

# Cards of a Library Catalog, Like So Many Lost

## Art Reviews

By LEAH OLLMAN  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

What happens to all of those little yellowed cards when libraries transfer their card catalogs online? As essayist Nicholson Baker has lamented, most get trashed, some get used as scratch paper, some have even been sent up in the sky at the end of balloon strings to celebrate their obsolescence. Few card catalogs are saved once computerization is complete because, the argument goes, it doesn't make sense to fill a storeroom with information that can now be saved on a chip infinitesimally smaller than the words. *See under.*

Perhaps a better question to ask, rather than what happens to the cards, is what happens to the culture that so gleefully eliminates one long-standing method of organizing information when technology introduces a new one? Implicit in David Bunn's deeply stirring show at Angles is the answer: It loses part of its soul, its spirit, its history of itself.

Bunn acquired the Los Angeles Central Library card catalog in 1990 after it was "deactivated." He used a portion of it for a permanent installation piece in the library and retained the rest as raw material, an archive suffused with possibility. In the current show, "Double Monster," Bunn extracts sequences of cards from the L.A. catalog and partners them with reproductions of cards from the defunct catalog of a 19th century medical museum in Philadelphia. Through deft, framed groupings of the cards, Bunn catalyzes a potent sequence of poems that revolve, ever self-reflexively, around the fate of things unwanted, cast out, disowned.

The cards from the medical museum, themselves illustrated like specimens, frequently describe physical specimens in the museum collection, charged objects such as the "Heart of a Child," or oddities such as the "Hand of a Giant."

Groups of L.A. library cards follow like riffs on a dominant theme, weaving in and out of range of the central idea, but always returning to it with renewed intensity. "Hand of a Giant," for instance, moves through sequences of cards with titles about casting shadows and casting glances, on to cards about giant things and dwarfs, ending with the poignant double-punch of titles, "When a child is born/When a child is different."

Poetic flights on spirit and matter, sex, love and loss launch themselves from these cards in an understated way but with tremendous power. Each grouping harks back to the body physical in one way or another, whether starting with a card on body-snatching or medicinal remedies, and the tone of Bunn's whole enterprise is one of reverential dissection of a deeply mourned corpse. The body—the card catalog—may have expired (forcibly), but the soul definitely lingers on.

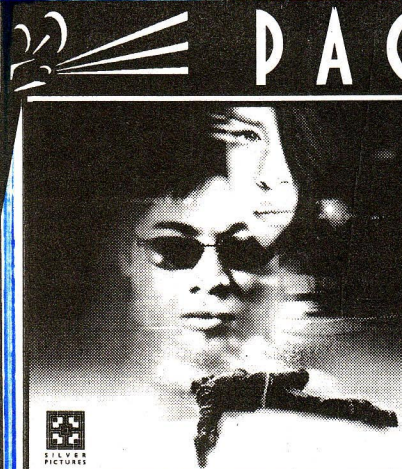
• *Angles Gallery, 2230 Main St., Santa Monica, (310) 396-5019, through April 15. Closed Sundays and Mondays.*

**The Power of Identity:** In her coy series of works at Remba, Yong Sin turns the contemporary fixation on personal identity on its head. All of the effort she expends negating her personal presence feeds—inevitably yet ironically—into the establishment of her very own artistic identity. She is a painter in whimsical denial of the idiosyncratic nature of every mark of her hand.

In one group of paintings, she uses her name as imagery, repeating it in endless columns on a lipstick red panel, or in "Yong Sin: Confusion I," casually rearranging the letters and strewing them across the surface. In "Yong Sin vs. Yong Sin," each patch in the painted mosaic of muted earth tones bears a letter of her name. The painting is a continuous sea of letters with the potential to spell out her name but without the resolve to do so. She is nothing if not humble in her egotism.

In another series of painted panels, she affixes small photographs of family members in clusters or rows, seated, standing or lounging in swimsuits. In every one, she paints over the faces, legs and arms, blotting out the individual distinctions of their flesh and leaving only clothing, eyeglasses, shoes, propped on anonymous stand-ins. Calling these works "Yong Sin vs. People," she poses the relationship, in paint at least, as an amusing zero-sum game, with the power of her own identity gleaned only through stripping others of theirs.

The artist's playfulness and sense of humor save these works from being sucked dry by rigid allegiance to their own conceptual premise. She prefers things juicy, quirky, oriented around an idea but not bound and collared to it. In two other bodies of work here, the young L.A. painter tinkers more with notions of self and selflessness by tweaking the consistency of the repetitive, minimalist mark. Her "Rubbing" and "Poking" series are both built of tiny, repeated gestures that coalesce into vibrant assertions of both her endurance and ingenuity.



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