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I N T E R N A T I O N A L



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ALEXANDER CALDER

BY DAVID RIMANELLI

LA RULES

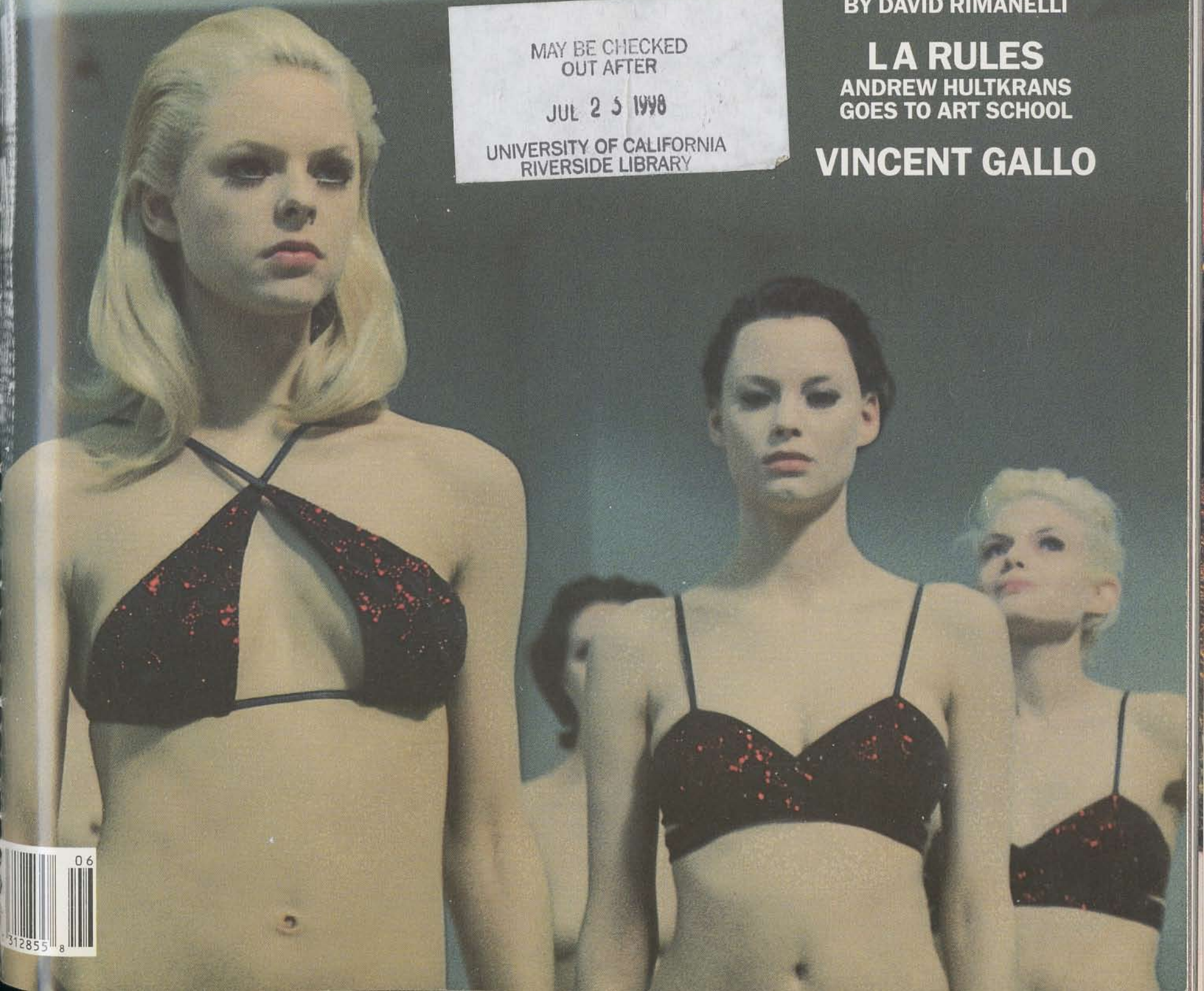
ANDREW HULTKRANS
GOES TO ART SCHOOL

VINCENT GALLO

MAY BE CHECKED
OUT AFTER

JUL 25 1998

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Not so long ago the decision to become an artist was greeted by parents with horror. But with the '80s art boom, the joke was that art was every bit as solid a career choice as dentistry. With more than 10,000 students due to pack off to graduate arts programs this fall, we wondered where tomorrow's MFAs most want to go today and why. With all signs pointing to Los Angeles and a pair of schools—UCLA and the Art Center College of Design—battling for the distinction of Black Mountain by the beach, we asked **Andrew Hultkrans to visit the campuses and talk with students in their studios. Photographer **Jeff Burton** followed with his camera.**

Surf and Turf

If UCLA were a rock scene, it would be Seattle, right after Nevermind went platinum.

—Dennis Cooper, *Spin*, July 1997

As I follow Dennis Cooper's car along a tortuous insider's route to the bowels of Culver City, location of UCLA's graduate art studios, I wonder if I'm being taken for a ride. A disarmingly friendly man despite (or because of) his snuff-film aesthetics as a fiction writer, Cooper has acted as unofficial evangelist for UCLA's MFA students for the past two years. Last summer the novelist (and UCLA faculty member) humanized his protégés for art outsiders in *Spin*, praising them as much for their wacky behavior—psychedelic drug use, zany costume parties, wrestling in a kiddie pool filled with fake blood—as for their art, which he describes with characteristic faux-naïf

