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Art Now LA

Urs Fischer: 'Ice Cream Truck Democracy'
Capturing the Nuances of Los Angeles
Gagosian
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by Jody Zellen



As an artist, Urs Fischer is unpredictable and full of surprises. For his 2022 exhibition at the Marciano Art Foundation (another Gagosian space), he presented *Chaos #1-#500*. The front room of the installation consisted of long tables filled with hundreds of found objects in all shapes and sizes. In contrast to the actual objects, three giant screens were suspended in the back gallery displaying tumbling intertwined pairs of these objects as digital scans. In the scans any disintegration of the object was erased so they were seen as unblemished, as if new.

The source material for his current exhibition at Gagosian is a printed book titled, like the exhibition, *Ice Cream Truck Democracy*. In the book, Fischer fills the pages with photographs of things that caught his eye around Los Angeles: the sky and the street; facades and window displays; myriad cars, live animals and their stuffed counterparts. Some of these colored images are inverted (printed as negatives). The book also includes photographs showing his paintings in the studio.

On the gallery walls are large-scale blow ups of portions of these images that have been silkscreened to the canvas as a collage. Many are overlaid with hand-painted or stenciled elements to create a kaleidoscopic bombardment. Fischer emphasizes the fragmentary nature of Los Angeles and presents the urban environment as a montage of fleeting instances. When seen together, these fragments begin to coalesce to create an idiosyncratic narrative that weaves through the sprawling expanse of the city.

Schmalifornia (2022) combines photographs of advertisements of an upcoming reality television series (*The Come Up*) plastered on the walls of a construction site. The sidewalk adjacent to the posters is strewn with trash. In what appears to be a puddle or cloud overlaid on the scene is an upside down shot of the Los Angeles skyline. The work juxtaposes what is cliché and what is exemplary of L.A. For *Numbaste* (2023), Fischer montages two renditions (one positive, the other negative) of a headless, dancing, cartoon-figure originally painted on a wall over a green-tinted photograph of a craftsman style house situated on the corner of an L.A. street and partially blocked by a sign post with a banner for the Walt Disney Concert Hall. The textured figures have been screened onto the canvas so they sit above the flat background image giving the painting depth.

High Maintenance (2022) uses an image depicting a quintessential Los Angeles sunset as the background over which he composites a photograph looking into a store window where a

broken Batman doll rests against the wall below toy cars coupled with a tall blue inflatable tube figure located behind a bus bench whose sign reads “Just a Prick” (it’s an ad for HIV testing). Fischer pays attention to chance juxtapositions and through digital montaging also plays with scale shifts when compositing the images. While the photographs in the book are crisp and exact, he plays with opacity changes in the paintings while creating the final compositions to allow multiple layers to be seen simultaneously.

In *Mulholland Drive* (2023), he focuses on the twisting curves of the road. The original photograph depicting a sports car driving down the street is presented as an inverse, so the car’s shadow appears white rather than black, and the trees more light than dark. A painted abstraction fills part of the background paralleling the curves in the road and giving the image a sinister, nightmare-like aura.

Fischer cleverly transforms his photographs into evocative compositions that speak to the diversity of Los Angeles, not in terms of its population but in terms of the experience of the natural and urban landscape and how that defines the city. While the paintings are large composites, the book of photographs is a thoughtful and insightful document that illustrates the complexity of the city— a place where one can witness a coyote crossing one street and a stuffed monkey sitting in a tree on another. Fischer is an astute observer who captures the nuances that make Los Angeles such a unique and special place.

<https://artnowla.com/2023/03/30/urs-fischer-ice-cream-truck-democracy/>