

FEATURED REVIEW

This is a vintage year for the City of Los Angeles (COLA) individual artist fellowship program. The big leap forward is in digital media. Of course, digital media isn't new, but much of its use by artists has been rudimentary, if not indeed crude. True, few could afford the sets and hi-def technology of Bill Viola, but as costs for equipment and production have gone down, I find that the ability to craft digital media with an artist's sensibility has also gone up.

Conditions of viewing remain a question. With a video are we meant to browse, or stay there for the entire program? Are we meant to concentrate on one work at a time, or let our attention wander?

This has been answered in the current show by putting the digital pieces in their own room, which suggests that they should be seen like movies — in dimmed rooms, by themselves, although the works may be multi-channeled. Maureen Selwood's multi-channeled work *As You Desire Me* is striking, its bemusement mixed with melancholy. The main work is composed of three images projected onto floating screens — drawn figures moving through photographed urbanscapes in and around Rome, where she spent a year. The left screen depicts figures in floor-length cloaks, filing restlessly down roads and forests, wandering like refugees. The middle screen hints of 9/11 as one figure holds up a series of pictures — perhaps of missing loved ones lost in the disaster — and bodies keep falling through space. The right screen prowls through Roman streets. Audio is the electronic music and haunting vocals of Anna Oxygen, who is producing a remarkable body of work, as signaled by her REDCAT performance last year.

While Selwood's work withstands dropping in and moving on — sampling, if you will — the video essay by Natalie Bookchin, *Mass Ornament Two Point Oh!*, ought to be taken in with a sustained viewing. She's assembled YouTube shorts of people dancing in their homes. Sometimes there's one take, but often there are several on the wide screen — young men and women walking into the frame, doing a few jiggles, then performing whole dance routines for the delectation of the Internet audience (and now, us). Bookchin scores this with music from an American feature film (*Gold Diggers of 1935*), an Italian opera (Puccini), and a Nazi-era documentary (*Triumph of the Will*), and somehow makes it all work, as if the dancers were all listening to the same sound cues.