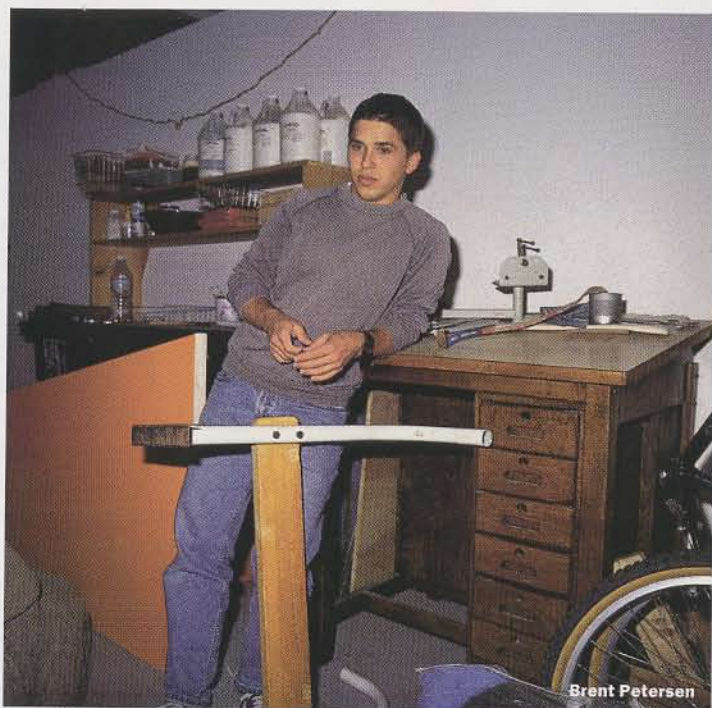
bemusement as “crazy, large-scale, incredibly ambitious, and very sincere.” This spring he brought to New York his “Brighten the Corners: Five Artists from Los Angeles,” a show featuring recent grads and current students at the Marianne Boesky Gallery in SoHo. Borrowing its name from a Pavement album, this East Coast coming-out party seems another effort by Cooper to demystify his students' work for a more general public. While certainly more sincere than, say, Subaru's risible recent attempt to equate one of its cars with punk, Cooper's wheel-greasing still begs the question. Can fine art capture the instant accessibility and popular appeal of indie rock? Boesky herself cites the work's “lack of irony and cynicism” as its selling point. Other gallerists are more bold. Richard Telles, a Los Angeles dealer who exhibits recent UCLA students, claims, “The LA schools simply characterize what the art world is interested in right now.”

It would be easy to dismiss such comments as self-interested boosterism if it weren't for the overwhelming evidence of art-world fascination with the LA schools, particularly UCLA and Art Center. In addition to *Spin*, articles in such unlikely venues as *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Forbes* have touted LA's “hot” art scene, fed by its schools. In these pages last winter, the relative temperature went without saying. For a review of “Malibu Sex Party,” a show made up largely of UCLA students, *Artforum* contributing editor Bruce Hainley wrote, “Everyone is by now aware of the hype about the LA art scene.” Most telling, though, was the lineup of last year's Whitney Biennial, which featured such an unprecedented number of recent UCLA grads and their famous teachers that *Los Angeles Times* critic Christopher Knight dubbed it “the UCLA Biennial.” While some point to the emergence of Jason Rhoades as an augury of UCLA's current buzz, the cyclical dynamic that art shares with the what's-hot-what's-not pendulum of fashion provides a more likely explanation. Exactly twenty years ago, the eyes of the art world were on another Southern California art school, looking for the Next Big Thing.

[Cal Arts] offered no drawing classes (craftsmanship was considered passé), but the course catalog included seminars in joint rolling and witchcraft. Classes generally had no assigned meeting time but were considered in session whenever the instructor ran into a student on campus. When an art class held an orgy that first year, news of it reached New York.

—Ralph Rugoff, *Vogue*, 1989

Art schools have gone in and out of style over the years, generally serving as solid, if unremarkable pedagogical institutions that train young artists to be teachers. Occasionally, however, a



Brent Petersen UCLA

They stress production at UCLA. During orientation, Lari Pittman said, "We don't want to think of you as students, you're just working artists who happen to be in school." If you're not making a major piece, you're not making anything. I can't make a set of drawings and show them. It's like, "Where's your big-ass sculpture?" The negative thing is that time gets compressed. Somebody gives an artist's lecture here and they talk about a body of work they've been doing for five years. Here, it's like, "Where's your next thing?" It feels like you have to keep up with the energy the instructors have.

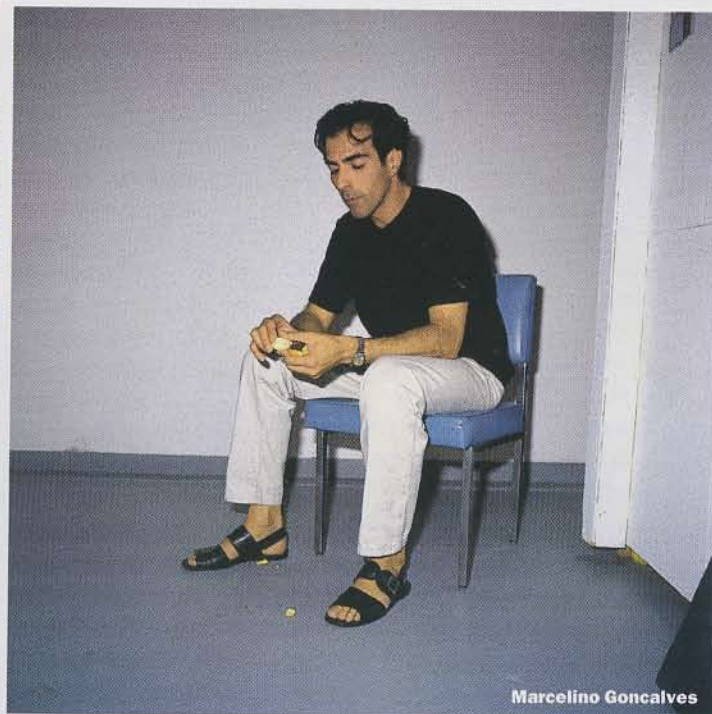
Jennifer Moon Art Center

I decided to major in art at college because I thought it might be an easy way to coast through. I originally applied to UCLA because they didn't ask for a portfolio. At UCLA I learned how to make stuff. They didn't stress reading or researching. They really wanted you to produce. I learned a way of working that I liked. I think of Art Center as a place that's teaching me how to talk about my work. I do think it's more theoretical here. At UCLA I was allowed to work free and do as much as I could. When I came here it condensed into something really solid.



