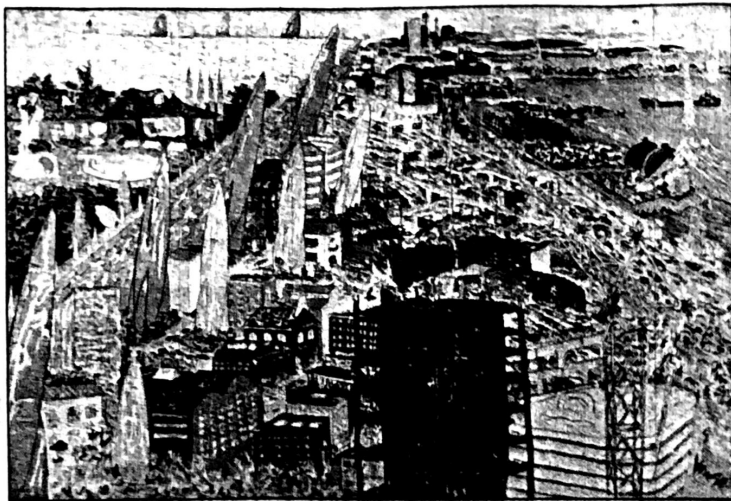


L.A. Art Seen

"To The Astonishing Horizon" at the Design Center

It was a perceptive decision on the part of critic Peter Frank to choose landscape as the thematic link for the annual LAVA exhibition of Southern California artists. There is a there here (apologies to Gertrude Stein) — an ineluctable sense of place that has influenced artists as disparate as John Baldessari and Manny Farber, both of whom are included. If there is any flaw, it may be that the generous inclusion of some 130 pieces has diluted the force of some of the major works and confused the most interesting premise, that this show is about the idea of landscape as much as it is about physicality.

Among the artists celebrating natural or artificial landscapes, there are those who are critical of the encroaching devastation by real-estate and industrial interests. There is probably no



Art in America by Tom Jenkins.

other community comparable in size or "awareness" to L.A. that so regularly permits its architectural landmarks and natural wonders to be wiped out. (Witness the most recent capitulation of Mayor Bradley to Occidental Petroleum, allowing them to drill for oil in the Palisades.)

A recent painting by Joel Bass

marks a new direction in his work — *Paradise Lost* is a dark, smoky, mysterious scene, difficult to decipher, of raw ochre earth torn up by what might be the treads of tanks or heavy trucks. The nocturnal image brings up thoughts of war or ecological destruction. More literal, and more comic, is Tom Jenkins' *Art in America*, which

alludes to the willing blindness of some in the aesthetic community to political, social and economic conditions. This cartoon-like painting features an art collector's suburban home protected from the smog, traffic jams and city violence by a large wall and phalanx of ICBMs. Philip Steinmetz' book of photographs, *The Package*,

visually chronicles the typical SoCal miracle, a parcel of virgin land quickly transformed into tract housing. He ironically concludes the book with a photo of a sign advertising "Paradise Realty."

The artists who confront the tradition of landscape according to history include Barrie Mottishaw. *Study for Interchange* is a delicate watercolor reminiscent of Arroyo Seco plein air painters of the '30s, but the scene has changed with time: serpentine concrete curves sweep above the sprawl of low-rise housing; the purple San Gabriel Mountains in the background are capped with an orange film of pollution. Constance Mallinson addresses the romantic optimism typically elicited by the idea of wilderness in her charcoal drawing of waterfalls in a forest, captioned "California" and titled *Plan Your Future*. David Amico's *Looking Back*, a small blue painting of a snow-capped mountain mounted within a frame upon a larger canvas, subverts the ideals associated with the noble landscape in art while simultaneously expressing a spirit of nostalgic loss. (433 S. Spring St., 6th Floor; through February 15.)

—Hunter Drohojowska

Jerry Brane at Irit Krygier

Jerry Brane's last show was rife with glorious, luminescent paintings, fields of rich, dark, glazed color that both embodied and commented on the philosophies of transcendence in 19th-century landscape painting. Although they were fuscious objects, their heavy baroque frames told us that the artist was desirous but self-conscious about the limitations of such painting in these times.

There are but two of these glazed paintings in his current show, and both are beauties. *Pasture* is a muddy blur of earth and sky, glazed to a surface sheen like highly polished furniture so that embedded figures and forms are barely discernible. But Brane has taken another direction in his more recent work. The backgrounds of several are heavily worked, chalky and overlaid with schematic line drawings, making the picture seem awkward and puzzled at first. These paintings are designed for the slow take, and they unfold their promise with time.

Their titles provide the first literal clues. *Chest* emerges from the thick, snaky red lines as a pair of lungs, sternum, back bone, collar, all against a clotted blue background. It is a tragicomic representation. *Anima*, being, according to Jung, the presence of the feminine inner personality in men, is presented as soft, concentric vulva-shaped rings of black, interwoven as black doodles in a chartreuse field. *Animus*, being the masculine inner personality in women, is a

charged, vibrant pattern of woody browns, whites and blues, supporting a more bulky, gently phallic architectural form. These linear drawings borrow from organic, natural shapes like spider webs, clusters of branches, nests, seaweed, tumbling water, rings of trees and the meandering squiggles of the unconscious. *Years, Months, Days, Moment* features the passages of time in written letters barely legible against the black

background. Exploding over such order is a burst of white, like a sudden growth or splash, maybe an embryo coming to life.

The worst that can be said of this new work is that it occasionally owes a little too much to the canvases of Anselm Keifer. Otherwise, Brane has continued to make strides in that most obstinate medium, "straight" painting. (At the Irit Krygier Gallery.)

—Hunter Drohojowska



Anima by Jerry Brane.

Self-Portraits at Security Pacific

One of the attractive things about the "Self-Portraits by Women" show is that it can easily throw the consumer of art into a conceptual tizzy. After one sees the works of 12 artists from all over the country working in all different media, questions have to be asked: What is self? What is a portrait? What is (a) woman? And the bigger political question, how does one re-present one's self as woman?

All of these artists, explicitly or indirectly, are addressing these issues. Cindy Sherman is represented in a series of tantalizingly enigmatic untitled photos. She is disguised in each of them, acting out visual scenarios about which the viewer feels compelled to make a story. In one photo, she's in gingham

on the floor; in another, she looks like a college freshman in gym shorts; in another, a vamp. Anita Stekel projects herself in photo-montage all over Manhattan's East Side, onto the Statue of Liberty in a defense of *Bills Holiday*, and into the Sistine Chapel on the wings of a bird. In five tall triptychs, Mary Ahrendt manages to make herself look like blurry X-rays of a long, skinny foetus, legs dangling unnaturally from an oversized head.

Many of these women depict themselves as blurred, fragmented or simply absent, as in a Brenda Goodman painting where, Magritte-like, a prom dress and a bowler appear, but no human figures do.

Even though it's slightly eerie to look at art in a bank lobby with tons of chrome and steel towering overhead, this is a show to linger in and mull over. It's strong.

—Helen Knode



Untitled Film Still #64 by Cindy Sherman.