

Little Messages for Modern Shut-ins

Stanya Kahn

Susanne Vielmetter Projects / Los Angeles

Aran Cravey / Los Angeles

With this group exhibition, curators Cha and Diner consider the decorative arts and their separation from much of “serious” contemporary art. The seven artists thus apply decor, design and pattern making to their processes, commenting on the divisions drawn between the two genres. Though we often think of decorative art as pertaining solely to domesticity, the context of the home is also found at the root of many important works of contemporary art.

The front gallery is swathed with Joshua Nathanson’s gray-tone pictorial wallpaper titled *Dirty Beach* (2014), which creates a quaint 1950s atmosphere reminiscent of powder rooms long forgotten. In the foreground stands Phyllis Green’s steel sculpture, *L12 (Duchamp Party)* (2001), which seemingly combines the structures of an old dress form and a tea sandwich pedestal. Two similarly cup-oriented ceramic works by Joan Bankemper are perched on a wooden shelf. Each has repurposed the familiarity of the classic coffee mug into miniature totems that resemble other abstracted serving devices.

Patrizio Di Massimo’s work evokes the core of comfort – the bedroom, and more specifically, the bed itself. His plush, pink sculpture made of stacked puffy round cushions, *Cushion no 3 (Portrait of Eliza)* (2013), also stands in front of Nathanson’s wallpaper, recalling the kinds of little girl’s bedrooms that most of our mother’s probably had. Around a corner one is lead into an intimate, carpeted hallway with an installation titled *The Lustful Turk (Souvenir)* (2012). This includes a singular cushion on the floor with a gold tassel whose long rope winds along the carpet and up the wall where it then dangles downward, calling attention to a small oil painting. Most importantly, this show proves that these artists are unafraid to transmit the detailed and at times messy qualities of the most private sector, the home, into the white cube, where they admittedly feel at once cozy and yet a bit overexposed.

by Courtney Malick

The bulk of Stanya Kahn’s recent solo exhibition at Susanne Vielmetter consisted of a sprawling assortment of new drawings executed in her signature cartoon style, which is at once bare-bones primitive and expressively refined. By and large, these works could be read as offhanded gags, something to simply “get,” yet vague intimations of deeper calculation and complexity keep one guessing. A work featuring a witch lifting her skirts while standing in front of a small cookie-cutter house offers a case in point. The pitched roof in the background distinctly echoes the peak of the witch’s hat, and both are in turn inverted in the black triangle of her exposed pubis. That this system of relations is more than just incidentally formal is corroborated by the voice that asks from inside the house, somewhat indictingly, “Do you need a doctor?” “I am a doctor,” comes the reply, and in this brief repartee is contained a whole history of struggle between the forces of conformity and deviance, authority and disrepute, and, of course, between men and women.

That old saying, “Physician, heal thyself,” is taken up literally in an ambitious 74-minute video screened in the back. Here a group of doctors and nurses, sequestered in the gaudy rooms of an abandoned high-end housing development, appear to prepare for a coming apocalypse, while periodically falling ill, treating each other, and steadily thinning in number. Filmed in the depressed, desolate environs of Kansas City, the black-humor premise of this zero-sum ecosystem takes on an urgent social tone, but one that remains curiously hopeful. Confronting a condition from which there is little chance of recovery, we are left to ponder the virtues of care. The close inspection of abject, traumatized bodies is both Kahn’s modus operandi as an artist and a kind of metaphor for the critical work that we as viewers perform on the outcome. “Do you need a doctor?” is a question one could level at her, no less aggressively, and in the end, superfluously.

by Jan Tumlir

Postcodes: Soft

Casa do Povo / São Paulo

“Postcodes: Soft” is the first in a series of exhibitions organized by Gabriel Lima, Pedro Wirz and Anamaué, intended to explore changing ideas of criticality in the discussion of global art practices and markets. Installed in the Casa do Povo, a cavernous five-story space built in 1953 to house the Instituto Cultural Israelita Brasileiro and known locally as a site of resistance during the years of Brazil’s military dictatorship, the works that comprise the exhibition are installed with an eye to mobility and multiple viewpoints.

“Soft” does not, in the northern hemisphere at least, seem the most critically charged term. What is the relationship, for example, between “soft” as a set of positive attributes, referring to the beautiful sensations of dissolving evening light or falling snow, and those indicated by its use in the world of creeping unofficial interventions into national arenas and markets: soft power, Microsoft, PeopleSoft, etcetera? How does it indicate that gently disintegrating space where borders meet and one thing stops being something and starts being something else? This question, posed with a pointed lack of the familiar terms of judgment and critique, animates the works on display as well as the choice of venue.

Max Ruf’s extremely logical interjections into traditional children’s horizon-bound landscape paintings (2014) give the impression of abstraction; their shapes gesture toward something that doesn’t quite manage to define space, as do the lost blots adrift in Sanja Todorovic’s paintings (2014). In Pedro Neves Marques’s three-channel digital slideshow, *What is repressed, in fact, is the full body as the foundation of this intense earth* (2014), ideas of the realized, the over and the still-potential rally around images of civilizational markings on land and body: one channel shows tribal tattoos, one aerial photographs and the third, patents.

A second edition of the show will follow later this year, “Postcodes: Kind,” occupying a modernist house scheduled for demolition.

by Eva Kenny



From top, clockwise:

Nathalie du Pasquier
Septembre (2009)
Milanese Still Life (2014)
Installation view at Aran Cravey, Los Angeles (2014); courtesy of the Artist and Aran Cravey, Los Angeles

"Postcodes: Soft,"
installation view at Casa do Povo, São Paulo (2014)

Stanya Khan
Fuck Shit Up (2014)
Courtesy of the Artist and Susanne Vielmetter Projects, Los Angeles

