

On *THE* Radar

Seventeen Artists You Should Know About

It's *THE magazine Los Angeles's* first annual summer issue, and to make you care, we're devoting it to emerging artists.

The thinking was, school's out, who are the hottest players on the courts? Simple as that. But why do this at all? What's the big deal about emerging artists, as opposed to established artists, or obscure artists, or for that matter over-recognized or over-the-hill or not-yet-ready-for-prime-time artists? The fact is that Los Angeles's art scene — driven as it is by the impressive network of art schools and departments in the region — is, and has long been, defined by the artists who emerge into it. This is not (at least any longer) true of New York, for instance, which is driven by the art market far more than by its artists. And those other American cities for which it is also true — Philadelphia, for example — boast art scenes not large enough to present their artists effectively beyond their borders. This makes Los Angeles de facto the nation's largest cauldron of "new talent" (which is what "emerging artists" were called back in the day . . .).

Wouldn't it be more useful to examine the mechanisms by which an artist emerges? Well, sure, but who has the time or space? Rather, you can consider our declarations here implicit critiques of the whole "emerging artist" racket. This is not necessarily to bemoan the tendency to look for new faces — contemporary artistic discourse evolves thanks, among other things, to a constant infusion of new ideas and practices and skill sets — but to loosen the grip, however slightly, that conventional thinking and mainstream marketing have on the whole process of emergence. For better or worse, all of us at *THE magazine* are art-world monsters, hooked on the art world's cooking even as we might resist the soup of the day. What we're passing on to you here, once again to put it simply, is a few selections we've made from the menu — if not necessarily the stuff the maitre d' is flogging. — PETER FRANK



Man Holds a Car, 2009, black pencil on paper, 23" x 29". Courtesy Merry Karnowsky Gallery.

Mercedes Helnwein is a triple threat: besides making increasingly large waves with her drawings and occasional paintings of oddly disaffected young women and men, she has splashed as well with her short films of similar subjects and, especially, with her fiction/nonfiction/not-quite-fiction writing, to the point where Simon & Schuster, no less, has published her first novel. It all sounds

so lovely and smart-young-thingy, but Helnwein has the chops to produce genuinely provocative work, to do so seriously, and to keep doing so. She comes by such talent, and such sensitivity to the disquieting, genetically and geographically; daughter of Austrian hyper-realist painter-provocateur Gottfried Helnwein and sister to filmmakers and musicians, Mercedes was born in Vienna, raised in Ireland, and (with her family) now splits her time between the Emerald Isle and La-La Land. Drawing on sources and inspirations as diverse as R. Crumb, nineteenth-century Russian literature, and the Delta blues, Helnwein coaxes the ominous out of the banal — and vice versa — by finding madness and vulnerability in losers, wannabes, and twentysomething slackers whose affectless poses ill-mask their anxiety. Helnwein renders these lost souls with a technical proficiency just slightly less than elegant so that her style, like her subjects, subtly reveals its imbalances and inner tenderness — like Hopper but hipper. — PF



Still from *Blood Work*, 2009, HD Video, 3:00 minutes. Courtesy the artist and The Company, Los Angeles, CA.

Born in Chicago in 1974, **Julie Orser** studied photography and studio art, and currently does something that could easily be mistaken for filmmaking, if it weren't for the fact that modern cinema is the very thing her art most deftly deconstructs. Her videos and photographs are shown in institutions from MoMA and REDCAT to the Royal College of Art, but she also does well on the avant-garde film festival circuit. Taking apart and reconstituting the poisonous allure of fashion, the

psychological dimension of science fiction, horror, and noir, she amplifies key signifiers (dolls, designer bags, blood pools, bare light bulbs, the woods, lighting, music, and all the indispensable clues that let the audience know how to feel) in order to reveal how gender archetypes are created, perpetuated, and subverted in society. Orser's work, screened recently at The Company, is currently part of the Armory Center's *Drama of the Gifted Child: The Five Year Plan*. www.julieorser.com — SND