Marcelino Goncalves UCLA

I'm aware of the buzz around UCLA, but I wasn't when I applied. Whether or not you choose to play that game is really up to you. I'm laying low my first year here because I want to avoid the "too much too soon" syndrome. The public reviews are weird, but I try to shut that out as much as possible, being aware but trying not to have my expectations knocked down. The pressure is scary. It's a little secretive. We know what's going on but it's not clearly evident. There's an undercurrent that you feel. You know people are going to be looking at you from the outside.





Jonathan Herder

Jonathan Herder Art Center

This is a privilege, an opportunity to indulge in unfettered production and learning. No other way would I have been able to commit two years to investigating my possible role within the arts, to develop without the interruptions of a professional existence. My investigation led me to Art Center because it was my understanding that this school would be unparalleled in the amount of attention a student would receive. The ratio of students to faculty is extremely generous. There's a staggering number of visits and very challenging feedback. Complacency is very difficult to fall into here.

Karin Gulbran UCLA

I feel like the walls are transparent here. I feel lucky that there's a lot of buzz and I hope good things will come to me, but I also feel like it can be really destructive. It's two sides of the same coin. I expected grad school to be difficult, but it's just a whole different kind of difficult. The pressure's really high. My ideas of failure are so much different now. I see my peers having a lot of shows and then I start to have those expectations for myself.

Won Ju Lim Art Center

I'm aware that Art Center is hot right now, and I could use that to my benefit. There are a lot of students here who show more than I do, but I feel that this is not the right time for me. Art Center's more of a think tank than UCLA. At UCLA, they pump out a lot of work. There are students at Art Center who produce a lot, but many use the teachers to develop their thinking rather than their hands. If you're theoretically driven, you should come here, but if you're more oriented toward materials, UCLA's better. People at Art Center use theoretical language, and I felt like a real foreigner my first term here.



Karin Gulbran



Won Ju Lim

fortuitous alignment of professors, students, and the market occurs, sparking a flashpoint that gallerists, collectors, and critics find hard to ignore. Not surprisingly, an art school's swift rise to prominence is often initiated by a particularly inspired artist-professor. The arrival of Bauhaus refugee Josef Albers at Yale's School of Fine Arts in 1950 inaugurated the school's longstanding reign as the premier northeastern art academy. For nearly fifty years, Yale's program has ebbed and flowed while always retaining a dominant

Fortunately for the LA art community, the group associated with Cal Arts' "heroic period" meiotically headed for two other local schools, UCLA and Art Center College of Design.

position, graduating a diverse group of notables such as Richard Serra, Brice Marden, Chuck Close, and Jonathan Borofsky, and, more recently, Matthew Barney and Sean Landers. In Europe, Joseph Beuys reinvigorated German art in the '60s with his populist, iconoclastic pedagogy at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art, drawing attention to both the city and the school and producing artists producing a generation of giants including Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, and Blinky Palermo. More recently, London's Goldsmiths, run by Yale alumnus Michael Craig-Martin, set off the much-hyped Young British Artist phenomenon,

largely due to the now legendary 1988 show "Freeze," curated by then Goldsmiths student Damien Hirst. Heralding media fascination with "Cool Britannia," graduates of Craig-Martin's late '80s to early '90s Goldsmiths infested galleries and fashion magazines alike, creating a buzz that most closely resembles LA's today. But while most "hot" art schools have some kind of history, however humble, before their moment of glory, a few, like the Walt Disney-founded California Institute of the Arts, seemed to emerge from a vacuum.

The improbable ascendancy of Cal Arts during the '70s constituted the first genuine domestic threat to the northeastern art establishment. Its first decade of graduates included such rising luminaries as David Salle, Eric Fischl, Mike Kelley, Ashley Bickerton, Lari Pittman, and Stephen Prina. Its faculty, led by the Conceptualist troika of John Baldessari, Michael Asher, and Douglas Huebler, boasted an impressive roster of artists working across a spectrum of media. Nam June Paik, Roberto Rossellini, Laurie Anderson, Bruce Nauman, Jonathan Borofsky, and Barbara Kruger all passed through Valencia, lending heft to the nascent institution's reputation. This felicitous convergence of teachers and

students would redefine the paradigm for art education, recasting the MFA program as a community of working artists by leaving the regimented curriculum to Yale. "In the tradition of American art schools, Yale was the painting school, Cal Arts was the antipainting school," muses Art Center's Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, who taught at Cal Arts from 1980 until 1985. "It's very difficult to get anything done on the East Coast in terms of art pedagogy because it is so institutionally frozen."

