

contemporary

visual arts



Ruben Ochoa, *Extracted*, 2006. Courtesy: the artist and LAXART, Los Angeles. Photo: Lesley Moon

LOS ANGELES: LAXART

RUBEN OCHOA: 'EXTRACTED'

9 September – 31 October 2006

www.laxart.org

Driving on the Los Angeles freeways is an experience of navigating an urban jungle. Depending on traffic conditions, the temperature and the kind of day you are having, the concrete and asphalt thoroughfares that Angelenos famously spend more time in than a park or even their backyards can be awe-inducing for their engineering or seem oppressively confining, inspiring road rage and even drive-by shootings. What marks our version of a public space with a trace of humanity are the taggings – gestural interventions blasted on barrier walls or tucked under overpasses – which also serve as sheltered areas for

the homeless in a city notorious for its lack of social services. The neutralisation of this concrete fortress is a multi-million dollar enterprise. Graffiti clean-up crews play a cat-and-mouse game with taggers in which patches of fresh grey paint seem only to instigate more tagging.

Ruben Ochoa's exhibition 'Extracted' at LAXART brings together the politics of Southern California's sprawling freeway system in an ambitious new project that interrogates ideas about disruption, ownership, and camouflage. In the gallery, a massive chunk of a freeway wall diagonally bisects the pristine white space in a brutal intervention that disrupts the normal circulation within. Visitors were asked to sign a waiver at the opening before entering the work which requires one to get under the precariously leaning wall (think Richard Serra's prop pieces or torqued sculptures), seemingly collapsed by the weight of 3,600 pounds of dirt lying on top of it. The concrete wall, which normally functions to contain, retain and divide, is rendered mute here, its massiveness surreptitiously undermined when one walks to the other end of the sculpture exposing its hollow structure made of steel frame, chicken wire and plywood.

Ochoa is an urban archaeologist of sorts, placing him intellectually closer to Robert Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark than Serra. Ochoa's interest in the urban environment begins with a critical reading of the built environment as determined by and determining the social and economic dynamics of the city. Freeway walls cut into neighbourhoods, physically severing communities and displacing their residents. Issues of ownership play out on concrete walls in the form of tagging. Ochoa elaborates on these issues in a related series of photographic images that picture faux concrete wall parts in middle class suburban neighborhoods installed on an exterior billboard above LAXART and at the Lizabeth Oliveria Gallery. The final part of the project will involve an intervention on an actual freeway wall. On the 10 eastbound freeway in East LA Ochoa will cover a section of the barrier wall with a photomural that mimics the verdant surroundings. The draped mural will create the illusion of the extraction, temporarily inverting what is there and what lies around it. In so doing, Ochoa's project poignantly and forcefully questions the artificiality of our environment.

CLARA KIM