

Artefuse: Alex Israel: Summer 2 at Almine Rech Gallery, by Colin Kean, June 21, 2017



Alex Israel's exhibition Summer 2 is now showing at Almine Rech Gallery. The exhibition features an automated sculpture of a pelican, a joint creation between Israel and artist Michael Curry, whose animal puppet design work appeared in Broadway's rendition of The Lion King. As with all of Israel's works, the pelican sculpture presents a symbol of simplicity that conceals its incredible intricate genesis. Upon its string being pulled, the pelican blinks its eyes and engages in a hypnotic and gracious movement as its wings flap for the audience. This hand-powered spring mechanism—simultaneously deconstructing and commenting on the animatronics of Jean Tinguely or Takis—brings to mind the simple yet multi-associational paper cut-out birds of Henri Matisse, or even Georges Braque's Oiseaux.



Summer 2 continues in the tradition of Alex Israel's work by exemplifying the ways art and entertainment crossover and co-exist. For Millennials, this crossover represents a relationship between generation and city, which Israel has acknowledged with the title of his monograph, b. 1982, Los Angeles. Israel's works are in many ways a continual, figurative self-portrait. Literally speaking, the outline of the artist's face (taken from photographs) factor into many of his works. Among the latest Self-Portrait paintings, one depicts a pelican on a Santa Barbara waterfront; this work served as a model for the flying sculpture currently on display at Almine Rech.



While the title of Israel's latest exhibition brings to mind the sequel strategy oft-used in blockbuster Hollywood, the artist's work is actually more akin to a documentary or biopic. Take another of his Self-Portrait sculptures as an example: using a cast of his own body, the artist has created three sculptures depicting surfers in black wetsuits, a cultural nod to Los Angeles. By showcasing the wetsuits as stiff sculptures without heads, hands, or feet, Israel is observing yesterday and today's Los Angeles while also peering deep into the future, to a time when his era, his city, and his people will be relics of the past, much like the Greco-Roman statues his surfers resemble.





Alex ISRAEL Views of the exhibition 'SUMMER 2' 10.06 – 29.07.2017
Almine Rech Gallery, Paris © Alex Israel
Photo: Zarko Vijatovic Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech Gallery.