

artillery



**INSTITUTIONAL
FREAK-OUT**

**PROJECT DEITCH:
HELLO LA, GOODBYE NY
MUSEUM MALAISE:
GETTY, CLAREMONT, FRESNO**

**KAREN FINLEY'S JACKIE O
MARY WORONOV ON JACKSON POLLOCK
GUEST LECTURE: ROBERT WILLIAMS**



PHOTOGRAPH BY MONTY BRUNNELL

Joan Tanner, *Box*, 2009 (detail)

it the sequential successor to her incredible "On Tenderhooks" installation at Otis, in which she consolidated the rationale behind her 3D environments.

The work in "as is" shares the sensibility of historical assemblage and combine works but Joan is able to create modes of reconstructing her objects so that they reference that historical sensibility without remaking it. A sculpture of hers like *Box* indirectly allows the precedents of artists like Joseph Cornell or Hannah Höch to seep around the corners, without becoming citation. Another work of hers, *White Site* ricochets off the antecedents of Lee Bontecou or Ernst Trova without lodging in footnotes or commentary. The

strength of Tanner's work is how it conjures up precursors without relying on them or being overcome by them.

There are a variety of art and architectural vernaculars explored throughout the installation. Her *Stepped Construct*, an open-sided, interlocking pair of stair-like wooden sculptures leaning into each other, draw the relief work of Frank Lloyd Wright's Mayan friezes into a relationship with traditional gateways and arches. The group of slowly spinning suspended sculptures, *Spindles*, dance carefully back and forth between Oskar Schlemmer's proto-modern Triadisches Ballett forms and some very oddly configured tailoring mannikins. The *Towers (StepAway)* is an agglomeration of forms in which a twisting fragment of fencing lifts and pulls a wire frame up and down off the floor, surrounded by hieratic chair-like sentinels. The

inescapable feeling which this work conveys to the viewer of being in some Kafkaesque realm is as unsubstantiated as it is tangible. Therein lies the strength of Joan Tanner's imaginative fabrications: she conjures up the power of a viewer's projections without overwhelming delineations, she elicits a viewer's emotional participation without excessive restrictions.

Tanner's "as is" installation at the Fresno Art Museum is a part of the recognition she received as the recipient of the FAM Woman in the Arts 2009 Award. If this is the caliber of work that is being acknowledged for its significance and longevity in the arts, it is certainly an example that I hope other institutions will emulate. The gift it has provided is great.

— John O'Brien

FRESNO

JOAN TANNER

Fresno Art Museum
Ends April 18, 2010

WALKING INTO Joan Tanner's "as is" installation at the Fresno Art Museum is a little like stumbling onto the reconstruction of archeological fragments from some alien or entirely forgotten civilization. The work collectively has an air of regality, almost like the remains of a throne room or the assembled relics from some symbolic seat of power, and while a closer inspection reveals that everything in "as is" is derived from recognizable stuff, that stuff has been taken beyond recognition. This modification is at the core of Tanner's estrangement and recombinant process; she takes parts of things from the everyday world around her and makes them strange, recombining them through a physical grammar that transforms them into both allusive and multifaceted entities floating in the viewer's imagination. The installation "as is" is an opus magnus in the sense that it is a culmination of individual works culled from a larger (and longer) series, and because is



Oliver Jackson
Untitled (1985,
reworked 1997)

MAIN STREET MUSEUM

FALLIN' FORTUNES IN THE RAISIN CAPITAL BY JOHN O'BRIEN

SO Jeffrey Deitch is the new director of MOCA and people in the art world are either pleasantly surprised or rather worried about this news. There are certainly issues related to overt conflicts of interest when a commercial gallerist is appointed to this kind of a position. But, like it or not, a convergence (collusion? conflict?) of interests between collectors and museums has always existed, behind the scenes. What exactly is keeping it behind there — a sense of compunction, the force of habit? The real ongoing problem seems to be how museum board members have been treating their tenure as though it were an extremely lengthy cocktail hour and have eschewed any traditional notions of budgetary oversight or aesthetic stewardship. This lack of leadership has led to the widespread closing or paring back of contemporary arts institutions throughout the U.S. and left a vacuum that entrepreneurs like Eli Broad have been filling.

Is this a new direction for the art world? The question might be better framed if we ask whether museums can survive with their internal expertise split between curatorial priorities and financial priorities? Are museum boards of trustees still able to be an effective bridge between the artistic direction and the administration? Even if they could be, can museums, in this economy (and when the old money with its laissez-faire underwriting


has been supplanted by the nouveaux riches with their contractual activism), afford to have these two internal branches anyway?

I was up in Fresno recently to review the Joan Tanner exhibition and had a chance to speak with Eva Torres, the interim director of the Fresno Art Museum. Torres came to the museum as associate director, worked under two directors and was brought in (with previous experience in bilingual public radio broadcasting) to work in development and oversee day-to-day operations. When budget shortfalls caused the board to call for the release of much of the staff and personnel (including the curator and preparator), the last director left and Torres became interim director. Admitting her relative newness to the art world, Torres nonetheless points out that changes in structure and goals are the only way for the museum to survive and the sooner the multiple stakeholders get moving the better. (Their sister institution, The Fresno Metropolitan Museum closed last January.)

Torres argues that museums must change direction in order to survive and that the separation of economic and curatorial powers has become impossible within the operating budgets allocated today. There's a need for a more integrated and informed economic perspective on how exhibiting, collecting, storing and disseminating art can be successfully combined with meaningful exhibition

programs. To act otherwise would propagate the failures we all have been following.

Yes, this is a new direction. I'd add: Do we really need that "new direction" to come from the East Coast (again) — with its ties to most traditional collecting, acquisitions and exhibitions? I thought that was the part of the older European model that wasn't really building new constituencies or creating a relationship with communities or watching the demographics that are in motion. Any new directions coming from another heading? Just a thought.

While Fresno is not particularly well-known as an art town, the Fresno Art Museum has been active since the late 1980s (it began as a regional arts center in 1948) and has maintained an active program, with catalogs published on their Pre-Columbian sculpture, the work of Terry Allen, Viola Frey, June Wayne and Betye Saar among others. The museum highlights six areas of art: the work of women artists, professional mid-career local and California artists, modern masters, ethnographic art, emerging younger artists and "popular" art. Located on Fresno City property at Radio Park and rife with possibilities in terms of physical location, new demographics and untapped constituencies, it would be a shame to let it disappear in the storm. 

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