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**Tyler Stallings**  
**By Holly Myers**



Tyler Stallings is a thinking man's curator with an inquisitive eye for popular culture. His shows are intelligent without being academic; ambitious without being haughty; and playful, when appropriate, without being flippant. In his tenure as chief curator (and formerly director of programs) at the Laguna Art Museum, he's helped to elevate what might have happily remained a pleasant, provincial, small-town institution into one of the most valuable — and refreshing — arts centers in Southern California. The artists he's showcased solo — Deborah Aschheim, Sandow Birk, Simon Leung, Rubén Ortiz Torres, Kara Walker and Robert Williams, among others — are expansive thinkers, often politically minded and adept at the manipulation of boundaries. Group shows like "Whiteness: A Wayward Construction" (2003) and "Cyborg Manifesto, or the Joy of Artifice" (2001) reflect similar concerns on an ambitious, if occasionally unwieldy, scale. The boundary play, in particular, comes to the fore in his accessible but still rigorous surveys of popular culture: "Surf Culture: The Art History of Surfing" (2002), "Margaret Keane and Keanabilia" (2000) and "Grind: The Culture and Graphics of Skateboarding" (1995). In addition to curating and writing, Stallings is also an artist — his eloquently unsettling paintings showed at Newspace last year — and he brings an artist's sensitivity to all of his many endeavors, making him a salient presence on the Southern California scene. (HM)