



Maurizio Cattelan's L.A. Art Tour, With a Stop at Jim Carrey's Painting Studio

-Maurizio Cattelan and Ali Subotnick

Fueled by kombucha, sprouted raw almonds, Whole Foods sushi, and chocolate-covered espresso beans with a very special ingredient, we traveled all over Los Angeles visiting nine artists and 14 galleries in four-and-a-half days while the majority of the art, fashion, and PR worlds flocked to the other side of the country for the annual mayhem that is Art Basel Miami Beach. After dodging the initial inquiries — Are you going to Miami? So, you're not in Miami? Why aren't you in Miami? — we began our quest in earnest to see what happens in L.A. when "everyone" is in Miami. (Our expedition was from November 30 to December 4.) The answer: artists inspired by Hollywood, anarchy, pop culture, the body, animals, vegetables, minerals, and a recurring theme of Surrealism, which reinforces the notion that anything goes in L.A., a city where artists feel free to take risks, fail, and experiment without the dark cloud of the market hanging over them.

Day 1

Our first stop (directly from LAX) was New York artist and gallerist (47 Canal) Margaret Lee's exhibition at Team (bungalow) in Venice. The second exhibition at the gallery's new West Coast outpost featured one chrome banana and one rose atop a chrome plinth set on softer-than-soft alpaca. It was raining, an extremely rare, newsworthy event, and it continued to pour for most of the week. During a brief respite from the weather, we popped in on Venice locals Liz Craft and Pentti Monkkonen at their home/studio compound. They showed us around their gallery space, Paradise Garage, and Nathalie Jones's installation in the window on the back alley. Craft gave us a sneak peek of her new, life-size marionette-like ladies that she'll be showing at the hip, new gallery Jenny's in Silver Lake next year and her giant bronze teepee with eyes in the yard. During the visit, Mexican artist and Venice local Gabriel Kuri stopped by with his kids for a play date and some pizza. Craft and Monkkonen are both sculptors who met while studying at UCLA (she was his TA and their teacher Charles Ray played matchmaker) and are key figures in the L.A. art scene as artists, gallerists, and co-founders of the coolest art fair ever, Paramount Ranch, which runs from January 31 through February 1 of next year and takes place on an old Western movie set in the Santa Monica Mountains.

Day 2

The next evening we popped in to see painter Alex Becerra at his Venice studio where he had been laying down some tracks with a friend. Becerra recently had his first solo exhibition of his so-bad-it's-good, goopy, and irreverent paintings at L.A. gallery LTD and there were several finished or nearly complete paintings in the studio including one of a naked lady playing the tuba, an office chair on a studio floor, and the tour de force Rex-Goliath (2014) depicting a naked black man lounging in a pose reminiscent of Manet's Olympia, his orange-and-yellow robe splayed open, an empty bottle of Rex Goliath wine on one side. The figure lies on a white ground built up with thick gobs of paint over two years. Becerra also showed us his handmade tattoos that he applies himself (except for hard-to-reach areas) and that cover his legs, arms, chest, and elsewhere. Becerra compared them to prison tattoos — very DIY — and told us how he started out as a self-taught tattoo artist and referred to the crude style as "bad lines, good intentions." He also showed us a giant book of his sketches — scanned, copied, and bound at Kinkos; thick as a phone book — that featured every good, bad, weird, and funny drawing he's made in the past few years — a taste of his process and source imagery for the paintings.

Next stop was Jim Carrey's studio. Yes, that Jim Carrey. He's been drawing and painting since he was a kid. And for several years now, Carrey has been making art that is as expressive and emotive as his work as a talented funnyman. One technique he has devised involves applying wet paint on top of a layer of dry paint and then scraping it off — it creates the look of a silkscreen from the lifting of the bottom layer of paint and remnants of the top layer. His imagery ranges from portraits of women to self-portraits, as well as pop icons like James Dean as a child, a baby gorilla, a mad elephant, and more. He often incorporates text and occasionally disrupts the paintings with slashes that he later stitches back together. His energy is boundless, and he's clearly having fun testing the boundaries of painting and sculpture. Carrey is also gradually inserting his art practice into his Hollywood persona — if you didn't catch it, he debuted a new piece, a Jeff Daniels puppet, on Jimmy Fallon, and it's a must-see moment.

