

It's Snowing in LA at AA|LA Gallery

June 9–July 14, 2018

Los Angeles, and California at large, is often viewed peripherally, as a fiction borne of a privileged *right* to the land of the American West, lingering still in the movie studio fantasies which hold a one-sided mirror to the variant cultures within. *It's Snowing in LA*, curated by Amy Kahng and Mary McGuire, examined the relationship between Los Angeles and Korea, as interpreted by Korean artists who have lived in both places. Yet Korea, presumably *South* Korea, is not merely a city; the comparison of one Western cosmopolis of 4 million people to a country of over 50 million was disorienting, and further confused by a noticeable absence of work bearing any evidence of a “lived” experience of Korea. Much of the work on view relied on the idea that Los Angeles has no inherent culture, devaluing its sites of interest and likening the city to that blank, absorbent theater screen, a surface on which to project.

Minha Park's video, *A Story of Elusive Snow* (2013), opens with the artist driving on the 101 freeway, longing for the snow of her homeland. She turns to found footage and fake-snow supplier videos, searching for seasonal comfort (“Hollywood's special magic” as she calls it) amongst her new surroundings. Going so far as to produce the fake snow herself, the artist's sincere

yearning for that particular ethereal comfort discards openness to time anew. Instead of availing herself to new experiences, she reduces the city to its weather and industry. “It's confetti, refrigerated,” Alfred Hitchcock gesticulates at a snowperson in a found clip in Park's video. “For realism.”

Borrowing Art from Ikea (2018) by Sejin Hyun, a glib take on the already timeworn ready-made, presented a dining room tableaux: the Swedish retailer's faux-Modernist furniture set against a pink swath of paint on the otherwise white gallery walls. Referring to the largest Ikea stores in the world, in Seoul and Burbank respectively, Hyun's installation insinuated both as transitional places devoid of personality, their aspirational “modernization” indicated only by “affordable” and supposedly ubiquitous, European, bourgeois furnishings. Akin to the cheap trick of fake snow, Los Angeles becomes nothing more than the slushy remains of generic simulacra, complete with a full refund.

Dahn Gim's sound installation *not so muffled* (2014), a soft, epidermal-esque veneer of stitched upholstery stretched around a car muffler, recalls Robert Morris' *Box with the Sound of its Own Making* (1961). Veering from the conceptual to the literal, the sculpture plays a dampened and markedly “female” voice impersonating a car muffler, a device which is designed to reduce engine noise. An allusion to traffic congestion, the object re-produces a cross-cultural trope: virile automobiles sold via “feminine” allure.

Similar to Min ha Park's semi-abstract oil paintings of glaring skylscapes, Gim's sculpture situates Los Angeles (to say nothing of Korea) as a locale polluted just as much by disposable objects as it is by light and smog.

Kang Seung Lee's somber *Untitled* series (2017) draws from the *L.A. Times'* photographs of the 1992 L.A. Riots. In one image, police chase a Latino man; in a second, graffiti reads, “la revolución es la solución!” Etching the archival image by hand before transferring to print, Lee explores the site of violence through the representation of othered bodies in the gray interplay of graphite and ink, a nod to both mass media and early mark-making. These captivating cenograph prints gracefully navigate the eruption of the discriminatory housing and business policies which contributed to the establishment of K-Town proper and played out in the Riots. Despite these subtleties, the editioned takeaways which accompany the framed prints read more as commodified souvenirs, too tranquil in their re-representation of turmoil, too faint to impose a future solution.

While participants in the exhibition were not bound to the West's understanding of Cold War legacies (or the opinions of this white author) it seems odd that nothing is said of the Reunification Summit last April, or nothing of Korea's emergence as a major Capitalist economy following colonization by Japan, America, and the Soviet Union. Each artist's relationship to L.A. does not



Sejin Hyun, *Borrowing Art from IKEA* (2018).
IKEA catalog 2017, NORRAKER bar table,
two bar stools with back rest, HEKTAR
pendant lamp, 6.3 watt light bulb,
Dimensions variable. Image courtesy
of the artist and AA|LA.

feel realized either, leaning too much on Hollywood conjurings, news footage, and take-out menus, broad impressions gleaned from screens afar and moving cars.