Using the male figure as his subject, **Miller Updegraff** grapples with the complexities and nuances inherent to the representation and assertion of power. Updegraff began his inquiry into male privilege and influence through his research on the exclusive Bohemian Grove — the clandestine working-vacation spot for the world's über-males, the ones who pull the global puppet strings — depicting his supremely authoritative subjects frolicking in the nude and engaged in frivolous play (events



Strategies of Commitment, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 36" x 30"

rumored actually to have transpired there). He honed his focus in on portraits of individual men who, because of their large size and heft, are perceived as imposing figures and unwittingly granted the status of authority. In both cases the men's agency is challenged, the power brokers caught naked and engaged in candid tomfoolery, and the physically larger men posed in supine or otherwise docile positions. Updegraff transfers or usurps his subjects' authority through his choice of depiction. The power play

at hand is not trite or peevis; it operates on an intriguingly subtle level, down to Updegraff's technical choices. There is firm gesture, but his brushstrokes do not feel rigid or controlled. His figures, while solid, are rendered somewhat tentative by his light touch and washes of color. Updegraff's use of succinct lines and dashes, on the other hand, leaves enough space between the moments and gestures to allow us to insinuate ourselves into the resolve. www.millerupdegraff.com — AMcE



In Defiance of Gravity, performance at Steve Turner Contemporary, May 2009. Courtesy the artist and Steve Turner Contemporary, Los Angeles.

My Barbarian is a performance group, founded in 2000 by Malik Gaines, Jade Gordon, and Alexandro Segade, whose glitzy tribal hip-hop cabaret rituals evoke the punch-drunk holy foolery of *commedia dell'arte* — but without the macho shenanigans.

Offering humor, satire, and politics as time-based social experiences, My Barbarian uses media with a surrealist's voracious pragmatism, embracing whatever serves their idea, be it music, movement, dialogue, video, costume, or the improvisational chaos of audience participation. The group has performed at LACMA, MoCA, the Whitney, the Studio Museum, and two *Performa Biennials*, but this year marked their first show in a commercial gallery (Steve Turner Contemporary). Their lack of object-fetish might stem from their mostly non-art backgrounds; Gaines (born 1973) holds a BA from UCLA in History and an MFA from Cal Arts in Writing; Gordon (born 1975) has a degree from USC in Theater; and Segade (born 1973) has a UCLA degree in English, has studied in the School of Film and Television, and is currently finishing an MFA, also at UCLA (which makes his the only Art degree in the bunch). www.mybarbarian.com —SND

There is something endearing and quaintly reassuring about **Kim Tucker's** ceramic creatures. Hers is a menagerie of misfits, and we are drawn to their strange, anthropomorphic qualities. In her most recent *Imperfect Eden* series, Tucker's creations are human and animal, or in some cases composites of humans, animals, and other aspects of nature. They



Two Nudes (detail), 2007, ceramic with china paint, 20" x 7" x 7" each

sprout flowers, bear lumps, bumps, and disquieting protrusions, or copious amount of fur. Tucker is proposing a new normal, a synthesis, and hence harmonization, of human and nature, bringing us back to Eden before we bit into the damned apple and plunged ourselves into self-imposed dualism. Almost in a Hindu-gods-meet-Sid-and-Marty-Kroft vein, but without the kitsch, Tucker's hirsute "monsters" are representations of a primal state, not coiffed and preened but real, hairy, and lovin' it. The men sport erections, the women have blossoms over their private parts, and their tender and unabashed corporeal awareness signifies their enlightenment. They are awakened and alert to their true essence. At first we may feel discomfort and even an inability to relate to Tucker's creatures, as if we were confronting our own warts and all; but once we recognize the beauty in their, and our, imperfections, we too are lovin' it. —AMcE

Choosing my artists proved a wee bit challenging, as there are many I admire, and more than a bit titillating, as it provided an opportunity to spend some special magic moments with artists who turn me on. I love these artists for their beauty and their minds. Talking with each of them about their work was like sipping a warm cup of scrumptious in front of roaring fire on a cold winter's eve. It made me content inside and out. And I found the discovery of inadvertent connections and through-lines between them uncanny and

illuminating. I have known each of these artists for close to a decade and relish the privilege and excitement of following the development of their work. For the sake of brevity, I have curtailed my proclivity for garrulous ramblings and pray that I have aptly encapsulated the essence of their artistry. And, oh yes: I understand the "emerging artist" to be one who has achieved modest, or even larger, success and acclaim but remains unrepresented by a gallery.

