

IMAGINE THIS: On April 29th, 1992, when the Rodney King verdict was broadcast, Ms. Kim, owner of a convenience store located in a middle-class Los Angeles black neighborhood, encourages her African American customers to loot and burn her store down. When they persistently refuse on both counts, she lights Molotov cocktails herself and lobs them one after the other to set her store aflame, blocks all efforts by horrified bystanders to put out the fire and watches the ensuing destruction with a satisfied smile.

Certainly the outrage against the Rodney King verdict was widely shared and is believable. But would a Black Korean American, even one harboring conflicted feelings of loyalty, express this outrage by destroying her own business? This retelling of a scene from the “crazy beautiful” novel by Paul Beattie compels the reader to negotiate the many landmines of upended or confounded stereotypes.¹

I begin my discussion of the *Exquisite Crisis and Encounters* exhibition with the above literary reference in order to suggest a multi-nodal approach characteristic of the exhibition itself. Like Beattie’s novel, the exhibition attempts to provoke and expose unexpected possibilities or at the very least, potentially productive speculations however destabilizing or unsettling. In disrupting the political geographies of race relations, the novel straddles the liminal space between the fictive and the documentary, asserting a certain primacy to imagination. The exhibition likewise asks viewers to rethink the role and modalities of creative imaginary in relation to history and memory with regards to the LA Riots.²

When I set out to conceptualize an exhibition about the LA Riots in Fall 2006, I wasn’t aware of the considerable body of literary works such as that of Paul Beattie, or films addressing aspects of this historical event.³ Initially, what spurred my decision to do such an exhibition was a confluence of enticing factors: an invitation from A/P/A Institute to create an exhibition for their larger, new gallery space and the fact that this space is part of the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis, an interesting amalgamation of cultural studies related disciplines that dovetailed my own interdisciplinary inclinations, the linkage of the exhibition to an upcoming annual Association of Asian American Studies conference to be held in NYC with its theme, “Crosstown Connections: Asian American Urbanism and Interracial Encounters,” and an article in Korean magazine, a glossy LA based monthly, pointed to the limited exposure that most younger generation Korean Americans have to the LA Riots. The realization that an event that remains so fresh in my mind and experience might be quite distant or unknown to others instilled in me a desire to keep this history alive and relevant. The coincidence that

the exhibition would be held during the year marking the 15th anniversary of the event was, well, icing on the Bundt cake (see Kim Yasuda’s work in the exhibition).

Invariably, questions of methodology, scope and intent had to be addressed, all the more so in considering a historically-based topic of immense complexity and lingering controversy. I sought a methodology that would foster dialogue and collaboration that was also playful. The Surrealist/Dadaist game of chance called *Cadavre Exquis* (Exquisite Corpse) seemed a fitting method that would not only spotlight a creative collaborative process, but also interject a healthy dose of chance.

The meanings of the word *exquisite* that I wished to highlight for the project were “highly sensitive, keenly discriminating, consummate” and even “very beautiful and lovely.” When coupled with the word “crisis,” which in this usage refers to the LA Riots, *exquisite* triggers a strangeness that might please a Surrealist or two. Dubbed the first “multicultural riot,” the LA Riots offer sobering, cautionary lessons that have yet to be fully understood or confronted—indeed an unfinished crisis—the vestiges of which can be seen in the currency of recent anti-immigration mobilizations and legislations as well as its exuberant counter demonstrations and actions.

For many observers and for those who suffered neglect and abandonment by government officials during the height of the conflagration, the LA Riots revealed a massive systemic and structural failure that was tragically revisited in the Katrina Disaster. Both of these events unearthed deeply rooted racism and the systemic neglect of the underclass. In the horizon of numerous recent socio-political crises and calamities, these two events underscore a state of emergency that begs for the *emergence* of new possibilities and change that transcends the official recovery efforts that have been band-aids at best.

More nuanced discussions and fresh perspectives are necessary within and among the various underserved groups implicated in this event in which the asymmetry in power relations is quite complex and layered. One symbolic beacon from the past that is pointedly recalled for this project is the multi-disciplinary journal “Crisis” founded by W.E.B. Dubois in 1910 that evolved into “The New Crisis: the Magazine of Opportunities and Ideas” in the more recent past. The exhibition title by extension suggests an embedded understanding that every crisis presents an opportunity for coalescing an acute desire to affect change.

