

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

LOS ANGELES

Charles Gaines

LAXART

2640 S. La Cienega

July 19–August 30

With work as topical and conceptually taut as Charles Gaines's new installation, *Greenhouse*, 2007, there is a risk that polemics will trump aesthetics. But here, the Los Angeles–based artist has achieved a suggestive, mutually constitutive situation wherein one does not feel coerced by his agenda, but rather gently seduced into his way of thinking. In the center of the gallery is a large glass enclosure supported by a nondescript blond wooden frame. The construction is proficient but far from precious and as a result operates more as a platform for rumination and experimentation than as an object of reverence. The interior floor of the enclosure is lined with multiple aerial views of a city. Dangling from the ceiling is a grid of lightbulbs in four colors, and the whole space is infused with the wispy haze produced by a fog machine. The lights are linked to a computer that takes readings of pollutant levels in Los Angeles at regular intervals and then converts those readings into voltage, which in turn controls the light; the fog is a theatrical addition that dramatizes the results. Most obviously, Gaines's installation is a demonstration of the capacity of art to embody a fugitive statistical concept. What differentiates this work, however, is its extreme contingency. The sculpture's physical allure lies entirely in the ethereal miasma generated by the interaction of colored lights and fog. Reduce the pollution readings, however, and the work becomes concomitantly less compelling. Wipe out pollution entirely and you are left with an unremarkable glass enclosure and a dormant computer mechanism. In other words, eliminate the problem and you eliminate the appeal of the object: an ideal but unlikely scenario.

—Christopher Bedford



Greenhouse, 2007. Installation view.

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