

GAGOSIAN GALLERY ARTNEWS



Tatiana Kronberg, *All Night Long*, 2016, mixed-media installation, dimensions variable. Joan.

AROUND LOS ANGELES

The high-school bathroom is an essential site of drama in the canon of teen film and television, from *My So-Called Life* to *Mean Girls*. So too is it in Jennifer Reeder's surreal short movie *Blood below the Skin* (2015), which made its L.A. premiere at the CalArts REDCAT arts center on February 22. In the film, one high-school student (an angelic-looking blond with a boyfriend and a plan to wear a pink princess gown to the upcoming school dance) encounters another (this one less confident, less girlish, and prone to locking herself in her bedroom) by the bathroom stalls between class periods. One girl introduces herself as Joni, the other as Joan; in a scene of palpable sexual and nervous energy, they banter about their namesakes, from Joan Didion to Joan Jett.

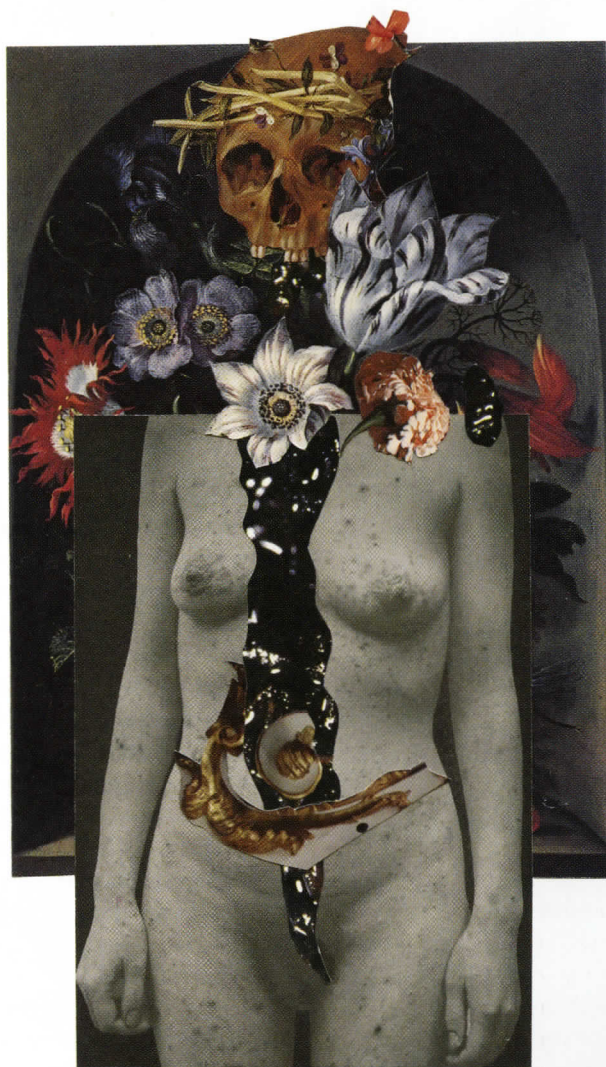
In many ways, Joan and Joni are typical American suburban adolescents; while from disparate social circles, they share a name and, by implication, a common experience. But their invocation of the iconic Joans of pop culture highlights their aspiration to, and performance of, a feminine power that is far from generic.

In *Blood*, the mother of a third girl, Darby, shares with her daughter Joan Didion's adage "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." Didion is a California girl, a famous storyteller from a place famous for its storytellers. This mythos has seeped into the city's art galleries, where many recent shows were overwhelmingly narrative, character-driven, and dreamy.

West Adams's nonprofit space **Joan**, whose bathroom features photographs of Joan Didion and Joan Crawford,

presented **Tatiana Kronberg's** installation *All Night Long*. Kronberg made the piece in collaboration with Karina Precious Revlon—a skilled vogue performer with the fitting Internet handle "Elasticgirl"—who danced in front of a 20-foot roll of black-and-white photo paper as Kronberg exposed it to strobe lights. In the resulting work, which the artist wove through real dance poles, Precious's flying limbs appear as abstract, billowing forms. Kronberg cites Man Ray's 1926 portraits of Ballet Russe members performing *Romeo and Juliet* as an inspiration, but while *Romeo and Juliet* is a story of boy-meets-girl, virginal love, Kronberg's work is rooted in the gay ballroom scene and the overtly sexual practice of pole dancing.

At **Cherry and Martin** in Culver City, *Cinderella*, **Erica Beckman's** 30-minute



FROM TOP John Kayser, *Untitled*, 1965, original Kodak Kodacolor photograph, 3½" x 3½". Farago. Ashkan Honarvar, *King of worms - Growth*, 2015, hand-cut collage on found image, 9" x 6". CES.

film from 1986, played alongside an exhibition of its original props and related drawings and photographs. In Beckman's surrealist reimagining of the fairy tale—somewhere on the aesthetic spectrum between vintage video game and black-box theatrical production—Cinderella, who toils as an ironsmith, receives a mysterious package containing a ball gown and learns she must be home by midnight (as represented by the recurring appearance of a clock tower). In the end, Cinderella realizes that she can simply disregard the clock and, in doing so, free herself from her curfew and all the other restrictions her gown implies. Breaking character, she escapes the boundaries of her role as unwitting princess.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN a cultural figure can no longer bear to read her assigned script? At **Sade Gallery** (named for the pop star), French artist **Claire Tabouret's** show "Because of You" included two circular paintings of Britney Spears with a partially shaved head, an image from the singer's very public 2007 breakdown during a fraught custody battle with ex-husband Kevin Federline. In these works, Tabouret shows Britney in the delicate transitional moment between teenage sweetheart and young-adult basket case. But, portrayed using soft brushwork and the template of classic portraiture, Britney doesn't look crazy; she looks resigned to this traumatic rite of passage, in which the child star loses her fans because she grew up and panicked. The idol is now a mutant.