—ASHLEY McLEAN EMENEGGER

Eric Zammitt continues the stylistic arc set in motion by his father, the late finish/fetish painter-sculptor Norman Zammitt, while establishing a distinct manner, and style, for himself. Hewing mostly to the wall, Eric still expands on Norman's luminous vision by seemingly weaving laminated acrylic plastic (actually assembling thousands of discrete plastic pieces) into shimmering fields whose attenuated geometric formations give the sensation of constant movement — and constant light. As you can see in several of his paintings currently on view in LOOK Gallery's *Locals Only* group show (until July 25), Zammitt's approach at once embraces and transcends the decorative, coaxing an almost religious numinousness out of so many colored morsels. His

uninflected surfaces allow the visual depth of the underlying designs to recede into infinity; there is a peculiar hall-of-mirrors effect, as if the flickering acrylic tiles were actually part of a single grand structure endlessly reflecting itself. Zammitt's painting/constructions have been compared to ocean sunsets, but they reach well into outer space. —PF



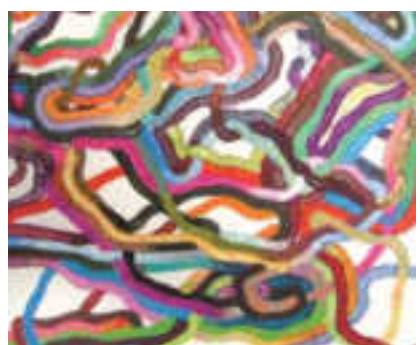
Blush/hybrid (detail), 2009, 151,276 pieces of colored acrylic plastic and glue, 71½" x 77½"

Born 1957 in Chattanooga, **Wayne White** took a more scenic route to L.A. than some of the others on this list, but there's no denying that these are his years. He enjoyed a well-received solo show in Culver City in 2008 — including a juicy, above-the-fold, full-color editorial reproduction in the *New York Times*. Meanwhile, a new book by Todd Oldham (the fashionista is also an international art and design collector) chronicles the development of White's signature style from his career in Hollywood art departments (*Pee-Wee's Playhouse*) to his quirky wood sculptures and most notably his text-based interventions on found paintings. Operating on the kind of Sunday-painter, Kinkade-wannabe pastoral landscapes that scream oppressive



Tinted Lard, 2009, acrylic on offset lithograph, 18¾" x 25"

banality, White improves such visual drivel with catty, caustic, colorful bits of copy that get straight to the point — the inside joke at someone's (not yours, certainly not his) expense. www.western-project.com/white/white.html —SND



Worm of Stifled Creativity (detail), 2009, gouache, ink, thread and ultrafine glitter on paper, 52" x 55"

Parasites and worms that invade the body are **Nancy Baker Cahill's** current obsession. She has spent sleepless nights pouring over medical books on parasitology, learning of their grotesque behaviors and manifestations. Such creatures are rather gruesome, and hardly a fitting dinner table topic, but Cahill transforms them into stunning artworks. She likens her parasitic subjects, their unwelcome invasion and the subsequent harm they do their host, to equally unwelcome nega-

tive psychological states that infect us universally with their sinister and disruptive effects. The real worms live in the brain and gut, as does that icky, gnawing and nagging voice that speaks within in us all. Whether it's in a dormant or active state, we all know it's there, waiting for the right conditions to unleash itself, like the hungry ghost in the machine that is never sated and constantly complains to be fed. Applying gouache to paper, Cahill uses her renditions of corporeal

creepy crawlies to poke sympathetic fun at our own host of psychological conditions. Laboriously crafted and beautifully rendered, each piece has a narrative accompaniment that blends and blurs the worm's actual pathology, life cycle, and symptoms with Cahill's own tongue-in-cheek descriptions of their effect on their host. For her *Worm of Stifled Creativity*, for instance, the high-risk sites of infection include "government offices and postgraduate schools." www.nancybakercahill.com —AMcE



