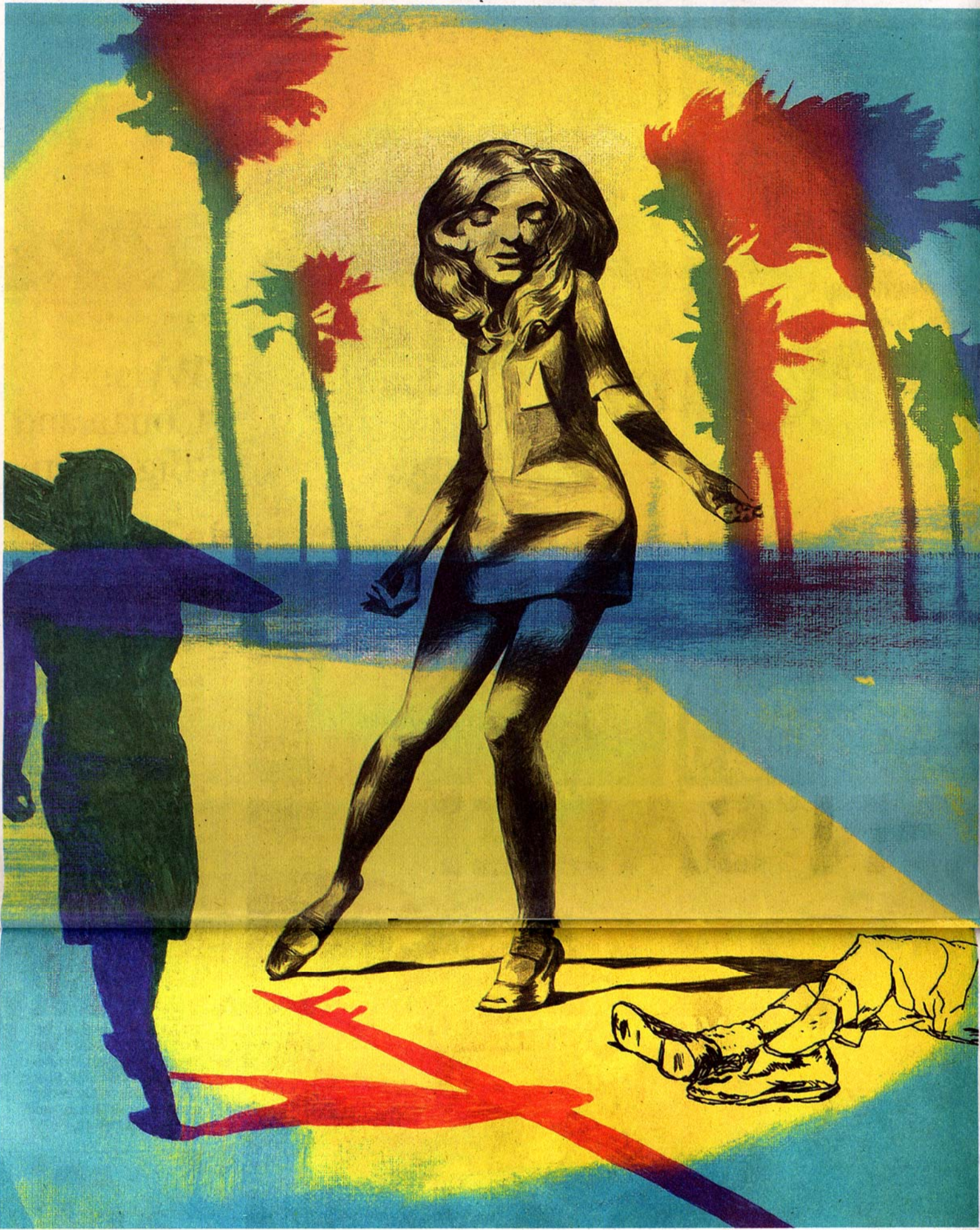


## ARTS &amp; BOOKS

SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 2009 :: LATIMES.COM/CALENDAR

