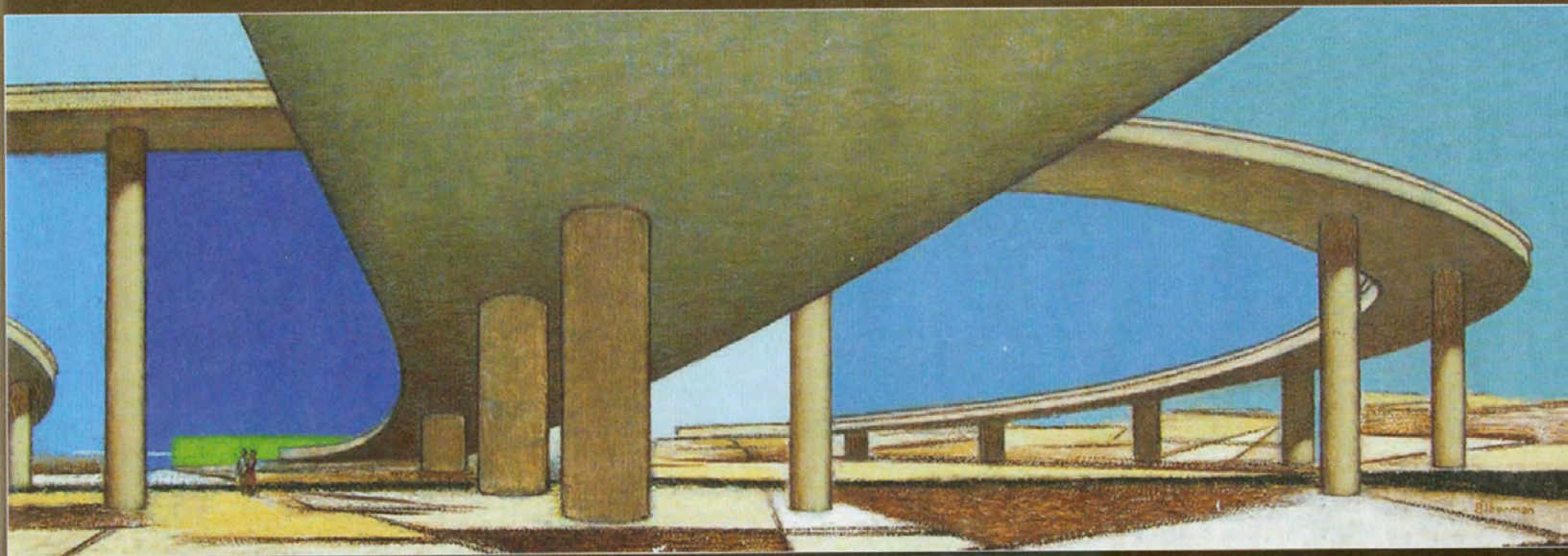


L.A.
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WITH **PACIFIC STANDARD TIME**,
A MASSIVE INITIATIVE INVOLVING
MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES,
THE GETTY DRAWS ATTENTION
TO **SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S**
PIVOTAL PLACE IN POSTWAR ART.



By **Scarlet Cheng**



In 1974, the artist Patssi Valdez was fastened with tape to an outdoor wall in East Los Angeles. Wearing a red jacket, hot pants and platform shoes, she posed like an ancient Egyptian with one hand up and one hand down.

Instant Mural, as the performance was titled, was a hit-and-run art action by Asco, a young Chicano art collective she was part of. Murals were popular in the barrio, but Asco thought some of them were eyesores, Valdez recalls. Why not put up something fun that could also be easily removed? As artists who felt excluded from the mainstream art world—the word *asco* means “nausea”—they enjoyed experimenting with alternative methods for art making and alternative venues for art showing.