The exhibition focused too much on the *aura* of the urban—as if Korea is simply Seoul and Los Angeles just a city of émigrés who relocated solely to pursue graduate degrees at various Southern California institutions. Perhaps the solace of the movie-set snow or the frozen impression of ink are exactly the sensorial minutia which constitute the feeling of being “in-between” country and city. Yet despite the broad-sweeping theme, none of the work directly called on Korea itself or attested to a “felt” resonance of place, disregarding the vibrancy of either country or city beyond the timely, quarter-century anniversary of the L.A. Riots. Instead, like the movies, *It’s Snowing in LA* appreciated the city solely for its capacity for ready-to-assemble, cosmetic transformation. For realism.

Fiona Connor at the MAK Center May 11–August 12, 2018

Beyond mere entry and exit, not much thought is given to the doors through which we pass every day. *Closed Down Clubs*, New Zealand-born, Los Angeles-based artist Fiona Connor’s latest exhibition, invited contemplation of the larger significations of such mundane portals. Housed at the MAK Center’s Mackey Garage Top (a sleek and airy space above

a garage behind a Rudolf Schindler house), Connor’s exhibition was comprised of nine freestanding doors installed in a staggered, parallel formation, each emblazoned with printed or hand-written signs announcing the recent closure of the businesses to which they were once attached.

Like virtually all of Connor’s work, each of the sculptures included is a meticulous replication of an actual object. Having previously assumed such forms as bulletin boards, drinking fountains, and architectural infrastructure, her works are typically adorned with artist-drawn or screen-printed stickers, posters, or pamphlets to faithfully match the original reference as closely as possible. As relics of shared space, her works often bear traces of obsolescence or fatigue, expounded through the artist’s fastidious duplication of objects’ apparent wear or corrosion. *Closed Down Clubs* was no exception—one could sense the traffic that Connor’s chosen doors had experienced in their past lives, as seen in suspended animation (such as where sullied hands cumulatively left their mark in instances of worn-off paint or accumulated grime). With such minute attention to detail, Connor’s work offers a verisimilitude so precise that it could easily be mistaken for the real thing, which begs the question: why laboriously recreate an object that could simply be appropriated?

Unlike Danh Vo or Cameron Rowland, two artists whose use of the readymade foregrounds the compelling personal and political histories of their

chosen objects, Connor’s work is a deft repetition of the real. Indeed, her readymade-once-removed production is a fiction residing in tandem with reality—meaning we are meant to understand that her work is a facsimile of lived experience at a particular place and time. With this, Connor mobilizes the deceptive surface of artifice not only to underscore the often-overlooked aesthetic qualities of quotidian objects, but also what they communicate about the societies in which they function.

Connor’s works at the MAK Center—as is the case in most of her work—were duplications of things that, by and large, are only truly experienced in person—whether that be the touch of a worn brass door handle (*Closed Down Clubs*, *Club Tee Gee*) (all works 2018), the kicked and nicked bottom side of a plum-colored entryway (*Closed Down Clubs*, *NoHo London Music Hall*), or the texture of corroded duct tape stuck on an emergency exit (*Closed Down Clubs*, *The Smell*).

As a title, *Closed Down Clubs* is more fictive than legitimate, being that not all of the establishments featured are actually closed and many are not clubs. (At least two are restaurants, one a bookstore, and one that’s altogether undefined.) Nevertheless, while these portals obviously act as agents of erstwhile monetary exchange, these are also relics of physical access, frozen between states of entry and departure, assembly and dispersal. More pertinently, each work is a token of sidelined identity.



41



Fiona Connor, *Closed Down Clubs* (2018)
(installation view). Image courtesy
of the artist and MAK Center.
Photo: Esteban Schimpf.

Martine Syms, Olivia Erlanger/Luis Ortega
Govela, *Group Show 2* (2018) (installation
view). Image courtesy of the artists and
The Gallery at Michael's.



Deborah Roberts, *Political Lamb #3* (2018).
Collage and acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 inches.
Image courtesy of the artist
and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

Show 2 at The Gallery @ Michael's April 28–June 30, 2018

One only need recall the *Cheers* theme song to emote the pursuit of belonging and shared escape through spaces of congregation. When these establishments shutter, a part of us does as well. Additionally, these works called our attention not only to the potential pitfalls of being a small business owner but of the mortality of brick and mortar stores more generally. Connor, though, was not singing a song of financial victimization and e-commerce heartache, but was rather building a narrative of foreclosed selfhood and belonging. Ironically, the namesakes for the two works that were most regionally emblematic of this kind of belonging, *The Smell* and *Club Tee Gee*, are still open.

