

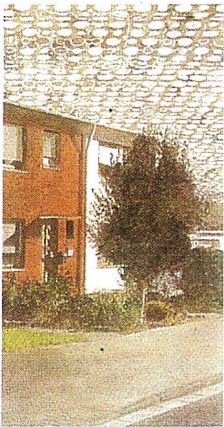
f the "strange new world" of its title, the exhibition significant in mapping artistic responses to the region's Ism.

-Alessandra Moctezuma

sea  
**Kurten**  
 LLLERY

subdued 1973 paean to suburban ennui, "In Every a Heartache," applies very neatly to the well-appointed midcentury dwellings that are the subjects of Stefan Kurten's patterned paintings. The fifteen works in Kurten's show, variably depict middle- and upper-middle-class abodes of isolation beneath visually complex exteriors. The facades are shrouded in or embellished with kudzu-strength vines that are multiplied when the developments were new. Intricate exteriors are the sole notable feature of this otherwise unremarkable show.

Other works feature backgrounds of shimmering gold paint, a treatment that lends a glimmer of low-rent magic. And in a few, Kurten leans into the chic art direction and modern designer furniture of the 1970s, a taste of the residents; yet, as in the glossy pages of the art magazines, no one ever seems to be home. The glass coffee table is spotless but untouched. In fact, the atmosphere isn't completely sterile. Kurten's uneven accumulations of flat surfaces that add up to a whole that is deeper and heavier than the sum of their parts. Each edifice is burdened with the weight of use-if those walls could talk, they would tell tales of dreams gone gloriously to seed (literally, as in the 1973 preternaturally, almost frighteningly lush). *Green Car* (2006), the painting after which the show is titled, is a view of the porch of a modest, cabinlike home. The site is framed by a forest of potted plants, their red and green leaves so obscure the terra-cotta vessels they live in. A cheap plastic table, its elongated shadow visible on the whitewashed wall behind it. Below it is a faded patterned rug that could, in any condition, have come straight from a Las Vegas casino. If gambling palaces know full well that a complicated narrative can make a scene, Kurten's *Dot* has the effect of seducing and disorienting, making the viewer feel as though they were walking on air as they hemorrhage savings. On more than one occasion, Kurten flips the ceiling sky with repeating prefabricated patterns. *Warten* depicts a scene outside a modernist glass-and-concrete house.



The deck is set with contemporary furniture and surrounded by tropical foliage, but the cantilevered overhang seems unstable, a vision enhanced by a sky seemingly composed of washed-out blue wallpaper squares.

In the large work *Clouds*, the show's most dazzling and effective painting, Kurten ups the intensity. This exterior scene shows three flat-fronted single-family dwellings, each boasting the same regimented architecture and patch of front yard. The buildings are emphatic

facades, walls with no backing or visible means of support; they are distinguished from each other only by their skins-one is a matrix of blue, ochre, and white bricks, another is of standard red brick, the third is simply painted white. The adjacent garage of one house, topped with angled solar panels, adds to the sense of imbalance. The sky is dramatically delineated with circles of brackish brown paint that form bubbles of unpainted canvas. What are essentially holes in the painting form a dense, atmospheric canopy that, like most of Kurten's work, is simultaneously suffocating, exalting, and otherworldly.

-Glen Helfand

LOS ANGELES

**Ivan Morley**  
 PATRICK PAINTER

While Ivan Morley has often included hand-lettered "anecdotes"-textual cocktails of oddball California lore and fantasies dreamed up by the artist-as nebulous primers and legends to his disparate work, no such guides were present in his recent show, leaving viewers to fend for themselves. But four works here, made in 2005 and 2006, all titled *Tehachepi (sic)* (a folksy misspelling of the name of the mountains that separate the Los Angeles basin from California's Central Valley), make Morley's modus operandi clear.

One *Tehachepi (sic)*, in oil on canvas, is an all-over composition packed with hard-outlined cartoonlike blossoms, each inlaid with a pastel shade, that intermingle to create shiftingly mottled blocks of color-imagine a symbolist/pointillist/Orientalist Pattern and Decoration Pop Rothko. Another, in oil and gold leaf on glass, is iconic, depicting a skull and crossbones adorned with what appears to be a hybrid between a grass skirt and a cheerleader's mini. The tops of the crossed femurs burn as torches while the bottoms morph into fists clutching pom-poms. The iconic merges with narrative in a canvas combining oil, acrylic, batik, and embroidery that depicts a masked and helmeted ghost rider on a BMX bike, its ID plate marked with a toll-free telephone number and a dollar sign. Cycling straight at us through space under a crescent moon, the rider hauls as passengers a pair of tribal guardians and a drummer whose presence is made known only by sticks raised aloft. Another melange of process offers an arrangement, strangely like something a florist might assemble, of primitive weapons and obscure industrial objects, topped with a straw hat and hovering under a crescent moon in a smoldering sky.

Among other stylistic offerings was the distilled surrealism of *Ghost(s)*, 2005, an embroidery depicting a flat surface interrupted by an encrusted orifice leading to a dark void, into and out of which travel lily-white, slightly flaccid, fleshy arrows. Another embroidery, *A True Tale*, 2006, suggests a baroque division of landscape into earth below, sky above, and an activated heaven above all, but abstracted as if Hans Hofmann and Clyfford Still had collaborated in a sewing circle. Hofmann turns up again in *Bad Memory of a Good Painting*, 2006, the exhibition's one fully narrative painting. It's a vision of a

Ivan Morley, *Tehachepi (sic)*, 2006, oil and gold leaf on tempered glass, 42x30".

