

# Los Angeles Times

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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2010

latimes.com

## Mayor takes on teachers union

In a speech to state leaders, Villaraigosa brands UTLA as an obstacle to reform.

PATRICK J. McDONNELL  
AND DAVID ZAHNISER

With a hard-hitting speech that branded the city's teachers union as an unyielding obstruction to education reforms, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa set the stage this week for a new battle over control of the troubled Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second-largest.

In a Sacramento address to state leaders, Villaraigosa — himself a longtime teachers union employee before launching a career in public office — declared that education in Los Angeles stands at “a critical crossroads,” and he assailed United Teachers Los Angeles for resisting change.

During the last five years, the mayor said, union leaders have stood as “one unwavering roadblock to reform.” He called for change in contentious areas such as tenure, teacher evaluations and seniority — all volatile arenas in which teachers unions have balked at proposals for reform as eroding their rights.

“At every step of the way, when Los Angeles was coming together to effect real change in our public schools, UTLA was there to fight against the change and slow the pace of reform,” Villaraigosa declared at a forum of



DON BARTLETT Los Angeles Times

## REDUCING EXPLOSIVES TO ASHES

Escondido residents watch as a house full of explosive materials goes up in flames after authorities deliberately set fire to the structure to incinerate the dangerous chemicals. George Jakubec, 54, the tenant in the home, remains jailed on bomb-making and bank robbery charges. **LATEXTRA, AA1**

## Senate blocks repeal of ‘don’t ask’

Bill to let gays serve openly in military is stymied by tax-cut impasse

KATHLEEN HENNESSEY  
AND LISA MASCARO  
REPORTING FROM  
WASHINGTON

Legislation to repeal the ban on openly gay personnel in the military was blocked in the Senate on Thursday,

dealing a blow to a top White House priority and underscoring the emerging boldness of congressional Republicans.

With just days remaining in this session of Congress, supporters of lifting the 17-year-old military policy could not overcome a GOP

pledge to block all legislation in the Senate until a stalemate is resolved over the unrelated issue of extending expiring tax cuts.

Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.), a leading proponent of the bill, said he was disappointed to see the measure fail, knowing that

the necessary 60 senators who supported the repeal were committed to its principles of equity.

“This afternoon, process triumphed over those principles,” Lieberman said after the vote.

Repeal advocates swiftly seized on a plan to hold another vote. Lieberman said he and Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) would introduce another bill immediately.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) agreed

## HOUSE IN OPEN REVOLT ON TAX CUTS

In a major challenge to Obama, Democrats say they’ll reject his deal with Republicans unless it’s rewritten.

LISA MASCARO  
AND RICHARD SIMON  
REPORTING FROM  
WASHINGTON

House Democrats erupted into open revolt Thursday over the tax-cut deal negotiated by President Obama and Republican leaders, threatening to undermine GOP support and rekindling the prospect of a tax increase for virtually every American worker.

During an angry and emotional meeting of their caucus, Democratic lawmakers voted overwhelmingly against bringing the Obama package to the floor without substantial modification. “Just say no!” many shouted in the Democratic caucus meeting.

Though the voice vote amounted to a recommendation to party leaders, it marked the first major challenge to Obama from his party in Congress as he navigates in a new political reality by negotiating with Republicans, who will have the majority in the House and greater numbers in the Senate in the new Congress.

The rebellion came as House and Senate Demo-

COLUMN ONE



## [Galleries, from D20]

a sequence of larger and larger weapons — from pistol to machine gun to bazooka — that he aims at the box, presumably to destroy it, though he could also be copying the content it delivers. Rhode performs with conviction, squinting to squeeze two-dimensional triggers and straining under the weight of a drawn cannonball. Though the narrative is weak, the interaction between man and his contrivances is compelling. When the piece ends, all that remains on the wall is a turbulent thrashing of smeared marks and the trace of a figure aiming a gun.

Both Hirsch Perlman (based in L.A.) and Matt Saunders (Berlin and Cambridge, Mass.) use preexisting imagery as the basis of their work. Amusing, if benign, Perlman's "Two More Affect Studies" (2001) pairs montaged footage and stills with music by Johnny Cash and Miles Davis. Jaunty and jazzy in turn, both halves pay homage to composition itself, to the construction of an image — in particular, a moving image — from its constituent parts. Saunders' "Passageworks" (2010) has more complexity and mystery, its three separate projections of painted stills (derived from television and film footage) punching the space with fierce, strobing rhythm. Imagery coheres into the recognizable (bicycle riders, a woman raising a cigarette to her lips), then disintegrates into gestural, inky slashes and dot patterns. Values reverse, turning positives into negatives and back again. Graphically intense, the piece oscillates between graspable and elusive, playing effectively with the phenomenon of transforming still pictures into moving ones — the essence of animation itself.

**Blum & Poe**, 2727 S. La Cienega Blvd., L.A., (310) 836-2062, through Dec. 22. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.blumandpoe.com/](http://www.blumandpoe.com/)

## Taking shots at urban landscape

The "New Topographics" exhibition resonated widely

when it opened at the George Eastman House in Rochester, N.Y., in 1975, and the show's reprise last year at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is having its own ripple effect. Artist James Welling guest-curat-ed "The City Proper," at Margo Leavin, with the museum exhibition in mind, gathering work by 18 photographers who represent Los Angeles with crisp irony and incisive scrutiny. Never mind that a few of the pictures stretch the show's purview to Oceanside and further south, to the border with Mexico. "The City Proper" doesn't propose an argument about the city as much as it unfurls an engrossing prose poem to urbanity itself and all of its abjectness, deadpan comedy and unexpected pathos.

