

LA Weekly  
 "L.A. Artists Are From Mars...  
 Five Books to Help You Through  
 Pacific Standard Time"  
 Gabriel Cifarelli  
 October 7-13, 2011  
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## Books //

# L.A. ARTISTS ARE FROM MARS ...

Five books to help you through Pacific Standard Time



David Hammons,  
*Boy With Flag*  
 (1968)

PHOTO COURTESY TILTON GALLERY, NEW YORK

BY GABRIEL CIFARELLI

**N**ot to be forgotten in the commotion around Pacific Standard Time, L.A.'s newly inaugurated multimuseum retrospective of postwar California art, are the numerous books and catalogs accompanying the exhibitions. Here are five that help make sense of our unruly city.

***Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles Art, 1945-1980*, by Rebecca Peabody, Andrew Perchuk, Glenn Phillips and Rani Singh**

This book takes a comprehensive approach to L.A. art history — from celebrated movements like the Otis ceramicists, who took pottery out of the realm of the decorative and turned it into a medium for large-scale sculpture; to more obscure art groups, such as the abstract classicists of the 1950s, early exemplars of what became the L.A. look, with their clean, colorful, hard-edge abstractions. These artists became associated with the California lifestyle — breezy, hedonistic and leisurely.

***Rebels in Paradise: The Los Angeles Art Scene and the 1960s*, by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp**

Drinking, sleeping around, partying through the L.A. art scene, the heroes of Hunter Drohojowska-Philp's story live soap-opera lives. Off-camera, they also produce art, all on their merry way to fame. The heart of the story, which is gathered from a trove of interviews with numerous artists probably telling lies about each other, is the brash Ferus Gallery group (John Altoon, Billy Al Bengston, Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, Craig Kauffman, Ed Moses, Ken Price and others), who

would eventually draw national attention to the L.A. art scene with their distinctly "cool" aesthetic. The book, for example, recounts Robert Irwin driving with a New York art critic and trying to convince him that the automobile was an important aesthetic influence. The critic remained unconvinced, so Irwin pulled over and left him on the side of the road.

***It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles 1969-1973*, by Rebecca McGrew, Glenn Phillips, Marie Shurkus and Thomas Crow**

In Los Angeles, the art community is centered on its art schools. *It Happened at Pomona* looks at the history of the Pomona College Museum of Art during a time when it operated less like a museum and more like an alternative-art space, pushing the envelope with works that moved decisively away from art as "object making" and into various intervention and performance practices.

A seminal intervention occurred in 1970, when artist Michael Asher removed the museum's doors, rendering the space unenclosable. (Asher currently has a piece at the museum, reinterpreting his original.)

Such works coexisted uneasily with Pomona's otherwise conservative suburban campus. Coexisted, that is, until some performances went too far. Two years after Asher, Chris Burden, a former Pomona student, performed a piece that involved launching lighted matches aimed at a naked woman lying in the center of a gallery. By 1974 college administrators had had enough and closed the door on an important chapter in L.A. art.

***L.A. Xicano*, by Chon A. Noriega, Terezita Romo and Pilar Tompkins Rivas**

A companion to exhibitions at the A-try, the Fowler and LACMA, *L.A. Xicano* is a wide-ranging book spanning Mexican American- and Chicano art in Los Angeles from the early part of the 20th century to the height of the Chicano movement. The interactions among these artists and their community formed powerful social and political movements that continue to resonate. Artists, as the book explains, work by "reclaiming and moving through urban spaces, staging events, communicating to their community and beyond, and creating an alternate aesthetic and educational system."

***L.A. Object & David Hammons Body Prints*, by Yael Lipschutz, Tobias Wofford, Kellie Jones, Dale Davis, Josine Ianco-Starrels and Steve Cannon**

David Hammons is best known by the body prints he started producing in the mid-1960s while based in Los Angeles. Using his body as a printing plate, Hammons literally stamped imprints of himself onto the surface of his work, resulting in hyper-real yet strangely distorted portraits. The book's images and close readings of rarely seen prints, sculptures and assemblages examine Hammons the artist, while personal reminiscences from those who knew him show Hammons the man. What emerges is a brilliant if somewhat maddening figure, one who could make art out of almost nothing, at times literally with just hair and wire, but who could be elusive and difficult to work with, engaged in a constant game of cat and mouse with curators and dealers.