

# Los Angeles-New York Exchange' leaves

1 Sunday, June 26, 1983, Los Angeles Herald Examiner E5

## us with trade deficit

*East Coast show probably better than the one here*

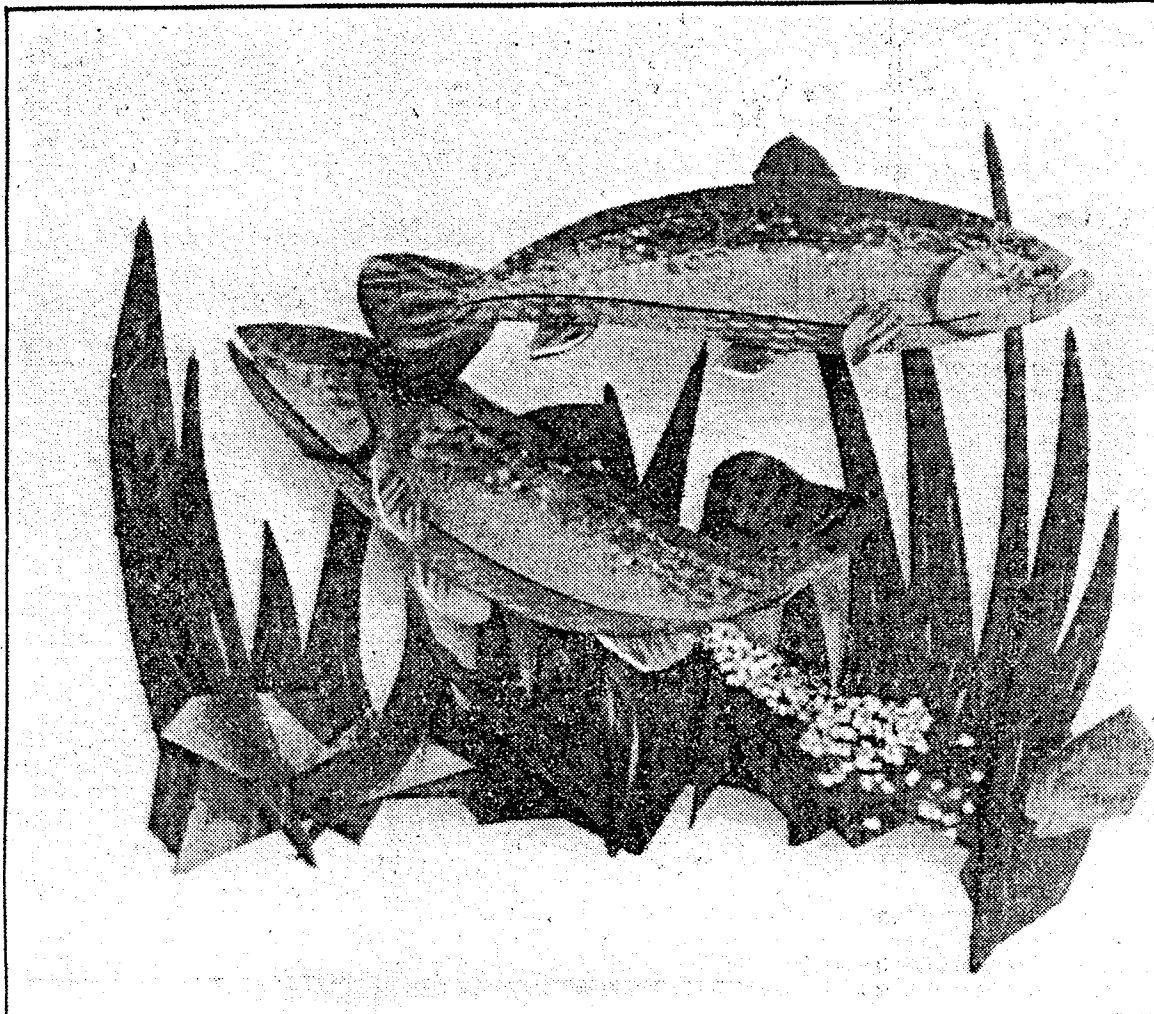
By Christopher Knight  
Herald art critic

**T**he practice of making comparisons between Los Angeles and New York is endemic to many spheres of life, not least among them the region known as the art world. And there, the most often argued question asks: Is art made by artists living in L.A. inherently better, or worse, than art made by artists living in N.Y.?

