

CONTEMPORARY ART IN  
LOS ANGELES

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With its rapid emergence as a international cultural center, Los Angeles - and California, and the North American West Coast, in general - have in many observers' eyes, overtaken New York - and the North American East Coast - as the artistic hub of the Western Hemisphere. The concomitant exhaustion of New York's art scene, first aesthetically and now economically, certainly supports this analysis. But the situation is, of course, more complex than a 2simple shift in polarity - particularly if regional economic patterns, American sociocultural patterns and word patterns of communication are accounted for. The emergence of the Pacific Asian countries as economic (super)powers; the emergence of Los Angeles as the new gateway for emigration into the United States; and the emergence of global electronic networks and the dawning of a civilization predicated on pure information; all these factors have conspired to make Los Angeles a new capital of international art - but only one capital among many. That such a polyglot, almost defiantly unfocused city as L.A. - with its improbable social, commercial and ecological dissonances - can be a consciously nurturing center for substantive cultural experimentation<sup>2</sup> (and not just a paradigm for the pluralism of such experimentation) indicates that the Western idea of an "art center" is itself changing radically. The question is: how much is the Western idea of "art" changing with it? If Los Angeles actively, even officially, supports and propounds "multi-culturalism" in the arts like some municipal UNESCO, is a new,

post-Western concept of artistic practice emerging in its studios, galleries, performance spaces and museums? Are Los Angeles and the North American West Coast breeding a new avant garde? Or is it all Hollywood hype?