

Beyond 15 Minutes

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CURATORIAL ESSAY

Josine Ianco Starrels

Tim Hawkinson's eccentricity inhabits his art like thunderbolts hiding in clouds, waiting to strike upon collision. Delightfully bizarre and endlessly ingenious, this work makes ideas manifest. However, this is not dry, cerebral, concept art; there is playfulness here, joy, humor and self-mocking irreverence, a robust intellect fertile and full of life. Materials and ideas are explored without inhibition; imagination is allowed to roam free to examine, poke, dissect, arrange and re-arrange anything and everything. An agile mind and a spirit unlimited in its quest is quicksilver; impossible to capture, incapable of acceding to convention and unable to acquiesce to the dictates of others.

From his early, exquisitely disturbing drawings of the 70s to his most recent paintings, *John Mandel* has used his virtuosic skills to create psychologically charged images in the service of conceptual ideas. An important presence in Los Angeles as an artist, as well as a mentor to other artists, Mandel has consistently produced challenging works which engage the mind even as they arrest the eye. Typically, each painting contains a variety of elements; perfectly rendered objects placed alongside abstract forms engaged in dialogues with symbols, diagrams, text, or representations of photographic likenesses. The artist sets up a complex gathering of visual and intellectual relationships, inviting the viewer to decode their meanings.

Rafael Perea de la Cabada was born and educated in Mexico. He moved to Santa Barbara, California, in the mid-1980s and has lived there ever since. His paintings, collages, and other works on paper reveal a sensuous nature; surfaces are painted, drawn on, collaged, and raised. In aesthetic terms his sensibility is closer to European Modernist traditions than to either the Mexican social-commentary or muralist schools. His work is poetic and fragile, qualities best realized in intimate scale. Detached from both Mexican or Mexican American socio-political concerns, Perea de la Cabada is a loner who delights in his isolation, pursuing his own aesthetic inquiries.

The often subdued and monochromatic harmonies of color which dominate in his work, allow him to use superimposed ink drawings on painted surfaces, or delicate washes that indirectly alter colors, creating textural variations of unusual subtlety.

A few years ago the artist wrote: "Painting is essentially an unconscious activity that can be enriched by the conscious mind. It records the internal dialogue between the artist and his

work...Art is the deepest form of knowledge, a wisdom more profound than human words, an intelligent intuition. Art is a perpetual question." Informed by Jungian ideas, and a thorough familiarity with art history ranging from cave paintings to tribal effigies, contemporary lyrical abstraction and symbolic figuration, these works reveal rather than proclaim or inform.

John O'Brien is a sculptor, art critic and writer. His unusually broad repertoire of ideas and his considerable verbal agility somehow permeate the nature of his sculpture. Possessed of a quick mind, he juggles words "with the greatest of ease." He is a prestidigitator, moving from past to present, from historic to contemporary, and from verbal to visual, in record time. Critic Peter Frank defined his assemblages as "physicalizations of thought which he attempts to tame and by extension also tame his thoughts into orderly formations."

Thus, frequently, the sculpture derives from a metamorphosis of fragments, once common objects, whose origins as functional entities was de-constructed or dis-membered and re-arranged. A touch of familiarity leads one into an intellectual labyrinth devised by the artist - a locus dense with visual and verbal references, charades, automatic poetry, and other secret strategies - invented and re-invented to challenge the observer at every turn.

The paintings of *Manuel Ocampo* readily disclose a complex and conflicted relationship with the Catholic Church, a deep distrust of political power structures, and a raging anger at man's inhumanity to man. A fascinating paradox is his use of the language of religious paintings which bear the scars of time, damage incurred by deteriorating materials and the ravages of humid climate. Born and educated in the Philippines, Ocampo speaks eloquently in biting, satiric, images of his own invention, yet clearly related to traditional Spanish Church art.

Thus, a pictorial language, associated with religious narratives, used to express intensely revolutionary ideas, proves to be extremely effective. Ocampo aims his considerable rage at hypocrisy and ruthless exploitation, obviously based upon first-hand observation, at an establishment which disregards human life with ruthless brutality. The results are not only unexpected; they are unforgettably powerful.

Bruce and Norman Yonemoto began their careers by making a brief foray into the area of conceptual photography before