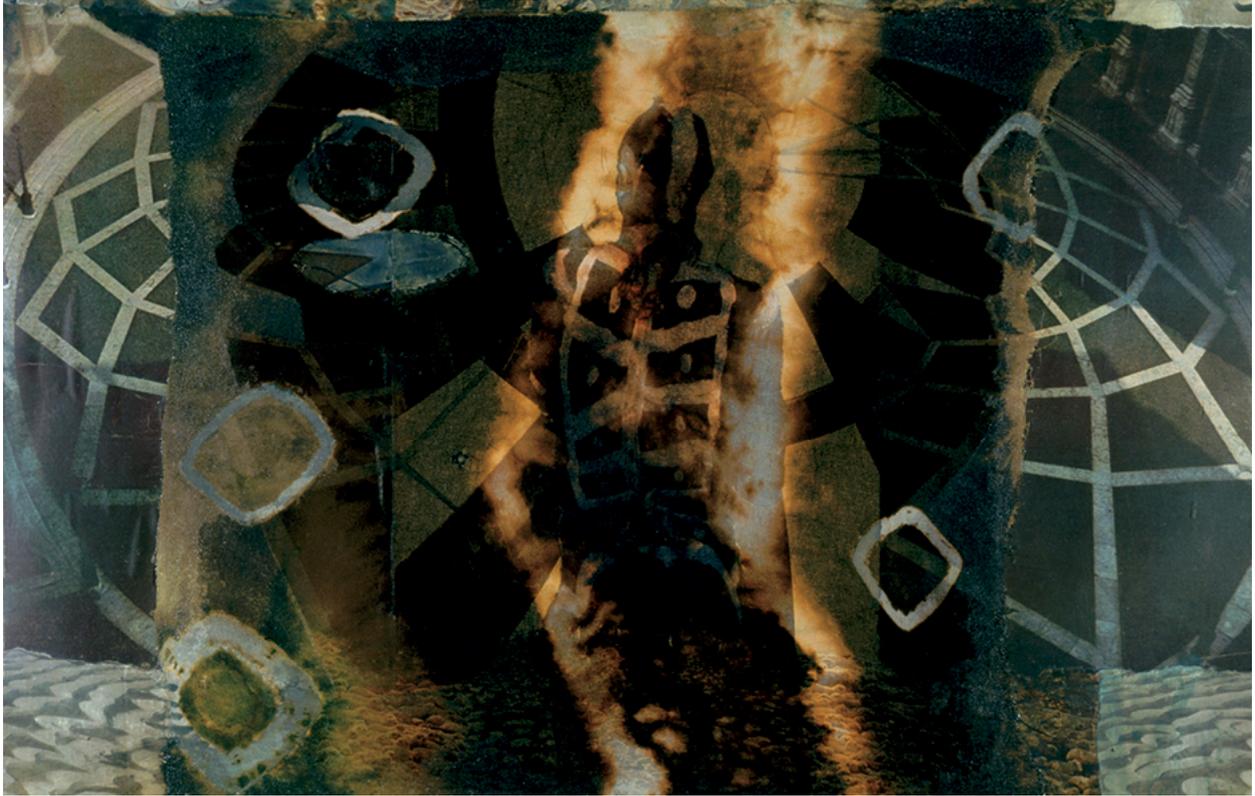


LA Raw

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Betye Saar, *Mti* [detail], 1973. Mixed media floor assemblage,

"L.A. RAW: Abject Expressionism in Los Angeles 1945-1980, From Rico Lebrun to Paul McCarthy" is a play on words, obliquely referencing "abstract expressionism" in its title, while rejecting that movement's exclusivity and resistance to figuration. Curator Michael Duncan writes in the catalog, "The mid-century promotion of the New York School largely excluded consideration of figurative art, including the surrealist works that inspired much of 1940's and 50's abstraction." Here, 41 artists depict "abject," a term that refers to a low life condition, to a sense of hopelessness and resignation in painting, sculpture, photography, video and performance pieces. Yet in this show - one of the most politically significant among all of the Pacific Standard Time exhibitions - the artworks transcend humanity's exposure, darkness, even horror by conveying perhaps more basic human traits: honesty and integrity. The result is a contrast to the concurrent cool school of L.A. art that does not disparage the latter.

Barbara T. Smith's six-part "Pucker Painting" documents a performance piece, spending a night naked in a small room and inviting people in to share food, wine, conversation and sensual pleasures. But no sex. One photograph of Smith's middle-aged body covered with lipstick kisses confronts the sexual caste system (mandating the devoted wife and mother role) of which she was previously a part. Ben Sakuguchi's "'Spraying is in,' Popped Wee Willie Limphand" is a Japanese American's nightmarish memories of childhood years, a portion of them in a World War II internment camp. This large collage-like oil features soldiers, families torn apart, a concentration camp and a fashionable woman morphing into a sixties garbed paper doll. Hans Burkhardt's "My Lai," an abstract work, becomes a Vietnam era nightmarish scene with real human skulls affixed to it. Rico Lebrun's six pieces in this show, several combining expressionism with figuration and influences of cubism, depict human suffering. His "Buchenwald Cart" is a clear reference to the Nazi concentration camp. Betye Saar, maker of exquisite assemblage boxes, displays "Mti," featuring a black faced doll surrounded by scary gypsy, Indian and voodoo dolls and symbols. With works also by Judy Baca, Wallace Berman, William Brice, Chris Burden, Lynn Foulkes, David Hammons, Robert Heinecken, Ed Kienholz, John Outterbridge and others, this is a long overdue retrospective of L.A. art that asserted a genuine "commitment to insights and profundities," as curator Duncan puts it (Pasadena Museum of California Art, Pasadena).

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