LOS ANGELES AREA

LINDA DAY
another year in LA

LINDA DAY IS ONE of the most compelling abstractionists in America. I was going to write "one of the most compelling abstract painters," but one thing making Day's work so persuasive is its refusal to distinguish between the conditions of painting and sculpture. What difference does a Day make in its extravagant assembly, its eccentric contours, its shifting, sagging weight, its gritty yet luminescent colors, between two and three dimensions? Indeed, in their open-ended structure and pervasive sense of the haphazard, her rambling structures embrace the fourth dimension no less than the first three, here threatening to collapse, there promising to boogie off the wall.

This is certainly not to assert that Day's objects lack coherence, balance, or even elegance. Indeed, they are anything but ungainly, their myriad components attached to one another not just with assured technique but with consummate rigor, so that they look fetching and unanticipated whether seen (I'm almost tempted to say "felt") close up, from far away, or even in reproduction. They look, in fact, as if discovered by the artist in some tropical shantytown, discarded shelters or decorated walls that she has appropriated or replicated and then modified painstakingly so as to minimize all trace of function. Were that actually the case, these works would be morally suspect; but rather than exploit the exoticism of the poor, Day has derived inspiration from an entire civilization, allowing its difference – not its exoticism, but its entirely foreign construction of the universe – to unsettle her own thought and production.

Such reordering – strikingly evident to anyone familiar with Day's earlier, no less vibrant but much less funky and expansive, more physically well-behaved painting – resulted from a trip to India. She came back feeling her perception transformed by a sense of fear and wonder, the simultaneous conditions of the sublime. "Unable to define our own boundaries within the experience" of the sublime, Day notes, "we are at once filled with pleasure and terror." Contemporary popular understanding of the sublime would have that experience manifest spiritually and immaterially; but Day's interpretation is, if anything, aggressively substantive, threatening and exciting in its very tendency to body forth, to allow us to feel as if we can dance with elephants, albeit at our own risk.

The title given this show, "Ou-Boum," refers to a sound described by E. M. Forster in *A Passage to India*, an echo filling the Marabar Caves that subverts the Western rationalism of a British tourist, proposing instead an existential sublimity in which "everything exists, nothing has value." Seen from this vantage, Day's artworks are not merely elaborate fields of delight, but heroic struggles against an equalizing, annihilating void. They posit composition(s) of sorts, exquisite contraptions that respond to the persistence of gravity and (thus) resist the no-up-no-down infinity implied in the sublime abyss of Forster's – and Day's own – India.

This may sound like little more than hippie Orientalism; but what's all in a Day's work is not a superficial colonization of the "other," but a reclamation of the perceptual disaffection exposure to the "other" has inspired in her. It's no fantasy, no pose, nor even some outmoded Raj version of the Stendahl syndrome, but, if anything, exactly the opposite: a way of marveling at renewed perception, of giving it form and sharing it with the rest of us.

—Peter Frank

Linda Day, *Zazena*, 2011

MARGARITA CABRERA
UCR Sweeney Art Gallery, Riverside

THE CONCEPTUAL GAMBIT that filters through Margarita Cabrera's endeavors — the forming of a corporation entwined with her artistic practice — is at the heart of her ambitious exhibit at the Sweeney. The show is a multifaceted agglomeration of performance, sculptural objects and art-as-advocacy.

Cabrera's sculptural objects, which date from 2003 through the present, are a combination of artifact and craft object, and are fashioned by artisans employed by her Florezca corporation. The objects themselves either venerate craft traditions — a host of copper butterflies swarm the walls of the gallery — or point to dangerous working conditions or difficulties faced by undocumented immigrants — desert plants sewn from U.S. Border Patrol uniforms, soft sculptures sewn from vinyl and foam to highlight toxic by-products of maquiladora manufacturing.

Cabrera's performance-based work takes aim at the parallel reality of corporations. In creating Florezca, a for-profit, multinational corporation committed to promoting fair wages and providing employment to artisans, and by creating performances to dramatize the existence and aims of Florezca, Cabrera both co-opts and subverts the mechanisms by which corporations dominate public life. The idea of the corporation as a disembodied legal entity, which pursues its own interests, and the reality that individuals may, under the umbrella of the corporation, gain advantages, legal protections, and a voice, are the very characteristics of the corporations that intrigue Cabrera.

"Pulse and Hammer" (2011) gets knotty where immigration issues

Margarita Cabrera, "Pulse and Hammer," performance, 2011

DAY: COURTESY OF ANOTHER YEAR IN LA, PHOTO BY GENE OGAMI