

Los Angeles is still Los Angeles



Curated by Marta Fontolan, [Say ahh...](#) brings together three generations of West Coast artists, namely Sister Corita Kent, Larry Johnson and Adam Stamp, who have influenced each other in many ways, dealing with uniquely specific Pop appropriations with simple real-life content. The following is an excerpt from Geoff Manaugh's [BLDGBLOG](#), accompanying the exhibition press release.

There are three great cities in the United States: there's Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York – in that order.

I love Boston; I like Miami; I think Washington DC is habitable; but Los Angeles is Los Angeles. You can't compare it to Paris, or to London, or to Rome, or to Shanghai. You can interestingly contrast it to those cities, sure, and Los Angeles even comes out lacking; but Los Angeles is still Los Angeles.

No matter what you do in L.A, your behavior is appropriate for the city. Los Angeles has no assumed correct mode of use. You can have fake breasts and drive a Ford Mustang – or you can grow a beard, weigh 300 pounds, and read Christian Science fiction novels. Either way, you're fine: that's just how it works.

L.A. is the apocalypse: it's you and a bunch of parking lots. No one's going to save you; no one's looking out for you. It's the only city I know where that's the explicit premise of living there – that's the deal you make when you move to L.A. The city, ironically, is emotionally authentic. It says: no one loves you; you're the least important person in the room; get over it. What matters is what you do there.

And maybe that means renting Hot Fuzz and eating too many pretzels; or maybe that means

driving a Prius out to Malibu and surfing with Daryl Hannah as a means of protesting something; or maybe that means buying everything Fredric Jameson has ever written and even underlining significant passages as you visit the Westin Bonaventure. Maybe that just means getting into skateboarding, or into E!, or into Zen, Kabbalah, and Christian mysticism; or maybe you'll plunge yourself into gin-fueled all night Frank Sinatra marathons – or you'll lift weights and check email every two minutes on your Blackberry and watch Bruce Willis films.

Who cares?

Literally no one cares, is the answer. No one cares. You're alone in the world. L.A. is explicit about that. If you can't handle a huge landscape made entirely from concrete, interspersed with 24-hour drugstores stocked with medications you don't need, then don't move there. It's you and a bunch of parking lots. It's the most ridiculous city in the world – but everyone who lives there knows that. No one thinks that L.A. "works," or that it's well-designed, or that it's perfectly functional, or even that it makes sense to have put it there in the first place; they just think it's interesting. And the huge irony is that Southern California is where you can actually do what you want to do; you can just relax and be ridiculous. In L.A. you don't have to be embarrassed by yourself. You've got a surgically pinched, thin Michael Jackson nose? You've got a goatee and a trucker hat? You've got a million-dollar job and a Bentley? It doesn't matter. Los Angeles is where you confront the objective fact that you mean nothing; everything there somehow precedes you, even new construction sites, and it's bigger than you and more abstract than you and indifferent to you. You don't matter. You're free.

And I don't just mean that Los Angeles is some friendly bastion of cultural diversity and so we should celebrate it on that level and be done with it; I mean that Los Angeles is the confrontation with the void. It is the void. It's a confrontation with the oceanic; with anonymity; with desert time; with endless parking lots. And it doesn't need humanizing. Who cares if you can't identify with Los Angeles? It doesn't need to be made human. It's better than that.