

L.A. Art Fairs ArtBandini Art Los Angeles Contemporary Paramount Ranch

January 28–31, 2016

Though Los Angeles may not be the most convenient art marketplace for the old-school collectors of New York and Europe, it has nonetheless entered the saturated global art fair game. Now firmly established as a major artist enclave, L.A. has done so (at its best moments) with the city's own brand of sprawl and aesthetic twists.

Three simultaneous fairs sprouted across town the last weekend of January, the largest of which was Art Los Angeles Contemporary (ALAC), now in its seventh year at Santa Monica Airport's Barker Hangar. Not only did ALAC's participating galleries hail from more diverse locales than ever (Spain, Argentina, New Zealand, and Korea, among others), this year the fair inaugurated a new section, subtitled "Freeways," for galleries under four years of age. Did this inject a different vibe into ALAC's somewhat predictable offerings of mainly large paintings and manageably sized sculptures? Not really.

None of the Freeways booths—though smaller in scale—would have looked out-of-place in the main space, which begs the question of why they were set apart in the first place, and highlights a missed opportunity to shake up tradition, perhaps with a wider variety of mediums and political angles.

Across ALAC were an abundance of vibrantly colored objects, punctuated by works such as Loie Hollowell's modest canvases (Feuer/Mesler), whose muted palettes and sinuous lines were intriguing in their intimate eroticism. Laure Prouvost's evocative phrases invoking sweat and the sea (MOT International) were painted in stark white on black. They inspired uneasy daydreams of the hangar, submerged.

Certain galleries tinkered with their allotted real estate. New York's The Hole papered its walls with a reproduction of Photoshop's moiré background pattern, treating the art objects hung atop it like so many interchangeable JPEGs. L.A.'s own Various Small Fires adopted a beach theme, with works in pastel and neon hues, and surfing-related text by Andrea Longacre-White strewn across the walls graffiti-style.

Of course the hot spot for unconventional fair presentations for the last three years has been Paramount Ranch. Named for its site—a former Old West set—it was founded by galleries Freedman Fitzpatrick and Paradise Garage, the latter run by artists Liz Craft and Pentti Monkkonen. Equally ambitious as ALAC in the internationalism of its participating venues, Paramount Ranch's venue forces galleries to adapt to awkward spaces (the jail, the engulfing barn), and in doing so, gives off an anything-goes aura amidst wooden cabins and dusty walkways. One feels something like a trespasser; a sensation promoted by the park rangers warily patrolling their transformed stomping ground.

The most memorable installations here usually fall into two opposing categories. In the first, unconventional objects occupy the ranch's more conventional-looking spaces—as was the case with Paulo Monteiro's quirky painting-sculptures (Mendes Wood DM), which transformed a plain, four-walled room into a poetic minefield of color and form. On the other end of this spectrum are typical-seeming objects placed in unexpected settings, such as Eirik Senje's gouache paintings (1857 gallery), hung





outdoors on a cluster of makeshift plaster walls that recalled portals or large tombstones. Paul McCarthy's imposing inflatable buttplug (*Tree*, 2014) belonged to this latter group on a grandiose scale; its green inflated tip rose above the tree line, a beacon to approaching visitors.

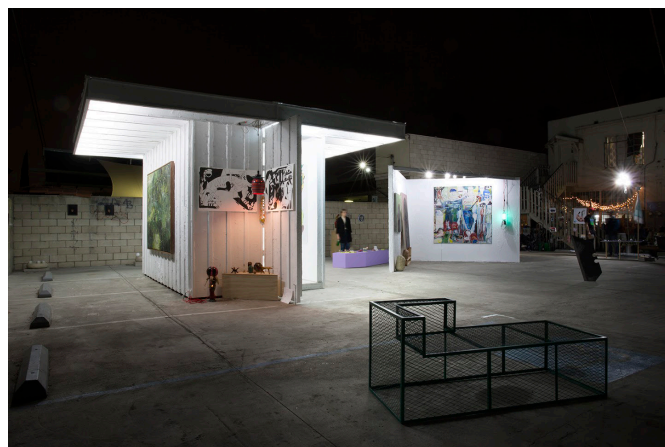
Despite its popularity—or in fact because of it—this was the final year of Paramount Ranch, as its organizers want to end on a high note. This lends bittersweet irony to the fact that strong rains nearly shut down the event on its last day. The same storm canceled completely the final day of ArtBandini, a third concurrent (and one-time-only) fair organized by artists Isaac Resnikoff and Michael Dopp. The fair was the logical progression of their coltish enterprise, Arturo Bandini, a gallery-in-a-shack-in-a-parking-lot in Cypress Park. Over two-dozen entities—some real galleries, and others invented for the occasion—shared only a handful of walls, but brought carloads of supporters. Participants reveled in the common knowledge that Los Angeles is the ideal city for such shenanigans: it (still) has enough affordable spaces for larger experimental efforts, but enough cred as an art center for such diversions to be taken seriously.

