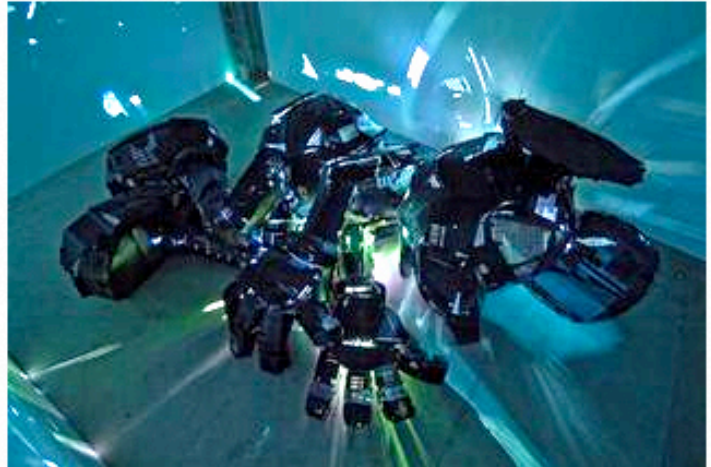


Los Angeles Times

Art review: 'COLA 2011: Individual Artist Fellowship' at Municipal Art Gallery

June 9, 2011

The gallery housing Danial Nord's "State of the Art" sculpture at the Municipal Art Gallery is pitch-black. Until your eyes adjust, pretty much all a visitor sees is shards of bluish-white light flickering like broken glass on surrounding walls, as well as inside some unfathomable structure taking up most of the small room.



A vaguely militaristic audio-remix of the familiar "Mickey Mouse Club March" theme song, its rat-a-tat-tat snare drum echoing repetitiously (even relentlessly) inside the chamber, gives a clue as to what slowly comes into view. A 17-foot-long sculpture of Mickey lies on its side. The cartoon rodent, fabricated from cast-off television sets, recalls an armored vehicle.

The sleeping-or-dead pose is critical to the work's creepy success, as is the sheer volume of old TV sets from which the work is deftly cobbled together. Nord's video-sculpture wedges itself into an electronic zone somewhere between a numbed life and eternal death, between commercialized seductions of youthful play and the cast-off consumer culture that has long-since replaced the "idiot box" of the cathode-ray tube era with today's ubiquitous digital flat-screen. Mickey is dead; long live Mickey!

"State of the Art" (even the title blows a cold breeze) is video as sinister inevitability in our globalizing march. It's also a strong work in a strong exhibition -- "COLA 2011," the public presentation of works by artist-recipients in the most recent round of the city of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department's individual artist grants. Ten artists are in the show.

Ken Gonzalez Day's large ink-jet prints put photographs of figure and portrait sculptures by artists and anthropologists in confrontation and conversation -- a colonial American woman and a classical Venus, for example, opposite Japanese and Eskimo women. Similarities and differences are thrown into high relief, but it's the blank chasm between them (in this case, between cultural conceptions of East and West) that looms largest.

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Carolyn Castaño, who is Colombian American, elaborates her eye-popping brand of extreme netherworld celebrity portraits with a series of brightly painted, glitter-encrusted, life-size reclining nudes that she calls "Narco Venuses," fictionalized tabloid girlfriends of drug lords here adorned with cascades of poppies, pot leaves and skulls. Heather Carson merges Dan Flavin's industrial-strength fluorescent tubes and lighting fixtures with Agnes Martin's painted pastel abstractions of horizontal color bars, forming an unlikely pairing for wall sculptures simultaneously ephemeral and muscular.

Amid paintings, a harpoon-sculpture and altered book texts, Tony de los Reyes flips a 31-star American flag, which dates to circa 1851. That's a year after California joined the Union, sea-to-shining-sea, and the year Herman Melville

published "Moby-Dick," his epic sea-faring tale of obsession on nature's whiteness. The flag's symbolic colors are replaced by watery swirls of black and white, evoking a turbulent run-up to the Civil War.

Anna Boyiazis' documentary photographs of AIDS orphans in sub-Saharan Africa compose lyrical images of love, loss and human fragility. As the pandemic's 30th anniversary arrives, the pictures also mark time.



Dont Rhine, working with a sound-art collective, orchestrated John Cage-like "listening tours" in which small groups were instructed to briefly visit a place without speaking, then report back

on what they heard. There's not much to look at in the gallery; however, playing against a very loud society in which everyone clamors to be heard, a paean to the virtues of listening is worth, well, hearing.

Soo Kim makes a not-unrelated admonition about the value of seeing through a forest of visual clutter. Parts of her large landscape photographs have been neatly excised with a razor blade, mingling real and depicted shadows.

Less satisfactory are the skillfully drafted yet prosaic commercial icons -- Tony Tiger, Charlie Tuna, a Kool-Aid grin -- painted in tattoo-like markings by Mark Dean Veca. Their sense of rotting decay is held too much in check by pretty fields of flat, decorative colors. Those colors are said to have socially relevant sources, such as the mercury base of the vermilion in the Charlie Tuna work, but it's a stretch with no visual payoff.

And Yong Soon Min's room-size video installation projects images over vinyl letters on the floor, documenting email exchanges that often concern the difficulty of communication. Nearby, a split-screen video monitor plays fragments of what appear to be television soap operas. The context is far too obscure to hold interest, though, while the scale of the projection dilutes the whole.

Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Park, 4800 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, (323) 644-6269, through July 3. Closed Mon through Wed.

www.lamag.org

-- Christopher Knight

Top photo: Danial Nord's "State of the Art," 2011, mixed media. Credit: Gene Ogami

Middle photo: Heather Carson's "light/LINES: Untitled No. 1," 2011, mixed media. Credit: Ace Gallery

Bottom photo: Tony de los Reyes' "1851," oil and ink on canvas. Credit: Municipal Art Gallery