After visiting Jim, we stopped by LACMA to see the sublime Pierre Huyghe show, a mind-blowing exhibition, filled with evocative beauty and wonder. The show is also quite groundbreaking for its open floor plan and meandering installation, which left us a little starry-eyed (L.A. will be its only American venue). And we caught Larry Sultan's inspiring show, which reveals a master lensman's ability to capture lives that exist behind closed doors.

Day 3

Despite the heavy rain, we started off with a visit to L.A. native Aaron Sandnes, who showed works in progress incorporating bullets, gleaming auto-paint paintings, bullet-wound drawings, and even a custom motorcycle. Very relevant. The studio is a boy's dream come true — it's filled with toys and weapons. Sandnes was bursting with ideas for ambitious works like a spinning-neon-hands sign. Definitely someone to keep an eye on.

Next up was a visit to Jonas Wood's exhibition of large paintings of ceramic pots and plants at the new home of David Kordansky Gallery in mid-city. We almost didn't get inside because of the rain (leaking was a prominent theme of the trip — keep reading). In typical L.A. fashion, we drove across the street to what is arguably the city's most beautiful gallery, **Kayne Griffin Corcoran, to see Mark Handforth's sublime exhibition of new sculptures, including an old-school telephone-receiver light sculpture, a turquoise star and giant coat hanger in the courtyard, among other works. Gallery partner Maggie Kayne set us up in the James Turrell perceptual cell for a little dose of Zen and then took us on a tour of the gallery's back room where we saw new resin works by Romanian artist Daniel Knorr.**

Next, we ventured to the new downtown gallery scene (actually more like east of downtown, not an easily named district). First stop, Night Gallery to see the new show, "Paris de Noche," featuring new Michael Jackson-face wall reliefs and truck paintings by Monkkonen (the exhibition's curator), Amy Yao ladders, and Andrei Koschmieder's corrugated fence paintings. A few buckets that could have passed for art revealed yet another leaky roof. Across the parking lot (this time we walked), we visited Francois Ghebaly Gallery (more leaking) to see the partially de-installed exhibition by L.A.-based artist Sayre Gomez with works in the back by another local, Joel Kyack. One highlight — his truck-nuts chair, which we tried on for size. We continued our journey through the rainy streets of industrial warehouses to see Christina Forrer's brightly colored, hand-woven tapestries at the new gallery Grice Bench (co-founded by artist Jon Pylpchuk). Here the leak came from under the front door, so buckets were useless. Forrer's weavings featured varying textures demonstrating her unique take on the traditional craft with startling imagery of dark fairy-tale-like imagery of girls and boys behaving badly and a portrait of a gypsy woman, among others.

Then a visit to Frances Stark's Chinatown studio; we met up with Stark and her muse/protégé Bobby Jesus. After an adventurous and drenched trip to Little Tokyo for lunch, which culminated in two flat tires, Stark showed us works around the studio and we watched her recent video of photos from her Instagram feed (What Goes on @threalstarkiller, 2014) as well as parts of her revealing video Osservate, legette con me (2012), which features Skype conversations between Stark and online paramours, set to Mozart's Don Giovanni. And before calling it a day, we stopped by to see the "Support/Surface" exhibition at 356 Mission Rd. (more buckets) and got a preview of Jay Chung and Q. Takeki Maeda's show of new photos in the basement gallery. The space, which pioneered the new downtown scene and is run by Laura Owens with Ethan Swan and others, is one of the most active, dynamic, and exciting venues in town, featuring exhibitions and programs that rival the local museums. Legendary book- and art-wares shop Ooga Booga set up an outpost in the front of the space so we couldn't help but browse the merchandise. We also met up with Joel Kyack, who, because his studio in the building next door had been flooded, gave us a run-through of his work via a slideshow on his laptop that he made for a recent talk at Pomona College. He showed images and recounted his outlandish performances, several fountain pieces, videos, and

multimedia paintings. The works are multilayered, humorous, boyish, and complicated, mixing survivalism and Surrealism in unconventional ways.