Most enjoyable as a mini-installation was that by newly minted *Animals With Human Rights* Humans With Animal Rights (Nick Kramer), in which an intimate assortment

of works by fellow L.A. artists was propped unceremoniously atop wire grids and a folding table, the work ready to be hawked as salable wares. Nearby a collaborative enterprise called L.A. Ashtrays (Edgar Bryan and Scott Reeder) presented malformed but useable ceramic receptacles upon a lilac-colored coffin. Their crisp, attractive posters provided only hazy hints as to the trademark's *raison d'être*.

The relationship between the larger, traditional fair and its more provisional offshoots has been symbiotic: ALAC offered the preliminary impetus for art-viewers to spend a weekend perusing aesthetic wares (whether traveling crosstown or cross-country to do so); which Paramount Ranch took advantage of in organizing its first iteration; whose success in turn generated more enthusiasm for ALAC's subsequent annual presentations. ArtBandini fed upon this cycle as well, drawing fair-goers Eastward for further, and more affordable, artistic encounters.

Since Paramount and ArtBandini will not be returning, however, it remains to be seen whether ALAC drew its largest crowds and collectors this year on the strength of its own offerings, or whether the light-hearted irreverence of the satellite presentations provided a crucial attractive balance. Signs such as ALAC's inclusion of a lively performance by Compton's Centennial High School marching band—orchestrated by artist Alison O'Daniel with the non-profit, JOAN—as well as a marvelously convoluted “three way” rotating installation organized by Dave Muller (Blum & Poe), Brian Sharp (ROGERS), and Jon Pylypchuk (Grice Bench), imply that the now-disappeared sideshows have indeed left their mark.



Material Art Fair Mexico City

February 4–7, 2016

After an hour or so spent weaving through the labyrinthine layout of this year's Material Art Fair in Mexico City, I retreated to the Expo Reforma's café area to get some air. Soon, a crackling backing track started playing, and I turned to see a woman in a soiled gray sweatsuit holding a microphone. Wearing hideous horror-film make-up—her face bubbling and seemingly about to slough off—she began singing, timidly at first but earnestly. Her sincerity—not to mention her appearance—had me unnerved. As she burst into the chorus, I suddenly recognized the tune: Whitney Houston's 1985 torch song "All at Once." She then launched into Joe Cocker & Jennifer Warnes' "Up Where We Belong," as four more fleshy, misshapen characters joined her onstage. All in various stages of transformation, (from a fairly normal looking man with a frizzy mullet, to an insect-like creature), I realized they were manifestations of Jeff Goldblum's character in David Cronenberg's gross-out classic *The Fly* (1986). It was a mesmerizing and heartfelt performance, bringing together two elements from the '80s pop-cultural spectrum: splatter-house cinema and radio-friendly earworms.

Like the "Brundlefly" composite of Cronenberg's film, Material, too is a hybrid: it takes the trade show model that most art fairs are based on, and introduces an energetic, not-ready-for-prime-time, and decidedly non-commercial element, conveying the complexity and messiness of art.

This year marked the fair's third edition (and location), and it was clear that fair organizers Daniela Elbahara, Brett W. Schultz, and Isa Natalia Castilla were still working out the kinks. (According to Schultz, Material will be staying put at the Expo next year, so they'll have time to fine-tune.) In contrast with last year's more traditional, open plan, this year's compressed layout was designed by Mexico-City based architecture studio APRDELESP, in part to accommodate an



increased number of participants. The result was a maze-like warren that squeezed smaller galleries into claustrophobic passageways, while pushing others into less traveled corners.

"The labyrinth was great for the energy of the fair," Schultz told me a week after the fair closed. "This is a very different fair ideologically so why should it look like any other fair? We pushed it really far." They certainly deserve credit for shaking up the staid, rectilinear model, but I found it maddening trying to figure out which artists went with which gallery, or going over the same paths numerous times, only to discover there were whole sections that I had missed. Others loved the layout, finding that it encouraged conversation, rewarded unfocused wandering, and broke down the rigid traditional fair structure.

Some gallerists played with this confusion, such as Mexico-City based Lodos or Michael Jon Gallery from Miami. The fair neighbors both hung brightly colored,



bleach stained weavings by Yann Gerstberger, toying with the assumption that one gallery had usurped some of the other's real estate. SPF15 from San Diego was all the way in the back; luckily the beach canopy that serves as the project's mobile home drew me in. And I would have completely missed L.A. space Arturo Bandini had they not recreated the wooden ribbing of their outdoor shack on the one wall they were allotted.