Perhaps only a Korean with their *ppali-ppali* (hurry-hurry, last minute

rush) mindset would even entertain the notion of organizing a large group show in little over a two-month period. What gave me some confidence was the reliance on the internet without which I could not have done an international outreach or imagine such a speedy turnaround. The dedication and supportive, resourceful attitude of the A/P/A staff headed by Laura Chen-Schultz also gave me courage. For instance, while dealing with a work composed mostly of sugar blocks that are steadily melting (that would raise the alarm of even the most seasoned of gallerists), Laura and crew calmly continue to keep an eye on it to check for any unwanted rodent activity in its midst.⁴

Within the wide array of works found in the gallery space and on the exhibition blog, four broad themes emerged: LA Riots Legacies/Vestiges, International Connections/Global Context, Poetic Encounters/Resonances, Material Sensibilities /Process Matters. A discussion of the specific works in the exhibition under these headings follows. Here text-based projects that are not visually documented in the brochure are presented in greater detail.

LA Riots Legacies/Vestiges

A number of projects responded to documentary accounts of the event or were informed by various aspects of its history. Comparative strategies are much in evidence, in connections made between LA Riots to that of the Baltimore and Detroit Riots of ‘67 and with the recent history of police brutality cases in New York City. Some of the key works discussed below assume a refreshingly complex vantage point in relation to the immigration issues that had been so problematic in the aftermath of the Riots in which brute stereotypes fixed Latinos as looters and Koreans as racist vigilantes.

One of the most eloquently moving testaments about the LA Riots was by a long-term Angeleno, **M. A. Greenstein**, an art and cultural critic. In the paragraph excerpted below of a longer essay posted on the exhibition blog, she offers a comparative perspective with the riots in Baltimore.

It was the summer of 1967, just two years after the passing of the Civil Rights Act, two years following the Watts Riots. In Baltimore City black citizens, driven by the summer heat of the civil rights movement, took to the streets and dramatized the art and consumerist mayhem of civil disobedience. Traveling in frenzied packs, they broke through store windows, filched goods, set buildings aflame, trampled innocent bystanders — the aggressive melee brought “Charm City” to its knees. Amongst the burning buildings on Eutaw Place was a late 19th century office space in which my father had started and grown his early medical practice....To city and state pa-

triarchs, ash is the sign of losing control; to a child’s eyes, ash looks a lot like snow.

Others in Greenstein’s group showed works in the gallery highlighting some of the searingly iconic and memorable scenes from the Riots - **Salvatore Reda**’s close-up of the policemen’s leg in riot gear, reaching for the baton, **Vincent Johnson**’s image of a solitary individual trying to put out a raging fire, **Elaine Brandt**’s satiric collage of LA city officials dancing in a circle (stylized figures reminiscent of those in Matisse’s painting *Dance*), amidst the destruction and **Carrie Patterson**’s delicate birdfeeder form offered a child’s perspective of the event.

A video projection by **Other: Arab Artists Collective** (Joe Namy & Rola Nashef), **Sarita See** and **Bill St. Amant**, juxtaposes archival footage from the 1967 Detroit riots with images of present day Detroit and the manifestation of Arab owned gas stations. The video is scored with a sound collage by Sterling Toles and interviews from the 1992 documentary *Sa-I-gu* by Christine Choy, Elaine Kim, and Dai Sil Kim-Gibson. The piece foregrounds immigrant issues that were thrust into public eye during the LA Riots and offers not only a comparative consideration of the Detroit Riots but also of the current day Arab American merchant experience in relation to that of the Korean Americans.

Jeffrey Skoller and **Mark Bartlett**’s digital photo montage, *Please Please Please (for JB)* depicts James Brown with open arms illuminated by stage lights. Overlaid on this evocative image are horizontal lists of police reports of the 53 deaths attributed to the riots in conjunction in tandem with a list of NYC casualties attributed to police brutality. The text in red honors those who in various ways, died while attempting to help or save the lives of others and highlights the extraordinary humanity and courage that arises even, perhaps especially, in the face of extreme calamity. This work imparts a visual effect akin to an elegy, as if the James Brown is extending his grace to the violated lives.

Members of **Connie Samaras**’ team responded to her image shot in South Los Angeles shortly after the riots and then digitally mirrored for this exhibition. Stacked in front of the photograph to echo the irregular contours of a cityscape were letter-sized handouts for viewers to take, designed by four colleagues. The first flyer by **James Rojas**, an urban planner, stated, “What I like about this picture is how it ties the LA Civil Unrest into an urban history of change, struggle, and architecture....Just as the iconic Spanish arches simultaneously represent to me beauty and subjugation, those precariously standing

The conversation brings together some of the artists in the exhibition from across the country with cultural critics to examine the various legacies and vestiges of the 1992 LA Riots and its resonance in the different communities and contexts to the present day. The conversation will also center on the rich array of cultural producers, including the current Exquisite Crisis exhibition, that have responded to this history.

Speakers include Patrick ‘Pat’ Hebert, Vincent Johnson, Nathalie Meeke Lemons, Yael Tzoref Nijzen, Other Arab Artists Collective, Connie Samaras and Min Hyung Song (author of *Strange Future: Passions* and the LA Riots).

