

west coast

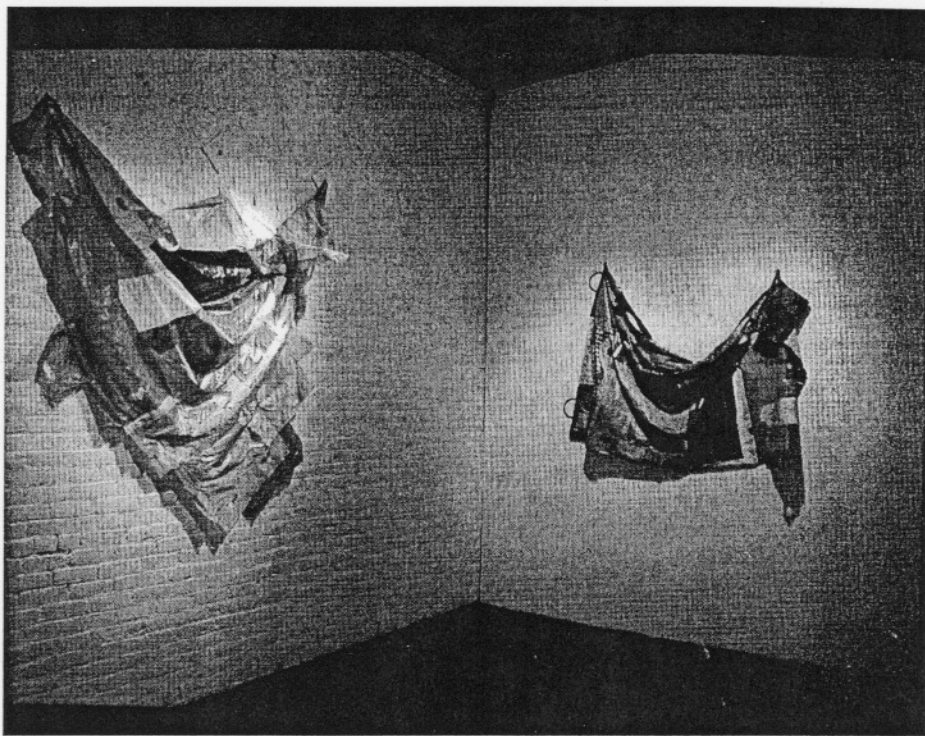
LOS ANGELES

For many reasons, Los Angeles is a great place to see art. Being second to New York in terms of volume and prestige makes the art scene here try harder while simultaneously allowing it the freedom to succeed grandly or fail miserably. If nothing else, the L.A. art world is boldly experimental, wildly diverse and lots of fun. While this playful and provocative spirit is evident all over town, it is especially so in the galleries off the beaten path, those in Echo Park, Chinatown and our funky industrial downtown. In the funkiest of funky downtown are three exhibitions at Post (July 7—August 11) that exemplify what is best about artmaking here. Fiercely independent, thoughtful and playful, the solo shows "Bag" by DIANNA COHEN, "City" by JAIME SCHOLNICK and the group show VINYL are all connected by their use of plastic materials, transformed in beautiful, profound and unexpected ways.

In "Bag," Cohen takes plastic shopping bags and cuts and sews them together to create "paintings" of considerable beauty. Some are draped, hanging in folds and mimicking textile designs, while others lie flat resembling flags, banners and maps. Each is a meticulously crafted juxtaposition of color, form and symbol and suggests the unforeseen power of this otherwise disposable and ubiquitous item. Having served first as container of commodity, the polyethylene is given a new life as commentator on art history and our commercially disposable culture. *Los Ojos* (2001) is a 60 by 45 inch work made up of some two dozen square pieces of bags of various hues. Yellow, black, green, orange and red fragments overlap and are sewn into a crazy-quilt pattern that simultaneously suggests an aerial map, carpet and flag. With a wink towards Modernism through her repetition of the grid and square, Cohen shuffles the art history deck and comes up with truly original works of art.

Jaime Scholnick's exhibition "City" consists of towers of stacked, multicolored plastic cones. The stacks are of varying heights and arranged on the floor and it is easy to envision them as skyscrapers from some alien or Lilliputian city. These colorful stacks are jammed pretty close together and fill a third of the gallery, creating a densely populated, crowded metropolis that is beautiful and funny and slightly weird. The cones themselves resemble cheap 16-ounce tumblers found at the local 99 Cent store, making the construction funny and familiar. The strangeness arises from the intensity and composition of the "city" that suggests geological stalagmites and a futuristic, crowded skyline. The beauty is in the overall effect of the work, an undulating sea of color and form rising from the gallery floor.

The group show "Vinyl" brings together the works of Ashley Thorner, Roland Reiss,



Dianna Cohen, left: *Rose*, 2001, plastic bags, handles and thread, 76 by 72 inches; right: *Post Consumer Mandela*, 2001, plastic bags, handles and thread, 48 by 67 inches (photo courtesy POST Gallery).

Martin Durazo, Osvaldo Trujillo, Adam Prentiss plus Cohen and Scholnick. Reis pulls vinyl over traditional stretcher bars and applies small colorful patches of the same to the surface. Resembling a child's Colorform kit, the odd little shapes float on the bright, monochromatic "canvas". Though a bit too controlled, they expand the meaning of acrylic painting. Ashley Thorner's works suggest both organic forms and alien creatures. *Green Love Lotus* (2000) is a mass of hollow green forms, clustered together like giant, dried seed pods while *Blue Ball* (2001) and *Pink Ball* (2001) are clear plexi globes filled with crinkled colored plastic. The mysterious interiors seem like an other-worldly specimen encased in the smooth ball.

Martin Durazo's *Fast and the Furious* (2001) is an entertaining installation of bright colors and lights that could have come from a creative teenager's bedroom and Osvaldo Trujillo's *Life Support* (2001) is a clever ink-on-vinyl schematic drawing detailing a metaphysical power source for a prototype human. While the group show is a mixed bag with nothing but material and ingenuity to connect the works, it is entertaining and intriguing to see the multifarious uses of plastics by such a diverse group of artists.

Contemporary art often incorporates inorganic and non-traditional materials, but plastics remain stubbornly synonymous with disposable commodity. Ironically, these same materials may be best for artmaking since they don't

degrade. Just try to imagine a world without plastics—no artificial heart valves, foam coffee cups, computers or spandex! Plastics are simultaneously one of our greatest inventions and liabilities and just because they are inexpensive and easy to use is no hindrance to using them creatively.

Thomas McGovern
Los Angeles

PORTLAND

Trench, JULIA FENTON's room-sized installation at Mark Woolley Gallery (September 6–29), set out to confront the outmoded taboos that cling to women's bodies—or, more precisely, their bodily secretions. With a quiet and elegant economy, Fenton, a veteran Feminist artist, art activist and founding editor of *Art Papers Magazine*, transformed the south gallery into a cross between a Buddhist temple and a Saks Fifth Avenue window display. Three spare wooden structures commanded the space around shallow gold-, silver- and copper-plated basins containing mixtures of menstrual blood and breast milk. Each was topped off with a thick crust of amber beeswax incised with a central gash, the "trench" of the title. Matte black heat lamps held in place by black conduits snaking up the walls and across the ceiling hov-