Preposition 4 (detail), 2009, acrylic, ink, mylar on paper, 22" x 15"

Jeff Miller's abstract compositions are studies in nothingness. They have no prescribed idiom or theme. That is why his work is so magnificently loaded and ripe with potency. Miller attempts to rid himself of the push-pull of meaning inherent in abstraction: can abstract work ever truly be free of representation, imposed or implied? In addition he challenges himself to supersede ego

and pre-cognition, understanding full well that this transcendence is a slippery slope. Granted, Miller commands a knack for strong, competent, aesthetic composition, but that only turns the conundrum in on itself. Ultimately, this is the test, prompting Miller to work all that much harder at nothing. He seeks a visual counterpart to the deconstruction of language and the logic of philosophy, psychology, mythology — the stories we use to help us understand and navigate the world. As humans, we are hell-bent on drawing conclusions, asserting dominion through comprehension; but as soon as we glom onto a story or set of paradigms, as soon as we settle for the convenience of a prescribed resolution or conclusion, the journey comes to a standstill. Miller avoids these stories in order to touch the essence of experience and find the moments between the words. Through his work he converses with the unknown, and the results are beautiful. Round and round we go. www.jeffrydavidmiller.com —AMcE

June Harwood may seem a bit long in the tooth for an “emerging” artist, but although she’s been painting for about half a century, the recognition she’s due is coming to her only now. Harwood actually “emerged” for a minute with the abstract classicist painters who got the whole hard edge — and minimalist and finish/fetish and light-and-space — thing going in the early 1960s; but as she



Siege (detail), 2002, acrylic on canvas, 50" x 50". Courtesy Louis Stern Fine Arts, Los Angeles.

was slightly younger than they, and a woman (the wife of the movement’s critical champion, no less), she got overlooked in the hubbub. Harwood was a damned good geometric painter back then, however, and she’s stayed a good painter even as she strayed from hard-edge painting and came back around. For all the stylistic metamorphoses she underwent in the intervening years, Harwood’s sensibility has endured intact, and you can see her subdued but luminous palette and her shifting, unsettled planes recur in myriad different ways over the course of her career, revealing her to be a very indirect but very lyrical painter of the space and even the things around us. It’s time to give June her due. —PF

This list formed itself organically, with issues of personal taste, overall demographics, mediumistic eclecticism, and apparent popularity all swirling around the centrifuge of this term, “emerging.” There has been some discussion, and slightly divergent definitions, of “emerging” among our editors, but we all agree we know it when we see it. Some buzz, an increasing local profile, the beginnings of real out-of-town and even out-of-country attention,

especially from museums — but not overly much to date . . . I suppose if this group of men and women who are painters, sculptors, installation artists, performance artists, and photographers has any specific qualities in common, it would be a dark sense of humor and the patience and skill sets for superior craftsmanship.

— SHANA NYS DAMBROT



This Tree Fell and Made No Sound (detail), 2009, acrylic, iron, collage, spray paint and glitter on panel, 11½" x 11½". Courtesy Roberts & Tilton, Culver City, CA.

