

Meliksetian MB Briggs

ART AND CAKE

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Twilight & Lowlifes: American Life at Meliksetian Briggs

By Genie Davis, March 2017



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Just closed at Meliksetian | Briggs, *Twilight & Lowlifes* is a powerful group exhibition with work by Tami Demaree, Steven Hull, Jim Shaw and Kaari Upson. Curated by Hull, the show mixes dark comedy and darker themes with works often as witty as they are resonant.

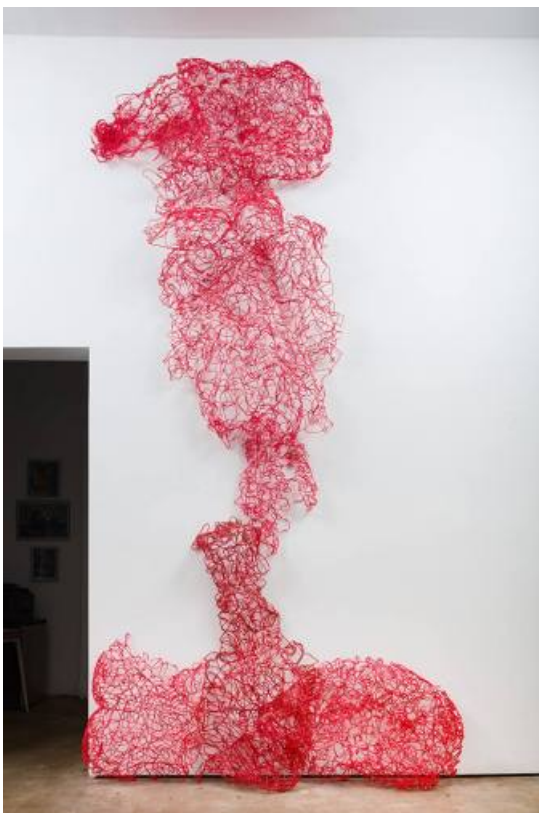
Viewed as a complete installation, the show features works that can be viewed as a vital and dark commentary on current American life and politics. Hull's 2009 installation of foam, wood, plastic toys, and umbrella with black gesso was ahead of it's time. "Sleaze" is every insolent pervert hiding under a dark umbrella or a convenient rock. The piece resembles a crouched human figure, and it's placement near Tami Demaree's "We're Gonna Spite the Noses Right Off of Our Faces," a feral-looking, two headed creature equally black both visually and spiritually, renders both powerful works all the more frighteningly visceral. Demaree's work, in acrylic paint and woodcut, evokes Japanese woodblock prints, and is demonic, wild, and impressive as a demigod. The dimensional aspects of the work literally and figuratively jump off the wall.



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Jim Shaw's harlot-red "Untitled (Variable Yarn)" is a tornado, a siren, electricity unleashed – a seductive and angry form that appears ready to sweep viewers off their feet. Made of fiberglass-impregnated yarn, the piece has a fierce energy that swirls from a surface that looks like lace, if lace was wire.

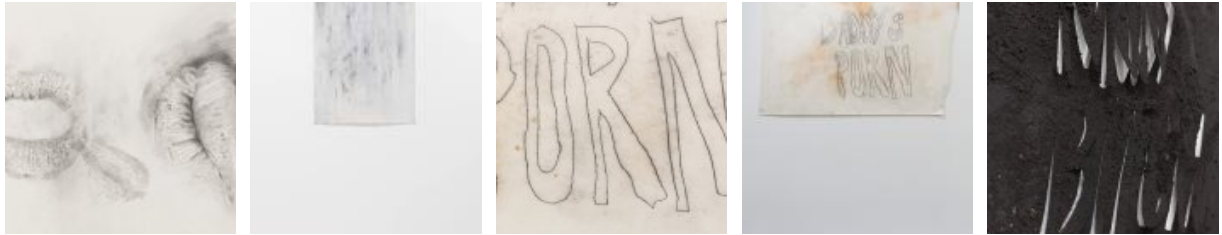
Wire-like imagery is also strong in Shaw's "Untitled" airbrush and ink on paper work, where barbed black patterns intersect with wildly curving lines, forming shapes in which one can almost but not quite view alien creatures, or the spiritual equivalent of static electricity.



Kaari Upson's "Cult of Invalidism," at a distance resembles a smooth, marbled surface with pale images carved delicately on the surface. The graphite and gesso on paper work presents an intricate, beautiful, and yet somehow frightening entwinement of nude figures. A smiling woman is the central, repeated figure. Juxtaposed with the raw text of Upson's "Daddy's Porn," graphite and Doritos on paper, the apprehension that's absolutely palpable in "Cult of Invalidism" becomes fully realized. The artist's "Moody Bitch" is a richly layered mix of

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charcoal powder and Doritos on paper, thick as volcano ash. The titular words are partially cut out of the surface, creating a wall culture whose texture is both alluringly touchable and yet somehow deeply foreboding. The phrase itself is ash on the tongue, so why not represent it as such. Similarly, the perfectly drawn lips of Upson's "Untitled," graphite on paper, are composed and positioned so that their voluptuous physicality also resembles slugs.



Hull's ink on paper "Carnevil" series features figures such as "Carnevil #3" with its scatological clown, and "Carnevil #2" with its ominous central figure, a face on a wooden saw horse observed by or perhaps controlling a man in his underwear and a naked, pregnant woman.

The doom and darkness that seems to inhabit each of these works like a shadow only half-seen is leavened with just a pinch of humor, a light in that darkness. There is an acknowledgement that no matter how bad things get, if we look at our fears head on, there is beauty in them. If we claim and redefine ugliness, we can explore how to defeat it.



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Hull's solo show, "Sheets Deprived of Wind" opens March 4th at Meliksetian Briggs, and looks to be equally insightful of the human condition, and the condition of today's all too intimate political state of mind.

The gallery is located at 313 N. Fairfax in West Hollywood.

