

COLA 2010

Individual Artist Fellowships

About C.O.L.A. and DCA

Visual Artists

Fumiko Amano

Linda Arreola

Sean Duffy

Sam Erenberg

Mary Beth Heffernan

Jesse Lerner

Brian C. Moss

Michael Pierzynski

Rebecca Ripple

Tran T. Kim-Trang

Literary Artists

Fernando D. Castro

Performing Artists

maRia Bodmann

Ken Roht

Gallery Schedule

Performance Schedule

Acknowledgments and Credits

LAMAG
Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery

Rebecca Ripple

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Since Western art parted ways with the Church, several hundred years ago, and the Christian narrative ceased to function as its central vessel of meaning, the question of where that meaning should lie has been a subject of ongoing debate. Romanticism found it in the landscape; impressionism in the senses; modernism in the object; conceptualism in the idea. In our own multifarious, post-everything age, the matter seems to have spun out in confusion, leading many to either nostalgic imitation or the anxious denial of meaning altogether.

Rebecca Ripple is among that shrewd minority who find meaning in the state of confusion itself. Raised Catholic but no longer practicing—her own life mirrors the secularization of art—she has a deep, experiential understanding of what the structures of faith both allow for and prohibit. Her sculpture is filled, as a result, with charged dichotomies. Catholic imagery mingles with a kind of roiling eroticism, gestures of transcendence with an almost sticky materiality.

This wrangling with faith should not be viewed in strictly Christian—or even strictly religious—terms, however. At its root is an inquisitive discomfort with any hegemonic ideological system: with language, say, or capitalism, or conceptual art, or the codes of modernist sculpture. In each of her sprawling yet meticulous works, one feels Ripple prodding and plying received truths in search of contradiction and paradox, sorting what is allowed from what is prohibited and playing the two against each other. Each piece sits on some viscerally uncomfortable line—between the secular and the spiritual, the intellectual and the emotive, constraint and movement, idea and sensation, language and materiality—pinning the viewer in a state of intellectual and sensorial conflict. A word appears as both an abstraction and a mass: tongue, for instance, cast in a thousand tumbling shards of Styrofoam. Microscopic biological imagery is reproduced in the homey, spinsterish medium of lace; a vast philosophical concept—God—cast in the patent leather of a young girl's Sunday school shoe.

In Ripple's very recent work, such as the sculptures that appear in the C.O.L.A. show, both the language and the Catholic imagery have fallen away, and a stronger interest in architectural forms and structures has emerged. If her focus in recent years has been on religion as a social institution and the capitalistic (materialistic) suburban experience, it shifts here to concepts of transcendence and the intangible. Wrestling with yards of rubber escalator handrails—a material that she identifies with female genitalia—and drawing upon recalled childhood perceptions of such architectural wonders as the escalator, she explores the interplay of longing and fear, possibility and danger,



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that characterizes the experience of looking upward, literally and figuratively speaking.

Because Ripple's sculptures are such absorbing objects—colorful, tactile, skillfully crafted—it is easy, at a glance, to underestimate the challenge that they pose. It comes not by way of critique, exactly, because given her distrust of imposed wisdom, she is clearly loath to tell you what to think. It comes in the refusal of dichotomous thinking—of an either/or, right/wrong, us/them mentality—and an embrace of the confusion, in both contemporary art and contemporary life, of messy, holistic experience.

— Holly Myers