

Apple, Jacki, "Spin Control," California, (May 1989), p. 129, illus.

L.A. artist John White imposes order on a whorl of memory and detritus.

The Kern River runs past the town of Kern, about 30 miles outside of Bakersfield. It's the kind of place a man might go to get away from big-city stress and do a little fly-fishing.

John White, a first-generation Los Angeles performance artist and painter, was sitting in a coffee shop in Kern thinking about fish when a dust devil struck. As the little desert twister whipped through town, White plucked paper napkins out of a chrome dispenser and dashed off pen drawings of the bounty of common things spinning past his window. He spent that stormy night in a cabin and arose to find the river flooded; instead of trout, a torrent of debris floated downstream. That was in 1983.

White's pictographic notations were filed away until 1988 when, transformed by memory, they resurfaced as "Kern Valley Landscapes," a series of paintings. Above is Kern Spin #4. A cyclonic energy dances through the painting. Nature confronts our manufactured world, disrupting our illusion of control over it. At the same time, the painter, in control, carefully choreographs the scattering of personal souvenirs across the landscape.

The paintings in the "Kern" series are maps – game boards that invite the viewer to enter pictorial labyrinths and travel through them. For White they are performances that take place on canvas instead of in time and space.

White was first drawn to performance art as a student at the Otis Art Institute in the 1960's. John Cage, Allan Kaprow and the Judson Dance Theater's Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton were inspiring improvisers, spinning the ordinary and unpredictable incidents of daily life into art.

All of White's paintings and performances are infused with a wry humor and a sense of play that has its roots in sports. Not only have the paraphernalia and vocabulary of fishing frequently appeared in his art, but golf and baseball have also provided anecdotes, images and metaphors.

"I was a closet jock in the art world back in the early seventies," White laughs, recalling the days when he had waist-length hair, a bicycle and three golf clubs. He earned \$30 and \$40 a day playing retired executives at the Santa Monica Golf Club and picked up a lot of good "material" for his art. Though he's no Orel Hershisser, he's a most valuable pitcher for the baseball team led by Michael Jackson (whose only glove is a mitt) in the Entertainment League.

White lives in Venice with his wife and four-year-old daughter. He is represented by the Dorothy Goldeen Gallery in Santa Monica.