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- [Under the big black sun : California art...](#)

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BOOK REVIEW:

## *Under the big black sun : California art 1974-1981*

by

*Reviewed by Vi Ha, Young Adult Librarian, Teen'Scape, January 30, 2012*Like 0

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Starting in 2011 and going through the middle of 2012, Southern California cultural institutions have joined together thematically to celebrate the birth of the Los Angeles art scene from 1945-1980. Pacific Standard Time, the name of this unprecedented undertaking that is

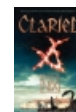
funded by The Getty, celebrates the multiplicity of artists and works created during this fertile period; the diversity covered by more than 60 cultural institutions includes such topics as ceramics, racial identity, feminism, photography, local history, design and architecture. A sampling of the shows includes the upcoming swimming pool photography at the Palm Springs Art Museum, Otis College's show on feminist art, the Museum of Latin American Art's coverage of Mexican modernism and the Hammer Museum's survey of African American artists. A majority of these shows also include a corresponding well-researched and well-designed catalogue.

The Museum of Contemporary Art's catalogue for Under the Big Black Sun documents the art created between the time of Richard Nixon's resignation and Ronald Reagan's election to the Presidency. On the national level, the disillusionment with the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement created cynicism and malaise in the American public. Locally, this is the time period of Proposition 13, the growth of the military and aerospace industries, and the flourishing of art schools. The title of the book refers to the seminal Los Angeles punk band X's album of the same name and implies the dystopic period where new groups of artists were finding voices and were able to express themselves in new media and new ways. The artists during this time period show diversity and pluralism in their works—in who was participating as artists, and in ideas—and also, frustration in reaction to this conflicted period. This pluralism allowed for women, minorities, disaffected punks and protesters to find an audience for their work.

The beautifully designed book is divided into two parts—first, a series of essays documenting the Bay Area and Los Angeles area artists and art movements and then, plates documenting all the pieces in the show. For the curious, page 244 in the book contains a reproduction of Terry Schoonhoven's 6'x20' painting Downtown Los Angeles Underwater that shows the Central Library underwater, as if after a monumental earthquake.

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by Nix, Garth.



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