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What They Can't See From 9th Ave.: Livin' on Pacific Standard Time

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Calling the Getty-sponsored Pacific Standard Time art and design initiative "overcompensation" and citing a source calling it "boosterish" (as the New York Times did recently) is a gasp of the shop-worn Gotham provinciality mocked so brilliantly by Saul Steinberg in his "View of the World from 9th Avenue." It is a canard that I thought had breathed its last when the New York Times, my hometown paper, sent the astute Bernard Weinraub to Los Angeles to report on us two decades ago.

Since I came to Los Angeles more than a quarter of a century ago I have known Angelenos who were guilty of the flip side of boosterism: the equally provincial view that everything is better somewhere else: i.e., you have to go to New York for "real" art. (For New Yorkers it used to be Paris.) Mega-populous New York has, of course, long been justly celebrated for its art and its architecture (well, its skyscrapers anyway), a reputation facilitated by its role as the publishing and periodical capital of the country.

Los Angeles, however, matured into the economic and cultural capital of the United States west of the Hudson River so quickly and so recently that it is frequently misperceived as having no past, even by some of its own residents. Although the city has by now developed a healthy sense of itself, it took Pacific Standard Time to engender serious self-reflection of the city's largely uncelebrated cultural heritage.

It was thanks to Pacific Standard Time that LACMA's *California Design 1930-1965: Living in a Modern Way* (for which I was the consulting curator) was able to research, document and exhibit the rich underpinnings of California's Modernism in the 1930s and its post-World War II apotheosis facilitated by the region's unprecedented population surge during the war years and the subsequent even greater demographic boom.

And PST enabled design historian Dave Hampton to create the extraordinary exhibition *San Diego's Craft Revolution: From Post-War Modern to California Design*, a stunning celebration of creativity south of Los Angeles which, in spite of its awkward sub-title, is worth the trip to San Diego. Before I saw this beautifully designed show (twice) I knew a thing or two about craft in San Diego, then I found out that that was all I knew. Even about my long-time favorites Arline Fisch, Svetozar Radakovich and Barney Reid.

Fisch? Radakovich? Reid? "Overcompensation"? "Boosterish"?

Better to have said as I did, awe-struck, as I surveyed *San Diego's Craft Revolution:* "Who knew?"

Bill Stern is director of the Museum of California Design.

Image: Svetozar Radakovich in collaboration with Carl Ekstrom, Double Door, ca. 1967, polyurethane foam, fiberglass and wood with resin. Photograph: Lynn Fayman.

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