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ALAC Fair 2010 by Gilles D'Amecourt

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The Pacific Design Center, Los Angeles

On the last weekend of January, the Art Los Angeles Contemporary fair (ALAC) stamped an impressive footprint on the second floor of the Pacific Design Center (PDC). The PDC, aka “The Blue Whale” beached up on West Hollywood in 1975. Measuring about 1.2M square feet, it is an imposing piece of architecture at best, and a colossal eyesore to its neighbors at worst. Normally the PDC is utilized by the design community for showroom space but it has also provided comfortable accommodations for all sorts of events. In this case, and not without a hint of irony, the PDC hosted an Art Fair.

The ALAC this year was directed by Tim Fleming and produced by Fair Grounds Associates. They laced the occasion with a combination of events including lectures, panel discussions, local gallery tours, author signings, film screenings, and an art installation from Artemio provided by the Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND). The ALAC also hosted the launch of LAND, a non-profit public art brainchild of former Whitney curator Shamim Momin and Christine Y. Kim, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Modern Art (LACMA). With only about 55 galleries clamoring for attention, the fair was a very manageable size for attendees who could reserve energy for the multitude of activities and evening festivities... including an opening night party by Calvin Klein (also celebrating the launch of LAND) where stargazers caught a glimpse of Penelope Cruz and Jared Leto’s hair.

The first thing I did in the PDC on my way to the fair was unwittingly step on Artemio’s installation. The ceramic tile floor uses pattern repetition of a Colt .45 pistol, which transforms the gun into an aesthetically decorative element that brazenly contradicts its deeper roots in urban violence, thus disarming the literal context of its practical nature. This was one of four installations around Los Angeles provided by LAND. Like the other projects by Gonzalo Lebrija, Moris, and José León Cerrillo, it successfully weaves fine art and culture into the

fabric of our public lives with such class and subtlety that if you're not observant enough you could just miss it.

On to the galleries!... There was a good, healthy mix of established galleries as well as many upstarts (both domestic and international). The most impressive booths displayed a careful consideration of the dialog between their artists' work. Dealers who can curate really demonstrate a level of thoughtfulness that both their artists and collectors can appreciate, and even the most pedestrian art lover can learn from. On the other hand, those galleries that chose to represent a single artist had the challenge of flaunting their versatility without disclosing any mediocre work.

Tracy Williams, LTD. kept it simple and musical with a centerpiece Steinway Rug by Barbara Bloom, lyrical graphite drawings by Alyssa Phoebus, and a sculpture by Jennifer Nocon which looked like a stack of chairs covered in white felt scales. Eric Charest-Weinberg Gallery focused more on anatomy. Unique prints by Richard DuPont defined the epidermis by connecting a multitude of pores with straight lines, forming contours of body parts by simply connecting the dots. These hung next to a very dark, grey relief sculpture by Fernando Mastrangelo, which only got darker when revealed to be constructed from an aggregate of human ash.

Notable galleries that focused on solo artists included Gavin Brown's enterprise with its interactive, multi-sensory installation by Oliver Payne. Anyone could sit on his couch and play video games while he sampled the musical effects and mixed them to create fresh sounds and rhythms. Payne complimented this dynamic performance with sculpture casts of his Dreamcast, a video game console discontinued in 2001. The Breeder displayed work by LA artist Mindy Shapero, whose eye for detail, assemblage, and earthy palette suggest primitivism, feminism, surrealism, and spiritualism all at once. Patrick Painter presented a series of sculptural wall-mounted pieces by John Miller whose work would resemble core samples of landfill if they were not so seductively dipped in imitation gold leaf. Guadalajara based gallery Charro Negro served up a solid solo effort by Edgar Cobian, displaying a wide range of talent from performance to painting to sculpture that all emphasize proud, visceral introspection of his Mexican heritage.

, Peter Sarkisian had a rear-projection installation at the I-20 booth that looked like the inside of a mechanical engine. It's pistons and cogs pumped and spun for apparently no other reason than our pure enjoyment, and it successfully brought analog artists of such fantastical invention as Jean Tinguely into the digital realm. Another outstanding video performance hid behind the curtain at Eighth Veil. Alex Hubbard simultaneously channels Donald Judd, James Turrell, and Leatherface by using a chainsaw to carve minimalist patterns into backlit pieces of drywall. Just as remarkable are his resin paintings on stretched fiberglass: the resin has a cure time of about 30 minutes which emphasized the spontaneity of creation. Other artists that raised a few more eyebrows included: E.V. Day's fashionably mummified collection of Barbie dolls at Otero Plassart; Joshua Callaghan's oversized mylar and staple bone sculptures at Steve Turner; Antonis Donef's newspaper/pen and ink collages at Kalfayan Galleries; Alex Olson and Anthony Pearson's minimal paintings at Shane Campbell Gallery; Andy Ouchi's colorful acrylic grids at China Art Objects; and Michael Vasquez's portraits at Frederic Snitzer.

I suffer occasionally from a condition I like to call Art Burn. This sensation is felt after being overstimulated from so much art that the accumulative value of everything appears to sink toward the lowest common denominator. As a result, I begin to lose faith in the whole

system, if only for a moment. Massive art fairs with hundreds of booths and lines everywhere can have this effect on people, especially those people working at the fair. That being said, art fairs are a necessary evil in the world, if there is such a thing. Fortunately the ALAC did not try to overburden themselves or anyone else by admitting all comers, and that seems to be just what the doctor ordered.