Wed., April 25, 6:30-8:30 PM, A/P/A Gallery

A conversation moderated by curator Yong Soon Min

WHAT TIME IS IT: Cultural Production and the LA Riots

April 6, 7:30-9:30 PM

Exhibition Reception for Association of Asian American Studies Conference

February 15, 6-8 PM

Exhibition Opening Reception

PROGRAMS RELATED TO EXQUISITE CRISIS AND ENCOUNTERS EXHIBITION

ASIAN/PACIFIC/AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
7TH FLOOR GALLERY AT 41-51 EAST 11TH STREET NY, NY 10003 | WWW.APA.NYU/GALLERY/EXQUISITE

Exquisite Pain
LA
Last year’s American Idol? Yes, and before that?
Yes, and before....
America’s Top Model?i
And, my fav, Project Runway?i? Yes, yes, yes....
The LA riots and uprising?
Humm. When was that?
Was that connected to the O.J. trial?
Jobs?... You mean Steve Jobs?
An act of collective creative re-membering.
NYC : LA
Christine Whitman, head of EPA: “The air is safe.”
America’s Mayor: “Shop!”
As New Yorkers hear the (now already old) news of
post 9/11 respiratory deaths,
exotic toxic blood poisonings....
We shop. And also want to name evildoers.
An act of collective creative re-membering.
Jack Tchen
Director, The A/P/A Institute, New York University

Exquisite Crisis & Encounters

arches in the photo represent both a quintessential form of the LA landscape as well as the remnants of ethnic conflict....The LA Civil Unrest told us and the world that LA is both a place of dreams and of constant struggle and inequity." Next, artist **Eve Luckring** composed this text centered within a circle on a field of grey, "our sky/charred black with smoke/ for the third day--eating a bowl of cold noodles/ I unbury a blue phoenix." (Slashes stand for line breaks). The tallest stack, **Susan Sifton's** handouts were thick sheets of black paper embossed with the word, REMAINS. The last handout was by **Adrian Rivas** who composed a mirror-imaged text in white letters on a narrow black strip on a white sheet of paper. It read: "What we're seeing is fast food. This is what has come in to fill our large retail vacancies. When Hall's Furniture was burned down, it was replaced by El Pollo Loco. We had a very large Pep Boys. Now there's a Taco Bell and a Pizza Hut. It's not equivalent by any means." This quote is attributed to an urban planner who specialized in the South LA area that was most affected by the destruction.

In the best tradition of the political posters, three artists **Bia Gayatto, Haruko Tanaka, Dee Williams** and **Amy Bowen**, a social activist, offer a bold design of words against an aerial view of LA dotted with plumes of smoke during the riots. This work was inspired by John Cage's mesostic poems, having a similar vertical and horizontal structure, "where notions of dominance and control (verticality) intersect with [notions of] democracy and change (horizontality)."

In another work that spotlights the immigrant merchant experience, the collaboration by **Viet Le, Viet Nguyen, Wendy Cheng, Beverly Andrews**, "MCMXCI" is a series of photographic images adhered directly on the wall with accompanying text composed by writer and scholar Viet Nguyen. The images document the performance by a striking figure covered in black from head to toe, (pointedly in opposition to the usual city of angels mascot depicted in white and with wings) seen in various setting around some of the key sites of the LA Riots and in Westminster, the location with the largest concentration of the Vietnamese diaspora.

Artist **Ji Young Yoo** teamed up with journalists **Rose Kim** and **Brenda Paik Sunoo**. Yoo's deceptively simple video image of an eye close-up, actually contains instantaneous flashes of images from the LA Riots. She relates *saigu* (Korean term for the LA Riots) with a Korean concept of *Haan* commonly defined as an accumulation of suppressed and condensed experiences of oppression. Kim and Sunoo point to the specificities of the Korean American perspectives of the LA Riots that was missing in mainstream coverages of the riots, symptomatic of Korean American's political impotence. Sunoo's writings that appeared in the English edition of the LA Korea Times during the riots played a pivotal role in giving voice to this perspective.

In another work about the destructive force of the LA Riots, ashes seem to be the medium of **John Di Stefano's** work on paper which upon close scrutiny reveals the numbers 90210, the zipcode made famous by the 90s TV hit, suggesting that even the heavily protected Beverly Hills neighborhood was not spared the smoke from the distant sites of destruction.

International Connections/Global Context

The effects of globalization are readily apparent in this exhibition, not only in the international composition of the participants but also in the mode of artmaking and in the subject matter of the works itself. Of course the breadth and scope of the international outreach was tempered by my language limitation of English and the material reality of internet access.

