

'Gravity and Transformation' at Kristi Engle Gallery

The giddy and subtly dark summer group show *Gravity and Transformation* required a ready supply of helium. Amidst a gallery full of art about weighty levity and sad clowning, Pilar Conde's *Night Terrors* included felt, empty speakers (i.e., vessels of a soundless void) and an expanding collection of black balloons. Each day, new balloons

September 2008 19



infused with life and levitational pull gathered up towards the ceiling, but with passing time they would drift down to the floor. Balloons in varying stages of depletion and sagging entropy emblemized the way of all living things. Happy summer!



Curated by artist Suzanne Adelman, and comprised of artists from Los Angeles and New York working in multiple media, *Gravity and Transformation* filled Kristi Engle's new Eagle Rock storefront gallery with spirits both bubbly and sobering. Incipient irony, on one level or another, exerted an influence on all the art here, and the recurring motifs of gravity and the aura of festivity became part of an acknowledged aesthetic smoke screen. Conde's giddy-grim balloon trick may have been a conceptual centerpiece in the exhibition, but George Raggett's pair of sculptural pieces tucked quietly in the back corner of the gallery convey the magnetic push-pull of forces—natural and artistic—with a different kind of cleverness. His raggedy cast plastic *Book* sits in the corner on the floor, while the plastic and rope-based *Stick* dangles from the ceiling, seemingly symbiotic and empowered by quasi-metaphysical power.

Won Ju Lim's mixed-media *Plaster Study* pieces suggest nothing so much as decomposing and drooping birthday cakes, as if subjected to heat or post-nuclear irradiation. In other disaster news, Keith Walsh's polymorphous-shaped sculpture, decked out in gaudy

and spiky colors and angles, assumes another layer of meaning via the suggestion of its title: *Phil Spector*. Intrigue meets a certain sense of inveterate creepiness.

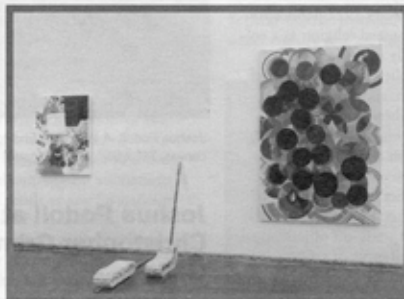
Even the minimalist effects in the show came

show's mix, but discreetly. In Steven Hurd's painting *Heads of State*, a west-meets-middle-east diplomatic meeting with Condi Rice, an unidentified American diplomat and two Arab leaders, is willfully blurred in a way imitating the pixilation process of low-res photographs. It takes only a little imagination to read Hurd's painting as an

indictment of fuzzy low resolution of intelligence and integrity in the current American administration and connection to the world, but it can also be seen as an unholy matrimony of media,

with painting mimicking the nature of contemporary photography.

Continuing the theme of gravity gone wild and media tweaking, Todd Gray's *Shaman Series* deals with layers of obfuscation: both the faces and prints in these photographic portraits are slathered with whipped cream. We get the sense, here, of stacked representational modes and a self-conscious complication of media definition. Photography, in its detached, purist sensibility, instantly morphs into the region of assemblage with a smear of goop on



Clockwise from top left: left to right, Pilar Conde, Anoka Faruqee, George Raggett, Suzanne Adelman, Tracy Miller, Shirley Tse; from left to right, Tracy Miller, Shirley Tse, Hadley Holliday; from left to right, Roger Dickes, Steven Hurd, foreground Won Ju Lim; from left to right, Todd Gray, Mark Dutcher, Rebecca Ripple, at Kristi Engle Gallery, Eagle Rock. (Photos: Robert Wedemeyer)

equipped with sly subtexts. Although seemingly uncharacteristically in its subtle and monochromatic touch, Anoka Faruqee's acrylic on

linen painting *Freeband Fade to Exposed Gray—Green Ground (Diamond)*, on close inspection, is marked with muted, celebratory asterisks beneath the predominantly gray-green surface.

In paintings such as Tracy Miller's *Top Hat* and Mark Dutcher's *The Stripper*, archetypes of bounding cheer—party supplies, bright product labels, over-amped color palettes and cake icing-like paint applications—are cannily set against anarchic density, in Miller's case, or void-like blackness, in the Dutcher piece.

Global political angst, a topic hard to avoid in this election year, slips into the

the surface.

In the end, it is the metaphorical powers of whipped cream and balloons that inform the goal of *Gravity and Transformation*, a summer show with its canny, cautionary sensors intact.

—Josef Woodard

Gravity and Transformation closed August 2 at Kristi Engle Gallery, Eagle Rock. Other artists in the exhibition included Roger Dickes, Hadley Holliday and Shirley Tse.

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