“We were fed up with being left out, not being inside the museum, not being recognized by the institution, the art world at large,” Valdez says. Those days are over: This fall, She and fellow Asco members Gronk, Harry Gamboa, Jr. and Willie Herrón are being

celebrated in a major exhibition, “Asco: Elite of the Obscure, A Retrospective, 1972–1987,” at the very museum that once symbolized the closed door to them—the venerable Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Valdez grew up in East L.A., struggled to attend art school and eventually made a living as a painter of Magic Realist tableaux. Now she finds herself literally the poster girl for the LACMA show—in the form of a photograph of her *Living Mural* performance—as well as for “Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980,” a massive project spearheaded by the Getty Foundation that engages some 60 cultural institutions in re-examining the post-war legacy of Southern California art. PST, as it is known, launched in September and continues through April 2012.

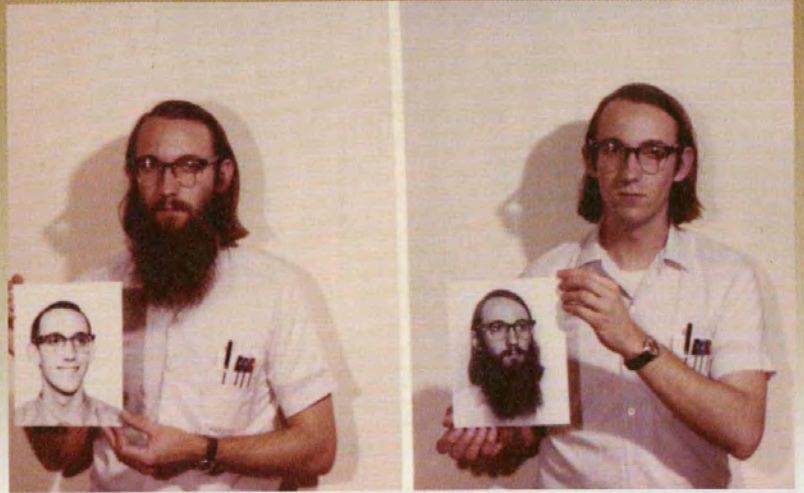
“We were all convinced that Los Angeles had a history in modern art on a par with to New York, London, and Paris,” says Andrew Perchuk, deputy director of the Getty Research Institute, “and the story of it hadn’t really been told yet.” Having done his doctoral thesis on art in postwar L.A., he was well aware of how scattered the history was and how much it was in danger of disappearing. “After all the research we’ve been doing,” adds his colleague Rani Singh, “we’re even more convinced.”

The Getty has generously funded the project in stages, first giving research and development grants, then provid-



Previous spread: Edward Biberman, *Under the Freeway*, 1950. This page: Helen Lundeberg, *Interior with Painting*, 1960. Opposite: Vija Celmins, *Freeway*, 1966.





ing for exhibitions and publications—all to the hefty cumulative tune of \$10 million. Major exhibitions will take place at LACMA, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MoCA), the Hammer Museum, and of course the Getty, and participating institutions stretch from Santa Barbara to San Diego. They will be showing painting, sculpture, assemblage and photography, as well as ceramics, woodworking, video, and performance (or documentation thereof).

This fall over 40 PST shows open in rapid succession, with the remainder opening in the winter. Catalogues accompany these shows, and history is literally being written. Some of it may be familiar to those in art world circles, but clearly the hope is for an expanded history that will enter the annals of the larger history of American art.

The major survey shows are at the Getty Center and MoCA. At the Getty,



HARRY GAMBOA, JR.: WALTER WITTEL; ALFRED LUCJEANS

Clockwise from opposite: Asco, *Instant Mural*, 1974; Walter Wittel, *Before - After*, 1970; Alfred Lucjeans, *A Spatial Occurrence, the Levitation of a Human Being*, 1971, Tony DeLap, prior to performance.



Perchuk and Singh have organized “Crosscurrents in L.A. Painting and Sculpture, 1950–1970” (Oct. 1, 2011–Feb. 5, 2012). That 20-year time frame was chosen, says Singh, because “after World War II there was a shift in the appreciation for modern art, going from a very conservative atmosphere and no contemporary art departments to speak of in the city, to this groundswell.”

