



Bob Zoell's work Gary Leonard

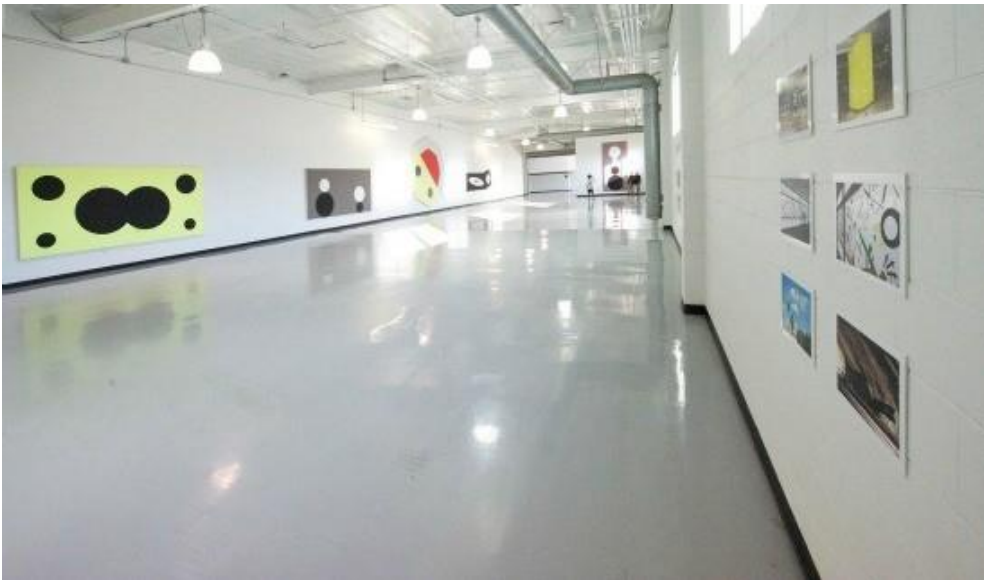
Flag Stop Art Fair: South Bay Lexus Dealership Becomes an Art Gallery

SHANA NYS DAMBROT | SEPTEMBER 12, 2011 | 9:50AM

The [Flag Stop](#) art fair at South Bay Lexus in Torrance over Labor Day weekend wasn't billed as an art fair, but instead as an "alternative art experience." In truth, it was both, with elements ranging from a major survey of the work of Bob Zoell curated by Howard Fox, to the "Pod Alleys" outside the building in which rows of moving and storage crates functioned as micro-galleries.

By and large, both exhibitors and attendees reported that good times were had at the test-drive, if you will pardon the pun, of what the organizers hope will become an annual event. Future locations may vary, but the inaugural Flag Stop's encampment on the grounds and in the buildings of this luxury car dealership made for a curious context that was both surreal and familiar.

Many of the people in charge were exhibiting artists themselves, and that made for a palpable difference in overall vibe, which was both professional and casual. The majority of the staff was made up of artists, such as director Tm Gratkowski and event planner the tireless Tiel Park, who along with associate director Nick Lisica and the rest of the main committee invited participants from the broader professional L.A. art world in an organic process that, while resulting in a bit of aesthetic unevenness, achieved an impressive quality and variety of individual installations.



Bob Zoell's work **Gary Leonard**

The larger-scale exhibition installations inside the building's garages and sprawling lobby, especially the Zoell and the group shows curated by William Moreno, Scott Canty, and Lily Siegel, made explicit the similarities in the displaying of artistic luxury goods and automotive ones, creating a sense of spectacle.



Ahree Lee and Brett Armory, *courtesy of William Moreno Contemporary*

Several artists took the opportunity to create impressive and semi-site specific installations that activated otherwise inconvenient or under-used areas throughout the building itself, such as dark hallways and



Marilyn Lowey's work

Throughout the weekend, Flag Stop featured lively panel discussions and performances ranging from dancers and musicians to more interpretive actions that were far preferable to the usual barkers and sales reps that usually work the crowd at a car lot.



Back outside, viewers were initially greeted by a block of overly



Traditional art-society exhibitions, watercolor landscapes and the like, but soon enough, pods belonging to painter Christopher Mercier and collagist Tm Gratkowski offered the first of many breaths of fresh air, and the quality of the work, though uneven, steadily improved as viewers encountered more and more innovative uses of these temporary spaces.



Besides the clear crowd favorite, the sponge-wall environment by Olga Lah shown above, the dozens of pod shows alternated between innovative individual installation pieces and more traditionally formatted exhibitions. For example, the gallery-in-miniature installed in three pods belonging to Offramp Gallery, which included works from gallery artists Mark Steven Greenfield, Quinton Beimeller, Susan Sironi and Chuck Feesago. Offramp Gallery



More cheeky, so to speak, installations like Johnny Naked's well- appointed sets for staging live nude model-drawing sessions and Carrie Sinclair Katz's room designed for the benefit of feline art-lovers -- not cat-lovers, but actual cats -- made the best use of the event's spirit of adventure.



Steven Hampton's "Super Salon" was an exercise in comfortable maximalism, with a color-riot of a group show. Super Salon

DEN contemporary's Michael Napper was just one of several artists, including Olga Lah and Susan Sironi, whose art featured diverse forms of destroyed or altered books -- a fact that may not have been so striking to me in a different locale, but which in lieu of the shiny-toy consumerism of the place, seems worth noting. Besides DEN and Offramp a number of galleries like l2kontemporary



Neuartig, and LAMAG took the opportunity to show off smaller works in groups shows from their programs, mixed with the occasionally inspired nod to the unusual circumstance. The use of pods in this manner is becoming more typical at fairs like Basel, where they are nevertheless on the margins, and not the groovy main attraction as they were in Torrance.



Shizuko Greenblatt

While the format of certain installations certainly responded to the circumstance, surprisingly few artists chose to show or make work that dealt specifically with the role of industry, sustainability, and decay that one might have expected more of in such a setting. Sculptor Shizuko Greenblatt's uneasy meditation on these issues was a notable exception.

The best pod concepts overall did tend to be the instances where artists were allowed to create miniature environments rather than trying to tame the pod or remake it as a clean white box.

A great many of the pods featured installations that occupied the corners of the "rooms," which was not only helpful for audiences trying to get inside the 100 or square feet of each, but which helped to keep the experimental nature of the layout at the forefront of the experience, despite its overall resemblance to the mainstream Labor Day ritual of the car-lot shuffle.