Knight, Christopher. "Pomona at the edge, and beyond." *Los Angeles Times*, 25 January 2012, p. D22-23.

In late August, the Pomona College Museum of Art was first out of the Pacific Standard Time gate with the lead installment of its three-part survey, "It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles, 1969-1973." The exhibition was modest in size but surprisingly rich in implications. Not the least of its virtues, especially in our bigger-is-better era of art extravaganzas, was the vivid demonstration that a small college art museum can have a big impact if a keen intelligence is at work.

So it was 40 years ago, and so it is now.

The show was organized by Pomona Museum curator Rebecca McGrew and the Getty Research Institute's Glenn Phillips. It comes with an excellent catalog. Part one looked at the curatorial decisions made by Hal Glicksman during the 1969-1970 academic year. The second part, up now, moves the ball forward a bit, featuring about 30 works by 13 artists exhibited by Helene Winer, the curator who followed Glicksman.

Part two doesn't have a specific theme, since the aim is to be a straightforward chronicle of an ambitious if short-lived institutional effort to show new art. But, at least partially, one emerges anyhow. Disquiet, apprehension, precariousness -- after the lively 1960s, this is art from a gnawing age of anxiety.

Sometimes it's funny, rarely is it grim; but the restlessness is apparent.

In a performance, Chris Burden shot little "rockets" of bundled matches at a nude woman prone on the floor, watching the activity on a live-feed video monitor. Hirokazu Kosaka, covered in the artificial warmth of an electric blanket, was partly buried beneath a mound of dirt from which he mentally tried to escape. Bas Jan Ader filmed a black-and-white self-portrait, "I'm too sad to tell you," in which copious tears rolling down his anguished face left an open question: Sincerity or Hollywood artifice?

Jack Goldstein, best known today as a painter, is represented by reconstructions of two Postminimal sculptures. Horizontal blocks of wood are stacked vertically, reaching about 9 feet high. Nothing but inertia keeps the tall stacks from toppling over. Especially in California, where the concept of *terra firma* is continually challenged by routine tremors in the earth, the likelihood of sustaining a sculpture's embodiment of the basic human urge to rise up off the ground is thrown into considerable doubt.

Come close to these stacked monoliths and one soon perceives a risk that is both physical and metaphorical: What if the whole concept of museum art, as established convention, came crashing down around you?

Goldstein's engagement of the museum as a space for change is echoed in a very different work by John Baldessari, his Cal Arts professor. A photograph of a pristine ceramic bowl -- itself a symbol for an ancient art form -- shows that it was dusted for fingerprints, like evidence at a crime scene. A label reveals that the grimy prints belong to the show's curator. Winer had invited Baldessari to participate in a printmaking exhibition, and his eccentric work turned the tables. Curators, not just artists, create the public perception of art that museums foster.

Like two other PST shows -- "State of Mind: New California Art Circa 1970" at the Orange County Museum of Art and "Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1973-1981" at the Museum of Contemporary Art -- the main focus here is on Conceptual art, especially as it resonated with camera work. Photographs, films and video are prominent.

Some, like John M. White's pictures of the college football team performing a combative scrimmage inside the gallery, rather than on a playing field, are documentary. Others exploit a camera's equally significant capacity for duplicity: The ominous black crow in William Wegman's double-take photograph appears to cast the incongruous shadow of an ungainly duck.

For some sculptures, a camera's "mechanically manufactured" imagery also hovers in the background as a frame of reference. Joe Goode's wall-relief of a staircase-to-nowhere is illuminated by multicolored stage-lighting, which turns the clean white treads an improbable pink. (It clashes with the stairs' awful, oatmeal-colored carpet.) William Leavitt's set design for a typical -- or stereotypical -- suburban California patio, complete with sliding glass door and potted plants, exudes the deathly self-consciousness of a TV show. Estrangement is the storyline of both.

Other anxious images, blatant or subtle, include a big Ed Moses abstract canvas embalmed in resin, which posits painting as an ancient practice now trapped like a fly in amber; a thick, lacquered, pitch-black wall work by John McCracken, which can't seem to decide whether it's a painting, a sculpture or some mysterious hybrid from another planet; an elaborate missing-persons storyboard by Allen Ruppersberg; and Ger van Elk's mirrored reproduction of a Post-Impressionist painting, which sets the arrival of the future into a hall-of-mirrors repetition of the past.

One telling element of the show is that only four of its 13 artists were originally from California; five were born in other countries. A burgeoning cosmopolitanism is implied.

That pushes back against the popular (if lame) conception of L.A. as hosting a regional art extolling sunny surfboards and car culture. American society circa 1971 was beset with hurt -- Vietnam, ongoing civil rights struggles, a looming recession that would quickly evolve into the biggest economic shock since the Great Depression, blow-back from Middle East turmoil, Ronald Reagan's grim California governorship and more. No wonder the art feels precarious.

The show's Conceptual art is double-barreled. It forsakes the precious object-hood of much highly polished 1960s L.A. art. Yet clearly, it's also deeply indebted to the focus on perception that drove that earlier work.

Winer's Pomona tenure, like Glicksman's, was relatively brief -- from the fall of 1970 to late 1972, when the school's administration effectively managed her departure. (The

studio art department soon followed in a mass exodus.) A controversial performance piece by Wolfgang Stoerchle, which culminated with the nude artist urinating on a carpet pad like one that earlier had been literally pulled out from under him, is assumed to have been the catalytic event; it's documented here.

Winer was an L.A. native. After Pomona she wrote reviews and an art news column for The Times before moving to New York. There she eventually headed the alternative gallery Artists' Space and opened the influential commercial gallery Metro Pictures with business partner Janelle Reiring. (It still operates today.) At least indirectly, the Pomona show suggests one way that Los Angeles became a feeder for New York's art scene, which hadn't happened much before.