



Editor's Note

Being a fan and supporter (I do serve on the Board of the recently reconstituted Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles) of the most populist form of public art, I was pleased a few days ago to come across NPR's profile of the Philadelphia Mural Art Program and its longtime Director Jane Golden. As mural programs in the United States go this is the gold(en) standard. What particularly struck me was that, given the presence of perhaps 3,000 murals, it was noted that virtually none have been lost or damaged due to graffiti.

Now the very term "graffiti" is loaded and polarizing. Graffiti itself has evolved over the last several decades to become an art form of standing, alongside rap music, as a core element of hip hop culture; love it or hate it that is real. But graffiti itself comes from elements of gang and youth culture that, knowingly or naively, crosses over into the realm of vandalism. As that relates to public art, graffiti tags sprayed over an existing mural truly suck. Happily for Philadelphia, there appears to be an organic "hands off" cultural norm that allows for that city's street gallery to really make a difference in the cradle of American democracy.

That brings us to Los Angeles. The mural movement there once earned that city a reputation as the Mural Capital of the United States. But over the last twenty years that title has been painted out by a tagging culture that is as voracious as it is vicious. It has not only cost the city and state millions, but it has stifled the rise of a new generation of top quality public art by the most talented emerging artists.

To make matters worse, the artists who created some of the best examples over the past half century are being treated not as victims of this atrocity, but more like cohorts in it. If Caltrans has its way a small but crucial population of murals located on the Los Angeles freeway system, most created in 1984 as part of the Olympic Arts Festival, will be painted out once and for all. One can understand why, too. All of them - literally ALL - are defaced by graffiti. If, under a state funded project conducted six years back, most of the paintings are actually protected from damage underneath all that junk, the present economy has meant zero funding to keep them clean and protected. But is the money



Buff Monster, "Untitled," 2010, acrylic on wood panel, at Corey Helford Gallery.

THIS WEEK'S RECOMMENDATIONS. . . .

Buff Monster
at [Corey Helford](#)

Il Lee
at [Crow Collection of Asian Art](#)

Emma Hardy / Sabin Aell
at [Walker Fine Art](#)

On Kawara
at [SF Art Institute](#)

Graciela Iturbide
at [Rose](#)

Tim Waldron / Arthur Drooker
at [William Siegal](#)

Opening September 4, 2010
Corey Helford Gallery
Culver City, California

For his fourth solo exhibition here, "Beyond the Pink," street artist **Buff Monster** renders his colorful cast of amorphous characters in tie-dye camouflage. Alternately sporting fangs or dimples in lieu of mouths, he places them in meticulous 2D patterned landscapes that allude to analogue video game technology, and accessorizes his creatures with the symbol of Satan. The arsenal of subjects employed in the works are nether worldly creations inspired by Japanese design. An outright spermatozoa transforms the squeaky clean Scrubbing Bubbles characters into curious and mal-intentioned creatures. Several pieces bear Japanese

there to paint them over? You bet. Letters will soon be sent to all of these artists informing them that they must do the work and bear the cost of cleaning and maintaining their originals to avoid this; yet as I understand it the artists, at the time the murals were painted, signed over ownership of the murals to the public. Caltrans, to its credit, is talking to the community before talking this precipitous action, and does plan to experiment with temporarily mounted reproductions of the originals. But this is a solution that will kill the patient.

The State of California and the City of Los Angeles own a collection of public art, murals included, which is conservatively worth tens of millions of dollars. Yet, even in better times little or no money was invested in proper care for these assets. Rather than making them disappear, it is past time that we recognize that these

intentioned creatures. Several pieces bear Japanese typography or text referred to as "Buff Monsterisms" such as "Like it up," "Take Me to the Lollipop Land," and "Extra Creamy." The tongue-in-cheek verbiage riffs on the suspicious waves of liquid that ooze out of the creature's bodies; curious sexual innuendos are masked by the cute and overwhelmingly pink creations.

The world of Buff Monster is as uninhibited as the name he has assigned himself. Whether brought to us in the gallery space or on the streets of Los Angeles, in his world forget-me-not creatures live in a world of fantasy, with landscape features that are origami on acid. Just as the artist cites that happiness is present in all that he creates, it's hard to resist the alternate universe he has created wholly separate from the constraints of a "proper" and "distinguished" art world.

[See complete article. . .](#)

- A. Moret



Sabin Aell, "Departure to Wonderland" (inspired by the Genuine Wealth Model), 2010, Acrylic on Discarded Billboard, 50 Year Old Telephone Wire, Black Tape, Hanging Rail System (Designed And Engineered By Custom By Rushton), 12 X 18', at Walker Fine Art.

Continuing through September 3, 2010

Walker Fine Art Denver, Colorado

The end of summer in Denver also marks the conclusion of the satellite exhibits revolving around the primary exhibition of the Biennial of the Americas, which ended along with the month of July. One of the finest offerings is a series of installations, under the title "Perceptions," that probe the principle themes of the Biennial: community, sustainability and community. Two installations here stand out for their blend of strong concept and visual engagement.

An environment consisting of paper and paper packaging tape by **Emma Hardy** is aptly titled "Packages." This construction consists of five individual figures orbiting a tree at the center of the piece. This tree, in the artist's words, "serves as both the physical and thematic heart of the installation." The surprising strength of her material allows for an intimate physical inspection by the viewer. One must gaze into the center of the tree, which holds a series of mirrors that can distort perception and prompt a period of personal reflection. The five orbiting figures are of various ages. These individuals represent friends, parents, children or other integral parts of the human social blueprint. By navigating your own way through this installation's individual parts you are tempted to form your own personal "package."

Sabin Aell contemplates global society's ability, or lack thereof, to maintain our quality of life. Her installation is a large scale model for economist Mark Anielski's concept of Genuine Wealth as expressed in his book "The Economics of Happiness." This idea provides an alternative to outdated methods of economic growth and accounting models. Instead, it considers quality of values and capabilities or potential as our most valuable assets. Aell says, "Metaphorically, this installation can be seen as a medium I use to shift focus from past economic concepts of wealth to a genuine well-being of every human self." Her three dimensional installation is a series of obsolete billboards that have been deconstructed and recycled into large, organic forms. Then, using these as a series of canvases, the viewer's previous association with the billboards purpose is redefined through vibrant color and complex patterns.

- Gabe Scott