Nguyen Nhu Huy, an artist and writer based in Ho Chi Minh City formed a group of fellow artists including **Le Thi Viet Ha, Kelly Le Lan Phuong, Ly Hoang Ly, Rich Streitmatter Tran, Le Quay Anh Hao**, and **Nguyen Duc Tinh**. Their brainstorm sessions lead to a decision to display two interrelated works: one set consisted of individual works on paper that were shared with each other and in some case collaboratively produced. These were displayed on a table along with printed sheets of biographic information and represent the "materials" that contributed to the other work. Next to the table is a blank vertical wall space entitled "Invisible Tower" that is "based on the respectfulness of creativity, freedom of expression, and mind of each [artist] and exists...invisibly inside the mind of the audience." One of the most arresting image among the works on paper are a collaboration between Streitmatter Tran and Le Quy Anh Hao. Both the initial image entitled *Quiet Riot*, (titled after a 1980s heavy metal band) by Streitmatter that juxtaposes a comic strip account of the LA Riots and Le's photographic sequence of a self immolation by a Buddhist monk in 1963 point to connections between the LA Riots and "Vietnam's own quiet riots, simmering beneath the surface."

The collaboration coordinated by **Terry Berkowitz**, a video artist based in NYC and artists **Varsha Nair**, based in Bangkok, and **Karla Sachse**, based in Berlin was made feasible with Skype technology. Their B&W video projection, "Barriers and Beyond" is a collage of walls they each have discovered around the world, mixed with a haunting voice-over that ponders the metaphoric power of these physical embodiments of divisions and conflicts.

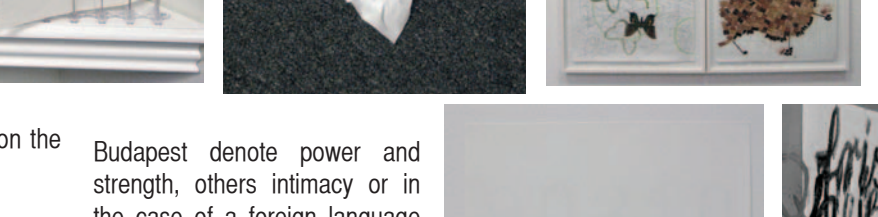
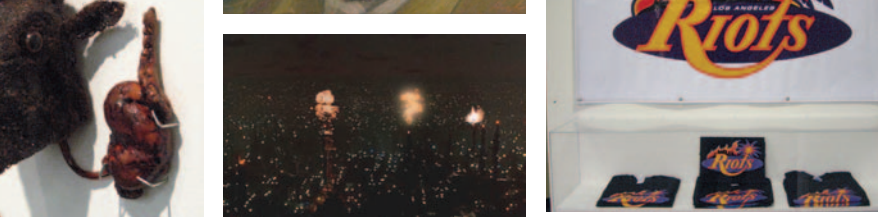
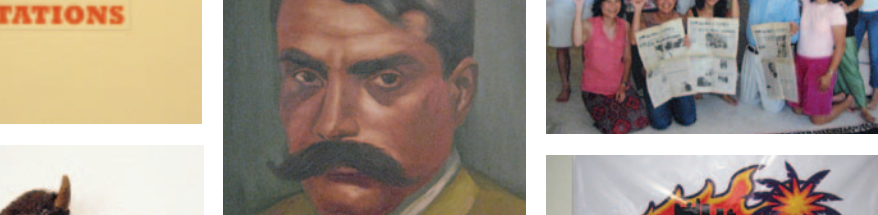
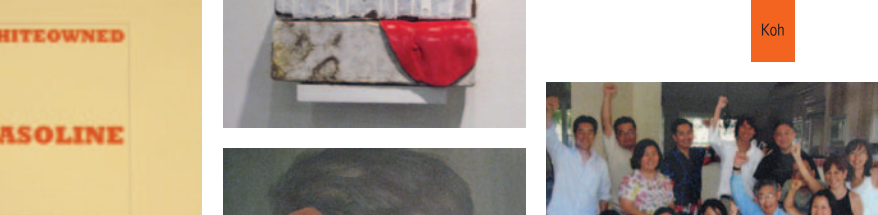
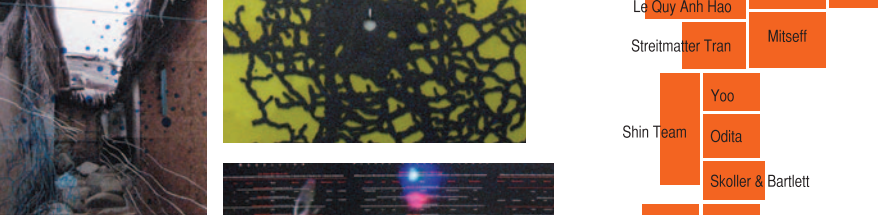
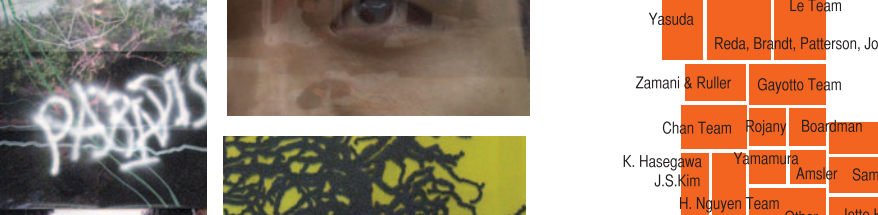
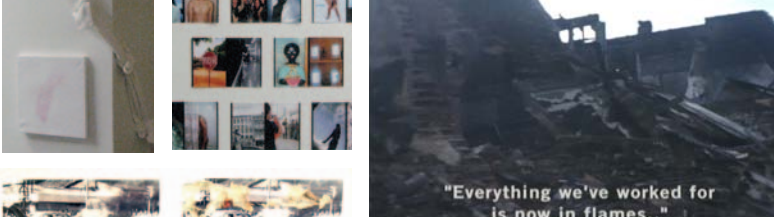
One of the most ambitious projects in terms of geographic reach, spanning as far north as Norway, west to LA, east to Beijing, south to Singapore and many points in between, and in testing the limits of virtual technology was **Jane Jin Kaisen's** "The 24 Hours Exquisite Crisis and Encounters. In addition to Jane who is based in Copenhagen, others include **Nathalie Miihe Lemoine, Ulrike Lau, Vibeke Jensen, Tone Olaf Nielsen, Anna Jin Hwa Borstam, Sean Huang, Vivian Wenli Lin, Heman Chong, Nanna Debois Buhl, Frederikke Hansen, and Elena J. Kim**. As a 24 hours online chat forum, participants considered the term "Crisis" in its various manifestations. This project also explored how interaction may be structured or structure itself in a virtual shared space during the 24 hours period through different means of online communication, such as instant chat, writing, and file sharing--some of which has been posted on the exhibition blog. Due to problems with Skype technology and time constraints, there was only limited interaction with gallery viewers. Anna Jin Hwa Borstam, of this grouping also belongs to **UFOLAB**, an artist group composed of Korean adoptees based in Denmark and Sweden. Several of their eclectic images posted on the blog playfully suggest new and "alien" subjectivities.

