

***Body Parts I–V* at ASHES/ASHES**

**June 2–
July 11, 2015**

Martin Basher at Anat Ebgi

**June 13–
July 25, 2015**

As I entered Martin Basher's exhibit at Anat Ebgi, I had the feeling that I had been in this apartment before. The black velveteen pillows, glass and fluorescent surfaces, the scent of Drakkar Noir and other oils of murky purpose—I know this man. Probably from online.

The women's legs interwoven with gradient bands in a painting behind me suggest I'm not his type. The legs are a hair away from the sleekness of advertising, the barest suggestion of a varicose vein or two just under the surface. Basher's realistic flesh adds only the slightest depth to the otherwise flat texture of his subject: a certain kind of lifestyle based around seduction and the false appearance of effort.

Basher's installation ringed by a centrifuge of wall art is both sleek and seedy, desirous and joyless. The sculptural pieces consist of poor joinery, mid-shelf liquor, spotless free weights and kitschy set dressings. The commercial materials (extruded aluminum, display case glass) and domestic accents smear the line between each. A tumbler glass half full of ice and brown booze recurs as a well painted motif, carrying an air of celebration even as it appears on canvas marred by footprints, spill stains, and strips of cardboard. Basher's effluvia of repurposed and recreated consumerism is the final red flag in a date gone horribly wrong.

Have you ever wondered whether it's possible to give yourself a blowjob? Perhaps you've tried it. If you're a woman, you can attempt by popping a baguette between your legs, à la Cheryl Donegan.

ASHES/ASHES has found a clever way of presenting video art: the gallery will show a single work every week during the exhibition. Each installment of *BODY PARTS I–V* (all works from 1991 to 1998) is summarized by a one-liner that remind of a TV guide, like *Man in flat-front trousers pisses himself*. Arriving at the gallery's 2404 Wilshire—a schlep by default in L.A.—you're damned well going to see that one work all the way through. And you'll have to do it standing, because the gallerist isn't fond of chairs.

The discomfort of positioning yourself in a dark chamber-like unit (Nayland Blake's *Gorge*) for an hour long video becomes part of this demanding viewing experience. Spoiler alert: you won't get passive entertainment here. This is inverse television. Handling masochistic topics, the works have an ironic anti-climatic structure that sends up the cliffhanger. You see a man's buttocks being spanked to deepening shades of red to no avail (Bob Flanagan, Sheree Rose, and Mike Kelley's *100 Reasons*) and a vagina being hair-raisingly de-haired (Patty Chang's *Shaved At A Loss*). They're works that don't take themselves too seriously. If only that was something you saw more often.

But in spite of all the subversive sexiness as the artists play around with their private parts, it's the presentation of *Body Parts I–V* that in the end I find to be the most original and memorable thing about this exhibition. ASHES/ASHES makes you think about how we can engage with video art. They force you to do what the artists do in these works: slow down and concentrate on one thing, for a while.

Matt Siegle at Park View

May 24–
June 28, 2015

Eve Fowler at Mier Gallery

May 22–
July 3, 2015

Eve Fowler (born 1965) has presented a high-energy and literary exhibition at the newly opened Mier Gallery in West Hollywood. Tiring recent trends in contemporary art have included highly commercial and decorative abstract canvases on one hand and anti-intellectual irony on the other. Fowler brings a breath of fresh air using an old familiar friend that we have not seen much of in recent years: text. In the case of her Mier exhibition, she uses cuttings appropriated from the great Gertrude Stein. By reclaiming these century old texts, she has created a highly-sexualized, queer, and designerly exhibition that is amplified by both rigor and humor.

Sculpture, painting, and wall text are combined in the exhibition to create a menagerie of objects and images. Every vantage point in the gallery gives you snippets of Stein, cut up in such a way that they become peculiar slogans. Visually treated with a nod to advertising, yet so erudite in nature, one walks away feeling as if she has just entered into a transformative event. Fowler stirs the pot of literary and visual resources to extract something that is humorous, sexual, and idiosyncratic. In a world of derivative and decorative art, her exhibition comes across as an inventive and refreshing eruption of verve and intensity.

