The catalog for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's fine exhibition, "Asco: Elite of the Obscure, A Retrospective 1972-1987" is a chunky, two-inch thick book that surveys the intermittent collaborations of the artist-collective Asco over the course of 15 years. It's everything a reader wants from such a book -- plus one thing that represents a negative, though increasingly common, turn in such publications.

The good: Virtually everything Asco and its collaborators undertook is gathered in 432 illustrated pages, together with period documents. An index would sure help, but essential source material is offered.

The not-so-good: Also featured are 19 essays, none presenting a full historical narrative. ("Asco and the Politics of Revulsion" comes closest.) Sixteen writers instead slice and dice the work, about one author for every nine months of Asco's lifespan. The museum presents its curatorial perspective in the galleries, then co-opts and preempts almost every potentially contradictory interpretation of Asco's art in the accompanying book.

ALSO:

Culture Watch: NT Live's broadcast of 'One Man, Two Guvnors'
Culture Watch: Gustavo Dudamel's first recordings from Gothenburg
Culture Watch: 'People on Sunday' DVD and Elena Katz-Chernin

-- Christopher Knight

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