

HAW/CONTEMPORARY

An Appreciation of an Exhibition and Love Letter to Its Curator

Blair Schulman, Cupcakes in Regalia, September 30, 2013

An infinite Los Angeles. Fool's Gold. La muerte de un revolucionario and more, are on display as artist and curator Peregrine Honig debuts work reflecting on the American Southwest at the newly christened Haw Contemporary.

Mount explains the end is nigh, long live the end. The work is a chrysalis of meaning, texture and idealism in a part of the country that is both endless with desert and bordered by greed and politics. Honig's assembly of pattern mixing and esoteric connectivity accurately follows the journey's romance. With the idea for this show conceived during a recent stint at Landfall Press in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to etch a series of recent drawings, the romantic notions and harsh realities of the American Southwest were born. Anyone who has travelled this route is keenly aware the psychology of such a trip is drawn from the desert dust etched deep in your skin and the endless sky above.

Back in the 19th Century, the reason for heading out West from the already landmarked East was gold. And land. But mostly gold. Drowning yourself in precious metals was useless without water, however, Honig presents, side by side, two reactions to the necessity of the other. Jack Daws' Counterfeit Penny (2007, copper plated 18-carat gold) is a meta-play on the value of currency. The gold seekers of 1849, or forty niners, as they were called, paved the way for the destiny that would become California, bringing with them larceny, thievery and "flannel mouthed" talkers ready to separate the flush from their feathers. As Los Angeles became a heaven on earth, the politics of land ownership asserted its authority. The magnificent, and terrifyingly heavy, MacArthur Park Lake by John Woods (1978 pennies and marbles on painted board) is a reminder that gold sets the tone, but water makes the rules. Re-watch Chinatown, the 1974 Roman Polanski film about the 20th Century Water Wars and Woods' image of a drained lake in Los Angeles' MacArthur Park, once known as the Champs-Élysées of Los Angeles, is a remnant of that politics. Woods himself walked the drained lakebed in 1970, gathering a century of debris and incorporated it into many works over the years. This piece, a view of the park looped by mismatched colored marbles, reminds one of the never-ending traffic and ongoing arrival of people from all over the world that populates and energizes the city.

Further south, but with its own brand of politics that reverberate throughout the Southwest's landscape, is the stunning Cuban Rebels (The Last Supper) by Donna Huanca, (2007, father's clothing on stretched canvas). Huanca's father, Sergeant Bernardino Huanca of the Bolivian Rangers accounts: that upon facing a twice wounded Che' Guevara, the famed Marxist revolutionary, shouted "Do not shoot! I am Che Guevara and worth more to you alive than dead." His daughter, working from a 9 x 12 foot portrait of her father with Che Guevara and his gang in the Bolivian jungles, replicates the image exactly using her father's clothing. This piece, big, bold and exquisitely re-imagined, renders a juxtaposition of one's role in history with familial bonding. One has to stand far back to absorb it all. I'm glad Huanca doesn't rationalize this piece with the original photograph in the space. ... Rebels, practically a mural and worthy of one, relates more stunningly on a personal level than any historical handout. It is apparent the artist struggled with ensuring her father's clothing replicates the life of her

father in depth and texture, lovingly arranged, then folded and steamed, before finding its place on the wall.

If there was anything that seemed out of place in this exhibition, it's Gilded Gloves (Sarah E. Xeno, 2013, gilded etched copper and chord). Not that this isn't a beautiful piece, it is. And I feel the idea of boxing gloves shows the tough attitude that comes with belonging in the Southwest. Nothing comes easy and these gloves reference the precious gold so much a part of the regional history accompanied by the fight of staking your claim. However, I would have preferred to see it in a full rotation, and not up against a wall. The delicate boxing gloves appear to be made from threads of gold, replicating lace (Fool's Gold, again!) and deserves to be viewed in the round, enabling the light to pour through, catching glints of the glistening metal wherever one stands. Strung from the ceiling, or even against a small post elsewhere in the gallery would really have made this superb work more standout than standby.

To have allowed Honig full run of the Haw's multiple galleries would have engendered a fully engrossing experience, rather than limiting it to one room. However, she makes great use of the space and the work she presents, as well as its flow, is exactly right. Honig's attention to detail correctly nuances the romanticism of history with factual realization.