Cal Arts' Conceptual orgy came to a close in 1983-84 with the arrival of Catherine Lord as dean. "It became quite ideological," recalls Art Center chair Richard Hertz, who taught at Cal Arts from '74 to '79. "She wanted artists to be socially responsible, politicized—feminist issues, gay/lesbian issues. What was allowed became very narrow, and as a result Baldessari left, and he was really the main influence there." Another casualty was Gilbert-Rolfe: "I was driven out by something of a PC rage in '85, but the heroic period had already passed when I was there. The last wave was still there, but it was heading into decline, becoming the homogenous PC school it is today." In his 1989 *Vogue* article on Cal Arts, critic Ralph Rugoff wondered aloud whether the school, once so constructively chaotic, had become "merely the new academy." By most accounts, it had. As Gilbert-Rolfe recalls, "In the early '90s I was having dinner with a critic friend, and he said, 'I'm just not going to any more Cal Arts students' studios. I'll go there and there's this thing, and the student hands me a list of ingredients, like this is where the Benjamin reference is.'" Longtime LA gallerist Marc Foxx characterizes the stultifying shift at Cal Arts from praxis to theory: "When I first got into the art world, it was Cal Arts. John Baldessari was supremely important in bringing this new formula to the art school. Today, there's a lot of good theory coming out of there, but I don't see a class that's really forming together the way UCLA and Art Center have."

In an art market obsessed with product, it's not especially surprising that Cal Arts' makeover as an academy producing laundry lists of theoretical tropes in lieu of objects was bad news. Fortunately for the LA art community, the group associated with Cal Arts' "heroic period" meiotically headed for two other local schools, UCLA and Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. Cal Arts grad and current UCLA faculty member Lari Pittman was among these. "When I left grad school in '76, I was among the first generation of artists, along with Mike Kelley and others, who decided not to go and live in New York. Now that's a given." Indeed, UCLA and Art Center owe much of their current prestige to the LA patriotism of its '70s generation students and faculty, many from Cal Arts, and

the integral role teaching plays in that art community. "What makes LA so great is that the school program is actually a vital part of the community," observes New York gallerist Andrea Rosen, who currently shows Art Center student Charlie White. "A big part of being in the art community in LA is being a teacher."

Richard Hertz, who has chaired Art Center's graduate division of Liberal Arts & Sciences since 1979, recognized the potential to produce another premier art program. Arriving at the institution when the MFA track there was little more than a minor independent study program attached to a "glorified trade school," he had bigger ideas. "Having been at Cal Arts, which had this great community, I thought I'd like to create something like that here. Because a lot of faculty were leaving and there was all this turmoil, I could bring in a lot of these people." Over the course of a decade, that's exactly what Hertz did, starting with recent Cal Arts grad Stephen Prina in 1980 and adding Gilbert-Rolfe in '85 and Mike Kelley in '88. By the late '80s, thanks to Hertz's inspired hirings, Art Center had inherited Cal Arts' throne as the most talked about program in LA. Today, the school's diverse list of faculty and visiting advisers—including artists Diana Thater, Tim Ebner, Liz Larner, Jorge Pardo, and Christopher Williams, *Semiotext(e)* founder Sylvère Lotringer, and Red Krayola stalwart Mayo Thompson—is unparalleled by any other, save UCLA.

The history of UCLA's all-star lineup is somewhat organic compared to Art Center's, the result more of generational turnover and snowball effect than the strategic intentions of one man, but the arrival of performance artist Chris Burden and young sculptor Charles Ray at the end of the '70s and beginning of the '80s was clearly the defining moment. "When I came, UCLA was an ivory tower painting school, a contingent of old farts," recalls Ray. In the years to come, Nancy Rubins, Paul McCarthy, and Mike Kelley were all hired, but according to Ray, "the older guys still ran the school. They would never let us do 100 percent what we wanted. It slowly rolled along until it erupted into an all-out war in '86. We dechaired the chairman [Ray Brown, who had run the Art Center's program since 1976]. It was a mess. Older guys would see you in the hall and say, 'You're a goddamn motherfucker. I'm going to kill you.'" With the "old farts" out of the way, Ray, along with Burden, Rubins, and McCarthy, took over the department and began luring others, including Lari Pittman, photographer James Welling, and Cal Arts guru Baldessari. "UCLA is the first public school where the tenured faculty are above all professional artists," boasts Pittman. According to Ray, this is the secret of the school's success. "Our current prominence comes from the fact that we're a department of

artists. As long as I've been here, I've never written a curriculum, never prepared for a class. I've just sort of taught by the seat of my pants. I've hired a lot of good young artists and I would never in a million years ask them to write a curriculum. I would just trust them as artists."

Ray extends this "trust" to his program's students as well, pioneering a method of hands-off pedagogy that Pittman characterizes as "sweet neglect." As Marc Foxx, who shows several young UCLA sculptors, notes, "Charley Ray is the last person to tell anyone to make sculpture that looks like his own work." This freedom from orthodoxy has attracted, and produced, a certain kind of UCLA student in recent years. "There's a bit more fending for yourself here," remarks Pittman. "If I were to characterize it in terms of butch and femme, I think the butch student fares better at UCLA. It's a very physical school." According to

Dennis Cooper, "the whole point of the [*Spin*] article was to say, Look, these kids are cool, they make this weird stuff, and it's just as good as an electronica CD. They're not elitists, they're not intellectuals. They're just like you." Several of his subjects, including Evan Holloway, Casey Cook, Liz Craft, and Tim Rogeberg have ridden the UCLA wave, going on to show frequently since graduating. But after my visit to the Warner Building, UCLA's graduate studio facility, and a chat with Cooper, I sense that while the buzz remains strong, the drugs may be wearing off. While there was some surprisingly funny and absurdly intangible work—Brent Petersen's stalking of Ronald McDonald up and down the California coast with a video camera, Brandon Lattu's taking up residence at LAX for an entire week—it was done during the high times Cooper chronicled. Today, Petersen responsibly runs Brent Petersen Gallery and codirects Room 702, two spaces in LA, and Lattu has taken to rigorously documenting and deconstructing his apartment, using photography, color-coding, and household items.

