

The

**Experimental
Impulses**



November 18, 2011–January 15, 2012

The Experimental Impulse

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Opening reception: Saturday, November 19, 6-9pm

Co-organized by Thomas Lawson and Aram Moshayedi
and participants in “The Experimental Impulse” seminars at CalArts

Exhibition design:	Contributions:	Research:
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In conjunction with *The Experimental Impulse* at REDCAT, *East of Borneo* hosts a selection of commissioned essays, documentation, interviews and research materials that explores the pivotal role of experimentation in Los Angeles in the years immediately following the city’s emergence as a vital artistic center. Edited by Stacey Allan, this archival component to the exhibition offers an alternative, immaterial approach to the role of the exhibition catalogue, as a site where the ideas initiated by the exhibition can continue to develop and be explored. Available at <http://www.eastofborneo.org/topics/the-experimental-impulse>

east of borneo

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Gallery Hours: noon-6pm or intermission, closed Mondays
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Lenders to the exhibition:

Jacki Apple, Skip Arnold, John Baldessari, Linda Burnham, California Institute of the Arts, Robert Covington, Dorit Cypis, Charles Gaines, Raul Guerrero, Mary Kelly, Marc Kreisel, Chip Lord, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles Free Music Society, Paul McCarthy, Stephen Nowlin, Jack and Joan Quinn, Allen Ruppertsberg, Timothy Silverlake, Rena Small, Robert Smith, Stuart and Judy Spence, James Welling, Robert Wilhite, and Diana Zlotnick.

Interviews conducted for the exhibition and *East of Borneo*:

Michael Asher, John Bache, John Baldessari, Elizabeth Balogh, Herb Blau, Barbara Bloom, Jill Ciment, Roger Conrad, Robert Covington, Dorit Cypis, Sheila de Bretteville, Richard Farson, Charles Gaines, Stanley Grinstein, Craig Hodgetts, Candye Kane, Suzanne Lacy, Chip Lord, Mary Kelly, Cheryl Kershaw, Sherry Milner, Amita Molloy, Joe Molloy, Stephen Nowlin, Marc Pally, Antoinette Portis, Michael Portis, Allen Ruppertsberg, Mira Schor, Timothy Silverlake, Rena Small, Robert Smith, Stuart and Judy Spence, James Welling, Christopher Williams, and Diana Zlotnick.

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Premier telephones donated by KGP Logistics.

Most exhibitions begin with a concrete idea, an historical period to be investigated, certain material to be explored and understood: objects are scrutinized, evaluated, borrowed and arranged. *The Experimental Impulse* positions itself athwart this convention; this exhibition is the result of an open-ended process that began with two questions: What does a younger generation of artists make of Los Angeles' history? And how can that admixture of history and understanding, whatever that is, be presented in a way that will be lively and relevant, and seem to part of current art discourse? These questions in turn lead to a third: Is it possible to make an historical exhibition that resonates in the present, for the present?

Our process began as a seminar at CalArts' School of Art (Fall 2009–Spring 2011). The first question under consideration had to do with the particularity of the art made in Los Angeles in the post-war period. What made it distinctive, and, more particularly, what if anything transcended a provincial practice? What would remain relevant to artists working today? It was soon clear that much of the iconic work with well-known capitalized identities—Pop, Finish Fetish, Light and Space, etc.—remained securely locked in the period rooms of the museum, admirable but out of reach. What resonated with the group was the range of tentative, fugitive and experimental attempts to push the boundaries of art that emerged in the 1970s—a handmade, personally distributed magazine; the unorthodox use of a space, an action that places the relationship between audience and artist under scrutiny. But more than any particular artist or artwork, it was the movement towards self-sufficiency that grabbed at our attention. As our discussions continued we found ourselves more and more interested in the new ways of organizing that emerged out of the radical moments of the late-1960s and the new organizations that were generated as a result. Related to this was the impact of new technologies on how art was considered and made, which in turn seemed to encourage a sudden wave of many new publications seeking to define the moment. Pulling back from our research, we came to realize that we wanted to better understand how institutional frameworks and personal networks come to define and support the art of any given period.

