

In an issue analyzing the cities that recently had an economic boom—with all the related consequences and contrasts due to the technology pounce on society—it is interesting to switch the mind on the other side, and show what it means to live in a city of the established excess like Los Angeles.

The idea everyone could get from the City of Southern California comes from the star system, in juxtaposition with some dark thoughts coming from common people who are based there or who travel there. This all-or-nothing generates a strong and strange curiosity about the city.

In L.A. a crew of rising artists like Nora Berman, Lena Daly, Brian Khek and Natalie Labriola express this sentiment through their works, even sometimes subconsciously.

From photographs showing instants of gleaming daily life around town to works like “Nora Pia” where the smooth and luxe surface makes a context-pristine like the paint



O (INFINITE LOOP), 2016, COURTESY OF NORA BERMAN

# FOCUS ON THE OTHER SIDE



INSTANT, 2016, COURTESY OF LENA DALY

on a car—for the imagery and painting on it, Nora’s images are fully showing their Californian origins by evoking a fictional world. This intent is crystalized in Andrew Berardini’s words on the artist’s solo exhibition “Shhh” at Weiss Falk in Basel last Fall. From an extract: “You call up an altar and lay your own body upon it, both fold and ribbon into each other and the difference between what you can make with your hands and what is real, dissolve into a mist. An ethereal electricity shoots from your fingers. You begun with nothing but materials. The jerk and pull of lust has brought you here”. In her solo debut “Charm” at Ellis King in Dublin, previously opening last June, an iconic arch in Downtown Los Angeles serves as the setting where the story is unfold through documented performances for camera, hand-drawn interventions and painting, that show—even through their composition as a constellation with a front and back-dualities such as the push and pull between viewer and artwork, with an aim

against objectification and acting like “physicalized charms as mementos of being”, in a disorienting play that reclaims expressive freedom and clarity.

“I find myself constantly asking about this other side because at times it feels perfectly normal and then the deception it creates starts to make life spooky. And, that’s where things get weird and interesting…” sentences Lena Daly. Her glass objects—like the ones in her works from her debut show “Night Bell” at Various Small Fires in L.A. that opened last November—are made by hand blown uranium glass, radioactive no more than how an iPhone is, that fluoresce intensely under ultraviolet light and turn them into musical instruments when filled with varying amounts of water, like an elegiac object that can be played over and over. These sonic illusions produce visual realities hiding out under the spotlight. Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, in her piece on Lena’s solo for Artforum, underlines “...we encounter the buzzing shadowed side of things” and “...a model of how bodies might generate, radiate, and emit light from within an environment of extreme darkness”.

At American Medium in Brooklyn, New York, Brian Khek—on the occasion of his solo show “Poorly Planned Honor Racks” on view last Spring—made the debut of his “Newspaper Stick” series. Reasoning on the complication of time around accelerationism, in a conversation with Kyle Hinton published by 0 Fluxo, Brian explains: “I liked this allegory of buying flowers from



COURTESY OF NATALIE LABRIOLA & DAVID ROESING

wholesale markets or bodegas in newspaper. It’s a portrait of the day” and again “I guess all innovations are predetermined to be superseded. (...) It’s like the hierarchy of importance is constantly shuffling, just as popular cultures values do. It’s all about how the facts are presented and validated—especially who mediates this information”, unveiling another point of view on the same perceptions of the situation at this present time.

In a PDF project by Natalie Labriola with David Roesing, made on the occasion of the exhibition “Petrella’s Imports” at Night Gallery in Los Angeles, the underlaying structure combining images of two different places—Biosphere II in Arizona and a small roadside attraction called Roadside America in Pennsylvania—with overlaid texts spliced from the writing of Jane Jacobs and Rem Koolhaas, addressed some of the issues investigated here. In this project, conceived as narrative, the images of the two environments mix and confuse with each other, with a meaning enriched by the text words describing our reality like “And each project will look very much like the next one. From city to city the architects’ sketches conjure up the same dreary scene; here is no hint of individuality or whim or surprise, no hint that here is a city with a tradition and flavor all its own”.

Art is a field to examine, challenge and give new meaning to identity. It is interesting to actually look at how artworks are being presented starting from the context where they were created, and how they are able to motivate change.