

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Artforum  
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## Best of 2009

By [MICHAEL NED HOLTE](#)

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MICHAEL NED HOLTE, A FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO ARTFORUM, IS A VISITING FACULTY MEMBER AT THE CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF THE ARTS. HE COLLABORATED ON THE TEXT FOR ALEXIS MARGUERITE TEPLIN'S THE PARTY, A PLAY PERFORMED IN SEPTEMBER 2009 AT THE SERPENTINE GALLERY, LONDON, AND IS CURRENTLY ORGANIZING THE EXHIBITION "SUPPORT GROUP," OPENING IN MAY 2010 AT THOMAS SOLOMON GALLERY AT COTTAGE HOME, LOS ANGELES.

1 Larry Johnson (Hammer Museum, Los Angeles) Situated between Warhol's cool remove and TMZ's stalker embrace, Johnson's photographs "to be looked at and/or read" don't celebrate celebrity so much as they frame its simultaneous fantasy and banality. (Painfully fitting, then, that the King of Pop OD'd the same week this overdue retrospective opened.) Again and again, Johnson nails the duality of Hollywood as idyllic imago and boulevard of broken dreams. Wisely including several slight variations of similar works--a series of snowcapped landscapes with textfilled panels, for example--curator Russell Ferguson foregrounded the artist's investment in repetition and his wicked time-release humor. Now that Johnson is finally getting some attention, let's hope this notoriously elusive character stays in the picture.

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2 William E. Jones, "Le Grand Mash Up" (REDCAT, Los Angeles) Trawling the overlapping boundaries of art, film, and porn, Jones has unearthed an astonishing archive--mostly forgotten VHS tapes--that furnishes the raw material for his affecting meditations on sites of desire, from anonymous warehouses in Los Angeles to shabby late-Communist domestic interiors in Eastern Europe. For this one-night-only screening, organized by Berenice Reynaud, he debuted two startling new videos--Discrepancy (A New All Around Leap Forward Situation Is Emerging) and Discrepancy (Countdown), both 2009--side by side, with a shared, discordant sound track: a computer voice reading Isidore Isou's manifesto demanding a "revolt against cinema." Jones is answering his own call.

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3 Simone Forti (The Box, Los Angeles) This miniretrospective mingled photo and video documentation of Forti's influential dance works, such as *Huddle*, 1961, with drawings, archival material, and even a hologram. In *To Borrow Salt*, 2009, a new performance inaugurating the show, Forti and her ensemble fluidly shifted between two rooms and the gallery's basement, combining movement, autobiographical text, and improvised play. The free-ranging spectators inevitably missed some of the activity, though I was lucky enough to see Forti throw her graceful septuagenarian body onto the floor while growling like a wild animal.

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4 Elad Lassry (David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles) Although Lassry's enigmatic, seductive pictures are usually taken in the studio, his subjects--food, animals, carefully posed models, tasteful arrangements of found objects--evoke the more enigmatic results of a Google image search for "commercial photography." (Try it.) Still, in this age of ephemeral-image overload, Lassry's photos are specific objects--modestly scaled but intensified with matchy-matchy frames or altered with collaged "zips"--that slow down the process of looking. So does *Untitled*, 2009, a 16-mm moving picture (featuring Eric Stoltz) that hovers, ecstatically, at the verge of stillness.

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5 "Video Journeys" (Sister at Cottage Home, Los Angeles) A group video show is usually a recipe for disaster, but this one (at the gallery formerly known as Sister, now Kathryn Brennan, in a space, Cottage Home, used by several Chinatown galleries on a rotating basis) was that rare potluck that totally satisfied. Ten sculptors were invited to create "viewing stations" for ten videos, and the results were remarkably different--and often playfully antagonistic. Justin Beal trapped Cal Crawford's paranoid animation of concentric circles on a surveillance monitor mounted to a pedestal with stretch wrap, while Ry Rocklen's undulating shell of plastered carpet threatened to swallow the laptop playing Paul Slocum's contribution. Eric Wesley simply burned DVD copies of Paul Pfeiffer's creepy *Sex Machine*, 2001, and placed a stack of them on the front counter as freebies, efficiently signaling the mutable nature of the medium.

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6 Carter Mull/Jennifer West (Marc Foxx Gallery, Los Angeles) In these two ambitious solo shows, several months apart but at the same gallery, Mull and West exploited media-- photography and film, respectively--in transition from analog to digital. In both cases, one might easily have fixated on the signs of abstraction, abundant as they

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were, but even more compelling were the outbursts of narrative incident just below the surface: for Mull, the hallucinatory reverberations of a rebuslike city as inscribed in the Los Angeles Times; for West, the (re-) enactment of urban myths fueled by the intoxicating substances of pop culture.

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7 "Dan Graham: Beyond" (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York) Curators Bennett Simpson and Chrissie Iles organized this retrospective with such elegance that Graham's wildly divergent concerns--from magazine layout to film installation, architectural maquette to feature-length documentary--seemed almost too tidily connected. This is, after all, the artist who recently claimed the unexpected relationship of shimmering corporate architecture and psychedelic drugs as the inspiration for his spacey mirrored pavilions. Among the works were a bizarre new didactic panel and a slide show by Graham that revealed a number of his influences--an unusually modest and slightly embarrassing gesture, though one could, of course, imagine a longer list of the artists working in Graham's substantial shadow.

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8 Shio Kusaka (Shane Campbell Gallery, Los Angeles) Kusaka's objects resemble vernacular vessels--teacups, planters, vases--from Japan and elsewhere. And yeah, these pots are functional, but the Los Angeles-based artist's formal concerns--line versus volume, surface play, repetition and difference--situate the work squarely in the lineage of perceptually driven West Coast abstraction stretching from John McLaughlin to Roy McMakin and prove that this family tree is still producing vital offshoots.

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9 Shannon Ebner, *The Sun as Error* (coordinated by Dexter Sinister; Los Angeles County Museum of Art) Ebner's oversize book, a collaboration with Dexter Sinister, is a critical if slightly perverse take on the "coffee-table" genre--one that short-circuits but doesn't negate the pleasure of paging through a sequence of images. The associative process of the book's construction is legible but also open-ended, succinctly positioning Ebner's project as an ongoing mediation of the sign as it is lost and found in the complex entanglement of image, object, and text.

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10 Richard Hawkins, Entropy Place (Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles) Leave it to misanthrope Hawkins to capture the contagious gloom of the art world this year in a single, pitch-perfect work: Entropy Place, 2009, a tabletop scale model-cum-allegory of two deserted Chinatown galleries shortly after the great collapse, cheerily painted in red, green, and pink and adorned with heartbreaking little signs reading for rent in "Oriental" calligraphy. Like Hawkins's recent series of haunted dollhouses, the stores' ceilings are outfitted with Christmas lights. And the electricity is still on: the audacity of hope?

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