**Dance:** Ballroom goes Broadway, via Australia. **E9**

SKETCHBOOK E2 :: PERSONAL FILE E2 :: BESTSELLERS E8 :: DESIGN E10 :: THE GUIDE E13 :: PUZZLES AND GAMES E14



JEFFERY DECOSTER For The Times

## BOOK REVIEW

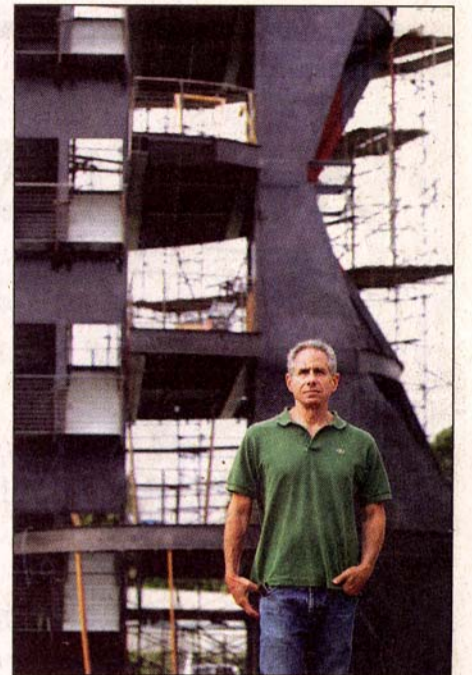
# Into the haze of '60s noir

Thomas Pynchon sets his Chandler-like 'Inherent Vice' in a bygone L.A. that is thick with marijuana smoke and mystery.

**By Carolyn Kellogg** >>> "Inherent Vice" is Thomas Pynchon doing Raymond Chandler through a Jim Rockford looking glass, starring Cheech Marin (or maybe Tommy Chong). ¶ What could easily be mistaken as a paean to 1960s Southern California is also a sly herald of that era's end. This, of course, is exactly the kind of layered meaning that readers expect of Pynchon. ¶ His fans tend to be drawn to either his massive, bafflingly complex efforts — the iconic, National Book Award-winning "Gravity's Rainbow," "Mason & Dixon" and "Against the Day" — or to the more constrained, plot-driven narratives of "Vineland" or "The Crying of Lot 49." ¶ It is the big books, with their parades of gloriously obtuse set pieces, full of slapstick and conspiracy and minutely researched ephemera, that established Pynchon as a writer worthy of intense inquiry. Yet having a plot doesn't make his work any less brilliant, any less Pynchonian. ¶ "Inherent Vice" is a perfect case in point. It has a plot. It has a main character. This clear structure will, no doubt, disappoint the big-book boosters, the obsessives who began contributing to the online wiki annotation of "Against the Day" before finishing its 1,085 pages. ¶ But maybe we should all take a hit off a fat spliff and enjoy the dirty, brainy achievement of Pynchon's "Vice." ¶ At the center of "Inherent Vice" is Doc Sportello, a low-key private investigator living in a dingy bachelor pad in Gordita, a beach community with [See Pynchon, Page E8]

## An ill wind blows

In an excerpt from "Inherent Vice," Thomas Pynchon uses Santa Ana winds to set a mood. **E8**



GARY FRIEDMAN Los Angeles Times

**IN PROGRESS:** Eric Owen Moss in front of his Gateway Art Tower.

## THE ARCHITECTS

## Making this place into a city

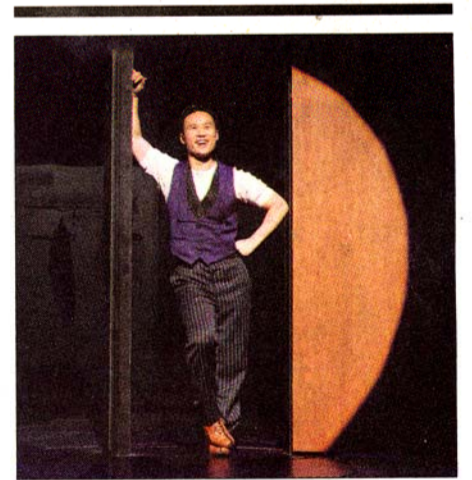
L.A.'s past, the future — all these pieces. Eric Owen Moss wants to bring them together.

SCOTT TIMBERG

The neighborhood around the office of Eric Owen Moss tees first like mayberry, then a bit like "Killer of Sheep." And just after the block of tree-shaded single family homes runs into a stretch of factories and warehouses, a parched, undeveloped hill rises — almost a bit of John Ford.

It's near where Culver City — that once forgotten, now chic, city — rams into Los Angeles, and it's the kind of hybrid, fragmented setting that Moss says makes the greater L.A. area so rich with possibility.

