

Alessandro Pessoli at Marc Foxx

March 25–
April 22, 2017

It's just the most meaningless title for a radio show. And don't even get me started on Jason Bentley, the dreariest voice on KCRW and the presenter of the morning music program, *Morning Becomes Eclectic*. (Fine, I admit, I listen to it most days and, yes, I sometimes enjoy his music selections.)

Alessandro Pessoli has taken *Morning Becomes Eclectic* as the title for his exhibition at Marc Foxx, which mercifully has none of the middle-of-the-road radio show's milquetoast inclusivity. In four sculptures (two of them mobiles), four paintings, and two groups of drawings, Pessoli materializes a singularly piquant vision of his inner life.

Eclecticism enters via the cast of questionably related signs and signifiers that Pessoli uses to assemble his impression of selfhood. He appears in the most domineering work in the show, a painting more than eight feet tall titled *A-P backyard* (2017), in which he sits looking down at us through a thick black mane of hair, smoking a thin-stemmed pipe and kicking a cowboy-booted leg up against a tree stump. Beverage cans and Colt revolvers—silk-screened over a brushed and spray-painted ground—contribute to the painting's

noncontiguous, collagistic effect.

The exhibition's press release, which comes in the form of the artist's first-person explanation of the show, reveals that the hirsute figure in the picture is in fact "a wigged self." Whether consciously or not, Pessoli's acknowledgment here that the guy in the wig is just one of many selves (rather than himself disguised as someone else) is what delivers the exhibition—which he describes in the press release as "a big self-portrait"—from straight solipsism. Instead, it becomes a more general reflection on the fluid and subjective nature of selfhood, a quality that is not unique to, but is especially prevalent, in the self-realizing/self-inventing social milieu of Los Angeles.

In 2017, artists can anyway no longer assume that the world is necessarily interested in art based in autobiography, especially if the artist is male, white, heterosexual, or otherwise speaking from a position of privilege. Jason Rhoades' concurrent exhibition, across town at Hauser & Wirth, makes this painfully clear. (Rhoades was born two years after Pessoli, although in very different parts of the world.)

Some would maintain that the self is all an artist has. Pessoli seems to disagree. He goes further and reveals and depicts a menu of possible selfhoods: repressed selves, compartmentalized selves, private selves, public selves, past selves and future, aspirational selves. Fantasy becomes an alternative

form of self-revelation. *Me Myself & I* (2017) is a sculpture of a life-sized chopper, a customized motorbike with a ludicrously long front fork which, in Pessoli's rendering, is made from welded-together BMX frames. The fuel tank is made from papier maché, the engine is terracotta, and the wheels are stitched felt. Above the seat, stuck on a welded pole, is that wig—a totem of one of the artist's alternate selves.

As a European expatriate living in California, the Italian-born Pessoli has been subject to the profoundly destabilizing experience of having to recalibrate his native proclivities to a foreign culture that is at once strange and deeply familiar. *Easy Rider* was released as *Libertà e Paura* in Italy while Pessoli was still a kid; the Captain America chopper in that film is recognized the world over as an archetype of a certain conception of American freedom. (The BMX tubes in *Me Myself & I* have Stars and Stripes stickers on them.) Endearingly, Pessoli admits to listening to *Morning Becomes Eclectic* in his car after he drops off his daughter at school, on his way to the studio. Talk about compartmentalized selves.

In two hanging mobile sculptures, objects including a carved wooden head, more bike tubes, and several plaster penises hang in equilibrium. I'm not so sure that most of us ever achieve such a balance. More realistic, perhaps, is *City of God* (2017), in which static steel frames suspend elements individually,



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Alessandro Pessoli, *City of God* (2017) (detail). White ceramic, wood with glitter, artist's altered clothing, synthetic hair, plaster, pine and handmade metal chain on welded steel frame, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist and Marc Foxx, Los Angeles. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.

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2
Jennie Jieun Lee, *Public Transportation* (2017). Glazed stoneware and porcelain, 40 x 19 x 2 inches. Image courtesy of the artist, Martos Gallery, New York, and The Pit. Photo: Jeff McLane.

3
Jennie Jieun Lee, *Seizure Crevasse* (2017) (installation view). Image courtesy of the artist, Martos Gallery, New York, and The Pit. Photo: Jeff McLane.

