ALMINE RECH

Alex Israel
Summer

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Alex Israel's second solo exhibition at Galerie Almine Rech, following up on 'Thirty' (2012), features an ensemble of his recent works – "Lenses" and other new works – staged in a configuration that asserts his conception of the exhibition as an event.

The exhibition revives the memory of 'Thirty', its walls entirely painted with a sky motif said to be Californian with resolutely pink and blue accents summoning the memory of Edward Ruscha's pictorial skies, via a new *Sky Backdrop Painting* whose craftsmanship and color range present a notable evolution, substituting orange tones for various blue hues and purple shades for pink ones, and generally speaking presenting a hazier appearance. Before being elements of the décor, these large pictures made in the Warner Bros. studio are paintings whose style and manner are each time put back into play by Alex Israel. Moreover, this is the structure itself for all the elements in his work, which combine several functions, several readings, and several critical intensities. Better say it now: all these rather pretty things composing his oeuvre offer several levels of intent–from an obvious ambition to simply delight to an acerbic yet irresolute criticism, this amplitude embracing as many possible approaches as can be imagined, inevitably leading the viewer into a palette of feelings that range from libidinal satisfaction to pure guilt.

When producing *As It Lays* at the beginning of the decade –a set of film interviews with well-known actors of Los Angeles's art and media life, from Bret Easton Ellis to Larry Flynt, Vidal Sassoon to Darren Star– Alex Israel has given the tone of an oeuvre that could readily be described as a portrait of Los Angeles. More accurately, it is the portrait of a certain reality of Los Angeles that is more dream-like than socially constructed and talked about; more cinematic, more televised and literary than journalistic. With an apparent casualness "à la Warhol" that characterizes the attitude he has chosen for these interviews, for instance,
Alex Israel asks movie director Oliver Stone, "*Does the avant-garde exist today?*" and receives in return the following answer: "I don't know what the avant-garde is". This is another entryway to the work of Alex Israel –yet it will be necessary to form an opinion about the nature of Oliver Stone's answer itself (*Is he serious? What does he really mean? Is this simply provocation? Isn't this merely reality? Is this a bitter observation or just a casual answer?*). Every single work by Alex Israel seems to carry the same contradictions, carefully refraining from solving them, enunciating them stylistically in the most refined and seductive manner.

The *Sky Backdrop Painting* in the exhibition isn't used as "décor", as is traditionally the case for an object (a "prop") temporarily borrowed from suppliers to the entertainment industry to compose the backdrop of a movie or TV scene. That these interchangeable elements whose function is to showcase and complement the painting are not sold with said painting constitutes a proposal that is for now an unheard of principle, calling to mind the glory days of conceptual art. Alex Israel would probably not be displeased to be considered as a sort of cool Michael Asher, totally adjusted to the reality of an artistic field violently reconfigured by the internet and its acceptance of the rules of the Spectacular Society. The *Sky Backdrop Painting* here is associated with a new, small polychrome sculpture representing a Chevy Corvette stationed near a cactus tree, that effectively used to be a "prop" once rented by the artist for a display, then finally kept and reproduced in a small edition of painted bronze ("*Yes the car is a Chevy Corvette –but the colors I chose are all from the Ford Thunderbird. The Thunderbird colors from that time were nicer than the Corvette colors. Also, the car has no steering wheel…*"). The painting and sculpture constitute an ensemble that builds a mini narrative: "*The car is on a pedestal in front of the sky as if it's on a cliff overlooking the expansive sunset. This tableau is sort of about riding off into the desert sunset at the end of a movie.*"

The three new "Lenses" in the exhibition are presented in a range of colors that is precisely the same as the one used for the sky represented in the *Sky Backdrop Painting*: yellow, orange, and purple. As with Alex Israel's other works, these borrow from various combined realities: the memory of California art from the previous century (Craig Kauffman, Larry Bell, DeWain Valentine), and are also a nod to the Freeway Eyewear company founded and managed by Alex Israel, specializing in the production of sunglasses that inevitably go together with the Angeleno way of life. In the perfectly diabolical structure of this work, each element is incessantly recycled, re-profiled, redesigned, recombined, re-mastered,each new adaptation strengthening the legitimacy of the previous ones by way of an advertizing logic perfectly accepted; and so the Freeway Eyewear glasses are largely used in the episodes of the web series *Rough Winds* (2011), where all the actors wear them in accordance with the very ordinary practice of product placement in the movie and TV entertainment industry.

The two *Self-Portraits* in the Paris exhibition, too, are the latest updates of a form that was birthed almost by accident. Initially created as a logo for *As It Lays* from the artist's own profile (similarly to Alfred Hitchcock's, who lived in Hollywood, and whose profile was destined to last), Alex Israel made an "official" portrait from this logo, borrowing its palette at first from famous paintings (from David Hockney to Milton Avery), and later on organizing the investment in this specific form with various stereotypical images from Los Angeles.

Alex Israel's exhibitions are always much more than the reunion of artworks (and other elements) that compose them: thought out as events that go beyond the works, they are powerful devices calling on all sort of strategies, including from the world of advertizing, to create situations quite naturally given to all kinds of consumption, including the current and triumphal one broadcasting perfect images methodically generated on Instagram or on fan blogs. It's a sort of soft perversion that evokes the behavior induced by the encouraged disappearance of Felix Gonzalez-Torres *Stacks*: to pick up one sheet from these *Stacks* is also to bring back home his most politically brutal stories.

Eric Troncy