SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

SHADY, SENSUOUS FIGURES: ALEX BECERRA AT LTD LOS ANGELES
BY Jennifer Piejko, Modern Painters | October 08, 2014

Suspect women finally relax in Alex Becerra's recent works: Letting down their guard, dubious — shady, even — figures recline, reveling in the opportunity to inspect themselves from uncomfortable, unflattering angles in the same ways that others observe them whenever they step out. "Las Putas Problematicas" (the problematic whores) is a collection of 11 large paintings at LTD Los Angeles through October 11. Many of them depict a distorted female figure, while the others illustrate the women's presumed occupational hazards: muddled men, exhausted furniture, and mutilated reflections in the mirror.

Details are lushly attended to. Becerra's rich impasto treatment delivers textures such as green crushed velvet in Couch and Table with Light (all works 2014) and faded, peeling wallpaper abutting the old, murky wooden floor in So Many Ways (Lisa). In the balmy diptych Living in the Suburbs Can Be So Depressing, two green pineapples splay their cool crowns with leaves akimbo, and their rough, knotted fruits sit on sand composed of many warm yellows, dwarfing a nude woman in the right panel.

But it's the figures that benefit the most from the young Los Angeles–based artist's lavish technique. Each portrait betrays the two-dimensional medium, with thick wads of paint wet to the touch a year after application, alternately built up heavily off the surface of the canvas in some areas and slick and glossy in others, giving fleshy curves and folds visual and sculptural heft. The images are composed in layers, beginning with loose sketches, which are then overlaid with oil or acrylic. Best seen in works such as Right Angle Tango and Chach (Half Gone), the first layer slips through the second, with stray graphite lines, shadowed by oil seeping from the pigment, escaping the sensuous limbs and torsos that are centered in the raw, beige canvas but stopping themselves from saturating it.