



COLLECTIBLES

Image Conscious

Young L.A. artists are
drawing attention

LOS ANGELES, THE PROBLEM child of America, a stubborn adolescent, has finally reached adulthood. Signs of this maturity are: L.A.'s new power as a financial center; its population diversity; a far-reaching influence in life-style trends. And, L.A. has developed its own culture, especially in the area of fine art.

The last five years have seen the opening of galleries devoted to modern and contemporary art at the L.A. County Museum of Art and the building of the Museum of Contemporary Art and its auxiliary space, the Temporary Contemporary, as well as the Santa Monica Museum of Art, as yet only open for on-site sculpture installations and performance art.

There is only one alternative space—L.A. Contemporary Exhibitions—dedicated to showing the work of promising but still unrecognized artists. But the number of commercial galleries has exploded. Art dealers from New York (Blum/Helman), San Francisco (Daniel Weinberg, Dorothy Goldeen), and Chicago (Roy Boyd) have relocated or opened ancillary galleries in L.A. Hence, L.A. artists have more opportunities to show and to see the imported production of artists from New York, Europe, or elsewhere. And L.A. artists are regularly included in international survey shows.

There are dozens of new artists displaying distinct gifts, but a few may be considered "emerging" young talent, as in "emerging" from the crowd and coming into focus as individuals with special vision. Artists such as Jim Isermann, Renée Petropoulos, Roy Dowell,

Kady Hoffman, and Tim Hawkinson.

Jim Isermann, 33, grew up in Kenosha, Wisconsin, obsessed with the futuristic design of the sixties TV series "The Jetsons." But needless to say, there was very little in Kenosha resembling the Jetsons. It was only when he came to L.A. in 1978—to get his master's degree from the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts)—that he found the lost promise of futuristic design in suburban architecture and atomic-age furniture. "For me, art's still about making things I want to be surrounded by, it's my attempt at creating an ideal environment, the future I didn't get," explains Isermann.

He creates furniture and paintings designed after the space-age fifties or the Pop-Op sixties, often placed in idealized environments. "I never thought of paintings and decorative objects as separate kinds of activity," Isermann says. Through his seemingly naive recreations of fifties furniture, Isermann attacks the marketing hierarchy, where oil painting reigns over decorative arts. For instance, by presenting his kidney-shaped coffee table as a sculpture in an art gallery, Isermann is reversing the historical devolution of style. The "style" was rooted in the biomorphic abstractions of Joan Miro's paintings and later was borrowed as the inspiration for Charles Eames's chairs. Ultimately the style devolved to the tangerine formica furniture of L.A. coffee shops. Isermann's furniture/sculpture was the logical completion of the cycle—style again is fine art.

Isermann re-creates his own versions of the sixties Op-Art patterns as "paintings"—divided so that half is executed in enamel on wood panel in the high-art tradition of hard-edge geometry; the other half is a hooked rug

Jim Isermann at his Spring 1988 one-man show, held in the Kublen-schmidt Gallery in Santa Monica.

By HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA



MARVA MARROW/SHOOTING STAR



of orlon acrylic, representing mass-production. Siamese twins of low and high culture, these pieces implicitly question the Modernist tradition, with the patterns referring as easily to corporate logos as they do to Frank Stella.

Isermann's career has blossomed over the last five years. He is represented in New York by Feature Gallery and last year he designed a TV lounge for the American Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria, New York. He is represented by Richard Kuhlenschmidt (1634 17th Street, Santa Monica, CA 90404; 213-450-2010). His four by four foot paintings are \$4,000.

Like many artists of this generation, René Petropoulos operates from the belief that painting is a culturally deter-

mined language as opposed to being a purely internal expression of self. The 33-year-old native of Los Angeles received her BA in art history from UCLA with a specialization in Islamic art before getting a master's in fine art. "The Islamic religion forbids any recognizable imagery so they had to use abstractions to create visual forms," she says. Petropoulos's paintings borrow from this tradition by incorporating Arabic letters, which to Western viewers read as fluid curvilinear forms.

"I'm not interested in abstraction as most artists approach it. I'm interested in images from the world that function as something but are also abstract. Everything in my work has to have multiple references."

