



DRAMATIC ARTS

Sparked by classical theater, artist Elliott Hundley fuses a dizzying array of media in his epicly scaled, deeply immersive tableaux

Stepping into Elliott Hundley's Los Angeles studio is a lot like standing before one of his monumental wall-hung assemblages—you're not quite sure where to look first. Both are laden with a kaleidoscopic mix of seductive images and mysterious items, and both reward closer inspection.

A native of North Carolina, the artist began attracting savvy collectors—among them Eli Broad and Peter Brant—shortly after receiving his MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles in 2005. A solo show of his work at the Hammer Museum a year later introduced viewers to his enigmatic combinations of painting, sculpture, collage, and photography in a densely imbricated installation. That display also revealed many of his signature themes, including antiquity, theater, and other subjects that have captivated Hundley since his five-year sojourn in Rome before graduate school.

"The shock of seeing so many historic epochs collapsed in a single building or street was astonishing," he says of his experience abroad. "I was making gestural abstract paintings at the time, but the energy of Rome really spurred my interest in narrative art."

Storytelling is essential to his practice, as evidenced by his celebrated series "The Bacchae," a rapturous fugue on Euripides' tale of ecstasy and violence. After building sets for his imaginary production of the play and photographing friends and family as the characters, Hundley incorporated the images into hallucinatory tableaux he refers to as "billboards," which are also embellished with thousands of found objects, magazine clippings, sequins, flowers, text passages, and magnifying glasses—all obsessively layered and secured with glue and an army of straight pins that extends the picture plane outward into three dimensions. The

Clockwise from top left: Artist Elliott Hundley in his Los Angeles studio with a group of works in progress. *Soon . . .* (2012). *Untitled* (2012). *A Clearing IV* (2009). For details see Sources.

series debuted at New York's Andrea Rosen Gallery and L.A.'s Regen Projects before traveling to museums.

Hundley promises that his next show, at Andrea Rosen later this spring, will reveal the behind-the-scenes action of his pretend production. "It's as if the curtain came down on *The Bacchae* and now you're backstage," he explains of the new work, which—as usual for him—will span multiple media. The play, it seems, is still the thing. —MAYER RUS

“Elliott Hundley: The Bacchae”

NASHER SCULPTURE CENTER
DALLAS
Through April 22
Curated by Christopher Bedford

Ambitious, dramatic, and earnestly personal, Elliott Hundley’s assemblage-based practice is forged from ancient narratives and contemporary realities, sublimating notorious characters and plotlines into cyclonic images or structures. “The Bacchae” will feature a dozen works made in the past two years, all drawing from Euripides’s tragedy. Including quasi-figurative sculpture and billboard-size prints, paintings, and collages, this body of work breaks down the revenge story into discrete elements—gendered accoutrements of bacchic ritual are poised like spindly shipwrecks on the gallery floor; a semiabstract portrait of Pentheus renders the young man at once whole and torn to pieces at his mother’s hands. And with essays by curator Christopher Bedford, poet and classicist Anne Carson, critic Doug Harvey, and art historian Richard Meyer, the accompanying catalogue should further tempt the imagination, providing rich perspectives on Hundley’s modern-day interpretations of the classics.

— Catherine Taft



Elliott Hundley, The Lightning's Bride (detail), 2011 six panels, wood, sound board, ink-jet print, on Kitakata paper, pins, paper, plastic, magnifying lenses, metal, photographs, wire, found paintings, 8' 3" x 24' 1 1/4" x 1' 7".

Elliott Hundley

REGEN PROJECTS

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“Semele,” Elliott Hundley’s latest exhibition and his second interpretation of the themes and interpersonal dramas in Euripedes’s *The Bacchae*, again showcases his characteristic conflation of collage with painting and sculpture, and his even more compelling blend of visual art with textual narrative, to wondrous, decadent effect. His assemblage materials—gold leaf, shredded tapestries, metal wires, pine cones, and lobster legs, to mention only a few—have a luxurious, fertile irony and drag sensibility as symbols of the debauched Greek tragedy’s focus on a spurned Dionysus’s return to his birthplace to violently avenge his mother, Semele.

The show is made up of three monumental, multipaneled collage paintings and three wispy, precariously balanced sculptures whose messy, scavenged ephemera resemble bowerbirds’ nests or wrecked kites. On the wall furthest from the gallery’s entrance, two loosely rendered, abstract oil paintings provide a tertiary introduction to Hundley’s fantastic, theatrical imagination. They are like color keys or tonal studies for the other pieces that are more immediately demanding of the viewer’s attention for their figurative and macro/micro scale experiments.

Hundley’s effort to display what he has called “the narrative of production” works best, though, not in the abstract paintings but in the large wall works, where he litters sweeping compositions with excruciatingly detailed minutiae (thousands of beads, sequins, and found objects) pinned delicately to flat surfaces. Notably, these pieces are bejeweled with images he shot of his friends campily re-enacting *The Bacchae*, as if to channel Jack Smith or Derek Jarman. Formally, each wall work transcends its Greek connection with its devotion to an element: For example, *eyes that run like leaping fire* (all works 2011) feels fiery for its red color scheme, and the fierce, warlike imagery aerated by a layer of rainbow fringe obscuring

the surface’s pictorial frieze. *The Lightning’s Bride* undulates with watery blues and purple motifs, while earth is represented in the *high house low!*, a copper-leaved, volcanic explosion of terrestrial imagery ranging from gems and minerals to architectural ruins to photos of a person stomping through a landscape. Just as the bricolage panels beg to be seen from afar and up close, Hundley’s exhibition embraces paradoxical slippages between romance and horror, violence and ecstasy, and gender binaries, not to mention antiquity and modernity.

— Trinie Dalton

Interview

ART

Tragic Birthing

By ASHLEY W. SIMPSON 05/24/2011 12:15 PM



For the past five years, Los Angeles–based collage artist Elliott Hundley has been working his way through the Greek tragedies. It’s a messy, compositional project, complete with Hellenic choruses typified in ransom-note-style magazine clippings. This month, Hundley will turn his near-epic vision to the weight of Dionysus’s mother with his show “Semele,” opening at West Hollywood’s Regen Projects. “Expect the usual photographs, paper, pins, wire, bamboo, and foam,” the 36-year-old artist says. “But also embroidered robes, hand-woven chicken wire, Mylar fringe, and plastic luau skirts.” Leave it to the 21st-century Rauschenberg—our god of post-sculptural decadence—to rope in and reevaluate Euripides’s excess.



Elliott Hundley: *Agave*, 2010, wood, photographs, pins and mixed mediums, 96 by 192 1/2 by 14 1/2 inches; at Andrea Rosen.

ELLIOTT HUNDLEY ANDREA ROSEN

Elliott Hundley, in his second show at this gallery, expanded his more-is-more esthetic to great effect. Titled “Agave of *The Bacchae*,” the exhibition was intended as a visual exploration of themes in the play by Euripides. Five paintings and three sculptures (all 2010) gave new life to the term bricolage, with all kinds of materials attached to surfaces by means of pins, glue and what appear to be long specimen needles. Tiny bits of images, sticks and a bull’s horn are fair game, as are found paintings, sequins and elaborate ransom-note-style sentences (sometimes the length of short stories). The paintings resemble ‘80s Neo-Expressionism at its wildest.

There are narratives implied, along with scientific or philosophical allegories and fantastic extremes of ornamentation. The large-scale *Dionysus*, 8 feet high and 16 feet wide, includes such materials as soundboard, inkjet prints, kitakata paper, photographs, found paintings and the bull’s

horn. A monklike man, bald and robed (Dionysus arriving from the East?), is seen four times in four panels, elevated above a landscape teeming with activity. Tiny naked men convene in a circle, and hundreds of the specimen needles pierce the surface at graduating angles, creating a wave effect. The whole glows a brassy amber-to-orange. The work feels familiar in its elements, yet one senses that, in its totality, the imagery has never been seen before and cannot quite be apprehended. Aside from the connection to *The Bacchae*, the narrative seems to jump around in time, like episodes in early Persian painting or scenes collaged in an epic movie poster.

Agave is similarly grand, materially lush, and also has a cast of thousands. It culminates on the right side with the image of a woman, saintly or mystical, with an aura around her head. She is making a theatrical gesture while holding a rainbow-colored garland. Perhaps this is Agave herself, who in *The Bacchae* kills her own son during Dionysian rites but realizes it only when she sobers up.

Hundley’s work has been compared to Rauschenberg’s and Twombly’s, but Schnabel feels more apt than Rauschenberg. Insofar as Twombly consistently references ancient Greek myth and theater, as does Hundley (in his titles and sheer extravagance), that comparison seems reasonable. Still, it is in the sculptures that we feel a stronger relationship to Twombly. *Thyrus for Ino* (7 by 5 1/2 by 4 1/2 feet) cantilevers interlocked metal spheres and a conflagration of wood strips, paper and paint off one side of a four-legged, twisting piece of driftwood. In all of Hundley’s work the metaphor is massive and crosses boundaries of time, taste, tragedy and stuff a housekeeper won’t touch.
-Stephen Mueller



ELLIOTT HUNDLEY NEW YORK

Elliott Hundley's exhibition *Agave of the Bacchae* draws from Euripides' tragedy *Bacchae*, a play about the power struggle between the god Dionysus and King Pentheus, who is ultimately killed by his own mother and a band of Dionysus' female worshipers [Andrea Rosen Gallery; March 19—May 1, 2010].