Andrew Schoultz lives and works in the Bay Area, and lately he’s been showing everywhere from Havana to Copenhagen. Born in Milwaukee in 1975, he moved west to San Francisco where he settled after attending the Academy of Art University. But his most enthusiastic audiences have always been here in Los Angeles. Over the past several years local art lovers encountered

his magnetic, densely detailed ink drawing-based murals and vignette pieces through groundbreaking shows at Kinsey/Desforges, Track 16, and REDCAT. A gorgeous, invigorating exhibition of Schoultz’s most recent work at Roberts & Tilton through August 1 — and the June unveiling of his 2009 House of Campari commission prize — have made this a monumental year in his career, locally and internationally. Meanwhile, Schoultz continues to evolve and mature, focusing his emotionally convincing, mythology-laced landscapes and ocean vistas, populated by creatures great and small, on political allegory and social commentary. www.andrewschoultz.com —SND

Infused with a healthy dose of cynicism, or perhaps realism, **Dan Van Clapp**’s work makes keen and clever inquiry into monolithic institutions of authority, in order to expose their hypocrisy and challenge the absurdity of granting them canonized status. In his *Defense Mechanisms*, painstakingly executed simulations of military weapons, Van Clapp calls the Dr. Strangelove genie out from behind the wizard’s curtain. At first glance his faux weapons look like the real deal. Upon further inspection, however, one discovers they are masterful similitudes fabricated from mundane materials — colanders, fan blades, water bottles, golf caddies, Styrofoam containers, children’s toys. In his *Santos* series, Van Clapp recreates mini-tableaux of iconic moments in religious history with baby dolls and other common objects. Laboriously antiqued through layers of dental cement, paint, and glaze he has built up and sanded down, the *Santos* look as if they could have been plundered from an old Spanish chapel. But again, you realize you have been hoodwinked when you note the Duchampian mous-

taches painted on the saintly stand-ins. Precisely executed and inflected with a Monty-Pythesque wink wink nudge nudge, Van Clapp’s work re-appropriates the common into the sublime (or vice versa). He is not an iconoclast for iconoclasm’s sake; rather, as he sifts through the fool’s gold of unquestioned authority and alleged absolutes, Van Clapp seeks deliverance and illumination. www.danvanclapp.com —AMcE



El Tigre, 2008, mixed media, 60" x 36" x 22"



Sieve (detail), 2009, canvas, gold hoop earrings, thread, crocheted doily, single earrings, monogram pins, vintage iron-on, wooden thumbtack, gold-plated pendant, rhinestone earring, ceramic pinch pots, aluminum thumbtacks, latex, acrylic and Xerox transfer on cut canvas drop cloth, 144" x 108" x 6". Courtesy Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles. Photo Robert Wedemeyer.

As far as I know, L.A.-based installation artist **Amanda Ross-Ho** holds the current record for amount of kitty litter included in a *Whitney*

Biennial. Her series of whimsical studies in memoir and industrial surrealism were the pride of the West Coast contingent in the 2008 show. Born in 1975 in Chicago, Ross-Ho attended the Art Institute there before getting her MFA from USC. She immediately began breaking down walls. Literally. A major component of her sculptural sensibility is architectural, deconstructing normative spatial forms and repurposing construction materials into lean-to edifices, riddled with holes and festooned with the remnants of studio materials and mundane personal memorabilia, especially old photographs. The best part is when Ross-Ho rips a clean gallery wall open and incorporates its innards into her finished piece, leaving traces of herself inside of work that documents her interaction with the system of a time and place. www.amandarossho.com –SND

Renée Lotenero was one of the most startling finds in *Thing*, the Hammer Museum's 2005 survey of sculpture in Southern California. Here was someone who could conflate painting, photography, sculpture, and architecture into structures that seemed at once to be in a permanent state of entropy and a permanent state of construction, like parts of nearly demolished buildings that had become imbued in their fragile desuetude with animalistic drives — the drive to eat, the drive to reproduce, the drive to nurture. Lotenero continues to conjure her zombie building wings out of wildly diverse materials, almost anything that falls into her hands, but assembled with exquisite care — specifically, the care to capture the tendrillous, segmented way living things grow, and grow around, their armatures. Lotenero loves sprawl, and the funkier the better; her piles and trails of eccentric-

cally ordered segments are becoming more and more elaborate and baroque, and even her little one-off sculptures — two or three elements knocked together into toylike objects that seem to mock the extravagant pretensions of the large pieces with familial fondness — are gaining in intricacy. –PF



Mallorca, 2008, from *Shape and Shatter* at John Michael Kohler Arts Center, handmade tiles, steel, vintage Spanish roof tiles, photographs, dimensions variable. Courtesy John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI.

