

# Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement; Absurd Recreation: Contemporary Art From China

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Through September 1 Los Angeles County Museum of Art

In 1972 members of the Chicano avant-garde art collective Asco tagged their names on all the entrances of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. This "intervention" — the group's first outside its home territory of East Los Angeles, the birthplace of the Chicano civil-rights movement — was in response to members' being told by a curator at the museum that Chicanos made graffiti, not art. Thus "Spray Paint LACMA" (also known as "Project Pie in De/Face") became the first conceptual work of Chicano art to be shown at the museum, its point highlighted by the fact that it was removed by maintenance workers the following day.

Now, 36 years later, the museum has moved Chicano conceptual, urban art inside its walls, rather than cleaning it off outside. But the curators emphasize that they wanted to avoid choosing the artwork on the basis of Chicano identity or style alone, insisting in the catalog, "We wanted to give ourselves the freedom to follow an idea, rather than represent a constituency." Although Chicano identity is inseparable from the exhibition's theme, the museum is adamant about not wanting to ghettoize the artists. "If they are grouped together here as Chicano artists," writes the museum's director, Michael Govan, "it is not by their own volition or consensus; it is a curatorial artifact, a device to reflect and speculate on the interests and issues facing Chicano artists today."

The artwork itself runs the gamut: installation, video, photography, film, ink on paper, even watercolor. Among the pieces are a yellow vinyl Volkswagen Bug trailing delicate lengths of thread like long black hairs ("Vocho," by Margarita Cabrera); a painting of a

dark-eyed woman gazing out from swirls of feathers, glitter, and neon-colored flowers ("Tropical Baby/Yandara," by Carolyn Castaño); and an anxiety-producing palm frond that looks like a murdered insect ("Palm Frond With Its Throat Cut," by Danny Jauregui). In a documentary photograph of an intervention, the artist (Alejandro Diaz), dressed in a white suit, stands in front of Tiffany's on Fifth Avenue holding hand-scrawled cardboard signs with messages like "Looking for Upper East Side lady with clean elegant apartment — must have cable."

The curators are Rita Gonzalez and Howard N. Fox, the Los Angeles museum's curators of special exhibitions and contemporary art, respectively; and Chon A. Noriega, director of the University of California at Los Angeles's Chicano Studies Research Center.

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*Through October 4*

*Sweeney Art Gallery*

*University of California at Riverside*

*Morono Kiang Gallery*

*Los Angeles*

Conceptual art from China shares a predominantly urban theme in "Absurd Recreation" but feels dreamier and, perhaps by necessity, seems to take itself a little more seriously than the Chicano experiments, despite the "absurdity."

"When you are living in China, it's like living in your old home when you go visit the parents," Karon Morono Kiang said recently. She and her husband, Eliot Kiang, owners of Morono Kiang Gallery, in downtown Los Angeles, were discussing Chinese contemporary artists and their work in a conversation transcribed in the exhibition catalog. She continued: "You can see the flaws and the reasons why you don't want to stay for very long, yet it feels very good to be there. [The Chinese] themselves are very confused about the next step where they're going."

Much of the conversation was about the rapidity of change in China and how difficult it is to pin down any central themes in the contemporary art scene there. "For so many decades, artists were incapable of expressing themselves in a public forum, and they had