In Hundley's installation—a stage set, where the works stand in for places and characters from the play—the artist explores the “disintegration of old systems of belief and the creation of new ones, questioning the boundaries between intellect and emotion, reality and imagination, reason and madness.”

The play's excess, exaggeration, ecstasy, and exuberance become the perfect subjects for Hundley's explorations. The artist is known for layering his canvases with cutout figures, shapes, and fragments from advertisements. Self-generated or collected from a myriad of appropriated sources, these bits of ephemera are pinned to the surface with varying lengths of gold or silver flathead pins and extend out into the space, giving the three-dimensional collages an undulating depth. As Hundley explores the borderline between two and three-dimension, the works exist on many planes and become architectural in scale.

Text from Euripides' play is scattered throughout the backgrounds of *Agave*, 2010, *Dionysus*, 2010, and *Pentheus*, 2010, like a ransom note. Overlays of large-scale studio photographs feature actors and friends enacting the drama. These are, however, obscured and fragmented by the text. Smaller images of the actors and pictures cut from magazines dot the surface—each is attached to the substrate with a long pin from which strings and bits of cloth often dangle. Magnifying glasses extend from the surface of *Pentheus*, allowing more detailed views of specific aspects. The works attempt to make order from the chaos of accumulation as the elements decorating the surface create new shapes and patterns. Similar colors and images are positioned in relation to each other, further obfuscating the image.

Stained Cithairon, 2010, a seemingly-simple, large, yellow-toned painting depicting the mountain where King Pentheus was killed, offers a bit of respite from these dense mixed-media works. Full of symbolism and history, this yellow field becomes a plane for imagined events. Three sculptures evoke thyrsuses—plant-like shafts made from pinecone-topped vines. Atop bases made from pieces of knotted wood, gold-toned plant forms, ribbons, and fragments of paper hang from a lattice of interlocking bamboo, plastic, and metal rods. Bursts of energy emanate from a shaft. They stand for *Agave* and her sisters, Ino and Autonoe, and represent the play of sexuality.

Hundley uses Greek mythology to endow his works with layers of meaning and multiple interpretations. If the *Bacchae* “explores the boundaries between reason and ecstasy and the complicated nexus of justice and violence,” Hundley pushes the limits of this exploration through the juxtaposition of image and text. His *bricolage* is an attempt to fuse antiquity with the modern world. He begins with historic themes and stories, recreating them in his studio. He then assembles text, original photographs of costumed and naked actors, scores of appropriated images including car tires, comic strip text bubbles, scantily clad models, abstract shapes, and body parts, weaving together the past and the present. The frenzy produced by these images makes it difficult to know where to look. Focusing on a fragment reveals a world unto itself and is a delight to behold. Yet, because there is so much to take in, it is impossible for the fragments to add up. The works coalesce in our mind's eye from afar and draw us in. From then on, it is difficult to move away. Hundley, the seducer, indulges in presenting incomplete narratives made from disparate literary sources that resonate because they make popular culture more than the sum of its parts.

—Jody Zellen

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Elliott Hundley, installation view of *Agave of the Bacchae* at Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, March 19—May 1, 2010 (© Elliott Hundley, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, photo: Jason Mandella):

Art review

Elliott Hundley, “Agave of the Bacchae”

A contemporary artist finds inspiration in classical Greek tragedy. By Michael Wilson

Andrea Rosen Gallery, through Sat 1

Pentheus

Photographs: Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery



Unless your name happens to be Cy Twombly, it must take a good deal of guts to produce epic art about classical Greek tragedy a decade into the 21st century. Yet Elliott Hundley does exactly that in the two paintings, three sculptures and three expansive collage works on display in his second New York solo exhibition, demonstrating a fulsome enthusiasm for his storied source.

Focusing in particular on Euripides' *The Bacchae*, the Los Angeles artist weaves a fiendishly complex set of images, objects and textual fragments around the ancient drama. But while titling each work wholly or partially after a central character therein, he aims—sensibly—at a subjective interpretation of the play's conceptual and emotional landscape rather than a literal illustration of its narrative.

Agave, Dionysus and Pentheus, the collages that are the show's most absorbing components, envelop the viewer in dazzling, kaleidoscopic patchwork quilts of color and detail, each the result of a multistage layering process in which Hundley's original photographs of unidentified performers are printed large scale on rice paper, then bejeweled with thousands of cutout words and pictures. Often these bits are affixed with long, golden pins, turning the surfaces into dazzling pincushions; in *Pentheus*, strategically placed magnifying glasses additionally provide selective glimpses into the depths of the work. More so than the comparatively slight canvases and freestanding pieces, this is art that repays long and repeated looking, reflecting the profundity and incompleteness—key sections of *The Bacchae* have been lost to time—of their formidable inspiration.

ART

AROUND THE GALLERIES

Deftly playing with art history

DAVID PAGEL

Elliott Hundley's fantastic exhibition takes visitors on head-spinning trips that go every which way. Stopping off in such unlikely places as dumpsters, thrift stores and ancient Greek stages, the young artist's paintings, sculptures, collages, photographs and odd combinations of all these media transform forlorn leftovers into stunning tableaux. A blood-drenched tragedy from 2,000 years ago is brought up to the minute, its heartless vengeance and searing anguish making a month of the nightly news look like a walk in the park.

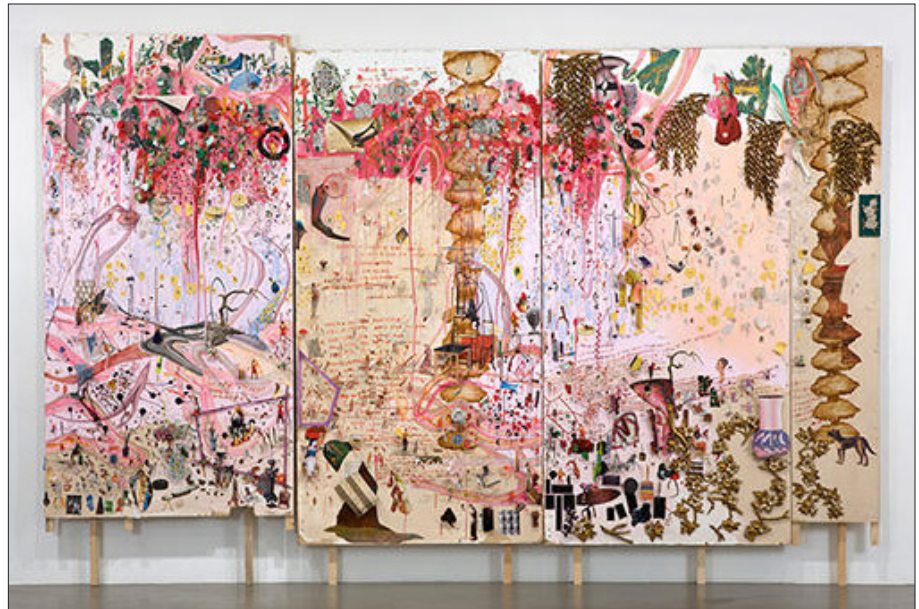
Titled "Hekabe," after a wildly violent tragedy by Euripides, Hundley's solo show at Regen Projects II -- his second in Los Angeles -- plays so fast, loose and deftly with recent art history that it conjures the formidable spirits of Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly without getting lost in their shadows. The gritty dreaminess of their richly inventive mixes of everyday stuff and soul-expanding fantasy are made even more focused, loaded and potent by Hundley's art without losing any of their scope or generosity.

Hundley's installation makes a virtue of the phrase "begged, borrowed and stolen." The recycled objects and dramas in his work raise pointed questions about the relationship between the individual and the growing mass of humanity that seems to be filling the globe to bursting.

In the entryway, Hundley has hung seven mid-size light boxes that illuminate photographs of his friends pretending to be characters in "Hekabe." There is "Josh as Agamemnon," "Teddy as Polydoros" and "Ivan and Daniel as the Sons of Polymester."

Their costumes are improvised. Some would fit into high-end fashion shoots. Others look as if they were made for a school play. The settings are even more casually adapted: simply the chaos of Hundley's jampacked studio, where he stores his secondhand stuff.

The lighting is charged -- campy, melodramatic, effective. The characters' expressions are unforgettable, suffused with so much pathos, doubt



Regen Project, Los Angeles

COLOR: "Some Poured Leaves Over the Dead Girl" by Elliott Hundley, whose art conjures the spirits of Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly.

and honesty that the trappings of playacting fall away to expose the reality of emotions.

And that's just the prelude. In the main gallery, Hundley has installed three wall reliefs, three big sculptures, two huge landscape paintings and a backlit photograph.

From a distance, the reliefs appear to be gestural abstractions, dramatically composed whorls of color, texture and form. From up close you see that Hundley's pieces are made up of thousands of tiny elements, each stuck with a pin as if part of a misbegotten butterfly collection.