"Los Angeles, probably to be fair, is probably an adolescent city," the architect, 65, says, leaning behind his desk in a way that somehow seems intense. "People talk about Los Angeles as a world city — I was in Tokyo and I was in Beijing, I was in London, I was in Milan — you talk about cities with long, long histories. Kings and queens with long, long histories. Kings and queens [See Moss, Page E10]



LIA CHANG La Jolla Playhouse

**WELL-SUITED:** B.D. Wong stars in "Herringbone" at La Jolla Playhouse.

## THEATER

## Complicated, bizarre . . . so hard to resist

KAREN WADA REPORTING FROM LA JOLLA

"Herringbone" is one of those shows you may have to see to believe. It is, after all, a vaudevillian musical about demonic possession in which the narrator portrays nearly a dozen characters, including an 8-year-old boy, a floozy and a homicidal dwarf.

This tangled tale — and the sleights-of-hand required to pull it off — have long fascinated B.D. Wong. The Tony-winning actor has spent two decades pursuing opportunities to perform the Tom Cone play, drawn by its challenging role(s) and bizarre twists. ("I kind of respond to things that are a little bent," he admits.)

In recent years, Wong has been joined in his quest by another Tony-winning actor, Roger Rees, who directed Wong's three most recent versions of the piece, the last [See "Herringbone," Page E4]

## DESIGN



Photographs by STEFANO PALTERA For The Times

**DUO:** Gaston Nogues, left, and Benjamin Ball pause while installing "Feathered Edge" at MOCA Pacific Design Center.

# Architecture in brief

Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues have built a reputation with temporary structures. There's more to come, and one project is even permanent.

PAUL YOUNG

For an architecture firm with only four years' experience, it's surprising how much attention Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues have received. "It's a little crazy," says Ball, 41. "And it puts a little pressure on us because people seem to have higher expectations."

Indeed, in three short years, they've received commissions from the likes of MOMA, MOCA, Tiffany & Co., Frank Gehry and the 2008 Architecture Biennale in Venice, Italy.

Yet they still haven't built a single permanent structure.

Rather, they're known for building installations and temporary structures such as the twisting, three-story plastic form that greeted concertgoers at this year's Coachella festival in April. Most last for a couple of days, weeks or months before landing in the recycling bin.

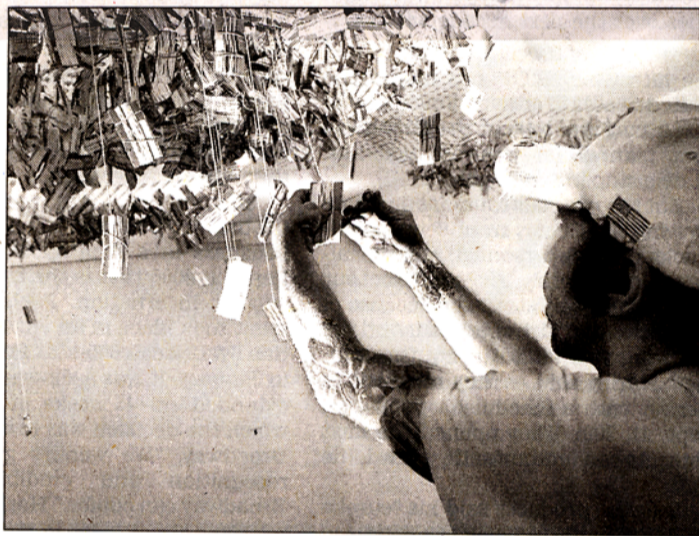
Their latest effort, called "Feathered Edge," can be found at MOCA's satellite space at the Pacific Design Center in West Hollywood. Like a number of the duo's recent projects, it's a "suspension piece," as Ball calls it — which is to say that it's mounted on the ceiling instead of the floor. The work is composed of thin pieces of string — more than 21 miles' worth — that have been cut and arranged into precise arcs and crisscross patterns. The designers used a computer to determine the overall shape, as well as a map that told them where to place each section by hand. (It took the artists and 15 volunteers two weeks to install.) The result is a sensuous, rainbow-colored, nebulous mass that hovers in the upper quadrant of the 24-by-24-foot interior and invites viewers to navigate through its recesses and voids.

The complex process included the design of a machine that the pair call the "Instalator 1 (with Variable-Information Atomizing Module)," which can be programmed to not only cut each piece of string at precise lengths, but also paint various sections via four internal airbrushes. "The process is really about working in an architecturally scaled space, where we can marry materials with fabrication processes and computation," Ball says of the MOCA project.

One could argue that "Feathered Edge" is an extraordinary piece of interior design, and it's certainly a work of art, but is it architecture?

"I can understand how people might find it hard to make that leap from these temporary structures to what most of us think of as architecture," says exhibition co-curator Brooke Hodge. "But why does architecture have to be about solid materials? Why can't it be a piece of material constructed on the scale of architecture, or some other flexible material that redefines space and makes us rethink our relationship to it?"

