
**A Show's Artists in a State of Unrest**

“Against the Grain,” part of LACE's 30th-anniversary celebration, reflects back on another LACE show organized during the art center's 10th year. In the 1988 exhibition "Against Nature: A Group Show of Work by Homosexual Men," 30 artists negotiated the intersecting forces of illness, loss, decadence, artificality, AIDS, gay male sexuality and the production of art.

The earlier show's mix of irreverence and anxiety (to borrow the curators' terms) informs the current show, as well, for which artist Christopher Russell selected 14 L.A. artists (male and female), who adopt, in one way or another, a socially critical stance. Russell suggests the contemporary Gothic as a curatorial frame, for its thematic stew of "destruction, violence, anger, macabre."

Some of the work comes across as gentler than that: Anna Sew Hoy's hanging web of tie-dyed T-shirts is a benignly charming exercise in resourcefulness; Kelly Sears' short video docu-collage is more wry than radical. But unrest does prevail, with or without a declared object.

**Brian Bress**' "Disaster Family" is a work of breathtaking sobriety. A group of four figures fashioned from the thick felt of disaster blankets, the family doubles as angels of death and their victims. John Knuth's desiccated, affecting take on a city going down is countered by the pseudo-levity of Amy Sarkisian's Ensor-like laughing/grimacing heads and the exuberant strangeness of Wendell Gladstone's slickly painted visions. Ami Tallman's watercolors and drawings of animal corpses range from slight to disarming gorgeous. Robert Fontenot spells out the basics of the eternal power struggle in a comic storyboard of bread-dough figures: Big folk oppress the little folk; little folk rise up and take the big folk down.

Works by all of the artists in the show (the others are Tom Allen, Matt Greene, Julian Hoeber, Brian Kennon, Ryan Taber and Cheyenne Weaver) incorporate decay or its stagier twin, decadence, but many lack the self-sufficiency to thrive in such a heady context. In the end, the show wears its premise like an oversized flak jacket, heavier and denser than what it encloses.


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