Closed Down Clubs was not just about communication consumed in transience—the taped note on the door seen while strolling by, “PULL” written in crackled signage, business cards crammed in crevices—but it was also about the state of community in the face of its looming digital annihilation. Indeed, with modes of identity shifting further out of the realm of the real and more into the realm of the immaterial, Connor’s assiduously analogue endeavors gave clarity to this very reality. Though Connor’s exhibition decidedly conjured extinction, her simulacra reminded us that no matter what technological advances society makes, analogue forms of communication will outlive all others.

Michael’s is not a gallery, but rather a venerated, upscale Santa Monica restaurant nestled between the Third Street Promenade and the Pacific Ocean. The private upstairs Palisades Room accommodates 75 standing and boasts a fireplace, a full bar, and a wall-mounted TV. Since January, however, the Palisades Room has moonlit as The Gallery, an unorthodox exhibition program guided by whim. To say that the programming lacks cohesion might read as a mode of lambasting its bill. Instead, this deliberate disjointedness appears as an original curatorial strategy. To begin, neither of the two inaugural shows bore a formal title (opting instead for a dry numerical system of *Show 1* and *Show 2*). The shows are laid out in an index of artists, like a list announcing appetizers, entrées, and aperitifs. But the menu, perhaps, is beside the point.

In 1979, art school students Michael and Kim McCarty opened Michael’s restaurant for Los Angeles with a focus on the art community. John Baldessari, Ed Ruscha, and others gathered at the eatery, a watering ground for local artists and a hub for a thriving art center that has since crept steadily eastward. Early exhibitions at the restaurant featured iconic Los Angeles artists and even included a show centered around the

color yellow—fitting, given the beach-adjacent geography. While no formal documentation of these informal, impromptu exhibits remains, the legacy, or anima, of the restaurant’s early days lingers. Revivifying Michael’s as an art space opens up a time capsule into Los Angeles’ history, when Santa Monica rents were lower and Los Angeles was not the same vital nerve center of the art world that it is today. Michael’s now houses these stacked histories: watercolors, drawings, and all manner of canvas from this original era furnish the stairwell walls, chronicling the restaurant’s remote past.

For *Show 2*, works in the gallery room were multifarious, an odd collection that read more as one zany collector’s vision than a methodical or cohesive curatorial approach. Louise Lawler’s small black and white coloring book outline of a dining room interior *Still Life (Candle) (traced)* (2003/2013) depicts wine glasses, angular plates, ornamental salt and pepper shakers, and an ashtray piled high with cigarettes. Her stark tableau resembles a window, a literal link to the restaurant’s storied past, but also a mirror to the dining experiences that take place in this very room today. Lawler’s domestic scene is at once sloppy and expertly arranged, the soiled napkins crumpled just so. A date painting by Japanese conceptual artist On Kawara hanging behind the table setting sites her backdrop in a wealthy collector’s dining room, a *mise-en-abyme* that foregrounds the rapport between fine dining, expensive art, cultural access,

and other aspirational extravagances. Ultimately, this gallery inserts art into a domestic space—an inevitable part of an artwork’s lifespan if it doesn’t breathe its last breath in an artist’s studio, or in museum storage.

A purple tinted circular window across the room provided a more radiant background in the *Show 2* gallery space. Martine Syms’ monochrome glass work *Belief Strategy IX* (2015) leant an ethereal light that simultaneously evoked the Los Angeles-based artist’s interest in the 1985 African American period drama *The Color Purple* and the vibrancy of an abutting magenta bougainvillea. One might have wondered how the politics of an artwork shift when it enters a private collection, like the On Kawara outlined in Lawler’s nearby illustration. Here, the upscale environment seemed to underscore the fetish of ownership. Syms’ window was immediately decorative, a setting whose rounded form found parallel in Jennifer Bolande’s video *Earthquake movie* (2004), a close up looping shot of a dryer rotation. This shape also repeated in the rounded outlines of the gallery’s dining room tables and plates.

The experimental program at Michael’s is not specific to a singular vision of what and how art is defined. There were no official press releases for the two exhibitions that have taken place so far, which have included works by Silke Otto Knapp, B. Wurtz, and recent *Made in L.A. 2018* alumna, Luchita Hurtado, along with other notable artists. The gallery is open when the restaurant is

open, so the experience itself might include the discomfort of viewing art in a busy dining room, drawing attention to the commercial underbelly of art. This art might not be listed on a menu, but it is certainly for sale. Yet even if you can’t afford the steak, you can come in and see the art. Still, the crossover of food and art is irrelevant here, surpassed by a desire to embrace this space’s past by pulling it into the present. As wait staff whiz by with stacked platters, you become a witness to a dual functioning site, both in terms of its current use and its historical layering.

