

Ruckus L.A. Meets (Dom-Ino Effect)

Lincoln Tobier and Rirkrit Tiravanija



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What is the role of art museums in our communities? Statistics show that more people visit museums than attend sporting events, and blockbuster exhibitions like the recent Van Gogh show at LACMA attract increasingly large crowds. They come, they say in audience surveys, to find connections between art and their everyday lives. But although avant-garde movements throughout this century have challenged the distinctions between life and art, viewer and spectacle, encyclopedic museums such as LACMA still tend to present hallowed works in hushed, formal galleries that encourage silent and orderly viewing. Do visitors find the connections they seek?

Museums are always reaching out to new audiences, hoping to appeal to the new as well as the experienced visitor and to address the confusion or alienation many people feel upon encountering contemporary art. Institutions in the United States and Europe have begun experimenting with exhibition paradigms that encourage fluidity in the roles of artist, curator, and viewer. In London, Seattle, New York, and Baltimore artists have been invited to select and analyze works from museum collections; in Houston and Los Angeles audiences have collaborated on exhibition content or presentation strategies; in Boston members of the public have been asked to interpret art for others. The crossing of any invisible but sacred threshold in the museum world often leads to questions about its appropriateness. More than thirty years after Carl Andre invited people to walk on his metal floor sculptures, experiencing them with their feet as well as their eyes, the notion of full participation by the public in the development or presentation of an art exhibition still seems radical.

Several international artists today are creating conceptual work that addresses these issues: the viewer's relationship to the object and the architecture of presentation. Their work tends to broach social questions and depend on the participation of other people; often it is functional rather than purely visual. Challenging the neutrality of the white cube and the pristine gallery,

these artists often also test the ingenuity of museum professionals. They may insist on exhibiting their work in informal spaces; they engage their audiences by letting them take control. They push the definition of acceptable museum behavior and question the walls that still separate art from life.

Lincoln Tobier and Rirkrit Tiravanija have worked collaboratively to present *Ruckus L.A. Meets (Dom-Ino Effect)*, an exhibition that not only invites but requires audience involvement. Their distinct but complementary works, Tobier's (*It All Comes Together in*) *Ruckus L.A.* and Tiravanija's *Untitled (Dom-Ino Effect)*, coexist in this space, creating a metaphorical landscape of urban life and art in Los Angeles.

Ruckus L.A.

Lincoln Tobier (b. New York, 1964) has been creating works of art over the past ten years that focus, in his words, "on the erosion of the public sphere (a term that refers to the place for public articulation of experience, the place in which democracy transpires)." His exhibitions have often engaged social and political questions with a subtle sense of absurdist humor. They include an art-historical retrospective of political media consultant Roger Ailes; a series of radio stations in the United States and Europe that offered free air time to the public (an exercise that, according to Tobier, "traced the legal limit of individual speech"); and the *Panoptiramicon*, a room where visitors could see the entire city of Tokyo in detail in three minutes.

Tobier's ongoing project (*It all comes together in*) *Ruckus L.A.* is presented here in its most complete form to date. His ultimate goal is to construct a comprehensive scale model of Los Angeles in collaboration with the city's residents, who will be invited to make scale models of their homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and favorite landmarks. The final work, Tobier proposes, "will be housed in a large interior space, such as a converted aerospace factory. Highways and certain streets will be made wide enough for visitors to walk on." Part work of



Rikrit Tiravanija, UNTITLED, 1999, computer-generated map/poster, courtesy of the artist.

Tiravanija created this map to reflect the intentions of (*Dom-ino Effect*) and describes it in the following terms: "Certainly a reference to Guy-Ernest Debord's map [*The Naked City*, Paris, 1957] showing the movements or possible shifts (drifts) of society's fluxes and flows (like ice on the Atlantic) ... implicating a certain way of moving or influences of movements or rather effects one body has on another ... acting out with (in) and under the circuitry of social relations, acting in or against the set or model pertaining to social influence in the name of culture. Destroy the steps left behind and make a new path forward sideways back to and against what is not yet possible."

art, part architectural model, part tourist attraction, and part public work, *Ruckus L.A.* combines conceptual and stylistic elements borrowed from past or existing representations of cities and communities. These include Simon Rodia's *Watts Towers* (1921–54), the collaborative *Peace Tower* of Los Angeles (1966), the ongoing *Names Project* quilt (begun in 1987), Ed Ruscha's book *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), urban planner Robert Moses's *Panorama of New York City* (1964), and Red Grooms's *Ruckus Manhattan* (1976).