Jette Hye Jin, another Denmark based artist of Korean adoptee background, created a multi-channel video installation featuring **Kate Hers, Kim Kyung Yeon, Daniel Bastian Tandjung**, who are situated respectively, in the U.S. of Korean adoptee background; provisionally in South Korea; and in the Indonesia. The transnationally constructed identities of each individual is elaborated through intricately layered composition of sound and images.

Jennifer Chan, Yoshiko Shimada, and **Pikki Leung** collaborated on a suspended sculpture made of traditional *silk obi* that is collaged with images. They note that, "between the 10th and 14th Century, the Japanese painted scrolls that depicted riots. The scrolls served as a sort of documentary of the conflicts at the time. In this collaborative piece, we draw upon our different location as academic researchers and artists to highlight the celebratory aspect of "riots" in a traditional silk obi. The images come from across the globe--Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, South Africa, Mexico, and Okinawa--and share a common feature. They depict a group of global citizens who riot for peace, whether they approach it from the angle of reparation for colonization, the landless movement, anti-military base protest, caste equality, indigenous peoples' rights, farmers' right to food sovereignty, and access to HIV/AIDS drugs....The obi unfolds memories that celebrate diversity and peace."

Nguyen Tan Hoang organized a group that consisted of **Bavo De-**

urne, Cirilo Domine, Dredge Byung'chu Kang, and Anne Smolar. Each artist contributed ten to fifteen images based on their interpretation of the curatorial statement. The individual images, representing half-frames, were paired with others to make up twenty full-frame color diptychs, that look like commercially printed snapshots. A common response to the show's themes is the face to face encounter with a foreign culture: a Flemish in Budapest, a Filipino American in Tokyo, a Vietnamese in Bangkok, a Korean American in Berlin, a Walloon encountering alterity within Brussels, the center of Europe, itself. Interestingly, images of hands dominate, as symbols of the very encounters, e.g., those belonging to communist



Budapest denote power and strength, others intimacy or in the case of a foreign language teacher, as an efficient vehicle for signaling language flows. These half-frames--partial documentation of recent military coups, increasing tourism in former socialist states, economic and cultural legacies of Western colonialism and imperialism, and the promiscuous traffic of physical and electronic bodies over national borders and across cyberspace--exhibit surprise, delight, nostalgia, confusion, boredom, doubt, ambivalence, danger, and desire.

