

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

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Big, messy and downright beautiful works A rollicking Alex Becerra exhibition at ltd los angeles

Review by David Pagel

Art historians often say that Cubism made it possible to see an object's front, back and sides without turning your head or moving an inch.

Picasso made a joke of those claims by using Cubism to depict curvy women so that you could see every square inch of their anatomies in a glance. In one fell swoop, painting became an all-over erogenous zone.

Alex Becerra ups the ante, adding a second layer of provocative playfulness to Picasso's tongue-in-cheek send-up of academic seriousness.

The young L.A. artist's rollicking exhibition at ltd los angeles brings whiplash paint-handling and dopey cartoons into the mix. If Philip Guston's late paintings mated with Mad Magazine the offspring might resemble Becerra's weirdly beautiful works.

His big messy paintings invite double takes, second thoughts, nervous laughs and all sorts of other surprises. And then they get really interesting.

Populated by deluxe buttocks, lumpy chairs, contorted figures, beastly creatures, spindly limbs, spiky cacti, classy hubcaps, a big fat beer barrel and genitals that seem to have taken on lives of their own, Becerra's hallucinatory paintings are sophisticated stews that leave plenty of room for vulgarity. In an eye's blink, they move into the big leagues without leaving the backwoods behind.

That eat-your-cake-and-have-it-too attitude gives them a kick of pleasure you feel in the seat of your pants before you understand, in your head, what's happening right before your eyes. It's a rollercoaster ride of garrulous fun, punctuated, pretty regularly, by surprises so subtle and sensitive that you feel like a heel for not seeing them sooner.

Such ambivalence-generating complexity is a thrill, especially in a world of instantaneous communication and even shorter attention spans.

ltd los angeles, 7561 Sunset Blvd., #103, (323) 378-6842, through Oct. 11. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.ltdlosangeles.com)

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