Individual sequins get the same treatment as beads, bangles and all sorts of mini-ornaments. The same goes for snapshot-size pictures of Hundley's friends, sometimes dressed as characters, sometimes nude and always meticulously cut from the photo so that no backgrounds are visible.

Images of chairs, wheels, trees, lamps and umbrellas make for a mix of things that sustain endless interpretations. Individual letters, clipped

from magazines in the manner of old-fashioned ransom notes, spell out lines from "Hekabe" as well as the instructions for Method actor training exercises.

Hundley's 3-D pieces allow him to strut his stuff with greater muscularity. Amid dense layers of dangling, earring-like ornaments, he has crafted idiosyncratic networks of drinking straws fastened together with pins and spray-painted gold. In another piece blusters a windstorm of tiny gold leaves, recycled from piles of costume jewelry.

An actual scythe anchors "Polyxena's Sacrifice," alongside a few interlocked sets of deer antlers, a weighty ceramic vase and a shelf carved from a tree trunk. The facade of Hundley's mongrel mobile resembles several paper kites that have crash-landed.

The show is a hallucinatory treasure hunt. Filled with sorrow and redemption, fragility and strength, anonymity and intimacy, it's among the best of recent memory.

Regen Projects II, 9016 Santa Monica Blvd.,

ART

West Hollywood, (310) 276-5424, through April 4. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.regen-projects.com

Bold works in the fabric of L.A.

As a piece of historical scholarship, "Gallery 32 and Its Circle" is first-rate: an informative time capsule that gathers about 50 works by 20 artists who visited or exhibited at the gallery Suzanne Jackson ran out of her modest apartment in the Granada Building near MacArthur Park from March 15, 1969, to Aug. 30, 1970.

As an art exhibition, it's even better. An impressive number of the works installed at Loyola Marymount University's Laband Art Gallery by director Carolyn Peter and guest curator Damon Willick have not faded with age but are as bold and evocative as they were 40 years ago, when many were first exhibited at the upstart gallery.

Standouts include three haunting body prints by **David Hammons**, five enchanting pieces by **Betye Saar**, a solid figurative assemblage by **John Outterbridge**, a melancholic drawing by **Charles White** and four crisp prints by **Emory Douglas**, who was the minister of culture for the Black Panther Party.

Works by less renowned artists are just as compelling. These include **Timothy Washington's** larger-than-life sculptures, **Joe Van Ramp's** intense little collage, **John Stinson's** exquisitely dense abstractions and **Senga Nengudi's** vinyl sculpture filled with brightly dyed water.

The short-lived gallery gave many African American artists their start. It also provided a forum for discussions about art, life and politics. Jackson ran it while taking drawing classes from White at the nearby Otis Art Institute and making her own works, three of which are displayed. To pay the rent, she danced at a nightclub.

Compared with contemporary venues in the art business, "Gallery 32" may not sound like much. But its effect cannot be measured by sales or headlines. Instead, it is part of the social fabric of Los Angeles, an essential ingredient to the rich mix of city life, past and present.

Laband Art Gallery, Loyola Marymount University, 1 LMU Drive, Westchester, (310) 338-2880, through March 22. Closed Mondays and Tuesdays. cfa.lmu.edu/laband

The shapes of powerlessness

To look at **Dimitri Kozyrev's** five new paintings at the Mark Moore Gallery is to feel as if you're sifting through the rubble of some cataclysm. It's impossible to know if you're looking at the blasted aftermath of a terrorist attack or simply staring at the screen of your laptop as its digital info convulses and freezes before crashing completely.

This whiplash shift from public tragedies to personal frustrations is Kozyrev's specialty. His large-format canvases deliver it with aplomb by confusing the boundaries between feelings and facts. They also make paranoia appear to be a pretty sensible response to the newly global world, in which the horror of powerlessness takes ever-changing shape.

Each of Kozyrev's predominantly abstract paintings splinters the picture-plane. Compositional unity is fractured into jagged fragments that provide faceted, often conflicting perspectives of a world without center.

Sometimes it seems as if you're looking into a landscape dotted with barren trees. At others, your view seems to be interrupted by glitches in the transmission. In all of Kozyrev's conflicted works, solid structures drift into focus only to disintegrate, leaving your desire to stand on terra firma maddeningly unsatisfied.

Each part of each painting is handled differently. Sometimes, the delicacy and detail of super-realistic watercolors predominate. At others, the rough-and-ready messiness of mortar-slathered bricks takes over. Everywhere, the jostling planes of Cubism meet the giddy instantaneousness of the Digital Age.

Kozyrev, currently based in Arizona, was born in 1967 in what used to be the Soviet Union and is now St. Petersburg, Russia. The sense of one system breaking down and another replacing it takes chilling shape in his vertiginous images of profound instability.

Mark Moore Gallery, 2525 Michigan Ave., Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, (310) 453-3031, through March 28. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.markmooregallery.com

There's lyricism in this dark art

The six paintings and four prints in veteran New York artist **Joan Snyder's** L.A. solo debut are vintage Snyder: chewy clots of mismatched materials wrestled into abstract images that are lyrical without being lightweight, visceral without being heavy-handed.

At the Solway-Jones Gallery, the fleshy physicality and broken-bones impact begins with the stuff Snyder uses. Into her gooey mixes of dripping acrylics and runny oils she sprinkles seeds, herbs, twigs, glitter and nails. She contains these stews with nest-like enclosures sculpted from papier-mâché and torn strips of fabric. When they dry, they have the presence of wounded flesh, freshly scabbed over yet too sensitive to touch. Think of these parts of her paintings as scars in the making.

The soaring lyricism in Snyder's otherwise dark art comes through via her capacity to make paint sing. She slaps gestures together with the best of them without wasting a move or missing a beat.

There's a no-nonsense frugality to her funky art, which is nothing if not serious. There's also great pleasure, which comes with the wisdom of knowing what you can do and then doing more than that for reasons you can't quite explain.

It's odd for an artist of Snyder's stature to be having her first solo show in L.A. It's doubly so because her go-it-alone, category-be-damned, DIY-style rhymes so well with so much of the best painting made in L.A.

Solway-Jones Gallery, 990 N. Hill St., No. 180, L.A., (323) 223-0224, through April 11. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.solwayjonesgallery.com

Elliott Hundley at Regen Projects II

By Christopher Miles *Thursday, Mar 19 2009*

As much a master of assemblage as of theatrical showmanship, Elliott Hundley flexes his chops in his first solo show with Regen Projects by dipping into the bloody tragedy of Euripides' *Hekabe*. Hundley re-imagines the tale of grief, retribution, and comeuppance in epic fullness with photo transparencies, paintings, and both sculptures and wall works barnacled together out of — among far too many elements to fully note — architectural fragments, antlers, beads, sequins, textiles, faux flowers, letters cut one-by-one from printed texts, and thousands of tiny figures and other bits carefully clipped from photographs and all affixed with pins as an entomologist would preserve insect specimens.

Hundley's work most obviously descends from miners of urban detritus and pop-cultural loot like Robert Rauschenberg and Joseph Cornell, but he makes more sense counted among West Coast funksters and oddballs like Bruce Conner, William Wiley, and Jess, as well as British "Independent Group" artists like Richard Hamilton and Peter Blake, who with Jann Haworth famously created the Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band album cover. And it's equally hard to look at Hundley's work and not think of Jamie Reid, artist and graphic designer behind the ransom-note aesthetic of Sex Pistols graphics, and Asger Jorn, whose "detourned" paintings — found paintings reworked by the artist — prefigure Hundley's handling of assorted found paintings and objets d'art.

Hundley has structured the exhibition like a theater experience. In the gallery's entryway, one encounters lightboxes, hung in a cluster and functioning like headshots or lobby cards, introducing the players, who turn up in Lilliputian scale in scenes throughout the rest of the show. Here they are big and bold, shot in the artist's cramped studio among the tangles of fodder he uses in his assemblages, and emblazoned in a DIY version of Caravaggio-style lighting.

In the main gallery, two massive squishy/splashy gestural paintings, which would hold their own in a different context, here function unmistakably as backdrops of land, sea, air and architecture. On other walls, panels covered in photo fragments and pieced together texts become plot summary, and the collaged equivalent of the Greek chorus. In the middle are assembled sculptures, both freestanding and dangling from cables, serving as both sets and players. These have about them the simultaneous blunt presence of a mastodon in a china shop, the delicacy of box kites, and loft and lilt of clouds.

And good theater it is — distracting, immersive — so much so that it demands repeat visits — and relevant in that way the ancients have of reminding us they still are. Hundley's achievement is on the scale of a grand revival and a brilliant contemporary adaptation — lovely, clever, poignant, staggering.



Elliott Hundley, *Terror On Terror, Disaster I Dreamed* (2009)

Regen Projects II, 9016 Santa Monica Blvd., W. Hlywd.; Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m.-6 p.m., through April 4. (310) 276-5424 or www.regenprojects.com.

Assemblage Required

Elliott Hundley's sculptures take collage to the next dimension.

