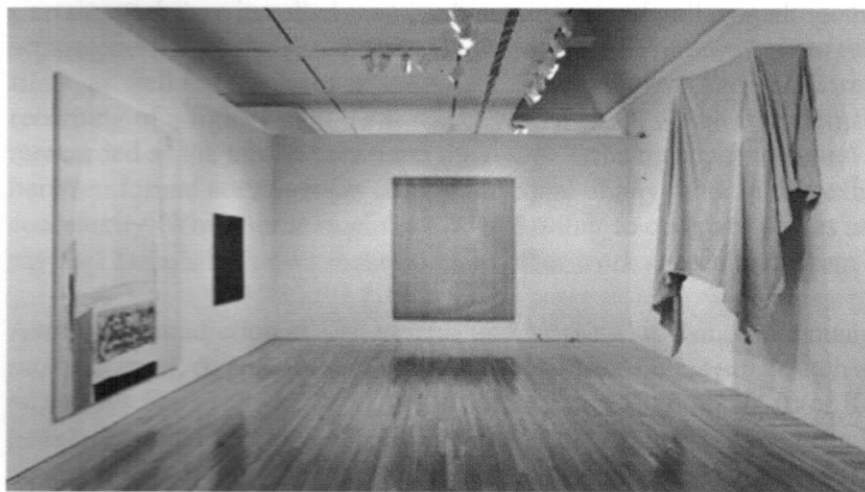


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All of This and Nothing

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, USA



The Hammer Invitational is a biannual survey exhibition that has never called itself a biennial. That is about to change: next year it will be superseded by the new Los Angeles Biennial, organized jointly by the Hammer Museum and LAXART.

Take, for instance, the muted palette and tentative, propositional tone set by the first room of the exhibition, which contains an installation by the British artist Ian Kiaer titled *Melnikov project, silver flower* (2010). White or off-white panels of discarded board and paper, recommissioned by the artist as quasi-paintings, hang alongside an architectural model and other carefully poised ephemera. Further on, works by New York-based Gedi Sibony, Berlin's Sergej Jensen and Glasgow-based Karla Black all share a certain material sensitivity to the faded and the forlorn, albeit funnelled through divergent concerns. However, the inclusion in between of LA artists such as Evan Holloway, Charles Gaines, Frances Stark or Matteo Tannat simultaneously muddies the waters and adds depth to the curators' argument.

Fogle and Ellegood get viewers thinking about enchantment, transformation and open processes by asking them to pass through three portals at the start of the exhibition: a large, square metal frame as part of Kiaer's installation; a doorway through Jorge Macchi's printed wallpaper *Vanishing Point* (2005), and *The Cutters* (2010) by Sibony, featuring a door in a freestanding section of plasterboard wall. In fact, I found out, the latter is not actually meant to be walked through, which points to the show's contradictions: for an exhibition that prioritizes flux, fluidity, lightness and provisionality, most of the work looks very settled – locked down, even – in its museum environment. The texts applied to the wall of each gallery also impose didactic (not to mention aesthetic) punctuations in a viewing experience that might, in other

circumstances, be more drifting and exploratory. Of course this is to some extent a practical function of the institutional context, but it is not insurmountable. (One negotiation of the problem is effected by a work that's not actually part of the exhibition: outside the entrance, visitors are invited to help themselves to a dried leaf printed with an instruction by the artist Charles Long; mine invited me to 'Look around the room; do not make any distinction between art works, parts of art works, people, the room, shadows, and smells, see it all as one complete art work.' Long also contributed a text work to the exhibition catalogue.)

Certain works are installed outside the main suite of galleries altogether. As if to underscore her separateness from the rest of the exhibition, Kerry Tribe was given two smaller galleries for her films, as well as the spaces of LAXART. *Milton Torres Sees a Ghost* (2010) involves a tape recording of a fighter pilot's encounter with a UFO, which is systematically erased and rerecorded as the tape runs around the room. Tribe manages to achieve a rare balance in her art between formal attentiveness (easily the equal of any other in this exhibition) and philosophical complexity. While some might consider it unfair to compare apples and oranges, it is tempting to say that Tribe's inclusion makes certain other work shown here seem limited in scope.

Another contradiction of 'All of This and Nothing' is that, while many of the art works consist of multiple parts, or contain within themselves various elements – such as Evan Holloway's diptych sculptures *Emperor Ideal and Broom* and 48" x 96" (both 2010) or Karla Black's scattered powder installation *Once Cut* (2010) – by and large artists have been installed together either singly or in pairs. Despite the quality of most of the art, it all feels rather flat-footed. One exception is the gallery that pairs wall-mounted works from Jensen, Stark and Sibony with Fernando Ortega's music stand and score *Transcripción* (Transcription, 2004). The piece was written to mimic the buzzing of a mosquito, and is periodically performed by a violinist. From the neighbouring space emanates the haunting sound of a recording of a string quintet playing Charles Gaines' translation of four political manifestoes into music. This convergence of language, sound, image and inscrutable form (Sibony's sculpture consists of a sheet thrown over objects on a shelf) draws us away from our habits of reductive comparison and categorization, and begins a genuinely illuminating exchange that, like LA itself, depends on difference rather than similarity.

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