Poetic Encounters/Resonances

This section highlights works that privilege text along with those that are visually allusive and open-ended. Poetics are uncanny in assuming as tough and durable a physical presence as any object-based works.

jut beyond these kempt measures of commemoration like a broke anniverse, a migrant shore, an interstate

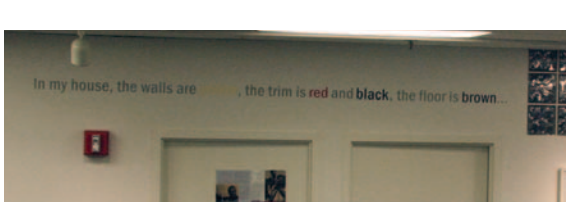
of stragglers and involuntary volunteers. they got shand it don't stop and it won't stop, that beat goes on

The above four lines are from "Arche's Corpse," a poem by **Laura Kang, David Lloyd** and **Fred Moten**, presented in the gallery as an audio recording along with a hard copy and also in the exhibition



blog. This riveting poem was composed for the exhibition "exquisite corpse" style according to a delineated process worth quoting: "each participant composed two lines at a time, sending on only the second line to the next participant by e-mail. That participant in turn composed two lines, sending on the second to the third participant, and so on. At no point until the composition was completed did anyone have a sense of the whole composition. We agreed on 45 lines, three participants writing a total of fifteen lines each in honor of the fifteenth anniversary of the L.A. uprising. The recording was made after several experiments in the form of a round: one speaker begins with the first stanza, the second reader begins from the first stanza as the first speaker comes to the second, and the third speaker begins to read as the second speaker begins the second stanza. The resultant blend of individual and group voices provides some correlative to the mode of composition as well as hopefully capturing the cacophony of conflicting voices."

Lucy Lippard offers the sentence: "In my house, the walls are yellow, the trim is red and black, the floor is brown...the ceiling is white." Based on her instruction,



these words were processed as vinyl lettering, accentuating the color denoted by having those words cut in the designated colors and adhered directly onto the wall in a site of my choosing. The playful punctuation and observant emphasis of color in relation to a dwelling engenders endless associations about intimate and personal relationship to color in our daily lives that is also intersected by a body politic.

Lippard's work interacts with **Sowon Kwon's** text based work situated below it. According to the artist, "dong ghap (Jackson, Mississippi) is part of an ongoing series of *self-portraits* that chart events contemplated by the convergence of the year of my birth, 1963 and *gasoline*." *Dong ghap* is a Korean word that translates as the same year of birth.

Young Min Moon's three inkjet prints are also text-based and refer to color and likewise situated to interact with Lippard's words. The texts in "Coffee" and "Artichoke" are appropriated from *Native Speaker* by Chang-rae Lee, and that of "Black" from Spike Lee's film "Do the Right Thing." The artist eloquently explains that the collective title, "Public Identity," alludes to the fact that public identity of Asians "are virtually non-existent other than the way Asians are stereotypically portrayed, if at all, in the media. I was drawn to the two sources because "Do the Right Thing" foresaw and *Native Speaker* reflected upon the multi-ethnic conflict during 1992 L.A. disturbances. That the texts are quotations of conversations

or utterances is important not only because they are statements located at the cusp of revealing the speakers' exasperation of coming to terms with reality, but also because they serve as a 'safety device.' Through such utterances, minorities and immigrants go on with their lives suppressing their emotional impulses. It is not only their hard work but also daily occurrences of such minor utterances that contribute to the immigrant's 'success' in their new life in America....Taken as a whole, the texts suggest both complexities and subtleties inherent in the representation of racial struggle and the experiences of minorities and immigrants. The public identity of minorities is not inaccessible or impenetrable by the majority; rather, it is displaced as an undesired object."

Poet and essayist **Luis Francia's** usual wit and deft word play is in full-throttle in this final section, "growing pains" of a triptych entitled, "Global Warning":

if blackboy redboy yellowboy/brownboy hit/whiteboy/ohboy badboy kickyoy beatyoy/boy go to jail nowboy/paytheprice boyboy/if whiteboy hit blackboy redboy/yellowboy brownboy /attaboy/goodboy smarchristian/boy gotoitboy/we're behind you boy/goddamn boyohboy/you're a man now/Boy.

Fellow poet **Oona Paredes** contributed a "Triptych" the first section of which follows:

"helpless i watch/you said/as my country burns/i thought i was that country/or oh how i burned/you could never be your country/you didn't mean me."

Artists **Kyungmi Shin, Christine Nguyen** and **Huntz Liu** collaborated on a tall two part photo collage entitled "Rabbit, Snake, Rooster: Paradise (top), Rabbit, Snake, Rooster: Home (bottom)." The dynamic interplay of drawn linear forms over photographic images of dwellings made of earth and rocks seems evocative of a sense of pleasure and joy to be found in the harmony of nature in a built environment.