Portrait by AMANDA MARSALIS



Above: A detail from Hundley's *Deathless Aphrodite of the Spangled Mind*, 2003, plastic, paper, color photographs, pins and wire. Right: Elliott Hundley in his studio.

“He was already a very mature artist,” says Gary Garrels of Hundley in his grad-school days.

To cross the threshold of artist Elliott Hundley's studio in a former factory building in downtown Los Angeles is to enter a distinctive and seemingly complete ecosystem of the artist's imagination. A taxonomy of all that exists there would fill pages, but it is an environment of exuberant fecundity, densely layered like a rainforest, and it includes such varied objects as silk flowers, marble obelisks, peacock feathers, yard-sale art, reproductions of Old Master paintings, strings of beads, a shopping bag decorated by Jack Pierson (*YOU ARE ALLOWED 2 TOUCH THINGS*, it reads) and tiny cutout pictures of Hundley and his friends, often naked. Delicate bamboo armatures that may someday become one of Hundley's critically acclaimed sculptures hang from the 30-foot ceiling, while underfoot lies a thick layer of paper scraps, pictures cut from magazines and shards of this or that. Hundley, who is a quiet presence amid the creative chaos, refers to the studio as “a mulch pit.”

It's an apt metaphor, because the 32-year-old's work—already the subject of solo shows at the Hammer Museum at UCLA and the Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York—feels, to a rare degree, like something dislodged from where it grew, as if a tropical orchid had been plucked from a moss-encrusted branch and hung on a collector's wall.

“Hopefully when a work is taken to the gallery, some residue of the studio is taken with it,” says Hundley. “It's like a net that caught something on its way out the door. You look at the autonomous object and you know it's extracted from a much larger visual narrative.”

Hundley—whose work is on view at the Hammer again in May as part of the “Eden's Edge” show—is something of an L.A. sensation. Top local gallerists vied futilely to sign him even before he received his M.F.A. from UCLA in 2005, and both the Museum of Contemporary Art and super-collector Dakis Joannou bought early pieces. “He was already a very mature artist,” says Gary Garrels, chief curator and deputy director of exhibitions and public programs at the Hammer. “You sense the preciseness of the decision making and the very considered formal control, yet there's also a sense of intuition, of freedom and spontaneity.”

Hundley's work is sculptural but not bound to the traditional plinth. His technique includes assemblage and collage, and he works with a limitless palette of images and objects, often lightly affixing them to an armature with straight pins.

“In my work, I don't believe there is an inevitability to the final form,” says Hundley, who sits very still and speaks with steady deliberation. “I think that

there are simply compelling resolutions, but any piece could be reconfigured into another composition that could be equally as compelling.”

Hundley left his native North Carolina to study at the Rhode Island School of Design and went to Rome as part of a RISD study-abroad program. “It was sort of stunning, but in a literal sense, like I was stunned,” he recalls of his first visit to the Eternal City. After graduation, he returned for a four-year sojourn and found inspiration in the frescoes of Pompeii's Villa of the Mysteries and in Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Theresa* at the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria. “That's like the precursor to installation art,” he says.

Back in the States, Hundley found his “voice” by collaging the walls of his mother's house and enrolled at UCLA. Today his work includes portraits and images of family and friends, but it's not quite autobiographical. Like Robert Rauschenberg's *Combines*, notes Garrels, Hundley's art embraces the continuum of Western culture and confidently proposes a place for the artist amid that dusty pantheon.

“He retains a sense of hope against the abyss of history and a freedom of invention against all that has come before,” explains the curator. While that may sound heady and suggest that Hundley is overly earnest—especially alongside ironic jokesters such as Damien Hirst or Tom Sachs—the artist himself doesn't indulge in academic pretensions. He notes that his technique is familiar to any bored teenager who ever stuck a picture to his bedroom wall. “Anybody can cut out something and pin paper onto foam,” he says. “Philosophically I think it's nice. There's no mystique about a secret technique I have.”

—KEVIN WEST



ART: ELLIOTT HUNDLEY/COURTESY OF THE HAMMER MUSEUM

Art

Elliott Hundley

★★★★★

Andrea Rosen Gallery through April 21 (See Chelsea)

The ambitious New York debut of young L.A. artist Elliott Hundley combines painting, collage and sculpture, and demonstrates both the potential and the pitfalls of the “everything but the kitchen sink” approach to making art.

The wall-mounted assemblage *After Medea’s Craft*, for example, nods to Greek mythology, Wallace Stevens, reggae lyrics, late Matisse and Robert Rauschenberg (to whose “Combines” Hundley’s work owes a big debt). A short list of the materials in the branchlike *Garland* includes an end table, a bamboo chair, broken china, painted straws and botanical illustrations. In this particular case, Hundley’s bricolage yields a work that’s merely pleasantly decorative, in which the connections between floral motifs and the sculpture’s appearance remain fairly simplistic.

More successful pieces like *Alphaeus* (named for the father of the apostles James and Matthew) fuse material, reference and structure in richly associative ways. Architectural renderings and diagrams of cat’s cradles combine with photos of naked and seminude male models to culminate in a lyrically beautiful, conceptually coherent object charged with homoeroticism.

In the poem cited in *After Medea’s Craft*, Stevens writes of a beauty that transcends thought; for all his intellectual acrobatics, Hundley is after a similar experience. When his work is at its best, the show’s complex pileup of references is subsumed by an almost magical visual pleasure.

— *Joshua Mack*



Bible Themes, Exploded Seagulls, Tiny Nudes: Chelsea Galleries

By Katya Kazakina

March 22, 2007 (Bloomberg) -- Danish painter Maja Lisa Engelhardt approaches her abstract landscapes as if each were a battle.

"I fight with my brushes, I fight with my hands," said Engelhardt at the opening of her new show, "The Second Day," at Elizabeth Harris Gallery in Manhattan.

Engelhardt, who's tall and energetic, explores the second day of creation as told in Genesis, when the water was separated from the firmament, with 18 works in acrylic on linen. Ranging in size from 3-by-4 feet to 7-by-8 feet, these turbulent, moody pieces are layered with brushstrokes. In some paintings, you can detect baby blue or pale yellow underneath the murky accumulations. In others, dark red and flaming orange dominate.

The artist, who paints in Paris, starts with several preparatory layers that make the rough linen skin-smooth. The contrast between this silky background and torrid brushstrokes creates tension -- as does the combination of her mostly stormy palette with occasional bright or pastel color.

Paintings are priced from \$12,000 to \$40,000. The show is on view through April 14 at 529 W. 20th St.; +1-212-463-9666; <http://www.eharrisgallery.com>.

Exploding Seagulls

A three-artist show, "Stranger Than Fiction," at RareArt Properties Inc. could not have had a better title.

Its centerpiece is an installation by Johnston Foster of 100 seagulls suspended from the ceiling as if in mid-flight.

The birds, made of white plastic, insulation foam, plywood, puppy toys and surgical tubing, reflect an urban legend that seagulls explode when fed Alka-Seltzer. Not all of the gulls have exploded.

The show also includes a group of paintings on handmade Indian paper by Andy Cross. The artist, who got his MFA from Hunter College in 2005, recently spent two months in India. His subjects range from Bollywood to Hindu motifs, and include at least one happy-looking bong smoker in a turban.

The third artist, Jean-Pierre Roy, offers one 7-by-9-foot oil-on-canvas called "Feast of the Bullgod," depicting a post-apocalyptic scene in a fictional megalopolis. The work is rendered in poisonous greens and ominous grays.

Prices range from \$1,000 to \$20,000. The show is on view through March 31 at 521 W. 26th St.; +1-212-268-1520; <http://www.rare-gallery.com>.

Naked Dancers

Elliott Hundley's first solo show at Andrea Rosen Gallery comprises paintings and three-dimensional collages.

His large-scale, obsessive collages are made from tiny components, including figures of naked men and women cut from magazines and personal photographs. The Los Angeles-based artist, who received his MFA from UCLA in 2005, stages elaborate photo shoots enlisting friends to pose and dance; then he cuts out individual figures. The works are a result of accumulation, destruction and reassembling of materials.

His "Garland" piece juts out from the wall horizontally more than five feet above the ground. It includes hundreds of red coffee straws painted white and hundreds of cut-out paper leaves. The work seems fragile and ephemeral, but it also has a solid looking base made of wooden objects.

Throughout the construction, larger objects make an appearance: broken pieces of porcelain, a magnifying lens, fake flowers.

Prices range from \$25,000 to \$36,000. The show is on view through April 21 at 525 W. 24th St.; +1-212-627-6000; <http://www.andrearosengallery.com>.

(Katya Kazakina is a reporter for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are her own.)

Art

#1 Combo

A full serving of Rauschenberg, with a side of Youngblood and Hundley

By **DOUG HARVEY**

Wednesday, May 24, 2006

In 1943, a young sailor named Milton on furlough from his duties in the psych ward at Camp Pendleton wandered into the Huntington Library in San Marino and stood stock-still, transfixed by the aesthetic epiphany of seeing Gainsborough's *The Blue Boy* and Lawrence's *Pinkie* in the flesh. He remembered having seen them reproduced on packs of playing cards back home in Port Arthur, Texas. "It sounds corny," Milton later recalled, "but my moment of realization that there was such a thing as being an artist happened right there."

