

Firstenberg, Lauri, "Art on Fire," *LA Confidential*, April/May 2012 (in-print).

ART ON FIRE

Esther Kim Varet, owner of Abbot Kinney's hot new experimental space, Various Small Fires, talks to LAXART director and curator **Lauri Firstenberg**.

What led you to name your exhibition space after Ed Ruscha's 1964 publication *Various Small Fires and Milk*?

The gallery is in reference to [Ruscha's] conceptual-art picture book of various everyday items literally set to flames. I see each mounted exhibition in the gallery as an individual fire. These fires—active metaphors for good ideas—hold the promise and potential of spreading like wildfire.

Does being involved with Performa in NYC—a biennial platform featuring emerging and established contemporary artists across many disciplines—inform what you show?

Performance art, in fact, is the medium of our generation—our YouTube generation. In May I'm showing a video by Liz Magic Laser, a New York artist who was awarded one of the 13 major commissions for Performa's 2011 New Visual Art Performance Biennial. We will exhibit a video and an installation of prints and small sculptures related to Liz's piece *Flight*, which was staged both at MoMA PS1 and in Times Square last year. Liz hired six actors and a fight choreographer to execute a performance piece of scenes lifted from classic films, collaged and restaged in the midst of a live audience sitting on a massive red staircase in Times Square. The work involves 23 classic film scenes—most involving epic chases—including snippets from *The Wizard of Oz*, *Cinderella*, and *Vertigo*.

Why did you commission a site-specific painting by LA's Alex Israel for the façade of your Abbot Kinney space?

Alex [Israel] and I first became friends through an undergraduate painting class at Yale University. I remember his paintings were always "so LA"—he painted fading pink skies, crisp blue bourgeois swimming pools, and mute sunbathers in their little swim trunks. I had never met anyone whose imagination was so enraptured by his own city. Alex became the obvious choice for the mural to represent LA in the public realm. *1212 Abbot Kinney Blvd., Venice, 310-426-8040; vsf.la*



Various Small Fires on Abbot Kinney features an Alex Israel mural on its exterior.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX PRAGER (LEFT)
MICHAEL UNDERWOOD (BUILDING FACADE)