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LOS ANGELES**Vincent Johnson****LAXART****2640 S. La Cienega****May 16–July 7**

Well known as a photographer, Vincent Johnson has definitively branched out this year. His first venture was a riff on Brancusi's monumental *Endless Column*, 1938, at the Studio Museum in Harlem, created in collaboration with a group of Los Angeles artists with whom he has worked for nearly a decade. The second, a site-specific installation entitled "Civil Air Defense Project #1" (all works 2007), is also his first solo exhibition in LA.

Johnson is a sleuth, fascinated with architecture and the military. The installation's centerpiece takes off from the 1956 Chrysler Air Raid Siren, a result of his deep research into the American Cold War Civil Air Defense Program, which commissioned the Chrysler Motor Company to produce air-raid warning sirens. According to Johnson, these sirens were placed around LA in the 1950s as a replacement for the civilian volunteers who alerted Angelinos of impending air strikes. Not surprisingly, the sirens looked like clinical tractor-and-radio hybrids. Emblazoned with Chrysler's logo, they were an advertising opportunity, conjuring the cars Chrysler had in production at the time. Most of them were deinstalled unused because they proved to be ineffective or dangerous if activated.

Painted red with the artist's own slickly designed motif, Johnson's siren dominates LAXART's space, turning it into a bunker for the defunct device and forcing viewers to move with caution, and a bit of reverence, around its mammoth edges. The siren's companion sculpture *Family Fallout Shelter* incorporates the aims of the original enterprise: consumer branding, national fear, and technology. Throughout the installation, Johnson lucidly strikes at industrial production in art, the latest war culture, and the mutability of current design without ever preaching or being didactic.

—Courtney J. Martin

TALK BACK (0 messages) [E-MAIL](#) [PRINT](#)**Alexandra Grant****THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
LOS ANGELES****250 South Grand Avenue****April 26–August 12**

Installation view of "Civil Air Defense Project #1."
Foreground: 1956 Chrysler Air Raid Siren (*Horns by American Blower Corp.*), 2007; middle: *Family Fallout Shelter*, 2007; background: *Cold War Civil Defense Logo*, 2007.