

## Malik Gaines

Curator at *LA+ART* and member of *My Barbarian, Los Angeles, USA*.

It's encouraging to look at Los Angeles, more than a decade after magazines were trumpeting its arrival as an 'important' art centre, and see a maturation of the 'emerging artist' class. Of course stalwarts such as Mike Kelley, Lari Pittman and Marnie Weber continue to shine. But impressive shows this year from Edgar Arceneaux, Alexandra Grant, Pearl C. Hsiung, Stanya Kahn, Yunhee Min, and many others suggest that an intelligent, technical young practice can evolve nicely over the long term, and that LA's art culture has produced much more than a sensational moment; there is an art civilization here that feels durable. These artists are producing works that are great to look at, but that resist the encroaching spectacle culture.

This defence is now a necessity. While the LA art world has typically functioned in détente with Hollywood, the lines have blurred. Earlier in the year, University of California performance scholar Jennifer Doyle wrote good analyses (published on *frieze.com*) of Nao Bustamante on the television reality show *Work of Art* and James Franco's and Kalup Linzy's appearances on the daytime soap opera *General Hospital*. LA MOCA's complicity with the latter project drew attention to the institution's Deitchification, which has been a mixed bag. Ryan Trecartin's recent exhibition at the museum was impressive, mixing a YouTube sensibility with an inheritance of queer cinema and

performance, while skillfully presenting the work as an immersive museum installation. There, the mode of entertainment occasionally produced awareness of generic structures and their logic, an effect that entertainment genres themselves only rarely propose. In showing Dennis Hopper with one hand while cancelling Jack Goldstein with the other, MOCA has also sent some disheartening messages in the last year. Despite contemporary LA's difference from '80s New York, one imagines the dissipated ghosts of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring lingering behind some choices, promoting an interest in popular forms that, for example, led to the insertion of a television dance instructor into the institution's experimental 'Engagement Party' series. I've heard from a couple of people an idea that the popular approach is more populist: the notion that celebrities, clothes, and fun are for the people, while advanced art is for the elite. Others have argued that this so-called populism is really an elision with corporatism. While there are problems with the old-fashioned museum model, a legitimate fear is that the best parts of what museums do will be subsumed under a celebrity/commodity mandate. It's clear that 'celebritocracy' is a poor form of government. California has produced two movie-star governors in the past decades - Ronald Reagan and the present incumbent, Arnold Schwarzenegger - and they have both been terrible. In politics, the danger is clear. (Need I mention a particular Alaskan politician who recently aired her own reality show?) In art, there can be reasons to entertain, to

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adapt entertainment forms and content. But let us hesitate before we lay ourselves out for consumption by the entertainment-postindustrial-complex.

A thoughtful approach to mass image production was offered by two wonderful works in the 2010 Whitney Biennial, by New York artists Danny McDonald and Lorraine O'Grady. Both use Michael Jackson as subject matter. In his kinetic assemblage, *The Crossing: Passengers Must Pay a Toll In Order to Disembark (Michael Jackson, Charon, & Uncle Sam)*, (2009), McDonald has a *Tbriller*-style Jackson doll presenting a giant penny in order to gain admission to the underworld, as Uncle Sam lays nearby, penniless and expired. O'Grady, in a series of portraits entitled 'The First and the Last of the Modernists' (2010), provides a map of Modernism's dead-end, while addressing the ways that popular images produce categorical notions of race, age and life itself. In these pieces, the deceased star is used to interrogate the historical situation he symbolizes, reflecting back onto viewers a sense of the mechanics of our imposing image world, leaving this viewer with the insistent impression that there is still meaning to be had, even from such as this. Should I be offered my own television show, that's the point I'll try to make.



1. Lorraine O'Grady  
*Diptych 3 Blue (Charles and Michael)*  
From the series  
'The First and the Last of the Modernists'  
2010  
Fujiflex print  
Each: 94x118 cm

2. Yunhee Min  
*Attraction #17*  
2010  
Acrylic on canvas  
1.9x3 m

3. Edgar Arceneaux  
*Blind Pig #1*  
2010  
Acrylic and graphite  
on paper  
1.5x1.5 m

4. Alexandra Grant  
*Body (3), Second Iteration, After Michael Joyce's 'and'*  
2010  
Oil on linen  
2x1.5 m