

Ellegood, Anne. "Best of 2009" (California Conceptualism: "Allen Ruppersberg: You and Me or the Art" (Santa Monica Museum of Art) and "William Leavitt, Allen Ruppersberg, Ger van Elk" (Margo Leavin Gallery)). *Artforum* (December 2009), p. 204-205.



Anne Ellegood

ANNE ELLEGOOD IS SENIOR CURATOR AT THE HAMMER MUSEUM IN LOS ANGELES. HER FIRST SHOW THERE, OF THE ARTIST CLAUDE COLLINS-STRACENSKY, CLOSED IN LATE OCTOBER. UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS WILL INCLUDE PROJECTS BY KEREN CYTTER, DIANA AL-HADID, MARK FLORES, AND TOM MARIONI.



Ree Morton, *Wood Drawings*, 1971, felt-tip pen, pencil, acrylic, clay, sponge, hardware on wood. Installation view, Drawing Center, New York, 2009. Photo: Cathy Carver.

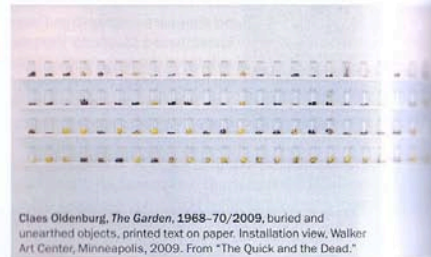
1 *"Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World"* (Drawing Center, New York) This large gathering of Morton's drawings (curated by João Ribas) is a revelation. In her short career, the artist gracefully moved from abstract repeated systems, through mapping her children's games, to joyful combinations of botanical drawings and wordplay from the mid-1970s, just before her untimely death. But in the intimate space of the Drawing Center, the real stars were works that hovered between two dimensions and three: the relatively obscure *Wood Drawings* from 1971, small constructions that foreshadowed more substantial sculptures to come. A tantalizing appetizer for the upcoming retrospective organized by Helen Molesworth for the Harvard University Art Museums.



Yvonne Rainer, *RoS Indexical*, 2007. Performance view, Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater, Los Angeles, June 2009. Emily Coates, Sally Silvers, and Patricia Hoffbauer. Photo: Scott Groller.

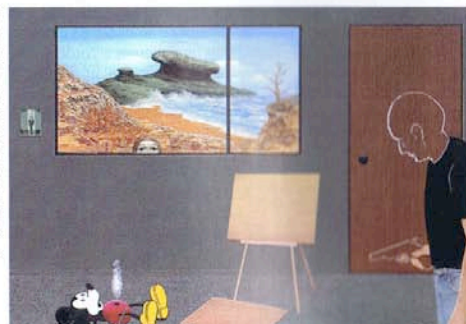
3 Yvonne Rainer, *RoS Indexical* and *Spiraling Down* (REDCAT, Los Angeles) During the West Coast premiere of these two extraordinary pieces by Rainer, one of the four female dancers had to fly home unexpectedly, so Rainer, now in her mid-seventies, filled in: a rare treat. *RoS Indexical* (commissioned by Performa 07) was inspired by the 1913 Stravinsky-Nijinsky ballet, *The Rite of Spring*, and Rainer had a ball reinterpreting the chaos of the work's original, extremely controversial reception. She devilishly highlighted her dancers' attempts to connect with the discordant music and their playful struggles with aggressive movements. Delightful and riotous—yet offering a serious consideration of the radicality of the avant-garde—the works suggest that Rainer has once more hit a remarkable stride.

2 *"The Quick and the Dead"* (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis) Examinations of the legacy of Conceptual art often privilege idea over object, but curator Peter Eleey's absorbing insights resulted in an exhibition filled with material richness. Such heavy hitters as Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, and Adrian Piper were presented alongside younger artists like Trisha Donnelly, Mark Manders, and Susan Philipsz (with some works even straying beyond the galleries). The installation elicited an unexpected range of emotions—curiosity, wonder, and desire—creating a genuinely layered experience, more romantic than cerebral.



Claes Oldenburg, *The Garden*, 1968-70/2009, buried and unearthed objects, printed text on paper. Installation view, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2009. From "The Quick and the Dead."

4 Lynn Foulkes (Hammer Museum, Los Angeles) Now in his seventies, the long-underexhibited, LA-based Foulkes has been skewering the facade of American life in his art and music since the 1960s. His enormous legacy was brought back into the limelight by curator Ali Subotnick's fantastic "Nine Lives" exhibition at the Hammer. (Full disclosure: I joined the museum when this show was on view, but would have picked it regardless!) The artist's alarming portraits of bloody heads are visceral and nightmarish, taking on personal, political, and religious demons via surreal pastiche. Disney has likewise been a target of the artist's work for many years, as in the monumental *Lost Frontier*, 1997-2005, which stages Mickey Mouse as a pioneer woman brandishing a rifle—only to be shot dead by the artist in his painting *Deliverance*, 2004-2007.



Lynn Foulkes, *Deliverance*, 2004-2007, oil, acrylic, assemblage, and filler on panel, 72 x 84".