Her travels to Latin America and Indonesia influenced her decision to include pictographs used in Third World sign painting in her art. Petropoulos combined her own pictographs—hand gestures, vessels, domestic objects—in compositions that thwarted attempts at narrative reading. They suggest the complexity of international relations, the miscommunication inherent to contemporary life, and the potential richness of heritages other than Western European. (*continued on page 60*)

ABOVE: PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM McHUGH. PHOTOS OF REAR VIEW MIRROR PAINTING AND ECHO CARDIOGRAPH LANDSCAPE, COURTESY ACE CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS. PHOTO OF THE PLANETS PROPERLY ALIGNED: DOUGLAS M. PARKER, COURTESY ROSAMUND FELSON GALLERY. PHOTO OF NO TITLE: TOM VINETZ.

L.A. ARTISTS

(continued from page 42)

Roy Dowell, 37, shares Petropoulos's fascination with the imagery of developing nations and they have traveled together in search of source material. Dowell's paintings might be thought of as abstraction rooted in the patterns and language of decoration. Dowell, who grew up on the East Coast and in Northern California, has lived in L.A. since 1971 when he came to get his BFA and MFA at CalArts. Now the Chair of Graduate Studies at the Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design, Dowell is articulate but refuses to be pigeonholed by theory. "In that way, I'm an old-fashioned painter. I'm not uninterested in theory but I don't relate it to my work."

Dowell draws the language of abstraction in his work from the lexicon of Modernism—Biomorphic Futurism, Cubism, Surrealism—but combines it with a language drawn from nature—seed pods, embryos, seashells—and decorative motifs like linoleum and textile patterns from the forties. It is not surprising that these acrylic paintings

evolve out of collage, which he still uses as a form of "drawing."

As Petropoulos's language-based abstractions invite then deny interpretation, Dowell's decorative imagery also seems familiar yet unplaceable. "When I use a decorative motif, it may have started with something recognizable. But I'm more interested in the way something looks than where it came from and what symbols it may carry," explains Dowell. "My paintings are bumpy rides," Dowell confirms. "They ask you to look into your own experiences and interpret what they are. You take the logic of something that reads as a pattern and figure out why it has meaning and importance to you."

The Rosamund Felsen Gallery (669 N. La Cienega Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA. 90069; 213-652-9172) represents both Petropoulos and Dowell. Dowell's 40-by-60-inch paintings are \$2,750. Petropoulos's paintings of 50 by 36 inches are \$3,500, but prices for both artists are expected to begin soaring soon.

Kady Hoffman, 39, is another L.A. na-

tive. Her paintings are radiant with the sort of captured luminosity too often associated with the Southern California School of Light Painting, a fact that prompts her to assert that they are painted at night. The layered geometries and matrixes of gesso, ink, and paint are subtly limned beneath a veil of white. With their soft blue and green hues, it is tempting to think of Hoffman's work in terms of landscapes. But these paintings come from the dream state. She describes her paintings as "notations of a certain place and consciousness. My work comes from that time that is just between sleeping and waking, that funny time when there is a change in your consciousness. That's where I work. I try to make it visible, put it on the map."

With Hoffman's paintings, it is often easier to write about what they are not. They don't attempt to transcend in the ethereal manner of Rothko, nor do they remain as rigorously worldly as Ellsworth Kelly. Instead, they serve as moderators of conversation between

Almost Home, Hawthorn Suites.

Suite Rates \$65-\$90
800-527-1133

Great news!
The comforts of
Hawthorn Suites

- hotels will help you feel at home on the road:
- Spacious one- and two-bedroom suites.
 - Fully equipped kitchens for a snack or a meal.
 - FREE home-style breakfast buffet served daily.
 - FREE evening refreshments and hot hors d'oeuvres Monday-Thursday.

- Swimming pool and recreation facilities.
- Color TVs and FREE in-room cable movies.
- Videocassette players and cassette library rental.

Call now for reservations at 800-527-1133, or have your travel agent or planner call.


