Drohojowska-Philp starts her account of the slick art scene in L.A. by quoting artist Billy Al Bengston: “Anytime somebody says you can’t do something is the time to do it...You just have to do things with authority” (p.50). This sentiment is echoed throughout her book, comparing the blossoming ‘finish fetish’ movements that defined L.A’s artists to the Abstract Expressionist works being produced by New York artists. There is an undercurrent to her mini biographies and historical anecdotes: one can sense the palpable tension between the two worlds. Ed Ruscha, David Hockney, Ed Kienholz, and Larry Bell face off against Jackson Pollock, Jasper Johns, Robert Motherwell, and Willem de Kooning. A new world order versus old world tradition.

Drohojowska-Philp provides a fresh glimpse into the art of the 1960s, covering as many artists and movements as possible in 230 pages. She incorporates important elements needed to understand how these L.A. artists came to social prominence in the art world by tossing in the occasional historical reminder about political machinations and the radical state of domestic affairs in the U.S. As readers explore each chapter, they are introduced to the (in)famous Ferus gallery, the Dwan gallery, and the beginnings of contemporary museums in the L.A area. She documents the struggles of the artists to be acknowledged as true artists, explaining how each one dipped their toe in art education and created something unique. The book ranges from the beginning of Pop Art to the end of Light and Space. Everything in between can be summed up easily by Stanley Grinstein: “When L.A. artists make art, they just make art about how they feel” (p.172).

Discussion questions

1. Are you familiar with the L.A artists on the 1960s? If so, did you feel that Drohojowska-Philp captured the look and feel of that decade in art?

2. Based on the descriptions of the artist's lives and the movements they were apart of, who was your favorite? Which movement most interested you?

3. The New York Times notes, and its glaringly obvious, that Drohojowska-Philp does not include very much about women's and minority art. These artists were once thought of as non-mainstream, but the predominantly African-American Watts neighborhood in L.A produced several artists of note at the time, as well as the Chicano Art Movement, and the Feminist Art Movement. Do you think mention of those artists and movements would have rounded out her narrative, or overly extended and complicated the book?

4. Did you feel the book focused enough on each unique movement? What would you like to know more about? Did you perform additional research? What did you find?

5. While reading, did you agree with the author that L.A was "the epicenter of cool" in the 1960s? Or did the "competition, failure, and resentment, set against the larger insanities of the cultural era...[make it] feel increasingly twitchy and overheated" (New York Times)?

6. What stories provoked an emotional response? Wonder? Dismay? Was the narrative well written?

Further Reading