In the center of the maze was an oasis of sorts, a large (for Material) room that was given over to N.Y. art bar Beverly's. On opening night, it was here that L.A. noise-drag-industrial duo Xina Xurner performed a blistering set as front man Yung Joon Kwok flailed and screamed his way through the throngs. If that scene was too intense, there was always the Mini Bar, a small space reached through a side door, where Alison Kuo and Stina Puotinen were holding court, telling fortunes, offering cups of mezcal, and selling small sculptures. This highlights a crucial distinction between other art fairs and Material: performance is given prominence. "Performance is normally one of these disciplines that is excluded, unless it's something commissioned for the fair, so to have it so deeply integrated into the daily agenda was an interesting experiment," Schultz said.

Material attracts and welcomes smaller galleries and independent artist-run spaces. It is a less expensive fair featuring predominantly less expensive work than larger regional fairs, like MACO, which means that gallerists can show artists that they feel strongly about, without worrying about selling everything (or anything) just to break even. Schultz recounted that

a fair member from a non-profit arts center said that an ad in his hometown paper was more expensive than a booth at Material; a novel motivation to participate.

And then there was The Fly. "The Jaimie Warren performance was incredible," Schultz confided when I asked him to pick some highlights. "It didn't feel forced or premeditated. That felt special, where you felt that something could happen anywhere at any moment." How many other fairs can you honestly say that about? As larger, more traditional fairs like Paris Photo L.A. are folding as a result of flagging sales, Material has found a sweet spot between commerce and community, appealing to an emerging collector class drawn by its fresh approach, rather than the bombast and exclusivity of established art fair behemoths.



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Alison O'Daniel, *Centennial Marching Band Forwards, Backwards, Pause, Silent* (2016). Documentation of performance organized by JOAN, Los Angeles, for Art Los Angeles Contemporary, January 28, 2016. Photo: Gina Clyne.

2

Paramount Ranch III. Image courtesy of Freedman Fitzpatrick and Paradise Garage, Los Angeles. Photo: Michael Underwood.

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Opening of ArtBandini (installation view), January 29, 2016. Image courtesy of Arturo Bandini, Los Angeles.

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Xina Xurner at Beverly's, Material Art Fair 2016, Mexico City. Image courtesy of Material Art Fair. Photo: Livia Radwanski.

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Performance by Jaimie Warren and Friends, Material Art Fair 2016, Mexico City. Image courtesy of Material Art Fair. Photo: Livia Radwanski.

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Work by Santiago Taccetti and Asger Dybvad Larsen at Galerie Rolando Anselmi, Material Art Fair 2016, Mexico City. Image courtesy of Material Art Fair. Photo: Ramiro Chaves.

Rain Room at LACMA

November 1, 2015–
April 24, 2016

It was everything I imagined it to be and that was precisely the problem. I entered a darkened room to the sound of unimpeded water. It was strange: something registered as less raucous than a waterfall but wilder than a shower. Industrial gray plastic grates above and below spewed out and swallowed up water without a fuss. Here was the much anticipated *Rain Room*, a glorified faucet and drain.

The *Rain Room* advocates have it right: there is a sense of caution and anxiety when entering the grid; a *Rain Roomer* must believe in the technology. Those who set foot into the rain field saw the artificial downpour cease above them and leave them dry. As new shifts of people rolled into the room, grown men and women tip-toed into the walls of water, arms outstretched, bewildered and smiling wide, keenly watching the encircling torrent. Pairs of people inched into the perimeter of the showers and locked eyes in delight of their dryness. Hands flew in and out of pockets and purses, fingers clutched phones, ready to record the triumph and the bravery of those willing to trust in the *Rain Room*.

Ten covert 3D cameras track your body as you

enter and move throughout the rainy portion of the *Room*.¹ The cameras work, as most cameras do, by translating light. They triangulate your position within the matrix of rain and send signals to the sprinklers above to halt where you are sensed. The creators of the work—London-based designers Hannes Koch and Florian Ortkrass of the collective Random International—voice a warning: “don’t wear stripes into the *Rain Room*—not yet anyway... different fabrics and patterns reflect light at different intensities.”² This work filled with extremely smart parts also effaces its dumbness. Its inability to sense a striped visitor foils its seamlessness and instead gives it an endearing sort of dopiness.

But the presentation of the machine’s fragility—its sensitivity to its surroundings and the tender balance of unpredictable human movement and the calculated mechanical reaction—paints an artwork caught in the throes of technological poetry. In October 2015 Koch explained to the *Los Angeles Times*, “We’re exploring the consequences of living in a machine-led world... we amplify one aspect of that, which is a space that permanently sees you and observes you. It is a surveillance machine in a way.”³ The lack of trepidation with which the *Rain Room* is offered as both “surveillance machine” and artwork is what is so unsettling. It makes nonchalant the technologies that follow us, that record us, and sense us without our

knowing. The *Rain Room* capitalizes on the machinery that enables pervasive surveillance technologies and ultimately renders the panoptican novel.