**HAWTHORN
SUITES
HOTEL**
Stay a little closer to home.®
800-527-1133
Or have your travel agent or planner call.

Atlanta-Northwest • Austin-Airport/Central • Austin-Northwest • Chicago-Lincolnshire
Dallas-DFW/Arlington • Dallas-Market Center • Dallas-Richardson/Plano • Tulsa

L.A. ARTISTS

the two theoretical poles. This is abstract painting that both seduces and elucidates theory. "It puts the focus back on the viewer, which gives them a less absolute and authoritative purpose. Both the artist and the viewer have to take responsibility," she notes.

Hoffman, a graduate of Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design, is represented by the Fred Hoffman (no relation) Gallery (912 Colorado Avenue, Santa Monica, CA 90404, 213-394-4199). Her five-by-seven-foot paintings sell for around \$4,000.

Tim Hawkinson, 28, is the latest wunderkind of the L.A. art scene. While still a graduate student at UCLA, where he studied with Roger Herman and Alexis Smith, he had his first exhibition at ACE Contemporary Exhibitions. Nearly every piece sold. The results were similar at his 1988 show.

Working in the terrain of the found and altered object—the legacy of Dadaists and assemblage artists from Mar-

cel Duchamp to Joseph Cornell—Hawkinson evolved a personal vocabulary. This Northern California native, who once considered building musical instruments as a career, may compose a painting or drawing to fit the personality of a found frame or employ unconventional materials in the construction of a familiar object. He poured cement into the body of his childhood violin, then peeled away the shell to leave a sculpture of the instrument in resolutely dead sounding material. In this act are art historical references to Man Ray's photograph, "Violin d'Ingres," of a nude woman's back transformed into a violin, which in itself referred both to Ingres's hobby of playing the instrument and to his early 19th-century painting of a woman at her bath. Such layered significance is inherent rather than obvious, and delivered with the wry wit appropriate to a follower of the Dadaist camp.

In "Rear View Mirror Painting," Hawkinson represents a panoramic Western landscape—a subject of myth-

ic dimension in American art—but in the center of the timeless image, he adds the element of time in the form of the rear view mirror, the device by which we see the majestic scene today at 65 m.p.h. He adds a sort of reverse perspective to the painting so that we are viewing the scene in two directions at once, though they appear nearly identical. Thus he is personalizing the impersonal history of art, just as his landscape sketch drawn from an electrocardiogram printout is in fact his own heart beat.

Hawkinson's work sells for \$2,500. He is represented by ACE Contemporary Exhibitions, (5514 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90036; 213-935-4411).

It's clear that the time has past when L.A. artists presented themselves as laid back lovers of sun and surf. L.A. is an adult now, and so is the culture it produces. That year-round sunshine has been heating the crucible. The refined substance of art is ready for the respect it deserves. ●

A CORPORATE RATE THAT'S YOURS FOR THE ASKING.

It couldn't be simpler. Just ask for our "Texas Corporate Rate" and you can stay at a Wyndham Hotel for only \$69 per night in Austin or

\$69 **\$89**

Austin,
Corpus Christi.

Dallas, Houston,
San Antonio.

Corpus Christi, and only \$89 per night in Dallas, Houston or San Antonio. Which is truly a small price to pay considering everything Wyndham has to offer. Like the richly appointed

guest rooms and attentive service that together have made Wyndham hotels among the finest in Texas.

WYNDHAM HOTELS OF TEXAS
TRAMMELL CROW HOTELS

For reservations: **800-822-4200**.

North Houston
Wyndham Greenspoint
12400 Greenspoint Dr.
Houston, TX 77060
713-875-2222

Central Houston
Wyndham Medical Center
6633 Travis Street
Houston, TX 77030
713-524-6633

Dallas
Wyndham Garden Hotel
at Las Colinas
110 West Carpenter Frwy.
Irving, TX 75039
214-650-1600

Austin
Wyndham Southpark
4140 Governor's Row
Austin, TX 78744
512-448-2222

San Antonio
Wyndham San Antonio
9821 Colonnade Blvd.
San Antonio, TX 78230
512-691-8888

Corpus Christi
Wyndham Corpus Christi
900 North Shoreline Blvd.
Corpus Christi, TX 78401
512-887-1600