

Carter Mull at fused space (L.A. in S.F.)

November 12, 2015–
January 17, 2016

A few years ago, Carter Mull ditched the art world to hang with a totally different group of weirdos from L.A.'s underground party scene. He made friends with some of the people that were dancing, drugging, and documenting themselves in what can fairly be called "alternative spaces," just across the way from his downtown studio. Mull had them over to pose for pictures and otherwise become involved in the artwork he started making as a way to articulate his experiences among the ecstatic revelers of the 21st century. Their names and internet handles figure in the titles of the work collected in *Theoretical Children*, Mull's recent exhibition of 2D work, sculpture and video presented by Jessica Silverman at fused space in San Francisco.

Mull's 2D work employs uncomplicated digital effects; inkjet prints of shapes, gradients, and letterforms are collaged onto marbled cotton stretched over aluminum. Marbleizing, a technique that produces lush whorls of mingled color, is sometimes used in hardback bookbinding and brings with it a whiff of distinction. By combining contemporary

digital design techniques with traditional analog ones, Mull participates in the ageless impulse to parse moments of lived experience into good-looking documents.

Untitled Social Subject (Emotional Assassin, Svelte Accomplice, Fractured Defendant) (2015), a 2D work with a cotton candy palette features reproduced images of Fragonard's *The Lover Crowned* (1772) and a leather jacket. Together, they form a continuum of self-centered coolness—an attitude that is comfortingly familiar amid Mull's high-key translations of the brave new world he found in alternative nightspots and online.

Like the right number of the right people at a party, or in a chat room, the collaged elements in *Untitled Social Subject (Suitor)* (2015) form an enlivened gestalt. The concise formal and technical dichotomies—chance/ intention, wet/ dry media, geometry/ intuition—push and pull like living specimens under glass. Mull's best compositions function in the small space between looking incidental and right-on-the-first-try fresh.

Elsewhere in the exhibition Mull took on ideas of identity in a more direct and conventional way, and the results were less revelatory. The layering of technique and materials in the smaller portraits, *Theoretical Children (Luna Miu)* (2015) and *Theoretical Children (Alanna Pearl)* (2015) is foggy and dense. They lack the sense of migration that makes Mull's larger, more abstract works so descriptive of the mercurial nature

of social groups and the media by which they define themselves.

Covering the floor of the gallery was *Connection* (2011), comprised of 1,800 stills from an iPhone 4 ad printed on silver metallic pieces of Mylar that shift like slow moving static as people walk around on them. The piece calls to mind the short-term gratification and disposability of the devices of the Information Age. The viewer is left alone to reckon on the inextricability of digital culture from the technological medium of its expression. If the latter so quickly becomes obsolescent junk, what does that mean for the former?

Mull also chose the floor for an even more ominous and intimately scaled expression of existential apprehension. Two sculptural *memento mori*, flower arrangements wilting under tulle veils, presented accessories common to rituals of transformation, including, but not limited to, weddings and funerals. Surely flowers and veils are comfortable bedfellows, but Mull combines them to particularly bleak effect. *Chase / (The Tribune Company) / Los Angeles Times* (2014) features a veil printed with the *Los Angeles Times* masthead. Covered by a haze of information, beauty and vitality shrivel up and die.

An assertion gestated in Warhol's Factory, and re-affirmed by Mull, is that art—beset by toxic amounts of information—

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Review Contributors

Claire de Dobay Rifelj is a curator, writer, and art historian based in Los Angeles. She has produced exhibitions for CalArts, the Hammer Museum, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Williams College Museum of Art, and her writing has appeared in exhibition catalogues, the *LA Weekly*, and on *ForYourArt.com*. She completed her doctorate at New York University in 2015.

Matt Stromberg is a freelance visual arts writer based in Los Angeles. In addition to *Carla*, he has also contributed to *Hyperallergic*, *Daily Seving*, *Glasstire*, *KCET Artbound*, and *Artsy*.

Hana Cohn lives and works in Los Angeles.

Lindsay Preston Zappas is the founder and Editor-in-Chief of *Carla*.

Simone Krug is a writer, curator, and MA candidate in Curatorial Practice at USC. Her writing has appeared in *Art in America*, *FlashArt*, *Kaleidoscope*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*.

Keith Vaughn is a freelance writer. He lives and works in Alameda, CA.

Ikechukwu Casmir Onyewuenyi is a Nigerian Australian curator, art critic, writer, and curatorial fellow at the School of Visual Arts, New York. His writing has appearing in *Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Media Culture*, *Cool Hunting*, *Pop'Africana*, *ARTS.BLACK*, *Art Base Africa*, and *HYCIDE*.