Steven Evan Lam and **Erin Lee's** one minute web-based flash loop on the blog, entitled "2019" compiles an assortment of quotes taken from presidential speeches and the media. "By decontextualizing the quotes from their sources and placing them in a formal replication of Ridley Scott's 1982 "Blade Runner" (the director's cut was released months after the L.A. Riots), the project attempts to situate "calming" as a symbolic method to control the masses, while playing with the idea of crisis as a turning point--an event with the potential to destabilize subjectivity."

Jin Soo Kim's painting, "What What," and **Deborah Boardman's** painting on paper, "In my studio the world flows in," asks viewers to ponder the relationship of one's personal life to the larger socio-

political context.

Curators **Edwin Ramoran** (Longwood Arts Project), **Serena Basta** (Sculpture Center), and artist/curator **Fred Wilson** created a curatorial version of the "Cadavre Equis." As curators they all chose an artist's work not knowing who the other artists were or the artworks chosen by each other. They kept to the theme suggested by the title "Exquisite Crisis and Encounters" and each chose a part of the body. Fred chose the head, Edwin the torso, Serena the feet. As it turned out, Fred's choice was a drawing by **Jorge Julian Aris-tizabal**, Edwin's choice was a video work by **Ivan Monforte** and Serena's choice was a photo document by **Sylvie Fluery**.

The six participants, both curators and artists, each brought their different talents to bare on the same subject. Through the chaos, confusion and DADA serendipity of their "corpse", this "multi-culturalriot" of artists, curators and intentions produces a strong message of the plight, life, death and love within the contemporary urban environment.

Material Sensibilities/Process Matters

In the context of this exhibition's emphasis on social political history and memory, work that incisively relies on its form, materials and process for its content is of special focus here.

H.K. Zahmani organized a large group of fellow artists including **Nena Amster, Salomon Huerta, Odili Donald Odita, Rachelle Rojany, Tomas Ruller, Jose Sarinana, Petra Schilder, and Kim Yasuda**. The resulting ensemble of works is adventurous in its eclectic range of materials and form that included Zamantoni and Ruller's collaborative video of a performance of the two of them engaged in paintball combat, that references a work by Chris Burden entitled, "Shoot," to Huerta's painted portrait of Zapata; to Rojany's floor sculpture in wood that is a metaphor of a broken bridge; to Yasuda's suspended stack of iced Bundt cakes. Sarinana relates that his work is based an event that happened to his grandparents during the LA Riots, when they bought a VCR from a guy off the street, most possibly a looter, and they opened the box to find two bricks. As the group organizer, Zahmani felt it was important to rely on chance to arrive at

the final work--so no one in the group knew what others were contributing.

Vince Golveo's collaboration with **Nodeth Vang, Young Chung, Tala Mateo, Pemi K. Gill**, "Let Go," was based on a

set of cryptic instructions that Golveo sent to each group member that is found on the blog along with the original sketch. The exuberant fusion of images, patterns and textures that activate the four framed work hint at the regenerative agency and esprit de corps of lives informed by the legacy of gay liberation and pride movements. A circular design of the words radiating from the center of all four works reverberates like a chant or a prayer without end as if in a call for unity and harmony.

Often, outsiders can sum up a city better than any local as in the case of Vancouver-based artists, **David Khang** and **Henry Tsang** who designed a banner with matching T-shirts that is just waiting for the right LA team in need of a boost. Their deft branding of the city with stylized cityscape in blazing flames and its iconic palm tree that doubles as an explosion packs a sly and wicked punch.

An adjacent gallery sculpture wound around a column is **Ellen Krout-Hasegawa's** "Knot for Sale or Speed Queen, I Think I Love You," made of men's undershirts that she had worn and washed in one of the neighborhood laundromats where she also assembled them by knotting one to another. Inspired by a Korean shamans' performance of a funerary rites that the artist had witnessed in which the undoing of a long line of knots is symbolic for the release from regret or unaddressed longing, Krout-Hasegawa concludes that she's come to view the history of Los Angeles in somewhat similar terms with "The Riots/Uprising of 1992 as merely one knot among many."

A close-up image of weeds in front of a building in **Jin Lee's** archival pigment print served as the point of departure for her group of cohorts. **Candida Alvarez's** delicate pencil on vellum drawing in which Alvarez traced Lee photograph "until it disappeared into my drawing." **Jason Reed's** photograph of a bucolic field of weeds betray a trace of a former Housing Project in St. Louis in the incongruent sighting of a lamppost. **Wendy Jacob's** photographic image of a professional tightrope walker on the suspended line suggests "possibilities for multiple and seamless border crossings." **Kim Mitseff's** sculpture is like a wonderous playground piled high with colorful profusion of sugar blocks and chocolate blobs accented with cutesy, kitschy toys that is really a cover for a lesson in entropy. *Either* both poem and/or essay, **Calvin Forbes'** text is a potent litany of names that follow below the heading *What Color Black Do You Prefer/W.E.B. Dubois, Vanessa Williams, Walter White/Romare Beardon, Nella Larson, Muhammad Ali/Adam Clayton Powell, Jelly Roll Morton/Sterling Brown, Lena Horne, Charles Chestnut...and so on*. Addressing this partial roll call, the artist opines that "one of the gifts African Americans have given the world is an expansive definition of what it means to be black."

