

# ART PAPERS

## MODULAR: NEW ART FROM LOS ANGELES

by Paul Krainak  
Art Papers  
July/August, 2007

White Flag Projects' second exhibition affirms the presence of St. Louis' newest art space. Its Chelsea-style restoration boasts a spacious, clean, muscular interior with high ceilings and polished concrete floors. The windows above a central black I-beam flood the space with ashy light of the gallery's mixed-use neighborhood. For art to succeed here, it cannot be faint, intimate or decorative.

Organized by St. Louis-born independent curator Dana Turkovic, *Modular: New Art from Los Angeles* (White Flag Projects; January 6-February 10, 2007) is a smart, formally concise exhibition that reflects her six-year stint in Los Angeles. Her intent is twofold insofar as she seeks to apply the idea of modularity to certain artistic practices while giving form to her memory of a city known for its impermanence and transience. What's more, her use of the term "modular" tacitly is based on her experience of place, which she seeks to represent through actual artworks. While thematic relationships do connect the selected projects, her concept of modularity reflects an often-disregarded idea about Southern California: it's thingness-its concrete reality and the equally concrete paths that lead to it's understanding. In addition, the exhibition charts an experience of time that, shirking linearity, collapses into the concurrent layers that make particular moments. Ultimately, *Modular*, an exhibition of works by six artists in their early thirties, is both fundamentally anecdotal and an independent record of site, time, and memory.

Most the work freely interprets constructivism by way of dynamic and colorful structures that assert themselves vigorously in the gallery. They often reference familiar sculptural forms that have been turned inside out or flattened.

Two works are somewhat allegorical. Nichole van Beek suspends a 3-dimensional photo collage mobile of arms and hands from the ceiling. One Hand emerges from the cloud of limbs and pours a glass of petrified water on an irregular polyhedron set in sand and laminated with a photograph of bubbling water. While it alludes to the artist's actual beach play, the piece also calls to mind the graphic intensity and lyricism of Hannah Hoch's work, made 3-dimensional. Conceptually ambiguous but pictorially succinct, van Beek's piece is an uncanny document. Still, a question remains: what does it document? Carnality? Intoxication? Rite of passage?

Bari Ziperstein presents an arrangement of fourteen small mixes-media collages that enlist photographic reproductions

culled from popular home improvement and design journals. She corrupts these staged renovation projects with drawn gray and white pillars or partitions that intrude rakishly on the magazine illustrations, parodying one of the perpetual leisurely pursuits of the "rich and famous." The shapes lurch awkwardly through parlor interiors, even through the bodies of craftsmen installing the latest tile or trim.

The abstract paintings of **Kevin Wingate** and Hollis Cooper are aggressive distillations of Los Angeles street culture. They also serve as lively points of transition between works that are more formally stable. Wingate makes trapezoidal aluminum panels of loosely gestured oil and spray car paint. Hybrids of automobile detailing and neo-expressionist canvases, they juke and jive their way across a huge back portion of the gallery space.

Cooper's titanic, irregularity-contoured, seven-by-twenty-foot painting-installation tumbles off the wall and onto the floor, inviting us into the spatial logic of it overlaid industrially produced vinyl and brightly-enameled matrices. The work is an imaginary urban map that also serves as a hyper-constructed backdrop for passage among the tighter arrangements of other works.

All of these works circulate formally and conceptually around two central installations. The first is a spectacular, multi-faceted plywood floor piece designed by Louisa Van Leer, which looks like a digitalized wooden starburst or the structural undercarriage of Lady Liberty's torch flopped on its side. The structure's back opens up to a ten-by-twenty-foot TV ad sporting a large red Warholian lipstick impression, the slogan "DUE THIS JANUARY," and BRAVO blocked across the bottom. From the front, one can peer through several sighting holes that isolate fragments of one of the city's corroborations of celebrity.

Danny Jauregui's five small graphite and charcoal drawings on print paper feature beautifully rubbed and erased backgrounds with frame-filling fragments of architectonic projections. Each of the dense radiating structures is corrupted by eroding edges or incongruous improvisations on axonometric logic or standard perspective. Like each of the artists invited by Turkovic, Jauregui maps the sometimes slippery and symmetrical logic of vision and place in Los Angeles culture.