Aside from the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* pods populating the common room, the conspiratorial gleam in Petersen's eye when I note the paranoid trippiness of his Ronald McDonald surveillance tape, and Marcelino Goncalves' paintings, which evince a possibly unwholesome obsession with palm trees and truckers, the atmosphere at the Warner Building bore little resemblance to

The history of UCLA's all-star lineup is somewhat organic compared to Art Center's, but the arrival of Chris Burden and Charles Ray was clearly the defining moment.

Liz Bentel Art Center

When I came to Art Center, I was very nervous that it was going to be a very theory-oriented school. I had just come from UCLA, where it was like, "Just do your work." But they gear the program here to each student. The faculty is very generous in offering you ideas on what theory you should be reading in conjunction with your work, but I have my own "theory." Not that I'm against what Deleuze or Freud have to say, but I need time to explore the ideas in my head. The professors understand that and give me the space to work on my ideas.

Scott Trattner UCLA

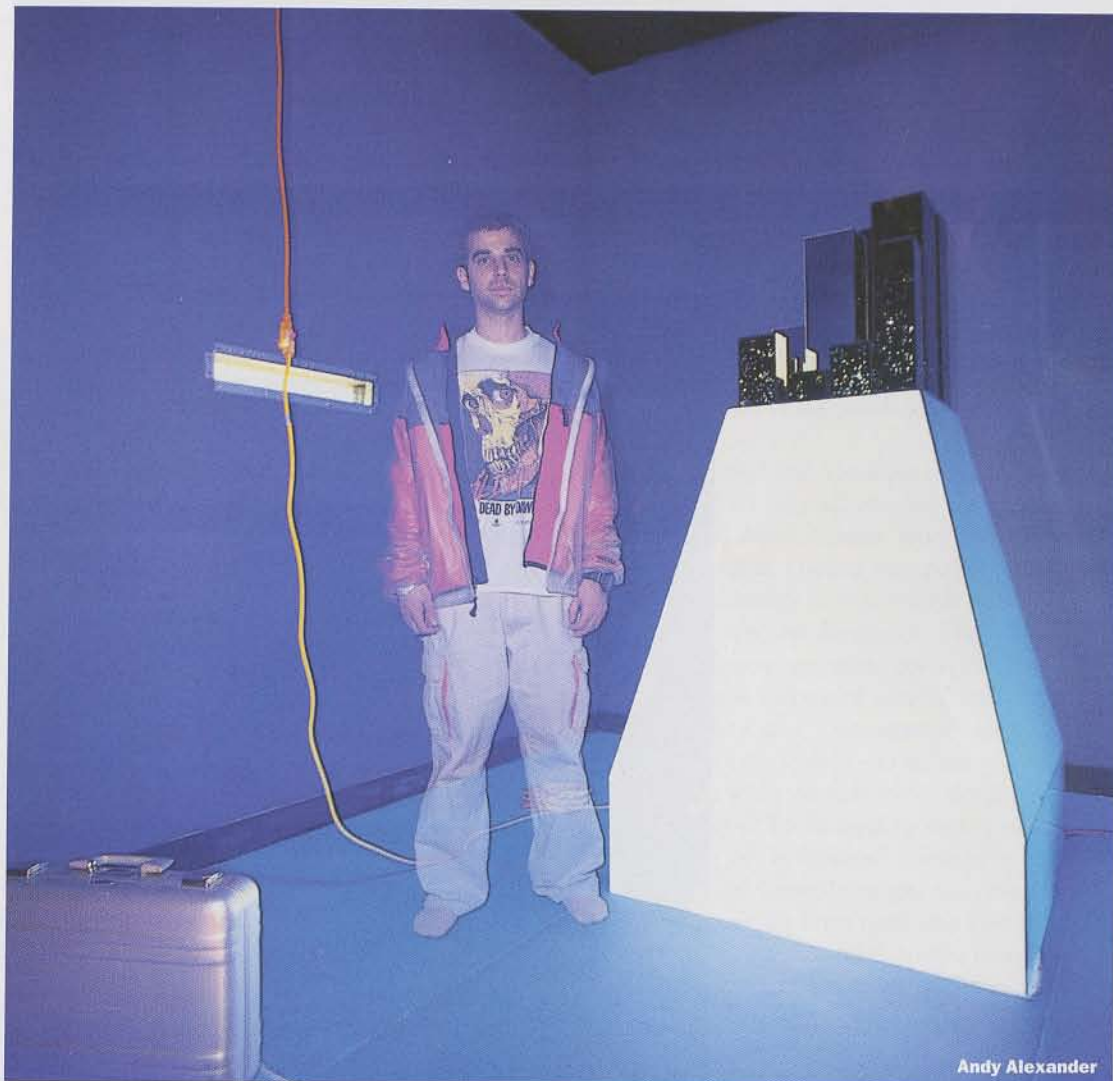
UCLA's ideology is practice. The faculty wants you to be working all the time, and they won't let you get away with any crap. I didn't know that dealers would be showing up at every review. To me, reviews are about progress, but when dealers come in, they want to see product, like, "We can take this now." Sometimes it gets a little twisted. A lot of my peers are doing well, and I'd be lying if I said I wouldn't be disappointed if I didn't show before I got out. Still, I welcome the competition. It raises the ante.

