

REVIEWS

OPENING REVIEW

DISORDERLY CONDUCT: RECENT ART IN TUMULTUOUS TIMES
Orange County Museum of Art NEWPORT BEACH, CA

BY LIZ GOLDNER

For a museum that is known for its biennials, as well as "Beautiful Losers, Contemporary Art and Street Culture," "Disorderly Conduct" is a disappointment—a tepid compilation of post 9/11 works. The exhibition by nine artists from China, Africa, Europe and the United States is intended to address war, terror, social and racial tension, environmental disaster, psychological break-down, and criminal behavior. With the exception of a few outstanding pieces, the show restrains and sanitizes disorderly conduct, obfuscating its provocative message.

The subject of Rodney McMillian's video, *Untitled (The Michael Jackson Project)* (2004). Is the artist, a black man in white face, singing Barbara Streisand's "The Way We Were," reminiscent of Jewish Al Jolson in black face singing "Mammy" in *The Jazz Singer*. This work provokes issues of race, gender, sexuality and celebrity, yet ends up only as an amusing bit of fluff.

Robin Rhode's *Color Chart*, on the opposite wall is an stop-motion video that addresses racial conflicts in the artist's native country, South Africa. This conceptual piece based on racial battles presents the most confrontational message in the show.

Martin Kersels' video, *Pink Constellation* is a visual legerdemain of a teenage girl's bedroom, as the girl inside and then Kersels (a 300-pound guy) walk from floor to walls to ceiling. When the furnishings are dislodged, the artist disappears, evoking Robert DiNiro's disappearance in a stack of newspapers in the 1985 film, *Brazil*. While amusing and interesting, the sugary Mary Poppins aspect cannot be ignored.

A few works here do make us aware of the deeper undercurrents of our world run amok. *Learn to Win or You Will Take Losing for Granted*, by Glenn Kaino (an OCMA Biennial alumnus) is a chess set with cast bronze pieces of life-size hands—in closed fists and gesturing signs. The hands, many with an "up yours" stance, are among the most menacing pieces in the show, alluding to the simplification of politics that divides us into good versus evil.

Referencing criminal behavior is *The House That America Built*, by Daniel Joseph Martinez. The reconstruction of the Unabomber's cabin in Montana is modeled on Thoreau's house on Walden Pond, painted in Martha Stewart pastels. The connection: the decorating diva and Theodore Kaczynski were both



Pearl Hsiung, *La Noche*, 2006

convicted and imprisoned. The conceptual piece plays on the superficiality of a cutesy, benign playhouse, as even with its skewed construction, the viewer might wonder if Stewart did indeed have a mountain cabin design in mind. Yet the concept connecting Kaczynski and Stewart (a stretch I realize) is valuable, as it addresses opposing poles of simplicity and conspicuous consumption.

Pilar Albarracín's *La Noche* is an expression of her obsession with women subjected to violence in her native Spain. The photograph of the artist, who has shown throughout Europe and Latin America, is of a woman tied up with suitcases on top of a Mercedes Benz. Its statement of woman as luggage is straightforward; this single image is more powerful than most other works in the show.

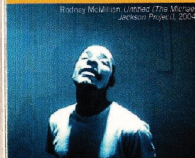
Pearl Hsiung's large canvasses in glossy enamel paints are among the exhibition's most ominous: an iridescent lava flow creeps over a cliff, turning into a hand with red nail polish; in another painting a volcano wears a pearl necklace. Hsiung, who has exhibited internationally, creates works that attract and repel, reminding us that greed may lead to demise.

The most outrageous participant in the show is Karen Finley, famous for smearing food onto her naked body and yelling obscenities on stage in the '80s. Her "Condoleezza Quartet," is tame with a sense of resignation. Rice's luminous eyes drop from a stealth bomber in *My Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Eyes of Condoleezza Rice* (2007), and a childlike color scheme displays her makeup shades, eyebrows and hair in *Considering Condoleezza* (2006). While the assumed intention is to bring Rice and her political stature down to size, her execution trivializes the effect.

"Disorderly Conduct" lacks a sense of urgency. It looks and feels like a show that took a post 9/11 theme to appeal to our political sensibilities, then chose notable artists and their works to conform to that theme. By making the exhibition fashionable and seemingly top-down, the curators have ignored the gestalt. ■



Martin Kersels, *Tumble Room*, 2001



Rodney McMillian, *Untitled (The Michael Jackson Project)*, 2004