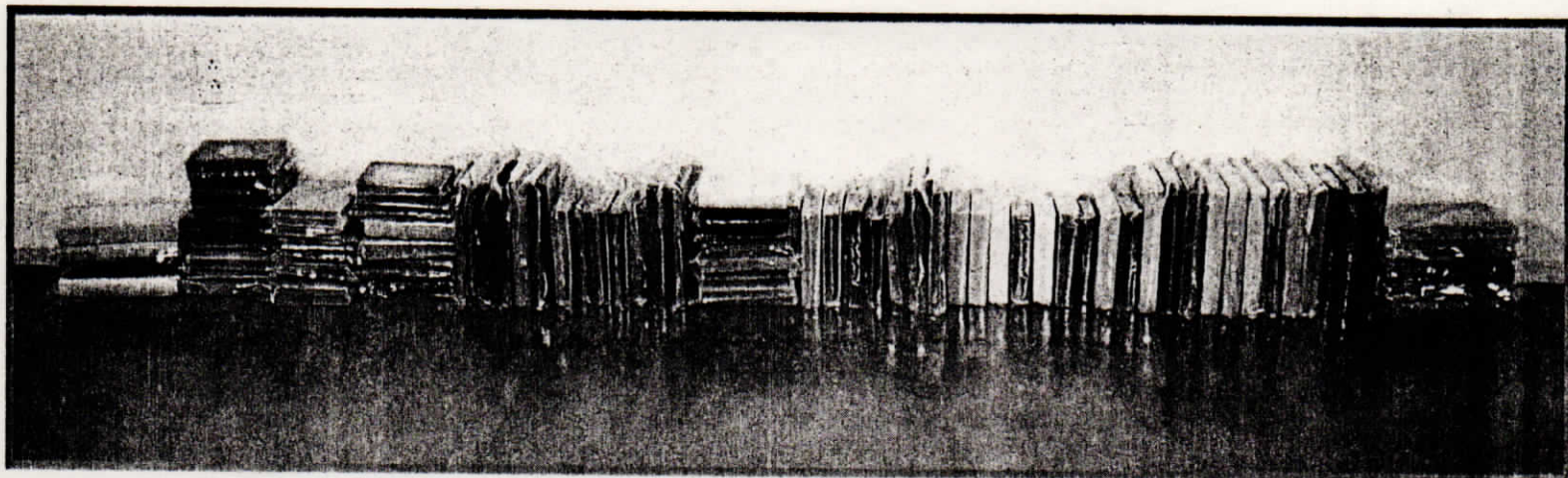


Yong Soon Min curated this exhibition.



Kyungmi Shin, *Candy Bibles (Color Study)*, 1995, cast candy, shrink wrap, at the Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles

'PROP' at the Korean Cultural Center

A group show with one of the more successful organizational premises I've seen of late, *PROP* takes its cue from what a prop can be: a support or substructure, a theatrical object or effect referring to a place or reality other than its own, or ballot-speak for a political or cultural proposition. None of the work seemed made for this show, but the five artists included fit effortlessly within the underlying (prop) framework.

Upon entering this exhibition, I was struck by a dominant characteristic running through all the work which I best can describe by saying that it all looked very young (which in some cases meant not quite fully cooked but most often meant fresh). This intuition was shored up by a notebook of curricula vitae revealing that all of the participants were recent art school hatchlings, but the youngsters here seemed less a matter of age or experience than of a notable generational shift—the obvious extent to which all of this work might fit into a particular genre and the overt manner in which all breaks with the genre's conventions.

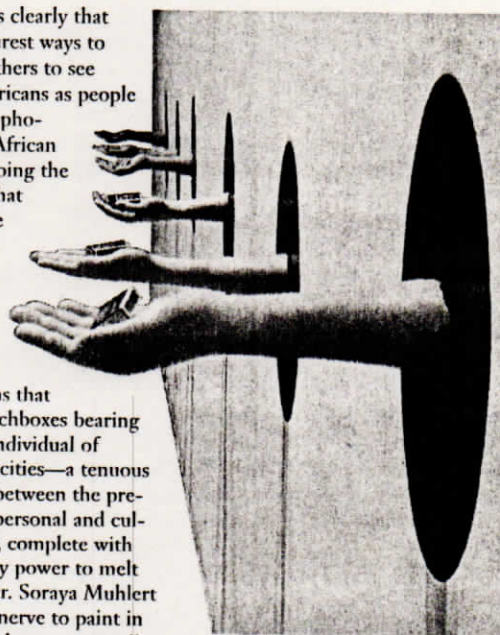
The genre in question is identity-centered art (an admittedly broad category), but for those who don't believe it's a genre I ask only that you think back to the last dozen or so identity-centered works you've seen and consider the mediums used, the

aesthetic codes employed, the visual components, the implied (or spoon-fed or force-fed) message and its mode of delivery. Notice any similarities? Those similarities are conventions, and I'm pleased to report that I noticed none of them in this exhibition. The most striking and satisfying break (and the most provocative) is the extent to which these emerging artists have passed up the display of slogan-riddled banners in favor of simple though often daft objects and images of contemplation.

Kyungmi Shin offers cellophane-wrapped bibles cast in corn syrup and pure-cane sugar laced with food coloring—a candy store metaphor for the devilish infiltration of culture. A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down? Rico Reyes has the foresight to recognize that perhaps the best way to promote a consideration of the complexity of Filipino culture and identity is simply to list the Philippines's boggling recipe of cultural and ethnic ingredients on the side of a soda glass—no editorializing, but bold implicit commentary. Kori

Newkirk sees clearly that one of the surest ways to encourage others to see African Americans as people is to present photographs of African Americans doing the same thing that everyone else does each day—going through life.

Javier Valenzuela lines a wall with wax arms that hold out matchboxes bearing portraits of individual of varying ethnicities—a tenuous relationship between the presentation of personal and cultural identity, complete with the incendiary power to melt the messenger. Soraya Muhlert even has the nerve to paint in this camp, and presents small canvases bearing amber-lit images of exotic



to think about.

One might argue (and one might well have a point) that these artists and others of their generation are merely squatters in a safety zone of inherited, post-activist conceptual luxury—afforded the fun of doing twirling tricks with torches their forbears had to carry with both hands clasped

tight and cloaking themselves like rock stars in flags that generations of warriors before them were able to plant only after fighting hard to take the cultural hill. Perhaps so. These artists, like all artists, definitely have debts, but their greatest luxury likely has been the timing of their births and the time which has allowed them to witness how things played out for the strategies of their predecessors. They seem to have learned in this time that one-two punches might deliver knockouts on bumper stickers and billboards, but that in the realm of art (at least) it might be better to give people something to think about than to tell them what to think. A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.

—Christopher Miles

PROP closed December 11 at the Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles.

Christopher Miles is an artist and an instructor at Los Angeles Mission College.

Above right: Javier Valenzuela, *Handout; the Mark*, mixed-media installation; below: Kori Newkirk, *1158 E. 224th St., Bronx*, mixed-media installation, at the Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles.



curated by Yong Soon Min

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