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4
Trisha Baga, *BIOLOGUE* (2017)
(installation view). Image
courtesy of the Artist, 356 S.
Mission Road, Los Angeles
and Greene Naftali, New York.
Photo: Brica Wilcox.

5
Trisha Baga, *The Voice* (2017).
3D video, single channel with
sound, 25 minutes and 22
seconds, edition of 5. Image
courtesy of the Artist, 356 S.
Mission Road, Los Angeles
and Greene Naftali, New York.
Photo: Brica Wilcox.



6

Jimmie Durham, *Malinche* (1988-1992). Guava, pine branches, oak, snakeskin, polyester bra soaked in acrylic resin and painted gold, watercolor, cactus leaf, canvas, cotton cloth, metal, rope, feathers, plastic jewelry, and glass eye, 70 × 23.6 × 35 inches. Image courtesy of Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK), Ghent, Belgium. ©S.M.A.K. / Dirk Pauwels.

including a sweater well-worn by the artist and embroidered with patches, and “1963”—the the year Pessoli was born—spelled out in dangling ceramic numbers.

What makes Pessoli’s work so enjoyable is not so much his reflections on his own psychology but his facility as a painter, both on canvas and on paper. His luminous pictures swim fluidly between media and styles of application, typically comprising sprayed sections (both stenciled and freeform), coarsely brushed abstraction, silk-screened motifs, and areas that are nearly photorealistic. Despite their technical eclecticism, they always feel so right, so coherent and whole: hopeful metaphors for the fractured self.

Jennie Jieun Lee at The Pit

March 12
–April 23, 2017

A sign posted outside cautioned viewers to enter at their own risk. In *Seizure Crevasse*, her first show at The Pit, Jennie Jieun Lee offered a provocative reminder that clay’s ability to convey the possibility of breakage is a key to its persistence within culture. Stepping up into the space became an act that required heightened physical awareness, as Lee filled it with a raised walkway constructed from reclaimed wood that gave off a musty smell, creaked when one moved across its

planks, and exaggerated the dimensions of the deep pit that gives the gallery (a former mechanic’s shop) its name. A wrong step would have resulted in a nasty fall; the specter of injury also haunted the works on view.

As observed from the front door, the squat *Adeline Boone* (all works 2017) was perched directly at eye level on the walkway itself. Actively confrontational, its slapdash glazing and crumpled, jagged upper edges recall the metal sculptures of John Chamberlain. Hanging nearby was *Public Transportation*, a quasi-pictorial wall-based work in landscape format; it resembled a municipal mural that had been scorched, shrunk, and fossilized. Frenetically applied black glaze had been used to loosely render a figure sitting on a bus or train, but formally speaking the image, like the object itself, was subsumed by action and threatened to come apart. Mass transit being a place where everyone rides together, this seemed an apt metaphor for the crumbling faith that plagues the public sector. If the commons disintegrates, individuals will too.

Figuration is a constant—if sometimes only implied—presence in Lee’s work, made most apparent in three garishly glazed busts, each installed idiosyncratically. *The Witch*, a head on its side entwined in a looping, salmon-colored ribbon of clay, was barely visible in the depths of the pit. Another bust, *Green Lantern*, could easily have been mistaken as the

crowning segment of *Untitled Green*, a chest-high object doing double duty as a pedestal.

The pairing begged the question of whether the other columnar works of this kind, the most ambitious objects in the show, had all been beheaded, leaving behind a series of vertical forms—ominous monuments to a culture edging toward ruin. Unlike presentations of antiquities, however, in which missing limbs or broken pots are symbolic of the passage of time, Lee’s work is born of rupture, seemingly pieced together in collage-like fashion from mismatched parts. Even her glazing, which is forcefully heterogeneous and made up of washes, pencil-thin lines, and expressionistic brushed passages, serves to atomize the overall visual effect of each object’s surface. Colors range from muddy to electric and back again, sometimes within the space of a few inches. The strongest works thrive by barely holding together as collections of distinct sections, each with its own grisly physicality and visceral mood.

The cumulative effect of seeing these works installed together in the spaces surrounded by the walkway was powerful (together they felt like trees in a petrified forest), but the individual objects are so commanding that I wondered how they might read when isolated in a more traditional setting, in part because of a desire to better understand their complex relationship to the vessel.