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Rain Room by Random International, (2012) at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. Image courtesy of Random International. Photo: Random International.

2

Evan Holloway (2016) at David Kordansky Gallery (installation view). Image courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA. Photo: Brian Forrest.

3

Aleksandra Domanović, *Turbo Sculpture* (video still) (2010/2013). HD video, color, sound, 20 minutes. Edition of 5 + 2AP. Image courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton.

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Carter Mull, *Theoretical Children* (2015) at fused spaced (installation view). Image courtesy of Jessica Silverman Gallery.

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Awol Erizku, *Tigist* (2013). Digital Chromatic print. 40 x 50 inches. Image courtesy of artist and The FLAG Art Foundation.

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might avoid shriveling up and dying by demonstrating an awareness of the primacy of media. To this end, Mull's digital video, *Triple A Bond* (2013-2015), features two party girls mirthlessly leafing through his works on paper, taking photos, and putzing around in his studio. Phrases like "In a new community, a negation of the old" are repeated by a female voice that, in turn, sometimes also refers to the process of repeating and articulating the phrases. Less substantial than the other works, it is nevertheless effective for framing the viewer's understanding of Mull's process and his point of view.

Up close, Mull's work reveals itself to be deceptively low-tech and handmade. His impeccable craftsmanship affirms the traditional studio-based processes of distilling tangible form from the ether of experience. Mull is a wry and incisive artist and doesn't align his work with Romanticism, which might have been tempting and a bit on the nose. Instead he gives us Fragonard and the Rococo, a style of art associated with the apolitical hedonism of the time right before the guillotine of the French Revolution.

Incidentally, fused space occupies the same building as the internationally-acclaimed design studio fuseproject. I'm told that before the building hummed with the business of conceiving the future, it was a place where coffins were made. Talk about on the nose.

Awol Erizku at FLAG Art Foundation (L.A. in N.Y.)

September 17–
December 12, 2015

Awol Erizku has developed quite a name for himself as an agitator of the canon. Intent on reworking the art historical episteme, the Ethiopian-born, Bronx-raised, Los Angeles-based Erizku pits the image, invisible, against the icon, visible, to foreground the textualities of black bodies.

Take Erizku's Donald Judd-inspired sculpture, *Oh what a feeling, aw, fuck it, I want a Trillion* (2015). The work consists of seven all-black regulation-size basketball rims with 24-karat gold-plated nets: an iconographic similitude to Judd's *Untitled (Stack)* (1967). But there's more to *Oh what a feeling* than mere mimicry of, or overtures to, Judd. Hoop dreams, and higher goals emerge, as does the escapist-cum-entangled narrative that weaves its way into how black boys dream themselves differently.¹

In many respects, *New Flower | Images of the Reclining Venus* at FLAG Art was no different. For *New Flower*, Erizku turned instead to Manet's famed *Olympia* (1863) and Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* (1814). Subversive for their time, both paintings riled the Parisian public and its conservative Salon. Manet and Ingres blatantly dis-

avowed the allegorical devices that protected the white female nude; this was no Venus amidst a whimsical environment replete with distractions. In her book, *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art*, Charmaine Nelson offers up a riposte, contending that allegorical signposts like Venus "kept representations of white woman contained within the realm of art" while the black female was a woman of her own devices, responsible for the sexual gaze.²

Erizku acknowledges this dialectic, taking issue with the allegorical narrowness. As dissident as *Olympia* and *La Grande Odalisque* may appear, Erizku felt it needed a modern-day revamp that: 1) centered the peripheral black female servant in *Olympia*, and 2) considered Nelson and her problematic around the antithetical posturing of the black female body in relation to Western allegorical traditions. Gone are the romantic undertones and redeeming disguises—shisha pipes, Persian silks, and comfort cats. Waiting black attendants are nowhere to be found in *New Flower*. Instead, threadbare hotel rooms of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, frame the fray. The demure black maid, peripheral in *Olympia*, is now the object of desire, the new flower, *Addis Ababa*.³ What will be her lot? Will she be afforded the same courtesies as the white female nude? That we still find ourselves mired in such negotiations adds impetus to *New Flower*. To address this impasse, Erizku opts for salon-style

1. The work of David Hammons in *Higher Goals* (1986) and that of coming-of-age film, *Hoop Dreams* (1994) are immediate references beyond Judd.

Ikechukwu Casmir
Onyewuenyi