MICHAEL LAZARUS
SISTER GALLERY - LOS ANGELES


Michael Lazarus is the consummate trickster. In his show at Sister, Lazarus exhibits six small paintings in the large space. The bright white walls amplified the size disparity, but the talismanic paintings pull one in closer, as if these hypnotic pieces were to reveal hidden mysteries of the collective unconscious. Each of the six wooden pieces contain similar metaphorical motifs: symmetrically carved smiling faces that resemble masks, skulls, serpents, mirrors and geometric prisms. They are precisely painted with vibrant hues of blues, reds, greens and collaged with flesh tones cut out from skin magazines, and photographs of congested city scenes and natural landscapes.

Lazarus lures the viewer with candy colors and provocative placements, but the seduction quickly turns ambiguous. In Echoing (2008), pink and red lines draw one’s eyes to the center where a flesh-colored snake spirals into the mask’s mouth. Looking in closer, the snake’s skin is also made of far-off snapshots of a city. Placed in the center of its body a tiny, circular mirror reflects the viewer’s image. Lazarus tempts the viewer with the proverbial forbidden fruit to remind that once the darkness is revealed, it can never be the same.

Anat Ebgi

JOHN OPERA
ANDREW RAFACZ GALLERY - CHICAGO

JOHN OPERA, Zoor, 2006-08. Digital print, 177 x 160 cm. Courtesy Andrew Rafacz Gallery, Chicago.

The title of John Opera’s exhibition perhaps misses the mark: “Zoor,” the image ostensibly headlining this contemplative group of photographs, is in fact the anomalous touch. Opera’s works are quiet, calm notes on two themes. The first focuses on refining an abstract syntax of shapes and tones produced through durational photographic processes, while the second concentrates on the generic codes of landscape photography. There is a strong sense of visual and thematic interplay between these parallel tracks.

Darker Diamond is a particularly strong example, a subtle piece in which a series of narrowing, rotated ochre squares produce a penumbra of tonal variations from black to inky-yellow and gray. Each shift in color marks a new exposure on the print, each demarcating line retaining the soft edge of a hand-printed photograph, and drawing an understated line of connection to Surrealist painting. In Forest, Opera’s careful framing of a clearing in the woods foregrounds detailed texture, like the patterning of organic debris on the forest floor. It is precisely the absence of obvious narrative elements in this image (as distinct from Zoor, which features a brooding hermit-figure) that allows Opera’s fascination with dialectical visual play to swim so compellingly to the surface. 

Michelle Menzies

KNUT HENRIK HENRIKSEN
HOLLYBUSH GARDENS - LONDON


There is something clever about Knut Henrik Henriksen’s work that suits the intellectual atmosphere of Hollybush Gardens. The light from the industrially sized windows pours in on these new works of steel; sculptures that rest easy on their individual transport crates. Not just the objects, but the containers themselves have become the works of art; the minimal forms appear temporary on these ‘right way up’ wooden boxes, as if undecided upon and recently unwrapped. Collectively entitled “Monuments of Doubts,” these sculptural objects appear to be based on configurations of precise trigonometry, curves and straight lines that fold and turn these manageable sizes of steel into pleasurable shapes.

These monuments of doubt are slightly stiffed by Henriksen’s exercises in formulation. It is a genuine wonder to see such objects that resemble something of the aura of Brancusi’s works; however Henriksen’s intentions suffer from an idea that runs dry, and wonder turns to doubt. Henriksen’s success came previously with his architectural interventions. The works on view here only slightly succeed in their qualified ambition; their occupation of space, their color and materiality archive something quite elegant and their simplicity is enlightening, yet these works merit criticism not criticality.

Rajesh Punj

ZSOLT BODONI
FA PROJECTS - LONDON

ZSOLT BODONI, Monument n° 3/02 (detail), 2000. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm. Courtesy Fa Projects, London.

Zsolt Bodoni’s large, loosely worked acrylic and oil paintings, which depict 19th-century Hungarian monuments in a war-ravaged part of Serbia, impose a decidedly somber ambience.

With their muted inky tones and diffuse outlines, by way of which these monuments seem to be breaking into slate-gray skies, they can only be described, with their drips and runs of gray paint, as bleak and desolate — a mien through which Bodoni conveys a sense of history gone wrong. The viewer, through these desperately melancholic paintings, feels the real weight of the tragedy of lost glories erased by the serial catastrophes of conflict that have rippled through the Balkans since the 19th century.

Every European country has its triumphalist statues and monuments, a seemingly immovable part of their cultural history. Hungarian statuary in Serbia, however, through the exigencies of history, have become cut off and exiled from their cultural roots. Ironically, in this war-ravaged area, they are often the only truly intact structures still standing. Elevated on pillars, these are not the usual heroic generals, princes or kings, but saints and the Virgin Mary that transcend the limits of partisan nationalism. Like St. Simeon Stylianos, who spent years on top of a pillar, they seem to have something to prove.

Ray Edney