Trisha Baga at 356 Mission

January 27–
March 19, 2017

Though contemporary artists often use clay to make a wide variety of non-functional objects, a previous generation of artists known for working with the medium—including figures as diverse as Ken Price and Betty Woodman—played up unavoidable connections between ceramics and utility (as well as the medium’s technical demands), expanding possibilities for painting and sculpture by using a material that had long been considered unsuitable for serious artistic exploration. In fact it was precisely by confronting the issue of utility head-on that these artists renovated modernism’s aesthetic dogmas, charging them with embodied energy that brought them closer to home.

Lee retains the contrarian ethos of this approach, but the rawness of her exhibition, including the disorienting nature of the installation, suggested a more radically destabilized kind of intimacy very much in keeping with the political climate in which we found ourselves. Rather than using ceramics to shed new light on the formal issues at stake in so-called “major” art historical disciplines, she shows how these disciplines, like clay itself, are durable precisely because of their ability to retain meaning when broken. Hopefully our social institutions are capable of summoning the same kind of strength.

Globs of paint sat atop a saccharine hologram image of golden retriever puppies, creating an odd flatness atop the hokey 3D simulation; the trick revealed. A row of these painted holograms led down the wall into a dark cavernous gallery, becoming increasingly shrouded in darkness. Trisha Baga’s mammoth exhibition *Biologue*, at 356 Mission, reveled in oppositional interplay: shadow and light, flatness and dimensionality, sociopolitical understanding and total, unfettered bewilderment.

The first video projection encountered in the space, *Tree of a Beez* (all works 2017), grounded the installation in the artist’s studio. A video projection picturing the artist’s desk glowed behind (and on top of) an actual desk plopped into the space. Littered across the table were the familiar frenetic tools for coping in our recent whirlpool of American politics: a myriad of newspaper pages about Trump’s election; an Arts & Leisure article titled *We Will Not Be Ignored*; a half-eaten Danish; a jar of Tums; a Mac computer. Bumper stickers that read “procedure,” “graph,” “results,” and “conclusion” sat towards the edge of the desk, awaiting use. This slew of smattered objects might inform the artist’s work in the studio, but

more likely, they stilt it; one can imagine Baga seated at her desk computer, scrolling through Trump’s Twitter feed, neglecting a canvas sitting nearby.

Past this glowing still life, in the main space (where you’d be armed with 3D glasses), multiple projected videos fought for attention. Baga described her installation as “theatre in the round,” and it certainly demanded 360-degree awareness; the rolling office chairs sprinkled throughout the gallery could hypothetically be put to practical use, spinning about so you would not miss a thing.

Virhanka Trail uses tourists at a famous Japanese beach as its subject matter. Projected across a pile of crumpled brown paper, and flat panels that pull sections of the video out into the space, the tourists throng along a large, sandy stretch. Some stop to pose for photos, most look travel-tired but committed. The endless stream of passersby was much quieter visually (and audibly) than its neighbor, a 3D video titled *The Voice*. And it certainly was loud.

The Voice added a palpably frenetic and looming quality to the room. The 25-minute video is a marathon of attention grabbing clips: snippets of news footage, fictional characters, and YouTube videos. The sound editing is chaotic and assaulting. Palpably though, the piece embodies a deep-seated panic that has been looming since Trump’s inauguration, or maybe, more simply, since the coining of the phrase FOMO.

Lindsay Preston
Zappas

Baga's exhibition is at once playful and political, resolute and spaced out, swapping political didacticism for unabashed foolery. Moments of terror are met with gorgeous aesthetic choices and a hefty dose of levity. Try though we might to read all of the latest *New Yorker* articles, or keep NPR on a soft din as we go about our days, there is a sort of manic reality that sets in. While it's imperative to stay abreast of our current political landscape, with so many competing news outlets and social channels, our frantic political FOMO may simply lead to more confusion. Instead of clarity, we are often left with only a jumble of flashing images and nothing concrete to show for it but a half-eaten danish and some Tums.