So we zeroed in on the 1970s, a decade riven by paranoia and anxiety, but also energized by optimism and a belief in thinking everything anew. In the mid-1960s it had seemed that the art world in Los Angeles was developing apace. There were a good number of well-considered younger artists doing work comparable to what was being seen in New York. Los Angeles County had opened a new museum and dedicated some of its resources to contemporary art. The more established Pasadena Museum of Modern Art, under the directorship of Walter Hopps, had one of the best exhibition programs in the country. There were a significant number of commercial galleries, including Ferus, Virginia Dwan, and Nicholas Wilder. And there was *Artforum*, a rigorously edited, smartly designed magazine dealing with new art. Even the venerable and beloved art school, Chouinard, was looking towards a renewed future as an exciting interdisciplinary academy to be called CalArts.

By the early 1970s all this had turned sour: *Artforum* had packed up and moved to New York; and the Pasadena Museum had collapsed under the weight of an inappropriate new building, its contemporary programming replaced by the rather unimaginative collection of the financier Norton Simon. Following the publicity surrounding its *Art & Technology* show—a project to bring artists into productive relationships with various

corporations that ended up angering just about everyone—LACMA drastically cut its contemporary art programming. CalArts was struggling to settle into its new building and to understand the limits of its budget, faculty fought administrators and each other, and after a major crisis of confidence, the Design School was closed. All this against a general atmosphere of distrust of established authority expressed as opposition to the war in Vietnam, disgust toward the unfolding Watergate scandal, and a fresh start in utopian communes and collectives.

Out of this strife new opportunities blossomed. Leaving the familial battles of the CalArts campus, Judy Chicago and Sheila de Bretteville joined Arlen Raven in renting the old Chouinard space to create a new kind of school and exhibition space. Robert Smith used his expertise running the art gallery at the Brand Library in Glendale to found a new kind of contemporary art space and associated journal. Small groups of artists banded together around shared interests in new technologies, to make music, to explore the possibilities of radio. New networks and support structures developed, and a new generation of collectors appeared, interested in supporting new approaches to art. Documenting all this turmoil, new publications, from LAICA's *Journal to High Performance*, and *Cross Cross Double Cross* to *The Dumb Ox*, sprung to life and fed debate.

Having come to this understanding of where our interest lay, next came the discussion on how to present it. We spoke with a number of innovative curators from around the country, seeking input on the knotty problems associated with displaying archival materials, reconstructing past events, restaging passing moments. We soon discovered, for reasons both practical and ideological, that we did not want to show any artworks, and neither did we want to reconstruct anything. In fact we came to think that we wanted to hold our material at some sort of distance, to reprocess information, hearing from witnesses, re-photographing and recapturing the evidence. Above all we wanted to create a space for information exchange and dialogue. We talked about staging dinner parties or marathon panel discussions. In time we came to realize that the dynamic space we desired was part classroom, part reading room, and asked Martin Kersels to help us design a space that would both contain rich information and hold the imagination. We wanted a space that would be playful, yet serious; a place to read and to talk, to watch and listen.

From the beginning we intended the online journal and collaborative archive *East of Borneo* to function as the catalogue for the show, but as our plans gelled it became clear it could function as a dynamic way to extend the possibilities of the exhibition. Available on several video monitors in the gallery, the site allows visitors to access additional material, from full-length interviews to archival tidbits, PDFs of historically significant essays to rarely seen photographs and videos. Readers will also be able to use *East of Borneo*'s user-friendly upload feature to add further material in response to their experience in the exhibition, thus becoming participants in what we expect to be an on-going exploration of one of the most fertile and challenging periods in the recent history of art making in Los Angeles.

