

# "Mongrel"

---

Michael Ned Holte /ARTFORUM

NOV 2007

SANTA MONICA

"Mongrel"

SIXTEEN:ONE

The word mongrel denotes inbreeding and other unholy matrimonies: A mongrel is less lovable pet, more unstable experiment. So the self-deprecating title of this playful exhibition surely refers to the potentially unruly hybrid practice of each Los Angeles-based artist in the show—[Kathryn Andrews](#), [Chris Lipomi](#), [Donald Morgan](#), and [Stephanie Taylor](#)—as much as it refers to the unexpected ways in which their distinct individual contributions aggregate. While the common denominator for these artists is sculptural or otherwise object-based work, their practices extend to embrace, among other things, found photographs, rented neon signs, sound, and printmaking.

That Andrews organized the show and included three of her own works might suggest an ethical breach of Doctor Moreau-like proportions. Mongrel-like, she seems to force the issue by calling the role of the curator into question: At what point does the curator and the "frame" established by an exhibition become an active participant rather than a detached facilitator? Such questions set the tone for a collégial installation where a number of decisions made individually by the four artists seem to acknowledge the contributions to the show made by the rest, presenting us with a chicken-and-egg conundrum.

Whale Tale, 2007, the title of Morgan's elegant wall-mounted paddle, constructed from laminated chloroplast and covered in blue Formica, is a double entendre that puns on its own tail-like appearance and simultaneously pays homage to Taylor's rhymed-driven practice. Her narrative sound work, Gutter Foal, 2003, which was installed in the entrance courtyard, and Red Heads, 2003, a related silk screen of that story's dramatis personae, relay an enjoyably convoluted tale concerning an orphaned horse named Lanar and the nefarious deeds of his eventual adopter's son Thor. The work's libretto (sung by artist Simon Leung) uses only five notes, following from Taylor's humorous and perverse conceptual schema in which syllables are broken down into building blocks based on the dominant vowels before being assembled into unlikely musical (or sculptural) configurations.

Lipomi's trenchant Pyramid Rubbing, 2007, employs a "primitive" method of reproduction to duplicate a Thomas Kinkadee corporate diagram. Ironically, the diagram was intended to help

Kinkade's sales force distinguish between the various levels of authenticity-from original paintings, to prints anointed with precious daubs of the master's brush, to entirely mechanical reproductions-in the Painter of Light's sappy, populist canvases. Lipomi's smart, circuitous sculpture, Unfitted (Notary), 2007, also plumbs primitivism by constructing a crude wooden structure display for an inflatable vinyl lobster "borrowed" from a recent sculpture and several paintings by Jeff Koons, who used the child's pool toy to refer to his earlier inflatable rabbit as well as to Salvador Dali's lobster telephone. Lipomi covers the alreadyoverdetermined object with a highly credible faux-Basquiat painting that appropriately-appropriatively?-includes the words LEECHES and PARASITES in Jean-Michel's familiar all-caps scrawl.

The lobster unexpectedly shares a nautical motif with Morgan's Whale Tale, and a neon coil that ornaments Lipomi's sculpture also recalls Andrews's two neon wall sculptures (both 2007)-a rented, wordless sign featuring a voluptuous red stripper dancing on a blue pole against a black plywood background, and a poker-faced, minimalist "response" piece comprised of five vertical blue neon lines against a similar ground acting as a de facto, if ambiguous, sign at the gallery's entrance. Andrews's Picture, 2007, which frames an ad for a Haim Steinbach sculpture, is itself flanked by two identical pieces of black wood. Such a surplus of framing material plays like a sneaky in-joke on her potential overreaching as artist-curator, and on Steinbach's influence to boot. Likewise, while drawing out astute formal connections between her peers, Andrews also manages to successfully tease out a spectrum of appropriative tactics, from the archest precincts of the "global art market" to the cozier confines of the interpersonal.

-Michael Ned Holte