

PRETTY PROFANE

Bright colors and brown skin. Rhythmic textures and even, shiny surfaces. Goddesses and ghouls. Vixens and Victoriana. Breasts and beasts. This is the stuff of our time, the stuff of "Pretty Profane", an exhibition that unites a pair of artists whose technical skills and conceptual acuity are matched by their searing wit. Paul Torres' painted images and Linda Vallejo's repurposed objects will create a space where visual tension is optic – immediate but inviting, jarring but amusing, and serves to stimulate a conversation about visions and realities of contemporary American culture.

Paul Torres' paintings show enough skin to make you want to come right out of yours. His subversive brand of satire comes in the form of Los Angelean stereotypes that turn on themselves and then demand that the viewer do the same. Given only a superficial glance, the images look just that, but in reality they are multi-layered tableaux vivants, hyper-allegorizing the human condition like a doctor of sociology with a paint brush for a pen, an eye for the sumptuous and a sense of humor. Just when you think you've wrapped your head around "the" story, he presents you with yet another one. The sexy sirens in the eponymous series scry the viewer with their mirrors reminding you to take a deep look at yourself, as part of a wider world regardless of the company you keep. Torres' paintings present in an equal parts a shocking and gratifying experience, and vindication for those of us that live another day in the morally ambiguous Mecca that is Los Angeles.

Sculptures from Linda Vallejo's series "Thugs and Ho's" and "Make 'Em All Mexican" also offer biting social satire of sexual and racial politics. Far and away from the nature-based imagery upon which she built her career, with these objects Vallejo has proven ~~that~~ not only that she is a master of reinvention, but that she is on the pulse of America's social climate. She's taken its temperature and decided that laughter is the best medicine in a madly cosmetic world. In works like "Superheroes and Supermodels," Vallejo represents a cast including "The Caped Crusader" and vamped out versions of beauty icons on repurposed Greek-style vases, reconstructing cleverly kitschy pantheons to tease postmodern worshippers of celebrity. Vallejo toys with the viewer's perception and attention by using the same color palette as those found in classical pottery. These vases sit on pedestals adorned in Giclée prints of her original paintings, playfully defying constructions of the original, irreproducible fine art object, interrogating the status of authenticity and originality. From

her "Make 'Em All Mexican" series, objects like "Dandy" avail a reality for minority queer folk. Largely invisible to the "majority culture" and often ostracized by their own often socially conservative culture, the identity of the Latino queer exists in the margins. When Vallejo paints her objects brown, she calls it "destroying the image." In this context, she's symbolically destroying the exceptionalism of the majority culture to celebrate identity regardless of ethnicity.

Although Humans have historically excelled in the art of judgment to testify to one's moral compass or good taste, this action only ~~but~~ serves only to defame and dehumanize humanity as a whole. Vallejo's images visualize an alternate, more egalitarian order, while Torres' narratives construct a perversely hallowed vision of the inhabitants in our hometown. This exhibition exists as an open-ended question, with moments of laughter to smooth gritty responses, to interrogate the gambit of these social dynamics and political realities.