Deborah Roberts at Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

May 12–June 16, 2018

Deborah Roberts wants us to see black people—black girls and women specifically. For Roberts, this seeing begins in the face—what many deem the reservoir of recognition.¹ But when recognition escapes the black woman (whether cis, queer, or trans) time and again, we must pause, and realize it isn’t enough to simply look upon their visage to recuperate the trodden history of patriarchal whiteness. Instead, Roberts wants us to see differently or, in her words, to “see [black] people not as parts or as a single person...[but] as a whole human being.”² This charge is a complicated one: what is it that distinguishes a single person from a whole human being?

The collages and text-based work on view at

Luis De Jesus didn’t make this ontological paradox any easier. Across the two-room, white-walled gallery, Roberts opted not to answer the question but to instead lay out a palimpsest of sorts, adopting surrealist strategies of assemblage, gender subversion, and political critique to (in)form her black feminine faces and androgynous bodies.³ The latter was actualized through appendages that pop out, with certain limbs referencing historic moments that are as uplifting as they are upsetting. Take *Political Lamb #3* (2018), a figurative collage of loose body parts assembled against a stark white background. Looking upon the work drew one not to the face, but to the two pairs of hands on this girl (a fifth hand hangs on the side). The more central set of hands were taken from a photograph of activist Rosa Parks; she held a slate with her arrest number, 7053. Glancing upwards on the figure, we were not met by Parks’ enduring eyes (these hands date to Parks’ second arrest on February 21, 1956) or her face for that matter. Instead, we encountered an alien face—a fragmented mien comprised of three unknown girls and/or women. Two of these partial faces appeared side-by-side. Both were missing an eye, but their juxtaposition produced a somewhat seamless face with two eyes. Things got a tad bizarre as a doubleness unfolded across this fragmented face: two noses; two lips; two chins. One face actually offered up a profile view, her eyes staring off to the side, shirking any semblance of a shared gaze. Rounding things out was

Ikechukwu Casmir
Onyewuenyi

1. Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), n.p.

a third girl's effaced face that sat atop these two other partial visages; she became the crown of this fragmented head, with the only visible features being her left ear, braids, and bow barrettes.

Due to this alienable aesthetic, *Political Lamb #3* became a mien of multitudes, her fractured face beholden to everyone and no one, her identity both known and unknown. While Parks' hands felt familiar and, sadly, familial—a generational hold-over of police violence—how do we also come to know the countless black girls today that are being increasingly criminalized, detained, and incarcerated?⁴ It's a tall order to know such girls since our seeing remains governed by a visual calculus habituated less towards recognition than the impersonal and indifferent.⁵ Moreover, if we consider the form to the face of *Political Lamb #3* alongside Roberts' call for humanism, it's worth asking: can this collaged adult-child approach a (collective) individualism within a fragmented aesthetic of competing guises? In short, can the piecemeal help apprehend the whole human?

This face of multitudes—cobbed together through found photographs, painting, drawing, and text—was mirrored in Roberts' other figures, all of whom were girls. *Golden Smile* (2018) also sported braids, pigmented gold barrettes, and three different faces, each of varying skin tones. This patchwork physiognomy was offset with sleek, sturdy legs of a musculature at odds with the apparent age of the figure. Roberts' girls typically span

ages eight to 10. Yet their extremities are larger-than-life, often disproportionate with their lissome bodies. Such bodily schisms appeared in *Human nature* (2018) where the girl bore three hands, one appearing willowy and aged. Things got more penetrating in *Here before, here after* (2018): a figure with furrowed hands (belonging to Roberts' grandmother) that rest over a floral patterned blouse. The hands—held in a pensive embrace—exuded a wisdom that signaled possibility for the youthful, wide-eyed, and splintered face.

Do these assemblage faces demand humanity? That is Roberts' provocation, really. Writing on the ethical imperatives of the face, philosopher Judith Butler considered the face as “that for which no words really work.”⁶ Indeed, these girls never speak, and thus their faces are left to negotiate these ethics in silence. Yet, despite their inability to communicate, as cut-up configurations, these faces articulated that black girls are irreducible to a single person. As such, there is a spectrum to black girlhood, one that we come to see by virtue of how Roberts' rendered these fractured faces with *other* women's bodies—e.g., Rihanna's eyes. For Roberts, this depth to looking—seeing the parts and the human—insists that sameness and difference can indeed coexist under the umbrella category of “human.”

