

Kevin Concannon, "Life's a Beach: An Installation by Chris Enos," *Art New England*, April 1986, p. 14.

Massachusetts

Danforth Museum/Framingham
Life's a Beach: An Installation
by Chris Enos

Photographer Chris Enos, best known for her elegant series of 20 x 24 Polaroids of decaying flowers, has once again captured the tension between beauty and decay with her "portrait" of Venice, California, *Life's a Beach*. Commissioned by the Danforth as part of their ongoing installation program, this multi-media project incorporates oversized, hand-colored black-and-white photographs, a soundtrack, and a sandbox complete with "beach junk" as well as hard-cased photos over which visitors are encouraged to walk.

The photos were shot during the artist's recent (and brief) return to her Southern California "home," where she accepted a temporary teaching job. The photos depict the mostly roller-skate clad denizens of the "Strand," an endless strip of sidewalk spanning the beaches of greater Los Angeles. By coloring certain figures with appropriately hot and garish tones, Enos effectively suggests the one-dimensionality of their lifestyle, or lack thereof. Body builders pumping iron next to empty wheelchairs, flabby bodies in too-tight bathing suits, and ever-present backward glances at passing bodies conjure up the Club Med of your worst nightmares. The soundtrack, produced from spoken-word records with the assistance of Mario Paoli, echoes the banality of the visual stimuli. "Surfer chicks" alternately gossip and wax philosophic.

The use of a (time-based, "moving") soundtrack in conjunction with the still photographs works to create a sense of suspended animation much like a dream. The "walk-on" photos further encourage individual pacing through this landscape—as much a mental landscape as a physical one. The "beach junk"—beer cans, plastic tampons, and the like—speaks to the artist's ecological concerns and, as such, constitute not only a continuation of her interest in the "aging" of the earth (as with the Polaroid *Drift* series), but also, perhaps, a metaphor for the beach life of Southern California.

Kevin Concannon



Photo: Burton Elliott

Chris Enos—*Life's a Beach*, installation

ART NEW ENGLAND

APRIL 1986