Los Angeles: A Different Look At A Different City

A conference organized by Guy Bennett, Béatrice Mousli & François Nida

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Located at the intersection of the spectacle and the spectacular, Los Angeles is known throughout the world, but more often than not only superficially. As presented on both the big and little screens, the Southern Californian megacity is the epitome of excess, glitz, and violence, with little else to distinguish it. This conference proposes a more nuanced view of Los Angeles, one that looks beyond the clichés typically evoked to describe it. In a series of panels focusing on politics, urban design, literature, and cinema, we will offer a different look at a different city.

Panels

Fine Arts

If we were to draw up a list of the "art capitals" of the 20th century, Paris, Berlin, and New York, would all come to mind, but Los Angeles would not, as it is better known for its contributions to popular culture than to the field of fine arts. That said, a number of world renowned artists live in this city and are have created a body of work that is identified with it.

Is there an Angelino art and, if so, how might we describe it? Can we speak of a "school" or "aesthetic" that would define it? Does it have a specificity that would distinguish it from art made in other cities or other socio-cultural contexts?

- Hal Glicksman (Curator, gallery director)
- Sophie Dannenmüller (Curator, art scholar)
- John Humble (Artist, photographer)
- Catherine Grenier [Beaubourg, Curator of the Beaubourg exhibit on Contemporary L.A. art, spring 2006]

Literature and Poetry

Los Angeles is better known for the films, television programs, and records produced there. However, Los Angeles is also a center of literary activity, with its own publishers, magazines, readings, and related literary events. Though less visible, they are an integral part of the city’s cultural landscape.

What is the status of literature in Los Angeles? What place does it occupy in the cultural production of the city? How can we describe the current "literary scene" there? What is it like to write, translate, and publish in Los Angeles?

Moderator : Guy Bennett

- Sophie Rachmuhl [Los Angeles Literary scene, 1980-1990]
Poetry reading

This event will feature French and American poets reading work that in one way or another focuses on the city of Los Angeles. The poetry of Angeleno writers, presented in the English original and in French translation, will alternate with that of their French colleagues, offering a dual vision of the city.

- Michel Bulteau
- Jean-Michel Espitallier
- Christophe Fiat
- Paul Vangelisti
- Guy Bennett
- Jérôme Game,

Architecture, Urban Design, History

Los Angeles is often described as an "ugly," "shapeless" city lacking the coherent architecture and well-defined limits of a "real" city. Compared to cities built on more traditional urban models (Boston, New York, San Francisco, etc.), Los Angeles does seem strange and difficult to come to terms with.

What is the material (urban, architectural) history of this "city which is not a city"? How can we define its character/specificity with respect to architecture and urban design? What can Los Angeles teach us about what is (or is not) a city? To what extent can it be said to represent the model of an "alternative city"?

Moderator?

- Bruce Bégout (Zéropolis, Lieu commun, L’éblouissement des bords de route)
- Norman Klein (The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory, Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles, 1920-86 (CD-rom interactif)).
Politics, Diversity, Sociology

A hub of immigration, the city of Los Angeles has attracted hundreds of thousands of people from around the world: from Latin America, of course, but also from Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa, not to mention those who have immigrated there from elsewhere in the United States.

What is the history of cultural or ethnic diversity in Los Angeles and what role has it played in the political development of the city? Is Los Angeles any different with respect to the exploitation (in both the positive and negative senses of that word) of its ethnic diversity than other similar cities, whether in the U.S. (New York or Miami, for example) or in Europe (Paris, Madrid, London, etc.), and if so how?

Moderator: ?

- Cynthia Ghorra-Gobin [Los Angeles: Le mythe américain inachevé, CNRS editions]
- Director of the Center for American Studies, Institut des Sciences Politiques, Paris
- Fernando Guerra, [Center for the Study of Los Angeles, LMU]
- Kevin Starr [historien, USC]

Cinema

The capital of American cinema, Los Angeles often stars in the films made there, at times playing the role of the anonymous “big city,” at others appearing in all its specificity. In some cases, Los Angeles itself becomes the focal point for dramas whose action couldn’t take place elsewhere without changing the nature of the work.

What is the image of Los Angeles as presented in the films we watch? To what extent does this representation reflect the reality of the city? What does its cinematic representation tell us about the city?

Moderator: N.T. Bihn

- Bill Krohn
- Jean-Loup Bourget

Screening of the film of Thom Andersen, « Los Angeles Plays Itself »