

LOS ANGELES
ALEX CHAVES
 Artist Curated Projects

The surfaces shine. Maybe it's sweat. Perhaps the walls, the floors, the chairs and anything that surrounds the figures present in Alex Chaves's latest body of oils are perspiring with the labor of becoming abstract. Leaves bloom in interior space. Sinewy lines adorn the upholstery. A cherry hovers in the periphery. Lilies flower from a subject's ear. The palette is Crayola chic: canary, turquoise, candy apple. The paint is maximal, dramatic. Some-



Alex Chaves: *Baby*, 2014, oil on canvas, 22 by 18 inches; at Artist Curated Projects.

times it splits a body into its planar forms. Sometimes gobs of it line the lips of a canvas, enduring as a frame. The kind of lawlessness that prevails in these works is painting at its psychedelic best. Fantasy is always just a raunchy interpretation of the real.

But the queer hermeneutics of domestic space belong less to the canon of oils than to cinema's variously shunned and celebrated stepdaughter: melodrama. In Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant*, the camera never leaves the heroine's apartment, which is populated not by people but by the kinds of wretched feelings only German can name. Always failing to boil over into action, these sentiments emerge instead in bizarre compositions, perspectives, and extravagances of fashion and home decor. "I wanted to bring out the inner violence, the energy of the characters, which is inside and can't get through," Douglas Sirk wrote of his totalizing, saturated film sets. Chaves shares Sirk's lascivious eye for the odd corners in the hallucinogenic confines of the home. Rather than "ground"

and "figure," Chaves's work seems to demand the cinematic language of "mise-en-scène," or even behavioral psychology's "milieu." Indeed, the faces and muscles bifurcated by reds and blues, and the ghostly white silhouette of a face in profile that twice appears in a high right corner, should signal us beyond representation's worn routines of identification and desire, and toward a better investigation of the bizarre rituals of looking and being looked at, or the hysterical disjuncture between seeming and being.

Feminists invented object-oriented philosophy. Emerging in response to the interiorized morality of the 19th century, melodrama deals in the parallel between interior space and interior life, between women's place as caretakers of commodities and the absurd position of being commodities themselves. Of course, Freud saw melodrama as furnishing the essential machinery for the psychic horror of disclosing one's sexuality to oneself. Chaves revamps not just the anachronistic medium of oil but also melodrama, with its high-wire excesses of subversion and escapism. At stake is the pathos of interiors, both lonely and suffocating, the sublimation of feelings within things, and the drive that makes a Disneyland of every crotch.

Baby (2014) spells out "Baby" in a piquant script. Perhaps the perfect term to conjoin the artist's childlike palette and polymorphous perversity, what is "baby" besides a placeholder, an ultimately uninhabitable projection of the lover onto the loved, onto the half holy ideal/half thing? When Taylor Swift, in a triumph of a music video, throws herself and various housewares across the grounds of an ornate estate, slashing portraits of former partners with kitchen knives and her mind, she sings, "I got a blank space, baby, and I'll write your name." Melodrama discloses the glorious circuits of mutual exploitation that make each individual both culprit and victim. Poor baby, you always hurt the ones you love.

—Tracy Jeanne Rosenthal

SAN FRANCISCO
BENOÎT MAIRE
 Kiria Koula

In "Sticker Beings," the first U.S. solo exhibition of Paris-based artist Benoît Maire (b. 1978), things seesawed between order and chaos. As one approached the windowed storefront of the new art space-cum-bookstore Kiria Koula, polished vitrines contrasted with conspicuously threadbare items. The installation suggested a well-lit pawnshop in the middle of a move, or a sparsely furnished design store. This place of confusion is where Maire's work functions best, and where the philosophical tussle embedded in his project emerges. In the world he has created, the mundane and the marginal have cosmic—and sometimes comic—portent. His world asks questions like, What if all the choices made during the artist's process were still attached to the finished work like vestigial organs? Extrapolating from art, Maire also asks, What would it mean if humanity's technical mastery were just an extremely sophisticated charade to conceal a fundamental impotence?

Two sculptural installations, *Love being* and *Itself* (both 2015), occupied the center of the gallery. Each consists of a large acrylic display case housing a sundry assortment of stuff. The contents include photocopies of Balthus reproductions, a weathered wooden stick and a rough-hewn yet elegant marble hand pointing its index finger upward. Maire's categorization method, which involves convoluted decision-making processes described in the press release, divided these and the rest of the room's objects into two groups. Some were "decided objects." The others were "sticker beings," and had been unceremoniously tagged with adhesive letters. These sticker beings are rejected items from Maire's multistep process that he has nonetheless retained. If there was something dumb and synthetic about this binary organization, it was on purpose. By calling certain objects rejects, Maire allows them to come alive instead with the animistic force of the repressed; and he puts these castaways on the pedestal alongside the victors.

Dice featured prominently as a leitmotif. *One Tool Repeated* (2015) is a canvas emblazoned with silkscreened images of two identical dice frozen as if in mid-throw, while two versions of *One Tool* (both 2015) are silkscreens of a primitive arrowhead. The graphic, icon-like presentation of these man-made objects creates a schematic parallel between their functions: although arrowheads are for violence and dice are for generating random numbers, both are tools that give humans the illusion of control. They represent the Janus-faced nature of artistic production, which is a quixotic, almost faith-based combination of directed action and chance. This idea was driven home by a face-off between two flat-screen TVs flanking the room. They played in tandem the three-second video *Le monde donné à midi* (The World at Midday, 2013), which shows a tennis player whacking at phantom dice hurtling toward her blonde head, accompanied by the sound of a racket hitting a normal tennis ball.

Those wanting a more in-depth exegesis of Maire's project did not have to venture further than the adjoining bookstore, which is being slowly stocked by guest selectors rather than by employees. During the course of the show, the store displayed 10 books chosen by Maire on a single shelf (mostly contemporary French



cultural theorists), with more copies available for purchase. The bookstore and gallery do not always feature the same person; for the inaugural program, Paul Chan selected the books for the store, while Ilja Karilampi and José León Cerillo exhibited in the gallery. The bookstore will accumulate titles with each ensuing rotation, becoming a symbiotic, intellectual barnacle for the gallery. The double function of the venue is a reminder that art is supposed to be a platform for the exchange of ideas.

—Linda Mai Green

PORTLAND, ORE. JULIA STOOPS Upfor

Over the past two decades, Julia Stoops has forged a multifaceted career in Portland, founding a design studio, teaching art, writing fiction and showing her paintings at various venues around the city. Her resume includes an international background (New Zealand, Australia, Japan) and academic degrees in philosophy and linguistics as well as in art. Forty-six new paintings (all 2014) made up her first exhibition at Upfor, charging the gallery with eye-popping color.

In these pictures, each 16 by 12 inches, Stoops conjures galaxies of flying orbs, rings, saucers and enigmatic vessels. Abstract passages of apparently spontaneous brushstrokes and splashes coexist with illusionistically rendered motifs, some of them computer-generated, to create a heterogeneous universe alive with engaging pictorial incident. Skeins of drizzled white or pale-blue acrylic paint suggest planetary orbits or the trails of vanished comets, while warped grids and floating spheres, diagrammed by longitude and latitude lines, map a visionary space-time continuum. Helixes, vortices and torrents of colored dots animate the cosmos Stoops creates.