Thomas Lawson



•2

Everything was happening outside of the institution, that was the orientation of everyone. I feel like my education was from other places. Mary Kelly

It was just because it was a time of social unrest, when you thought that ideas could change, government could change and of course that was going to effect artists... you just thought things would change. John Baldessari

...if art speaks clearly about something relevant to people's lives it can change the way they perceive reality. Judy Chicago

I'll do what I do in my lifetime, and not another damn thing matters. When I'm gone it's all gone. I have the courage to be honest and face this. The rest of you live with a lot of illusions, sentimental attachments. Norton Simon

It is a history of compromises, conflicting goals, egomania, and private greed that has acted against the common good, and has ended finally in a violation of the public trust. John Coplans



•12

There was a sense of the school being engaged in social change, technological change, but very seat of the pants, *Whole Earth Catalog* sort of stuff. Without any aesthetic preferences. Craig Hodgetts

We'd find out what it meant to be a woman in terms of design.... I didn't have an agenda other than figuring it out, together.

Sheila de Bretteville

The radical part of our teaching was based on consciousness-raising. So every day we would sit in a circle in a particular room, and the session I remember best took place in the kitchen. In this old abandoned mansion we sat on the floor, had our talk time, and then we got our mops and cleaned it up. But the kitchen talk was one hell of a drama; that's what I remember. Everyone told her story of growing up with her mother and her experiences in the kitchen. Miriam Schapiro

I basically did two things with my class; we took the clock out of the equation and forgot about time. Michael Asher

Because he was working so closely with many of us feminists, Allan Kaprow's work gave us a foundation for the move into "life" that we were looking for in a political sense. He gave us a rationale for it. I thought of them, humorously, as Judy Chicago, the passionate mother and Allan, the affectionate, distant father.

Suzanne Lacy

Maybe that's why I've always hung out with musicians, or improvising musicians, because that's part of that culture—to not know exactly what you were doing while you were doing it. I was learning techniques of thinking. Barbara Bloom



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In 1971, at the corner of Whittier Boulevard and Arizona Street in East Los Angeles, L.A. County Sheriff deputies fired live ammunition into a group of peaceful Chicano demonstrators who were protesting police violence and the recent police killing of Rubén Salazar, a news reporter. Many were wounded, and at least one person was killed. Collective fear was imposed by blatant oppression during the next few years, eliminating all public dissent. In 1974, Asco returned to that site and created a dinner party on a traffic island, *First Supper (After a Major Riot)*, that would dispel the fear and replace it with a celebration of liberation. The persistence of images in the larger context can now contribute to a broader understanding of a difficult period that somehow extrapolated unexpected fun out of conflict.

Harry Gamboa, Jr.



•6



•1

The younger artists are dealing more with ideas. Here's a media city, and the native language just isn't painting and such: it's television, films, the media. This place is *about* reality and illusion, sanity and insanity. Chris Burden

In L.A. you were never clear as to what the situation was. There was no focus, no center, only confusion; the smog blinded your eyes. It was a quagmire, a soup. Paul McCarthy



•8

Mary Kelly in conversation with Fiona Connor for "The Experimental Impulse," 16 July 2011.

Oral history interview with Miriam Schapiro for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1989.

Oral history interview with John Baldessari for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1992.

Michael Asher in conversation with Fiona Connor for "The Experimental Impulse," 18 October 2011.

Judy Chicago quoted in Betsy Beaven, *The Political Palate: A Feminist Vegetarian Cookbook*. Los Angeles: Sanguinaria, 1980.

Oral history interview with Suzanne Lacy for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1990.

Norton Simon quoted in John Coplans, "Pasadena's Collapse and the Simon Takeover: Diary of a Disaster," *Artforum*, February 1975.

Barbara Bloom in conversation with Fiona Connor for "The Experimental Impulse," 26 August 2011.

John Coplans, "Pasadena's Collapse and the Simon Takeover: Diary of a Disaster," *Artforum*, February 1975.

Harry Gamboa, Jr. quoted in "L.A. Stories: A Roundtable Discussion," *Artforum*, October 2011.

Craig Hodgetts, "Biography of A Teaching Machine," *Artforum*, September 1973.

Chris Burden quoted in Carl E. Loeffler, and Darlene Tong, eds., *Performance Anthology: Source Book for a Decade of California Performance Art*. San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1980.

