

Where's the Crazy

It's college: 'Greater LA MFA' should be more insane

by REBECCA SCHOENKOPF

I've been enjoying reading about various college contretemps in the past few weeks—my favorite being a University of North Carolina screening of a film by a UC Davis professor about why Asian men aren't portrayed in American porn, and the tasty hubbub that ensued. (The filmmaker's premise, and I agree, is that Asian men are emasculated in American culture. The columnist relating the tale, who is retarded, said the problem was that high school kids lurking on the campus might see a pamphlet for the film. Oh, yeah, and taxpayer, taxpayer, blah blah blah.)

So I was excited when several student curators at Cal State Long Beach (many of whom are involved with DIY art groups like Santa Ana 7 and the defunct Out of the Streets) invited me to "Greater LA MFA." With more than 50 works by Master of Fine Arts students (from Chapman, UCLA, Claremont and others), the show was bound to have some delicious scandals, and I really couldn't wait.

But there wasn't a single feminist examination of the vulva—what is college coming to?—and the show was sadly short on callow rashness or any examination of American imperialism. But if you're looking for an exquisite film of a decapitated, twitching chicken or a painting of a man that effortlessly evokes the German penis-eating cannibal, "Greater LA MFA" is totally the place to be.

Most of the works are fairly mannerly. There are several sly photographs, a few funny installations. But generally, the students seem quite . . . mature. I don't know about you, but I don't go to college shows to see "mature." (There's plenty of time for the Festival of the Arts after I'm dead.) I go for the shrill screeds and Manson-like scrawls. I go for the brattiness and the acting out and the intentional gross-outs—like Tony Do's *Orbus Imperium*, a spinning ball of dead, crunchy locusts, suspended in thin air behind glass. (But it's got nothing on the chicken.) May Jong's *Rocks* is fairly horrible—papier-mâché rocks piled in gallery corners, painted up with "Fuck," "Love," "To" and "You." But the four-part installation, while bratty, is aesthetically/morally/experientially dull. They get points for being papier-mâché instead of actual rock, but still. So?

Most of the MFA students' works are well-done, but few embody white-hot-heat. Julie Orser, from CalArts, offers three lovely, almost identical photos of a couple in a verdant, New Jerseyish farmscape. She's taller than he, until she digs a hole to stand in so she can cut herself down to size. The pop psychology might as well have a neon sign blinking about men's need for superiority and women's efforts to reassure them, but Orser still manages to keep it sly and let it speak for itself.

There are nicely done ink outlines of fluid, faceless figures. There are nicely done photographs of a karaoke bar in time lapse (the figures are blurred and ghostly, but the background—the song—remains the same). There's a nicely done painting of an immensely irony-free girl fanning the flames of her spiritual phoenix. And there are nicely done photos of cardboard on a bed.

Cardboard is totally the next big thing—and actually, two of the funniest works are in paper: Arni Tecson's *The Hulk Self-Portrait* is a huge cardboard cutout of himself—mild-mannered in lavender scrubs—backed

by his invincible green alter ego (whose armpit hair alone is worth the trip). Mary Younakof's *Portrait of a Mexican Hairless Dog* is done in the style of a children's pop-up book; the dog looks as though he's fashioned from meat. The pieces are funny and beautifully executed—and most important, they don't seem like washed-out, burned-out replicas of each other.

Are area schools sanding off their students' edges, molding them into gallery-friendly mush that sells? Or are they just tired and wrecked from all that school? Where are the hormones? Where's the egocentric grandeur? Where, most importantly, is the *crazy*?

Well, there are a few.

The grandeur is right in the courtyard, with Brady Rodman's *The Saga of the PG Tetanus*, a hulking monolith of a ship's rotting clay hull. The hull is titanic, and Rodman spent two years fashioning it. Following the exhibit, I'm told, it will probably be taken apart.

The *crazy*, meanwhile, is all housed together in one gallery in Cal State Long Beach's five-gallery student art complex. Anna Parkina's *Corn Rush* is visually dull and almost impossible to decipher, and it's absolutely hilarious. It's a treatment for a movie, with diagrams and storyboards, based on the Gold Rush, but with corn. Bits of paper on black backing (like a high school science project) say things like "Tin Man is Corn Slave of -Horse -Dog -Hegehog [sic]," and features a letter written home (about the corn rush, I guess) that talks in stilted English about the sky warning them to fill in their hole and sounds slightly schizophrenic. I kind of want to marry her, just so life would always be interesting.

Ondriyla Van Voorhis' *Karl* is a very disturbing depiction—painted in a flat, naive style—of a masked man with high socks, a yellow sweater, big rolled socks for boobs and a spiky thing on his penis. It's notable mostly for the shock factor—the school asked the curators to post a notice outside the gallery that there would be adult material inside—but also for the uncanny evocation of the German cannibal about whom we couldn't get enough news a few years ago.

And then there's the chicken.

I don't usually have the patience for video art, but the nine-minute chicken snuff film is so appalling, and so grotesque, I've never seen anything that meets it. It is mesmerizing and horrific and *so* much fun.

"GREATER LA MFA: A STUDENT TO STUDENT INVITATIONAL EXHIBITION" AT CAL STATE LONG BEACH'S FINE ARTS COMPLEX, LOT 8A, 1250 BELLFLOWER BLVD., LONG BEACH. OPEN MON.-FRI., NOON-5 P.M.; THURS., NOON-7 P.M. THROUGH SEPT. 7.