Ten years later, Milton Rauschenberg had changed his name to Bob and the seed planted by that unholy marriage of male and female über-kitsch archetypes, having passed through an art history wormhole called Erased de Kooning, spawned an outpouring of virtuosic and revolutionary visual artifacts unsurpassed in the history of 20th-century visual culture. Rauschenberg's "Combines" — collagey, rigorously sensual paintings that erupted into the third dimension with the attachment of functioning light bulbs, rows of Coke bottles and, most famously, a taxidermied Angora goat with an old tire encircling its torso — derailed the juggernaut of smug elitism that was the decaying New York School with an upsurge of joyous populist pastiche that was as informationally complex as *Finnegans Wake* and as sensually ravishing as Satyajit Ray's *Apu Trilogy*.

Although widely acknowledged as the most influential and controversial body of work in Rauschenberg's ongoing oeuvre (the artist, in spite of a debilitating stroke early in 2002, continues to work), the Combines have never been the subject of an in-depth museum survey — until now. MOCA's "Robert Rauschenberg Combines" deploys 70 of the sprawling works (10 of which were not included in the show's debut at the Met in New York, although several signal pieces — the infamous *Bed* and the exquisite *Charlene* among them — were also lost in the translation) in chronological order across half the museum. This matter-of-fact format allows the subtle strategic shifts that cumulatively transformed the subdued formalist lyricism of works like *Red Interior* into the raucous confrontational exuberance of *Monogram* (the goatwork) to emerge gradually, in an almost narrative fashion.

Which is entirely appropriate, for as much as anything, the individual Combines are records of their own making. The deliberate, often roughly systematic accumulation of component photos, comic pages, children's drawings, bills of lading and other paper ephemera; the self-consciously casual, faux-arbitrary application of paint; and the over-the-top spatial play conjured by the dangling and jutting scraps of urban detritus all serve to draw attention to the controlled improvisational decision-making process of Rauschenberg's virtuosic compositions. It's made patently clear in the periodically reunited *Factum I* and *Factum II* (owned by MOCA and MoMA, respectively), which re-creates the same seemingly random cascade of calendar pages, news photos and drippy paint marks in two nearly identical canvases.

This performative aspect of the Combines is a key undercurrent. It's often forgotten that Rauschenberg was also an important figure in the development of performance art, and he regularly collaborated with dance companies, particularly that of Merce Cunningham. The exhibit, and Rauschenberg's Combine period in fact, opens with *Minutiae*, a freestanding multipanel explosion of primary colors that was commissioned by Cunningham for a 1954 dance of the same name. About halfway through, one encounters *First Time Painting*, created onstage at a "concert" in honor of composer/pianist David Tudor at the American Embassy in Paris in 1961. Alongside other simultaneous entertainments, Rauschenberg painted the canvas in a position so that the audience couldn't see, although it was rigged with contact mikes to amplify the sounds of its creation. When an alarm clock attached to the surface went off, an assistant helped the artist wrap the painting up, still unseen, and carry it off to end the concert.

Gold Standard from 1964 closes the show, and was created under even more absurd circumstances —

Rauschenberg was ostensibly being interviewed on Japanese television, but rather than respond to any of the translated questions, he simply began attaching an array of bric-a-brac (shoes, another alarm clock, a Coke bottle . . .) to a traditional gold folding screen. The frustrated interviewer had the translator write out a question on a sheet of paper and hand it to the artist, who immediately added it to the mix, where its unanswered plea, “If someone paints a Marilyn Monroe portrait on canvas they say it is a creative act, and if I paint Mona Lisa they say it is an imitation. Why?,” remains dangling plaintively to this day. Good question, though. Just what is it that makes Rauschenberg’s piles of junk so different, so appealing? For one thing, the patent, LOL ridiculousness of many of Rauschenberg’s juxtapositions was the first significant rupture in the high (and highly paranoid) seriousness of the AbEx generation (de Kooning excepted, of course) and opened the path for Pop, Arte Povera and the layered psychedelic complexities of European artists like Sigmar Polke and Oyvind Fahlstrom. But if you look at the other end of the spectrum of influence, the thousands of artists who — to this day — try and fail to replicate the apparent ease of Rauschenberg’s offhand brilliance, any whiff of my-kid-could-do-that evaporates instantly.

What remains is an encyclopedic template for operating in what the artist famously described as “the gap between art and life.” Again and again, Rauschenberg invites us to awaken into a creative, transformational sensory engagement with everyday life. It’s an invitation that remains as valid and urgent as it was 40 years ago, when he made the first Combine, and 30 years ago, when he made the last. And you don’t have to look far for proof. Across town in Westwood, two of the young artists who were included in last September’s First Annual L.A. Weekly Biennial have work on view that shows how utterly contemporary Rauschenbergian strategies can be.

You’ll have to hurry down to UCLA’s Kinross Building to catch Brenna Youngblood’s MFA thesis show, which technically ends today (though it may be up another day or two), but if you’re familiar with her primarily photo-collagist work from the Weekly show or her subsequent project at the Hammer, you’ll be shocked by the sudden and powerful outburst of painterly nuance in these new large-scale works. And speaking of the Hammer, Elliott Hundley has transformed the always-challenging “vault” project gallery with an array of his exquisite, intricate accumulations of tiny, mostly pin-mounted fragments of photographs, illustrations, plastic flower parts, cocktail umbrellas, etc., clinging in clusters to scraps of distressed fiberboard or monstrous kite skeletons of bamboo and doweling. Both Hundley and Youngblood pursue Rauschenberg’s risky balancing act between symbolic and formalist modes of visual communication, between chaos and control, between the mundane and the sublime. It’s an awesome combination.

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG COMBINES | MOCA, 250 S. Grand Ave., downtown | Through September 4

ELLIOTT HUNDLEY HAMMER PROJECT | Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood | Through September 3

HAMMER PROJECTS

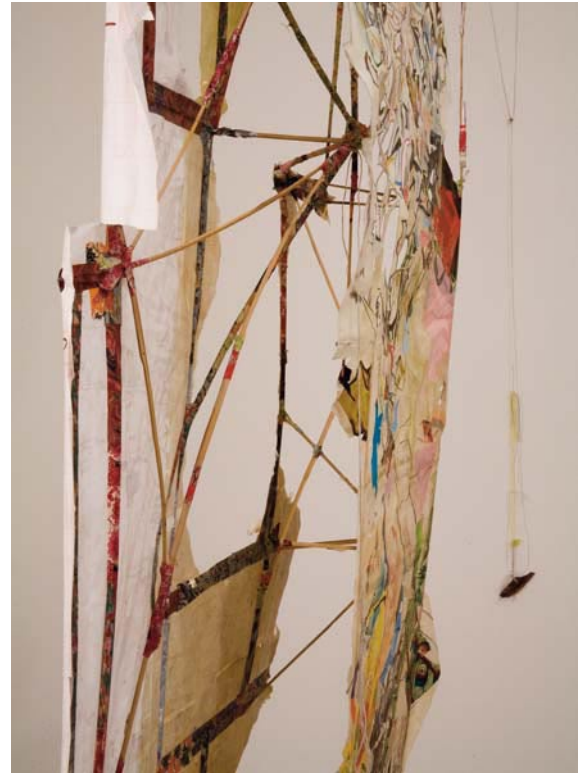
Elliott Hundley

May 9 - September 3, 2006

By Catherine Taft

Elliott Hundley crafts delicate assemblages that coerce the viewer into an ongoing, even epic, visual narrative. With a practice comprising photography, painting, collage, drawing, and sculpture, held together by a performative studio process, he allows the natural world to collide with both classical antiquity and the relics of modernity. The tiny figures that dwell in Hundley's pictorial topographies seem to act out dislocated scenes from some new mythology. In *Kindling for the Great Fire* (2005), a rice-paper and wood wall sculpture that resembles the masts and sails of a tall ship, arching strokes of watery paint create a color-striated landscape or seascape on which printed matter, found textiles, and cropped figurative photographs are pasted. A system of thin bamboo shafts holds the paper construction together; on the ends of its protruding beams, neatly tied strings dangle toward the floor as if wanting to be anchored to stable ground. In the work's collaged central scene, the duplicated image of a nude man circles around two-dimensional flames, conch shells, nautili, maize, and butterfly wings, among other papery vestiges. Each of the four cloned men grasps a bird-shaped paper kite and strikes a stoic pose. Nearby, an unstable architecture is formed by decoupage scaffolding, a coliseum-like tower and seven Doric columns. On the left, a grand schooner navigates the painted surface as if approaching the men's ceremonial bonfire. Hundley stages similar scenarios on the textured facades of both his freestanding and wall-mounted objects. Using titles that often reference the witchier yarns of ancient civilization, such as *Medea's Craft* (2005) and *Untitled (Lydian Work)* (2005), the artist, like some Penelope at her loom, weaves and unweaves a historical, personal, and symbolic fabric.

