

# ART IN LOS ANGELES



Eleanor Antin, *The Death of Petronius*, 2001, color photograph, 46 1/2 x 94 1/2". From the series "The Last Days of Pompeii," 2001.

WHERE, EXACTLY, IS LOS ANGELES? Somewhere between the studio lot and the Eagle Rock studio, *Chinatown* and *Chinatown*? Between the “playfield of the devil,” as Richard Neutra called it, and the “hyperurban configuration” described by Fredric Jameson? Amid all the endless commonplaces about the city, Jameson’s early-’90s reading still stands out, aptly charting a new disorientation and eclecticism in the buried entrances to the Westin Bonaventure Hotel and in the chain-link chic of Frank Gehry’s Santa Monica house. If over the years Angelenos have gotten used to those swimmingly crossbred spaces, the continual transformations and unmoorings of Los Angeles have nonetheless outpaced us. Indeed, it is the city’s constantly changing tectonics that we hope to explore here—not to definitively locate LA and its culture, but to get lost in its characteristically abrupt stirrings and mixed spaces.

On the occasion of the J. Paul Getty Museum’s “Pacific Standard Time,” a confederation of some sixty exhibitions opening across the region beginning this month, *Artforum* delves into the shifting scenes of postwar LA and the art that has unfolded within them. In this issue, artists, critics, historians, and curators speak to a broad array of venues in and around the city: the addresses on Ocean Front Walk and La Cienega where Chris Burden staged performances; the newsstand shelves onto which Robert Heineken slyly planted altered magazines for unsuspecting readers; the abandoned house that John Divola took

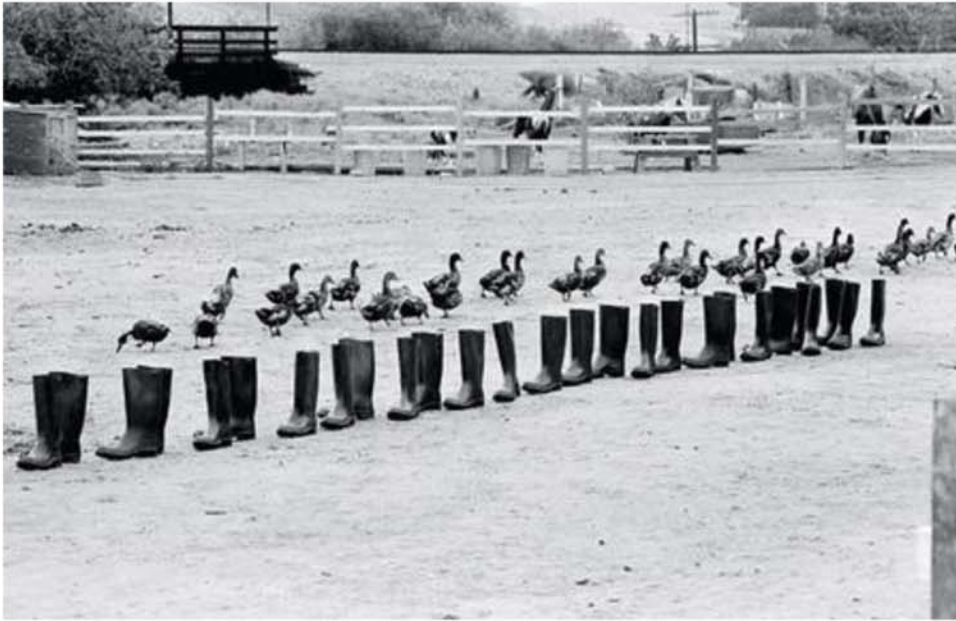
over, spray-painted, and shot with flash; the pit dug and molded by Kaari Upson; the studio where Simone Forti danced with Charlemagne Palestine; the street where Asco planted an ersatz gang victim. Further afield and in the present, LA-based artists Burden and Raymond Pettibon contribute special projects for these pages.

If time has been the obsession of art historians for as long as history and chronology themselves have been subject to study (see: *Nachträglichkeit* and *chronophobia*), this issue hopes to turn to space—and its purported disappearance. Place no longer exists, or rather, it is shot through with abstract networks of money and information, Jameson wrote; and he held LA to be exemplary of such shimmering finitude. We have tended to fixate on this abstraction, the dissipation of some kind of phenomenological or local sense of space. All is ether, the circulation of capital, the ciphers of control, whether “biopower” or “semicapitalism.” But to let ourselves go, to submit completely to the idea that both the body and the site have been pulled away into some vortex of abstract power, is to deny—or repress—the stubborn persistence of places littered with things and noise and people and rubber and glass, an infrastructure that remains. Instead, we have sought to move through the specific terrain that is Los Angeles and see what we might find there. This is, after all, the city where *Artforum* had its start, in 1962. Here we pick up the journey once again. —Michelle Kuo



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## ARTISTS ON L.A.:



Eleanor Antin, *100 BOOTS Move On*, 1972, black-and-white photograph, 8 x 10". From the series "100 BOOTS," 1971–73.

## ELEANOR ANTIN

David and I arrived in Solana Beach, a coastal town north of San Diego, after driving cross-country from New York in an old beat-up Caddy with our one-year-old son, Blaise. Robert Kennedy was dying of gunshot wounds in an LA hospital after winning the California primary, and it was twenty-four hours after Valerie Solanas shot Andy Warhol back in New York. A hot sunny day in June 1968, and there were huge juicy oranges in the back garden. A year later Manson and company went on their rampage in the Hollywood Hills, and the Hells Angels went on theirs at Altamont a couple of months after that. That beautiful poisoned ocean began sickening the surfers, and most of the time we managed to ignore the earthquakes, the fires, the droughts, and, less than fifty miles away, the San Onofre nuclear plant sitting on a fault line facing the sea with open arms like a lover. The beautiful and the damned.

There was always something of the Old West about Southern California. In those days, everybody in San Diego came from someplace else. We were, and still are, part of the sprawl coming down from Los Angeles on the way to Mexico with only Camp Pendleton, the marine base, protecting what's left of old California chaparral and sand cliffs. We anarchists and pacifists hope they never leave. The developers are waiting in the wings with their bulldozers.

We were all explorers and pioneers. For artists, it was open country—you could do anything you wanted to do. Nobody was standing over you to see whether you made the right move. None of that New York totalitarianism. Was Bob's new move right? Was he stealing from Dick? Was Joseph rigorous enough? None of it mattered down here where we were inventing a new avant-garde. Our fledgling UC San Diego art department of New York immigrants exploded into the first experimental art department in the country to include performance, video, film, photography, ecological art, writing, you name it. The orgy of new feminist possibilities—we questioned everything, sometimes absurdly, perhaps, but always bravely, with chutzpah and originality. Gay rights, Chicano rights. We were flexing our muscles, seeing how far we could go to cause trouble, to remake the world, and maybe, just maybe, end that dreadful Vietnam War in the bargain. You see, nobody cared what we did, except us. Even *Artforum*, which started out here, had its eyes on the East Coast and ran away from us as soon as it got the chance. But we knew the rest of the world was out there. Sometimes we even sent messages, like *100 Boots* [1971–73], my photo picaresque of the adventures of one hundred boots mailed out to artists around the world. They were messages to the world that said, Hello, we're here, and even if you don't know it, you need us. And they did, of course. We were inventing the postmodern world and laughing all the way.