

Mizolta, Sharon. "PST, A to Z: 'It Happened at Pomona Part 2: Helene Winer at Pomona'." *Los Angeles Times*, 8 February 2012.

*Pacific Standard Time will explore the origins of the Los Angeles art world through museum exhibitions throughout Southern California over the next six months. Times art reviewer Sharon Mizota has set the goal of seeing all of them. This is her latest report.*



If there were an award for stamina in the marathon that is Pacific Standard Time, it would have to go to the Pomona College Museum of Art. The first of its three-part "It Happened at Pomona" exhibition was among the first to open in late August; the third will be nearly the last to close in May. In between is "Part 2: Helene Winer at Pomona," which looks at the two short but influential years that the adventurous curator helmed the museum, from 1970 to 1972.

After stints at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Whitechapel Gallery in London, Winer arrived at Pomona with an interest in then-cutting-edge work in performance, video, and photography. Much of this art centered around the body of the artist, fleeting experiences and the vagaries of narrative - it sought to jolt audiences out of their preconceptions about art and, indeed, reality itself. Winer's exhibitions attracted the interest of at least one key L.A. conceptualist: John Baldessari regularly took his CalArts students all the way from Valencia to Pomona to see her shows.

In fact, "Part 2" opens with a sort of collaboration between the artist and Winer. "Evidence: Bowl Handed to Helene Winer Dec. 1, 70" is a black-and-white photograph of a plain white bowl that Baldessari handed

to Winer at a dinner party and then had dusted for fingerprints. Marred with incriminating black smudges, the bowl wryly flips the curator-artist relationship, with the latter "framing" the marks made by the former.

Similar small, humorous but telling gestures are also evident in William Wegman's photographs. The three images that make up "Basic Shapes in Nature," also from 1970, each depict a figure standing in a majestic natural landscape, each with a different flat geometric shape -- circle, triangle, square -- where their heads should be. The images look like prototypes for Baldessari's trademark works, in which he obscured the faces of people in found photographs with flat, colorful dots. But Wegman's images are more oblique, playing the flatness of abstract geometry off the depth intrinsic to romantic landscape and portraiture traditions. They are also a sidelong jab at the reductive tendencies of science. By inserting distinctly unnatural shapes into nature, the artist questions whether nature can be said to have any "basic" shapes at all.

Although Wegman often performed for the camera, he was adamant that his photographs were not documentation, but images in their own right. By contrast, several of the artists Winer supported are represented only by documentation, emphasizing the ephemeral and, in most cases, highly physical nature of their work. Hirokazu Kosaka covered himself with an electric blanket and a pile of dirt to facilitate an "astral projection" of his body. For "Preparation F," John M. White enlisted the Pomona College football team to undress and change into their uniforms in the gallery. And Wolfgang Stoerchle's performance involved wriggling out of his clothes, sneezing and urinating; it may have been the reason Winer's tenure at the museum was so short.



Other artists examined the ways in which narratives are constructed. William Leavitt's theatrical set-as-installation foregrounds the artifice of Hollywood fantasies. Bas Jan Ader's slide projection, "Untitled (Sweden)," from 1971 contrasts before and after shots of the artist's body as a tree felled in the forest. And Allen Ruppersberg's "Where's Al?" from 1972 is a series of typed index cards and photos that document a search for the missing artist on the streets of L.A. Although now fixed in neat rows, in their original presentation the elements could be rearranged without really disturbing the narrative.

Ruppersberg's work points to the magical properties of art's ability to make (and unmake) stories. In the series of images titled "The Disappearing Chinese Theater," the artist makes Grauman's Chinese Theatre "disappear" by holding up a photograph of the Arc de Triomphe so that it blocks the theater from the camera's gaze. In our media-saturated existence, one may as well be in Paris as in L.A. Like much of the work in "Part 2: Helene Winer at Pomona," the piece reworks perception with startling simplicity.

*Upper photo: John Baldessari, "Evidence: Bowl Handed to Helene Winer Dec. 1, 70," 1970. Typed text, bowl, tape, and lamp black. (Bowl was later destroyed.) Photo documentation: black-and-white photograph, 8 x 10.25 in. (20.3 x 25.4 cm). Collection of the artist. Credit: Photograph courtesy of the artist*

*Lower photo: Hirokazu Kosaka, "Untitled," 1972. Photograph of performance at Pomona College Museum of Art. Credit: Photo courtesy of the artist*