

reviews



"LA NUESTRA SENORA DE LAS IGUANAS, JUCHITAN, OAXACA, MEXICO (OUR LADY OF THE IGUANAS, JUCHITAN, OAXACA, MEXICO)," 1979

Graciela Iturbide

GELATIN SILVER PRINT, 17³/₁₆" X 14⁷/₁₆"

PHOTO: COLLECTION SFMOMA, GIFT OF THE ARTIST
©GRACIELA ITURBIDE

stained glass origami and function like reliquaries, containing tokens of human brains and bones. The tiny video screens embedded in the group of uniformly cast, white plastic heads in *Recall to Mind* (2014) show found footage off the internet and read like windows on a sleeper's dream, offering perhaps the most directly stated visualization of the "Re:Mind" motif. The large, expressive figurative/abstract mixed-media digital prints on canvas in the extensive *On Mind* series (2014) use layering as a visual strategy, creating a graphic representation of the saturated state of simultaneity and cross-pollination in which this all unfolds. Up for debate is whether a lack of familiarity with the thornier aspects of progressive neuroscience theory detracts from the viewer's ability to articulate and wrestle with the issues at hand. What is not in doubt is that Chais' florid, opulent, chromatically saturated, and masterfully crafted objects—and the ephemeral moments they generate—are emotionally affecting, flat-out gorgeous, and engaged in a dialogue that both encompasses and transcends art history.

—SHANA NYS DAMBROT

BAKERSFIELD, CA "Photography in Mexico"

at the Bakersfield Museum of Art

Selected from the permanent collection of SFMOMA, "Photography in Mexico" is organized chronologically, beginning in the post-Revolutionary era of the 1920s and

"WELCOME HOME STRANGER," 2014

Rebekah Goldstein

OIL AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 78" X 64"

PHOTO: COURTESY CULT / AIMEE FRIBERG EXHIBITIONS

ending in the present. Because it spans so many decades, the exhibit offers a fantastic overview of 20th century photographic genres, including the formalist aesthetic of Tina Modotti, the sensationalistic tendencies of photojournalism, and the quirky "real-ness" of street photography. However, once the visual feast of extreme close-ups—tightly cropped to the point of abstraction—or dreamy lighting effects wears off, the viewer is left to ponder: what does it mean to be Mexican? Is there a singular Mexican identity? The success of this exhibit is not that it frames these questions, but that it refuses to answer them.

All of the photographers attempt to avoid stereotyping Mexican-ness, primarily by capturing known subjects in unknown ways and vice versa. The poor are dignified, the wealthy appear silly, and the ordinary becomes surreal. Héctor García, for example, photographed Frida Kahlo—the woman famous for her Aztec goddess-like self-portraits—in a very tired, unglamorous state. Positioning the camera low so that we look up at a woman carrying six iguanas on her head, Graciela Iturbide gives *Iguana Lady* (*La Nuestra Señora de las Iguanas, Juchitán, Oaxaca, Mexico*; 1979) a saintly appearance, proudly wearing her reptilian crown of thorns. A great example of how these images work together to refrain from portraying Mexican identity as "other," *Iguana Lady* is hung next to the very sensitive, very relatable *Caricia* (1989)—Mariana Yampolsky's moving portrait of a woman embracing a child. This push/pull of strange/familiar continues in the work of Lourdes Grobet, who explores professional wrestling as specifically embodying Mexican (though not exclusively masculine) identity, as seen in *India Sioux in Her Bedroom, Mexico City* (1983).

While the exhibit as a whole highlights the diverse *peoples* of Mexico, an interesting subcategory of the collection is "Mexico as site." Several contemporary photographers take an environmental approach, examining the effects of over-population. Pablo López Luz's aerial views of Mexico City capture rolling hills of nothing but housing. That the



series is in color is ironic, since smog blankets the massive city in a nearly monochromatic gray/brown haze. The effects of this urban sprawl are magnified by cropping out the horizon. In contrast, Edward Weston offers the viewer a purely aesthetic experience with his stunningly formalist landscape *Janitzio, Lake Patzcuaro, Mexico* (1926; printed 1946). Once again, the exhibit resists presenting Mexico as a singular, know-able place.

—REBECCA WELLER

SAN FRANCISCO

Rebekah Goldstein: "Passenger"
at CULT / Aimee Friberg Exhibitions

Meshing formal concerns drawn from the cubists and constructivists with a decidedly contemporary sensibility and palette, San Francisco-based Rebekah Goldstein's paintings evolve from her responses to things she sees around her, on the street or in the studio, as well as sculptural creations that she cobbles together. These tableaux may find their way into a painting, or images in a painting may serve as inspiration for sculptural objects, so that the referencing becomes a cyclical process.

The artist seems particularly interested in architecture, and the differing potentials of two and three-dimensional space, creating on the canvas structures which could not exist in the real world. She also is drawn to optical illusions; in *Welcome Home Stranger* (2014) black lines snake down the middle of the canvas, creating what could be viewed as a profile, or perhaps the outline of a house. The human presence, the "Passenger" of the title, is absent, yet implied. Large areas of gray-green, white and black segments act as a foil for bright areas of DayGlo hues of pink and yellow. Dense paint acts like a screen or window through which one may view the exterior "landscape." In *Just Don't Tell Me* (2014), the left edge and half the lower edge of the large canvas is rimmed by a narrow strip of brick red. A roughly rectangular shape in brushy hues of purple hovers mid-canvas, while a band of hot pink zigzags from the left. Other areas are left raw; in this context, white functions fully as a color and floats above the surface.

Entering the designated installation space—a holdover, as director Aimee Friberg explains, from the gallery's previous incarnation as a video room for Queen's Nails Gallery—one finds Goldstein's *Untitled* (2014). Offering a dizzying and lively immersive experience, the work evokes the German expressionist film "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" (1920). Off-kilter, angular lines and forms are blocked out on the walls in shades of black, white and gray. One large section is a leopard print; trompe l'oeil, replicating wood grain or fabric,