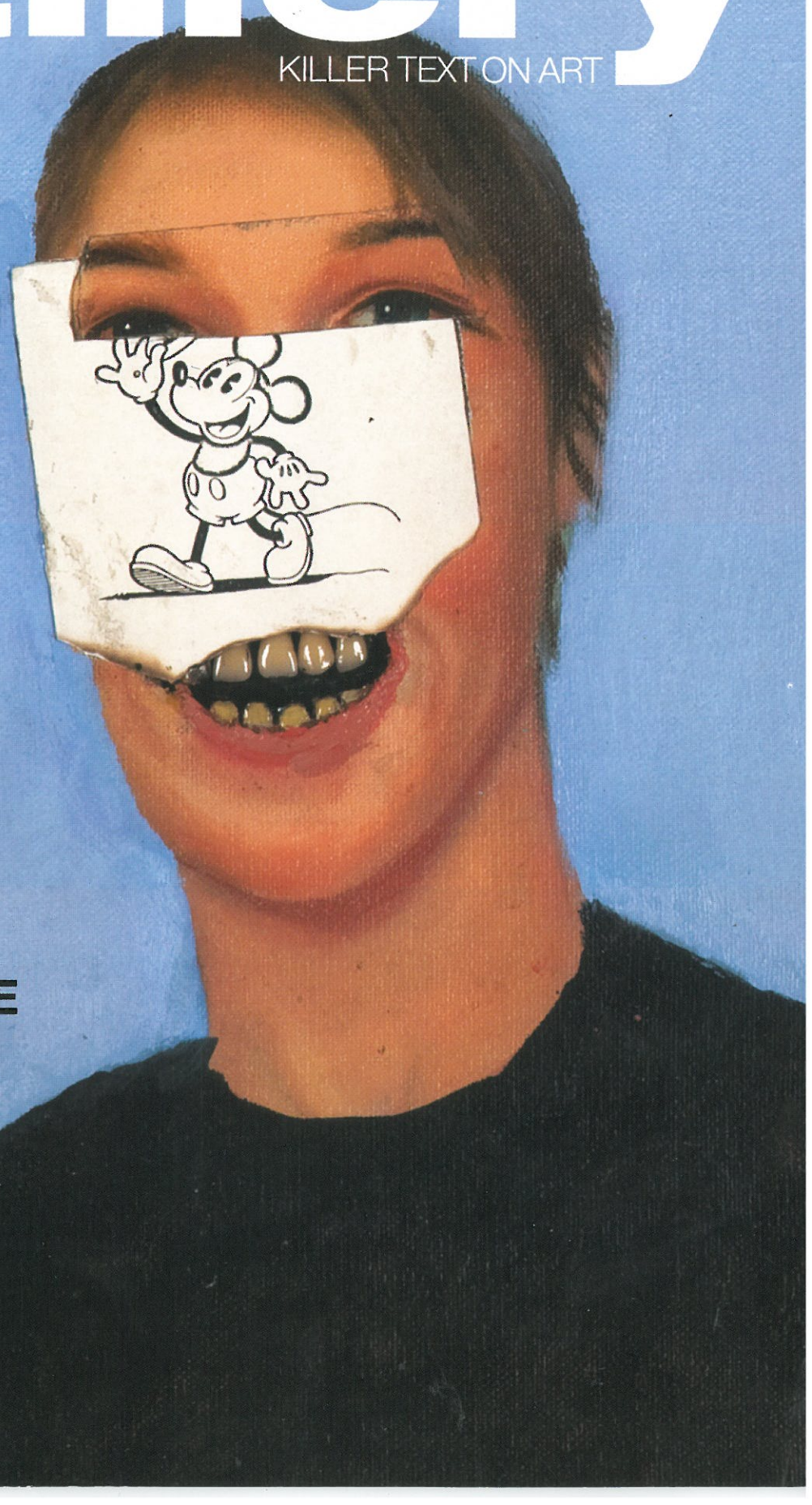
THE MILLION $ ROCK + JAMES FRANCO DOES JAMES DEAN

artillery

KILLER TEXT ON ART

the LA issue



Llyn Foulkes

ON THE ROAD to DOCUMENTA

THE CRITIC'S EYE

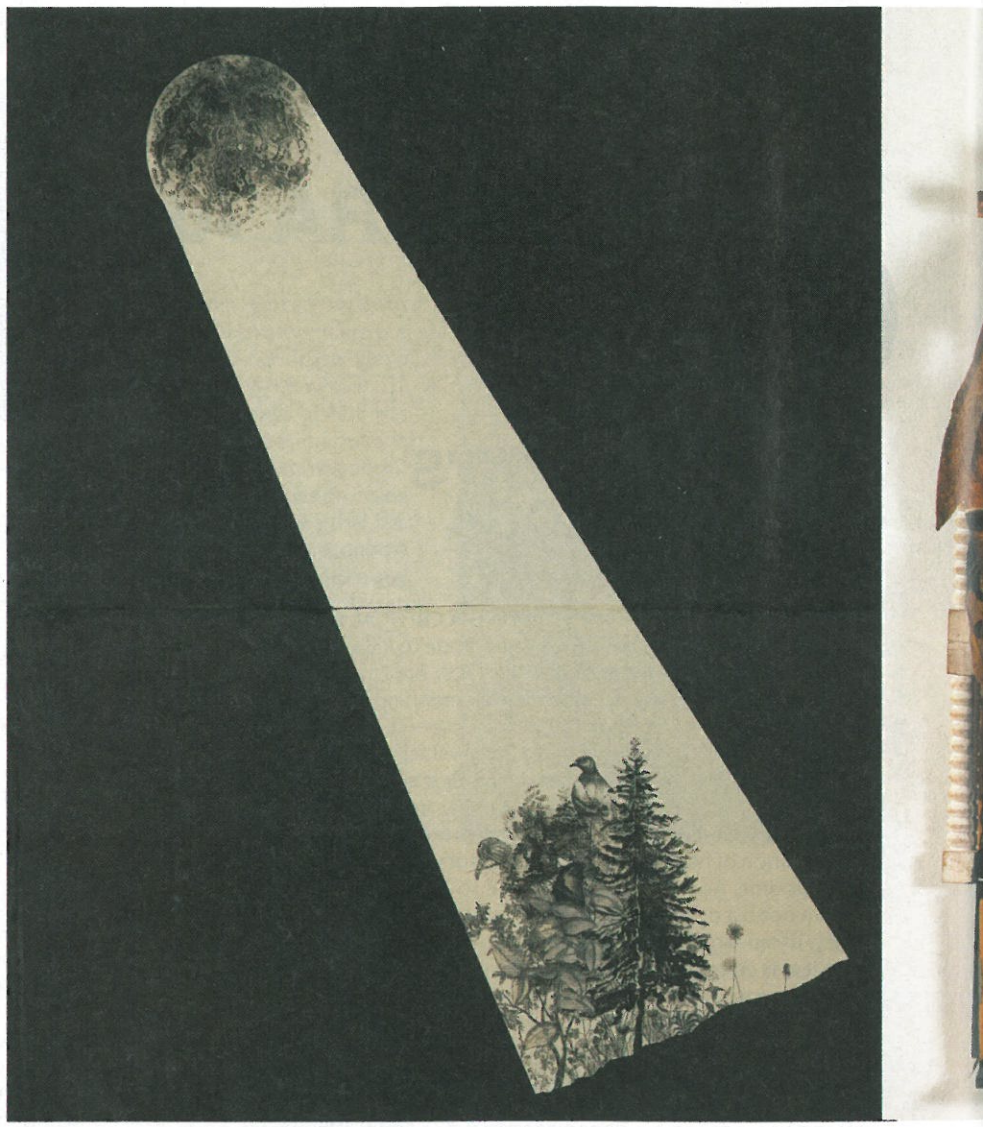
JIM SHAW'S MIRAGE

GUEST LECTURE

Camille Rose Garcia

SUMMER 2012, VOL 6 ISSUE 6 $5

THE RATINGS



FOR OUR ANNUAL CRITICS' PICKS THIS year we go back to our three original categories: Overrated, Underrated and Best in Show. A few times we changed those categories to more euphemistic terms, but we decided to drop the charade this time and not be afraid. Of course *Artillery* doesn't want to hurt anyone's feelings, but for chrissakes, there's some bad art out there, and artists that are just coasting. Our job is to call it like it is. And to pay attention to some of the great art being made in this city and to artists that are simply under-recognized. There was a whole lot of art around Los Angeles this past season, and our critics were watching.

Key:
Underrated
Best In Show
Overrated

JUDY CHICAGO
AT NYE + BROWN

This spring Chicago featured the very accomplished work she was producing as a UCLA graduate student, and shortly thereafter. Her drawings, paintings and sculpture explored ideas of minimalism, geometric abstraction and even Finish Fetish that whimsically addressed sex and conjugality.

"NOW DIG THIS!"
AT HAMMER MUSEUM

An eye-opening survey of black artists working in the LA area in the postwar era. While there were familiar names like Betye Saar and John Outterbridge, it was also wonderful to see work by gifted, lesser-known artists, such as Noah Purifoy.

