

## WEST COAST

### JEFFREY VALLANCE Rosamund Felsen Gallery

Jeffrey Vallance has an international reputation for being nuts and frankly manifesting the fact in his work. Since childhood, he has produced tableaux and drawings based on the kitsch art of popular culture, and the lore of an adolescence spent in Canoga Park, CA., where he still lives. The work gains its power not in irony, but in the sincere enthusiasm with which he has explored the mundane, borrowing from television, suburban decor, and life at the beach. In

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Jeffrey Vallance, *Island of a Million Chickens*, 1983.  
Pencil on paper, 14 x 11". Photo Douglas M. Parker.

mining this territory, he inevitably became intrigued by the tikis and Polynesian decor imported by American sailors after World War II. His most recent exhibition, "Aitatuiki" is the result of an interest that extends to the actual culture of the South Seas. Vallance took a research exhibition to the Cook and Society islands, Fiji and Tahiti to understand the roots of kitsch.

Vallance found that Tiki was not an ugly tourist souvenir but a god, the first man. He posted the hilarious Polynesian legends of Tiki in the gallery. They recount the deity's randy exploits with his daughter, which have earned him the nickname of "Tiki, the slimy," and "Tiki, the rigid." Vallance created a number of relief images of Tiki with a noticeably distended member. Most were stony brown, as if carved from lava rock, and framed in elaborated Polynesian restaurant style. Around the border of the tikis are decals of buxom women in bathing suits posed in the cheesecake style typical of the 1940s. He melds the imagery of the island and American cultures and reveals a lusty preoccupation common to both. This is the strength of the new work. By exploring new ground, he strengthens his perspectives on American culture, and gives attitudes a context. He also reveals the influences of the two cultures cutting both directions. Not only did America get the tiki, but the islands adopted the strange influences of Western culture.

In a series of pencil drawings in an intentionally naive and heavy-handed technique, Vallance recorded all the predictable island imagery—birds, bugs, plants, natives—but it is combined with industrial contributions such as canned beef, Surf coldwater detergent, buses, and bottled juice.

Vallance has gone beyond representing the icons of popular culture for their sheer zany power. The current work explores the way the surrounding environment provides the context for perception. One culture's deity is another's restaurant decor. Transplanted again, in the gallery, it attains the status of fine art. By extension, Vallance is also looking at what constitutes art and its function in the islands, and contrasts that with the prevailing view of art in America.

Hunter Drohojowska