

art agenda

Los Angeles Roundup

“This is a stupid town. It’s lazy, it’s polite, it’s so sissy in its mentality, so go along with everything that goes along. It’s corporate-owned, it’s a town owned by Hollywood, and it’s about time it grew up. It’s about time that it took art and said come on baby, show me something!” Thus spoke John Cassavetes in a behind-the-scenes documentary for his 1977 film *Opening Night*. The clip played as part of an intro bumper at Now Instant Image Hall, a microcinema in Highland Park with a bookshop selling various zines and small press titles related to its eclectic programming, from Susan Cianciolo’s films to historical gems like Reyner Banham *Loves Los Angeles* (1972). The latter screened just a few days before the cultural Leviathan known as Frieze Week descended upon the city, bringing with it a deluge of rain and the attendant disenchantment.



Alexandra Noel, *Plan A and Plan B*, 2019.

My beeline through the booths during the VIP preview of Frieze LA was a blur of greatest hits, although I was happy to see some unframed Vivian Suter canvases hanging like bruised and bloodied banners in the booth of local gallery Karma International, and actually stopped short at Paulo Nimer Pjota’s paintings juxtaposed with bronzed and found objects at São Paulo’s Mendes Wood DM. The façades that make up the storied Paramount backlot are not equipped for inclement weather, and several of the site-specific commissions, including Tino Sehgal’s *This is Competition* and Karon Davis’s installation *Game* were shuttered or moved elsewhere. But Trulee Hall’s Frieze Project installation *Infestation* remained unharmed by the rain. The giant acid-bright green tube wending its way in and out of the doors, windows, and fire escape of a tenement building façade, made for an uncanny semi-creature somewhere between an unspooled neon sign and a snake with no head, just tails at each end. Its campy, ruinous look worked particularly well among the ad hoc ruins of the dampened backlot.

Over at satellite fair Felix, held at the Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood, the throngs of people wending their way around the 11th-floor rooms where galleries took up residence, had a bit of a flattening effect for taking in the work, like being trapped in a posh MC Escher–designed house party. In New York gallery Marlborough Contemporary’s room, Matt Johnson’s carved wood sculpture *Black Hole Pizza Box* (2018) is exactly what it sounds like—a humble cardboard-looking pizza box whorled into a spin of color funneling down into nothingness. It has the material control of classicism and the retinal pleasures of a stoner’s pop-science musings. Many galleries made the mistake of filling their narrow hallway entrances with giant paintings that were impossible to take in from butterfly-kissing distance, which is exactly why Alexandra Noel’s tiny five-by-seven inch diptych *Plan A and Plan B* (2018) jumped out at New York gallery Bodega. The pastel-colored houses (duplexes?) are depicted with the flat compositional style of Walker Evan’s forays into paintings, but rendered in super crisp, bougie lines that still read as ironic. In his LA documentary, Banham declares that great cities are capable of imposing a kind of style upon the rest of the world. Sometimes that style gets imposed back upon Los Angeles in the form of naive fantasy, or tired iconography. Noel skirts both.

This week will happen again, and again, and every time we’ll snap to and fumble to find our place in it, and when it leaves things will go back to a calmer, lighter, and more quotidian form of enchantment. Whatever it means for management companies and big galleries will always be somewhat at a remove from those who still create like no one is looking. As comedian Maria Bamford said during an Art Center graduate seminar with writer Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, “Just find a way to do your work.... Look, I tremor. And I’m a millionaire. Who gives a shit.”