Opposite *Human nature* and *Golden Smile* hung the triptych *Sovereignty* (2016), a hand-drawn set of three serigraphs of black

women's names that Roberts sourced from friends. The far right in the triptych was a dense list of 213 names, from Khepri to Sharnell. All, however, were underlined with that all-too-familiar squiggly red line—these names were ostensibly misspelled, unrecognizable to word processing programs. The drawing on the left side of the triptych contrasted the list by featuring a sole name—Sharkesha—in large serif font. This work followed a similar logic to the collages: the viewer's gaze moved from the minute to the masses and back again. However, the simplicity of this solution—names, listed—can't be ignored. *Sovereignty* suggested a way to begin to humanize the silent figures that Roberts depicts, or at least to begin to find words that do the work.

So we were made to work—our eyes flitting back and forth, pausing now and again—all in an attempt to make sense of a dismembered black girlhood. What would Roberts have viewers see by way of this methodology of mutilation? Each fractured facial feature approached the *informe*—or formlessness—of surrealism that avoided meaning so as to impose “a job: to undo formal categories.”⁷ Roberts wants her black girls to sidestep the rigidity of formality—societal pressures concerning beauty, decorum—that prematurely shapes them into data rather than humans with vagaries.

4. Lyn Mikel Brown, Meda Chesney-Lind and Nan Stein, “Patriarchy matters: toward a gendered theory of teen violence and victimization,” *Violence Against Women* 13, no. 12 (2007): 1249–73.

5. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 24–25.

6. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 134.

7. Rosalind Krauss, “Corpus Delicti,” *October* 33 (1985): 39.

2. Andrea Blanch, “Feature: Deborah Roberts,” *MUSEE Magazine*, April 16, 2018,” <http://museemagazine.com/features/2018/4/16/feature-deborah-roberts>.

3. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso, 2012), 84.

Mimi Lauter at Blum & Poe

May 12–June 23, 2018

In *Sensus Oxynation* at Blum & Poe, Mimi Lauter's hallucinogenic, heavily pigmented drawings were intentionally arranged to connote the hallowed chambers of a chapel. Her abstractions conjured a dense pastiche of illusions—phosphorescent life forms, Fauvist color experiments, paleolithic fertility symbols—while simultaneously alluding to the loops and folds of the body, replete with fallopian tubes and cellular globules. Internal, more carnal chapels receded into mouth-like caverns.

Albeit conceptual, this embrace of religiosity—a conceit generally anathema to recent abstraction—imbued the work's kaleidoscopic fervor with feverish, ecclesiastical undertones. As such, Lauter's work posits gestural abstraction as a moment of divinatory rapture, categorically rupturing the viewer from a strictly visual experience.

In the main gallery, a symmetrical conglomeration of framed drawings formed four imposing wall-sized murals (collectively titled *Sensus Oxynation*) that functioned as the exhibition's cornerstone. Seemingly referencing both the patchwork appearance of stained glass as well as its historical use as a vehicle for disseminating biblical parables, each mural adhered to a specific color

palette and abstractly rendered a discrete allegorical theme: *Sunrise*, *Moonrise*, *Apocalyptic Flood*, and *Apocalyptic Flood Landscape* (all 2017). Scraped and impastoed striations of oil pastel loosely alluded to these titular cataclysmic scenes. In *Sensus Oxynation* (*Sunrise*), an explosive, amber-hued orb recalled Van Gogh's sunflowers at their melting point. On the surface, astutely etched lines coalesced into enigmatic glyphs that hovered somewhere between language and figuration. If we were to decipher color, gesture, and line as narrative, the murals elucidated a hybrid mythology that interfused creation myth with psychedelic hallucination, libidinous ritual, and divine prophecy.

Two smaller galleries consisting of what the artist often titles *Devotional Landscapes* extended from the central nave of murals. Predominantly depicting heavily abstracted landscapes and florals, the drawings' treatment of gestural mark-making conceded similar theistic undertones. Scaled more intimately, these works engaged with the tradition of still life, as well as with the history of Medieval devotional painting. An idiosyncratic genre of religious painting, devotional triptychs and diptychs were recognized as spiritual tools used to catalyze private worship in domestic or monastic spaces; worshippers would often physically interact with and touch devotional paintings as if they were anointed sacred objects.¹ Lauter's devotional drawings similarly

bore the indexical markings of devout human touch.