Andy Alexander Art Center

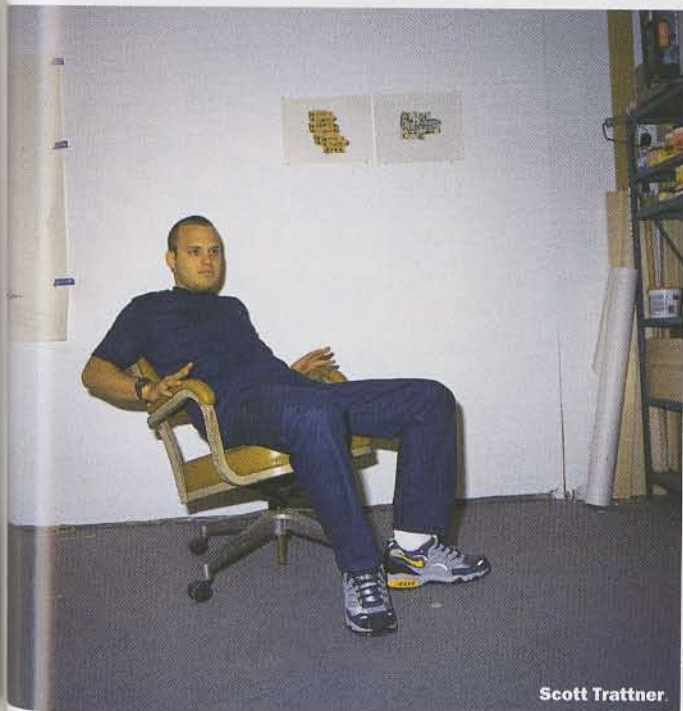
This might sound naive, but when I think about education, I'm more interested in what I'm going to learn, as opposed to what direction it's going to take me in a career. The reason I recruit high school kids to go to art school is that it teaches you certain ways of looking at things, a way of being critical about culture that is incredibly imperative, especially right now. I want to apply what I've learned at art school to a gamut of practices, not just the art world.



Liz Bentel



Andy Alexander



Scott Trattner



Dean Sameshima

Dean Sameshima Art Center

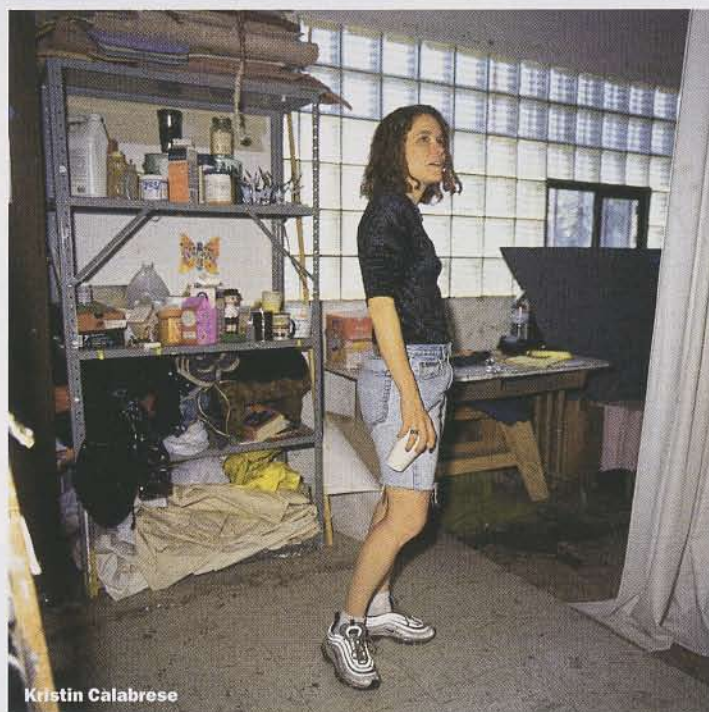
I don't think I would have been happy at UCLA. You see really interesting work coming out of there, and as soon as they graduate, they get a show in a major gallery. And then there's all this pressure on these poor kids, and what do they do after that? I don't even know if they have time to develop what their work is critically about. They just make shit and stick it up there. There's a bit of pressure here at Art Center, but it's a little more relaxed.

Kristin Calabrese UCLA

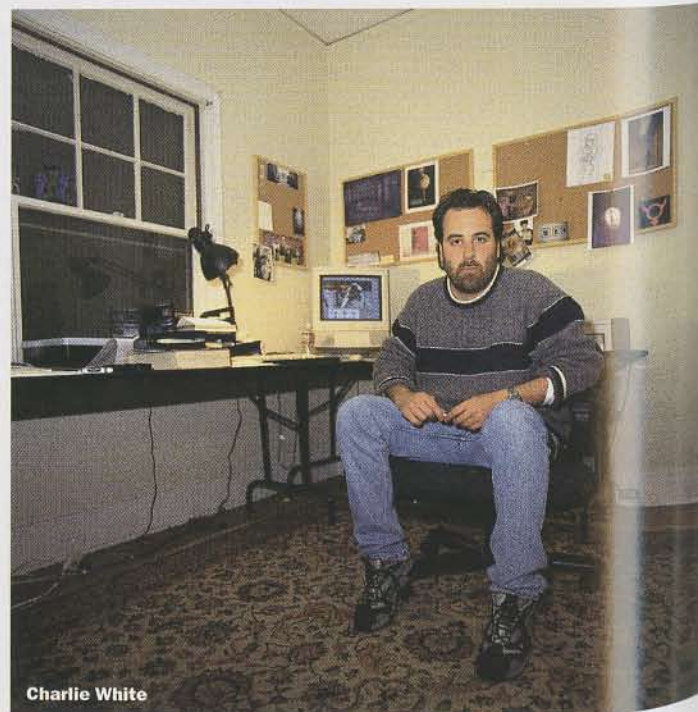
The *Spin* thing last year was pretty weird. People get tense around each other. Yesterday maybe everybody was light-hearted and in a good mood, and today people smile at each other but they're thinking, "What's going on? What's happening? Are you getting something I'm not getting?" It's really sad, because we're all artists and we're all in this together. You have to try really hard to ignore the market while you're working. If the market wants certain things from you, and you don't want to make them anymore, you make them and they look . . . wrong.