Jimmie Durham: At the Center of the World

**January 29–
May 7, 2017**

Knowledge:

1. The facts, feelings, or experiences known by a person or group of people
2. The state of knowing
3. Awareness, consciousness, or familiarity gained by experience or learning
4. Erudition or informed learning
5. Specific information about a subject¹

What do we talk about when we discuss knowledge? These definitions indicate that knowledge is not a unified field, but rather a representation of powerfully divergent worldviews. Knowledge as "specific information about a subject" or "erudition or informed learning" is very different from "the facts, feelings, or experiences known by a person or group of people." Often treated as a neutral social good, knowledge in our conceptualization of it is in fact a battleground with real ramifications for how we interact with others in our shared environment.

Knowledge as represented in Western culture is notoriously based in metaphors of mastery, rationality, and scientific progress. From Socratic dialogue, which displaced preexisting, more ritualistic ways of understanding the world, to Descartes' formulation "I think, therefore I am," contemporary Western forms of knowledge are based in disembodied logic and ratio-centric capacities. Importantly, Western culture naturalizes these modes of knowing by suppressing and erasing other forms of knowledge that are based in more relational modes of understanding and which have the capacity to encompass contradiction, fluidity, and non-linearity.

Jimmie Durham's retrospective *At the Center of the World* at the Hammer Museum complicated this idea of knowledge as mastery, demonstrating instead the flaws in Western rationality. The exhibition

bore witness to the horrific effects of scientific progress as enacted on this continent, narrated through Durham's experience and wry sensibility. Formally, the works were alliances between materially, conceptually, and physically disparate objects, creating poetic friction from dissonance. The first cluster of sculptures one saw when entering the exhibition were figures made of street objects, skulls, fur, feathers, shells, gems, wood, leather, and other materials, and included *Wahya* (1984) and *New York Gitli* (1984). Simultaneously precious and decrepit, manipulated and haphazard, animal and mechanical, broken and powerful, these demonstrate that physical presence doesn't have to be unambiguous to be generative.

Durham replaces consonance and logic with incongruity and non-linearity, frequently redirecting scientific narratives and classifications with double entendres, narrative interruptions, and contradictory statements. For example, works such as *Sequence of Events* (1993) juxtapose onto flat panels tattered newspaper pages with pieces of other printed matter and strings of fragmented handwritten statements. It reads, "First, Benito Juarez, A Zapotec Indian, Killed Napoleon's Emperor of Mexico, Maximilian. Later, I went to Paris."

The exhibition also gave form to histories that have been marginalized, suppressed, colonized, or eradicated by violence. Names and voices of



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8
Jason Rhoades,
Tijuanatanjierchandelier (2006).
Mixed media, dimensions
variable. Image courtesy of the
estate, Hauser & Wirth, David
Zwirner and lender. © The
Estate of Jason Rhoades.
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.

9
Jason Rhoades, *The Creation
Myth* (1998). Mixed media,
dimensions variable. Image
courtesy of Friedrich Christian
Flick Collection im Hamburger
Bahnhof, Berlin. © The Estate
of Jason Rhoades. Photo:
Fredrik Nilsen.

historical and literary figures, philosophical concepts, the artist, and the artworks themselves are literally inscribed onto the works. *Caliban Codex* (1992) is a suite of 12 drawings, each taking the form of a diary entry written by Caliban, the native slave to Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In creating a dialogue between Caliban and his imagined diary, Durham makes the viewer a mute witness to Caliban's heartbreaking attempts to understand Prospero's disgust toward him and his eventual internalization of Prospero's hatefulness in the voice he uses with himself.

Durham's inscribed texts sometimes speak directly to the viewer and/or are presented as internal dialogues. In *The Guardian* (free tickets) (1992), a placard on the sculpture declares, "I am a representation of Janus, the two-faced god," and later, "Sorry folks! This is the artist Jimmie Durham interrupting here. As soon as Janus mentioned opposites, I could see he was going in the wrong direction... May I suggest that we imagine systems in opposition to any concept of opposites?" This approach calls into question the possibility of a master narrative, replacing singularity with multiplicity and multi-directionality. It asks the viewer to constantly reorient herself in relation to who is speaking and what is being presented or embodied.

Durham took a break from making art from 1973–1980 to work as an activist with AIM (American

Indian Movement), but he ultimately came back to art making. Perhaps this is because art, as a non-linear, felt, corporeal mode of apprehending the world, posits a different form of knowing against the logic and rationality that is privileged by Western culture. Art encourages knowledge that is embodied, based on looking and listening instead of ratiocinating. A deep engagement with a work of art requires being fully present in one's body and senses, and allowing thoughts generated by the artwork to come from this place of deep perception.

