

ArtReview

David Hendren *Echo's Drift*

5 Car Garage, Los Angeles 31 May – 30 July

Anna Meliksetian/MJBriggs, Los Angeles 7 June – 19 July

To see a work by David Hendren is to encounter a contraption, a ramshackle tool jerry-rigged by a tinkerer. By turns, a Hendren can recall the kooky side of Larry Bell, the varnished steampunk of Marcel Duchamp or, more to the point, the backwoods pursuits of a talented craftsman working in wood, glass, wire and sometimes paint, who perhaps dreams of machines but doesn't quite know how they work. His objects and panel paintings are charming, well crafted and nostalgic, though Hendren's nostalgia is less a longing for the past than a study of its relevance for the present. Modernist abstraction, in particular, is a concern of his work, as though the artist is trying to come to grips with out-of-date beliefs by using his bare hands.

For example, the floating shapes of Joan Miró populate *Drift Painting (In Seven Parts)* (all works 2014) at 5 Car Garage, which, along with Anna Meliksetian/MJBriggs, is hosting Hendren's current two-venue exhibition.

In Miró one finds the recognisable world giving way to the world of the imagination, the landscape of dreams flooding into reality and turning it into something strange, but in Hendren this abstract world becomes tethered to and anchored by the world of materials, of day-to-day repetition, of fading pleasure. Echoes of Miró morph and dance across Hendren's seven panels, but to these the artist adds an evolving drawing of two lovers, who come together and then break apart.

Usually in Hendren's work the diversity of his materials provides a platform for more traditional portraiture. A face, often abstracted, will appear among his built environments and devices. Anna Meliksetian/MJBriggs features small, intimate panels of such faces twisting into landscapes or fields of string and nails, like handmade craft objects that one might make at summer camp or find at garage sales. In *Cabinet Painting 2*, a face in profile wears its strings like a prison mask. In *Echo Painting 1*, another face

is reduced to swirls of black paint while a slash of cut copper accents it like a question mark. The lesson is an old one: the organic reality of life is never quite contained by the systems we use to describe it.

More references abound: Arshile Gorky, Wifredo Lam, Yves Tanguy and the fetish boxes of Joseph Cornell – they all make appearances in constructions that look like antique inventions. In this rustic Surrealism, one is reminded of the drawings of Billy Malone or perhaps the Arkansas poet Frank Stanford. It is no surprise that Hendren, too, is from Arkansas, a place where ordinary life can only be described in terms of Surrealism, a place where the sophistication of Southern Gothic gives way to its rougher, more physical edges. In the same way that Stanford once found Jean Cocteau in the levee camps of the Mississippi River, so Hendren finds Paul Klee in the wood shop, in the poetry of back-alley refuse and the white noise of radio stations. *Ed Schad*



Untitled, 2014 (installation view, 5 Car Garage, Los Angeles), wood, glass, wire, ink and fabric, 274 × 147 × 229 cm. Photo: Wild Don Lewis. Courtesy the artist, Anna Meliksetian/MJBriggs and 5 Car Garage, Los Angeles