



Brian Moss, *Routine* (14 x five), gelatin silver print (19x191 in.), 1995/2002.  
Courtesy Southern California Institute of Architecture Gallery, Los Angeles.

## Genius Loci.

Southern California Institute of Architecture Gallery, Los Angeles.

**G**enius Loci, curated by Chris Kahle and Lize Mogel, was an exploration of urban cartography, posing the tricky question: can a city's essence be conveyed via marks on paper? And just whose city is it, anyway? In addition to original work by ten artists or groups, among them the Center for Land Use Interpretation, this exhibition (which closed March 23) included maps from the Los Angeles Public Library collection: departure points both for practical and fanciful navigation (the "Roads to Romance" map from 1954 providing an example of the latter).

Most of the artists chose the time-honored form of two-dimensional schemata on paper, with an emphasis on the subjectivity of mapping practice; thus Kerry Tribe's *North is West/South is East*, a collection of sketches made by individuals the artist approached at LAX. Asked to depict Los Angeles with pen and paper, Gregory from Budapest simply sketched the *Baywatch* lifeguard lookout. Steve from Sacramento envisaged East L.A. as a giant sombrero, while Andy from Minneapolis drew dollar signs in the Hollywood Hills.

Naomi Spellman uses the formal language of topography to chart her own subjective spaces in three Diazo prints (similar to a blueprint) from 1998. Poetic lunar landscapes are sprinkled with 0s and 1s, hinting at digital terrain, while the key, in the form of diary entries and lecture notes, provides information about circumstance rather than place, personal anecdotes overlaying any false pretense of scientific objectivism.

One artist who actively seeks scientific data is Joyce Campbell, who took soil samples from every corner of L.A. County and grew the resulting bacteria in giant petri dishes, which she then turned into contact prints. Their charming speckled surfaces run the gamut from delicate pastel pointillism to robust hairy expressionism (the grubbiest

panel hails from the artists' district in Chinatown!). Meanwhile Lane Barden plays at urban eugenics, engineering views of his local barrio with the help of Photoshop (*Frogtown Beach*, for example, depicts a digitally manipulated, perfectly symmetrical vista).

Two lyrical evocations completed the exhibition: Birgit Gehrt's lacy cut-up street maps colonized the wall in a way that was both organic and suffocating, mirroring urban sprawl. Brian Moss exposed a single roll of black-and-white film five times with different views of the same street in L.A. taken from a car window. Shown as a long strip called *Routine*, Moss takes the viewer on an unglamorous, back-streets tour; limp U.S. flags, dead palm trees, and income tax offices offer a window on a grittier reality than the one mapped out in the 1954 "Roads to Romance" guide.

—Tessa Laird