Enlisting close friends, Hundley arranges photo shoots to develop figurative prints from which to garner the expressionistic bodies of his complex compositions. The nude or semiclothed, predominantly male sitters are sometimes decorated with string, jewelry, tunics, or body paint. They clutch animated props, like poles and umbrellas, and are directed to act out heroic histrionics or a contrived naturalism. Although their images are ultimately clipped out of the photographic mise-en-scène, erasing the traces of a recognizable time and location, Hundley will often position his models in front of the very sculptures that their bodies are intended to adorn. While in various stages of completion, the works that appear in the margins of Hundley's ephemeral photographs operate as a kind of set dressing for the action of the model. These structures—many of which are also “propped” as they lean against the studio wall—are used in a deliberate performance of scale that only Hundley and his models can observe firsthand; during the photo shoot, the models' bodies are staged in relation to miniature corporeal representations, and their images will in turn be added to the two-dimensional troupe. Central to the artist's sense of scale, this juxtaposition places human giants at the threshold of their pictured collapse.



Hundley's works assume a double life, one in the gallery as an art object and another in the studio as a backdrop for dramatic, performative events. In this cooperative move, one can begin to consider what "theatricality" may mean to Hundley's practice. In *Art and Objecthood* (1967), a hoary but still seemingly pertinent text, critic Michael Fried argued against the notion of theatricality—to crudely sum up this idea, the problematic ways in which the constructed event of displaying a work can become as significant as the artwork itself—that he considered to be inherent to minimal (literalist) sculpture. Although Hundley's concerns are a far cry from those of minimalist rhetoric (in fact, he seems to retain the formal concerns of artists such as Bruce Conner and Jess, who continued to produce messy and illustrative work despite Fried's puritanical argument and the art that engendered it), it is helpful to consider the relationships that his forms activate with the spectator in space. In *Untitled (Screen)* (2005), the artist uses a freestanding, five-paneled screen or room divider as the support for his geometric patterning, multiplanar collage, and dense, atmospheric painting. Its two foam-padded faces are gesturally tacked with vinyl, ready-stitched craft patches, plastic bags, pastel silk flower petals, a harvest of sequins, warped oversize candles, and sparse photographic figurines. On one side of the object, Hundley has traced the outline of a table and still life lifted from an illusionistic painting that was given to him by an artist friend. The table and still life are patterned from solid black velvet, simplifying the likeness into a flat negative space. Pinned to the foam, this roughly life-size image is proportionate to the viewer who stands before it. In the act of observing, the viewer is cast into Hundley's dramatization of space.

Hundley's new work for the Hammer loosely adopts the splintered form of half a proscenium arch—the architectural device that separates a stage from the auditorium in a theater—using the gallery wall to move upward and overhead, as if beginning to define a frame. This work's most remarkable features are not its Brechtian characteristics but rather the ways in which it continues Hundley's ongoing drama-queen pursuits, a sensibility that has taken shape in earlier works. He continues the deliberately slapdash practice of affixing gathered things; paper umbrellas, coral, crystals, skin-toned wax, shark teeth, and Brazilian beads (among other familiar elements from previous works) are purposely fastened yet scattered throughout the composition. A striking example of Hundley's material call and response is a reference to his 2004 work *Bell-glass*, a corkboard and wood sculpture that incorporates a small vitrine encasing a fragile ruin of plastic beams. Again the artist uses a glass reliquary, though here a much larger one, to display (semi)precious sculptural objects. The glass capsule belongs to Hundley's recurring visual vocabulary; it is a lexicon interested not in the Victorian logic of classification, but in the aesthetics of collection as a way of structuring surface. Like a naturalist archiving specimens, the artist pierces his dwarfed figures with straight pins, plotting a playful surface in gesturing limbs and suggestive silhouettes. These "pinup" boys become leading actors in the artist's rhythmic but metered assemblages. Ultimately Hundley wishes to conjure drama, deploying the stuff of the world to fabricate both the "naturalness" and the classic make-believe of theater.

Catherine Taft is a writer based in Los Angeles. She is a regular correspondent for Artforum.com and managing editor of a forthcoming journal published by her MA alma mater, the Department of Art Theory and Criticism at Art Center College of Design.



M E T A M O R
P H O S E S

**INCLUDED IN CHARLES
SAATCHI'S USA TODAY
EXHIBITION, ELLIOTT
HUNDLEY IS OUT TO
TRANSFORM THE NATURE
AND RECEPTION OF
PAINTING AS WE KNOW IT**

words: CATHERINE TAFT

LATELY ELLIOTT Hundley has been entertaining a fantasy in which he is the lovechild of artists Yayoi Kusama and Lucas Samaras. Kusama is a seventy-seven-year-old (often hailed as Japan's greatest living artist) who currently lives (by choice) in a mental hospital in Tokyo, and is renowned for her signature use of polka dots. Samaras is a seventy-year-old Greek-American, best known for his manipulated Polaroid photographs. Roused by their reputed animosity, which sparked during the late 1960s when Kusama alleged that Samaras borrowed liberally from her oeuvre, Hundley posits the pair as locked in a sensational union out of which he is born to reconcile their formal differences. As the illegitimate son, he could discretely fashion a 'bastardised' aesthetic – perhaps deploying mirrors, manipulated photos, dotted patterns, self-portraiture or self-obliteration – to new ends. A type of creation myth, Hundley's modern folktale simultaneously embodies the failure of any notion of artistic authorship and a phoenix-like generation of hybrid, if not necessarily innovative, art forms. For now, the story remains kindling for an envisioned artwork intended only for an audience of two: his hypothetical parents, Kusama and Sumaras. Though the piece exists in the artist's imagination alone, the invention of his own contemporary mythos underscores the mounting potential of narrative in Hundley's ever-expanding practice.

Based in Los Angeles, Hundley graduated from University of California's Master of Fine Arts programme in June of 2005. Though he has already been included in several group exhibitions and was featured in Los Angeles' Hammer Museum project series, he will have his first solo show with Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York next spring. In the past, Hundley has often rummaged through ancient mythology for allegorical scraps that can be dramatised on the surface of spindly mixed-media assemblages and two-dimensional compositions. The narrative fragments he culls (those of Medea, Aphrodite, and the sibyls for example) fuel obscure tableaux and pointed but clandestine visual stories. Tiny expressionistic bodies, cut out from photographs of models taken in the studio, adorn each deliberately staged scene. In *Hyacinth* (2006), a stilted construction that leans against the gallery wall, nude and clothed figures are fixed with straight pins onto a gesturally painted corkboard facade. Though their images represent both male and female models, gender is down played in order to allow each theatrical individual to slip in and out of the plastic roles that Hundley plots.



Surrounded by a deluge of found objects – shells, feathers, tattered scarves, paper wings, sequins, and cropped images of plants, symbols, machines, animals, art historical references, architecture, and furniture – the figures seem engaged in some sort of Dionysian festival, albeit performing a series of actions that does not actually recall recognisable Greek myth.

Hundley's Delphic narratives are never literal, yet his impulse to relate a visual story (using his art objects as a kind of stage) materialises on his bricolage surfaces. Shaped by the figurative characters that interact with and within its discrete elements, his epically dense grounds can be read lyrically for possible meanings. Thus his finished works communicate an abstract series of events without having to adhere to a defined chronology. But as the accumulation of stuff in Hundley's work becomes increasingly complex, his enigmatic narrative threads have become tactfully protracted. In what seems like the ultimate test of

the limits of his storytelling. Hundley has been exploring the prospects of double-sided compositions. Working simultaneously on both sides of a piece, the artist aims at dismissing the hierarchy of front versus back while further undermining the restrictions of linear narrative.

The Hanging Garden, The Invention of Drawing (2005), a double-sided work on paper, lays bare the artist's ability to move through the boundaries of pictorial space. On one side is a minute landscape of collaged geometric scaffolding in which the repeated image of a seated figure gestures with his multiple arms. A large, hand-drawn portrait of a man in face paint hovers over the scene. His ghosted visage shows through the lightweight paper onto the opposite side where another frayed landscape of clipped paper structures, pillars, ladders, and small characters is intersected by pink ribbons of colour. Linking the binary composition, the pastel portrait is visible from either side, though perpetually shown in reverse like a mirrored image. This penetrating device demonstrates Hundley's keen negotiation of a two-dimensional field.

Leaving aspects of its exhibition to chance, Hundley intends for the pictorial episodes of *The Hanging Garden* to be revealed and concealed at will. When he first presented the work at a Museum of Contemporary Art benefit in Los Angeles he offered the piece folded and placed on the gallery floor, with no direction in its installation. The museum chose to display the work with the portrait side facing out. As Hundley's solution to its current owner's request for a frame, *The Hanging Garden* is now displayed in a custom-built Plexiglas vitrine. At the discretion of the exhibiting institution (in this case The Saatchi Gallery) the casing can be attached to the wall and flipped over by the viewer to expose either side of the work. It is also possible to position the vitrine at a fixed halfway point so that the two sides are visible to different viewers at the same time. However, Hundley believes that concealing parts of his compositions has a poetic significance; neither side has a greater importance. He claims to remain neutral about the definitive placement of his double-sided works and is interested in conceiving of his viewer as kind of collaborator. The inherent interactivity of *The Hanging Garden's*

AS BOTH TITLE AND PROMPT, THE
WORD 'FIRE' ALSO EMPHASISES
THE OBJECT'S FRAGILE, FLAMMABLE
AND IMPERMANENT MATERIALITY

previous page: *The Hanging Garden, The Invention of Drawing* (2005), collage and charcoal pastel on paper, 142 x 216 cm

above: *Medea's Craft II*, 2005, collage, charcoal pastel, peacock and ostrich feat hers. and plastic flowers, 206 x 249 x 18 cm

installation allows viewers to tailor and adapt his or her personal experience of the work.