Day 4

After a visit to the Hammer Museum to see shows of Robert Heinecken, Jim Hodges, Frances Upritchard, Yuri Ancarani, N. Dash, and Mario Garcia Torres, we made a drive-by visit to Marilyn Monroe's burial site across the street, Pierce Brothers Westwood Village Memorial Park, where Farrah Fawcett, Don Rickles, Truman Capote, John Cassavetes, and Heather O'Rourke (of Poltergeist fame) were also laid to rest. Heading east, we stopped at Matthew Marks Gallery to check out a couple of flower drawings and two new sculptures by artist and UCLA professor Charles Ray (stainless-steel sculptures of a mime on a cot and a compacted car). We touched the art. Then we headed to the Koreatown studio of Kaari Upson, whose stellar show is currently on view at Lower East Side gallery Ramiken Crucible. Upson made us green tea and pumpkin pie and showed us her molds for her recent work. With her large-scale installations, esoteric videos, layered narratives, soft sculptures, and intuitive drawings, Upson could be the bastard child of Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, with a strong feminist bent. As the rain became lighter, we headed to Silver Lake to see Max Hooper Schneider's new show at newish gallery Jenny's. Inside we found a popcorn trolley turned aquarium filled with live snails, a retrofitted '80s treadmill with snakeskin printed on leather, and intricate drawings of amoeba-like shapes in bright colors, sandwiched in Plexiglas and suspended from the ceiling. The show is entitled "The Pound" and is a precocious, strange, and compelling work.

Moving on, we headed across town to the Culver City gallery district (no buckets there). We started at Susanne Vielmetter to see Dasha Shishkin's new large-scale, strange, and colorful drawings of people from another world and time, reminiscent of the turn of the last century (you can almost taste the absinthe) as well as new abstract paintings by Angel Otero. We drove (rain clouds hovering) to L.A. powerhouse and Culver City pioneer Blum & Poe, to look at new photographs by Florian Maier-Aichen — more fantastical imagery with impossible landscapes and digital drawings. We then walked (!) to Cherry and Martin to see new video/paintings by Brian Bress (Surrealist inspiration with a mix of Hollywood, humor, and art history) and discovered, whilst strolling down La Cienega, Jeff Colson's tromp l'oeil overfilled storage unit, Roll Up, at Maloney Fine Art. New York-based UCLA grad Sanya Kantarovsky's new video Happy Soul (2014) at nonprofit LAXART brightened things up with its infectious soundtrack and inventive animation projected over a wall with a painting, which plays an essential role in the video. Next, we saw an eclectic group show about collage, "Saying Yes to Everything," organized by former Hammer curator Corrina Peipon at Honor Fraser Gallery, and we finished the tour at China Art Objects Gallery, where new paintings of semi-biblical semi-mythological scenes, ethereal landscapes, and abstracts by JP Munro (husband of Christina Forrer) were on view. Whew!

Day 5

Our journey culminated in a visit with Dan Finsel. His studio walls were filled from floor to ceiling with large drawings of two-by-fours, photo stands, and an organic, exotic image of something like a pear with a butt and a vagina. Finsel showed us some video clips and detailed his plans for his upcoming show at Richard Telles Fine Art. The work stood out for its weirdness, originality, and intensity.

What did we learn on this expedition? The rain was gone, the sun was out, and the bright-blue sky returned the city to its normal state of endless summer. L.A. is teeming with inventive, creative minds exploring universal issues, telling stories — fictional and not — and sharing their trippy worldviews with the rest of us. Who needs an art fair?