray and Fiona Whitton (Chinatown) and The Mountain School of Arts' Piero Golia (Hollywood Hills) and native Angeleno Eric Wesley (Lincoln Heights). The art schools exert primary influence over the social structure of the local art community, and every spring an increasingly thick layer of local graduates – who a decade ago may have felt obliged to move to New York – is spread over the town like a fresh layer of garden compost.

Those who did not end up in LA by chance came searching for something – especially a sense of the future. The story of European

colonization of the US is the story of westward 'progress'. For Charlie White (Silverlake), LA is 'always a little closer to the future [...] both a place to live and an idea to inhabit' and for Ryan Trecartin (Los Feliz) it 'feels like the Internet'. The city evokes 'a common time that moves both forwards and backwards, futuristic and ancient' to Luke Fischbeck (Echo Park) of the music collective Lucky Dragons. He described his latest endeavour, The Elysian Park Museum of Art, as an experiment in amateur urban park management, and seems to epitomize a certain LA hybrid of homespun and expansive urban culture that has made the city so appealing to young artists. Despite the fact that, by some accounts, LA has more museums per capita than any city in the world,² it is also a thriving centre for artist-led, neighbourhood-based activity. Here, you do not have to wait for your big break – everyone creates their own, for themselves and for each other.

It is this collegiate and networked community that attracts Mark Allen (Silverlake) of Machine Project and Robby Herbst (Rampart Park) of the newly initiated collective Llano Del Rio. Other influential enterprises include the roving home-based exhibitions of Artist Curated Projects (ACP), the wild inner-city expeditions lead by the LA Urban Rangers, and the new Chinatown hothouse for music and performance appropriately known as Human Resources. While many cities around the world have seen the rise of artist-run spaces and initiatives, in LA they often do not feel like the alternative culture, but rather the *de facto* culture, engaging not just an insular community of fellow artists but the general public.

LA's expanded sense of space can mean both the physical space appreciated by sculptor Liz Larner (Mount Washington), and the headspace identified by Anna Sew Hoy (Cypress Park). For Katie



Screening of
China Town by Lucy
Raven, organized by
James Thomas for
The Public School
2009



Sunset over the San
Gabriel Mountains
from Fritz Haeg's
Los Angeles home
2010



Lucky Dragons
2010

Grinnan (Topanga Canyon) this spatial freedom takes the form of a solar-powered studio in an empty swimming pool at the outer limits of the city. Edges and interior pockets of the city are rough and unpredictable as human occupation gives way to untamed hillsides, canyons, beaches and high deserts. The appeal of living with this wild precariousness is described in different ways. For Jedediah Caesar (Mount Washington), it is the sense of 'retreating to the hills', for Zackary Drucker (Silverlake), 'life on an urban ranch', for Alice Könitz (MacArthur Park), the 'farm in the city', and for Stanya Kahn (Highland Park), who moved from New York because she heard about a 400-dollar-a-day job sweeping the floors of movie sets, it is the 'open fields under smoggy moons' in the middle of the city where she shoots her videos. Another facet of this wildness is described by Liz Glynn (Lincoln Heights) as 'always saying yes to seemingly absurd pursuits', and the 'perception of achievable impossibilities' for Marc Herbst (Echo Park) of *The Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*.

Dimensions of artists' activity can be released from the confines of interior spaces in this Mediterranean climate with 3,000 hours of sunshine and just 35 days of precipitation a year.¹ Emilie Halpren (Highland Park) and Lesley Vance (Laurel Canyon) – who grew up waiting for the school bus in sub-zero Wisconsin temperatures – confessed that they are in LA for the climate, and for Kim Fisher (Silverlake) this means 'perfect painting weather'. The quality of light that originally drew the film industry to this city continues to attract artists, such as William E. Jones (Los Feliz) and Wu Ingrid Tsang (Koreatown). In Lawrence Weschler's 1995 essay 'LA Glows', he investigated the particular nature of LA light and even found some scientific evidence for the dream-like trance that it can induce.

In Weschler's 1982 biography, *Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees: A Life of Contemporary Artist Robert Irwin*, Irwin describes his most profound state of well-being to be found while driving aimlessly around the hills of the city. This 20th-century, wild-west, fossil-fueled version of the Situationists' *dérive* now seems like ancient history. Aside from Ryan Trecartin, who 'likes merging' and thinks 'traffic is sexy', the pleasures of driving are low on the list for the LA artists that I heard from. They are more likely to be found on bicycles, such as Lisa Anne Auerbach (Jefferson Park) whose celebration of slow movement on two wheels, in a city designed to be experienced violently speeding on four, has inspired some of her most exuberant work:

'The fabled "sprawl" has a veneer of sameness and a general mediocrity on a casual first glance. But it doesn't take long for paths and furrows to be carved out by daily or occasional journeys and the city begins to yield to the patterns and paths, taking on a well-worn personality, distinct and individual, custom fit for every citizen. These paths become our personal urban universe, routes radiating from the core like sunrays illuminating the landscape. And then the city becomes yours, and home is everywhere.'

