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## AROUND THE GALLERIES

### It's alive! With wit, diversity

By CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT  
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Just about the only thing missing from the exhibition "Some Paintings" is an exclamation mark at the title's end. A whopping 81 paintings by 80 artists, most made recently; here is a show that wants to make a point.

And it does, with wit, verve and considerable taste. If the taste is not always mine, or yours — well, that seems to be part of the point. The absurdly large numbers of artists and works lampoon the similarly absurd yet now nearly 40-year-old pseudo-argument over whether the practice of painting is alive or dead.

At Track 16, the third LA Weekly Annual Biennial lines every wall of the gallery's six expansive rooms. The paintings are large and small, and the artists range in age from their 80s to their 20s. Some works, such as Carter Potter's "Love Coffin," a sofa-size concoction built from — yes — actual sofas stripped of fabric, interlocked and then slathered with paint, even leave the wall behind, opting instead to stand (or couple) on the floor.

Paintings by established artists, some of international renown, including David Hockney, Ed Moses, James Hayward and Llyn Foulkes, hang in proximity to those of artists new to me. Younger artists are numerous, but perhaps most



'SOME PAINTINGS': Carter Potter's "Love Coffin" is surrounded by other works at the third LA Weekly Annual Biennial exhibition at Track 16 gallery in Santa Monica.

are at midcareer — the difficult hurdle at which many artists stop or get overlooked because they're no longer fresh or are insufficiently prosperous. Others continue, with or without booming commercial success.

The result is a show that yields a kind of visual ADHD. A visitor floats like a butterfly, looking for a painting that stings like a bee.

Esther Pearl Watson's mixed-media painting of a tin-foil flying saucer that has landed in a low-rent suburban neighborhood in Garland, Texas, employs a knowingly false outsider-artist style to insinuate art's visionary capacity. Nick Lowe conflates drawing with painting, using skinny

brushes in lieu of pencils to render a beautiful array of portrait heads of the paradoxical inhabitants of "Ugly Town."

Sandow Birk, working with graffiti artist Devin Flynn, creates a surprisingly pedestrian, Jacques-Louis David pastiche of noble virtue set in the 'hood rather than republican Rome. Marie Thiebault paints churning urban abstractions in quick, linear, multicolored marks. (They suggest a looser, less dynamic combination of Julie Mehretu's and Kevin Appel's paintings.) David Amico's addition of thickly painted, vaguely organic brown tracery on a yellow inflatable life raft transforms a rescue vessel into a dreamy, untroubled glass-

bottom boat.

Painting is a metaphoric eruption of puzzling chromatic sunspots in Mark Dutcher's kaleidoscopic abstraction. Space creatures with open, up-raised palms swell up from thick, dense gobs of paint in Allison Schulnik's "Greeting," which implies that paintings might be alien images, but they come in peace.

Constance Mallinson's sepulchral "Corpse" suggests a rather different painterly condition, while Monique Prieto's sign language, intentionally difficult to read, demands that viewers slow way, way down. Given our excitable, commercially mediated image environment, Mallinson and Prieto

each emphasize a demanding virtue of painting.

The selection follows no particular theme or unifying style, but LA Weekly art critic Doug Harvey, who acted as guest curator for the show, plainly likes his paintings messy. Except in a few isolated cases, such as Tom Knechtel's exquisitely rendered hyper-realism, neatness doesn't count. Hard-edge abstraction is essentially missing in action.

Expressionism, especially with a finely honed sense of the ridiculous (and occasionally a psychedelic twist), is the show's primary dialect, as it is in the gifted critic's writing. That seems to be the chief implication of "some" in the title, "Some Painting." It can be a limitation. Some works make me want to stare for a long time, then come back and look again, while others make me want to — well, not exactly pluck out my eyes, but at least apologize for the abuse.

Still, for a show that means to mock the dilapidated idea of painting's demise, which lingers among autocratic types in dusty corners of the academy, the absurdist attitude is more than apt. It also makes for the biggest, liveliest free-for-all of art since "Supersonic," the eight Southern-California-graduate-schools extravaganza in 2004.

**Track 16 Gallery**, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 264-4678, through Feb. 16. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.track16.com](http://www.track16.com)