"REBEL"
AT JF CHEN GALLERY/MOCA

This mess takes the form of various shacks and houses amidst a garden of plastic plants, and a sort of homage to the classic teen-rebel movie *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). Take my advice and pick up the brochure—read Franco's interesting ruminations on Dean, fame and Hollywood—and skip the show.

Reviews by Scarlet Cheng

HUGO CROSTHWAITE
AT LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES

Crosthwaite's "Tijuanerias" show solidifies the artist as a near-heroic cultural avatar. What amounts to a veritable plethora of gun-toting, beer-guzzling, breast-bearing hucksters, pimps, junkies, Latin impresarios (with the occasional rabid dog thrown into the mix), his universe is rich and expansive and should be frequented more often.

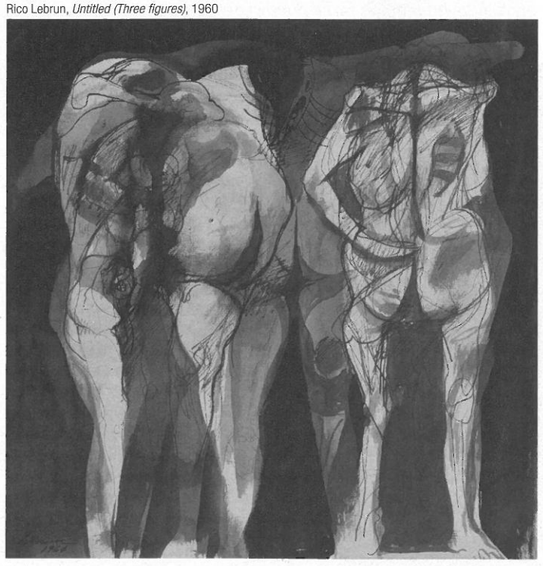
photos of Iraqi and Afghan citizens culled from the Internet. In both series the specifics of both place and people are obscured so Le's juxtapositions become timelines that metaphorically intertwine the past and the present. His powerful work resurrects icons and images from two civilizations that have been torn apart by war, suggesting the recurrent nature of conflict. Le's montages call to mind Martha Rosler's "Bringing the War Home" series in which she juxtaposed found photos culled from *House Beautiful* magazine with images of soldiers in combat. But where Rosler's commentary is direct, Le's critical voice is more oblique.

The Headless Buddhas of Angkor is a grid of 15 large-scale non-woven prints that holds court on the far wall of the gallery. Each depicts one of the famous headless Buddha statues at Angkor Wat. The Buddha statues are draped with saffron colored sashes which are replaced periodically at ritual events and are part of a tradition throughout Southeast Asia to dress carved wood or stone deities in real clothes. The spice-colored sashes stand out against the blue-gray stone figures and decaying walls and bring a suggestion of life to the headless sculptures. The color images, which represent regal and stoic (albeit truncated) bodies, ironically suggest hope, yet in the context of the exhibition also make reference to Taliban's destruction of the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan in 2001. While Le succeeds in linking past to present within a specific culture in his photographic montages, his attempts to make connections across cultures never quite consummate. His weaving of fragments never makes a whole, but rather suggests interrelationships and parallels that span places and times.

L.A. RAW
PASADENA MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA ART
BY CHRISTOPHER MICHNO

A SURVEY OF THE WORKS OF 41 LOS ANGELES ARTISTS WHO in one way or another deal with the figure, "L.A. Raw" is at times a bewildering aggregation of objects so diverse that the exhibit, like its namesake, the City of Angels, can feel like a nebulous periphery without a center. The independent curator and writer, Michael Duncan, who organized the show to re-evaluate the post-war figurative works of Los Angeles artists, advocates using the term "Abject Expressionism" to describe emotionally charged figuration employed to evoke the specter of human suffering on a grand scale, and as a classification of a larger art-historical movement.

Rico Lebrun, *Untitled (Three figures)*, 1960



Duncan's thesis is a reaction not only to the dominance of Abstract Expressionism—he cites Arthur Danto on the highly dogmatic and nearly religious tenor of the language surrounding the New York school—but also against the canonical history of Los Angeles as the center of Light and Space, Finish Fetish, Hard Edge and other forms of abstraction to the exclusion of figuration, which he considers equally important to the region's art-historical legacy and development. Duncan casts a wide net, and the works in the show address an impressive range of political unrest, ideological dissent, wars, and human suffering in exploring the "abject" depths of human experience.