A smattering of '60s and '70s work by Frank Gohlke, Allen Ruppersberg, Ger van Elk and John Baldessari anchors the show and reinforces the sense that the contemporary work here largely responds to an earlier generation's call. Gohlke's small black-and-white picture (1974) of the back of a modest commercial building, for instance, is a gem of understatement. It reverses the city's facade fetish and turns inside-out the art world's white cube to state an architectural fact, desacralized, humble, banal.

Mark Wyse answers in the amplified, smart-alecky voice of the present in his large color photograph, adjacent, of a pale cinderblock wall pressed up against the picture plane, trimmed by a band of foliage on top, a wedge of brickwork below, and garnished by the schooled, self-conscious humor of its title, "Marks of Indifference #9 (Jeff Wall)." Visual rhymes like this give the show a bristling vitality, as do themes that meander through and build to critical mass, having to do with the intersection of the built and natural environment (Christina Fernandez, Shannon Ebner, William Leavitt), the taxonomic archive (Amir Zaki, Catherine Opie, Cindy Bernard, Peter Holzhauer), and more. Others in the show include Zoë Crosher, Anthony Hernandez, Brandon Lattu, Lisa Ohlweiler, Arthur Ou, Asha Schechter and Jacob Stewart-Halevy.



Blythe Projects

**LARRY MULLINS:** "Cow Folk" mixes and matches letter forms on a graffiti-style platform.

**Margo Leavin Gallery**, 812 N. Robertson Blvd., L.A., (310) 273-0603, through Jan. 15. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.margoleavingallery.com/](http://www.margoleavingallery.com/)

## Wordplay with broad strokes

Larry Mullins' first Los Angeles show, at Blythe Projects, has memorable energy and absorbing, street-smart beauty. The artist, now living locally, floats a fragment of verse within each of his pale pinkish, scumbled, sanded, spray-painted panels. The words come from his own song lyrics, and they read as both simple music and homespun poetry, brief evocations of character. One pays homage to "radiant child" Jean-Michel Basquiat, another tells of a woman "with a tough guy stance" meeting up with a man who was "sucking chaw in the back of his jaw / been riding 5 days his butt was rubbed raw."

The texts might not be profound or revelatory, but they have a captivating duplicity as both words and images. Mullins mixes and matches letter forms, laying down the first half of a word, for instance, in an ornate Gothic script and the second half with the blocky clarity of a sign painter. He

breaks up the phrases, staggering and layering them so the letters recede and pop with syncopated, push-pull rhythm and textural variety, interspersed with flourishes of geometric patterning and ornamental arabesques. Both letters and imagery are confined to red, blue, black and white, with touches of green and silver.

With their distressed surfaces and paint drips, the panels recall the spontaneity of the street, but Mullins interweaves that raw immediacy with a more calibrated, composed harmony. He tempers graffiti's passion with calligraphy's refinement, allies the tight with the loose, proves that there's always room for one more around the table of text/image artists.

**Blythe Projects**, 5797 Washington Blvd., Culver City, (323) 272-3642, through Dec. 18. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.blytheprojects.net/](http://www.blytheprojects.net/)

## Forlorn nostalgia shines through

"Comedian" is not funny. One of the most stirring paintings in **Martin Mull's** show at Samuel Freeman, it centers on a seated man, slightly hunched, his features bleached by the false light of the television screen

before him. Behind him, a woman lies in bed, shielding her eyes from the morning's glare. Turned toward the numbing pitch of a distant car salesman rather than the sensual opportunity within arm's reach, the man reeks of detachment. Mull paints him deftly, without fuss, in a monochrome palette straight out of black-and-white TV or an old photograph.

That melancholic mood wafts through Mull's show, inflected by wry humor and a conflicted sort of nostalgia. Mull works from old pictures, familial and found, newsworthy and ordinary, interweaving personal and collective memory in montages either mildly or dramatically disjunctive. In one painting, he places a pair of '50s-era sunbathing women in the middle of a street riot; in another he puts an all-American suburban home in the path of a brush-clearing fire.

The paintings strain toward social commentary

but are most penetrating when, as in "Comedian," they distill the ordinary into a potent concentrate. Several works on paper and on linen fit this description, including "The New Refrigerator," "Sleeper" and "Apolo-gist."

Mull seems to be heading more and more toward this kind of singular, charged image rather than relying on the sparks generated by discontinuous pastiche. Over the years, he has unified his painting style too, shedding the bravado of postmodern performance for a more assured, consistent retro look. The strongest work here captures Mull's trademark combination of ease and unease, economic boom and psychic bust through the simplest and cleanest of means.

**Samuel Freeman**, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Suite B7, Santa Monica, (310) 449-1479, through Dec. 18. Closed Mondays. [www.samuelfreeman.com/](http://www.samuelfreeman.com/)

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LOVE &amp; OTHER DRUGS (R)

11:35, 2:20, 5:10, 8:05, 10:50

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