

[John Altoon at The Box](#)

This stunning selection of John Altoon's drawings, made between 1962 and 1968, represents a kind of Id of mid-century American marketing. In a group of scenarios disguised as print advertisements, the pleasure principal takes over revealing the repressed or unspoken desires of popular culture—a topless woman makes advances on a telephone repair man, a nude woman is crucified while a couple discusses their toothpaste. These drawings, which depart greatly from the late artist's well-known body of abstract paintings, should be housed in a museum as an important example of Altoon's deeply complex psychology and artistic ability.

[Cynthia Maughan at 2nd Cannons Gallery](#)

In January of 2008, artist Matthew Chambers' notorious closet-size gallery in Chinatown, Trudi, was handed off to artist Brian Kennon to establish an exhibition space for his experimental press, 2nd Cannons Publications. The claustrophobic space seemed tailor made for the onslaught of drawings and collages by Cynthia Maughan that was exhibited there this fall. Maughan is a native Angeleno who shares with Kennon a love of black humor and the darker sides of "normality." Her exhibition, *Wreckage: 1976-2008*, revealed the artist's sharp and sometimes cynical sensibility as it has developed over the past thirty years. Sadly, Maughan's brilliant but little-known video art from the 1970s was absent from this show, but with the rediscovery of her works on paper, I'm confident we'll see more from the artist before 2009 is over.

Bonus show:

[California Video at the J. Paul Getty Museum](#)

I'm not sure it would be journalistically ethical to include this exhibition in my "official" top ten given that I assisted curator Glenn Phillips in the organization of this amazing show. Nevertheless, I strongly feel that no "best-of 2008" list would be complete without 'California Video' ranking somewhere close to the top. Even having a small hand in its creation, I am still surprised and amazed by this exceptional survey of the abundance of video art that has emerged from the golden state over the past forty years. This exhibition, which merely scratched the surface of an incredibly diverse and important history of the medium, made way for more shows of and publications on these often under-recognized works.

About The Author



Catherine Taft is a Los Angeles based critic and curator. Her essays on contemporary art and culture appear regularly in publications including *Artforum*, *Modern Painters*, *ArtReview*, *Metropolis-M*, *Kaleidoscope*, and in exhibition catalogs in the U.S. and abroad. In addition to her writing, Taft is Curatorial Associate in the department of Architecture and Contemporary Art the Getty Research Institute, where she helped organize the 2008 exhibition, *California Video* and is currently working on *Pacific Standard Time: Art in Los Angeles 1945-1980* (Fall 2011).