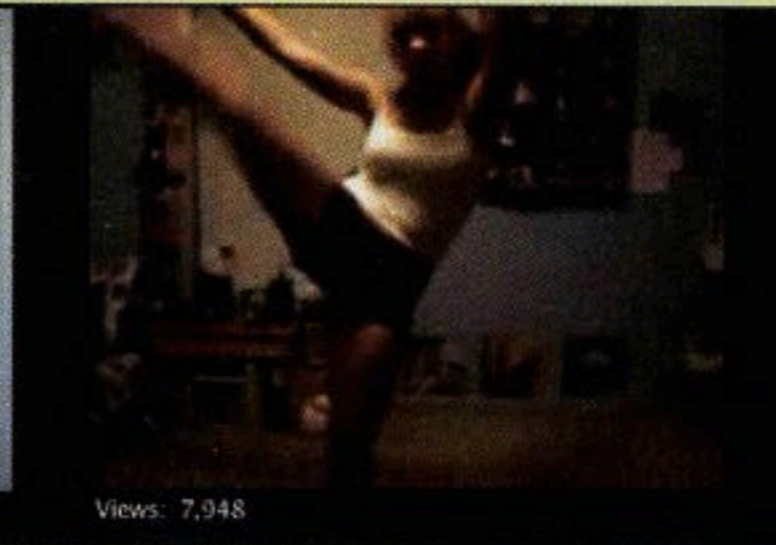
C.O.L.A. 2009

Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Art Park, Los Angeles

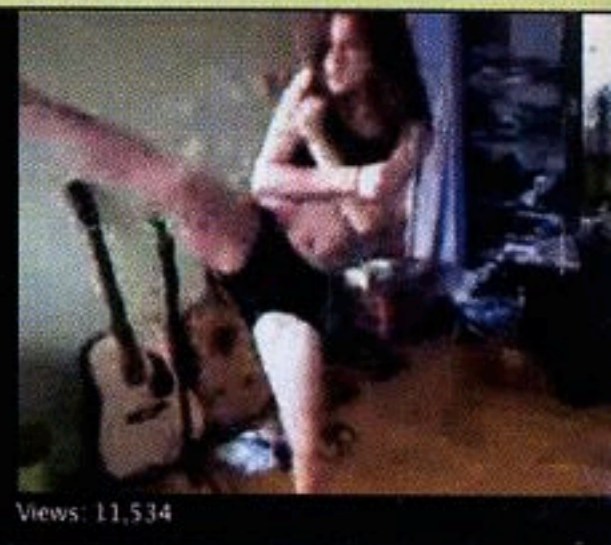
by Scarlet Cheng



Views: 36,881



Views: 7,948



Views: 11,534

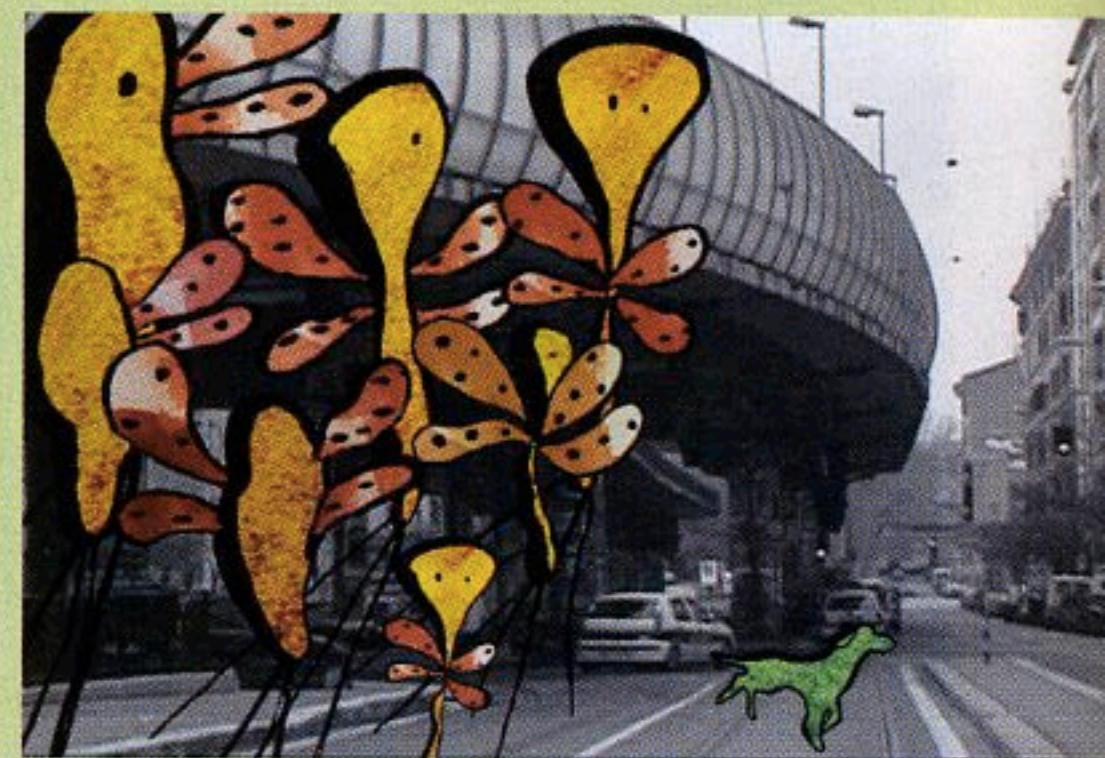
Natalie Bookchin, *Mass Ornament Two Point Oh!*, 2009

This is a fabulously joyous work, about the energy and rhythm roaring to get out from all of us, as well as the sharing of private space in a public space — at least virtually.