Random International declares the man-machine relationship as its grounds for exploration but the work is nothing other than a local anesthetic between the two. The experience of the *Rain Room* only perpetuates habits of unconscious multimedia documentation that make the work a haven for overlapping layers of surveillance on personal, institutional, and corporate levels. The *Room* is a site suited for cameras; the work has been engineered to both house 3D cameras that track visitors and to create the perfect venue for them to snap photographs of themselves and others. The room is outfitted with a Fresnel lantern—a fixture typically used on stages or movie sets to wash even washes of light—which permits civilian and self-documentation through providing a light level suitable for photography by the common camera. The Fresnel also enables the 3D cameras posed throughout the room to readily comprehend the location of a visitor at any given time in the space. The primary interaction is most simply: visitors enter; hidden cameras track visitors; untouched by rain, visitors pose for their cameras; their images swell out beyond the physical space and into cyber space. This secondary layer of documentation is bolstered by self-prompted keywords (hashtags) and geo-location

Hana Cohn

1. Deborah Vankin, “First Look Inside LACMA’s Rain Room: an indoor storm where you won’t get wet... honest,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 2015, accessed January 26, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-lacma-rain-room-20151028-story.html>.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

(geo tags) that enable another stratum of documentation by social media platforms that amalgamate both content and data.

The culture of the social media at the museum has been encouraged by institutions as a means of continued interaction with the artwork but also a way for museums to reach and stay connected to a younger demographic. LACMA in particular has headed up this charge by being the first museum on Snapchat and by dedicating a digital display of selfies from visitors and staff on the third floor of the Art of Americas building. LACMA solicits its patrons: “Be part of the exhibition by submitting your selfie.”⁴ Here, inclusion has been induced not by verbiage, but primarily through image. We absorb culture through the image, and we seek (and receive) societal approval of our cultured-ness through the proliferation of (and response to) that image. Admittance into the art historical dialogue is no longer limited to the word; physical adjacency seems to be enough.

So despite LACMA’s encyclopedic collection and handful of rigorous academic exhibitions, the *Rain Room* continues to be offered as the museum’s most potent work. LACMA has weighed the photogenic over the critical and the accessible over the analytical. The *Rain Room* does not require a reckoning or a wrestling; it is a work that is easy to engage and unlocks itself for the price of a (rather expensive) ticket. For those who gain entry,

the work at its lamest is a crowded photo forum that gets a bit wet. At its best it is a room of awesome wonder and of singular experience. But it is in the magic of the *Rain Room* that my largest caveat lies: it asks us to pretend. To pretend that we are only in that place at that moment, that we are only seen by what we can see, and that we are totally and utterly in control.

Evan Holloway at David Kordansky Gallery

January 30–
March 26, 2016

A sweet fragrance filled the air of David Kordansky Gallery upon my recent visit. (The familiar scent of Nag Champa seemed more appropriate to the head shop down the street than the gallery’s mannered setting.) This overpowering smell lingered with me into Evan Holloway’s sculptural exhibition. It wasn’t until I reached the end of my careful studying of the show (call me daft) that the culprit was revealed: an incense holder disguised as a large, abstract, fiberglass sculpture, *Benzoin* (2015).

The Möbius strip-inspired sculpture twists around itself like the fingers of a couple’s held hands; the tight strip conceals its own spiraling path (and, apparently, its ability to house incense). The Möbius

strip’s main function in mathematics (as I understand it) is its capacity to be non-orientable, or indefinable: its beginning is its end, its back is its front, etc. Perhaps by rooting such an abstract concept in heavy material and olfactory familiarity, Holloway is chasing away the unknown by giving it a purpose. Utility becomes an antithesis to the nameless.

Utility is coopted elsewhere in the exhibition. A stack of gnarled sculptural heads is as much an ominous totem as it is an innovative lighting solution; a reading further cemented in the innocuous title *Lamp* (2016). *Landscape* (2015), inversely, is a graveyard for used-up energy; various sized batteries in a milieu of colors and brands adorn its plaster armature. The piece feels alive with movement, its swaying arms paused in animation. Creating beauty out of humanity’s discards is not new, yet in Holloway’s hands, it feels curious and novel. Rather than proclaiming cautionary tales of human or technological waste, the inclusion of spent batteries seems based on the straightforward logic of what the artist had laying around the studio.

With *Serpent and Lightning* (2016), a Biblical title is lobbed onto a simple gesture. The artist—in a process that he’s done many times in the past—collected dead branches and pieces of wood and arranged bits of them together to form a 3-dimensional geometric gridded tapestry. Delighting in the negative spaces that align

4. “Submit Your Selfie.” *Submit Your Selfie*. LACMA. Web. 18 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.lacma.org/faces>>.

and misalign while walking around the piece reminds of driving past a graveyard, headstones rolling through stages of order and disorder as you zoom by. Here, the grid reveals a simple human impulse to create order where there is none; or, perhaps in this case, to create new life out of death.