Sheila de Bretteville in conversation with Benjamin Tong for "The Experimental Impulse," 27 September 2011.

Paul McCarthy quoted in "L.A. Stories: A Roundtable Discussion," *Artforum*, October 2011.



•4

An example of good patronage was Stanley and Elyse Grinstein. There's so much that they do that people don't even know about because it's not important to them that people know about what they do.

I'm talking about the situation where an artist wants to do a project and needs help, and they're there to help them. It's usually financial, but not always. They do this because they want to, and they feel that this particular artist is going to make an important contribution, and they're going to make it possible for this artist to do that. And they expect nothing. They expect **nothing**. Rosamund Felsen



•10

All you have to do is ask. You have to have a great idea, and you have to position yourself as an equal to the people you're asking. But all you have to do is ask. Dorit Cypis

You had to have a lot of your own energy because nobody else was around to do it. Allen Ruppersberg



•9

This is the way I feel the world is—that it can be refreshed, that it can be original again by releasing us from some of the models of reality that have been pressed upon us that may no longer be relevant. Douglas Huebler

With LAICA we wanted to create a public space that was like an artist's studio. The exhibitions and the *Journal* tried to provoke activity and dialogue—spaces to try out new, divergent and conflicting ideas. Robert Smith

Every piece we acquired made it possible to live another day.

Judy Spence

I really think that women practically invented performance in Southern California. Eleanor Antin

Other models might provide a path to a new art history and a different system of validation and legitimation. And maybe some bastards and orphaned daughters (and the entire third world) could find homes and genetic placement. Mira Schor



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•11

LACE was controlled by artists—not informed, but controlled by artists. Marc Pally

The last place anyone should go for an idea is their own subjectivity, because that is going to be going somewhere you already know. For me, the way to cause a jolt in the world I see is in reading. The ideas of others can take me further and to a less certain place. Charles Gaines

Oral history interview with Rosamund Felsen for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2004.

Dorit Cypis in conversation with Thomas Lawson and Aram Moshayedi for "The Experimental Impulse," 24 August 2011.

Allen Ruppersberg in conversation with Thomas Lawson and Aram Moshayedi for "The Experimental Impulse," 10 September 2011.

Douglas Huebler quoted in *Arts Magazine*, 1971.

Robert Smith in conversation with Thomas Lawson and Aram Moshayedi for "The Experimental Impulse," 9 August 2011.

Judy Spence in conversation with Thomas Lawson and Aram Moshayedi for "The Experimental Impulse," 2 August 2011.

Eleanor Antin quoted in Carl E. Loeffler, and Darlene Tong, eds., *Performance Anthology: Source Book for a Decade of California Performance Art*. San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1980.

Mira Schor quoted in "Patrilineage," *Art Journal*, Summer 1991.

Marc Pally in conversation with Thomas Lawson and Aram Moshayedi for "The Experimental Impulse," 29 August 2011.

Charles Gaines in conversation with Fiona Connor for "The Experimental Impulse," 2 August 2011.

Exhibition Wall Images

- Brian Routh of the Kipper Kids at John Baldessari's "Post Studio" class at CalArts, 1974.

John Baldessari and CalArts students on a field trip, Valencia, 1973. Courtesy of John Baldessari Studio.

• Spring Fair at CalArts, 1973. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

Suzanne Lacy, *Maps*, performance for Allan Kaprow's "Happenings" class at CalArts in the meatpacking district, Los Angeles, 1973. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Suzanne Lacy.

"House Trashing Party Group Shot," including Adam Beckett, Timothy Silverlake, Tim Martin, Vickie T., Nina Salerno, Carl Affarian, Holly P., Jim Shaw, Rick Fried, Bill Stobaugh, and Benjamin Weissman, c. 1978. Photo: Brian Bailey.

Alison Knowles, *House of Dust* at CalArts, c. 1971. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

CalArts campus in Valencia, c. 1968. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

2.

