

Tilt-Shift LA: New Queer Perspectives on the Western Edge

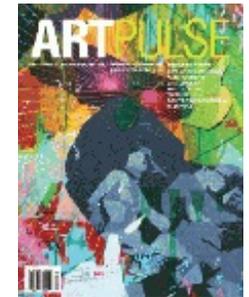


prvtndncr & BODEGA VENDETTA, Legends, Statements and Stars, 2010-2012. Installation: mixed media on canvas (paintings) and mixed media on paper (framed drawings and wallpaper), dimensions variable.

Luis de Jesus Gallery - Los Angeles

Curated by Darin Klein

By Tucker Neel



“Tilt-Shift LA: New Queer Perspectives on the Western Edge” at Luis De Jesus posits queerness as an identity and an artistic goal, with curator Darin Klein assembling works by 15 artists of varying backgrounds and respective practices. While sometimes heavy-handed, the result is no doubt an impressive and important exhibition. The most successful works here perform a surprising kind of queerness that excavates history while plumbing the depths of subjective experience.

For example, Danny Jauregui’s two paintings of delicately rendered grids of squares disarm with an unexpected confluence of form and content. At first glance, these works resemble angular modernist grids, bringing to mind Agnes Martin’s paintings. Yet Jauregui’s are not just picture problems, but representations of tiled walls in shuttered gay bathhouses—highly charged libidinous spaces from days gone by. Jauregui’s work succeeds tremendously in the context of this exhibition because these abstractions don’t appear queer at first. Yet once they reveal themselves for what they are, the paintings forever stay in your mind, rupturing banality and contaminating both their modernist precedents and possibly injecting representations of unexpected spaces into external, “neutral” interiors. I do so wish some daring CEO would buy them for the cold lobby of some corporate office.

Additionally, a complex installation of cryptic photographs and a limited-edition book by Christopher Russell and Halle Tate explores the personal photographic document’s contingent nature, how memory defies solidification as possibly the queerest element of human existence. Tate’s images resemble snapshot souvenirs of youthful trysts, or adolescent self-portraiture, with images of the back of a braided head of hair and naked limbs in bed sheets. Russell’s photographic constructions consist of the same cut-out image of a one-armed young man dressed in clothes from the early 20th century against a stark black background bearing what appears to be a signature and some sort of letter written in faint script. The work resembles pages from a scrapbook; one thinks of the inscriptions on the backs of vintage home photos and the fragility and trauma that often haunt our recollection of past events. Russell’s photos are transitory views of the past, an examination of how one image can bring about varying reminiscences, here conveyed through alterations by the artist: scarred paper, dried flowers, violent cuts, colorful decoration and imaginative drawings. While Russell and Tate’s work problematizes concepts of memory and representation, it’s the professional and personal relationship between the two artists that injects an air of inappropriateness into the show. Russell is Tate’s teacher and the younger photographer is still in school. Their collaboration questions the relationship of mentors to students, asking who influences whom.

In contrast to these more understated works, prvtndcr & BODEGA VENDETTA’s collaborative installation of glittery day-glow insouciant drawings scream for attention with shady and bitchy sayings and crude collages against large altered photos of female icons such as Lucille Ball decorated like rhinestoned drag queens. While this installation is a little too eager to please, it does include some gems, like a pair of high-top platforms formed from a stack of shoe soles, a DIY couture testament to a sidewalk runway life. Equally impressive is a totemic assemblage of ribbons and streamers containing incongruous objects: a Tetris block, a cock ring, dream catchers, chess pieces and a few incomprehensible doodads. These works seem more apropos, given that they use adornment and repurposing to make us see the everyday in a new and unexpected way. This is what truly queer works of art can do: awaken one to the possibility that with alterations or additions, our concepts of normalcy (which always forms from a system of binaries and stringent beliefs) can come undone.

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