“Crosscurrents” features 45 artists, with two 1950s movements as the jumping-off point—hard-edged painting (think Karl Benjamin, Lorser Feitelson) and ceramic sculpture (Peter Voulkos, John Mason). Then it traces the development of Los Angeles as a growing art center (Vija Celmins, Richard Diebenkorn, David Hockney, Ed Ruscha, Betye Saar). “You’ll find artists you associated with L.A.,”

says Perchuk, “and some you’ve never heard of, such as Ron Davis, Norman Zammitt, Gordon Wagner.” (The Getty also offers a historical show, “Greetings from L.A.: Artists and Publics, 1950–1980,” and a photography show, “In Focus: Los Angeles, 1945–1980.”)

Meanwhile, across town in the giant warehouse that is MoCA’s Geffen Contemporary, “Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974–1981” (Oct. 1, 2011–Feb. 13, 2012) will be unspooling. This show explores the intersection of art and politics, beginning with the ignominious departure of Richard Nixon from the White House and ending with the arrival of another President from California, Ronald Reagan. It’s the brainchild of chief curator Paul Schimmel who believes that the experiences of Vietnam and Water-



From top: Andy Wing, *Inferno Septych*, 1954; Karl Benjamin, *Yellow Landscape*, 1953.



From top: Hirokazu Kosaka, *Untitled*, 1972, performance at Pomona College;
Peter Voulkos, *Sculpture*, 1956.

gate not only traumatized the nation but also caused a sea change in the art world. “When this moral, institutional collapse occurred, the non-hierarchical approach to art began,” he says.

To illustrate his point, Schimmel has assembled 500 objects and 130 artists who run the gamut from the very famous to the somewhat obscure. “The show is organized thematically around broad social and political topics,” he says, and then rattles off a few of them—“identity politics, gender, race, the military industry complex, New Age religion, the deconstruction of Hollywood.”

One of the famous pieces is Ed Ruscha’s oversized oil painting, *The Back of Hol-*

lywood, from 1977. It shows the famous Hollywood sign from behind (and thus backwards) with a sunset beyond. Those who live in Los Angeles know this to be pure imagination, since the actual sign is set against a mountainside, not on a mountaintop. In any case, Ruscha’s point is well taken—we look from behind this icon toward an idealized Technicolor sunset. It’s the classic Hollywood ending, which you buy at your peril.

More pointedly connected to politics will be a Llyn Foulkes painting of President Gerald Ford with a letter going into his forehead at an angle, presumably the letter of pardon he wrote for Nixon. (The





Clockwise from top left: Hans Burkhardt, *Valhalla*, 1959; *Wandering Souls*, 1967; John Altoon, *Untitled*, 1969.

actual letter will also be shown.) There will also be Allan Sekula's *Reagan Tape*, which intercuts news clips of Reagan's inauguration with clips from his Hollywood films.

While the "Ferus Boys"—the hip young artists pushed by the legendary Ferus Gallery, such as Billy Al Bengston, Robert Irwin and Craig Kauffman — have taken up lots of print and gallery space in the last decade, PST reveals that things were percolating well before. East of L.A., in the Claremont/Pomona area, artist Millard Sheets was the charismatic head of Scripps College's art department for 25 years starting in 1938. His tenure, combined with artists choosing to live and work there, made the area a lively center for art and crafts. One show that elegantly traces the connections of that time and place is "The House That Sam Built: Sam Maloof and Art in the Pomona Valley, 1945–1985," curated by Hal Nelson for the Huntington Library. Maloof, a protégé of Sheets, became a woodworker who custom-made furniture for clients who appreciated his sleek lines and rounded edges. The 35 examples of Maloof's chairs, tables and cabinets are shown alongside paintings, sculpture and ceramics made by his friends and colleagues during the period. "Sam was part of a richly complex community of artists living and working in the inland Pomona Valley," says Nelson, "and it's the story of that community we hope to tell."

