

5 Free Art Shows to See in L.A. This Week

[Catherine Wagley](#) August 30, 2017



This week, a veteran L.A. artist screens his abject filmic take on a children's novel, and a longtime New York artist puts wildlife specimens on a flatbed scanner.

Chairs on walls

The question addressed in “The Useful and the Decorative,” the current show at the Landing, is simple enough and fairly well-trodden: How does art relate to its “decorative cousins,” such as furniture, ceramics and other design objects? But the objects in the show are uncanny and virtuosic enough on

their own to make that age-old question (is it art or design?) seem very much beside the point. Don Edler made a chaise-longue out of surf wax, Styrofoam and board, carving hieroglyphic-style marks into the surfaces of the objects. Garry Knox Bennett cut a chair by Dutch designer Rietveld in half and attached it to a panel, mimicking its angular shape with painted blocks of black, gray and red. He called his wall-mounted chair painting *Half a Riet*. *5118 W. Jefferson Blvd., West Adams; through Sept. 2. (323) 272-3194, thelandinggallery.com.*

Kill for beauty

Artist Gene Beery's text paintings have always been relatively simple, but those up now at Shoot the Lobster are especially so. They're just plain white canvases with bold black words painted across them. "Humans Have Killed for Beauty," reads one. Another has the outline of a long-sleeved T-shirt on it. Text inside the T-shirt reads, "I've seen the graveyard of the unknown the used up and the crybaby artists." Beery likes to poke fun at art's self-seriousness. A series of his artist books sits on a high table against the gallery's southernmost wall. One, sitting beneath a drawing of a bone with the word "ART" carved into it, says, "Art was first discovered when it was named, probably by a non artist, perhaps a salesperson." But even if Beery suspects art is a bit of a farce, he engages in the joke wholeheartedly. *3315 W. Washington Blvd., Arlington Heights; through Sept. 10. (212) 560-0670, shootthelobster.com.*

Specimens through a scanner

To make the romantically blurred prints on view at Gemini G.E.L., artist Ann Hamilton put specimens from the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture at the University of Washington on a flatbed scanner. We see the chin and small hands of a brown greater galago, a nocturnal primate found in South and East Africa, and the long, proud head and torso of a kakapo ground parrot. The chest feathers of a falcon are sharply defined while the rest of the

bird's body remains vague and shadowy. *8365 Melrose Ave., Beverly Grove; through Sept. 19. (323) 651-0513, geminigel.com.*

Where are you, Heidi?

A man with untied black boots and bare legs walks into a barn, yelling, "Heidi, where are you?" Then we see Heidi, a puppet with golden-blond braids, through a high, heart-shaped window. She's being groped by a bald male puppet who will, sooner or later, plummet from that window onto the floor. So begins Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley's twisted and abjectly funny 1992 take on *Heidi*, the classic Johanna Spyri novel about a lovable Swiss orphan. McCarthy and Kelley's version includes a weird dance scene in which Heidi wears a baby-blue track suit and ends with Heidi in bed with two old men. The film plays at Hauser & Wirth this week, as part of a three-part series on McCarthy's video work. *901 E. Third St., downtown; Thu., Sept. 7, 8 p.m. (213) 943-1620, hauserwirthlosangeles.com.*

Strange cars and a ponytail

Artist Peter Cain seemed to know in the early 1990s that driverless cars were on the horizon. Certainly, some of the strange vehicles he painted had no room for human bodies. The tiny blue car in *EB 110*, a large oil painting from 1993, has two wheels, a front bumper, a trunk and little else. This painting hangs in the late artist's show at Matthew Marks, along with a number of other flashy, competent and futuristic paintings of cars and fuel stations. But the sole portrait in the show, *Sean Number Two* from 1996, is perhaps the most striking and memorable work there: Cain painted his boyfriend, Sean, lifting himself up from a white towel on the beach, as if he's just woken from dozing. The sky is cloudy, trees are visible in the distance, Sean's goatee is untamed and curly and he has a blond-and-brown lock of long hair hanging from the back of his otherwise close-cropped head. *1062 N. Orange Grove, West Hollywood; through Sept. 1. (323) 654-1830, matthewmarks.com.*