

artillery

LA et al.

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KILLER TEXT ON ART



MY BARBARIAN, CAAM NOW, LAUTNER REVISITED

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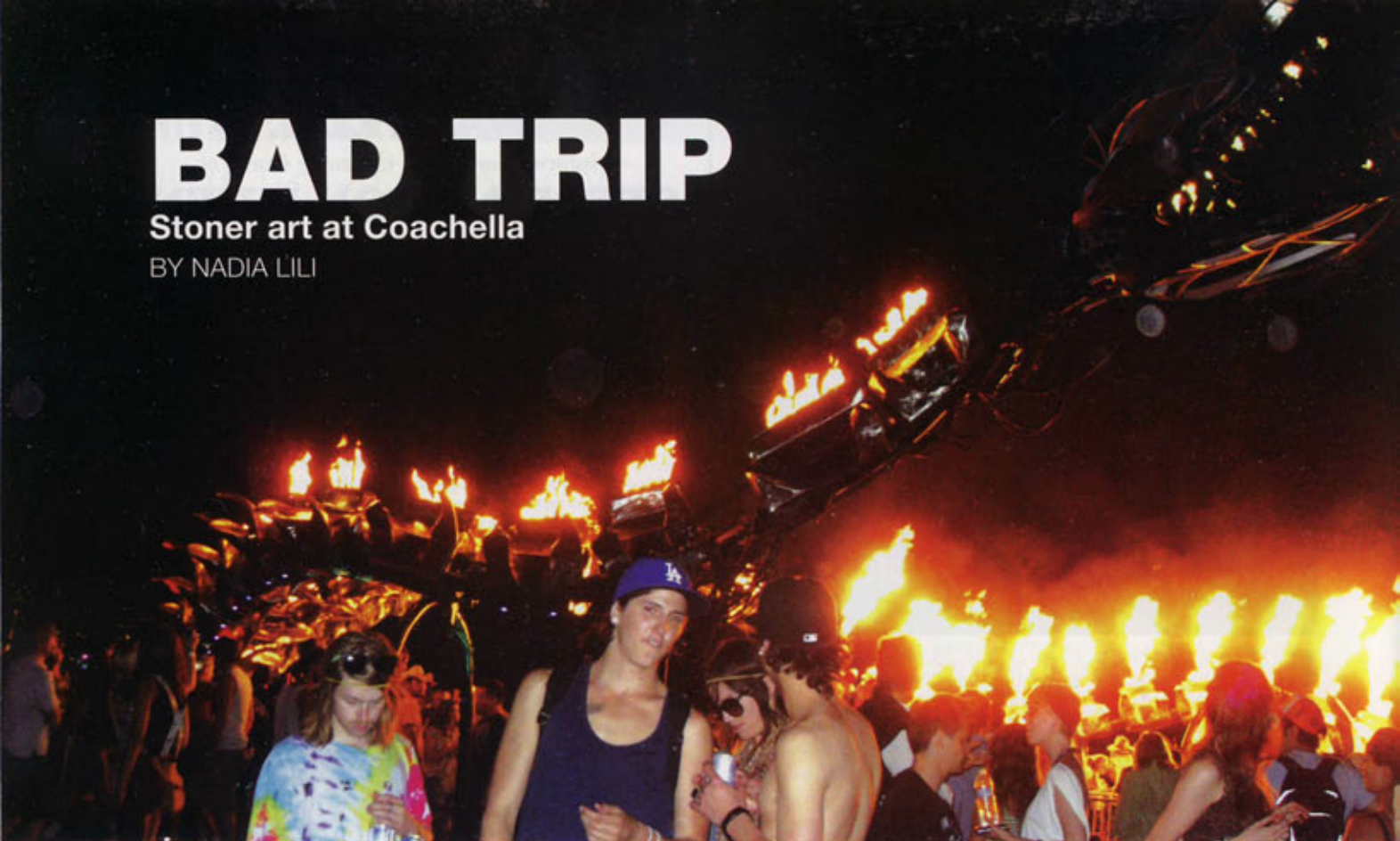
CRITICS PICKS, GUEST LECTURE: JENNIFER STEINKAMP

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BAD TRIP

Stoner art at Coachella

BY NADIA LILI



ART APPRECIATORS ENRAPT: *Serpent Mother* by the Flaming Lotus Girls

Maybe I'm just a cranky old punk, but I couldn't get into the groovy desert vibe at Coachella in March. I don't like to have to sit in my car for hours outside tastefully landscaped gated communities while waiting to park my hunk of metal on perfectly manicured grass. I don't like to be around thousands of people stoned and tripping while I'm not. And I don't like to be encouraged to let it all hang out in the safety of a fenced-in happy compound like someone in a padded cell. There was something of the sci-fi nightmare where the aliens chuckle at how easy it is to control humans with lights, sounds and special gases, or of Brave New dystopias on soma. Only, according to my paranoia and cynicism, the aliens/Big Brothers are the concert promoters and corporate contractors who exist on the controlled chaos of the modern-day music festival, now complete with temporary arty installations and crafty esoterica.

The artists and artist co-ops, who had largely been mined from Burning Man, came to this far less organized (some complained, despite the commercial fanfare and "Arts" nomination) gig. This time they were getting paid. All had done some

impressive engineering just to get the pieces up. The giant fire-breathing dragon (*Serpent Mother* by the Flaming Lotus Girls from San Francisco) with the tank loads of gasoline required alone boggles the brain. There was an awesome 3D rectangular prism LED light sculpture called the *Elastic Plastic Sponge* by SCI-Arc students which also blew people's minds. All the pieces had an interactive or walk-through element that was inclusive and experiential.

These mind-boggling effects seemed to be the point in the outstallations. It was stoner art in the most immediate sense. The techno pagan cool creations used the night and various sources of light quite beautifully, but could not quite transcend the canvas of the gated Arts and Music Festival, which became the overriding message. Like corporate plaza sculptures or has-been acts at Disneyland, the art at music festivals just gets the juice where it can. And appealing to an intoxicated crowd adds to the site-specific experience of the works. But in terms of something more meaningful happening, it was probably in the minds of the artists more than in their audiences.

While the drug-infused themes of the

'60s and beyond conjured up for the Ecstasy show several years ago at the Geffen Contemporary investigated and played on the alterations of mind states both drug and art-induced, the including of the decorative and trippy installations at Coachella simply serves to reinforce the closed mindset allowed in the new pop events. Nothing gets in and nothing gets out in the contained madness of the lost weekends. What happens in Coachella stays in Coachella—a wild weekend with a nod and wink—and a tidy profit.

Coachella seemed like good clean fun for the concertgoers—once you get inside there is not much oppressive authority apart from having to consume alcohol inside a cage. The constructions add to the atmosphere and are engaging—just don't call them art. They serve more as enhancements to the entertainment, and don't require a lot of viewer imagination. Boundaries are important: to separate the culturally significant and contemporary from the bobbles of decoration and mood setting. For me being straight amongst the "cool" was oddly reminiscent of going to 1st period wasted with all the weirdly unhip students and teachers around. ☹

PHOTO BY MATEO CELADA