Of course, the frequency of making such comparisons differs sharply from one city to the other. On this edge of the continent it's common, but that's to be expected since New York is the distribution center for art and it's essential to pay attention to what goes on there. For New Yorkers, the issue only arises when they happen to come here, or when we happen to go there, visibly reminding them that there is a here here. But that's to be expected, too, given the disorientation of being a stranger in a strange land.

It is entirely fruitless to compare apples and oranges, however, if one does so in the belief that both should taste alike, or that one is the standard by which the other should be judged. It's the quality within the differences that counts. "The Los Angeles-New York Exchange" is a current exhibition that doesn't necessarily bring those differences into sharp focus, but it does clarify certain aspects of the question.

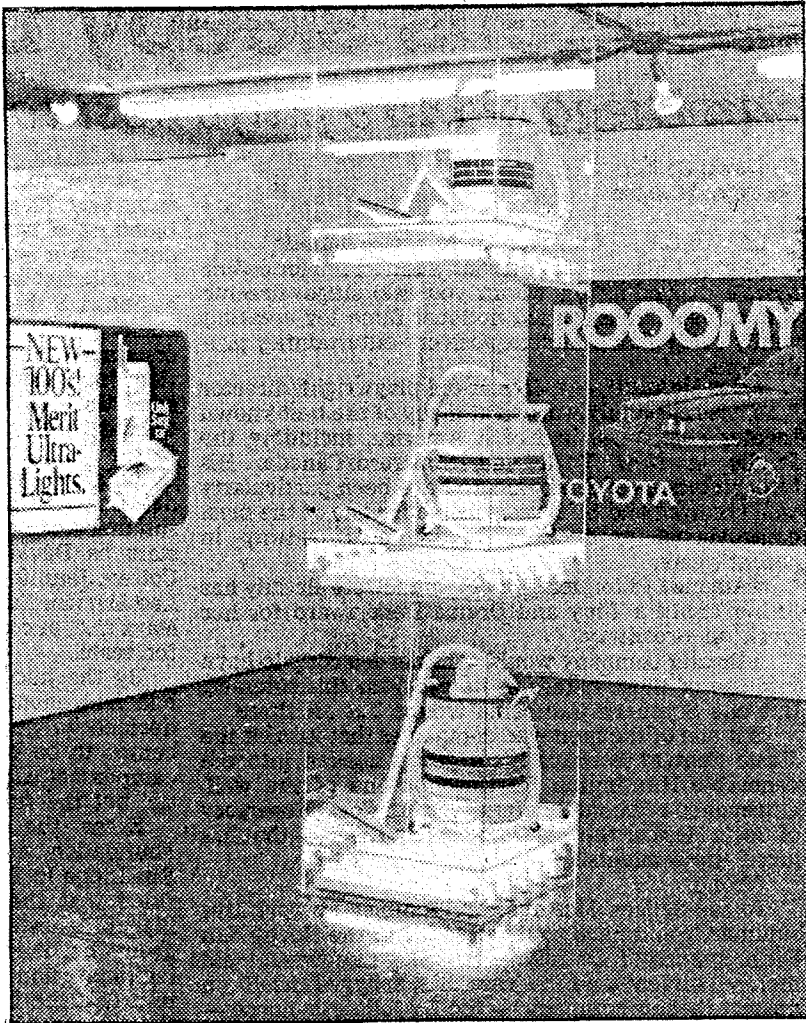
The show, which could be described as a small-scale "cultural exchange," was jointly organized by Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) and by Artists Space in New York. These are arguably the best artist-run alternative spaces in their respective cities. Artists Space director Linda Shearer and former LACE director Marc Pally (he stepped down from his post last February) together selected 12 artists, six from each city who had a degree of local visibility but hardly any on the opposite coast.