In many ways, this kind of engagement is akin to ritual. A primary form of the transmission of knowledge in many cultures, ritual requires being present for a multi-sensory experience that occurs at a specific time and place. Rituals are dynamic events that reinforce connection between the participants, the objects used in the ritual, the environment where it takes place, and the bodies of knowledge that the ritual affirms. Both art viewing and art making have aspects of the ritualistic that are not always acknowledged in art discourse.

Durham's works are rituals in that they are concerned with the energetic transactions that take place during the making. He brings the viewer into his process not only with the physical resonance of his materials, but by also inscribing the voices that inform his many identities: a polyglot, a Native American, an activist, a

peripatetic traveller, a poet and voracious reader, and an acute observer of history. Durham's assemblages make space for this kind of multiplicity, and the different forms of knowledge that are engendered when we inhabit our contradictions.

***Parallel City* at Ms. Barbers**

**March 18–
April 15, 2017**

In a storefront on Adams Boulevard a city slept. With the flick of a light switch, *Parallel City*, an exhibition organized by Nick Kramer and Erik Frydenborg, lumbered to life. The sparsely hung, one-room gallery held a smattering of bodies, ghosts, and grids. All these things collectively *could* be a city; after all what is a city if not a collection (dense or otherwise) of bodies and specters milling about the grid? But *Parallel City* offered more than the architectural echoes of urbanity—it proposed a body double to the one humming and rumbling outside of the gallery doors.

On a monitor beside the reception desk, an ambiguous form (a torso?) spun ad nauseum. The work, *Unrested Image* (2013), by Shannon Ebner, has undeniable allure; the process of deciphering the work produced a kind of highway hypnosis. It induced a neurasthenic reaction: an unshakeable anxious, depressive lethargy

Hana Cohn

symptomatic of a 19th-century medical theory of a nervous exhaustion exclusive to city dwellers. (The foremost physician on the subject, S. Weir Mitchell famously asked: “Have we lived too fast?”) The theory of neurasthenia was broadly based on the premise that the human body was an electrical machine and the condition’s onset was due to a depletion of its nervous energy—an idea which even centuries later still seemed to hold metaphorical water in *Parallel City*. The pin-wheeling image of Ebner’s work offered us a body literally produced, bound, and charged by electricity.

In the corner to the right of the monitor, were two tiny bodies, pointing accusingly outward. Joey Frank’s *Bulletin Laughing Man* series (2017) depicts two generic visages, their limbs and torso congealed into single rectangular blocks. The words “Cell! Cell! Cell!” across one of the works elicited cells that we experience on a daily basis: computer screen, cubicle, car. Its gilded companion featured an image of a GPS Navigation screen at its base. Where are you going? Are you going the right way? Are you driving too fast? “Have we lived too fast?” Frank’s figures have become one with technology; their connections extend outside of their bodies from human to machine and machine to human. Here the “internal compass” as a moral and directional concept took on a clever and pointed renewal.

Arguably the most seductive work in the

exhibition was Amy Brener’s *Flexi-Shield (Spring)* (2016). Its gel-y pink, membranous body, impregnated with flora, hung from the ceiling. It is unabashedly decorative: snippets of ferns and flowers are suspended in the silicone like Victorian pressed papers of yore. Mylar crumples and subtle patterns imprinted at the edges visually buzz. Suspended, it stopped and conflated time and space in a way that was utterly arresting. Jay Heikes’ *Gluttony* (2015) manipulated time too; the “fossilized” shells became historiographic—a metonym for a fictional prehistory of *Parallel City*. Sonja Gerdes’ 2017 work *Pie of Trouble. Let’s Hang. You look at it but it doesn’t exist. Rising.* too disposed of the traditional human body and instead was a composite of the industrial and the natural: a fleshy torso replaced by a pillow bearing an outward looking eye, fused to an engine and a daffodil. These bodies have morphed into something hybrid and almost unrecognizable. They, undeterred by industrialization, are subsumed by it. Bodies of human history fell away between Brener, Heikes, and Gerdes—they get lost, they become hybrids, all caught between tech-future-flesh and preserved muck.