Placed dramatically center stage amongst all of these dead trees and spent batteries is *Plants and Lamps* (2015): a cluster of sculpted houseplants that sit with dejected pride amidst two “lamps.” Though *Lamp* was graced with functioning, glowing bulbs, these “lamps” hover above the “plants” devoid of any utility. While the plant’s texture is appealing, and taken as a whole Holloway’s grouping of sculptures contains a certain gravitas, it’s hard to take these houseplants too seriously.

Since Kordansky opened in its new location a year and a half ago, there have been at least three exhibitions using similar tropical houseplants as a central motif. Houseplants were prominently featured in Jonas Wood’s self-titled exhibition (2015), and Andrew Dadson’s *Painting (Organic)* (2015). The gallery’s opening was christened by perhaps the most memorable of these examples: Rashid Johnson’s behemoth *Plateaus* (2014), a pyramid of steel and potted plants that seemed to advertise the gallery’s freshly-sand-blasted cross beams as its height stretched towards the ceiling. Though, Dadson’s work *Painted Plants* (2015) is perhaps the most analogous to Holloway’s recent

foray into tropical foliage. Dadson’s plants are real ones that have been monochromatically painted in a charcoal black. Two grow lights were positioned in front of the group, casting an orange glow and with it a smattering of shadows on the wall behind. Holloway’s *Plants and Lamps* snaps into view as a potential critique of his cohorts who have flocked to this familiar and easy subject matter. Yet, in replicating the thing which we mean to critique, are we not just duplicating the thing itself?

By distorting his sculptures’ embedded functionality, Holloway is perhaps leading the fray of the “analog counterrevolution.”¹ What is more accessible to a general audience than the familiarities of home? Yet, what becomes of the Möbius strip sculpture after the Nag Champa stick has burned away? Does it then—separated from its utility—become a more pure version of itself? Stripped of function and interaction, does *Benzoin* lay as a classical object to be quietly pondered? Does it violently skew away from the accessible, and into the shiny, white arena of Art? These subversions—along with a rich and vivid material exploration—surely enhance the ideals embedded in Holloway’s revolution. Although, what is a true revolution if not innovation? Mimicry then—in the revolution that is—is a weak form of protest. In attempting commentary of current artworld tropes by mirroring them, Holloway’s uprising loses a bit of its gusto.

Histories of A Vanishing Present: A Prologue at The Mistake Room

**January 9–
March 26, 2016**

Within contemporary art and discourse, the symptoms of globalization, Westernization, and post-colonial history are enigmatic, at once an afterthought and a cast shadow. The first exhibition of the ongoing multi-year curatorial project *Histories of A Vanishing Present: A Prologue* at The Mistake Room diagnoses—and boldly confronts—these broad, dense issues through a series of screenings, talks, and exhibitions. In the first chapters of the *A Prologue* section, young artists presented video and projection in the gallery space and scholars took part in a lecture series. Interstices between the Millennial Generation and international perspectives materialized, as each artist in the exhibition was born after or around 1980, and all hail from wide-ranging geographic locale.

In the video works, individual artist’s memories—watched on TV, read in a book, recounted, or experienced firsthand—assume equal significance. Retention (and with it, forgetting) is examined. The exhibition collapses space, joining

1. “What the artist describes as an “analog counterrevolution” is also a one-man paean to the belief that stand alone sculpture can, in and of

itself, be both conceptually complex and intuitively accessible to a general audience.” —Evan Holloway Press Release, David Kordansky Gallery.

Simone Krug

historical narratives from around the globe in ways that obscure the boundaries between subjective experiences. Shuffling through these memories, a strange and speculative portrait of the Millennial Generation's globalized world emerges.

Recent collective memories of public spaces inform Aleksandra Domanovic's haunting video *Turbo Sculpture* (2010-2013). In this provocative work, the artist explores a trend in bizarre monuments that were erected during or after the ethnic Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s. The video appears as a computer slideshow, where images pile on top of one another like a stack of real snapshots (a dated flip effect popular in the '90s). A narrator recounts the regional history and its monotonous tone of an educational documentary. She explains that pop-culture icons, stars, fictional characters, and Western politicians/celebrities have come to fill the empty pedestals in public art sites of the Balkan region. As Batman, Johnny Depp, Bill Clinton, and Tupac Shakur inhabit these plinths, one wonders whose identity and history is forgotten—or worse, erased? This glorification of fictional and foreign characters conceals real historical figures (regional political leaders, heroes, or fallen martyrs), instead honoring ersatz icons of Western visual culture. For Domanovic, these monuments are documents of active erasure.