The last two projects on this list, according to Tobier, have had the greatest formal influence on *Ruckus L.A.* Moses's *Panorama*, initially commissioned for the 1964 World's Fair and located now in the Queens Museum, is a 9,335-square-foot representation of all five boroughs of

New York City, accurate down to the approximately 865,000 buildings, although many are reduced by the scale (1:1200) to generic abstractions. In contrast, Grooms's *Ruckus Manhattan* was a walk-in environment depicting an abbreviated Manhattan south of 59th street. The perspective was caricatural, skewed, richly detailed, and multiscale, evoking the experience of an overwhelmed tourist. Visitors could cross the Brooklyn Bridge, sit in a subway car, pass the Statue of Liberty hailing a taxi, and stop by a Times Square porn shop.

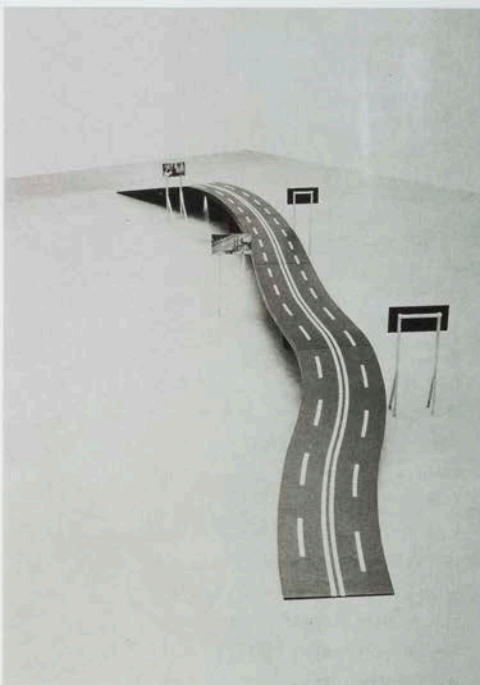
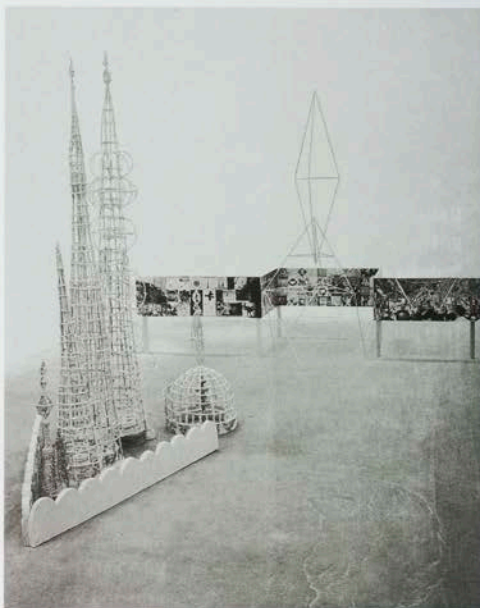
One of Tobier's objectives in *Ruckus L.A.* is to combine these inherently contradictory approaches—the city planner's broad view and the individual's subjective focus—and explore the interplay between official (municipal, architectural, or geographic) and personal

representations of space. Another goal is to portray Los Angeles in all its literal and figurative complexity. He explains,

What led me to this project was Los Angeles itself, the enigmatic qualities of which I've experienced both as a visitor and through the media. Rendered as a mythic fantasy by the glamour of Hollywood, L.A. has come to symbolize, for most of the twentieth century, the epitome of the American Dream: a youthful city with a perfect climate, the romance of car culture, and the grandeur of the Pacific. Yet the myth of Los Angeles has also come to include, if not be dominated by, the spectacle of unending trauma in the form of disasters both natural and manmade.

