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The Other LA Art Scene: Part I

Joanna Szupinska

Free from the agendas and restrictions of commercial art galleries and large museums, nonprofit, artist-run, and other unconventional art galleries abound in Los Angeles. By no means exhaustive, an introduction to some emerging and established spaces follows below.



Sea and Space Explorations (Lara, info@seaandspace.org) Sea and Space Explorations
Mandrake (Justin, mail@mandrakebar.com) Mandrake, 2006
photo by Josh White Mandrake, 2007 photo by Justin Beal

Some of these venues resemble smaller versions of museums, offering temporary exhibits funded by grants, donations, and annual auctions. RedCat gallery (www.redcat.org), opened in 2003 and located in downtown LA's Disney Hall, is funded and run by CalArts. Led by Gallery Director and Curator Clara Kim, RedCat is seen as a laboratory for contemporary artists to push boundaries and blend disciplines. A show of Dave McKenzie's work will open there in April.

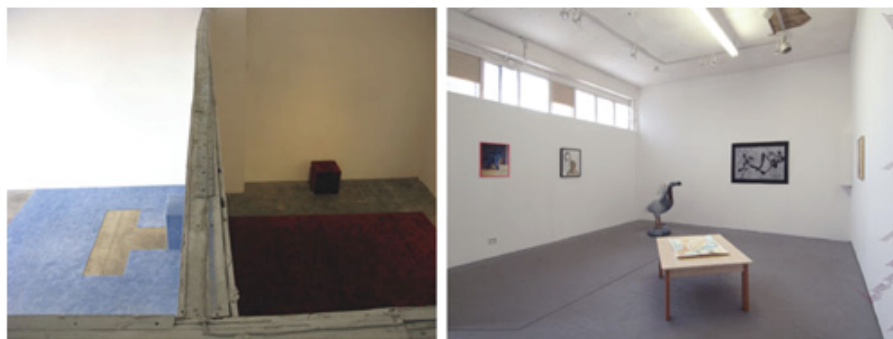
Another museum-like, institution-supported, nonprofit space that presents temporary exhibitions is the Luckman Gallery (www.luckmanarts.org), tucked away on the Cal State LA campus. It is headed by gallery director Julie Joyce and since 1998, when Joyce started in the position, the gallery has originated seven exhibitions that have traveled nationally, such as "Jessica Bronson: Panamint Tilt" in 2000/2001, and has organized three exhibitions nominated for Best Show Awards by the International Association of Art Critics USA, such as Joyce's "Patrick Nickell: Built for Speed" in 2003.



Ooga Booga (Wendy, info@oogaboogastore.com) Ooga Booga photo by Amy Yao Mountain Bar

Founded and directed by the recently announced guest curator of the 2008 Orange County Biennial, Lauri Firstenberg, LAXART (www.laxart.org) in Culver City, in addition to its exhibitions program, also organizes public projects and interventions throughout the city. One such public project, currently on view for pedestrians and commuters, is a billboard designed by artist Scoli Acosta, whose solo exhibition is concurrently installed in the gallery.

Some unconventional spaces, with no ties to institutions, resemble galleries more than they do museums. PawnShop (www.pawnshopgallery.com) in Westwood, directed by Hilary Rose Crisp, opened in July 2007. This April will bring the new exhibition series "Solo Solo" in which invited curators will be asked to select single works of art. The series will begin with Tate Modern's Ben Borthwick showing Andrea Büttner's *Yes I Believe Every Word You Say* (2007). Opened in 2001, South La Brea Gallery (www.southlabreagallery.com) sees itself as an educational exhibition entity. Exhibiting emerging artists and accepting proposals from young curators, South La Brea Gallery also focuses on educating new collectors. In Chinatown, a neighborhood seductive for its cheap rents and local ambiance, new arrival The Box (www.theboxla.com) opened in June 2007 – the alternative gallery owned by artist Paul McCarthy and directed by daughter Mara McCarthy. McCarthy is currently showing work by Julien Bismuth.



The Box (Mara, mara@theboxla.com) The Box Gallery

Julien Bismuth, *The Funniest Sculpture in the World (Version 1.1: Rough Cut)*, 2008 and

A Specific Object (Version 1.1: Rough Cut), 2008. Monte Vista (Chris,

info@montevistaprojects.com) Monte Vista

The Pyramid Show [installation view] photo by Frank Chang Monte Vista

First Kiss [installation view] photo by Gene Ogami

Some artist-run spaces feel less like galleries and more like informal apartment shows. Monte Vista (www.montevistaprojects.com) and Sea and Space Explorations (www.seaandspace.org), both situated in Highland Park, opened in July 2007. Wacky premises for exhibitions abound. For "The Pyramid Show" at Monte Vista in September 2007, co-curated by Noah Pepper and Frank Chang, artists made works that were inspired, as can be deduced from the title, by pyramids. These spaces foster the coming together of artists, and try to promote non-traditional discussion.

A long history of relationships between artists and bars does not minimize the opportunity for new manifestations of that growing kinship. Mountain Bar (www.themountainbar.com) in Chinatown pours drinks for local art aficionados but also functions as a venue, hosting various events and lectures, as well as weekly classes held under the auspices of The Mountain School of Arts (www.themountainschoolofarts.org). An answer to the many established art schools of Southern California, MSA, now entering into its third year, provides students with a 3-month program of discussions, field trips, and guest lectures on topics ranging from art

theory and philosophy to science and concrete poetry. Not to be rivaled by Chinatown, Culver City has its very own artists' watering hole as well. Opened by artists Justin Beal, Drew Heitzler, and Flora Wiegmann in 2006, the Mandrake (www.mandrakebar.com) hosts film screenings, lectures, and exhibitions in their back room gallery-slash-dance floor.



Sea and Space Explorations (Lara, info@seaandspace.org) Sea and Space Explorations
Mandrake (Justin, mail@mandrakebar.com) Mandrake, 2006photo by Josh White Mandrake, 2007

Representing art through the lighthearted approach of retail, Ooga Booga (www.oogaboogastore.com) opened in 2004 as a shop stocking artist books, clothing, non-mainstream music, and limited edition knick-knacks. Catering specifically to the art hopper, Ooga Booga had its own booth at Art LA.



Ooga Booga (Wendy, info@oogaboogastore.com) Ooga Booga photo by Amy Yao Mountain Bar