

TRISHA DONNELLY
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Bag, née Armendariz, Diane Gamboa, Teresa Covarrubias—lead singer of The Brat—and others relied on punk to negotiate identities opposed to both traditional Chicana cultural expectations and the countercultural clichés of their U.K./N.Y./L.A. contemporaries, challenging traditional notions of femininity with lessons learned from confrontational punk aesthetics.

The Vex was the epicenter of the scene, and Tomkins and Gunckel wisely opted to recreate its anarchic creativity. They also managed to avoid creating an animatronic Punk Disneyland. Instead, they successfully captured the spirit of the place and era within a contemporary context. Jessee Vidaurre's wall-sized mural *Movers & Shakers (Gerber)*, 2008, set the tone. A city map détourned with Day-Glo spray paints, silkscreens, and narrative descriptions detailing the history of L.A. Punk parodied Star Maps tour guides; tellingly, the map's most clearly documented and well-known events and locations were west of the L.A. River, graphically reiterating the chasm between West and East, Hollywood and The Vex.

The Claremont's galleries were a controlled cacophony of clashing colors, cut-and-paste collages, and cheap-looking xerography; a selection of jittery Eastside punk acts—both vintage and new—digitally played through a jury-rigged old record player. Posters advertising early 1980s gigs mingled with video performances, framed LPs, and other assorted ephemera to document the marginalized, nearly forgotten movement. Ultimately, however, the goal of the exhibition was neither to museumify a cultural cul-de-sac nor to institutionalize marginality, but to highlight The Vex's legacy.

The show also hailed conquering heroines. Patssi Valdez, one of ASCO's founders who is currently known for her contemplative paintings of magically real domesticity, was represented by bright-hued mid-1980s collages, including her 1987 jagged, torn-photographic self-portrait at the scene of the Edenic temptation. Diane

Gamboa, another former ASCO member, contributed a large canvas mural that bookended a stage featuring archival video and live performances; the black-line, sexually ambiguous figures strewn on either side of the musicians drew from her recent interests in tattooing, body modifications, and gender fluidity.

Even more revelatory were works by some of the younger artists who followed in their footsteps. Shizu Salmando, a San Francisco émigré, memorialized fleeting moments in tense, mysterious drawings. *Cindy and Asma in the Ladies' Room*, 2007, staged an intimate instant of melodrama under the proscenium arch of a bathroom door, while *Pee Chee Los Angeles*, 2004, crowds scenes of street life, romance, punky fashion, and grinning pandas around a beatific portrait of a confident young woman—rendered in doodles, sharpies, and ball points on a found manila folder. Lysa Flores' lithograph portrays a cigarette-smoking Latina staring sexily from a retro-style poster hawking *The Making of a Trophy Grrrr!*, 2002. Flores—a former member of Stay at Home Bomb and one of the Elvettes who sing backup for the conceptual rocker El Vez, “the Mexican Elvis”—also used this image on the sleeve of her cd that rebels against the expectations it creates, offering introspective, melodic folk-rock.

While *Vexing* convinces us of the continuing contribution of the women of the East L.A. punk scene, future acolytes will have to imagine their spiritual homeland instead of visiting it first-hand. Self Help Graphics will be evicted from their building in December: in July, the L.A. Archdiocese secretly sold the building to an investment firm.