In Larry Achiampong and David Blandy's

compelling video *Finding Fanon Part Two* (2015), the artists construct a narrative of history based on the lost theatrical scripts of post-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon. Rendered in Machinima-style graphics of video game and computer animation, the work places two men dressed in suits in the surreal and simulated environment of *Grand Theft Auto 5*. They fall from the sky onto the streets of downtown Los Angeles, perambulating through the urban terrain of industrial train tracks, grassy knolls, and loading docks. A narrator invokes Fanon's writing on power and oppression, revolution and complacency, colonialism and immigration. She recites his thoughts on reality and fantasy in relation to history. The prescience of Fanon's writing reverberates, particularly in light of contemporary crises like the Black Lives Matter movement, the European migrant crisis, and the surge in wealth inequality.

Kemang Wa Lehulere's video, *A Homeless Song (Sleep is for the Gifted)* (2013), activates stories of the apartheid era in South Africa through choreography. White and black dancers scuttle around a stage, moving bones or (more chillingly) digging graves. These gestures become an elegy for the fallen in both South Africa and other global conflict zones. Basel Abbas & Ruanne Abou-Rahme's video *Collapse* (2009) collages footage of movement and displacement in a somber rumination on the Palestinian condition. The

blurry, aged footage and shaky camera invoke war and loss; the calamities recounted are markers of painful recent history.

Histories of A Vanishing Present: A Prologue is itself a study in recollection, mining the recent political events that shape our present moment. But whose memories do these videos recount if many of these events precede the Millennial Generation? The exhibition activates the notion of *postmemory*, wherein one generation bears the memories of another. The stories these artists tell are both their own and tangled with that of older generations. Further, the voices of this exhibition are highly individualized and personal, which at times counteract the assumption that globalization creates one narrative or perspective. Each work in this show divulges a particular history rooted in the intersections of globalization. The themes that emerge bleed into one another. Disparate histories become shared collective memories. Here, the question of who writes history is as important as the question of who remembers it.

Carter Mull at fused space (L.A. in S.F.)

November 12, 2015–
January 17, 2016

A few years ago, Carter Mull ditched the art world to hang with a totally different group of weirdos from L.A.'s underground party scene. He made friends with some of the people that were dancing, drugging, and documenting themselves in what can fairly be called "alternative spaces," just across the way from his downtown studio. Mull had them over to pose for pictures and otherwise become involved in the artwork he started making as a way to articulate his experiences among the ecstatic revelers of the 21st century. Their names and internet handles figure in the titles of the work collected in *Theoretical Children*, Mull's recent exhibition of 2D work, sculpture and video presented by Jessica Silverman at fused space in San Francisco.

Mull's 2D work employs uncomplicated digital effects; inkjet prints of shapes, gradients, and letterforms are collaged onto marbled cotton stretched over aluminum. Marbleizing, a technique that produces lush whorls of mingled color, is sometimes used in hardback bookbinding and brings with it a whiff of distinction. By combining contemporary

digital design techniques with traditional analog ones, Mull participates in the ageless impulse to parse moments of lived experience into good-looking documents.

Untitled Social Subject (*Emotional Assassin, Svelte Accomplice, Fractured Defendant*) (2015), a 2D work with a cotton candy palette features reproduced images of Fragonard's *The Lover Crowned* (1772) and a leather jacket. Together, they form a continuum of self-centered coolness—an attitude that is comfortably familiar amid Mull's high-key translations of the brave new world he found in alternative nightspots and online.

Like the right number of the right people at a party, or in a chat room, the collaged elements in *Untitled Social Subject* (*Suitor*) (2015) form an enlivened gestalt. The concise formal and technical dichotomies—chance/ intention, wet/ dry media, geometry/ intuition—push and pull like living specimens under glass. Mull's best compositions function in the small space between looking incidental and right-on-the-first-try fresh.

Elsewhere in the exhibition Mull took on ideas of identity in a more direct and conventional way, and the results were less revelatory. The layering of technique and materials in the smaller portraits, *Theoretical Children* (*Luna Miu*) (2015) and *Theoretical Children* (*Alanna Pearl*) (2015) is foggy and dense. They lack the sense of migration that makes Mull's larger, more abstract works so descriptive of the mercurial nature

of social groups and the media by which they define themselves.

Covering the floor of the gallery was *Connection* (2011), comprised of 1,800 stills from an iPhone 4 ad printed on silver metallic pieces of Mylar that shift like slow moving static as people walk around on them. The piece calls to mind the short-term gratification and disposability of the devices of the Information Age. The viewer is left alone to reckon on the inextricability of digital culture from the technological medium of its expression. If the latter so quickly becomes obsolescent junk, what does that mean for the former?

Mull also chose the floor for an even more ominous and intimately scaled expression of existential apprehension. Two sculptural *memento mori*, flower arrangements wilting under tulle veils, presented accessories common to rituals of transformation, including, but not limited to, weddings and funerals. Surely flowers and veils are comfortable bedfellows, but Mull combines them to particularly bleak effect. *Chase / (The Tribune Company) / Los Angeles Times* (2014) features a veil printed with the *Los Angeles Times* masthead. Covered by a haze of information, beauty and vitality shrivel up and die.

