

Goodden, Sky, "Grieving in L.A.," *Momus.CA*, December 22, 2016

MOMUS

My first trip to Los Angeles started ten days after an election that diminished our assurance in something like a common good. I booked the flight before that fatal turn, of course, expecting something cool, maybe correcting in the city's artworld; imagining a community of shaggy game-changers who'd successfully mooted the binary between ambition and good sleep. I met, instead, a people bent, broken, groping for genuine, if inarticulate, exchange. Over five days of back-to-back gallery visits, openings, and meetings, I shared in pressed and fractured conversations about art and much else, that felt urgent and unlikely. I was nearly grateful for my timing.

We want our artists to publicly bleed for us as quickly as we feel our wounds. An ever-renewing online media suggests immediate reflection (and when the editor-in-chief of *The New Yorker* can produce two of the most in-depth and affecting responses to Trump's election inside a week, why expect anything less?). However, recent publishing standards haven't overcome the time-lag that consideration requires.

It's important to remember that it takes a minute for good art to show up. That the strange, static awareness we feel after an upset – the something-like-silence where we're observing the noise and fog of our own breath and trying to read into it a message – is not rudderlessness or detachment, but the substance of responding.

I moved through a slowed-down and vulnerable L.A., visiting the work that didn't mean to be the "after" picture of a suddenly-changed body. Wanting a response, I saw what was there, and acknowledged that it'd have to suffice: that I'd be seeking in its many-personed beings – however unfairly – some kind of sign, this artworld now burdened with newly-assigned meaning, and bearing a complicated weight.

Certain things buckled under this unsparing test, and it's educative to note what failed: for instance, Doug Aitken at MOCA LA is an impressive survey that's too celebrity-driven, medium-focused, and gorgeously vacant to deliver lasting comment. Similarly, the exhausted academicism on display at Kayne Griffin Corcoran (a polished gallery featuring the tiresome dance of the material-immaterial in an exhibition titled *Concrete Islands*, curated by Douglas Fogel and Hanneke Skerath) was overshadowed by its own architecture and light-infused galleries, designed by James Turrell. (I had a chance to sit in the gallery's office, where the ceiling houses a hole, and through it, the sky presses upon your eyelids like a wet, blue petal. Turrell has raised the bar perhaps impossibly high for that gallery to attempt any further aesthetic wins).

There were countless shows that felt important, of course, even historically overdue: Betye Saar thoughtfully showcased in something like an abbreviated museum survey at Roberts & Tilton. Paul Thek treated to a gorgeous, spare (and L.A.-first) exhibition at the young and ambitious Hannah Hoffman Gallery. Paolo Colombo curating on the theme of "sleep" at Ibid's newly-inaugurated L.A. space, including a specially-commissioned, massive Ed Ruscha wall-hanging, that, in concert with subtle works by the late Thek, Félix González-Torres, and Robert Gober, affected a posture of activity.

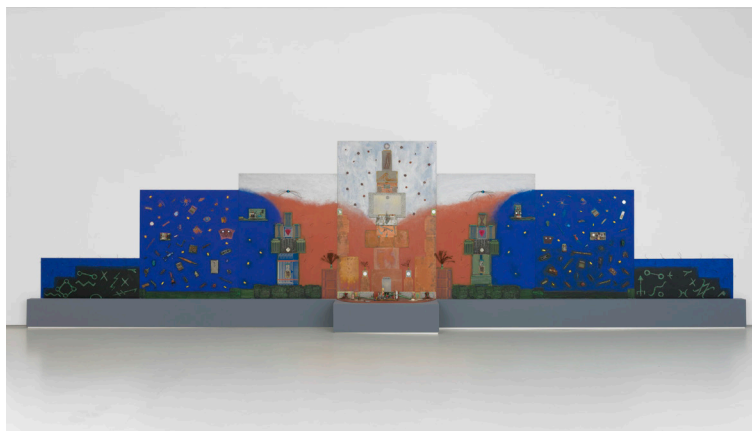
The exhibition that stood out as being particularly prescient and "ready" for our recent upset, however, was Kathryn Andrews's *Black Bars*, at David Kordansky. Even with its seductive production value – almost off-puttingly polished – Andrews calls up our central impasses with the media, government, and our own self-perception. Her show springs between populism and politics, and deals in sex and correction, reading as timely – especially when you learn that her first solo exhibition (currently touring between the MCA Chicago and the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas) is titled *Run for President*, and features a reluctant clown hitched to a position of power.

