

An exhibit to lift your post-Olympic spirits

By Hunter Drohojowska

The very idea is enough to make you groan. "Oh, nooooooo, not *post-Olympic art*." Just when you thought you never again wanted to *bear* the word Olympic. But the exhibition bearing that title is nothing to groan about. It fills a significant gap in the Olympic Arts Festival, i.e., the absence of new art produced by young L.A. artists. We've seen impressionism, monumental California sculpture, art in clay, masks, stamps, bronze nude statues, art about palm trees and cars, even art from Australia. But the here and now in L.A. was overlooked, and there was almost no dialogue between the local art community and that of any other country. Joy Silverman, director of L.A. Contemporary Exhibitions, in cooperation with the Paris alternative space Beau Lezard, decided to fill that gap after the fact with a show of art by five Angelenos and five French artists, continuing through Oct. 6.

"We felt that young artists in L.A. should have the opportunity to make art during the Olympics. It's been a tradition. At Lake Placid, they commissioned video by Nam June Paik and sculpture by Mary Miss and Siah Armajani. We learned that there wasn't going to be much representation of young L.A. artists in the festival and we thought it was important. It's similar to what the Olympics does for young athletes, challenging young talent. We got a grant so the artists could work during the Olympics and we would exhibit it afterwards."

The catalog to the show is decorated with drawings of a fallen column and an extinguished torch, preparing a visitor for some wry and

critical looks at the vaunted athletic events. The L.A. artists were selected by a panel composed of Josine Ianco-Starrels, director of the Municipal Art Gallery, artist John White and Herald art critic Christopher Knight. Each artist works in a different medium — Dorit Cypis created an installation; Walter Lab did paintings; Scott Rankin, video; B. Wurtz, sculpture; and Donald Krieger, performance. The French artists — Remi Blanchard, Sophie Calle, Claude Cognet, Bernard Frize and Ronan Olier — were chosen by four French critics: Laurent Charreyon, Catherine Franblin, Otto Hahn and Herve Perdriolle.

"Pierre Zins, from Beau Lezard, had received money from the French government to bring their artists here to do commissioned pieces for the Olympics," explained Silverman. "He came to us and we combined efforts. It wasn't one project to begin with, but two that came together. As a group, the L.A. artists really dealt with some sense of political content in their work. The French were dealing more with L.A. than the Olympics."

The French artist who reveals the most about L.A. is Sophie Calle, who asked one question of L.A. personalities ranging from the famous to the unknown: "Since L.A. is literally the City of Angels, where are the angels?" The answers are documented by photographs mounted with text. Police Chief Daryl Gates claims the angels are the "good people" of the city; poet Lewis MacAdams took Calle to the grave of Marilyn Monroe (an angel because of her beauty); the manager of Victor's Clothing on Broadway, where LACE is housed, cited his mother as an angel; architect Frank Gehry named his family as angels; cultural affairs honcho Fred Croton thought the bums in the park might be angels; writer Rex Weiner took the artist to the Variety Arts Center to see W.C. Fields' hat, explaining that

it takes an act of faith to believe it's the comic's topper and he prefers to have that faith.

The French paintings seem only tangentially reflective of the actual city. Remi Blanchard's pictures are emblematic: outlined, flat-colored figures and forms, such as a parked trailer with angels circling overhead, or hieroglyphic, stick-styled horses and deer. An expressive, abstracted tapestry of a painting by Ronan Olier takes up an entire wall. Claude Cagnet combines decorative and figurative painting techniques in a colorful triptych.

The L.A. artists aimed for direct hits at the Olympic target and the American government. Walter Lab's composite of paintings covers a wall with such politically charged images as Reagan, some LAPD officers on horseback, and a couple with their hands over their hearts in a pledge of allegiance, all rendered in a pop comic style.

In the center of the gallery, B. (Bill) Wurtz placed narrow wooden pedestals surmounted with sports-oriented "found objects," such as Frisbees, weights, golf balls and trophies, generating a wry absurdist view of the Games. Dorit Cypis put up a room-sized tent that acts as a screen to receive projected composite images of the Swiss Guards and colossal statues in Rome mixed with Olympic crowds in L.A. and a child involved in the Special Olympics in Montreal. Work by other artists was not yet installed, but it was easy to catch the political drift in the show. Donald Krieger, who has maquettes in the show, will address politics indirectly in a performance piece on the colliding of cultures titled "Island," beginning tonight at the Cast Theatre in Hollywood and continuing through mid-October.

Silverman has reservations about the Olympic Arts Festival and its director, Robert Fitzpatrick. "I thought the performing arts were incredible. I

would have loved to see the U.S. better represented with regard to performance art. But the visual arts didn't get the attention necessary to develop really interesting projects. (The visual arts component) did not meet the same standards as the performing arts. It was almost the same as what people (at institutions) would have presented anyway," said Silverman. "What was shown were mostly established artists and not really the example of the full extent of what's going on here. I would have liked to have seen a lot of really good, temporary public art. It was the perfect opportunity to do that. But my relationship with them just didn't exist."

Silverman submitted a proposal to the Olympic Arts Festival but never received any kind of response from Fitzpatrick. In response, during the Olympics, LACE exhibited work by two Russian artists who emigrated to New York. She sees LACE as showing more foreign work in the future. "The most important thing you learn (about working with foreign artists) is that you're only seeing surfaces and there's so much you don't know and can't know without spending the time." LACE may follow the model of New York's alternative space PS 1, which gives six-month and one-year residencies to artists from other countries. (Both Blanchard and Frize have spent time at PS 1.) When LACE relocates, there will be a few spaces for guest artists. "The European governments pay for their artists to come to the U.S. It's important to have that perspective in the U.S." In addition, she feels it's important for L.A. artists to be seen in Europe. To that end, the California International Arts Foundation, which also sponsored the California Sculpture Show, is funding this exhibition's travel to Paris. "It's an incredible opportunity and what LACE should be doing more of."