Rico Lebrun, an influential figure in the immediate postwar period, is the foremost practitioner of a figurative oeuvre that addresses the existentially abject in a generally humanistic sense, and his drawings convey an unadorned view of humanity. The many highlights in the show include Joyce Treiman's funkadelic painting from 1967, *Rabbit and Pills*, a formally sophisticated and fantastic exploration of social and psycho-sexual politics, and John Outterbridge's wonderfully inventive sculptures/assemblages from his "Captive" series from the mid-to-late '70s, which explore the specificity of the African-American experience in relation to the slave trade.

More interesting and problematic are examples that do not fit neatly into Duncan's thesis. Chris Burden's video recordings of his early performances do not suggest an exploration of human angst as much as they reveal Burden systematically, almost scientifically, attempting to measure the limits of the human body, reflecting a calculating empiricism rather than a preoccupation with the existential predicament. June Wayne's prints from the mid-to-late '50s, which are mystical and cosmic, seem more at ease with the work of William Blake than with the contorted, grotesque figures in works by Lebrun or Jan Stussy.

"L.A. Raw" fails to draw fine distinctions between categories and periods of figurative work over the 35-year span that it covers. Brief segments on each of the show's 41 artists in the catalog provide mainly biographical information and suggestions of artistic lineage rather than offering analysis. "Raw" would have benefited from a narrowed field and a deeper selection of works from each artist; yet that is the conundrum of the exhibition. The Achilles heel for "Abject Expressionism" as a new art-historical category is that it is an unfortunate catchall for figurative works that express any kind of political, sociological, gender, or personal discontent. The purported content of the show, "L.A. Raw: Abject Expressionism in Los Angeles 1945–1980, From Rico Lebrun to Paul McCarthy" cast too wide a net and, as a result, Duncan's thesis lacks punch.

Hugo Crosthwaite, *Tijuanerias #1*, 2011

HUGO CROSTHWAITE
LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES
BY PETER FRANK

THE QUINTESSENTIAL BORDER TOWN, TIJUANA IS NORMALLY thought of as a point of cultural transition, more American than anyplace else in Mexico and, of course, more Mexican than anyplace in America. But in Hugo Crosthwaite's "Tijuanerias," a suite of 100 drawings on paper plus a four-wall, room-filling mural, it takes on a grotesque hyper-Mexicanness—or at least a roiling, threatening Otherness. Himself a Tijuanista but educated in San Diego and now living in Brooklyn, Crosthwaite is clearly sending up the *Yanqui* viewpoint, exaggerating in his part-cartoon, part-fotonovella manner his hometown's image as a fetid site of sex, violence, poverty, perversion and clownish behavior, a place of dense activity but simple motives. It's as if Crosthwaite ran both long-standing stereotypes and recent headlines through a hallucinatory magic-realism animation machine, in order to put a scare into the *gabachos* and thereby reclaim Tijuana for its inhabitants.

Crosthwaite clearly loves conflating naturalistic detail and broad caricature. He claims quite credibly to pay homage with the "Tijuanerias" series to Goya's *Los Caprichos* (1797–99)—in spirit, in style, in intent. His, like Goya's, is a narrative impulse and to some extent a moralistic one, but also one that revels in the macabre for its own sake. Certain characters seem to recur, but what really recurs are stock themes—Lucho Libre wrestlers, pubescent girls, gangsters, street scenes, signs and posters, and weird spirits described in cartoonish outline haunting the "real" characters—guardian angels? Avenging demons? Crosthwaite's own commentary? At the very least, these figments bridge another border, between the real and the implied, the concrete and the imaginary, the seen and the felt. Crosthwaite's is a Tijuana of the Mind—and not just his.

The "Tijuanerias" series is also available as a compact booklet, its pages approximately the same size as the drawings. The drawings themselves are displayed in an even line around the four walls of the front room. Crosthwaite clearly descends from Goya via Posada, collage, the comic book, and the penny-dreadful (or at least its latter-day Latin versions), and, while he hasn't composed the "Tijuanerias" in any sort of apparent narrative arc, the series' common, page-oriented format and recurring motifs and figures make it work splendidly as a book. Thus, while the drawings have a richness of tone and texture entirely lost in the booklet's newsprint, their immediacy and palpability is also compromised (if not as badly) when hung from a nail. By this token, any one actual drawing is in fact stronger than the series as a whole—something you could argue is also true of *Los Caprichos*.

Happily, the staid, insistent rhythm of the front-room drawing installation set us up to be ambushed by the back room's feverish, episodic parade of hapless monsters, twisted street scenes, child's dreams, and moments of intimacy and tenderness between likely and unlikely people and unpeople. If casual incongruity powers the "Tijuaneria" drawings, an even more hilarious sense of dissonant but delightful juxtaposition wafted through the back-room mural, a "Welcome To The Funhouse" visual unpacking—or, perhaps, re-packing—almost operatic in its breadth and depth.