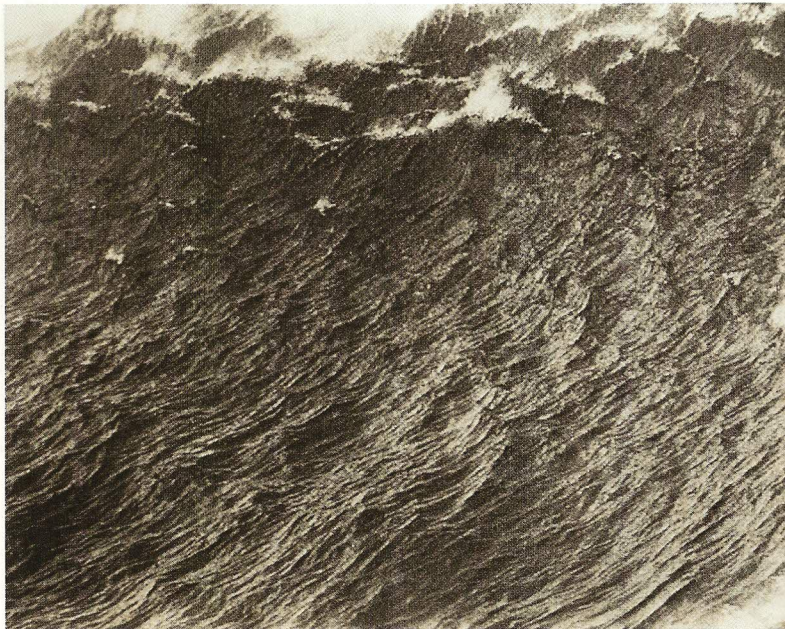
—Phil Oppenheim

Looking into the lofty main exhibition space from its upper landing entrance, viewers could easily assume that the door had been mistakenly left open during the installation process. The partially lit space and the seeming paucity of work make for a startling introduction. Originally conceived to coincide with Trisha Donnelly's 2007 exhibition at Modern Art Oxford, which investigated the sounds of the building, this project took off in a different direction [Douglas Hyde Gallery; August 1—September 18, 2008] .

The three largest works evidence a confluence of natural elements. As the eyes catch sight of *Untitled*, 2008, a modestly sized video projection of a carnation emitting bolts of electricity, and *Black Wave*, 2002, a photograph of a massive ridge of water, the nose picks up the scent of cypress. Redirecting our gaze to our immediate vicinity, we detect another untitled work—a lengthy cluster of branches descending from a duct pipe near the ceiling to the floor below. Then, on the nearby wall behind us, we discover *The Vibration Station*, 2002, a bewildering snapshot of inverted organ pipes. While its shape suggests a canopy, little more is certain. Does it refer to an arbor, as implied by the proximity of the cypress, or to the landing on which we stand? The other works produce similar responses. *Black Wave*, for example, bears a solidity and stasis that defy its fluidity, while the fall of cypress branches intimates a cascade of water.

In the main exhibition space, we find several small drawings, another sculpture, and more little snapshots that have either been placed at the periphery of prime wall surfaces, tucked away under the landing or mounted in the dimly lit recesses of the lower level. The drawings fall between abstraction and figuration and exhibit a conceptual restlessness, not unlike doodles. One, a word picture, invites decipherment. The outcome may be an anagram. Others vaguely suggest architectural features, landforms or technical diagrams. Having

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Jessee Vidaurre, *Movers & Shakers (Gerber)*, 2008, wall-sized mural, installation view of *Vexing: Female Voices From East L.A. Punk* (courtesy of the artist and the Claremont Museum of Art, Claremont, CA); Trisha Donnelly, *Untitled*, 2008, installation, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist and Modern Art Oxford, Oxford, UK)



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searched them out, we give them our attention, which they deflect elsewhere. We expect to take part in a conversation or see a pattern emerge, but find the works haltingly uncommunicative.

The sculpture nestled below the landing evokes the arrangement of things in a more literal manner. Single steel L-shaped legs support parallel blocks of mahogany, whose mirroring faces are disrupted by irregularly shaped hollows directly opposite each other. Crudely chiselled, these negative spaces imply a point of connection either destroyed or not yet realized. We lean forward to examine the indentations, comparing their ragged edges to the wood's grooved surfaces. We step between the pair, equating our height with their height, and compare the sculpture's characteristics with those of its setting. In a corner of the main space, a snapshot of a man looking out of a bay window has a similar effect. We feel firmly separated from the subject of the photo as the space between the seer and thing seen takes on an uncanny tangibility. Consequently, we zoom in on our surroundings, taking note of the direction in which we are looking, the relative scale of things, and the inherent contradictions between real space and the accompanying depiction.

