

ART SMART



# ART CONTAINED

WRITTEN BY DARRIN LITTLE

ARTIST'S RENDERING

Artistic, commercial, educational and political space-time continuums are converging at the NW corner of Ocean Boulevard and Alamitos Avenue. An exceptionally rich wave of inter-agency purpose offers the ultimate surfer's wave for X Marks the Spot, a temporary public art project slated to rise in May or June 2009 over this rather modest parcel of East Village land.

This is a colossal sculpture — over three stories tall — an X-shaped tsunami in steel that will be impossible to ignore, or to dismiss as “quaint” or “charming” or any of the usual well-behaved adjectives the average citizen (this writer) typically assigns to public art. Located just uphill from Shoreline Marina, The Queen Mary and The Port of Long Beach's incessant cargo tanker parade, this jumbo sans-serif letter stands to transmute contemporary nautical language (the shipping container) back to Robert Lewis Stevenson's 19th century novel *Treasure Island* with its fabled treasure map and implicit real estate-conscious mantra: location, location, location.

There's a vast ensemble of participants waiting anxious and giddy in the wings for this sculpture's launch. In addition to the artists themselves, Julie Williams and Hiep Nguyen, both MFA grad students at CSULB, the major contributors are: The Long Beach Redevelopment Agency, which put up the funding for the project; Craig Cree Stone, Art professor at CSULB, who partnered with the Redevelopment Agency to offer a class that would generate a public art proposal worthy of actually being realized; and The Arts Council for Long Beach, which handled the nuts and bolts of project management. When prompted to comment on the Herculean task of mounting a public art project like this, Williams offered these words of wisdom, “You can't do it by yourself and you aren't making it for yourself.” That's a rock-solid assessment where the challenge of putting art in the public domain is concerned. Analogous to astronauts flying to the moon to plant the flag, simple gestures often mask byzantine organizational logistics.



Detail: Claudio Gallina, Don't Lose Your Balance, (from the Patio series), 2008 acrylic and oil on canvas/ 78 3/4 x 78 3/4" / 200 x 200 cm Collection of the artist

## Claudio Gallina: Entre La Memoria y el Olvido/ Between Memory and Oblivion

### Through May 10, 2009

This exhibition includes a series of works — paintings, drawings, video and an installation by Argentinean artist, Claudio Gallina. His art examines how childhood memories and how childhood learning influences the way we work, live and play.

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628 Alamitos Avenue, Long Beach CA 90802  
Tel. 562.437.1689 ■ [www.molaa.org](http://www.molaa.org)

The U.S. Army knows a lot about organizational logistics. In 1952 they popularized the term “CONEX” or “Container Express” to refer to the redesigned metal cargo boxes they fabricated in an effort to move engineering supplies and spare parts from Georgia, U.S.A. to Korea via rail and sea in a more secure, efficient manner (earlier cargo box prototypes — going all the way back to the late 18th Century — were built of wood and inconsistent sizes, both of which increased the probability of damage during shipment).

But it was a civilian trucking entrepreneur, Malcom McLean, who really moved the global container shipping industry into its present-day form. He had bright ideas like sealing the shipping container for the entire duration of travel, and standardizing its form so that it could swap smoothly between rail, truck and cargo ship transits. These epiphanies saw fruition in 1956 when McLean sailed 58 containers aboard the modified tanker ship *Ideal-X* from Newark to Houston. The U.S. Department of Defense put the finishing

sculptural strokes on containerization in the late 50's by establishing the now familiar eight by eight by some multiple-of-ten dimension (present worldwide popular variations are the 20ft, 40ft and 45ft container — the 40ft container being the most popular).

Artists Williams and Nguyen's proposal calls for two of these standard 40ft CONEX forms — nearly 8.5 tons worth of metal — to be welded together, painted and erected in the midst of, among other attractions, the Villa Riviera — Long Beach's architectural crown jewel. This 1929 historic co-op building, whose open-booked facade itself forms an abbreviated “X” shape, will soon be extending its mid-morning, 16th-Century chateau-styled shadow towards a bold reconfiguration of late 20th-Century steel modernist ubiquity. ■

Artist's rendering image courtesy of Julie Williams and Hiep Nguyen.