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By Christopher Knight, Times Staff Writer

Has there ever been a major architect who did not also possess a profound sculptural imagination? Whatever the answer, the intersection between sculpture and architecture has been a burning issue at least since Frank O. Gehry became a "starchitect." In the forecourt at Materials & Applications, a center for exploratory architecture in Silver Lake, a fanciful installation by **Benjamin Ball** and **Gaston Nogues** deftly navigates the sculptural junction.

A vortex of more than 500 golden metallic Mylar "petals" is suspended from cables and raised at a 45-degree angle to the ground. The canopy is surrounded on three sides by stucco buildings and on the fourth by a busy street.

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The triangular pieces of Mylar are held together with grommets, but they curl at the ends, undulate with the breeze and shimmer in the light. The Mylar, both reflective and translucent, is reinforced with bundled nylon and Kevlar fibers that make it seem at once structurally strong — almost like plated armor — yet organically fragile. (Imagine the flower on a Cup of Gold vine.)

The material also cuts the passage of ultraviolet rays while letting through abundant light. As a result, the temperature beneath the golden canopy is considerably lower than it is out on the street. It beckons as a place of refuge.

At the center of the looming vortex, a narrow channel dangles almost to the courtyard's gravel-covered floor. The structure seems to suck in the ambient sunlight from above, channeling it down to this manageable, harmless, playful bundle within the courtyard. An existing fountain at the entrance might provide an analogy: Think of the sculpture as a sunlight cascade, funneling fluid beams of illumination the way a man-made fountain derives from nature's waterfalls, turning them to domesticated ends.

The sculpture also has a witty Pop dimension. Ball and Nogues have titled the piece "Maximilian's Schell," and a text explains its ostensible relationship to the old Disney movie "The Black Hole," in which Maximilian Schell played an eminent — and possibly deranged — scientist. (Ball is a former film production designer, Nogues is a designer in Gehry's office.) But camp science-fiction movies are not the vernacular source I have in mind.

"Maximilian's Schell" is, in effect, a gigantic patio umbrella. In addition to exploding the scale, Ball and Nogues give that ubiquitous artifact of the suburban American dream a hefty dose of urban edge and cosmopolitan sociability. Their engaging sculpture cajoles, contends and plays with the sun, rather than casting it as a hostile enemy.

Materials & Applications, 1619 Silver Lake Blvd., (323) 913-0915, through November. www.emanate.org.

A new opiate for the masses

More than a century ago, German economist and political philosopher Karl Marx famously declared that "religion is the opiate of the masses." Since then the drug of choice keeping ordinary citizens in a perpetual stupor, able to be jiggled by whatever Geppetto currently pulls the strings of power, has been attributed to everything from TV to the voting booth.

Canadian artist **Bruce LaBruce** has a far more sensible and, finally, convincing alternative. His exhibition at Peres Projects firmly declares that "heterosexuality is the opiate of the masses." It's a sentiment with which it's hard to argue.

Unexpectedly, LaBruce lobbs it like a grenade into the complacent and constricted conversation about global politics that, ever since 9/11, has been the norm in the United States. His film "The Raspberry Reich" uses sexuality as a raucous sociopolitical wedge, and the cheery result is a kind of "Chelsea Girls" for our time.

Rex Reed called Warhol's infamous 1966 film a "3 1/2-hour cesspool of vulgarity and talentless confusion," and I'd happily apply that review to "The Raspberry Reich" (although it's less than half as long). The difference is that Reed meant it derisively, while LaBruce's movie, like Warhol's, is a travesty of the best kind — a

smart, satirical swipe that smacks its subject squarely between the eyes.

The artist's contemptuous raspberry is directed at nothing less than the war on terrorism, which emerges as a deadly struggle being waged between two narrow-minded ideologies that, whatever their stark differences, both espouse repressive beliefs. In the film, LaBruce fuses the Red Army Faction — the 1970s German terrorist outfit otherwise known as the Baader-Meinhof gang — with gay pornography, its stylistic conventions dating from the same period.

The narrative is slight. An all-male group of thugs led by blond-bewigged Gudrun, a nymphomaniac psychopath, kidnaps the son of the head of a major bank. Along the way, she encourages her adoring male cohort to have sex with one another — an anti-bourgeois gesture to be indulged for the sake of the revolution — and hilarity, not to mention considerable pornography, ensues. (No one under 18 is allowed in the show.)

Sparks fly. They are further amplified by flash-cut editing, lurid color and supertitles that spell out such political gems as "The arrogance of the strong will be met by the violence of the weak," "The revolution is your boyfriend" and "Madonna is counter-revolutionary."

The "Reich" of the title is as much Wilhelm Reich as it is the old German state, and it refers to the Austro-Freudian psychoanalyst imprisoned in the United States in the 1950s for his unconventional ideas. Reich wrote perceptively about how ordinary Germans embraced their own enslavement in the Nazi era; LaBruce, with his anti-radical-chic wit, makes much the same point for the predicament we find ourselves in now.

Twenty film stills are being shown in the upstairs gallery, but they're more like souvenirs than effective works of art. The main event is the video, appropriately projected in a sweltering basement room. The acoustics could be better, but the underground locale is ideal for both a terrorist hide-out and a homemade blue movie.

Peres Projects , 969 Chung King Road, Chinatown, (213) 617-1100,
www.peresprojects.com , through Aug. 13. Closed Sunday and Monday.