But devotion to what, exactly? The terms of this are ambiguous. While the exhibition's conceptual objective, per the gallery's press release, was to frame painting as an object of secular worship, this contention flattened and overly simplified the more subtly nuanced insinuations of the works themselves. (This idea certainly aligns with a painting's status as a worshipped and coveted object of commercial value; however the exhibition avoided mounting a critique of this fact.) Instead, we could ponder Lauter's murals and devotional drawings as prophesying studies for spiritually opaque calamities, or perhaps as the ritualistic aftermath of the artist's (or viewer's) metaphorical ascent to salvation or descent to damnation. Or as the aesthetic interpretations of oblique and exalted visions—abstraction as mirage transcribed.

If we were to grant this body of work another Medieval counterpart, it would be the alluringly mystical yet utterly undecipherable Voynich Manuscript,² the infamous 15th century codex containing cabalistic and preternatural drawings of bodies, plants, and celestial geometries alongside text written in an unmapped language. The aesthetic allure of the codex's unknown and unknowable content renders it uncanny and beguiling, yet ultimately substantively impassable. Lauter's devotional abstractions echod this enigma. At times, this ambiguity felt hermetic and intentionally

Jessica Simmons

1. The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art's Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters, "Private Devotion in Medieval Christianity," in *Heilbrunn Timeline*

of Art History, Oct. 2001, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/priv/hd_priv.htm.

steeped with intrigue, as if the viewer were lured to archaeologically decode an elusive and impenetrable language.

As with prayer in religion, abstraction at best carves the inviolable unknown into snippets of readable language, and commands devotion to specific modalities of practice. While Rothko's chapel invokes a humanistic, meditative form of devotion, and Barnett Newman declared bombastic devotion to "making cathedrals...out of ourselves, out of our own feelings,"³ Lauter's manifestation of devotion was mystical and uncannily enigmatic, a space wherein cells quivered and water ran as wine and chimeric papal figures emerged from corporeal cavities. Her ferociously pigmented markings alluded to a bizarre transverberation of Baudelaire's opium-induced synesthesia and Saint Teresa's religious ecstasy, where rapture finds its locus in the physical body.

Abstraction here was a nebulous rhapsody, ensnaring the viewer with an archeology of chromatic flagellations and devotional hallucinations. While structured as a chapel, *Sensus Oxylation's* more acute references ultimately eschewed religiosity for a vision of rapture that ecstatically manifests in the flesh and senses of the physical body, while warping and folding perceptions of color, gesture, lineage, and time.

2. Voynich Manuscript, 15th or 16th century, from Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, <https://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/highlights/voynichmanuscript>.

3. Barnett Newman, "The Sublime is Now," in *Art in Theory, 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 582.

(L.A. in N.Y.) Math Bass at Mary Boone April 26–July 27, 2018

In 2011, Math Bass staged a performance titled *Dogs and Fog* in which a mismatched pack of dogs roamed the gallery space of what was then Overduin and Kite. As they rambled around, the room began to fill with fog until a gray haze permeated the space. Eventually, seven singers formed a circle and began to chant a series of verses conjuring images of "dying," "piss," and "scores of blood."

Much of the verse from that song was transposed to this exhibition at Mary Boone in a room-wide sound piece, marking the first time that Bass has accompanied her well known *NEWZ!* paintings with an aural element. The 2018 sound piece, also titled *Dogs and Fog*, emitted intermittently from four column-like sculptures placed throughout the gallery. At times, the voices played from two speakers at once so that several voices blended together as they chanted the repetitive and incantatory verses ("here it rests in storm and smoke / stormy smoky sky / here it rests in stormy smoke / storm and smoking sky").

Bass has been making *NEWZ!* paintings since 2012, employing a visual alphabet of recognizable forms like alligators and cigarettes as well as more ambiguous symbols of her own making. The addition of an auditory

element—which has previously been the foundation of Bass' performances—to this show of 2D work gives new life to Bass' visual alphabet and deepens the impact of its shifting symbols.

The oblique punning present in the sound work is perpetuated across her paintings. Like word play, Bass' visual puns are born out of shapes that look alike but have different meanings. Six out of the ten paintings on view included some variation of a white shape that alternatively acts as a speech bubble, an elongated muffin top, or, in its entirety, a cartoonish bone (the bone, of course, also invokes the dog of the sound work's title).

Bass' symbology has always been slippery but, in tandem with the rather witchy sound piece, her painted icons seemed alchemic, even more capable of transfiguration. Together, the visual and the aural underscore Bass' career-long emphasis on the mutability of signs and their power to shift and vary (recalling the function of a spell).

