



Laura Cooper: *Night Gown*, 1995, plaster, rayon, cotton and silk, 190 by 114 by 48 inches; at Bliss.

into painting.

In the end, the brash hipster and the thoughtful esthete complement one another. They come together in a painting that appears to be a romantic view of Los Angeles from the Hollywood hills, with a sunset glow in the sky and city light sparkling down below. It becomes something entirely different when the title, *LA 92*, is considered—a painting of the city during the riots. *Two Clowns Talk About Their Boss*, grotesque yet oddly appealing, features a pair of cartoonish faces, one executed right over a carefully drawn female nude, with the title in rough letters below. This starts as pie-in-the-face humor, but in spite of everything, even the drips on the clown begin to seem esthetic. The clowns stick their tongues out at art yet also display a kind of artfulness and pay a kind of tribute. I suppose Kaneiss is suggesting that raucousness may be a necessary antidote to Serious Art. But I think this really indicates the artist's gutsy willingness to try anything. Of course, that won't go far without intelligence and

talent. Fortunately, Kaneiss has both. —Robert Silberman

## LOS ANGELES

### Laura Cooper and Nick Taggart at Bliss

Bliss, an informal gallery operated by artist Ken Riddle in his bungalow, proved to be the perfect environment to exhibit pieces by Laura Cooper and Nick Taggart. The two artists, who are married, work both separately and collaboratively. Cooper's sculptures, which explore the realm of sleep and dreams, nestled comfortably in the living room, hallway and bedroom; Taggart's abstract paintings and drawings were hung above doorways and appeared full-force in the dining-room gallery.

Cooper uses fairy-tale metaphors as launching pads for works made from clothing, mattresses and plain bed linens. Recently she has also begun to stage photographs (taken by Taggart) in which she wears or performs with the sculptural pieces. *Night Gown* is a stunning dress with a huge, parachutelike skirt. For the related photographs *Flying Dream in Garden* and *Demi-witch*, Cooper poses perched in a trellis in her garden, wearing the dress so that its billowing skirt spreads like a cloud behind her. Installed in the hallway over a small chandelier, the dress enveloped the visitor like a canopy or tent. It conjures up a host of references, including the comfort offered by the Virgin's protective cape in Piero's *Madonna della Misericordia*, the skirts of the Sugarplum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*, and the protective skirts of Joan Crawford in *Johnny Guitar* and Hattie McDaniels in *Gone With the Wind*.

Cooper's piece *Prow*, made from layers of bedsheets strung from the ceiling with kite string, suggests an ethereal ship, a stylized vessel bound for other worlds. *Skin and Bones* consists of an open box spring covered in transparent white silk that reads as a kind of skeletal Minimalist grid.

Taggart's drawings play with inner structures and changes in scale. His wall grid *Forty Drawings* consists of abstract-

ed close-ups and overviews of naturally occurring forms—a polyp, a cave, a rose, a waterfall, a bolt of lightning and a nerve ending. Paintings like *Ignite* and *Interior* combine elements from the drawings with swirling lines and vibrant color. Other canvases rework his earlier figurative paintings, altering their forms to suggest micro- and macrocosmic structures.

Taggart turns his attention to his wife's dreamscape in their ongoing collaborative project *Exterior of Unconsciousness* (*one photograph every morning before waking*). Regularly rising before her, Taggart takes Polaroids of Cooper asleep; the

the Getty demonstrates the range of styles and subject matter mastered by this elusive, 90-year-old cult figure who has lived in the Arizona desert since 1935. With the approval of the artist, curators Weston Naef and Julian Cox arranged the photographs in pairs, setting off odd resonances and contrasts that seem appropriate to Sommer's self-described dialectic of "poetry and logic."

Inspired to take up the medium after meeting Edward Weston in 1936, Sommer became a master of sharp deep-focus photography. His nature studies present a hyper trophy of detail, not unlike the



Frederick Sommer: *Coyotes*, 1945, photograph, 7½ by 9½ inches; at the Getty Museum.

shots are presented as a diaristic grid. Cooper is a restless sleeper whose movements cover a wide range of tosses and turns. The piece is not only a fascinating analysis of unconscious movements, it is also a curious document of a couple's intimacy and a spouse's obsessive, voyeuristic gaze.

—Michael Duncan

## MALIBU

### Frederick Sommer at the Getty Museum

The relatively small output of photographer Frederick Sommer seems to gain in intensity with the passage of time. This selection of 35 works purchased by

dense miniature worlds in Richard Dadd's drawings. In one of Sommer's best-known images, from 1945, he depicts the Arizona desert from an elevated vantage as an all-over composition of scrub and dust punctuated only by thin cacti. With no horizon visible, each desiccated frond and gnarled bush vies for attention. In *Coyotes* (1945) a cluster of fox skeletal remains literally blend into the desert floor; clumps of dirt and the decomposing hide are given equal attention.

Sommer's penchant for the uncanny is evident in cool matter-of-fact photographs of skinned chicken parts and of an amputated human foot found in the desert. Yet he pursues these tough subjects not pri-