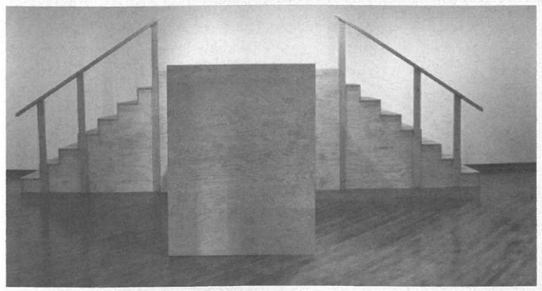
CROSTHWAITE: COURTESY LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES. LEBRUN: PRIVATE COLLECTION

REGINA JOSÉ GALINDO
MUSEUM OF LATIN AMERICAN ART
BY LIZ GOLDNER

WHILE CHRIS BURDEN'S '60S AND '70S PERFORMANCE-ART PIECES—including one in which he crawled nearly naked over glass—spoke to the atrocities of the Vietnam War, Regina José Galindo's current works in "Vulnerable," many inflicting violence on herself, are a reaction to today's political crimes and social hierarchies, as well as segregation and oppression of women. Though inspired by Burden, performance artist Marina Abramovic and others, Guatemalan-rooted Galindo, provides a unique window for understanding the inequities of classes and the abuse or subjugation of women.

For her opening night performance of *Third World* (2012) (subsequently displayed as a video in the exhibition), Galindo walked up to a small plywood stage, followed by a man carrying a saw. For 15 minutes, he cut out a square section of the floor beneath her, as she stood deadpan, staring downward. Then in an instant, the square of floor underneath her caved, she fell with a thud to the area below and was completely hidden by the sides of the stage. Once within that gap, the artist replaced the piece of floor and was silent inside for the duration of the exhibition. While the possible reads of this work are many, an especially potent one comes from exhibition's curator, Idurre Alonso, who explains the work of Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta, who uses her own body as "media" provides a strong inspiration for *Third World*. Mendieta "fell," or, as generally understood—though he was never convicted—was pushed out a window to her death by her husband Carl Andre, while still in her thirties, Galindo's age.

Five of Galindo's prior performances played on large monitors nearby. In *We don't lose anything by being born* (2000), Galindo was put into a clear plastic bag and placed near a field of trash in a Guatemalan city dump. The naked artist lay motionless in a fetal position as the two-minute video filmed her up-close at a distance, the latter showing massive amounts of garbage. In *Breaking the Ice* (2008), she huddles in a very cold room, naked and vulnerable as several people wearing heavy winter clothing stand in the background. The camera focuses on her for several minutes, until one woman approaches her and gently dresses her in a wool cap, then in underwear, jeans and shirt, and finally in jacket and gloves. The artist submits passively to the attention, behaving as a stunned, abused person might.



Regina José Galindo, *Tercer Mundo/Third World*, 2012

In another disturbing performance, *Games of Power* (2009), Galindo is hypnotized by a man who tells her, among other things, that she is desperately thirsty but cannot reach the glass of water. In *America's Family Prison* (2008), a sped-up video documents the artist who—with her husband and baby—spent 24 hours in a rented San Antonio prison cell. In this scenario of detention, she is seen frantically trying to create a home-like environment. The final video in this series, *Autophobia* (2009), is the shortest at just 26 seconds, and the only one in which the artist does not appear. Here, the viewer sees Galindo's shadow—which she shoots with a pistol.

This powerful sextet of videos reveals an artist of vision and fearlessness.

GALINDO: PHOTO RAYMUNDO BARRERA. COURTESY OF MUSEUM OF LATIN AMERICAN ART.

SAN FRANCISCO/OAKLAND

JENNIE OTTINGER
JOHANSSON PROJECTS
BY BARBARA MORRIS

PERHAPS OWING TO ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPLEXITY AND interior focus, the plight of the orphan has generally found greater expression in works of literature or film—*Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, *Anne of Green Gables*—than on canvas. However, in "What to Do With Your Orphan: A Manual," Bay Area-based Jennie Ottinger, who lost her parents at the age of six, tackles this complex subject, her darkly humorous style quickly sweeping us away into the compelling nightmare world of a brittle childhood.

Rows and Rows of Children (all works 2012) features an iconic orphan line-up. Figures in blue-gray uniforms become dehumanized as they queue up on lemon-yellow bands cutting oblique diagonals on a