Jennifer Vanderpool is an avid collector, and not of the run-of-the-mill variety. She collects *everything*, from egg cartons to plastic bags from a school trip to Paris, to her grandmother's costume jewelry, to to-go coffee lids. Everything Vanderpool lays her hands on finds its way back into her art. Her multi-media installations take the form of hyperbolic landscapes, bulging boutique bakeries, and interior gardens, and each installation builds on the former. (Vanderpool connoisseurs can spot remnants of former pieces tucked into the new formations.) From such



Once Upon a Tart (detail), 2008, from RACA, Copenhagen, Denmark, multimedia installation, size variable

heaps of refuse and memory emerge glorious topographies and interiors accented with duct tape, chicken wire, bubble wrap, straws, and dental floss. Her artistry blooms, bulges, grows, bubbles, and bursts, bedecked with viscous hot glue streams laden with glittery treasures and shiny beads. No moment in her work is random; every square inch is executed with laborious thought and theory. Both in form and content, Vanderpool's installations speak to the polarizing of ideals and realities — the allure and repulsiveness of domesticity in a postmodern world, femininity versus feminism,

artifice versus truth, veneer versus substance. Her happy, shining things attract us, but under their beauty courses an insidious undercurrent that evinces the ills of overindulgence and wanton consumption. Vanderpool is an artsy Betty Crocker-cum-Martha Stewart sitting front row at a Mensa meeting, a woman who can take Home Depot merchandise and transform it into powerful statements and monumental gardens of delight. www.jennifervanderpool.com –AMcE



Gold Rush, 2008, colored paper, gouache, and acrylic on paper, 53 3/4" x 53 3/4". Courtesy the artist and Patrick Painter Inc., Santa Monica.

Originally from Montreal (b. 1965) but raised in Geneva, UCLA MFA **Francesca Gabbiani** has had the kind of L.A. career that starts with, "That girl . . . you know . . . the one who did that crazy cut-out paper collage forest. . . ." and ends

with her adoption as a pillar of the community. Being married to Ruscha scion Eddie hasn't hurt, but Gabbiani doesn't make a big deal out of it, allowing her work's intensity, elegance, psychological drama, and impossible cleverness speak for itself. Her work is informed by the same taste for the slyly macabre that made her recent curatorial effort "Houseguest" (reviewed this issue) at the Hammer Museum such a gem: she elevates a child-like craft medium to the status of epic history painting with the obsessive patience of a monk. www.artnet.com/artist/6637/francesca-gabbiani.html –SND

The profundity of **Natasa Prosenec's** videos and video installations resides in her seamless merging of the elemental and the ethereal. The power of her work comes from the graceful presentation of form and its simultaneous abstraction. Her videos engage the four elements, to which Prosenec adds a fifth — the human body. Their immediate connotations are both maintained and sublimely transformed into more dreamlike circumstances. Their movements are subtle and fluid. Bodies

slowly writhe; a woman swims in a giant sphere of dark water; flickers of flame mimic a body in motion; a larger-than-life face stares straight at us, each blink of its eyes demarcating a new moment. Such manipulation of time, in which each instant is greatly measured, introduces a presence of its own and enhances the intimacy of the exchange. We feel as if we are in communion with Prosenec's subjects. Dark and mysterious, the work speaks of transformation — visually, as the terrestrial becomes the majestic, and metaphorically with the passages of life. Without being sexualized, her work is highly sensuous: the sinuous curves of the body and the primal attraction of the core elements enrich the experience of their engagement. www.kanalyapictures.com/filmography.htm –AMcE



Mud, 2009, video, size variable