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Black Flag: CAPITAL at Minnesota Street Project

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Installation view, "Black Standard," 2016, at Minnesota Street Project. Courtesy of CAPITAL.

For three weeks this April, the San Francisco gallery co-run by Bob Linder and Jonathan Runcio, is flying its banner at Minnesota Street Project (a brand new art venue in the City's Dogpatch neighborhood) with the group show "BLACK STANDARD."

Three artists are featured in this pop-up exhibition: Davina Semo, a New York artist who showed at in September and October of 2015; Phil Wagner, based in Los Angeles; and the Bay Area's Survival Research Laboratories (SRL), which was founded by Mark Pauline in 1978 and has been labeled a "robot art collective." The exhibition – which encompasses a large gallery, an adjacent screening room, and part of the atrium – resembles an architectural construction site.

Two hulking SRL devices, Pitching Machine (1999) and Inchworm (1987), are currently parked in the Minnesota Street Project atrium. They're gargantuan (each larger than a car) and capable of strange feats; Pitching Machine can launch two-by-fours at immense velocity, like a nail gun, while Inchworm's stack of metal pincers can hoist, mash, and tear apart large objects. The machines are remarkable for their exposed components: gears, chains, wires, rivets, batteries and tanks are all discernible.

Running Machine (1992) stands in the main exhibition space, its lanky arm piercing the air above with a terminal knife-like appendage. Smaller wiry "props" dot the gallery floor, appearing like hazard beacons, all called Prop (Offspring) and made in 2015. The gadgets are exhibited in a quiescent state, but the unmistakable acrid odor of burnt fuel is a reminder that these are functioning contraptions. A raucous din emanates from the adjoining screening room in which footage from prior live performances depicts the machines in action. They tug, heave, crush objects and each other, spew fire and blast sound waves, enacting processes similar to demolition and gutting.



Davina Semo, SHE HID HER FACE IN MY ARMS AND THE WATER STREAMING OVER HER HEAD MINGLED WITH HER TEARS, 2016. Pigmented reinforced concrete, Copper Mirage carbon fiber fabric, borosilicate glass. 12 x 12 x 2 inches. Courtesy of the artist and CAPITAL.

The walls in the main area are hung with four sizable paintings by Wagner and mixed media works by Semo. Two of Wagner's untitled canvases, densely layered with the names of materials used in some of the art on view, offer an inventory of sorts: BRONZE, CANVAS, CLAY, FOAM, GLASS, INK, OIL, RUBBER, STEEL, VINYL, WAX, and WOOD. Lists and plans are alluded to with another pair of works featuring the word "AGENDA" painted repeatedly in vertical columns. Semo's larger contribution, WE DON'T WIN ANYMORE (2016), is a giant "XX" rendered in black, powder-coated steel chain; it stands sentinel, like a safety barricade. Smaller square-shaped pieces — concrete slabs cast with steel, leather, glass, or other elements — utilize industrial materials in unexpected ways. For example, SHE HID HER FACE IN MY ARMS AND THE WATER STREAMING OVER HER HEAD MINGLED WITH HER TEARS(2016) is comprised of a concrete square layered with striated, woven carbon fiber-copper fabric, its face bisected by an embedded horizontal glass rod.



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This show is especially appurtenant considering Minnesota Street Project was itself a place of construction merely a month ago. It also acknowledges the Bay Area's current art moment. In addition to the debut of Minnesota Street Project, the home of conceptual artist David Ireland, at 500 Capp Street, was transformed into a museum; the new Diller Scofidio + Renfro-designed BAMPFA opened its doors; and SFMOMA, currently undergoing a major expansion, is set to reopen in May.

In this context, the show's title holds special relevance. The term refers to a black flag, which historically has been associated with revolutionary groups, symbolizing an ethos of "No Surrender." "BLACK STANDARD" salutes the resilience of the local art community which, despite the "tech invasion," gentrification and soaring rents, continues to lay exciting new foundations.



Phil Wagner, Untitled, 2016. Acrylic on canvas, aluminum stretchers, 96 x 72 inches. Courtesy of the artist and CAPITAL.