

As we take this issue to press the Centre Pompidou in Paris opens a large survey of Los Angeles art from 1955 to 1985, billed as the first exhibition to investigate an as yet undiscovered artistic milieu. The exhibition performs the valuable service of laying out a rudimentary art history of a region at some distance from, and at conceptual odds with what can be described as the mainstream. The flaw in the project lies in the notion of ‘discovery’, the unconscious slip into the language of colonialism as the curators attempt to place everything within the frame of a trans-Atlantic understanding of modernism. John Cage’s openness to the I Ching, the odd nativist avant-gardism of Harry Partch and Harry Smith, the Zen mysticism of the Beats — all this untidy West Coast, Pacific-facing background noise is missing from a show that announces itself with a face-off between Ed Ruscha’s *20th-Century Fox* and Jack Goldstein’s *MGM Lion*, between the flatness of modern painting and the inscrutable illusionism of film. The view offered is accurate, as is the view through a telescope. It just doesn’t tell the whole story.

I found the pomp surrounding the opening more instructive than the show itself, revealing a certain condescension to my adopted home. I was there as a member of an official delegation from the City of Los Angeles, a group lead by a politician and accorded some of the courtesies of a minor State visit. A reception at the palatial residence of the US Ambassador one evening was followed by another at the even grander Ministère des Affaires étrangères the next. At these, and at a two-hour press conference in between, speeches flowed, honours and thanks were bestowed, trite gifts of officialdom exchanged. We learned of the indivisible bonds between the two cities, now revealed with greater clarity than before. We learned of shared sympathies and shared hopes, especially a shared dream to see more tourists visit each city; particularly those highly valued ‘cultural tourists’ who are thought to spend more money when they travel. The representatives of Los Angeles were given ample time to boast of their many new museums and concert hall, while the French spokesman merely pointed out that the room we stood in at the Ministère had witnessed the ratification of the League of Nations.

These slightly barbed rituals of mutual respect, with art providing a backdrop and cover for a desired benefit of more fungible substance, made me think of the more direct rituals of welcoming that Jon Bywater and Nuraini Juliastuti describe in their essays providing context to this issue of the journal. According to Bywater, in Maori practice a stranger is challenged to identify himself or herself in public before being welcomed in. A self-description is theatrically presented to, and accepted by the woman issuing the challenge, who then declares the stranger to be someone who can be recognised as family and let in. Essentially the stranger is asked to explain himself in his own terms; these are accepted and he is declared not a stranger, but one of the tribe. How different from the scenario played out in Paris, in which French experts described the artifacts of a far-off, exotic land hitherto devoid of recognisable cultural landmarks. These were rituals of containment, not acceptance, politely

stifling the oddly sprawling atemporality that is the experience of life and art in Los Angeles with a timeline of cause and effect, influence and rejection.

In a globalising art economy this colonial structure of centre and periphery is no longer sufficient, it allows only for a fetishised response to the world. But there are other, differently centred modes of understanding, and globalisation can provide an opening to them, offering opportunities for productive collisions to take place. Such is our hope in this issue as we take stock from Los Angeles, looking out across the Pacific and back towards New York; calling out, looking for a response, seeking kindred spirits with whom to strike a chord.

This issue begins in Southern California with Center for Land Use Interpretation's ambivalently cast, apparently impersonal investigations of the human-altered landscape. A collective enterprise presenting itself as a public service organisation dedicated to disseminating information, CLUI maps the effects of water and mineral extraction, of waste disposal and weapons testing, uncovering the vast unseen, unknown networks that underpin our daily lives. Its work is to make manifest the great subconscious mechanism of modernity. In contrast, Taro Shinoda offers a more poetic reflection on various modes of meaning laid on the land, from the formalities of the Japanese rock garden to the skein of energy points envisaged by systems like *feng shui*. Sora Kim also uses ancient ordering systems to organise her work, recasting universal methods as determinedly local in ways that upend the expectations of a Western audience while giving a sense of identification to a Korean one. At some level the work functions like a joke, an unexpected opening to a bigger truth. More personal, but equally driven to use cultural systems, Yayoi Kusama and Aïda Rulova explore versions of the psychologised interior space, seeking order in the various obsessive traits associated with pattern and repetition.

In a sense these projects are all concerned with discovering the secrets of place — of the real and of the heart.