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"Best of 2007"

by Michael Ned Holte

ARTFORUM BEST OF 2007

DECEMBER 2007 INTERNATIONAL

ON THE GROUND

Los Angeles

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shadows. Do we get the Los Angeles we want or the one we deserve—the Los Angeles we *imagineer* for ourselves?

Just two miles from LACMA, but at the opposite end of spectacular (in the Debordian sense), was a September solo show at Richard Telles Fine Art by Richard Hawkins, whose reputation grows with every unexpected twist and turn. This show combined collage—his *métier* regardless of his medium—and a pair of painted, decorated, and distressed “haunted” dollhouses (one situated on a tabletop, one situated below), recalling the artist’s flimsy card table and

With Koons’s monstrous folly, one gets the sense that the Los Angeles art world might finally desire to bask in the spotlight of Hollywood rather than lurk in its shadows. Do we get the Los Angeles we want or the one we deserve—the Los Angeles we *imagineer* for ourselves?

cup o’ Noodles sculptures of the late 1990s. Hawkins managed to squeeze most of his career—a dialectical relation of stage and underworld—into those two *Munsters*-ish sculptures, along with some lovely little handmade chinoiserie pots, but his actual midcareer retrospective is on view now at de Appel in Amsterdam instead of in his hometown: Frankly, every LA museum missed the

boat on this one. This fact became painfully obvious as Hawkins’s influence was visible everywhere in LA this year. His role was nowhere more evident than in Brian Kennon’s recent repackaging and restaging of his former teacher’s disembodied heads executed in primitive Photoshop a decade ago. (Kennon’s solo show at Daniel Hug may have seemed a slight gesture to some—Hawkins willingly handed over the original digital files, adding to the slightness—though, of course, it’s worth remembering that similar charges were leveled at the elder artist’s work in the late ’90s.)

The show reminded me that I first encountered one of Hawkins’s cool (meaning chilly), zombified male heads in 1998, in a two-person, two-work show with Jorge Pardo at the Brent Peterson Gallery. One of the first lessons at the well-known 6150 Wilshire gallery complex, artist-cum-gallerist Peterson was among the fabled crop of UCLA MFAs featured in Dennis Cooper’s infamous 1997 *Spin* magazine article “Too Cool for School.” (That article, which centered on the considerable talent and debauchery of UCLA’s MFA crop from the period and aimed a spotlight on LA as an incubator for young artists, surely inaugurated an uncomfortable awareness of the local academy’s relationship to market forces.) Though Peterson’s gallery was short-lived, he hosted important, even daring early shows of Mark Grotjahn, Paul Sietsema, and Tim Rogeberg. Tragically, Peterson took his life this year, after a long battle with depression. His influence, while quiet and—yes—provincial, will resonate for those who knew him.

It is perhaps a fitting tribute to Peterson that artist-run spaces bloomed all over the sprawling LA art map this year—resulting from the vitality of the market (so I hear) or just the sheer



This page, clockwise from top: Richard Hawkins, *Stairwell Down*, 2007, altered dollhouse and table, 42 1/4 x 36 1/4 x 36 1/4". Photo: Fredrik Nilsen. View of “Where Was I? All About the Edges, Bag of Pockets, the Art of Semi-Autonomy,” 2007, Pauline, Los Angeles. Photo: Joshua Nathanson. Justin Beal and Mateo Tannatt, *Alteration Demonstration/Tasteful Guidance*, 2007, still from a two-channel color video, 45 minutes.

number of unsigned artists emerging from schools—representing a continuum of business plans ranging from venture capitalist to utopian cooperative or some unlikely combination of these approaches. In short, it became clear that more artists are taking matters of exhibition (or distribution) into their own hands—at least until something more enticing comes along. The best of these spaces, Pauline, an occasional apartment gallery operated by current UCLA MFA student Mateo Tannatt, was the site of two smart, energetic shows—the first was a collaborative installation with work made jointly by Tannatt and USC graduate Justin Beal; the second was a group show, rather maddeningly titled

“Where Was I? All About the Edges, Bag of Pockets, the Art of Semi-Autonomy,” organized by Joshua Nathanson. The latter show, with more than a dozen artists, including Will Benedict, Billy Al Bengston, Henning Bohl, Heather Cook, Nathan Hylden, and Paulina Olowaska, dropped thematic coherence—whether gendered, regional, or generational—in favor of sly formal play and associative proximity. Somehow ballsy and modest at the same time, Nathanson proposed a generous new dynamic.

Or, dare I say, he intimated a new way forward, between global and provincial, by bringing together an expansive, international group of artists in the confines of a shabby Hollywood apartment. □

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