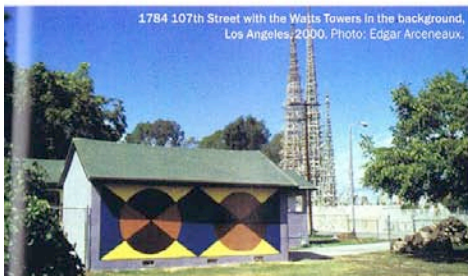
William Leavitt, *Luxury Items*, 1974, four black-and-white photographs, each 9 1/4 x 13 1/4". Photo: Brian Forrest.

5 California Conceptualism: "Allen Ruppersberg: You and Me or the Art" (Santa Monica Museum of Art) and **"William Leavitt, Allen Ruppersberg, Ger van Elk"** (Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles) Two recent shows highlighted the distinctive West Coast fonts of Conceptual art and their continuing contribution to the scene here: the small but tightly curated Ruppersberg exhibition in Santa Monica, organized by Constance Lewallen, and a show at Margo Leavin spotlighting works by Ruppersberg, Leavitt, and van Elk, the Dutch artist who began spending time in LA in the 1960s. Ruppersberg's *A's Café*, 1969, and *A's Grand Hotel*, 1971, put community into Conceptualism. Leavitt's borrowed ads predate Richard Prince's appropriation of luxury items by several years. And the playfulness of van Elk's *Co-founder of the World O.K.*, 1971, for which he contorted his body into those affirmative letters on the streets of LA, remind us that these practitioners looked to pop culture—slapstick, advertising, television—as sources of humor and calculated casualness rather than rigid systems or prescriptive rules.

Kaari Upson, *Untitled*, 2009, smoke on oil panel, 36 x 24". From "Chinese Box," Overduin + Kite, Los Angeles.



8 "Chinese Box" (Overduin + Kite, Los Angeles) Lisa Overduin and Kristina Kite have gathered an impressive roster of artists since opening their Hollywood gallery in 2007, and this group show was a sleeper highlight of the fall season. Trisha Donnelly, Vincent Fecteau, Barry Johnston, Seth Price, Amanda Ross-Ho, Paul Sietsema, and Kaari Upson all provided enormous visual pleasure and material satisfaction with a surprising economy of means, a conceptualism that invites touch. Indeed, Upson's gorgeous smoke pieces were so delicate you felt your breath might alter their surface. The elegant selection argued for instinct and subtlety over fixed meanings.



1784 107th Street with the Watts Towers in the background, Los Angeles, 2000. Photo: Edgar Arceneaux.

9 Watts House Project (WHP) Los Angeles-based artist Edgar Arceneaux has initiated what he calls "a collaborative artwork in the shape of a neighborhood redevelopment" surrounding Simon Rodia's landmark towers. While Rodia brought a pronounced sense of creativity and otherworldly flourish to the area, Arceneaux's project aims to meld aesthetic acts with social ones—volunteerism, problem solving, and sustainability. Artists, architects, and designers work closely with residents to envision and implement renovations, including painting homes, building porches, and planting gardens. The open-ended project is already having an enormous impact on art and life alike, redefining the ways in which artists can operate within a community.



My Barbarian, *The Night Episode Pilot: Purgatorial Curatorial*, 2009, still from a color video, 15 minutes.

6 My Barbarian, "The Night Episode" (Participant Inc., New York) Los Angeles-based group My Barbarian debuted six new videos that fabulously fused the anxiety of Rod Serling's 1970s sci-fi television series *The Night Gallery* with the shock of the financial crisis, each episode revealing just how bizarre our constantly collapsing environment has become. With Malik Gaines, Jade Gordon, and Alexandro Segade portraying creepy yet familiar characters, the videos uniquely grappled with the political dramas of our day through catchy tunes and action sequences.

7 Keren Cytter, *Untitled* (Venice Biennale) If you made it to the end of the Arsenale last summer, you were rewarded with Cytter's video in Daniel Birnbaum's show, "Making Worlds." Having previously used untrained actors, here the Israeli artist enlisted professionals and shot them onstage with a live audience, to intensified effect. Inspired by John Cassavetes's *Opening Night*, in which Gena Rowlands portrays an actress navigating between a theatrical role and her actual life, *Untitled* smartly draws on traditions of realism in dramaturgy and film to expose the competing roles and identities we are each expected to play.

Keren Cytter, *Untitled*, 2009, still from a color video, 10 minutes.



Ed Ruscha, *Los Angeles County Museum on Fire*, 1965–68, oil on canvas, 4' 5 1/2" x 11' 1 1/2".



10 Ed Ruscha, *Los Angeles County Museum on Fire* My understanding of Ruscha's iconic painting from 1965–68 has changed completely. I always saw this piece as a humorous example of institutional critique. But since I moved to LA this past spring, we have had an earthquake, mudslides, and the largest fire in the city's history, casting a very different light on Ruscha's flaming museum. In a locale constantly threatened by natural disaster, the work appears to be less about a desire to transform the mausoleum of the museum into a funeral pyre and more a rendering of a reasonable fear. That it is executed in oil—a medium rightly highlighted in Ralph Rugoff's current "Ed Ruscha: Fifty Years of Painting" at the Hayward Gallery in London—makes the tableau look all the more like the historic depiction, or even the harbinger, of a possible event. God forbid. □