Antfarm workshop at CalArts, 1971. Courtesy of Chip Lord.

• *Quick City*, a temporary community of alternative structures built in one day on the CalArts campus, one of several instant communities built simultaneously nationwide, 1972. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

Louis Danziger with student at CalArts, c. 1972. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

Sheila de Bretteville, c. 1971. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

Peter de Bretteville with students at CalArts, c. 1971. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

Metamorphokit Dormroom Furniture, designed by Peter de Bretteville and Toby Cowan, c. 1971. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

3.

Cover of *High Performance* with Suzanne Lacy, *Cinderella in a Dragster* (1976), 1978.

• Cover and page spread of *What is Social Art?* brochure produced by Los Angeles Women's Video Center (Jerri Allyn, Nancy Angelo, Candace Compton, and Annette Hunt), 1979. Collage: Kathleen Berg.

Women's Design Program at CalArts (Helen Alm, Dori Atlantis, Sheila de Bretteville, Sarah Eisenberg, Marni Farrell, Cynthia Friedman, Vanalyne Green, Martha Reed Herbert, Dianne Hough, Suzanne Lacy, Bia Lowe, Jennifer Merrihew, Jill Soderholm, Susan Starbird, and Ann Williams), 1971. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

Participants in Allan Kaprow's "Happenings" class at CalArts, 1974. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

Michael Asher at Claire Copley Gallery, Los Angeles, 1976. Photo: Raul Guerrero.

Mike Kelley in Los Angeles, 1982; in Kathy Huffman, "The Artist and Television," *Journal* (1983).

Jerry Dreva, "RTD Performance: Bus #164-165, San Fernando Valley, CA," 1980. Photo: Francis Shishim.

CalArts Video Lab, c. 1974. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

4. • Womanhouse, Los Angeles, 1972. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

5.

Participants in Allan Kaprow's "Happenings" class at CalArts, 1974. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

• Robert Covington, "Spotting TV Reflections," set up and performance for John Baldessari's "Post Studio" class at CalArts, 1973. Courtesy of the artist.

Rena Small, *Screen Dinner*, performance for Allan Kaprow's "Happenings" class at CalArts, 1974. Courtesy of the artist.

Douglas Huebler, Timothy Silverlake, and Mike Kelley at CalArts, c. 1978. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

Jerry Dreva with tattoo commemorating the Los Angeles bicentennial, 1980.

David Lamelas, Michael Asher, and Morgan Thomas at Claire Copley Gallery, Los Angeles, 1976. Photo: Raul Guerrero.

6.

Louise Lawler, marquee for *A Movie Will Be Shown Without the Picture* at the Aero Theater, 1979. Courtesy of Dorit Cypis.

• Foundation for Art Resources address book and phone cover designed by Kim Gordon, 1979. Courtesy of Dorit Cypis.

Raul Guerrero, *Jack Goldstein (Pos)*, 1976. Courtesy of the artist.

Mike Kelley at CalArts, c. 1978. Courtesy of the CalArts Archive.

John Baldessari, "Second Language, Trying for the Worst With Dorit Cypis," photograph of radio performance on Close Radio, 1977. Courtesy of the High Performance Archive, Getty Research Institute.

Michael Smith, *Down In the Rec Room*, performance announcement, 1979. Courtesy of Dorit Cypis. Photo: Barbara Kruger.

7.

• Marc Pally, John Duncan, Andrew Thornhill, Marilyn Anderson, Linda Frye Burnham, Bob Smith, Barbara Smith, Craig O'Rourke, Paul McCarthy, Chris Burden, and Roger Wong, 1980; in K. Anawalt, "Why Not L.A.," *High Performance* (1980). Photo: Paul Velick.

Morgan Thomas and Doug Metzler at Claire Copley Gallery, 1976. Photo: Raul Guerrero.

Riko Mizuno at Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, 1971. Courtesy of Mizuno Gallery.

Invitation to an informal buffet supper at the home of Stuart and Judy Spence, 1984. Courtesy of Stuart and Judy Spence.