Beyond such sensational representations lies another city that is equally enigmatic. Its geographic vastness renders it intangible. Paradigmatic of the postmodern city, Los Angeles is said to be "decentered." Its architectural essence is embodied not by landmark buildings but by the freeway system. L.A. is one of the most ethnically diverse of cities, but many of its communities are isolated from one another by economic disparity as well as physical distance. *(It all comes together in) Ruckus L.A.* will make it possible to see the way things are connected.

For the LACMA installation of *Ruckus L.A.*, Tobier invited the museum's staff, administration, and trustees to a series of workshops, where they constructed models of their homes and favorite places. Arranged on aerial photographs, the models chart the community of LACMA staff within the larger city. Rather than an objective portrait, the installation is a representation of the perceived environments of one group of individuals. The Los Angeles that emerges, hardly a celebration, speaks of poor planning and dislocation, but the individually articulated models suggest the variety of subjective experiences that contribute to an urban reality.



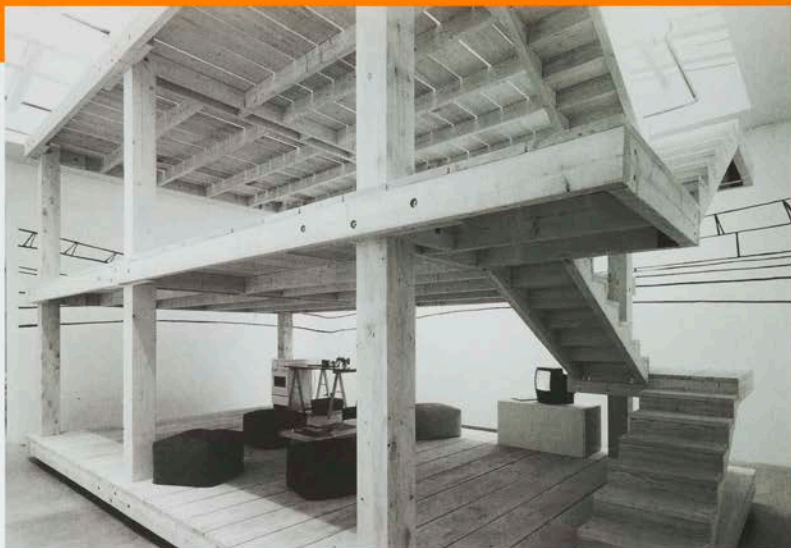
Lincoln Tobier, *STUDY FOR (IT ALL COMES TOGETHER IN) RUCKUS L.A.*, 1995, installation view, mixed media with photographs, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York, photograph courtesy of Pat Hearn Gallery, New York

Lincoln Tobier, *TOWARDS RUCKUS L.A.*, 1996, installation view, mixed media with photographs, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, photograph by Florian Kleinfenn

Dom-Ino Effect

Rirkrit Tiravanija, a New York-based conceptual artist, was born in Buenos Aires in 1961 to Thai parents and raised in Ethiopia, Thailand, and Canada. He first attracted international attention for a series of installations in which he cooked vegetable curry or pad Thai for visitors in museums and galleries in the United States and Europe. In a commercial gallery he removed the wall that concealed the back room from the public; in a museum he set up a cot and invited visitors to spend the day sleeping. At once poetic, sensuous, gentle, gracious, and disquieting, these exhibitions challenged the distinction between public and private space, inviting people to abandon traditional rules (don't touch, be quiet, don't play, don't eat) and become participants in the art on display.

Tiravanija has recently begun reinterpreting classics of modern architecture in his installations. At New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1997 he built a half-sized version of Philip Johnson's Glass House (1949) in the venerable Sculpture Garden; children's art classes were held in it. In *(Dom-Ino Effect)*, exhibited originally in a gallery in Paris and in a new version here at LACMA, he invokes architect Le Corbusier's 1914 prototype for low-cost housing, Maison Dom-Ino. Although the simple design (named because the six columns are arranged in two rows of three like dots on a domino tile) was never built, it set the precedent for much of modern architecture. Tiravanija's wooden scale model brings Dom-Ino to life, as both a house—though one without walls—where visitors can make themselves at home, and a stage where they can perform as well as observe. Tiravanija invites visitors to enter, explore, play in, and use the structure, which works best, he says, when there are “lots of people” around and inside it. He has worked with the museum to plan activities that exploit Dom-



Ino's versatility as workshop, stage, living room, game room, and kitchen, inviting a number of local artists to participate. A schedule of the activities is listed in this brochure and on the wall of the gallery.