Dogs and Fog was equal parts witchy incantation, Gregorian chant, and ghost story. In its repeating phrases and invocation of brooding imagery ("vultures came and picked the bones / ate them dry / when they left they left nothing / nothing left but hair"), the sound piece started to feel like a hex.

In this respect, *Dogs and Fog* reminded me of other artists' queer quasi-spell-casting. New York-based comedic performer Morgan Bassichis' recent performance/album "More Protest Songs!" is

1. Katherine Brewer Ball, "Morgan Bassichis by Katherine Brewer Ball", *BOMB*, June 22, 2017, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/morgan-bassichis/>.

a collection of songs characterized by their sirenlike repetitiveness. In a 2017 interview in *BOMB*, Bassichis explained: “I always think of these [songs] as spells. I love what Suzan-Lori Parks says, ‘Words are spells,’ and I love repetition.”¹ The recent interest among artists in the magical surely stems in some part from the fact that spells are historically a way for the marginalized to take some share of power, to threaten hegemonic culture and unnerve and intimidate on their own terms.

In the same way that the hex is an ominously opaque threat to dominant culture’s obsession with control, Bass’ paintings have long troubled fixed meaning by utilizing evocative if ambiguous motifs. *Dogs and Fog* gave new life to Bass’ alphabet by retooling her slippery arsenal of mutating signs into a spell of multifarious capacities.

(L.A. in N.Y.) Condo New York June 29–July 27, 2018

As art fairs have become the dominant means for galleries to travel their programs and expand collector bases, Condo has proven a more sustainable and accessible model, avoiding the sheer financial demand, hierarchical mode, and rigid homogeneity of art fair exhibition formats and viewing conditions. Taking its name from *condominium*, Condo is a gallery share program. Local galleries host visiting galleries in their spaces, either allocating

exhibition space or collaborating to curate a selection of work. Begun in 2016 by Vanessa Carlos (of Carlos/Ishikawa, London), Condo has already taken place in London, New York, São Paulo, Mexico City, and Shanghai. The second New York iteration—totaling 47 galleries hosted by 21 (mostly downtown) spaces—opened at the outset of an extended, record-breaking heat wave. With temperatures in the humid 90s, I spent the day traversing the city’s streets on foot, finding temporary respite in each air-conditioned gallery along the way.

The first of these was Bureau, which hosted both Kristina Kite Gallery (Los Angeles) and Hopkinson Mossman (New Zealand) with a seven-person group show. Two of Amy O’Neill’s vivid bean bag objects occupied the gallery entrance. In the main space, a single upright painting by Dianna Molzan, *Untitled* (2018), faced Fiona Connor’s freestanding *Closed Down Clubs, Tonic* (2018), a meticulously recreated façade of the now-shuttered nearby Lower East Side club.

The group show served as the primary exhibition format across Condo, as was the case for *Queer Thoughts’* gallery share with L.A.’s Park View/Paul Soto. Entering the small space, I slipped into blue booties to tread across a custom floor vinyl by Puppies Puppies, *The Difference Between Sex and Gender* (2018). A floor monitor screened *Sandra’s Walk* (2016) by Diamond Stingily, a minute-long video work showing the artist’s mother climbing and descending

a staircase in her home. On the wall, Aidan Koch’s 2018 *What are the odds?*—the phrase could be Condo’s byline—proffered a story told in comic-strip-like fragments.

As with many Condo presentations, the groupings of works at both spaces could as easily have been found in a fair, the big difference being that I didn’t have to enter the intense and dominant environment of one. Instead, the treasure hunt-style gallery-hop that Condo necessitates provides a slower approach; and since it spanned a whole month, visitors were granted a more solitary and peaceful viewing experience.

White Columns was one of the few participants to break from a group exhibition format, offering their space for a second year to the Claremont, CA based non-profit, First Street, who presented a solo exhibition by Micheal LeVell. The works on view—a bright suite of painted interiors alongside a group of micro-scale ceramic furniture pieces—were visual “amplifications” (LeVell’s term) of images found in his prized collection of *Architectural Digest*. White Columns was also the only non-profit space that participated in this iteration of Condo, and used the opportunity to promote another. LeVell, who is diagnosed with autism, and is deaf and legally blind, was one of the eight artists who helped found First Street in 1989, creating a space that provides resources to a community of artists living with developmental disabilities.

