

LA WEEKLY



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Credit: Bianca Tribuzio

HOW ALLEN TOMBELLO HOPES TO DISPLACE YOUR PERSONAL SPACE WITH PSYCHO-TRIPPING DOPPELGANGERS

JOSEPH LAPIN

On Saturday, Sept. 8, one of the biggest nights for art galleries and opening receptions in Los Angeles, a subtly strange and awkwardly stunning show opened in an old airplane hangar at the Santa Monica Airport. In the entrance of the hangar, people were standing around sculptures and installations, wondering, sometimes, what was the art — and what was just part of the room.

“I hope it comes together in a really awkward and odd way that I like,” says Allen Tombello, curator of “Doppelgangster — The Prequel.”

On first walking into Arena 1, gallery-goers notice two red bollards — the metal poles used to cordon off areas or separate cars in parking lots. And, since they're close to the parking lot, it initially appears that they're not a part of the show.

But upon touching them, it becomes that they're made of cardboard and papier-mâché — followed by a moment of embarrassment for touching a piece of art.

Then, straight ahead in the Center Gallery, there is a pair of golden parking blocks, chunks of Chicago snow, a bicycle stitched out of vinyl, toilet-paper sculptures and a blank “For-Sale” sign used by real-estate agents. It's all very strange.

“Everything is a little off; nothing is centered,” Tombello says. “All of a sudden, you're looking at the plugs on the wall, and you're wondering, is that in the show?”

At first glance, the show struggles to live up to its promise. “Doppelgangster — The Prequel” was pitched as an expression of the uncanny, doppelgangers and the uncanny valley; installation and sculptures were supposed to create “psycho-spatial displacement” in order to challenge the viewer's preconceived notions of the objects they see every day, forcing the viewer to reflect on their identity in relation to space. Whew!

Here's how Allen Tombello, curator and artist, described “psycho-spatial displacement” in an interview with the *Weekly*: “It makes you cock your head to an angle and makes you sort of readjust and makes you sort of aware of yourself in space. Because most of the time, we're not aware ... but I think these objects push you back a little. So there is a moment, maybe, of self-awareness. The best I can hope of approaching the uncanny.”

Allen Tombello chose the name for his event, “Doppelgangster — The Prequel” — because he believes the images and objects are sneaky; they're unsettling to your mind. He hopes the viewers will become suddenly aware of the relationship of their own identity to the objects. And maybe, the observers become aware that they're objects, too, which is the uncanny element.

“So if you get these artists,” Tombello said, “and you start to sort of undermine that or change the nature of these objects and these subtle ways or change what they're made of ... they can have an impact on identity, and the way we sense our world around us.”

But “Doppelgangster — The Prequel” is not an event you can rush through. It's quiet and subtle. For example, Margarita Cabrera's Carrizos 2 and Agave 1 initially appeared to be just fake cacti placed in pots throughout the gallery, but on closer inspection, it becomes evident that the cacti is actually put together by intricate needle work and constructed out of border patrol uniforms. On some of the cacti, there are intricate vignettes that tell stories of the immigrant experience.

Doppelgangster – The Prequel

Exhibition Artists:

Margarita Cabrera

Joshua Callaghan

Farrah Karapetian

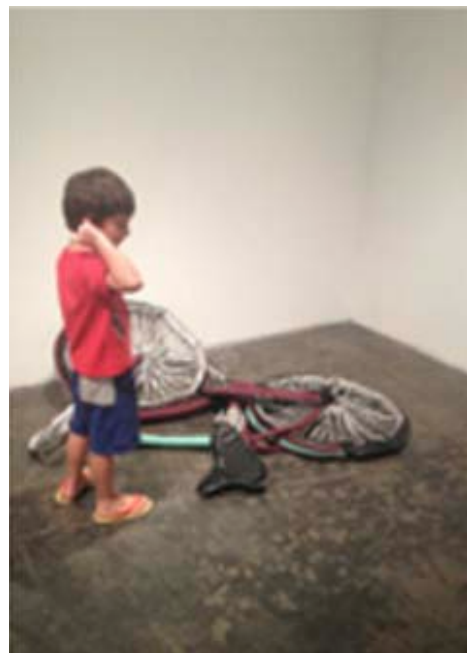
Amanda McGough

Amy Sarkisian

George Stoll

Vincent Szarek

Jennifer Wolf



Credit: Bianca Tribuzio

Then in the East Gallery, there is a “sponge painting” — though it seems more like a sculpture — by George Stoll. Picture two of those cheap, neon sponges from your sink. Now put a yellow and blue one together and then an orange and teal together and hang it on the wall. Bingo, art. In a way, though, it's kind of a brilliant critique of color theory and what contemporary artists can get away with; it's also asking the viewer to reexamine an object they see every day — to look at the colors and the vibrancy in your everyday life.

And after some time, it starts to hit — by creating slight variations on the objects being represented, Allen Tombello wants the viewers to feel a sense of wonder in the ordinary. The hope is to curate a moment where the viewer's surroundings, and space, are altered. “All of a sudden when the world tilts a little bit around you,” Tombello said, “that's one of the coolest things that can happen to you.”

If you're expecting the uncanny to hit you over the head — like the name doppelgangsters implies — you might be disappointed by this show. But if approached in another way, a slightly odd and funky way, you will find humor and delight in the ironic take on the minutiae of everyday.

“Doppelgangster — The Prequel” is on view through Sept. 30 at Arena 1, 3026 Airport Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 397-7456, santamonicaartstudios.com

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