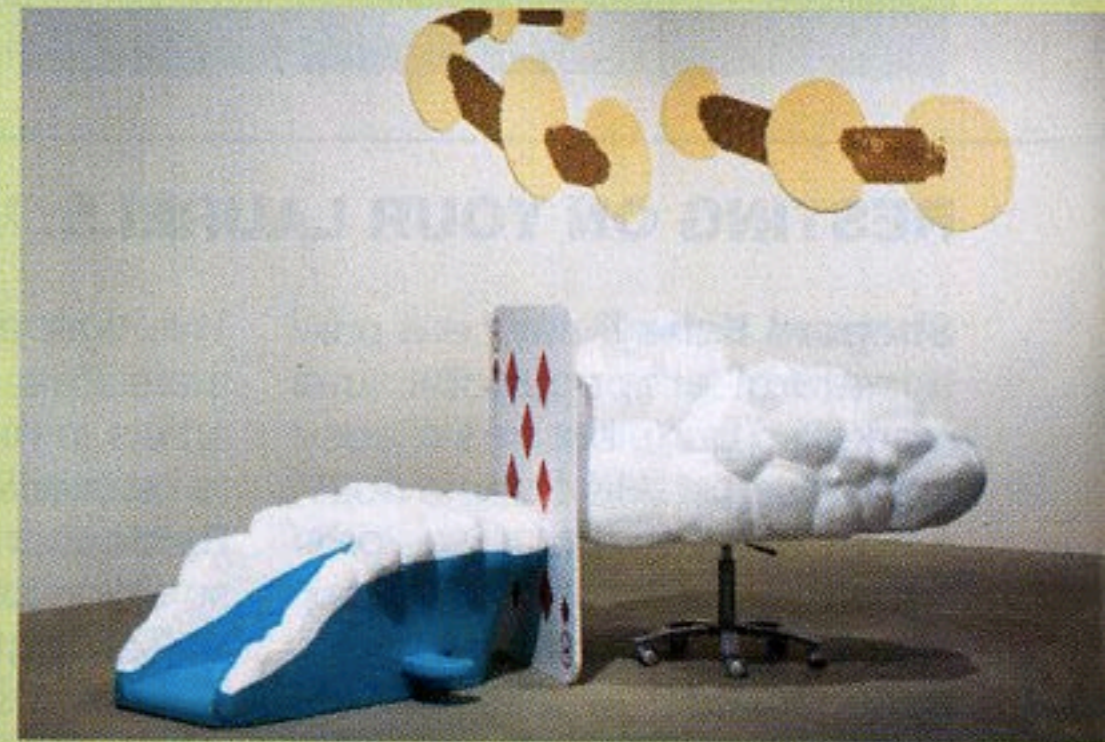
Bia Gayotto's *The Sea is Not Blue* is a multi-channeled video installation combining images of the sea around Terceira, an island in the Azores, on the main screen with two companion, smaller screens on the left and right of a narrow room. These show a flipping through of photographs and documentary footage of people talking about immigration, the sea, interconnectness. It's a poetic, meditative travelogue.

Works by two installation artists, Jane Castillo and Shirley Tse, drew one in with their autobiographical references but had an incomplete quality. Castillo's show at her gallery, Tarryn Teresa, opened the same weekend and displayed her more confident and resolved work — the giant suspended hair balls and the room-sized rope with its unraveled extensions — yes, like hair, particularly the artist's own long curly locks. At COLA she's moving in a new direction, somewhat. Here she strung up ten columns of burlap bags stamped with her own likeness on them, along with the words "Golden Brown" and "Pure Cane Sugar" — references to the self, to her multi-ethnic origins. The experimental quality of Shirley Tse's work, which often incorporate plastics, draws one in. In "Quantum Shirley Series: Flotsam and Webs" she interlinks cut-out circles marked with such words as "China, Hong Kong," "Malaysia," and "toy" — placed over a creamy polyurethane foam which looks like ocean foam. Tse herself is from Hong Kong, which amps up the references to Asia, manufactured goods, flotsam.

Wall-mounted works are still with us. One marvels at the mountain range landscapes of Joe Davidson. They're arrestingly majestic, and they're made with cellophane tape — yes, your desktop variety — on vellum. The



Maureen Selwood, "As You Desire Me: Empire of Dreams," 2009



Shirley Tse, "Quantum Shirley Series: Superposition," 2009

pieces are cut and stacked up to suggest dimensionality. Painting isn't forgotten, although it does seem to be shoved aside by new media. Eloy Torrez — well known for his public murals, including the famous seven-story high Anthony Quinn downtown — presents one 25-foot-wide painting, *To Be Continued*. It depicts scenes of people at a party, making music and wearing masks, and of people dancing outdoors.

What's ahead for these COLA artists? I for one am looking forward to the promise of those three wonderful words, "to be continued..." ☺