

NICOLAS SHAKE: Significance Swells / May 11 – June 8, 2013

Western Project is proud to present the first solo exhibition by Los Angeles artist, Nicolas Shake. Significance Swells is comprised of new sculptures, photographs and large-scale oil paintings. Returning to his home in the high desert of Palmdale in 2008, at the apex of the economic downturn, the artist found sections of his neighborhood abandoned and piles of domestic rubble in the surrounding landscape; an environment rife with debris and evidence of massive change. Out of the rubble emerged a lexicon of materials and possibilities. As a kind of transformative archeology, the artist began arranging the debris into sculptures and to photograph them at night, lit by rudimentary lighting equipment from Home Depot and the headlights of his truck. The outdoor still-life structures were ephemeral works existing for a few hours and only to be recorded; nocturnal apparitions in a landscape, reabsorbed the next day into the landscape, all sculptural qualities obliterated by the daylight.

Shake describes his work as, “pastoral and post-apocalyptic with one foot firmly planted in historical painting and the other in traditional still-life, so it is entropic and sanguine, gleeful, despondent, and matter of fact...my work celebrates the pastoral’s everyday ordinariness, the capacity for the viewer to experience something wondrous amidst decline. I focus on the cast-off household and utilitarian items that show up in the desert on the outskirts of Los Angeles. The items I engage with could easily be categorized as rhopography, but it is this insignificance that gives them the ability to be reassigned a new aesthetic value, transforming the rubbish into something unexpected by capturing and conveying its uncanny power and peculiar beauty.”

As objects imply narrative and carry a history, the artist has cast some elements found in the desert into sculptures elegant and haunting. The works are built into forms with plastic, wood, bamboo and cement. Shake has woven the cast parts with hand-dyed nylon twine as a kind of drawing element, and formal unifying material. A cast shopping-cart is transformed into something reminiscent of an ancient Chinese junk, or odd marble sarcophagus. An element of this piece is a woven purple nylon basketball net, giving the work an idiosyncratic urban/organic tension.

Influenced by Mark Doty in “The Art of Description”:

“...memory edits its records of the past like a brilliant auteur-cutting, juxtaposing, creating a peace determined by the direction and emotion of a story. What is memory but a story about how we have lived? ...it takes dozens of pages to render the inner lives of a group people sitting around a dinner table; later...decades pass in a few pages. The kind of shifting feels accurate because it replicates something of our internal sense of time, where the irrelevant portions blur while significant moments swell.”

Shake’s oil paintings do not rely on imagery so much as the touch of paint and the act of painting. They are records of activity, a period and field of movement. He is not interested in illusion as his sensibility is more in the tradition of Gordon Matta Clark and Andy Goldsworthy. His works use the ordinary, the discarded, and used up to point at a beauty in temporality, and the immediacy of life.

The artist was recently included in The 10th Circle, curated by David Pagel at Vast Space Projects in Henderson, Nevada and has shown at Jaus Gallery, Temple/Ad Hoc Gallery, Mark Moore Gallery and Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Los Angeles, and Lancaster Museum of Art in Lancaster, California. He received his BFA from Rhode Island School of Design and MFA from Claremont Graduate School. He is currently an assistant of painting at Chapman University in Orange, California.