An assertion gestated in Warhol's Factory, and re-affirmed by Mull, is that art—beset by toxic amounts of information—

(Review continues on pg. 50)

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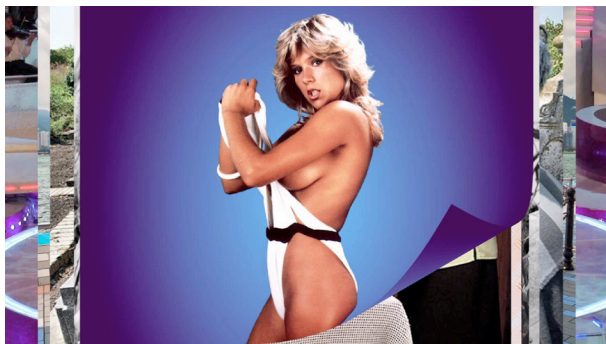
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Rain Room by Random International, (2012) at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. Image courtesy of Random International. Photo: Random International.

2

Evan Holloway (2016) at David Kordansky Gallery (installation view). Image courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA. Photo: Brian Forrest.

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Aleksandra Domanović, *Turbo Sculpture* (video still) (2010/2013). HD video, color, sound, 20 minutes. Edition of 5 + 2AP. Image courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton.

4

Carter Mull, *Theoretical Children* (2015) at fused spaced (installation view). Image courtesy of Jessica Silverman Gallery.

5

Awol Erizku, *Tigist* (2013). Digital Chromatic print. 40 x 50 inches. Image courtesy of artist and The FLAG Art Foundation.

(Continued from pg. 46)

might avoid shriveling up and dying by demonstrating an awareness of the primacy of media. To this end, Mull's digital video, *Triple A Bond* (2013-2015), features two party girls mirthlessly leafing through his works on paper, taking photos, and putzing around in his studio. Phrases like "In a new community, a negation of the old" are repeated by a female voice that, in turn, sometimes also refers to the process of repeating and articulating the phrases. Less substantial than the other works, it is nevertheless effective for framing the viewer's understanding of Mull's process and his point of view.

Up close, Mull's work reveals itself to be deceptively low-tech and handmade. His impeccable craftsmanship affirms the traditional studio-based processes of distilling tangible form from the ether of experience. Mull is a wry and incisive artist and doesn't align his work with Romanticism, which might have been tempting and a bit on the nose. Instead he gives us Fragonard and the Rococo, a style of art associated with the apolitical hedonism of the time right before the guillotine of the French Revolution.

Incidentally, fused space occupies the same building as the internationally-acclaimed design studio fuseproject. I'm told that before the building hummed with the business of conceiving the future, it was a place where coffins were made. Talk about on the nose.

Awol Erizku at FLAG Art Foundation (L.A. in N.Y.)

September 17–
December 12, 2015

Awol Erizku has developed quite a name for himself as an agitator of the canon. Intent on reworking the art historical episteme, the Ethiopian-born, Bronx-raised, Los Angeles-based Erizku pits the image, invisible, against the icon, visible, to foreground the textualities of black bodies.

Take Erizku's Donald Judd-inspired sculpture, *Oh what a feeling, aw, fuck it, I want a Trillion* (2015). The work consists of seven all-black regulation-size basketball rims with 24-karat gold-plated nets: an iconographic similitude to Judd's *Untitled (Stack)* (1967). But there's more to *Oh what a feeling* than mere mimicry of, or overtures to, Judd. Hoop dreams, and higher goals emerge, as does the escapist-cum-entangled narrative that weaves its way into how black boys dream themselves differently.¹

In many respects, *New Flower / Images of the Reclining Venus* at FLAG Art was no different. For *New Flower*, Erizku turned instead to Manet's famed *Olympia* (1863) and Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* (1814). Subversive for their time, both paintings riled the Parisian public and its conservative Salon. Manet and Ingres blatantly dis-

avowed the allegorical devices that protected the white female nude; this was no Venus amidst a whimsical environment replete with distractions. In her book, *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art*, Charmaine Nelson offers up a riposte, contending that allegorical signposts like Venus "kept representations of white woman contained within the realm of art" while the black female was a woman of her own devices, responsible for the sexual gaze.²

Erizku acknowledges this dialectic, taking issue with the allegorical narrowness. As dissident as *Olympia* and *La Grande Odalisque* may appear, Erizku felt it needed a modern-day revamp that: 1) centered the peripheral black female servant in *Olympia*, and 2) considered Nelson and her problematic around the antithetical posturing of the black female body in relation to Western allegorical traditions. Gone are the romantic undertones and redeeming disguises—shisha pipes, Persian silks, and comfort cats. Waiting black attendants are nowhere to be found in *New Flower*. Instead, threadbare hotel rooms of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, frame the fray. The demure black maid, peripheral in *Olympia*, is now the object of desire, the new flower, *Addis Ababa*.³ What will be her lot? Will she be afforded the same courtesies as the white female nude? That we still find ourselves mired in such negotiations adds impetus to *New Flower*. To address this impasse, Erizku opts for salon-style

1. The work of David Hammons in *Higher Goals* (1986) and that of coming-of-age film, *Hoop Dreams* (1994) are immediate references beyond Judd.

