

Review: Paint's Primal Power at The Box  
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Battles are waged across every surface in the group show "Painting" at the Box, battles of all sorts -- from private to political, struggles against war, against sexism, against propriety. There's a fierceness and urgency throughout, and a hearty, healthy irreverence. The pulse of this show races.

Barbara T. Smith's "Dubious Madonna" from 1959, one of the earliest works here, takes a classic Christian subject -- Mary holding the infant Jesus -- and reimagines it through the eyes of a skeptical fauve.

The rage in Michael Henderson's "Castration" (1968) seems to be what makes the canvas curl away from its own support. The scene of several grotesquely grinning Caucasians (including one in uniform) ravaging the body of

a black man is the painterly equivalent of Edward Kienholz's full-scale, full-throttle installation, "Five Car Stud" (1969-72), recently restaged at LACMA.

Eleven artists are represented in the show, which stretches into the present and features a selection of video works as well. Paint performs as a vital juice and a toxic one. In Judith Bernstein's "Union Jack-Off on Vietnam Policy" (1967) and Paul McCarthy's 1974 video, "Penis Dip Painting," it's a seminal fluid both literally and metaphorically.

The current of violation/generation that runs through the show makes it a fine complement to "Destroy the Picture," now at MOCA, and a compelling illustration of the primal, visceral power of paint.