Elsewhere, Company Gallery (hosting Carlos/Ishikawa, London) elected



49



Mimi Lauter, *Sensus Oxynation* (2018)
(installation view). Image courtesy
of the artist and Blum & Poe.
Photo: Joshua White.

Math Bass, *My Dear Dear Letter* (2018)
(installation view). Image courtesy
of the artist and Mary Boone Gallery,
New York.



to pair two artists. Four paintings by Marisa Takal contained a frenetic logic, morphing brilliant color into muscle mass and loose grids. Emblazoned with the word “SATISFACTION,” one work, titled like a poem, *If You Want to See a Butterfly in Space, Land on My Face. What’s my Name. You Better Tell Me Whose...* (2017), gave clues into Takal’s broader practice of writing as well as object-making, and echoed the large-scale text forms in Diana Lozano’s suspended sculptural clusters.

If most of its presentations still dealt in fair aesthetics—choosing to carefully highlight gallery programs over particular curatorial conceits—what Condo does offer is a generous alternative to art fairs. New York and Los Angeles galleries face their

own serious struggles with the rising costs of rent owing to neighborhood gentrification, not to mention the culpability that galleries share in being harbingers of it. In the midst of this, Condo is an experiment with the Gallery as Entity. It is conducive to camaraderie between galleries and insistent on the particularity of their local spaces. Like many alternative fairs (from the hotel rooms of Gramercy International Art Fair, started in 1994, to more recent endeavors including Independent and Mexico City’s Material Art Fair), Condo was started by gallerists. And so, while establishing itself as an alternative, it can also be understood as an extension of the fair model. Although Condo proclaims to make way for “experimental gallery

exhibitions,” for both galleries and viewers, exhibition making was the least of its experiments.

CONDO New York (2018)
(installation view). Image courtesy
of the artists and Queer Thoughts, NY.

Review Contributors

Matthew Lax is an artist, writer, and curator. His work has been exhibited at film festivals and gallery spaces including the Viennale (Austria), IHME Contemporary (Helsinki), MIX Brasil (São Paulo) and MIX NYC, Los Angeles Municipal Gallery, and Everson Museum of Art (Syracuse, NY). The second phase of his ongoing curatorial project, MAKING PLANS, will travel to Chicago in 2019.

Jessica Simmons is an artist and writer based in Los Angeles. Her work and writing navigates the haptic, oblique space that exists between the language of abstraction and the abstraction of language.

Simone Krug is a writer, educator, and independent curator based in Los Angeles. Her writing has appeared in *Artforum*, *Art in America*, and *Frieze*, among other publications.

Ikechukwu Casmir Onyewuenyi is a Nigerian Australian curator and writer based in Los Angeles, where he is a curatorial assistant at the Hammer Museum. His writing has appeared in *Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism*, *ARTS.BLACK*, *BLOUIN ARTINFO*, *Carla*, *OnCurating*, and *Performa Magazine*, among others.

Thomas Duncan is an independent writer and curator living in Los Angeles.

Laura Brown is a writer and curator living in New York.

Ashton Cooper is a doctoral student in the Department of Art History at the University of Southern California. She has curated exhibitions at Maccarone, Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, the Leslie-Lohman Museum Project Space, Larrie, and the Knockdown Center, all in New York, and Cooper Cole in Toronto. Her recent writing has appeared in *Mousse*, *ArtReview*, and the *Brooklyn Rail*.

Made in L.A. 2018 Contributors

Claire de Dobay Rifelj is a curator, writer, and art historian based in Los Angeles. She has produced exhibitions for CalArts, the Hammer Museum, the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Williams College Museum of Art, and her writing has appeared in exhibition catalogues, the *LA Weekly*, and on *ForYourArt.com*.

Jennifer Remenchik is an artist and writer living in Los Angeles. Her work has been exhibited at VIVO Media Arts Centre (Vancouver), Industry Lab (Boston), and HILDE (Los Angeles), among others. Her writing has appeared in *Hyperallergic*, *curate.la*, and published through *Agony Klub*.

Aaron Horst is a writer based in Los Angeles. His writing has appeared in *Carla*, *Flash Art*, and *ArtReview*.

Exquisite L.A. Contributors

Over the past twelve years in Los Angeles, Claressinka Anderson has worked as an art dealer, adviser and curator and is the owner of Marine Projects. Originally from London, England, she is also a writer of poetry and fiction, some of which can be found at *Autre Magazine*, *The Los Angeles Press*, *Artillery Magazine* and *The Chiron Review*.

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* magazines, 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.