

VENUS

MANHATTAN LOS ANGELES

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5 ART SHOWS YOU SHOULD SEE IN L.A. THIS WEEK



Playing God the gritty way

Thought Field, Brooklyn artist Marianne Vitale's centerpiece sculpture at Venus Over Los Angeles, consists of 90 railroad ties. Each rusty, indestructible object is 40 feet long. Together, they weigh about 60 tons. Getting them into the gallery required industrial equipment and contract workers who know the railroad business — all the ties had to come through a roll-up door significantly narrower than they were. And it was raining the day they did the deed. But when you see the ties sitting austere on the floor, it's hard to imagine the muddy, wet, tight maneuvers. They just look as if they arrived there, to sit still, surrounded by white walls. The work in the next room is, perhaps, more deceptive. It consists of six stacks of 11-foot white pine rectangles. They look like they've come straight from a lumberyard, though only after enduring harsh wear and tear. Some are nicked, cracked, whittled to a point or painted with the orange and white stripes that signal "caution." Vitale received the pine blocks in perfect condition. The signs of wear are something she inflicted on each. She played God in the most painstaking, obsessive way: trying to exact the random, nuanced destruction that cut-down, cut-up trees endures when put to industrial use.

Science as fashion

“The Small Laboratory,” William Leavitt’s installation at Honor Fraser, conjures a mad scientist with good taste. Domestic objects — shelves, a television set, house plants — are strung together by electrical cords and clear-plastic tubing and lit from the sides by the kind of can lights used on stage and film sets. Leavitt, who has been working in L.A. since the late 1960s, wrote a play to accompany the installation that involves three scientists limited by their own competitiveness and aspirations. The play won’t be performed during this exhibition, but the objects have a minimal tastefulness that’s irrational for a laboratory. You sense an overactive obsession with what other people think. 2622 S. La Cienega Blvd., Culver City; through March 5. (310) 837-0191, honorfraser.com.

Poetry for justice

ArtShare L.A. is hosting its second “Requiem for Sandra Bland.” Writers, some of whom also work in the realm of performance art (Jen Hofer, Chiwan Choi), will read what they’ve written in honor of the life of Bland, the 28-year-old found hanged in her Texas jail cell after being arrested under questionable circumstances for a traffic violation. While members of Bland’s family refuse to believe her death was a suicide, no officers have been indicted. The “Requiems” attempt to use art to honor Bland’s life with the hope that doing so could encourage greater justice. 801 E. Fourth Place, downtown; Wed., Feb. 3, 7 p.m.; \$5. (213) 687-4278, artsharela.org.

Black cats, fierce breasts

The best two things about Allison Schulnik’s show at Mark Moore Gallery are nipples and cats. Schulnik’s painted and ceramic figures — all female, long-haired, loosely rendered and wild-looking (some are half-woman, half-horse centaurettes) — tend to have the most remarkable, pink, tube-like nipples at the ends of their breasts. They’re like weapons, guns that could go off. And then there are the cats, vulnerable and silly while the women are fierce. Writhing Boochie is a black ceramic cat lying on its back on a pink pedestal, looking like a diva who’s sick of being pretty. 5790 Washington Blvd., Culver City; through Feb. 20.

Let’s try to get along

Handwritten signs taped up on the way down to 356 Mission’s basement gallery instruct visitors not to touch the artwork and inform them that “guided tours” are available. You might not know why you’d want a tour until you reach the basement and see that artist Susan Cianciolo’s “kits” are lined up in closed cardboard boxes. Only a tour guide can open them and show you the arrangements inside. Cianciolo, a New York-based artist, has a fashion label called Run, which she’s crafted with the help of a sewing circle. Some of the kits, which have titles like “Let’s try to get along,” include full outfits. A few are tiny domestic situations handmade by the artist’s daughter. Some include notes to self. Not all the contents are equally compelling, but the intimacy of choosing which box, opening it with a guide, and rummaging through has enough charm in itself. 356 S. Mission Rd., downtown; through March 13. (323) 609-3162, 356mission.com.