Christy Rupp's life-size "Cardboard Brook Trout" show at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibit (1982), from the "Los Angeles-New York Exchange" gallery on South Broadway.

Work by L.A.-based artists Jill Giegerich, Victor Henderson, Kim Hubbard, Lari Pittman, Mitchell Syrop and Megan Williams is currently being shown at Artists Space, while work by New York-based artists Charles Clough, Rebecca Howland, Jeff Koons, Nachume Miller, Christy Rupp and Reese Williams can be seen at LACE, 240 S. Broadway, through July 16.

While I've not seen the show in New York, I have seen relatively recent work by all six L.A. artists and, generally speaking, I suspect that the show on the other coast is "better than" the show on South Broadway. In particular, the painted wall-constructions of Giegerich and Henderson stand head-and-shoulders above most everything to be currently seen at LACE, and I don't think it's because the latter are more unfamiliar to me or that I'm steeped in local chauvinism.



Jeff Koons' "New Sheldon Wet/Dry Triple Decker" (1982), constructed from plexiglass, fluorescent lights and new vacuum cleaners.

In fact, Charles Clough's small paintings are the only things I'd want to go back to see again at LACE. As succinctly described by Village Voice critic Roberta Smith in the accompanying (and very good) catalog, the artist "paints over postcards and other art reproductions, photographing and blowing up the results and then painting on them again." Clough engages in a question-and-answer dialogue between the supposedly "dead" surface of a reproduction and the supposedly "live" surface of gesturally applied paint. In the process, it's the reproduction that becomes the impetus for action — it's a seemingly living force; meanwhile, the vividly direct, hand-applied paint carries the baggage of long-gone expressionist myths — it's a seemingly deadened possibility.

Clough establishes a self-contained analogy between production and reproduction. By examining that analogy, he reopens the resonance of both. In the broadest sense, his work addresses political complexities — that is, it looks at the influences brought to bear on the ways in which actions are chosen from the wide range of alternatives. And indeed, the very question of L.A.-vs.-N.Y. art must itself be understood within its political dimension.

Art is a sensuous thing, which means that the experience of art comes first (that, more than anything else, is what is being reasserted by much of the best new art being made in America and Europe). Therefore, the quality of a work of art lies, first and foremost, within its critical relationship to experience. To suggest that the possibilities for this enterprise are limited to a particular place is

nothing short of foolish.

The political dimension, on the other hand, is something else entirely. As a matter of influence, of shaping the future directions taken from the range of alternatives, the political dialogue is unquestionably more powerful in the center of distribution, that is, in a particular place. (In a capitalist culture, it should come as no surprise that the center of capital is also the center of culture, just as in an aristocratic culture it emanates from the court and in a theocratic culture from the church.) Beyond the realm of one's experience, the quality of a work of art can expand within its critical relationship to this political dimension.

It is this complex of factors — and most assuredly *not* simplistic notions of geography — that spells the difference between a "regional" artist and an "international" artist, although those terms are usually bandied about without the least claim to thoughtfulness. In simple terms, the critical relationship between art and experience is regional, while that between art and the political dimension is international.

It is for this reason that cultural exchanges, whether initiated by the State Department or by alternative spaces, always have a political dimension. "The Los Angeles-New York Exchange" is no exception. Indeed, to my mind it is this exhibition's careful and thoughtful consideration of that very dimension that is its greatest asset. For not the least of its contributions is a reaffirmation of the answer to the question: Is art made by artists living in Los Angeles inherently better, or worse, than art made by artists living in New York?

The answer is a resounding yes.