

AROUND THE GALLERIES

# Quick, efficient enigmas

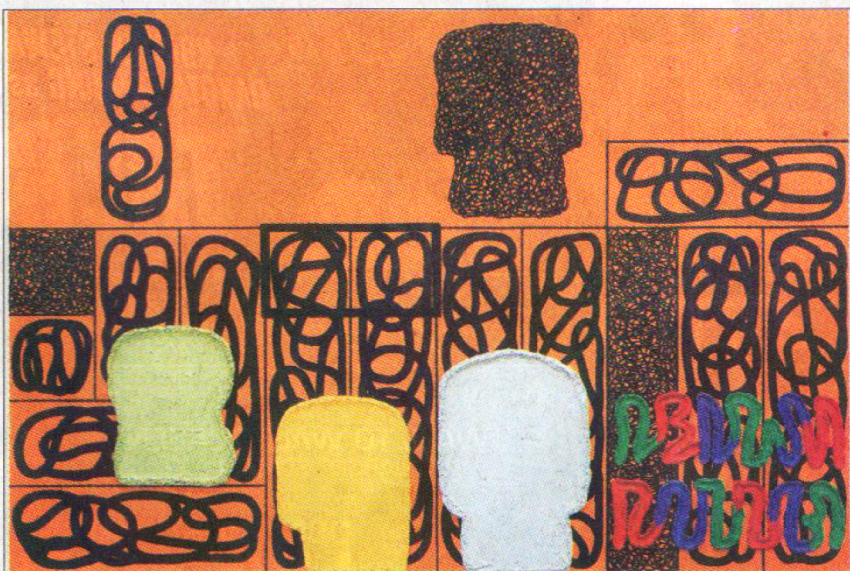
DAVID PAGEL

Jonathan Lasker's 11 new paintings at L.A. Louver Gallery are among the best he has made. Sharper and sexier, stronger and subtler, they plant both feet firmly in the world of Pop graphics while leaving plenty of room for mystery. If you like riddles that lead to mind-bending enigmas and enjoy nonsense efficiency, you won't find another painter out there able to match Lasker at serving up such idiosyncratic dishes with such derring-do.

Part of the pleasure of the 62-year-old New York painter's second solo show in Los Angeles and first in 15 years, is how quickly its abstract images hit you. Lasker doesn't waste a split-second in getting your attention. His large oils on linen, which range from 5 to 9 feet on a side, make billboards look like wallflowers, easily overlooked objects that disappear into their surroundings. Even his sketchbook-size paintings pack a punch that belies their intimate dimensions.

The best part of Lasker's art is that its stunning immediacy doesn't diminish. While sustaining an impressive level of pictorial energy, his abstractions draw the mind into action.

They invite questions about color, structure and time. Among the most pressing is "How do they



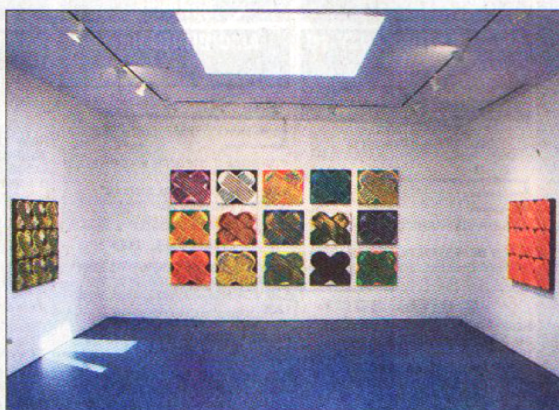
L.A. Louver Gallery

**'THE PLAN FOR MORALITY':** This 2009 oil-on-linen, 6-feet-by-9-feet painting is among the 11 recent Jonathan Lasker works at L.A. Louver through April 3.

make so much happen with so few colors (four to nine unmixed tints per work), so few shapes (rectangular lumps and alphabetic silhouettes) and so few types of painterly application (thin and linear, smooth and flat or thick and creamy)?" The answer has a lot to do with compression and condensation, processes from physics and psychoanalysis that account for the ways materials and meanings take on density and drama.

Art history also enters the picture but never so directly that it takes away from Lasker's quirky translations of its conventions and highlights. His compositions riff off of many genres, including still life, portraiture, landscape and interiors. His forms echo similar setups by such revered New Yorkers as Jasper Johns and Philip Guston as well as such under-recognized West Coasters as Frederick Hammersley and Karl Benjamin.

Lasker's images suggest loopy narratives in which



Peter Mendenhall Gallery

**X MARKS THE SPOTS:** Albert Contreras' paintings are on view at Peter Mendenhall Gallery.

earnest characters try things over and over until eventually getting them right — or coming close enough. The prevailing atmosphere is that of stubborn improvisation, of sticking to one's convictions while adapting to external circumstances.

Hard-earned whimsy is Lasker's modus operandi. Nothing happens by accident in his brainy art, which is head-over-heels in love with all of the stuff that cannot be explained by the brain's normal operations. With graceful persistence, his paintings spread this love to anyone lucky enough to lay eyes on them.

**L.A. Louver Gallery, 45 N. Venice Blvd., (310) 822-4955, through April 3. Closed Sundays and Mondays.**  
[www.lalouer.com](http://www.lalouer.com)

Forget muttering or even stuttering, abstraction is often made out to be dumb.

At Peter Mendenhall Gallery, **Albert Contreras'** two- and three-color paintings turn such conventional thinking upside down and inside out. Composed entirely of "Xs" — and buckets of juicy, highlighter-bright, sometimes glitter-sprinkled acrylic — the L.A. artist's exuberant panels mash painting and language into a rich mix that leaves neither one the same and both better for it.

In terms of materials, Contreras is anything but stingy. He paints on a tabletop, piling his specially mixed acrylics on single-colored wood panels the same way my 3-year-old puts cream cheese and jelly on a bagel: until both jars are empty. When it comes to deliciousness, too much is not

thebridge  
:: CINEMA DE LUX ::

HOWARD HUGHES CENTER

Purchase Tickets by phone at 800-315-4000 or online at [thebridgecinema.com](http://thebridgecinema.com)  
Directors Hall Hotline 310-568-9295

IMAX Tickets: 310-568-3375 - IMAX Group Sales: 866-747-1234  
TIMES FOR 3/26/10 ONLY © 2010

NCAA SEMI-FINALS (NR) Advance Tickets Now On Sale

NCAA FINALS (NR) Advance Tickets Now On Sale

OUR FAMILY WEDDING (PG-13)

11:30, 2:05, 4:40, 7:20, 10:05, 12:35

ALICE IN WONDERLAND 3D Premium  
Fee Applies RealD 3D (PG) Special Digital