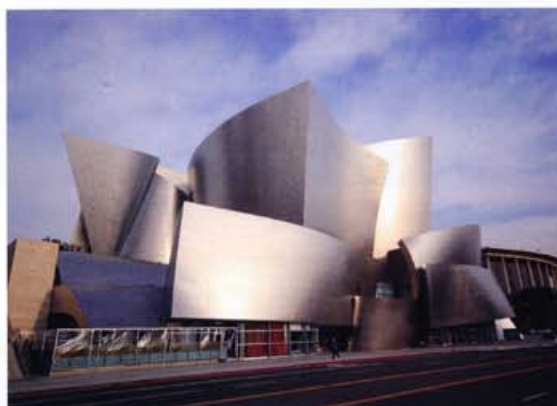
¹ The quotes from Malik Gaines and Lisa Anne Auerbach are from Fritz Haeg's *The Sundown Salon Unfolding Archive*, Evil Twin Publications, 2009

² <http://tinyurl.com/2cftqdl>

³ <http://tinyurl.com/24txg9q>



Renzo Piano
Building Workshop
The north façade
of The Broad
Contemporary Art
Museum (BCAM)
2008



Gehry Partners, LLP
The Walt Disney
Concert Hall
(opened in 2003)
2009



Renzo Piano
Building Workshop
Los Angeles County
Museum of Art
(LACMA - moved to
its current site on
Wilshire Boulevard
in 1965)
2010

Jonathan Griffin

An art critic based in Los Angeles.

Everybody thinks they know Los Angeles. It's one of the most filmed, photographed and sung-about cities in the world. However, archetypes of gridlocked traffic, plastic surgery, finish fetish, smog and gang violence sell short the city's many surprises. Originally a city of farmers, LA is spacious enough for everyone to tend their own patch without trampling their neighbours' crops. It's also elemental: flanked by mountains and ocean, its steep hills attest to its energetic seismic geology. And it teems with wildlife: mountain lions and bobcats prowl the foothills of Hollywood and bears are regularly rescued from Beverly Hills swimming pools.

I moved to LA four months ago. Looking for a map to help me get my bearings, the best I could find covers approximately a quarter of the city; above, below and to the east of the map stretch conurbations equally as big as itself. That Los Angeles has no centre is a commonplace; that it does, in fact, have multiple and distinct centres is less widely observed.

To chart the tides of LA's contemporary art world, it'd be necessary to mark two opposing currents – a current and a rip-tide.

If one were to chart the tides of LA's contemporary art world, it would be necessary to mark two opposing currents – a current and a rip-tide. One of these is the direction of civic energies towards my map's eastern edge, where Downtown, a bundle of high-rises lashed together with congested freeways, has struggled for decades to free itself from dilapidation. The second is a natural undertow that carries commercial interests towards the private capital on the city's Westside (which includes Santa Monica, Beverly Hills and West Hollywood).

When billionaire philanthropist Eli Broad, on the eve of the opening of The Broad Contemporary Art Museum (BCAM) at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in 2008, announced that he would not, as had been widely assumed, also be donating his impressive art collection to the museum, his perceived capriciousness prompted both local and international brouhaha. Two years on, Broad has just announced something long suspected: that he will build his own museum to showcase the collection on a Downtown site directly adjacent both to Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall (2003) and Arata Isozaki's Museum of Contemporary Art (1986). Broad's chosen architects are Diller Scofidio + Renfro with whom, it is hoped, he will develop a better relationship than he did with Renzo Piano during the design of the underwhelming BCAM.

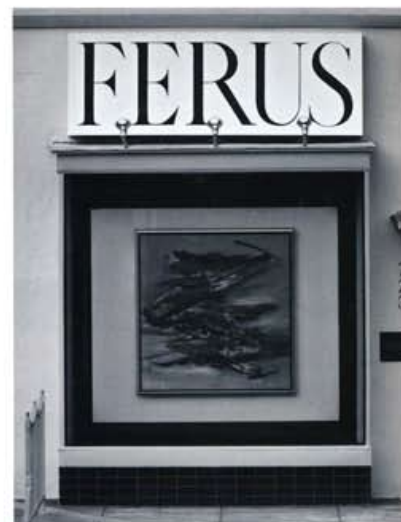
The move is part of Broad's ongoing commitment to an area of Downtown known as Bunker Hill. When the area's Walt Disney Concert Hall encountered budget problems mid-construction in 1996, Broad stepped up to lead fundraising for its rescue. Similarly, when The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) found itself in financial trouble in 2008, he offered a \$30 million package of matched funding,



Edward Larrabee Barnes
Associates
The Hammer Museum
(opened in 1990)
2010



William L. Pereira
& Associates
Pacific Design Center
(opened 2000 - one
of the Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Los Angeles' three
venues)
2010



Ferus Gallery
(1957-66)

with conditions attached that the museum remain independent (it was considering a merger with LACMA at the time) and that its leadership be reinvigorated. New York dealer Jeffrey Deitch was appointed director in January 2010.