Charlie White Art Center

I don't think it's necessary to have an MFA. I was drawn to Art Center proper more than just the graduate art program. I was very attracted to the mothership ["The Bridge" building]. It has a hum. It was a turn-on to be in a place that would facilitate certain skills that other art schools don't. It's a theory-laden program, with Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe et al., but the machine is up there at the main building. You can balance the two, which you have to at Art Center, because you're coming out with a \$60,000 debt. You have to be employable.



Kristin Calabrese



Charlie White

Despite being chaired by a man named Hertz, Art Center is the Avis of LA art schools. They try harder and are attentive to customers' needs, but more people still shop at their rival.

the drug-addled Romper Room of Cooper's article. "It does feel much more buttoned-down," observes Cooper. "The students I know have been saying that no one parties, no one hangs out. They haven't had a single party at the Warner Building all year. That was going on all the time last year. You weren't supposed to sleep there, but people practically did. It was very much this big family." Pressed to explain this newfound sobriety, Cooper can only speculate. The

influence of recently appointed chair Mary Kelly, whose theoretical proclivities clash somewhat with the production-oriented faculty, may have had an effect on admissions, while the new students themselves may also have a more mercenary, careerist agenda than their older counterparts. More likely, the enhanced career expectations brought on by the success of their older peers may have prodded current students to buckle down and get to work, both to live up to the school's reputation and to take advantage of what may be their one big chance to make it in the art world.

Art Center produces graduates every bit as interesting as UCLA. But if it's a two-team competition, Art Center plays the underdog. They're a little more bookish, they want to be able to talk elegantly and persuasively and with a lot of rhetorical flourish about their own work. Whereas at UCLA they just go with their gut. Does it look right? Does it feel right? Good, it's done.

—Bruce Hainley

Despite being chaired by a man named Hertz, Art Center is the Avis of LA art schools. They try harder and are extra-attentive to their customers' needs, but more people still shop at their rival. While faculty and students are quick to point out that there is no explicit competition between the two programs, the combination of geographical proximity and simultaneous prominence is bound to accentuate their differences. Some are obvious. Art Center is a very expensive, private school attached to a technical design college. UCLA is a cheap, scholarship-rich public school attached to a state university. UCLA's Warner Building is a grungy, labyrinthine warehouse in grimly industrial Culver City. Art Center's graduate studio building in friendly downtown Pasadena is a new, tidy space with security guards and no graffiti in the bath-

room. You can smoke in the Warner Building. You can't at Art Center. On the night I visited Art Center's graduate studio building, however, the students appeared to be trying to usurp UCLA's image as a "Fuck art, let's dance" party school. After a relatively staid open studio cocktail hour, a rave erupted in the garage space next door. Skittering drum and bass throbbed through the studio halls, kegs were tapped, and local rave kids appeared, sniffing around for drugs.

Although Art Center has a reputation as a theory-laden program, some of the students' work wouldn't have been out of place at Cooper's UCLA. Liz Bentel's monomaniacal obsession with Catholic schoolgirls and cheerleaders leads to disturbingly cheery paintings, drawings, and sculptures, some depicting what the artist calls "lactation pyramids"—the acrobatic Rube Goldberg-esque routine of the "Immaculate Lactators Club for the Good of the Defenseless." Jennifer Moon, who during the course of our interview said, with a straight face, "I want to be a superhero" (and insisted that I too could be one if I wanted), has transformed her studio into a space called "The Facility." Surprisingly bereft of art per se, "The Facility" is instead a haven for extreme sports, with a sculpted climbing wall, a set of monkey bars, a kung fu dummy, and a tightrope. "It needs tightening," sighs Moon as I look up at the sagging rope. More than just an art project, "The Facility" is intended for public use. "When I'm done I'm going to advertise as a place where people can come and do safety classes and work out," promises Moon.

Somewhat predictably, both Bentel and Moon were art-department undergrads at UCLA. There's no such excuse for Charlie White, an affable, unpretentious New Yorker who would be impossible to single out as an artist in a police lineup. The entire output of his years at Art Center consists of two offbeat porn layouts, one for *Cheri* magazine, the other for *Penthouse Comix*. Rendered with photography and computer graphics, and reminiscent of *Heavy Metal*'s conflation of sci-fi and weird sex, White's radically art-directed spreads ("Femalien" and "Demonatrix") raise the bar for what you can get away with these days—in art schools and porn mags. One can only imagine what the deliciously dry Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, who suggests a Peter O'Toole aged by theory rather than gin, said in his first critique of "Femalien." Somewhat less heartening, and more in line with Art Center's image, was one student who seems to have spent an entire term fastening two thin wooden slats onto the wall of his stark white studio, forming tight, vertical parallel lines, and then painting them, one blue, one yellow. Heavy.

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A lot of students coming into art school today expect to make a career as an artist. When I went to art school, that was a ridiculous presumption. It was like planned failure to go to art school in my day. It was something you did for ideological reasons. You wanted to be an artist, but being an artist didn't mean you could have a career as an artist.

—Mike Kelley

One characteristic both UCLA and Art Center unquestionably share is an awareness of their privileged position in the art world. UCLA, in particular, has received an unprecedented amount of attention from gallerists, collectors, and the press. The loose accessibility of the Warner Building, the faculty's clout in the art world, and above all, the hype surrounding recent grads have all contributed to the feeding-frenzy atmosphere. "Gallery people do come by often," admits Pittman. "It's like we're growing stem cells here." At Art Center, with its burly security guards and faculty policy of discouraging plundering dealers, fewer students show before graduation, but they're often plucked soon afterward. "Art Center students are getting shows right away," says Kelley. "I think it's a presumption." Such enhanced career expectations have changed the rules of art school. Even in the heyday of Baldessari's Cal Arts, star students such as Kelley, Pittman, and Stephen Prina never expected to cash in. "When I was a graduate student in the late '70s, the market wasn't even a glimmer on the horizon," recalls Prina. Where once it took a promising artist a decade to make a dent in the gallery scene, students and recent grads now receive splashy introductions on both coasts, and even beyond.

