

LOS ANGELES

**Rory Devine:**

**"we can plant a house,  
we can build a tree"  
at CB1 Gallery**

"We can plant a house, we can build a tree" is a lyric from the band Nirvana's song "Breed," which suggests hope and hopelessness simultaneously. Like the band itself, whose trajectory was curtailed by the suicide of Kurt Cobain, Rory Devine's paintings and sculptures explore the ups and downs, the trials and tribulations of life. Painted in a deadpan style, his 15 images inhabit the gallery walls like a frieze, creating a quasi-narrative. At the opening, a carpet of black balloons covered the gallery floor, popping every now and then, and making viewers jump. The balloons deflated over time, enhancing the sense of death and loss suggested by the paintings and sculptures.

Devine's paintings do have a playful edge and many are painted in bright colors—a nod to Pop Art and formalism. Yet for the most part, the works are embedded in a narrative of hopeless romanticism, nostalgia and disaster. The sequence opens with *Untitled (Hank Williams)*, from 2009, in which the words "THE HEALTH AND HAPPINESS SHOW" meld against a gray striped ground. The text in this work sets the tone for the exhibition, and Devine's subsequent paintings echo this ironic sentiment. The narrative that unfolds through the paintings becomes its own song whose tune is neither health nor happiness. The final painting depicts a cartoony blue bird against a pink-striped ground hovering above the words "BYE!" Nested between these remarks are paintings of flames, an upside-down portrait of River Phoenix, three vultures sitting in a tree as well as a graphically rendered surging wave.



"UNTITLED (BYE)," 2012, **Rory Devine**  
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 24" x 18"  
PHOTO: COURTESY CB1 GALLERY

The majority of Devine's paintings suggest danger. He distills the impact by the way he renders the work. In some he employs a cartoon inspired style, while in others he allows his facile hand to blend the realistic with the abstract. Devine's sculptures are less direct than his paintings. These table-top works recall Sam Durant's sculptures of case study homes, but rather than mock modernism, Devine explores doom and decay. In *Ruined Beach House* and *Ruined Beach Hotel*, expandable foam fills the interiors and protrudes from the windows suggesting the aftermath of a volcanic eruption. Devine's content, while invested in melancholy, is not devoid of hope. He is well versed in contemporary art (he ran a gallery in LA before moving to New York in the 1990s) and popular culture, and draws inspiration from the history of music as well as art, using these referents to engage the present as well as the past.

—JODY ZELLEN