

## REVIEWS

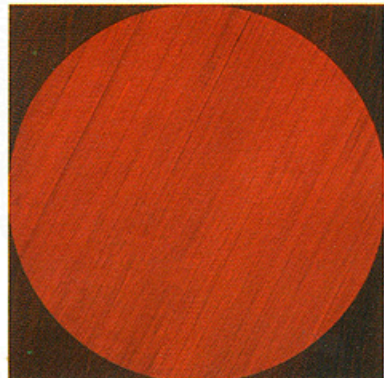
### LOS ANGELES

#### ECHOES

Orange County Center for Contemporary Art

"ECHOES: Women Inspired by Nature" at OCCCA complements the national re-investigation of feminist art work spearheaded by the WACK! show at MOCA. Curated by Betty Ann Brown and Linda Vallejo, to focus on women who have been inspired by nature, "Echoes" brings together an eclectic group of nature-inspired work, ranging from celebrations of mother nature in her glory to apocalyptic notes on her decline. Call me a cynic, but I found the work the most interesting on this latter end of the spectrum. In fact, I would say that this sub-category work is not so much *inspired by nature* as it is inspired by the unnatural, particularly with respect to man's effect on the environment.

Take for instance Kim Abeles' "Presidential Commemorative Smog Plates." In the early '90s, at a time when global warming was commonly regarded as a kind of hoax orchestrated by left-wing



Charina Horwitz, *Pink to Burgundy Circle Variance no.7*, 2007

radicals, Kim Abeles was quietly creating art using LA city smog. Abeles placed stencil cut-outs of US presidents' faces on china plates, and left them on her rooftop, letting the smog do its work. Combined with piercing quotes from each president that reflect their administrations' impact on the environment, Abeles' work is even more trenchant and timely in 2007 than it was 14 years ago. A brilliant piece of political, environmental work, Abeles' work should be on permanent display in a major US venue.

▷ Another artist in the show whose work is inspired by the unnatural effect man has on nature is Yaya Chou. *Joy Coated* and *Chandelier* are both sculptures that go past the merely unnatural and into the synthetic. *Joy Coated* is more didactic, a child-size mannequin coated in Gummi Bears that melt at the child/doll's extremities, having/becoming the jouissance of childhood obsession: candy. The highly saturated, surreal colors of the Gummi Bears underscore this sense of humor and unease, evoking our nation of obese children, poisoned by toxic, synthetic food. *Chandelier*, also made from Gummi Bears, emits an eerie amber light with an attractive/repugnant smell of dusty, hot, gelatinous High Fructose corn syrup, akin more to the nauseating sweetness of bug spray than to the enticing aroma of butter cream frosting.

There are other notable examples of the unnatural in the show, including Linda Frost's creepy "The Tortured Souls" series, digitally manipulated photographs commenting on the use of animals in testing, and Pamela Grau Twena's *Protecting the Seeds*, a circle of bronze cast barbed apples that warn of the consequences of man messing with nature. Set in a circle protecting a few desiccated grapes, Twena's thorny apples evoke other fabled apples (Eve's, Helen's, Snow White's). Except in this case it is not just woman who is punished for her transgression, but rather all mankind if our machinations with bio-agriculture produce the kind of monstrous fruit that Twena imagines.

Samantha Fields' *In the Belly of the Beast* is the most apocalyptic of the group, and also the one that brings us from a meditation on man's unnatural effects on the environment to nature's enflamed responses. Depicting the hills of LA on fire, her somber acrylic painting is both a vision of hell and a warning. The LA area chapparal needs fire as part of its cycle

of growth, but sprawling over-development combined with global warming's drought and flood pattern redistribution make it so that fire is increasingly lethal. Fields' piece seems to say that nature will have the last word, even if it means the end of us.

—Carrie Yury



Yaya Chou, *Joy Coated*, 2007