

mental. He pulls it off in a subtly adventurous show.

**Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects**, 5795 W. Washington Blvd., Culver City, (323) 933-2117, [www.vielmetter.com](http://www.vielmetter.com), through July 30. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

## Art that sees beyond the eye

When **Stephen J. Kaltenbach** was a graduate student at UC Davis 40 years ago, art was being rigorously — and narrowly — defined as something that happened in the eye. Truly great art was, in the parlance of the day, retinal.

Kaltenbach was among a host of young artists who demurred — with a metaphoric stick in the eye. Nearly two dozen of his Conceptual works range across the last four decades in a show at *Another Year in L.A.* (surprisingly, only the second time he's shown at a gallery here), and they include several that are sly and provocative.

The most famous is "Slant Step 2." The original slant step, a now-legendary object found in 1965 by Bruce Nauman and William T. Wiley, was a kind of stepstool whose tread was set at an angle — not level — which meant that stepping on it would cause you to slip and fall on your face.

Functional yet useless, the strange homemade object passed among several artists in California and New York over the next few years, inspiring a variety of responses to its perception-altering wit. Kaltenbach's rejoinder was to modernize and multiply: He commissioned an edition of 75 slant steps in bright-yellow molded fiberglass and black rubber.

Mass-producing a unique object deflates the aura of originality, which had grown to mythic proportions with the slant-step legend. It also adds an unexpected layer of distinctive weird-

ness. Forget sculpture; "Slant Step 2" looks like some cheerful product of the military-industrial complex. No amount of obviously expensive engineering can salvage its attractive inutility. Someone plainly went to great lengths to conceive, design and manufacture this yellow thingamabob. Visually, it's discordant — a fact that twists the retinal ideal into knots.

Kaltenbach's best work plays with art's visual edge, a notion introduced even before you get inside the gallery. Stenciled on an outside wall are the words "Nothing is revealed." The idea of stenciling graffiti — a deeply individual utterance, by definition endowed with autograph personality — is a wonderful contradiction. And nothingness — the void — is something artists have confronted as a defining experience of the modern era. When "nothing is revealed," some sort of spiritually satisfying artistic plateau has been reached.

Er, hasn't it? Kaltenbach's show is characterized by such puzzling, evanescent nuggets.

**Another Year in L.A.**, 2121 San Fernando Road, Suite 13, L.A., (323) 223-4000, [www.anotheryearinla.com](http://www.anotheryearinla.com), through July 29. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

## U.S.-Chinese culture clash

A pair of long fluorescent tubes in the window of Michael Kohn Gallery are wrapped in dark transparency film. Printed on the film, and glowing from the light, are some data.

"If the Chinese use oil at the same rate as Americans now do, by 2031 China would need 99 million barrels of oil a day. The world currently produces 79 million barrels per day and may never produce much more than that."

Suddenly, everything from the war in Iraq to the possible  
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