Both Tobier and Tiravanija are curious about what happens in the public space of the museum and in how visitors interact with their work and with each other. Both are interested in collaboration, in reciprocal gestures, in art that asks as much as it gives. Together their projects suggest compelling new models for the conception and presentation of art and new ways for museum staff, artists, and audiences to interact as participants in relevant and tangible exhibitions.

Stephanie Barron

Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art
Vice-President of Education and Public Programs

All quotations attributed to the artists are based on conversations and correspondence, December 1998–March 1999.

I would like to thank the artists for their cooperation in this presentation. Jill Martinez, curatorial assistant, has been helpful in all stages of the exhibition. In addition special thanks to Ian Birnie, Jane Burrell, Alla Kazovsky, Jo Lauria, Simon Leung, Pilar Mendez, Lynn Zelevansky, and the thirty-four members of the LACMA community who participated in the workshops.

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Schedule of Activities

In the Dom-Ino Structure

Performances, readings, and Family Days are free for members and included in the price of admission for nonmembers. Art classes and art camp have limited enrollment; contact the museum's education department at (323) 857-6512 for more information.

July 3 and 17; August 7 and 21, 2 P.M.

Storytelling for children ages 3–8 and their families.

July 9, 7 P.M.

Writers in Focus L.A. poets Jim Cushing and John Harris read from their works. A book signing follows in the museum shop.

July 10–August 8, weekends

Art Classes in theory and practice for adults, children, and families, including studio work in a variety of media; lectures; discussions; and tours of the museum galleries.

July 10, 6:30 P.M.

Musical Performance Stephen Prina, an L.A. visual artist and musician, plays and sings pop songs (some from his latest album *Push Comes to Love*) about love, sex, and death.

July 12–September 3, weekdays

Summer Art Camp for children ages 6–8 and 9–12. Morning, afternoon, and all-day sessions are available.

July 12–August 6, weekdays

Summer Art Camp for teenagers This new program includes classes in life drawing, cartooning, sketching, and color mixing, and tours of the museum's permanent collection.

July 25 and August 29, 12:30 P.M.

Family Days at the Museum Fun and learning with hands-on art, music, dance, theater, and storytelling activities designed for children ages 5–12.

July 31, 12–4 P.M.

Lunch with Rirkrit There really is such a thing as a free lunch. Artist Rirkrit Tiravanija prepares curry, then serves it to visitors in the gallery. Stop by and participate in a work of art!

August 21, 6:30 P.M.

Musical Performance Michael Webster, an L.A. composer and occasional band leader (formerly of The Native Shrubs), performs his latest songs—contemporary poetry set to music—with a small ensemble.

In the Bing Theater

This film series is free to the public.

"I'm a stranger here myself . . ." (melancholia and the city)

Five independent films explore the city as both a physical place and an imaginary domain of desire, longing, hope, mourning, and reflection. The program was organized by Simon Leung, visiting assistant professor of art at UCLA.

June 17, 7:30 P.M.

News From Home (1976/color/85 min.), by Chantal Akerman. Luminous shots of mid-1970s New York, accompanied by an off-screen voice reading letters from home, evoke the melancholy and exhilaration of a young person's move into the city.

June 22, 7:30 P.M.

Happy Together (1997/color/97 min.), by Wong Kar-Wai. Wong won the Best Director prize at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival for this dazzling film about

gay lovers who leave Hong Kong on the eve of political change to begin their lives again in Buenos Aires.

June 24, 7:30 P.M.

Persistence (1997/color/84 min.), by Daniel Eisenberg. The filmmaker reflects on the massive urban development campaign to rehabilitate Berlin in 1991–92.

June 29, 7:30 P.M.

Queen of Diamonds (1991/color/77 min.), by Nina Menkes. Menkes follows a Las Vegas blackjack dealer

(played by her stunning sister Tinka) through the ruins of the myth of the West.

July 1, 7:30 P.M.

Sans Soleil (1982/color/100 min.), by Chris Marker. This inventive and sophisticated cinematic essay weaves diverse footage, shot in locations around the world, into a complex web of meaning.

All programs are subject to change.