Whatever the ethics of a (former) gallerist, collector and art advisor occupying the head office of a public museum, or of an unelected billionaire using endowments to shape a civic landscape, Deitch and Broad are working hard in areas in which the hamstrung State of California is unable. Broad may currently be the biggest fish in the pond, but he is not the only one. Lynda and Stewart Resnick, who made their fortune from Fiji Water and POM Wonderful soft drinks, have put their names to the new Piano-designed Lynda and Stewart Resnick Pavilion at LACMA, which opens this month. The vast, open-plan structure will provide extra exhibition space for the museum. Media mogul David Geffen contributed to MOCA's annexe, the Geffen Contemporary, in 1996; the building has just hosted a populist retrospective for Dennis Hopper, who died from cancer just before the show opened. (Critics accused Deitch of opportunism in his timing of the exhibition, his first for MOCA.)

In Westwood, The Hammer Museum exists due to the generosity of tycoon Armand Hammer in the late 1980s. Now the university museum of UCLA, the institution has been most active in developing its contemporary programmes under the curatorial appointments in 2009 of Douglas Fogle and Anne Ellegood. The Getty Center is an exquisite Olympian retreat on a hill overlooking the north of the city. This geographical and intellectual elevation however has given it a reputation for insularity, and the museum caters mainly to tourists prepared to fork out for \$15 parking. More or less at the centre of my

The city persists with the line it has sold to tourist-immigrants for decades: there is enough room for everyone.

map, LACMA remains the force to beat. Michael Govan, its well-liked director, has found innovative ways of presenting the museum's sprawling collection - such as commissioning artists Jorge Pardo and Franz West to design displays of, respectively, historical Hispanic and Pacific art. Nearby, in the 'Miracle Mile' strip of Wilshire Boulevard, galleries - including Marc Foxx, 1301PE and Acme - benefit from LACMA's footfall.

Chinatown still offers spaces affordable for young commercial and artist-run spaces. Although the emphasis has now dispersed somewhat from Chung King Road itself, here Pepin Moore, The Company, Thomas Solomon, The Box and Human Resources all contribute to that rarest of things in LA: a 'scene'. Many of Chinatown's more established galleries have, however, moved westwards either through expansionism, opportunism, ambition or financial desperation (depending on who you talk to). David Kordansky, Parker Jones and, most recently, China Art Objects and François Ghebaly have all defected to Culver City. This increasingly dense hub of galleries (including the first to open there, Blum & Poe, as well as the public arts initiatives LAXART and LAND) is located almost exactly halfway between Chinatown and the ocean: just close enough to the affluent Westside to benefit from its walk-in custom.

China Art Objects'
newly opened space
2010



Emi Fontana, Mike Kelley
and the band Ya Ho Wha 13 at
the event 'A Night of Growth
and Discovery' organized by
West of Rome
2010



Judy Ledgerwood
'Chromophilia'
Installation view
1301PE
2010



Blum & Poe's recently
opened space
2009

Other galleries, such as those gathered in the Bergamot Station development, have set up shop directly in Santa Monica. The LA branch of the New York dealership L&M Arts opened in September with a show by Angelino Paul McCarthy. The gallery is located in the west of the city – in Venice, once the centre of the LA art scene, but now home only to its most august figures, including John Baldessari, Ken Price, Larry Bell and Ed Moses. Many of these artists apart from Baldessari were associated with the Ferus Gallery (1957–66), credited with first staking out LA's identity as an art capital autonomous from New York. The site of that gallery, in West Hollywood, was temporarily reoccupied earlier this year for an exhibition of works by many of its original artists. Now 'WeHo' (as, mercifully, hardly anyone calls it) is home to upscale premises such as Regen Projects and Matthew Marks is due to open a West Coast outpost of his gallery there next year. A little to the west, Gagosian Gallery (with its new Richard Meier-designed extension) languishes amongst the boutiques of Beverly Hills; to the east lies a handful of younger outfits including Overduin & Kite, Khastoo and Michael Benevento. The non-profit organization West of Rome, run by Emi Fontana, eschews a permanent exhibition space altogether, cropping up instead in such unexpected locations such as Mike Kelley's cavernous Eagle Rock studio (for this summer's collaborative project 'A Voyage of Growth and Discovery', with Michael Smith).

None of which commercial landscape would thrive in quite the way it does without LA's art schools. The California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), where Michael Asher famously taught his Post-Studio Art class, and University of California, Los Angeles, which counts Mary Kelly, Andrea Fraser and Charles Ray among its faculty, have

historically been leaders in the field, although more recently attention has shifted to the University of Southern California whose graduates include Elad Lassry and Amanda Ross-Ho. Art Center College of Design, located in Pasadena, has suffered somewhat from the loss of Mike Kelley, whose teaching was particularly influential on a now-prominent all-male group of LA sculptors including Sterling Ruby, Stephen G. Rhodes, Aaron Curry and Nathan Hylden. Nevertheless, young artists come from far and wide to study in LA, and then they stay, often to teach here themselves. The city persists with the line that it has sold to tourist-immigrants for decades, and which has caused its edges to spread further than a single map can contain: there is enough room for everyone.