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Andrews lands her emphasis on censorship, and the suggested limits of its reach. She marks the margins of surveillance, and how contained things inevitably leak history, aura, and comment. Seen through this lens, the media and the government can appear (gratifyingly) ineffectual, and absurd.

Andrews affects this comment both overtly and subtly as she plays with the stuff of memory, art history, and political (and emotional) subjugation. Deep-framed wall works contain sculptures that peek out from beneath thick black stripes like redactions. Beneath these, cryptic figures stutter their citations. These elliptical referents are both diminished and made more seductive. Above them, the screen-printed stripes nod to a wiped-out Minimalism, and yet claim as their chief quotation: silence.

Authorship is unseated, and appropriation gets queered. The gaze, both denied and begged on, is complicated by desire and objection. However, what makes this artist (a long-time assistant to Mike Kelley) compelling is the way she solicits the auratic object. Even when it's reduced to a mere toe-hold, she calls on the storied, undeniable original to



Betye Saar, "Mojotech," 1987. Courtesy of the artist and Roberts & Tilton.



Paul Thek, "Untitled (Meat Cable)," 1968-69.

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fight for its value. Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* appears in a work title, for instance, or American Apparel models (re-photographed by Andrews) wink through the slats, as do famed Hollywood props (a flipper from *Jaws*; a gun from *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*; a claw). Andrews demands of her nearly-rubbed-out subjects a larger profile than they'd be capable of summoning if sequestered to mere vitrines (or banner ads). She also demands that we work away at a censored space – to deny it, and fight for our perspective, however crooked or blinkered by history, experience, sentiment, and prejudice. She requires a fight from both object and subject, and makes clear that there are no blacked-out spaces, so long as we're political, keen, and constant.

Los Angeles was generous – perhaps typically, or maybe apocalyptically. I'm sure that I visited its city in a rarefied moment, witnessing a break-down before the rebound. The people I met with were strange and expansive. Like when I visited with a blue-chip gallery director who stood with me in a parking lot for half an hour, seemingly unhurried, and channeled his younger self – a poet, it turns out. Or as when I heard a confession from the partner of a prominent museum director, that despite her spouse's insatiable interest in the news, she was experiencing a small trauma every time the newspaper hit their doorstep. (The museum director would later mention to me how she was giving her staff sick days, holidays, and, now, "activist days," too.) Like how I watched powerhouse queers and storied feminists ascend the stairs to a famed Silver Lake manse, where a fundraiser for women in the arts would raise thousands to ensure our most endangered communities' continuance. Like how I toured through galleries with directors who were experiencing their shows anew, as though up-ended, turned-over, the work now leaden and reflecting. Or like how Yvonne Rainer privately performed with her formative collaborators, for me and fifty others, in what might be her last event, narrating something messy and playful that had the quality of a sadly literal *Waiting for Godot* – because we knew the waiting party was upon us, and it was, potentially, something worse than death.

Like how an activist-writer drove me along a stretch of freeway and recounted how, when this artery was choked with protests, the central jail flickered its lights, the cellmates voicing their solidarity. This, above all, made me bend with grief.



Installation view of "*Sleep*" (2016), with wall hanging by Ed Ruscha, at Ibid Gallery, Los Angeles.

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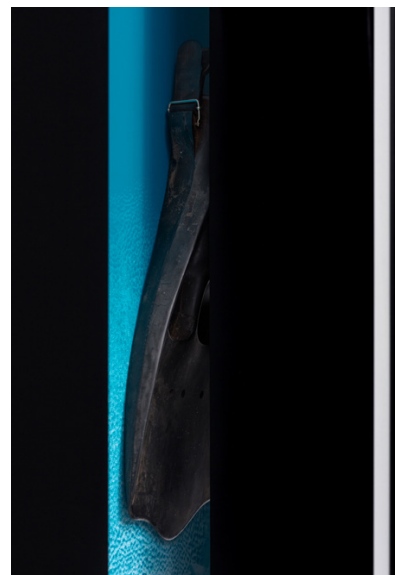
Regardless of art's slow generation, we experienced something stunning, this fall – a stunning I feel impatient to see reflected. But in the time it takes for cognition – and then our rectifying – we can visit with our mourning. Now's the time to bow our heads, to bend at the knees. To consider the pall cast over places that vibrate with light.



Kathryn Andrews, "Black Bars," 2016, Installation view. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen. Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery.



Kathryn Andrews, "Black Bars," 2016, Installation view. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen. Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery.



Kathryn Andrews, "Black Bars: Jaws," (detail), 2016.