

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

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Galleries showcase the new and the vintage...

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Two local galleries are showing art made in the country's two major art centers — New York and Los Angeles — offering a rare bicoastal experience.

The Los Angeles show at nonprofit White Flag Projects is the more relevant as a yardstick for young local artists, because it features other young artists working out their own ideas. St. Louis-based independent curator Dana Turkovic describes this as a survey of a new generation of LA artists, “immersed in a radically fragmented visual culture that threatens to simultaneously spin off into space or collapse in on itself like a dying sun.”

The six artists are all independent, resisting categorization, but their work shares certain characteristics. Awareness of architecture as a determinant of experience is a dominant concern, while surface decoration and a play of styles appear as leitmotifs.

Danny Jauregui and Bari Ziperstein have architecture and interior design on their minds. In his abstract ash-and-graphite drawings from the “Ruins” series, Jauregui creates fragmented cubic spaces out of alternating dark-and-light lines that suggest rooms without windows or doors but crumbling walls. In collages on pages torn from vintage house magazines, Ziperstein creates a utopian modernism laid over the rootless traditional — Russian constructivism atop Empire revival or chinoiserie.

Kevin Wingate and Hollis Cooper both use the wall as support and ground for their shaped works. Wingate, a Webster University graduate, renders three-dimensional forms on flat corrugated-aluminum surfaces, delineating their rectangular ends with a variety of decorative schemes. Cooper makes a Matthew Ritchie-like shaped painting that swoops across the wall, leaving a pile of unattached panels on the floor. She envisions a world of complex geometry, one where parallel lines bend, converge and merge as they move at apparently great velocity across space.

Nichole Van Beek and Louisa Van Leer contribute the most complex and, not coincidentally, satisfying works to the show. Van Beek's ceiling-suspended sculpture, obscurely titled, “Aether ... Carbonated the Lattice Site Dude,” is a surrealist conundrum that is actually somewhat easy to parse if you give it a try. Turkovic says it's all about a party on the beach at Santa Barbara. An orgy of (represented) hands and arms — photo-based inkjet prints, cut out and turned into a swarm — hang from the ceiling. One hand holds a (real) plastic cup out of which (represented) water drips onto a (represented) rock, where it splashes onto a circle of (real) sand. The piece ends up being a consideration of the differences between the real and the illusory, a time-honored subject of art that is particularly relevant in Los Angeles, the “dream factory” where truth and illusion are often hard to tell apart.

Van Leer's multipart installation, “Looking at You, Looking at Me,” unfolds cinematically. A large plywood construction, shaped like a giant crystal lying on its side on the floor, dominates the gallery. On the wall behind it is a fragment from a giant vinyl billboard poster sporting a pair of red lips for a show on Bravo “due in January.” At the tip of each crystal is a hole through which you can peer at the poster as if through a peephole, an experience that replicates the voyeurism at the heart of both film and art.

The piece changes dramatically when viewed from its open end. The crystal is lined with aluminum foil-coated board, which turns the interior into an elaborate architectural model of a deconstructivist interior of the sort that Zaha Hadid might design. The peepholes at the ends of the elongated spaces become windows that let in a rationed quantity of light, which make the spaces even more mannerist.

“Looking at You, Looking at Me,” a tour-de-force on the subject of looking, presages an important career for Van Leer.