Today, with collectors coming from as far as Europe to troll for student work, the lure of the market is unavoidable. Even students who enter school with Kelley's "ideological" intentions receive a quick awakening. "When I first came I just thought it would be a good pedagogical institution," remembers Amir Zaki, a UCLA photography student. "I didn't think about the career aspect, but that was due to being extremely naive. I was interested in getting a master's degree and developing my practice. I'm still interested in developing my practice, but now there's mixed information about your career and your practice, which sometimes collide."

This "collision" manifests itself in increased pressure, competition, and at times paranoia. "Part of the reason I opened my galleries was because I got a little tripped out," confesses Petersen. "I figured it would keep me busy and I wouldn't have to wait for something to happen. Waiting is the worst fucking thing in the world. There's a lot of whispering here, like 'Hey, this collector is coming by later.' It's nerve-wracking. I decided I couldn't deal with it."

Before all eyes were on UCLA and Art Center, they were both good programs. In some senses, they were probably more comfortable and better before. With the articles and with all the gallery owners coming through all the time, there's a feeling to many of the students that it's getting to be like yuppiedom. There's a success syndrome. They often feel if they

don't have a gallery or a show by the time they graduate, then they're losers. It's really, really sad. When the market falls and this whole thing crumbles down, which it will, I hope the students who are having early success don't think that their art-making is over.

—Charles Ray

While they readily admit they are partially responsible for the heavy dealer traffic in the studios, faculty members worry about the effect such basement shopping will have on their students' work. "You can have your first and second show," warns Pittman, "but will you have your twentieth? Hype both propels and kills. The tragic thing about the MFA trajectory in America is that it's being set up with the supposed guarantees of an MBA or a law degree, but the attrition rate is still tremendous." Even some dealers fear the "too much, too soon" syndrome. "There is a tendency for students to want to show before they even graduate," observes Margo Leavin, a prominent LA gallerist, "and other galleries in town are picking them up and selling their work. They're not out of diapers yet. To me, that's not a very healthy situation." Adds Hudson, who runs New York's gritty Feature Gallery, "I'm less and less interested in students and recent students. I admire the enthusiasm, but I don't see the kind of complexity that life experience brings to the work."

Even more sobering is the transience of the buzz surrounding the two schools. In a mercurial art market, there is bound to be a backlash. "The minute it becomes an academy, it'll be over," cautions Richard Telles, "which is clearly what happened with Cal Arts." Some gallerists, like Hudson, are already reading last rites: "UCLA, as a goldmine to plunder, is already over." Adds Foxx, "What I'm afraid of is that someone's going to put an 'LAism' on it, some sort of name or movement. Then the pendulum is going to swing." Beyond the whims of capricious gallerists, the faculty at both schools have their own internal worries. "I don't know if it can hold on," admits UCLA's Ray. "Cal Arts had its time, all schools have their time. Even now, it's starting to slip back. Mary Kelly, the new chair, is much more academically oriented, as are some of the other faculty." Even Dennis Cooper confesses that the "crazy, large-scale sculpture" that compelled him to write the *Spin* piece and curate "Brighten the Corners" seems to be absent from the newer students' studios. But if the recent infusion of seriousness worries some at UCLA, the problems facing Art Center may be a bit more pressing.

This spring, a growing rift between Richard Hertz and Art Center's administration over the department's budget led to Hertz being relieved as chair of the graduate design programs. He remains head of Liberal Arts & Sciences, but the abrupt action indicates an increasingly adversarial relationship between the graduate fine art department and Art Center proper. "The prestige and chic of Art Center is the graduate school," notes Bruce Hainley, "but the money-making program is the undergraduate design college, so there is a financial, as well as ideological, schism." The rift is reminiscent of another classic LA situation—the genius film director clashing with his meddling studio over final cut—but the potential effects of the split threaten to sink the ship. "It could lead to either our program becoming

more autonomous and having more say about its own budget," predicts Mike Kelley, "or it's going to return to being a technical school and we'll have to leave. It can't be run like a McDonald's." In a touching display of solidarity, the students have taken to wearing cheery orange buttons, designed by Stephen Prina and Mark Stritzel, which read "Dr. Hertz for President," but even they are aware of their department's precarious situation.

If UCLA ossifies and Art Center dissolves, it's unclear who will take their place in the spotlight. Long-standing programs like Yale, the Whitney Independent Studio Program, Cooper Union, and SVA are drawing little attention from gallerists who specialize in the work of younger artists. Many claim they just aren't what they used to be, and that the rigors of theory at these schools are killing the students' work. "Yale always seems to have a few people who rebel against the program and make interesting work," backhands Andrea Rosen, but Hudson simply "avoids Yale." Marc Foxx champions Great Britain as a font of challenging young work, citing Goldsmiths and Slade as two schools worthy of inspection. Bruce Hainley puts his money on a dark horse, Columbia's renovated program, chaired by former Yale honcho Ronald Jones. "He has his eye on LA," ventures Hainley. "He wants to steal their thunder. Maybe he will, maybe he won't. But his success will have more to do with the art world's fashion cycles than with whether there is interesting work coming out of Art Center or UCLA. It's going to be, Okay, we've heard about LA for the past five years, we want something new." Whatever the outcome, whoever intends to displace LA would be wise to hire someone as enthusiastic as Dennis Cooper, or at least some well-connected PR flacks, or school may be out for good. □