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Israel's Babylon and Arigato (center), Andrews' "Pot" (left) and "Full Set" (right)

ROME—Kathryn Andrews and Alex Israel are united for the first time at the Gagolian Gallery in an exhibit that is one part homage to Hollywood culture and one part commentary on SoCal extravagance. The free exhibit will run for another month until March 15.

The two Los Angeles-based artists play with the intimate gallery space as much as with the pieces that fill it. The first room contains a red carpet rolled up on its end that gives the impression you have either just missed the big event or have arrived unfashionably early.

The feeling of being somehow "off stage" is furthered by Israel's *Sky Backdrop* which cuts across the gallery floor, literally drawing the viewer behind the "scene" to reveal what looks like a disorganized prop room rather than a museum exhibition space.

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Pieces block each other or even face the wall so observers are left to negotiate the space themselves as they seek the best angle from which to view the art. It's an unusual take on the concept of gallery presentation that generally allows the museum-goer to passively appreciate what is being displayed rather than inviting them to explore.

Alex Israel is an artist known for work that examines the Los Angeles fascination with celebrity culture, fame, and artificiality as in his amusing, Warhol-esque video portraits of ageing Hollywood celebrities titled "As it LAys" (asitlays.com).

Almost everything of Israel's that is on display is a rented film prop like the classic red fire hydrant or a beat up mail box. Only one thing was made for the show: the canvas backdrop of sherbet-pink clouds that appears again and again in his work, the set piece that captures that classic LA skyline.

In Duchampian fashion, Israel's readymade pieces are clearly fake upon closer inspection posing questions about the value of presentation, the glorification of cheap materials dressed up on screen to look real, the modern trend of Hollywood adoration stretched like saran wrap over a hollow framework of props that we pretend are real, suspending disbelief, willfully deceiving ourselves for the sake of having something shiny and new to worship.

The pieces by Kathryn Andrews deepen this commentary by juxtaposing Israel's recognizably American props with unexpected sculptures of shiny chrome-plated steel. Unexpected elements cause you to look again at something that at first seems recognizable:

Full Set looks like a rack of dumbbells until further inspection reveals that the rack and the weights are fused together. *Tall Bike* is your average bike rack with a "bike" that looks more like freestanding scaffolding. *Pot* is a ceramic vase full of plastic plum blossoms and one steel pole, stuck in among the fake branches.

The brilliant sheen of her chrome pieces picks up the Koonsian notion of how modern society tends to worship materialism and fetishize everything new, young, and sparkling. The popular magic built up around new products has been deconstructed into incongruous shapes that ask us to examine what we think of as art, who owns art, who interprets it, who we are as viewers in addition to what is being viewed.

The extreme minimalism of this collection is likely to polarize viewers. To some, readymade is infuriating. "Even I could do this," is the common refrain from those peeved at what they perceive as laziness or the arrogance of an artist grabbing any old object and putting their name on it. If you fall into this category, this exhibit will leave you at loose ends.

For others, those same loose ends serve as a launching point for unexpected discoveries that challenge the very idea of what art is. To some this is liberating, exhilarating, a way in which every day objects can become profound simply through the act of arrangement and naming. *On this pedestal is art, says the modern or readymade piece, and why not?*