Indeed, Ball-Nogues, as they call themselves, are committed to exploring those very same questions. Despite coming from different backgrounds — Ball is from Colorado and Iowa, where his mother was a theater director, and Nogues from Buenos Aires, where his fa-



**HANDS-ON WORK:** Ball concentrates on assembling "Feathered Edge," which he terms a "suspension piece" because, unlike most architecture, it's mounted on the ceiling, not on the floor.

## 'Feathered Edge'

**Where:** MOCA Pacific Design Center, 8687 Melrose Ave., West Hollywood

**When:** 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays to Fridays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; ends Nov. 15

**Price:** Free

**Contact:** [www.moca.org](http://www.moca.org)

ther was an aerospace engineer — they both share an intense passion for working in that gray area where art, architecture and industrial design meet.

After meeting at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in the early 1990s and going their separate ways, they realized their first collaboration in 2005 at Material + Applications, an architecture gallery space in Silver Lake. That resulted in a 2½-story sculpture made of semi-translucent, semi-reflective Mylar petals that seemed to sprout out of the ground and spin in a circular pattern, much like a tornado, or black hole. Called "Maximilian's Schell" (a reference to the actor in the Disney movie "The Black Hole"), the project received worldwide attention and led to a number of equally ambitious projects. They include the event display for the launch of Gehry's collaboration with Tiffany & Co. in 2006, a work called "Liquid Sky" (another film reference, to Slava Tsukerman's 1982 sci-fi movie) for MOMA/P.S.1's prestigious Young Architects Program in 2007 and one called "Echoes Converge" at Venice's Architecture Biennale in 2008.

"If galleries and museums were not interested in this kind of work, there would be no forum for it," Ball says of the increasing interest in temporary structures. "Speaking for ourselves, these projects have really allowed us to experiment in ways — and on a scale — that we couldn't have done otherwise."

"They're basically prototypes," adds Nogues, 41, who wants to apply similar techniques to larger, permanent forms. "They're prototypes for exploring architectural ideas, exploring new ways of investigating space and explor-

ing new fabrication techniques."

They also allow them to create forms that might express the "intent" of a particular space or existing structure. Their piece at the Architecture Biennale, for instance, used string to amplify, or extrude, the existing patterns and colors of a Baroque ceiling.

Each of their projects to date begins with a basic unit, or cell, which is often made from common flexible material, such as fabric, plastic, cardboard, hoses, ropes or string. They first create the cell by hand, then repeat it

continually in the computer until it forms a larger shape. By doing so, argues Nogues, "it helps us understand the material, what its limitations are, and what it really wants to do."

It also creates a more organic shape, which tends to differ from the work of architects who create their designs in a computer first and then force their materials to conform to that. But by putting the emphasis on the material first, says Hodge, "It allows gravity, light and other natural forces help to determine the end result as well."

Indeed, such intangibles are essential to their practice. As Ball explains, they would like to produce sculptural forms that enhance the "atmospheric, the sensorial and the spectacular. . . . That's one of the things about architecture — the sensation and feeling that it can incite in the viewer."

For Hodge, that gives their work an earthy, human quality that is not far removed from California's Light & Space movement of the 1970s or the organic forms (and rope experiments) of Antonio Gaudi in the early 1900s.

But if there's a single quality that seems to define their practice, it's a preoccupation with craft. "They combine the hand and the machine in such an interesting way," adds Hodge. "They seem to know when the hand can amplify what the computer can do, and when the computer can amplify what the hand can do. There's little separation between the two."

Indeed, says SCI-Arc director and architect Eric Owen Moss, "these guys are very promising and I think it will be very interesting to see where they're going to go in their next stage."

That next stage already includes a host of projects, including a public artwork on the facade of Santa Monica Place (which was designed by Ball-Nogues' former boss, Gehry), a temporary structure on the UCLA campus and a shaded wildlife observation deck in Woodstock, N.Y. — which will be their first permanent structure.

But perhaps the most fitting is an 18-inch suspension project that will be installed inside L.A.'s Centinela Area Building and Safety Permit Office, which enforces building codes among contractors. Ball says it's another "investigation" along the lines of the MOCA piece, but there's also a certain degree of irony in the fact that the duo, famous for the ephemeral and the transitory, is installing it in an agency that is all about solid structures and permanence. "At least we're using metal chain for that one," Ball says. "So it's pretty permanent."

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