Heather Cook’s *Fluorescent and Blue Shadow Weave Draft Graph* (2015) brought corporeal meditations to a halt. Instead of complicated flesh we were confronted with what looked like data. Atop Cooks’ neatly woven

grid were meticulously applied numbers cascading beside a fractal-like pattern in shocking blue and orange. Cook’s work was an oddity here—it was the only work that refused a completely coalesced body. It only offered us the molecular. *Draft Graph* became a quiet protest against the fully-formed; in lieu of the mystical gestalt (of a city, a body, or full hybrid), we were offered only the most elemental of these things: systems, patterns, and numbers.

These elements also constitute the complicated algorithms that coordinate our streetlights, render our cities, and trace the paths of our firing synapses. Cook’s *Draft Graph* greeted us as forcible rest—the cure for the neurasthenia induced by the flurry of encountering electrically-charged and industrially-fused existences. Her work in *Parallel City* was a reminder that our bodies, our cities, and everything in between, are not at odds, but at their most basic, are quite the same: completely abstract.

Jason Rhoades at Hauser & Wirth

February 18–
May 21, 2017

Jason Rhoades was a quintessentially L.A. artist, whose sprawling, dense, visually cacophonous installations reflected Los Angeles' hodgepodge urban aesthetics and consumer culture. Despite this, he was always more popular in Europe—exhibiting widely in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland—than in the city where he lived and worked. Presented 11 years after his untimely death at the age of 41, Hauser & Wirth's career spanning survey *Installations, 1994–2006* is something of a homecoming; the artist's first major retrospective in his adopted hometown. It offers an opportunity to re-visit (or introduce) the work of an artist who has more often been talked about—lauded as heir to the lineage of Chris Burden and Mike Kelley—than seen in the United States.

The show opens with the earliest and tamest work on view, which caught the art world's attention, setting Rhoades on his meteoric rise to art stardom. Produced the year after receiving his MFA from UCLA, *Swedish Erotica and Fiero Parts* (1994) established Rhoades as a master practitioner of what Jerry Saltz termed "clusterfuck aesthetics." Piles of mundane objects litter the room: styrofoam, cardboard, pieces of wood,

legal pads, and a recurring motif—the ubiquitous five gallon plastic bucket, Rhoades' signature ready-made. The unifying element in the work is the color yellow, which, in the original installation at Rosamund Felsen's gallery, was based on the color of the building's façade. The installation serves as a celebration of American consumerism, not based on luxury or wealth, but a kind of populist, big box materialism à la Ikea and Home Depot, one attainable to everyone. As with many of Rhoades' works, *Swedish Erotica* has no center, no focus. It is up to viewers to find their way through the aisles between stacks of goods, attempting their own connections. You don't so much look at the artwork as inhabit it, even if inhabiting proves somewhat futile.

My Brother / Brancusi from the following year revels in the kind of high/low dichotomy that was another common theme for Rhoades. A central assemblage combines wooden crates, small motorbikes, toy trucks, and industrial items, with stacks of donuts referencing Constantin Brancusi's *Endless Columns*: icons of high modernism re-cast as junk food. The donuts also reference Rhoades' brother's desire to become rich from a donut business: Henry Ford by way of Homer Simpson. The walls are lined with photographs pairing Constantin Brancusi's studio with the bedroom of Rhoades' brother—one filled with modernist sculptures, the

other with weight benches and aquariums, symbols of adolescent masculinity. It is a playful jab at the 20th century archetype of the heroic, male artist, proposing in its place a slacker, man-boy juvenility. Despite Rhoades' ambition, it is a characterization that fits him, with his sophomoric enthusiasm, as well.

Rhoades ratchets up his freewheeling, omnivorous exuberance with *The Creation Myth* (1998), a messy, orgiastic panorama of human thought and invention. Subtitled *The Mind, the Body and the Spirit, the Shit, Prick and the Rebellious Part*, the installation loosely resembles a figure composed of stacked tables, overhead projectors, video monitors, lights and all manner of detritus, generously decorated with pornographic images. On one end, a snake riding a toy train stands in as the figure's scattered brain. On the opposite end, a large contraption representing an anus blows a smoke-ring every 15 seconds or so, the work's only true site of production. The once noble act of creation is reduced to a fart joke.