While he continues to experiment with such conceptual operations, Hundley's use of double-sided compositions has extended logically into a series of more overtly sculptural objects. *Proscenium* (2006), for example, uses two opposing planes to resemble a proscenium arch folded in half. Works like this and *Medea's Craft II* (2005) are marked by sketchy representations of theatre architecture that highlight the constructed nature of Hundley's performative studio process. Using many of his sculptural pieces as functional objects, Hundley often arranges the models he photographs in front of the surfaces that their images eventually adorn. Though these sculptures operate as set dressing during his photo shoots, Hundley eliminates the traces of his setting when he clips the figures from the photos.

The illusionistic space of a stage is implied in the basic form of his new work, *Fire* (2006), a sculpture that is hung from the ceiling, proportionate to the viewer's body and eye level, and is visible in the round as it spins on its cable. The work's central scene – an accumulation of images including drapery, screens, ropes, a ladder, a branched tree trunk, a pinwheel, a patterned sheet of paper, and several statuette figures in white body paint – is displayed on a horizontal rectangle, while an elaborate paper, wood, coral and string armature is built on its reverse.

Partitioned by vertical blue striations, the dramatic focal point seems contained by curtain-like folds covering the two wings of a stage. Hundley puns on this idea by attaching paper bird wings and arcing wood forms on the reverse side. A second rectangular field rises above the scene as if referring to a sprawling fly space, the area above a stage that conceals a system of cables, pulleys, and counterweights used to seamlessly move scenery in and out of view. While crafting subtly illustrative analogies for the architectural space of theatre, *Fire* also probes the theatricality of language.

right (from top): *Fire*, 2006, paper, bamboo, string, wire, charcoal, pastel, silk and coral, 254 x 163 x 36 cm. *Fire*, 2006, detail. All images © Elliott Hundley, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

At the bottom of the construct are four arbitrarily spaced red letters spelling out the word 'fire'. Though abstracted text – lifted from the

stylised lettering of album covers and printed matter – has played out in Hundley's older works, this is his first (and most potent) use of legible text in his practice. The textual move directs the viewer to activate the sculpture, intending that he or she imagine the work on fire when reading the word. In effect, Hundley orchestrates a semantic play in which the signifier masquerades as the signified. The word 'fire', as both title and prompt, also emphasises the object's fragile, flammable and impermanent materiality. *Fire* was recently shown at Art Basel adjacent to Felix Gonzalez-Torres' endless paper stack, *Untitled (Loverboy)* (1990). Channelling an intimate and historical dialogue, this specific juxtaposition distills the importance of transience rather than permanence inherent to *Fire*. Unlike his other assemblages that absorb the heavy physicality of earthly stuff, this work uses temporality and illusory disintegration to engender a new sensibility.



FRAGILE PLEASURE

by Kathryn Garcia

Elliot Hundley, May 9-Sept. 3, 2006, at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, Ca. 90024.

In Elliot Hundley's motley constructions, paper cut-outs of classical nudes disport themselves in dense landscapes of tiny objects, colored yarn and bright abstract elements. Everything is skewered on straight pins, as if the product of a collector who has abandoned his insects in favor of assembling the flotsam of visual culture. Megalopolises of collaged minutiae, Hundley's art is an obsessive meditation on the fragility of a world constructed purely for pleasure.

It's a regressive world that sends us into our youth -- much of the technique suggests kindergarten-level craft -- and into earlier ages of history. Images of Etruscan sculptures share space with masked figures, photographs of friends, clippings from fashion magazines and homoeroticia, all haphazardly set up against backdrops of painterly strokes, ranging from glancing to heavy impasto.

Hundley's work has proved to have considerable appeal. Even before graduating last year from UCLA's MFA program, Hundley had sold work to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and been called an "art-market-sensation" in the *New York Times*. On the evidence of scattered appearances in group shows, the London-based *Art Review* named him as one of its most promising contemporary artists.

What's more, his first solo exhibition is being held not at a commercial gallery but at the Hammer Museum, as part of its series of "Hammer Projects" presentations of works by emerging artists. The survey offers a suite of four works, all of them courtesy of New York's Andrea Rosen Gallery.

The first work in the Hammer installation is the massive collage *Siren*, two large, irregular panels flanking a freestanding sculpture. The panels are densely layered, filled with representational images clipped from art-history as well as contemporary fashion and erotica, all displayed atop a forest of abstract ephemera and other tiny elements. The works tap into a deep vein of figurative collage by artists ranging from Max Ernst and Robert Rauschenberg to Bruce Conner and the student work of Cindy Sherman, as well as the dense collage paintings of artists like Henry Darger and Lari Pittman.

The centerpiece of the show is *Proscenium*, a collage that towers toward the ceiling, with naked bodies excised from historical and erotic materials interspersed with two-inch-tall images of Doric columns ripped from antiquity. The work is built upon a haphazard infrastructure of light bamboo, and although it seems to aspire toward the monumental, it's a contradictory form, also embodying contingency and fragility. Haphazardly constructed, covered sporadically in collage, the piece yields an art-object aggregate almost by accident.

Most successful is a work that does not hover on the threshold between sculpture and painting. A completely three-dimensional object, *Garland* is a non-representational composition of feathers and bits of plastic, its conjoined fragments delicately attached and strung precariously to the wall. It seems as if a single touch could destroy the entire piece, allowing it an eloquent delicacy, a vulnerable repose. This is where Hundley's use of delicate, fragile ephemera becomes most gripping.

All the pieces in the show are lyrical, almost naïve expressions. And, though they all employ a similar methodology, they don't come together into anything memorable, almost by design. The viewer is left to contemplate objects that are neither autonomous nor hybrid. In previous exhibitions, Hundley's work succeeded on all levels, from perspectives both near and far, as paintings and as sculptures. Here, this master of instability seems to be resting on his laurels -- though there is excitement to the precariousness for precariousness' sake that is his stock and trade.

Several readings of Hundley's work are possible. With his copious -- one might say promiscuous -- art historical references, he could be attempting to debase the solid matter of art history through ephemerality. With his incoherent and inharmonious constructions, which are neither painting nor sculpture, Hundley could be embracing the avant-garde esthetic of anti-form. Or his free-form assemblages could be whimsical records of a consciousness overtaken by a fantasy world in which all hierarchies have dissolved. The artistic machine, then, produces a product that is unstable to the point of willed inconsequentiality.

In any case, these days, the limbo-like quality of the pieces at the Hammer seem poignantly emblematic of an uncertainty about how to move ahead.

KATHRYN GARCIA is an art writer in Los Angeles.



Elliot Hundley
Installation view at the Hammer Museum, with works *Garland*, *Proscenium*, and *Garden (for Ivan)*, 2006 (from left to right)
Courtesy of the artist and Andrea Rosen Gallery
Photo by Joshua Whitee



Elliot Hundley
Detail of *Siren*
2006
Courtesy of the artist and Andrea Rosen Gallery
Photo by Joshua White

Friday, October 28, 2005

Art show party -- A review in Friday's Calendar section about the L.A. Weekly art show at Track 16 Gallery at Bergamot Station in Santa Monica said a midshow celebration would be held at the gallery tonight. The event was held Friday night.

With no art museums in Los Angeles expressing any inclination -- for good or ill -- to hop aboard the international bandwagon of biennial survey exhibitions, L.A. Weekly has stepped into the breach. The lively and generally satisfying show at Track 16 Gallery, quixotically said to be the publication's "first annual biennial," is less a wide-ranging survey of what's happening now among the city's artists than a group exhibition keyed to a distinctive curatorial sensibility. The show is stronger for it.

L.A. Weekly art critic Doug Harvey has selected 16 artists who work with mixed media, plus a handful of single-channel video artists. Few have shown widely, and some are having their debut. A welcome sense of discovery, coupled with a distinct lack of interest in established marketability (or attendance at one of L.A.'s many prominent art schools), attends the show.

That said, the four exceptional collages and a five-panel folding screen by Elliot Hundley, whose work has been seen in group shows at Regen Projects and LACE in the last year or so, set the pace and tone for this biennial. Hundley's collages are assembled from thousands of small scraps of paper -- cut-up snapshots, magazine photos, pieces of colored tissue paper, etc. -- which he glues or affixes with straight pins to board or heavy paper. These fragments of a camera-mediated, reproduced and disposable landscape are pinned like exotic butterflies in an anthropologist's research lab, and they are just as compelling, mysterious, obsessive and beauti-

ful.