The wall pieces presented in *Eddie's Gulch*, a new solo show by Matt Siegle at Park View, are very *pretty*. Crackling grey paint lies atop raw linen, evoking dried mud or creases in a palm. Floating above, sepia-toned paintings show fragments of landscape. Prop-like sculptures dot the room: a crumpled tarp, a milk crate, and a small and minimal tent structure. The works are quiet and studied.

And then you find the slide list.

Stashed in Park View's kitchen next to sparking wine and empty cans of Tecate, the list of titles is key. Here, the reader is given a complex narration that the paintings alone could never provide. Paragraph-long titles are erotic novellas about modern-day gold miners working, sweating, and lusting. These stories, based on a group of men that Siegle has been photographing since 2013, focus on eroticism and wanton desire among its members. Ephemerality is central to Siegle's writing: scent of body and earth ooze from the text. They propose timelessness, where only references to REI and Reebok suggest otherwise.

A viewer who fails to stumble into the kitchen is left to contend with polite abstract paintings and a group of found object sculptures, which come off as props and—like the paintings—accessories to the written narrative. Considering the importance of the writing, its demotion to the gallery's kitchen is a mistake. Maybe this show would've been more successful as a book. Within, text and image could exist side-by-side, granting equal weight and momentum to the other as we flip each sweat and dirt-covered page.

1



2



1
Martin Basher, *Untitled* (2015)
and *Untitled* (2015), oil and
enamel on canvas, 40 × 30
inches each. Image courtesy
of the artist and Anat Ebgi.
Photo: Michael Underwood.

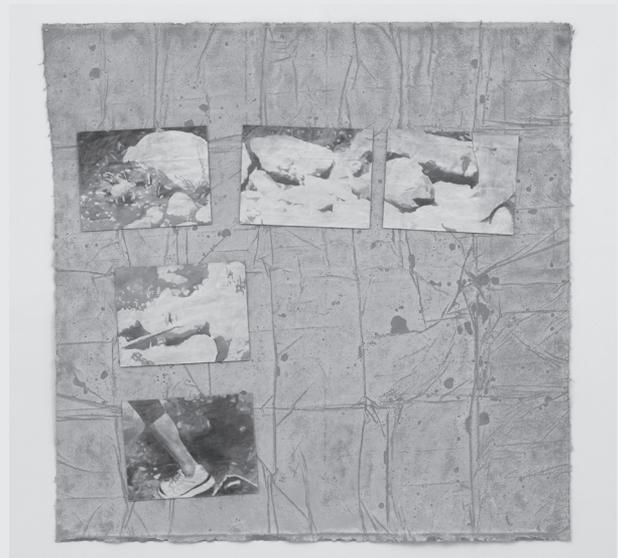
2
Cheryl Donegan, *Gag* (1991),
color video with sound. Image
courtesy of the artist and
Electronic Arts Intermix.

3
Eve Fowler, *the difference is
spreading* (2015), installation
view. Image courtesy of the
artist and Mier Gallery.



3

4



4
Matt Siegle, *I wear denim and
soiled ripstop. In the canyon
I sport white athletic socks,
hiking boots bought used from
REI parking lot sale—no cheap
Reeboks actually. My t-shirt
shaded gray with lightly brassy
pit stains. The sweat collects
at my hairline at the top of my
head. Drips the SPF 30 off the
tip of my nose. Chem-UVA-
UVB droplets collecting on my
chest hair, slithering down my
core and abdomen and each
notch of my spine. With every
passing sun-minute my cotton
shirt clings to my torso, closely
now. The shirt darkening with
perspiration, through the weave
of the belt and soaking the 501s,
dampens my athletic compres-
sion shirts, quads, junk, grime*
(2015), Acrylic on FSC-certified
plasticized bags mounted to
acrylic on linen, 43 × 43 inches.
Image courtesy of Park View,
Los Angeles, and the artist.