These works confront the notion of the masterpiece, presenting instead an environment of everyday materials for the viewer to wander through—though the question remains whether they dismantle previous hierarchies, or simply shift them around. Is it really any less grandiose to pack a room with ephemeral objects than to craft a monument out of steel or concrete? Saltz's "clusterfuck aesthetics"

Matt Stromberg

could be considered an artistic form of man-spreading, and it's not insignificant that most of its adherents were white male artists, challenging a previous generation's hallowed works with their own brand of grand gestures.

The final three works included in the exhibition escalate Rhoades' irreverence and repudiation of good taste, mixing sex, religion, and culture in a cheekily profane fusion that thumbs its nose at convention. In *My Madinah. In pursuit of my ermitage...* (2004), he creates a mosque-like setting, with a patchwork of towels on the floor in place of prayer mats, which viewers can only walk on once they have removed their shoes. As they gaze heaven-ward, they are confronted with a web of 240 neon signs overhead, each spelling out a slang word for female genitalia: Crotch Cobbler, Cock Alley, Woo-Woo. It reads like a blown-up, electric version of Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde*—the 1866 painting of female genitalia—made by a puerile obsessive. It is indeed dazzling, at least in its execution, the scale of which is revealed by scores of orange power cords cascading down one wall, but it raises the question, as does so much of Rhoades work, of whether or not this smashing of taboos serves to challenge dominant systems or reinforce them. Work that was once perhaps seen as a liberating rebellion against staid mores, now seems retrograde in retrospect, simply

enforcing patriarchal norms under a new guise.

The last two works combine Rhoades' linguistic, yonic obsession with his interest in consumerism, this time expressed on a global scale. *Tijuana-tan-jierchandelier* (2006) and *The Black Pussy...and the Pagan Idol Workshop* (2005) combine knick-knacks and tchotchkes from Mexico and Morocco with his jungle of neon signs. These are not "authentic" forays into other cultures—they're not trying to be—but they showcase the marketplace crafts, hookahs, and cheap figurines that represent cultural collision in a way that museum artifacts cannot. To some, this smacks of a sort of superficial cultural appropriation, yet it reflects the same wide-eyed appreciation for mass-market material culture seen in all Rhoades' work, here applied to the vaguely ethnic, off the shelf ready-mades of the tourist bazaar instead of Wal-Mart.

Despite his juvenile exuberance and sophomoric sense of humor, Jason Rhoades' maximalist installations are not simple, easy works. At their best, they're intensely personal and sincere epic constructions, drawing from a range of sources across the visual and material spectrums, dismissive of hierarchical distinctions. When ambition outpaces curiosity, however, they run the risk of simply being new manifestations of the old guard.

Review Contributors

Jonathan Griffin is a contributing editor for *Frieze* magazine, and also writes for publications including *Art Review*, *Art in America*, *Art Agenda*, *Cultured*, and the *Financial Times*.

Stuart Krimko is a poet, astrologer, and translator. *Studio Visit*, a chapbook of his new poems, was recently published by The Song Cave. Other recent books include *Belleza y Felicidad: Selected Writings of Fernanda Laguna and Cecilia Pavón* (Sand Paper Press, 2015), which he edited and translated; and *New complaints. New rewards*, a collaboration with Mark So (DEATH-SPIRAL, 2014).

Lindsay Preston Zappas is an artist, writer, and the founder of *Carla*.

Molly Larkey is an artist and writer based in Los Angeles.

Hana Cohn lives and works in Los Angeles.

Matt Stromberg is a freelance arts writer based in Los Angeles. In addition to *Carla*, he has contributed to *The Guardian*, *Frieze*, *KCET Artbound*, *Hyperallergic*, *LA Weekly*, *Artsy*, and *Daily Serving*, and has written catalogue essays as well as artist profiles for the book *LA Artland* (2005).

Exquisite L.A. Contributors

Claressinka Anderson has worked as an art dealer, advisor, and curator in Los Angeles for the past ten years. Originally from London, England, she is the owner of Marine Projects and a published writer of poetry and fiction.

Joe Pugliese, a California native, specializes in portraiture and shoots for a mixture of editorial and advertising clients. He has recently completed projects for such titles as *Wired*, *Vanity Fair*, *Men's Journal*, and *Billboard*, as well as advertising campaigns for Netflix, Sony, and AMC. His images have been honored by the Society of Publication Design, *American Photography*, and *Communication Arts*. He lives and works in Los Angeles.