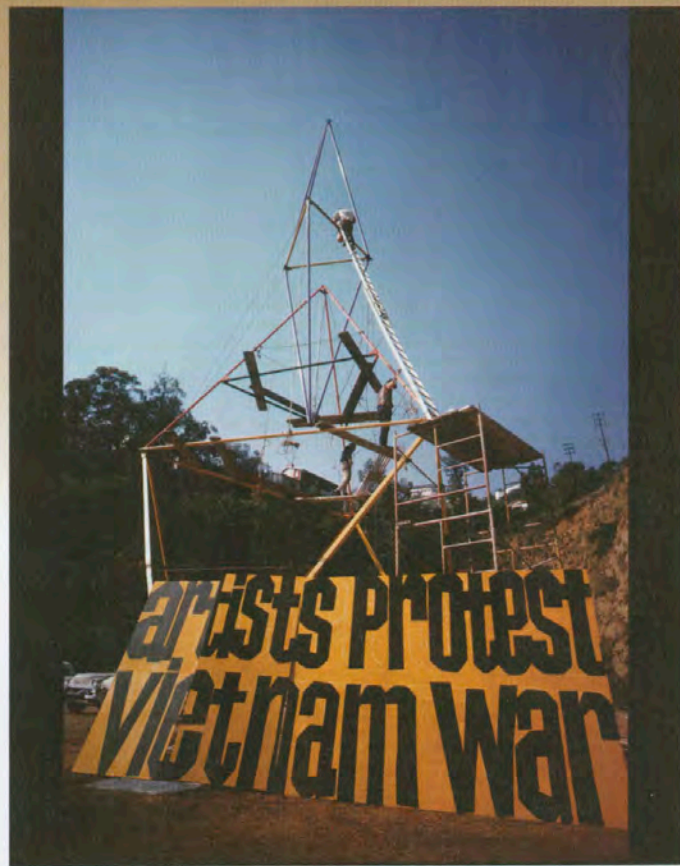
Other exhibitions featuring artists who worked, trained or taught in that part of Southern California are "It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles 1969–1973," a series of three exhibitions at the Pomona College Museum of Art, and "Clay's Tectonic Shift: John Mason, Ken Price and Peter Voukos, 1956–1968," at the Williamson Gallery at Scripps College.

Recognition is also being paid to the other constituencies that enriched the culture of this region. That includes African American art (with a major show at the Hammer Museum, as well as a one-man show for assemblage artist/activist John Outterbridge at LAXART), Chicano and Latin American art (in addition to the Asco show at LACMA, the Fowler Museum at UCLA has "Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art Movement" and the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach has "MEX/LA: Mexican Modernism(s) in Los Angeles 1930–1985"), and feminist art (Judy Chicago is included in more than one show, and the Otis College of Art and Design is presenting the exhibition "Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building.")

The Norton Simon Museum has decided to focus on a medium



JACK RUTBERG FINE ART; ESTATE OF JOHN ALTOON



Clockwise from top left: Raymond Pettibon, *It Terrifies Me...*, 1980; Charles Brittin and Mark Di Suvero, *Artists' Tower*, 1966; Betye Saar, *Black Girl's Window*, 1969.



for their PST show, "Proof: The Rise of Printmaking in Southern California." In 1960 artist June Wayne— who recently based away, sadly—founded Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles, saying that their intent was to "create a pool of master artisan-printers in the United States." They launched a revival in the graphic arts, pulling in Los Angeles artists and those from beyond—including John Alton, Richard Diebenkorn, Louise Nevelson and Ken Price. The founding of two major workshops followed: Gemini G.E.L. and of Cirrus Edition, both of which still exist.

