

MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY 812 North Robertson Boulevard, Los Angeles 90069
Craig Owens, "Michael Uhlenkott and Jeffrey Vallance at LACE" (review), *Art in America*,
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**Michael Uhlenkott
and Jeffrey Vallance
at LACE**

At least in concept, Uhlenkott and Vallance's "Fix-It-Up Show" demonstrates the iconoclastic stance we associate with a specific tradition of avant-garde practice in the visual arts. First, they inscribe their own work on top of other artists' works: Uhlenkott and Vallance have modified—their own word, "wrecked," seems more apt—works by some 37 L.A. (and one anonymous Etruscan) artists, including Chris Burden, Michael Kelley, Ed Ruscha, Betye Saar and Alexis Smith, thus extending the irreverence that begins with Duchamp's assisted readymades and runs through Rauschenberg's erasure of a de Kooning drawing. Second, they work in collaboration—the two began by wrecking each other's art—in a way that recalls the *cadavres exquis* of the Surrealist poets and painters. Third, they apply to the art they appropriate the kind of cultural detritus found in memorabilia shops—decals, protest buttons, bumper stickers—materials that are reminiscent of those used by Kurt Schwitters in his Merz assemblages. Finally, they conceive of their exhibition itself as a work of art—Uhlenkott and Vallance's interventions are not confined within the boundaries of each art work, but spill over onto the walls and floor of the gallery—thus recapitulating a tradition that begins with Duchamp's maze of string for the 1942 exhibition "First Papers of Surrealism" and runs through the work of the Minimalist sculptors to the cacophonous installations of Jon Borofsky—who seems to have exerted a powerful influence over Vallance in particular.

This reference to Borofsky suggests what ultimately distinguishes Uhlenkott and Vallance from the artists of the modernist avant garde, and that is their overriding *iconophilia*, an attitude they share with many artists of their generation (both have recently graduated from art school). Occasionally, their interventions are on target and genuinely witty, as when they display Ed Ruscha's book *Nine Swimming*

Pools in a plastic bag filled with water, or when they affix the shipping invoice to the surface of Bruce Everett's photo-realist canvas of a wall socket. More often, however, their alterations speak only of a new camp sensibility, one which displays an uncritical fascination with the debased emblems of contemporary civilization. Iconophilia, then, conflicts with and ultimately subverts the iconoclastic thrust of their concept; in the end, Uhlenkott and Vallance display a certain affection, almost reverence, for their materials, which makes their work much less aggressive than it may initially appear.

—Craig Owens