

# CALENDAR

## PREPARING FOR A POST-POST LIFE

After 10 Years, Inadvertent Gallerist Habib Kheradyar Closes His Downtown Space

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Immediately after its 1995 opening, the gallery called Post, located on a sign-less stretch east of Alameda Street, took off. Post's initial shows inspired both mainstream and specialized art journal reviews — the

### ART BEAT

kind of press that many galleries strive years to attain. It was critically respected, and director Habib Kheradyar's art world contacts and good eye kept a steady flow of established and emerging artists' work on the walls.

The only problem was Kheradyar, an artist himself, never wanted to run a gallery long-term. Now, 10 years after Post's debut, Kheradyar is shutting down the gallery to focus full time on his own work. A closing party is scheduled for Sept. 10, and in the meantime *Post@Post*, a survey of the space's life, is up.

The show is a primer in '90s contemporary

art, with appearances from future art world stars, unsung talents, tragedies and fade-outs. But it's also the story of a man who endured a decade-long conflict over whether to devote attention to his gallery or his art.

As is Post's custom, viewing the exhibit is by appointment only. New visitors who park on Seventh Place locate the address on a wall and approach tentatively; old hands go straight to the door buzzer. Inside, visitors see a wall filled with postcards from more than 200 shows.

In the next room are four slide projectors that capture the work. Kheradyar remembers nearly every artist's name, an impressive feat because there were solo and group shows, and he can describe the scope of the work when the slides don't do a piece justice.

Post gave young artists Brad Spence, Megan McManus, Liam Jones and Yek their first solo shows. Respected artists Nancy Evans, Maura Bendett, Linda Day, Seth Kaufman, Charles



Photo by Wayne Shimidzu

Habib Kheradyar atop the Post gallery's elevator, where installations were a frequent phenomenon. Post closes its doors next month.

LaBelle and Ken Gonzales-Day showed there. The gallery also helped launch the careers of Linda Besemer and Ingrid Calame; both sent work to the Whitney Biennial shortly after appearing in the space.

"If an artist showed at Post in its heyday, it boosted his or her credibility more than any other gallery could," said Mat Gleason, editor of art journal *Congula*.

### Having, and Eating, the Cake

The positive reviews in publications such as the *Los Angeles Times* and *Artweek* gave Post its early heat, but Kheradyar admits the timing helped. A number of alternative spaces had closed in recent years: Tri, Sue Spaid Fine Arts, Domestic Setting and Food House were gone, and LACE had just fled Downtown Los Angeles for Hollywood. Additionally, the art world was just climbing out of the early '90s recession.

Kheradyar, a Redondo Beach resident, had maintained a studio in the same warehouse as Post since 1989. He explains he was also looking for an impetus to keep driving Downtown a few days a week. "The whole thing was a strategy to have the cake and eat it too," Kheradyar said.

The general pattern at Post was a solo show and a group show running simultaneously. Often, the artist in the solo show would curate the other exhibit. There were also frequent installations in Post's elevator, which would occasionally break down. His group shows routinely included big names.

"I was very active. I knew the scene down here and I knew the artists. I could call and get people like Tim Hawkinson," he says, referring to the current art world darling who has a show at LACMA. "Gallerists were outraged that I got Tim Hawkinson; they had been trying to get a piece of his in a group show for years."

Early on, Kheradyar wasn't above pulling a stunt to drum up business — he calls them "innovations out of desperation." His 1995 show *Empty* had blank walls and John Cage playing in the background. More successful were the early *100 Dollar Shows*, where pieces were inexpensive and Kheradyar could raise a couple thousand dollars and divide it equally among the artists. It was a gimmick that other galleries would copy.

"Because his sensibility was sort of anti-commercial, he did things that nobody else could do," said Lynn Zelevansky, a curator

and head of the contemporary art department at LACMA. "He has a real vision about the way artists should be shown."

"He took chances and showed artists that might not be shown elsewhere," added Douglas Christmas, director of the Ace galleries. "His was an important gallery Downtown."

### Career Change

Success had its price, though. When asked about Kheradyar's work as an artist, Christmas says he isn't aware of it.

"I think that to be great in whatever you do, it takes full focus," Christmas said. "Basically, if you're going to be a great track star, you've got to practice every day. If you're doing that and playing the piano, even if they're two great territories, one is going to take away from the other."

In 1998, Kheradyar and partner Emma Jurgensen opened Post Wilshire in the Miracle Mile area near Fairfax Avenue. This space caused an uproar in Kheradyar's mellow way of doing business — his artists wanted to be shown at the westerly location because there was more patronage there, and sales became mandatory to pay both of the spaces' rents.

By 2002, Kheradyar says the gallery's success had become boring. "I was not happy with curating as my main art practice. I was liked as a dealer. I just didn't like myself in that role. Things just happened to go that way, and eventually had to be changed."

He stopped representing artists in early 2003 and he has been curating less in recent years, with other artists picking up the slack. Shows have not been regular. Kheradyar openly admits to sometimes feeling jealous of the artists who showed at Post and found success. But he also says the gallery has given him a way in, and people know his name. He won a City of Los Angeles Individual Art Fellowship (the so-called COLA grant) last year, and this year, a California Foundation grant.

When he sent out the e-mail announcing the gallery's final show, Kheradyar says he received many heartfelt responses. "One, which was very poetic, talked about how Post became more important than me," he said. "I didn't really like hearing that, but the gestalt of it is something... it became more powerful than one individual."

Post is at 1904 E. Seventh Pl., (213) 488-3379 or *post-la.com*. Closing reception is Sept. 10.

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