Yet another lens onto the period is being provided by the Laguna Art Museum in their PST exhibition "Best Kept Secret: UCI and the Development of Contemporary Art in Southern California, 1964–1971." Art schools have contributed a great deal to the wealth of Southern California culture, and University of California Irvine (UCI) had a

run of great teachers such as Larry Bell, Vija Celmins and Robert Irwin who helped nurture some very talented students, including Nancy Buchanan and Chris Burden. Nineteen-sixty-four was the year John Coplans, a writer and editor of *Artforum*, became director of the University Art Gallery, and 1971 was the year the school put on a Duchamp Festival—pretty hip for the times.

Commercial galleries have also been given a nod by the Getty—after all, the Ferus and Dwan galleries played a crucial part in championing contemporary art in the 1960s. Through an application process, galleries have been allowed to use the PST logo on announcements and press releases.

Some are complementing ongoing shows at museums, such as Louis Stern, who is doing a Karl Benjamin show, and George Stern Fine Arts, who's show "Bridging the Gap" will be focusing on figurative paintings by Millard Sheets, Phil Dike, Roger Kuntz and others from the 1940s through



1970s. A dealer who has specialized in post-war California art since 1980 is Tobey C. Moss, who personally knew two of the leading lights of the period, Lorus Feitelson and Helen Lundeberg. "When these books came out about American art, they didn't go to the West Coast," Moss recalls. "It made me very angry, and it made me focus on this area." Her fall show is a group show featuring work by Feitelson and Lundeberg, as well as Gordon Wagner, Betye Saar, George Herms and others. In addition, a wall will be devoted to photographs of L.A. artists shot by Lou Jacobs Jr. in 1949 and 1950 at the encouragement of Feitelson, his professor at Art Center.

Dealer Jack Rutberg is mounting a solo of painter Hans Burkhart, who is in several PST exhibitions, including "Artistic Evolution" at the Natural History Museum and "L.A. Raw: Object Expressionism in Los Angeles 1945-1980" at the Pasadena Museum of California Art. The passionately political Burkhart was widely known and widely shown, Rutberg points out. "In the 1950s he had the most solo shows of any L.A. artist, 23." Not only was his art influential for many contemporary artists, Rutberg continues, he also fostered the next generation by teaching at top art schools.

Other galleries plan to feature their own finds from the



From top: Asco, *Asco Goes to the Universe*, 1975;
De Wain Valentine, *Red Concave Circle*, 1970.

DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES; J. PAUL GETTY TRUST, ON LOAN FROM BANK OF AMERICAN COLLECTION/PHOTO: HARRY DRINKWATER



Clockwise from top left: Lee Mullican, *Untitled (Venice)*, 1967; Sam Maloof, *Double Music Stand*, 1972; Oscar Castillo, *La Mexicana Market*, 1970's; John Valadez, *Sad Girl*, 1979.



period. L.A. Louver is showing the very early work of Tony Berlant; in the 1960s the artist produced a series in which he covered plywood boards with clothing and resin. Gallery Luisotti will do a solo for photographer Barbara Kasten, who lived and worked in Los Angeles for 10 years before moving to New York. Kasten is known for her experimentation with cyanotypes and large format Polaroids, and later for staged tableaux featuring famous buildings. Art Resource Group is highlighting the painting and sculpture of bohemian Laguna Beach artist Andy Wing, who made up his own organic pigments and processes for applying them. Wing's experiments included leaving work exposed to the elements to achieve a weathered patina.

Meanwhile, up in Santa Barbara, Sullivan Goss—though not an official part of PST—has put together “L.A.’s Risen,” a group show that includes modernist paintings by Anders Aldrin and Howard Warshaw, as well as abstract classical work by Karl Benjamin and Frederick Hammersley. “Our inventory stretches back further in history to encompass older Los Angeles artists who helped set the stage for the Cool School,” says gallery director Jeremy Tessmer. (The term “Cool School” refers to the Ferus artists.) “These artists created pockets of culture and produced quite sophisticated art.”



Rich pockets of culture are exactly what is being explored in Pacific Standard Time, and the art that resulted is what we will have the pleasure of seeing throughout the region over the next several months. 