Ikechukwu Casmir
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trimmings—red walls envelope the exhibition space—without the salon-style clutter. Each photograph in *New Flower* commands its own space in which to speak and be seen. Even the implicit red-light district finish feels secondary owing to the genteel embellishments sprinkled about FLAG Art. The table and flowers that receive viewers at the top of the landing evoke domesticity, as though one has strolled into Erizku's carefully considered home.

New Flower was entirely shot in hotels, in-between spaces where sex workers—legal in Ethiopia—could bed their clients. For these women, hotel rooms present as transactional (and transitional) spaces, commutable, tailor-made for whatever acts that are to follow. In the case of *New Flower*, Erizku paid these women to sit for him, giving them the option to mirror *Olympia* or *La Grande Odalisque*. For some, it was just another transaction, with nudity as the commodity on offer. Others, however, viewed it as more, a gesture of agency, a salvaging of power.

Image after image capture scantily-clad women—*Yeshi*, *Tigist*, *Aziza* (all 2013)—reclining on nondescript beds. However, things become a tad off-beat at the uncanny *mise-en-abyme* in *Empty Bed with The Virgin Mary* (2013); Venus is noticeably missing. The yellowish walls in the photograph bring to mind *Tigist* and her cool, half-turned back; it seems *Tigist* has left in *Empty Bed*, or maybe she's yet to arrive.

Perhaps a new sex worker waits in the wings. Absence and presence are toyed with here, as are time and intimacy. From *Tigist* to *Empty Bed*, the different beddings thwart time—whose body laid here last? The posy of roses beside *Tigist* affects the room with a post-coital care. In a way, *Empty Bed* is theatrical yet transgressive in its implied instability, complicating the visibility of invisible labor as it relates to the oppressive morass of race and gender. Together with *Tigist*, the two images provide a form of double address that chronicle the *de jure* mix of (in)visibility and sex work.

Four of the women that were photographed decided to keep their underwear on; the other seven took after *Olympia*, hands guarding their sex against scopophilic eyes. Erizku had this to say regarding this sense of agency through adornment: “wearing their underwear... it was that last bit of dignity, this pride...that these women aren't willing to let go.”⁴ From gesture and adornment alone, the images in *New Flower* reveal selfhood as a panoply of subjectivities; it would be reductive at best to categorize *Yeshi* as just a sex worker. With pluralism as an undercurrent, what *New Flower* offers is renewed thinking on how we place the black female nude vis-à-vis Western tradition. Is she only an object of sexual desire or a subject of autonomous identities?

Through *Tigist* and *Empty Bed*, we see a valiant answer to the above. In her absence and presence,

Tigist negotiates her selfhood, all the while destabilizing allegorical traditions. Glancing over her shoulder, *Tigist* partially backs us, her face obscured. Key to this posturing is her sky blue underwear—they remain on, further fashioning this agency, this “game-changing kind of refusal in that it signals the refusal of the choices as offered.”⁵ This dissonance continues in *Empty Bed*; *Tigist* is gone. An absent trickster “acting with complete freedom and without social and moral constraints.”⁶ Nelson has leveled that allegories like Venus came from a Western visual tradition in which individuality and specificity are situated in a vacuum for the purposes of locating higher ideals within these bodies.⁷ Following this line of thought, if subjectivities are the end goal for the black female nude, is it prescient to rest our laurels on a tradition that evacuates selfhood from the body, let alone the black body? I think not. And neither does *Tigist* or Erizku. Instead, both look to cultivate this absence anew by bucking tradition, questioning perspective, and asserting absence as a point of view.⁸

4. Zara, Janelle. “Up and Coming: Awol Erizku's Powerful Photos of Black Sex Workers Disrupt Art History.” *Artsy*. 22 Sept. 2015. Web. 02 Oct. 2015.

5. Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Brooklyn: Minor Compositions, 2013. Print.

6. Molvaer, Reidulf Knut. *Socialization and Social Control in Ethiopia*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995. Print.

7. Nelson, Charmaine. *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010. Print.

8. Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Brooklyn: Minor Compositions, 2013. Print.

2. Nelson, Charmaine. *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010. Print.

3. Addis Ababa translates to “new flower.”