

Artist Fellowship COLA awards are given to mainly mid-career artists who apply for the funds for a proposed year-long project in their area of interest. As Cultural Affairs proceeds to figure out just what its new mandate means, I found myself looking with an altered perspective at the ten COLA 2004 visual artists and wondering at the political ramifications the new direction might have on its future art exhibitions.

Will the department's new mandate dictate the kind of images the city wants to use to represent itself? If so, would Jack Butler's wonderful black-and-white photographs of the aging hot rod subculture make the cut? Each low-tech, pin-hole image was an affectionate tribute to not only the enthusiasm of the strangely authentic individuals who cooperated



Habib Khaterdyar, *Patricia Faure*, from *LA Art Court Series*, 2004, slide projection on fabric and ammonia. He-arts, at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery.

with the lengthy exposures necessary to capture them, but the whole nostalgic love affair Southern Californian's have with souped-up street cars. Time, testosterone and longings for a simpler America wafted off the pictures like gas fumes. It made for a loving critique of the ongoing manufacture of personal identity and mobile community in a city that lives via cars.

If that kind of homeswapped eccentricity wouldn't be thought to seem off potential visitors, it is because the COLA artists tended to have their cultural politics wrapped deeply in aesthetic padding. The sweetly colored naive paintings of Ann Chamberlin were headline-inspired narratives in flat, stacked perspective that detailed the dangers of urban life, but veiled appealing pattern and color to mask the ominous behind a Prozac kind of

pleasantness.

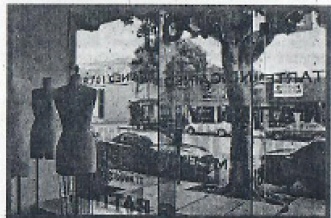
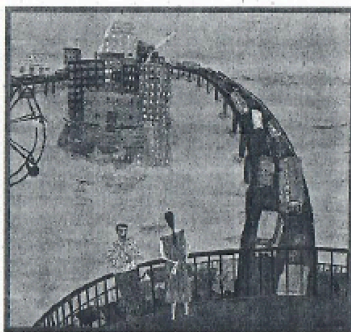
Takako Yamaguchi's large, gloriously illuminated landscape paintings on paper made the dangers of civilization an exhilaratingly ambiguous. Imbedded in her luscious, highly stylized scenes of curling ocean waves, decorative bands of metallic bronze leaf and organic landmarks were coded,

symbolic hints of alarming human ecological manipulation. Order, however, predominated and beauty was offered as a balm for anxiety. Jody Zellen's multi-wall participatory installation, *Disconnected Places*, also used pleasure to invert a distressing contamination of the urban environment: the cell phone. She visualized a shifting genre of negotiating public space and offered the opportunity to reshape ambient cacophony with sketches taken from one-sided private cell phone conversations.

Painting dominated COLA this year, yet, without saying anything new about it. That kind of omission, given the self-application process is understandable. But I wonder

if the future emphasis on attracting globe-trotting cultural vagabonds won't demand a more active curatorial search for the kinds of cutting-edge art that makes the city really interesting. Don't get me wrong, this year's COLA artists were all doing solid work but little about any of their art felt risky.

Certainly not Cindy Berraz's beautiful, crystal sharp formal color photographs of empty masked stages, or Renée Petropoulos's moral compositions of massive, overlapping vinyl geometric shapes that code and represent famous social-historical paintings as abstracted colorful blanks emptied of everything but architectural scale. While the improbable sounds in Tom Reochian's music environments were fas-



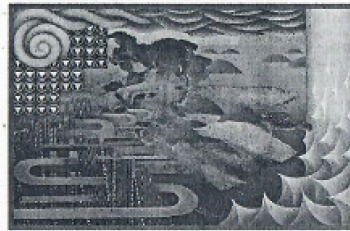
cinating, the black-and-gold poster-papered rooms that housed them were not.

There were three artists who used portraiture in COLA this year and, although they weren't selected to be emblematic of that kind of work or to present representations of the diverse populace of Los Angeles, they did offer some valuable insight into it that a cham-

ber of commerce approach to art might not want to consider. John Scorsia's thick, painted portraits of Latino day laborers were lively, intensely animated

Seemingly approachable but still ghostly, each almost three-dimensional projected image was frustratingly blotted out by the viewer's own shadow as we tried to see them more closely. In the end any approach to the figures, with all they represented, was necessarily and pointedly, indirect.

It's also hard to see directly the mayor's newfound faith in the importance of cultural tourism, given that LA currently spends only a fraction of what most other major U.S. cities spend on supporting their arts. Only time will tell what the change means to the Cultural Affairs Department, but it should be noted that for the past nine years the COLA awards have been one of the few aimed at giving the city's mid-career artists a much needed



Clockwise from top left: Ann Chamberlin, *Traffic Paper Places*, 2003, gouache, 19" x 19"; Takako Yamaguchi, *The So-Called Lines of Nature*, 2003, oil, bronze leaf on paper, 62-1/2" x 82"; Jody Zellen, *wwwghzoklyn.com*, 1997-2004, Web site; Renée Petropoulos, detail of *Nearly Two Months*, 2003, installation; John Scorsia, *Fernando*, 2003, oil on canvas, 60" x 48", at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery.

boost of institutional visibility and critical credibility. The kind of recognition and financial support that have been proven to make for a strong arts community, the kind people travel to see.

—Susan Geer

COLA 2004 closed in June at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery.

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'COLA 2004' at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery

There was a lot of turbulence around this year's City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs exhibition. In an attempt to staunch the city's \$300 million budget deficit, the mayor unexpectedly announced the termination of the entire Cultural Affairs Department. While the wall of protest from business as well as artists brought a quick recanting promise of preservation, it will be as a forcefully slimmed down department, with a new emphasis: "the promotion of cultural tourism." That's a suggestively vague direction that begs all kinds of questions about art and what the city wants to make from it.

Currently the \$10,000 Individual