Donnelly's rigorous installation subverts our expectations. It also leaves us guessing as to how her work should be read. Its seductive, yet enigmatic, presence resists verbal description. Whereas her exhibition at Modern Art Oxford dealt with the building's sounds, here the work's primary focus is the gallery's anatomy. The off-kilter placement, for example, draws our attention to the juxtaposition of exposed and whitewashed concrete or the space's various recesses and projections. The internal complexity and the fragmentary nature of the experience remain disconcerting.

—John Gayer

It is typical of Adam McEwen's interest in symbols of exclusivity that he announced his exhibition in East Hampton with a soaped storefront and a foreclosure sign [Glenn Horowitz Bookseller; August 9—September 15, 2008]. Provoking gossip and inquiry from neighbors and weekenders anxious about the value of their investments, his successful irritation used misinformation to unbind the static self-image of an idyllic vacation community. McEwen's threat of decline was as specific as it was menacing: an advertised foreclosure in this neighborhood is shocking enough, but the agency handling the re-sale wasn't Sotheby's or Corcoran. It was Century 21.

McEwen is a curator and an artist. In both roles, he enlists discreet series to extract a broad theme, often so broad that the project's internal organization implodes, re-dispersing into singular, stuttering metaphors. The conceit here is graphite—both pigment and material support. Entropic, graphite loses its inscription potential as it inscribes. Robert Smithson discussed entropy as the disintegration of a closed system, summarizing the disastrous re-routing of the Colorado River into a thirty-mile lake, inundating towns and the railroad, forcing communities to accommodate it. McEwen's work draws out this last stage, focusing on entropic systems' massive, inexplicable effort at re-settling.

In the upstairs gallery space, he presents banal text messages from friends and casual correspondents, many of them artists. With their geometric graphite frames, the pixelated text pieces approximate the appearance of text messages on a mobile phone. Playful and filled with typographical errors, these messages inform McEwen's interrogation of the artist as both cultural insider and generator of value. Ryan checks in; Nate informs us that he "took extasy last night and feel like shit today? [sic]" These are young people, primarily men, who have benefited from their mutual association,

allowing them to re-substantiate the artwork as bohemian protest—and thus commodity. Conflating immediacy and posturing, McEwen dismantles the subjectivity implicit in both, while retaining the gesture.

The exhibition's title, *Chicken or Beef*, asserts that it's all the same. What's more, the press release claims to awaken us from "the pervasive dullness of our usual visual experience." But in McEwen's parsing of the cache of artworks and luxury goods, banality is rich with compelling energies. In a vinyl wall piece, five frames of a text message from Leo read like a Bret Easton Ellis novel backwards: "the bathroom and found a fresh m. Jacobs Shirt/Also I cleaned all the drugs they left in." Truncated by the limits of the text format, Leo's message is hardly the medium. Not is it the name-dropped items he clearly covets—or parodies, which is not so different. Rather, communication itself becomes the object. McEwen himself could be speeding away from the gallery in a Porsche.

In the middle of the space, a yoga mat cast in graphite alludes to East Hampton's bourgeois bohemianism. It also deliberately connects—albeit in a labored fashion—the graphite of the text message to carbon-based organic materials. To use the mat is as much to mark your back as it is to wear at the logo delicately carved into its surfaces. Likewise, the text message pieces suspend the sender's identity—we are unsure even of their last names. Hung on four freestanding walls, their experience is immersive, their messages forgettable but infinitely iterable.

—Alex Gartenfeld

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Trisha Donnelly, *Black Wave*, 2002, silver gelatin print, 50 x 60 inches (courtesy of the artist and Modern Art Oxford, Oxford, UK); Adam McEwen, detail of exhibition *Chicken or Beef*, 2008 (courtesy of the artist)