Hundley often includes chopped-up nude figures, as if laying bare his specimens might somehow reveal more than meets the eye. But the fragmented and pinned body parts instead become vaguely ominous. They're like markers for a humorous crime spree, charted on a police detective's push-pinned city map.

Atomized experience is a leitmotif in the show, conveyed by a preponderance of work that employs techniques of collage and assemblage. (Messiness abounds.) This is not visionary work made in the old L.A. manner of Wallace Berman, Ed Kienholz or George Herms, but a post-assemblage sensibility inflected by such sober precedents as Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy and Raymond Pettibon. Grim agitation, a clenched resolve to make silk purses that retain some of the bloody stench of sows' ears, is everywhere encountered.

Notable are Sarah Cromarty's romantic images of journeys at sea or in the forest, which she coarsely gouges into slabs of plywood, then paints with grimy stains and oleaginous colors sometimes sprinkled with glitter. Wistful yet repellent, forced in their cheerfulness yet moody in pitch, they embody our currently conflicted social and political moment.

Avigail Moss' dark wall-hangings in purple-black felt, cut and stitched in the shape of giant teardrops and lightly sprayed with paint, are exotic abstractions -- lovely as a Venus flytrap. Adrian Ellis makes organic stalagmites from thousands of commercial ketchup packets, their unseen innards composed from a mass-produced confection the color and consistency of bloody ooze.

Cartoon-like yet monstrous, "The Lean Years" is a gnawed and stumpy figure rising from a painted dinner table and carved from foam by Erik Frydenborg. Imagine

Saturn devouring himself rather than his children.

And Glenn Bach's loose-limbed drawings are composed from whirlwinds of blunt and choppy pencil marks that struggle mightily to coalesce into serene landscapes glimpsed from the back porch -- but they can't quite manage so rose-tinted a task. Their depicted world insists on coming apart at the seams.

Among the videos projected in a separate gallery, the standout is an organic abstraction assembled from thousands of flickering, brightly colored pixels by Christine Siemens. Her fabricated image looks like something glimpsed through an electron microscope -- cells, microbes or enzymes -- to a soundtrack of cars whizzing by on a highway. Oddly, and without ever using figurative imagery, the brief loop recalls John Steinbeck's tortoise attempting the harrowing task of making it across the perilous, sun-baked pavement without getting summarily squashed.

The biennial is timed to coincide with the current issue of L.A. Weekly, designed to survey the Los Angeles art scene, and it's paired with a show of cover art from the publication, selected by art director Shelley Leopold. A mid-show celebration will be held at 7 p.m. Saturday, featuring art-rock band Fireworks, a DJ set by artist Shepard Fairey and a performance piece by Joseph Deutch, whose graduate school performance inspired by the game of Russian roulette caused such a ruckus last winter at UCLA.

Track 16, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 264-4678, through Nov. 12. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.track16.com

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THE GLOBAL EDITION OF *The New York Times*

Los Angeles artists get the buzz

By Jori Finkel

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LOS ANGELES — Elliott Hundley has a decision to make. Although he just completed his Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of California, Los Angeles, in June, he is already something of an art-market sensation. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles has bought one of his collages, a profusion of cut-up photos, plastic petals and other found objects pinned to corkboard. The Greek tycoon Dakis Joannou has bought another. Dean Valentine, a Los Angeles collector known for supporting artists like John Currin before they hit it big, has bought three.

So Hundley has a market; now he just has to choose a gallery.

“Hundley is the one everyone wants,” says Philip Martin, director of Mark Moore Gallery in Santa Monica, California. “But he seems to be taking his time deciding.”

In the meantime, “this is the most anticipated solo show in Los Angeles,” said the dealer Javier Peres of Peres Projects in Los Angeles, who compares Hundley’s work to “Joseph Cornell on acid.” When Peres met the artist at the university a couple of years ago, he offered him a solo show on the spot, but he has since had to content himself with including his work in group shows. So has the New York dealer Daniel Reich, who is including Hundley in “Desire Constellations,” opening at his gallery on Thursday. Meanwhile, as Hundley mulls his options, the New York powerhouse Andrea Rosen has flown out for a studio visit as well.

The buzz about Hundley says something about the size of his talent. But it is also a sign of just how much attention the Master of Fine Arts graduates in Los Angeles are drawing on both coasts. Not so long ago, most dealers and collectors looked in their own backyards for the next big thing. On the East Coast, the feeding frenzy focused mainly on the programs at Yale, Columbia and Hunter; on the West Coast, the locals gathered at CalArts, Art Center and UCLA. But in the last few years, more New York dealers are turning up on the California campuses as well.

One is Elizabeth Dee, who recently visited UCLA and Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, as well as the

California Institute of the Arts, or CalArts, in nearby Valencia and the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. She was preparing for her current show, “Sugartown,” named after the movie about Los Angeles’s music scene. Split between her gallery in New York’s Chelsea district and the Lower East Side space Participant Inc., the exhibition features 21 young artists who work in the Los Angeles area. Most are recent graduates.

“I’ve been flying to L.A. more and more over the last two years,” said Dee, who opened a gallery there in May in partnership with a Dallas dealer, David Quadrini. “In large part, it’s to see what’s happening among the next generation of artists. L.A. has the greatest concentration of art schools in one metropolitan area, so it’s the first place outside of New York you would look for new artists.”

The rise of the California art schools has been several decades in the making. Ever since Ed Ruscha drove a black Ford from Oklahoma City to Los Angeles in 1956 to attend Chouinard (now CalArts), the schools have drawn major talent. But it wasn’t until the late 1980s, when the artists Chris Burden, Nancy Rubins, Charles Ray and Paul McCarthy had all joined the faculty at UCLA, that the city’s leading programs began to ignite national interest.

Today, it’s hard to imagine the local art scene without the schools. “Most every gallery in L.A. has some recent M.F.A. grads,” said Martin, the Santa Monica dealer.

Even blue-chip galleries like L.A. Louver, which represents David Hockney, have been getting in on the action; it just opened “Rogue Wave,” a survey of emerging and mid-career Los Angeles artists that runs through Sept. 3. Of the 19 artists in the show, 14 earned Master of Fine Arts degrees at local schools, including the installation artist Karl Haendel (UCLA) and the painters Tomory Dodge and Violet Hopkins (both CalArts).

So is there anything that distinguishes this generation of Los Angeles artists from their New York counterparts? Some point to an affinity for installation art - especially the everything-but-the-kitchen-sink variety.

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THE GLOBAL EDITION OF *The New York Times*

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Pascal Spengemann of the Taxter & Spengemann Gallery in Chelsea, which represents five recent UCLA graduates, said he was drawn to a new breed of humble, hand-crafted sculpture, an aesthetic celebrated in "Thing," a recent survey at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. The poster boy for the show was the Taxter & Spengemann artist Matt Johnson - whose "Breadface," a plastic cast of a slice of bread with eyes carved into it, was reproduced on T-shirts for the exhibition.

"We're really attracted to approachable work, recognizable objects that are transformed in mysterious and poetic ways," Spengemann said. "And we see a lot of that coming out of Los Angeles." In some cases, New York dealers are moving so quickly that Los Angeles artists are getting their big break in New York before landing solo shows back home. Take the case of Tomory Dodge. Before graduating from CalArts in 2004, he had already had a New York solo show with Taxter & Spengemann, which sold work to Richard Desroche of New York's CRG Gallery, who directed him to ACME gallery in Los Angeles. ACME proceeded to sell out his thesis show as if CalArts were a branch of the gallery.

Many dealers chalk all this up to the dizzying acceleration of the contemporary art market. "It's a big change from the way artists' careers used to develop out here," says Randy Sommer, Dodge's dealer at ACME in Los Angeles, who in the mid 1990s helped nurture the careers of the painters Laura Owens and Monique Prieto (both CalArts grads). "Just a few years ago, it was a different world. We might have shown an artist for three or four years before a New York gallery took notice - even Laura and Monique took a

couple years. But now some of the Chelsea galleries know about L.A. artists before we do."

Sommer said he worried about how the adulation would affect an artist's willingness to take creative risks. "We don't tell Tomory how many people are interested in his work," he said.

One fear is that a new artist will be stunted by success. Although Valentine, the Los Angeles collector, owns work by Dodge and Johnson as well as Hundley, he suggests that collectors think twice before buying artists straight from school. "Artists need time to find their voice - painters especially need time to develop their hands," he says. "We're all doing a disservice to artists when we buy their work too young." Another danger is that success might evaporate as fast as it came. "I've seen premature arrogance, and I've seen premature disillusionment," said Thomas Lawson, dean of the School of Art at CalArts.

"Students may get instant gratification from having early gallery shows, but the art market is a very cruel and impersonal thing. It's very easy to find yourself dropped by that market. If you're dropped before the age of 25, it can be devastating."

And today's artists know it. Several graduates mentioned here expressed suspicion or fear of the rather efficient machinery of the art market. Perhaps that's one reason why Hundley, 30, is taking his time committing to a gallery. You can see his decision as a subtle form of protest: a Bartleby-like act of resistance in an increasingly frantic marketplace.