

Artweek

Reviews

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

pleasurably.

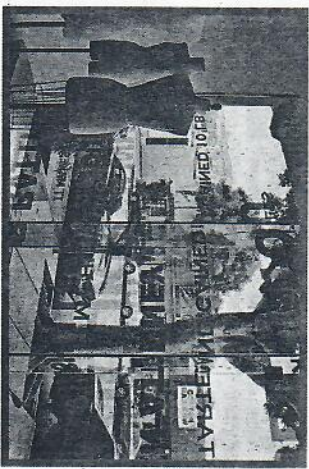
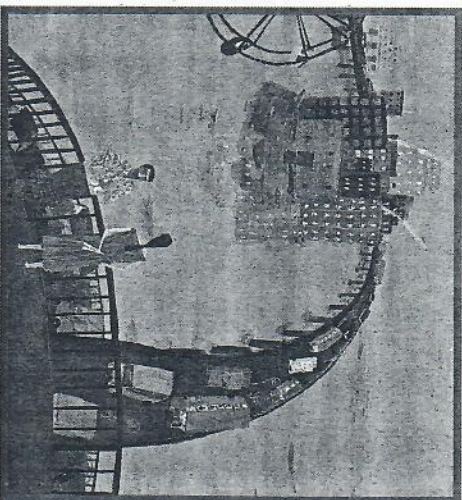
Takako

Yamaguchi's large, glorious-ly illuminated landscape paintings on paper made the dangers of civilization unthinkingly ambiguous. Imbedded in her lush, highly stylized scenes of curling ocean waves, decorative bands of metallic bronze leaf and organic handresses 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, *Disembodied Voices*, also used pleasure to invert a distressing contamination of the urban environment: the cell phone. She visualized a shifting game of negotiating public space and offered the opportunity to reshape ambient cacophony with snippets taken from one-sided private cell phone conversations.

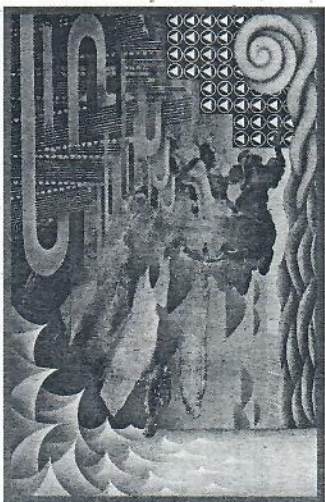
Painting dominated COLA this year, yet, without saying anything new about it. That kind of omission, given the self-application process is understandable. But I wonder if the future emphasis on attracting globe-trotting cultural vagebondos won't demand a more active curatorial search for the kinds of 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 Bernard's beautiful, crystal sharp formal color photographs of empty musical stages, or Rande Petropoulos's mural compositions of massive, overlapping vinyl geometric shapes that code and re-present famous social-historical paintings as abstracted colorful blanks emptied of everything but architectural scale. While the improbable sounds in Tom Reicheon's music environments were fas-

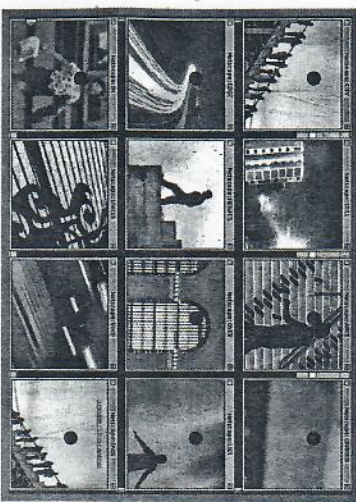


bet of commerce approach to art might not want to consider. John Sosnini's thick, painted portraits of Latino day laborers were lively, intensely animated

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



Clockwise from top left: Ann Chamberlin, *Traffic Paper Planes*, 2003, gouache, 19" x 19"; Takako Yamaguchi, *The So-Called Laws of Nature*, 2003, oil, bronze leaf on paper, 52-1/2" x 82"; Jody Zellen, *www.ghostcity.com*, 1997-2004, Web site; Rande Petropoulos, detail of *Nearly Ten Months*, 2003, installation; John Sosnini, *Fernando*, 2003, oil on canvas, 60" x 48", at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery.

images of men whose faces are often ignored or regarded as ciphers. Painted quickly, from life, each was titled with his own first name and returned our gaze us with remarkable personality and sensitivity to skin color that demanded we see each as an individual.

That was quite a contrast with Dan McCleary's portrait enclaves of people identified, not by name, but by their job or the action they were performing. His delicate line drawings were also drawn from life and often stared at us directly but had all the impersonality and warmth of a DMV photo. Seldom had the detachment of urban isolation and its toll of emotional emptiness looked back at us from faces that spanned so many races and professions.

Habib Kheradizay's life-size slide projections of female gallery owners, on the other hand, were women whose presence was a cunning mirage about power. Using some low-tech trickery, each woman's image was projected on a thin layer of sheer fabric held out from the wall by two rods of bent metal.

'COLA 2004' at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery

here 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 reannouncing 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

—Suzann Geer

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

Suzann Geer is a contributing editor to Artweek.