

Meliksetian MB Briggs

# ARTNEWS

MARKET

## IGGY POP ON TRIAL, LONG ISLAND ICED TEAS, AND THE LONG GAME: AT THE 2017 EDITION OF ART LOS ANGELES CONTEMPORARY

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“Most learned spirits, I must confess, I hated jazz,” said the artist Todd Gray, who had just entered the theater at the Barker Hangar in Santa Monica as part of a procession that included a tall woman in white, two musicians in West African dress, and a guitarist in a hoodie. This was the first full day of Art Los Angeles Contemporary, and the theater was surprisingly full for a Friday afternoon. Artist Kenyatta Hinkle, dressed colorfully and regally, sat beside Gray, presiding over an odd trial: Iggy Pop, otherwise known as Jim Osterberg, accused of attempted murder. The trial also seemed, less directly, about blurry cultural appropriation and the theft of other people’s stories.

“Rock is the white man’s theft,” Gray said, quoting his father, who had been a jazzman and resented his son’s attraction to the devil’s music of the 1960s. As a new kid in middle school in Los Angeles, Gray met a kid named Danny Sugerman, a wannabe bully who attacked his future friend with racial epitaphs. Later, as the two boys became inseparable, their fights would be about things like the merits of Rimbaud. A “tiny slave trader gun slinger who isn’t worth shit,” in Gray’s opinion. “I don’t care what Patti Smith says.”

They were grown up and living in the Hollywood Hills, Sugerman as the manager of the Doors, when the alleged crime occurred. They went to dinner with Ray Manzarek, Iggy Pop, and Timothy Leary, who insisted that Gray “should listen to music by black people.” (“Have you heard of Miles Davis?” Leary asked). Then Manzarek and Sugerman went to the airport, Gray went to house sit for Manzarek, and Pop disappeared, not

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to be seen again until Gray awoke in a fume-filled house, barely able to breath.

The fair's events curator, Marc LeBlanc, who titled this year's series after the William Onyeabor album *Anything You Sow*, said he chose artists whose work has "a strong sense of narrative, and whose approach to making work largely personalizes the political and politicizes the personal." Puppies Puppies laid a red-suited body on a red carpet the night of the opening for visitors to sidestep as they arrived. Except for that, the programming had an introspective feel.

Now in its eighth year, ALAC opened on Thursday, the first major art event of 2017 in Los Angeles. The past year was a significant one for L.A.'s art infrastructure—new private museums opened, as did multiple international galleries—and the crowd size reflected that growth. By 6 p.m., just an hour into the VIP opening, the aisles had filled. Carlye Packer, the director of the young Los Angeles space Club Pro had trouble getting into her own booth at one point. The artist Devin Troy Strother, showing with Club Pro at the fair, had set up a vintage silver office desk for Packer to sit at, her presence part of the installation. To her left, two office water coolers held red and purple substances: Long Island Iced Tea in one, soda mixed with cough syrup in the other. Strother's collages filled a big bulletin board behind her.

Megan Bradley of Montreal-based Parisian Laundry had come to ALAC four years before, and found the energy this year

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different—fuller and also more inviting. She had visited a number of local collections and found their approach “more pleasant and sincere than in New York.” On Tuesday, she had opened a group exhibition called “PDA Lovers” at Four Six One Nine, the West Adams space that consultant and curator Simmy Swinder leases to out-of-town galleries. Bradley saw her presence in L.A. this week as part of a long game. She’s watched Canadian artists leave their Canadian galleries once their careers take off. She would like to keep her artists, and exposing them to new markets seems like one way to do it. Both her booth and the offsite show included loosely figurative, sometimes crass painted portraits of women by longtime Winnipeg-based artist Janet Werner.

Adam D. Miller of L.A. gallery The Pit sees the fair as part of a long game, too. An artist-run outfit, the Pit announced its first official roster last autumn, and its booth featured quirky sculptures by Nick Kramer and Erik Frydenborg alongside a subtle abstraction by Allison Miller. “For us, it really benefits the gallery in a big-picture sense,” Miller said, “providing exposure for the artists, and creating more sales opportunities for the year overall, opposed to just during the run of the fair.” He added that the turnout felt larger this year, but sales were about the same as 2016, The Pit’s first year at ALAC.

Like Parisian Laundry, Jessica Silverman Gallery of San Francisco had returned to ALAC after a four-year absence. “I love the curators here and the institutions here are growing rapidly,” Silverman told me. “We wanted to insert our voice into all the great things happening.” Alongside lush, repetitive new

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abstractions by Dashiell Manley hung a 1970s abstraction by Judy Chicago and 1960s paintings by Suzanne Blank Redstone, with glimpses of sky through architectural shapes. Redstone's composites of shapes, architecture, and landscape had been received well in L.A., Silverman said. "I think although Redstone made this work on the East Coast, she was well aware of the Los Angeles scene in the late '60s," she said.

Sometime after 8 p.m. on opening night, four women, part of the new, anonymous GAR collective, walked through the fair with signs to protest the gender imbalance of exhibitors. "GAR insists that galleries and collectors expand their vision and give women and people of color steady and equal representation," reads a press release the group distributed via email before the fair opened. One member explained that they had planned their action quickly, propelled by the energy of Saturday's women's marches, and they saw the fair intervention as a first step toward more Guerrilla Girl-inspired interventions.

Also spurred by current conversations about activism, Jonathan T.D. Neil of Sotheby's Institute had pulled together a Friday afternoon panel called "Art in the Age of Donald Trump." It felt raw and undirected—unsurprising, perhaps, given how young the "Age of Donald Trump" is. "My paintings can't vote," said Christine Wang, whose recent show at Night Gallery in L.A. was a religious apocalypse on canvas in which Angela Davis appeared as a saint and most other politicians (Clinton, Trump, Sanders) were tangled up in a Bosch-like scene. She said she thinks that artists to organizing and art-making, that being political through

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art alone is not enough. “We have a certain kind of organizing debt that we have to pay for,” she noted, adding that “alternative facts” and refugee-related disasters have existed well before this week. “Reagan made up this alternative fact of trickle-down economics,” she said. “I really hope that we can ride our feeling into action.”

The difficulty of acting might have been one subtle theme throughout the weekend’s performances. On Saturday afternoon, 23-year-old artist Jasmine Nyende wove the poetry of others into her own writing about growing up in Los Angeles and learning to care for herself, as both a person and an artist. “I’m going to be completely OK,” she said, quoting the poet Michelle T. Clinton. “All I have to do is calm down and change completely.”

**Todd Gray’s trial of Iggy Pop ended without a verdict. After he woke up in the gas-filled house, threw up on the stairwell, opened windows, and turned off all four stove burners, Gray said, he found Iggy face down on the floor, thankfully alive. Bacon, raw and cooked, was on the floor and walls, remnants of “the most ridiculous breakfast ever.” “You asshole, SOB, cocksucker, shit bag, you nearly killed me!” Gray wanted to yell. Instead, he left a note for Iggy, whom he always called by his given name: “Jim, last night you nearly killed me. I did not appreciate that.”**