Situated in a corner, fragments of birdlike images on paper created by burn patterns are perched on spikes found on building to thwart such congregation. Does the metaphoric critique in the collaborative installation, "(Not to be) Pigeon Holed" by **Patrick "Pato" Hebert, Jaime Cortez, Peter Precourt**, extend beyond inhospitable built environment, perhaps to encompass questions about the root of quotidian experiences of oppression and violence?

The provocative visual impact of an oversized truncheon of **Carlos Andrade** and **Todd Ayoung's**, "Body Burden, Placebo, Early Bird," parallels the potential of its brute force in action. In the background, the artists' variation of the ubiquitous NYPD slogan gives unequivocal understanding about their stance with regards to police brutality.

The partial wallpapering with copies of Warhol's 1965, "Flowers" by art historian **Midori Yamamura** is part of her ongoing research about art market pressures on political expression. Yamamura asserts that, "*Flowers* are Warhol's cynical response to the tacit political oppression imposed on artists by entrepreneurial collectors, curators, dealers, and writers, which consequently deprived artists' freedom of creativity."

Two final works that share a minimalist, less is more attitude, sum up the evocative power of a well-chosen object. One is **Margaret Honda's** "West Blvd.," a discarded, crumpled sheet of letter size paper and the other is **Byoung Ok Koh's** black clock hung high on a wall. If nature abhors a vacuum and rushes to fill it, similarly, their succinct "statements" paradoxically prompts an overdrive of interpretations.

In closing, I want to note my heartfelt appreciation to all the participants in the exhibition who joined me in a leap of faith and imagination to envision EXQUISITE possibilities in this communal act of remembering. I hope this project serves as an opening to continue the dialogue with new questions and critical insights to traverse the imaginary expanse.

¹ excerpt from Jessica Hagedorn's jacket cover praise for the 1996 novel, *White Boy Shuffle*, a coming of age story of an African American.

² In an earlier passage, Beattie offers this nudge about Ms. Kim: "Ms. Kim was the half-black, half-Korean owner of the corner store. Fathered by a black GI, she was born in Korea and at the age seventeen was adopted by a black family and raised in Fresno. To us, when she was behind the counter of her store, Ms. Kim was Korean. When she was out on the streets walking her dogs, she was black. Ms. Kim and I used to kid each other as to who had the flattest rear end." (p. 89)

³ My choice of the term *riots* undoubtedly raises questions symptomatic of the ongoing controversy surrounding this history. One of the most nuanced and informative discussions concerning the naming issue was taken up by Min Hyoung Song in his *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 14-16). While my opinions stated here closely follow Song's main arguments, they are in their limitations, my own. With the understanding that no single term can adequately encompass the totality of the event, I have chosen to use the most commonly accepted term not simply based on consensus but because the other terms in usage are perhaps more problematic. Terms such as *uprising, rebellion, insurrection* or *even revolution* suggest a level of coordinated oppositional action that was not evident by most accounts. The other terms considered more neutral such as *civil disobedience, unrest* or *disturbance* seem to sidestep the scope and gravity of the mayhem and violence that resulted in 53 deaths, 2,000 people injured, an estimated 3,600 fires that destroyed 1,100 buildings. Of particular relevance to the exhibition, the term *riots* in the plural also seems to offer the richest possibilities of definitions in the dialectical interplay between violence and debauchery, revelry and exuberance.

⁴ Min Hyoung Song's aforementioned publication has become an indispensable resource for its incisive discussion of a wide array of fiction and nonfiction, popular films and documentaries as well as its in-depth analysis of certain key works of cultural production that are informed by the LA Riots.

⁵ I want to extend my appreciation to Cindy Yang, tech extraordinaire, Noah Loehsberg and everyone of the A/P/A staff: Alexandra Chang, Ruby Gomez, Antonette Bueno, Nyisha Hohn, Stanley Pradel, and Dylan Yeats. Thanks also to Jack Tchen's vision for A/P/A which always included the Arts to which I am a beneficiary. I am indebted to Koh Byoung Ok for his overall design consultation and services, Ellen Krout-Hasegawa for her proofreading and Allan de-Souza for general support and specifically for the photo documentation of the exhibition. (The sugar sculpture referred to is Kim Mitseff's.)