Joan Quinn, Stanley and Elyse Grinstein, 1979. Courtesy of Joan Quinn.

Allen Ruppersberg, *Al's Grand Hotel*, 7175 Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood, 1971. Photo: Gary Krueger.

Diana Zlotnick in Los Angeles, 1965; in Art Seidenbaum, "Home Is Where the Art Is for Avid Housewife-Collector," *Los Angeles Times* 19 Nov 1965. Photo: Nelson Tiffany.

8.

Kipper Kids performance at LAICA, 1974; in Peter Clothier, "The Kipper Kids: An Endless Ritual," *Journal* (1975).

LAICA at the ABC Entertainment Center, 2040 Avenue of the Stars, Century City, c. 1980. Photo: Robert Smith.

• Tom Jimmerson, David Askevold, and Michael Asher at LAICA, 1977. Photo: Robert Smith.

Robert Smith at the Museum Directors Conference, Bari, Italy, 1982. Courtesy of Robert Smith.

LAICA, aerial view of the ABC Entertainment Center, 2040 Avenue of the Stars, Century City, 1974.

Michael Asher, installation at LAICA, Los Angeles, 1977. Photo: Robert Smith.

9.

LACE opening in downtown Los Angeles, 1982. Photo: Gary Leonard.

Tony Labat, *Protection: Well Done*, CCTV broadcast and performance on the LACE rooftop in downtown Los Angeles, 1981. Courtesy of the artist and the LACE Archive.

LACE exterior in downtown Los Angeles, c. 1981. Courtesy of the LACE Archive.

• Marc Pally in Los Angeles, c. 1980. Participants in LACE's *Open Studios* event at 756 South Spring Street, 1981. Courtesy of the LACE Archive.

Participants in LACE's *Open Studios* event at 262½ Main Street, 1981. Courtesy of the LACE Archive.

10.

Illustration of Kipper Kids performance on Close Radio by T.M., 1979. Courtesy of the High Performance Archive, Getty Research Institute.

Close Radio, KPFK Antenna, Mt. Wilson, 1976. Courtesy of the Close Radio Archive. Photo: Paul McCarthy.

Chris Burden, *Wiretap*, 1977, photograph mockup for Close Radio catalog, c. 1981. Courtesy of the High Performance Archive, Getty Research Institute.

Ivor Darreg with his Megalyras "Mondrian Totem Pole," 1983; in Todd Brewster, "Music of the Spheres," *LIFE Magazine* (1983). Photo: Norman Seeff.

Mockup for Close Radio catalog, c. 1981. Courtesy of the High Performance Archive, Getty Research Institute.

• John Duncan in Los Angeles, 1982; in Steve Fritz, "Cal Acts," *Live Magazine* (1982).

Los Angeles Free Music Society recording studio, c. 1975.

Paul McCarthy and Paul Vangelisti with Chris Burden moments before Burden's performance that led to the cancellation of Close Radio, 1979.

35 South Raymond Avenue in Old Town Pasadena, the early home of the Los Angeles Free Music Society, c. 1972. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.

11.

LAICA exterior at 815 Traction Avenue, c. 1980. Photo: Robert Smith.

Robert Wilhite rooftop performance with musical sculptures in Los Angeles, 1983; in Todd Brewster, "Music of the Spheres," *LIFE Magazine* (1983). Photo: Norman Seeff.

The Woman's Building and The Women's Graphic Center at 1727 North Spring Street, c. 1983.

Paul McCarthy, Linda Burnham, Rachel Rosenthal, Nancy Forest Brown and Kim Jones in Chicago, 1981.

Al's Bar interior at 305 South Hewitt Street after closure, 2001. Photo: Marc Kreisel.

• American Hotel exterior at 303 South Hewitt Street, c. 1982. Photo: Alison Morley.

John Miller and James Welling in the Pacific Building, 1978. Photo: Raul Guerrero.

12.

• Protesters outside Los Angeles County Museum of Art wearing masks with image of curator Maurice Tuchman, 1981. Photo: Anne Knudsen.

