

LOS ANGELES

Li Yan at Morono Kiang Gallery

The Western feel of much new Chinese art makes me wonder if the international force of contemporary art isn't another imperialist device. But those fears don't apply to Li Yan's "Quotidian Truths," which is resolutely political and precisely aware of how it plays internationally.

The show consists of several large groupings of small paintings. Their style is painterly, a nod to Bay Area figuration, while Yan seems as prolific as the mechanically reproduced images he replicates: satellite maps, severely wounded bodies, a waiting room full of patients slumped upright with IV bags hanging overhead. Images of Chinese Olympiads, commemorative postage stamps, and other government propaganda are infused throughout the mayhem. It's clear that triumph and tragedy are equal aspects of government control. Yan uses the global appeal of contemporary art to further an international critique of his own government.

The title adds another disturbing layer to the show, reminding us that while our government's crimes are hidden overseas and largely escape the scrutiny of artists and news media, the Chinese government inflicts damage in plain view. Li Yan doesn't mimic Western art, but finds its lost potential.

—Christopher Russell



Li Yan, *Snippets 5*, (detail), 2008

HK Zamani at SolwayJones

The first thing you notice when you walk in the gallery is the large, tent-like dome structure hanging from the ceiling, edged in fluorescent tube lighting. To view the paintings, one must walk underneath the dome. If the paintings on the walls were as novel as experiencing the installation, this show, "Shelter from the Storm," might have been more interesting.

HK Zamani (the artist and Post gallerist formerly known as Habib Kheradyar) is well regarded for his pleasing Minimalist works employing stretched fabric over armatures on canvas. He is also a performance artist. His "Edifice Oedipus" performances starting in 2003 center around the geodesic dome structure, a tribute to the optimistic futurism of Buckminster Fuller with a nod to Zamani's earlier art involving fabric. Maybe the performances bring more clarity and meaning to his dome fascination. But these simple representations of domes (rendered in spray paint and oil on canvas) don't have the depth or sophistication to

make them memorable on their own. These "Burning Man" art/installations seem static and not fully realized. Even the "Flight" paintings featuring the dome tent caught in midflight on a large canvas sky seem deadlocked, without movement or joy. This show feels like a steppingstone to either more accomplished work around these themes, or a new direction for the artist might be in order. —Frank Rodriguez

Zachary Druckery at Acuna Hansen Gallery

In the "Summer Guest List" show at Acuna Hansen Gallery — a grab bag of non-represented artists invited by the gallery's main-staple creatives — is a video that will kick your ass. Artist Zachary Druckery's short video, *You Will Never Be A Woman...*, is a David and Goliath powerhouse. The press release says the video is "...a conversation between two trans-identified people," but this diamond's luster comes from the sublimation of such academic, institutionalized, gender-worn descriptions.

The video, played on a small monitor in one of the gallery's front windows (facing inside), begins with the ceremonial lover's knock at the door and the beginnings of prejudicial sexual slurs and insults directed at the other lover. Two white men (one transgendered, or embellished with breasts) spend the entire video hurling insults at each other in various physical positions and, as lovers' quarrels often go, encompass pretty much the entire apartment as the cozy stage for this cat fight. This surprisingly tantalizing, emphatic, warring couple do all the dirty work for us, so that witnessing the heartfelt conflict and resolution of these actors makes for welcome therapy where our own romantic relations melt down.

—Darrin Little

Robert Reynolds at Bert Green Fine Art

Robert Reynolds is not pussyfooting around. He's not afraid to offend your delicate, politically correct sensibility. His "Faith Machine" is a large kinetic sculpture consisting of a row of vintage school chairs attached to a giant bellows. The bellows blows smoke through tubes that connect to holes in the chair seats. On each desktop is the Arabic word for Allah written in neon. His unobtrusive commentary on education is accompanied by three lovely watercolor studies of the sculpture blowing smoke. Also impossible to miss is the 10-foot high nuclear reactor-shaped cone covered in relief sculptures of ancient Persian figures. And his Wheaties box features Osama Bin Laden eating breakfast instead of A-Rod.

If Reynolds' sculptures weren't so well crafted, they wouldn't be as impressive or purposeful. But what is most refreshing is the almost workmanlike practicality of his art. He doesn't believe in written artist statements. His particular perspective is there in the work, larger than life and in your face. —Frank Rodriguez

HOUSTON

Shannon Cannings at Anya Tish Gallery

Depicting beach balls, pink flamingos and floating devices, Photorealist painter Shannon Cannings has long been interested in the poppy colors and shiny surfaces of the plentiful, cheap plastics that fill our physical lives. Perhaps being a mother caused her to look more carefully at the ubiquitous plastic objects of childhood: Barbie dolls, inflatable kiddie pools and plastic guns. "Trigger Happy" at Anya Tish Gallery is a series of paintings of toy guns, meticulously rendered in bright yellows, reds, greens and blues. Unusually timely in their production, the paintings not only offer a gentle commentary on consumerism and the socialization of children — indeed, contributing to a decades-old conversation — they also evoke the more recent and much-debated "designer" pistols and rifles that are produced in toy-reminiscent colors like pink and blue, and are also available with depictions of child-friendly character Hello Kitty, designer labels Versace and D&G, and patterns including stripes, dots, and animal prints. The pistols and rifles flip the longtime public concern about toy guns looking too real: these deadly weapons look like toys, presenting a new possible danger for children and adults. Finally, and probably most poignantly, "Trigger Happy" reminds us that anyone under the age of eight has never yet lived in anything but a wartime United States. —Joanna Szupinska

NEW YORK

Laurel Farrin at Lesley Heller

Piet Mondrian's austere sense of beauty helps Laurel Farrin manage her life. In the project room at Lesley Heller she confessed to an austere lifestyle anyhow. In her hands, Mondrian's asymmetric geometries of red, yellow, blue, and black suffer only the most low-budget interruptions. As collage, Farrin appears to have added a crossword in progress, the logo from a pizza carton, a coat-room ticket, a photograph of Henry David Thoreau, a casual sketch, and other scraps. Are these her interruptions, her inspirations, or her necessities?

On inspection, even the abstraction dissolves into a found object. The white or off-white ground looks found and rumpled. The slim stripes look like elastic bands holding the collage in place. Is this what Mondrian meant by Neoplasticism — a new plastic art? Yet this too proves to be an illusion. Farrin has painted everything in oil and acrylic.

Her *trompe l'oeil*, like the straps of an old-fashioned letter rack, goes back to such 19-century models as J. F. Peto. Perhaps Mondrian has the last word after all. The Transcendentalists shared his ideals of spiritual harmony, and the confusion of artistic purity and function goes along with De Stijl's wish to encompass architecture and design. He even let loose at the end, with *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. But would he have ordered in pizza? —John Haber