L.A. has room for both, in abundance. "Women" at **Farago** surveyed the work of outsider photographer **John Kayser**, who took pictures of beautiful nude women in his home in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Kayser often photographed his subjects from behind, their naked bottoms perched on a bouquet of flowers, a scattered deck of playing cards, or a man's (possibly the artist's own) head. These icons of the male gaze, visible through the gallery's all-glass storefront on a pedestrian street downtown, caught every passing eye. They drew in those who did not seek them out.

At nearby **CES Gallery**, by contrast, "Sometimes I Forget Myself," an exhibition of **Ashkan Honarvar's** vibrant collages,



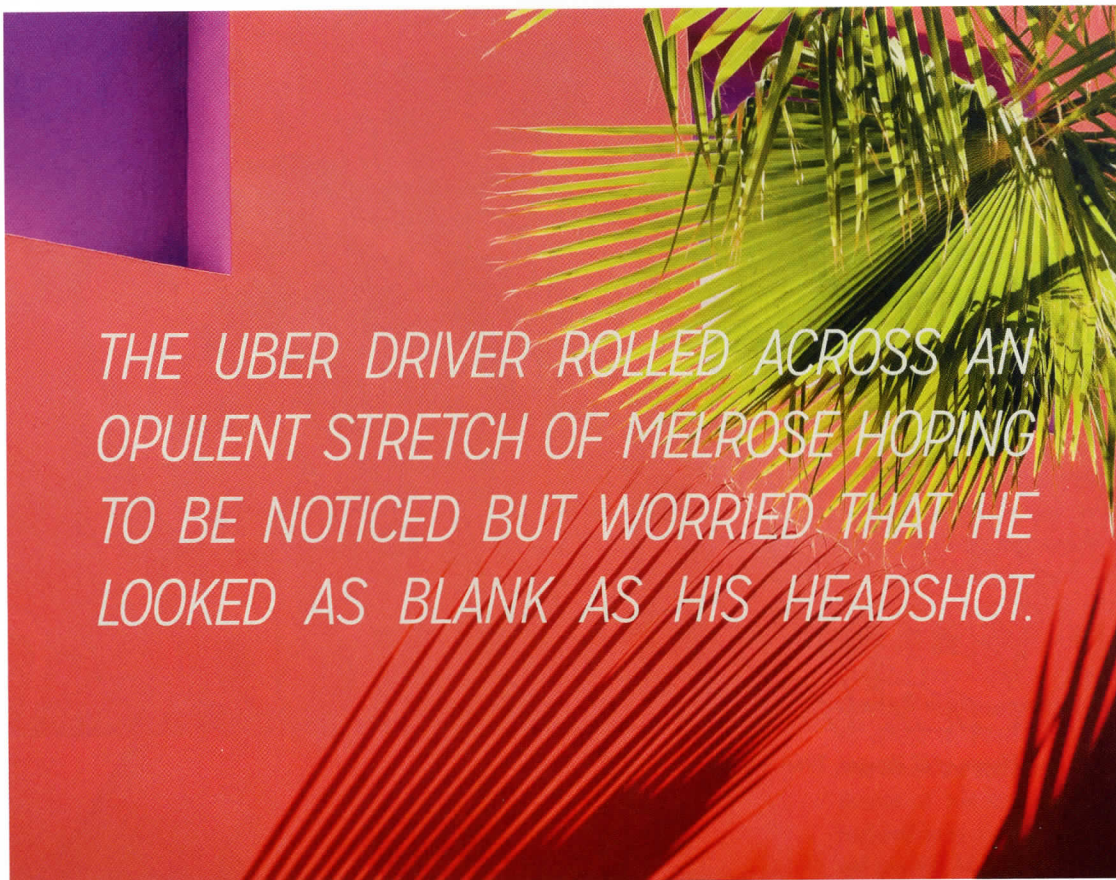
Jakob Kolding, "Another World with Difficulties," 2016, installation view. Team.



Ericka Beckman, *Cinderella Game 1-4* (detail), 1986/2015, C-print, 16" x 20". Cherry and Martin.

showed us a set of erotic freaks. In *Golden Lullaby* (2015), a woman hangs suspended over rough seas. She is nude save for her white socks; her wrists and ankles are bound with rope; her belly is split open to make way for the emergence of an ornate golden egg. Her mouth seems to hang open with pleasure even as a fully clothed man weeps in the background. In *Set 3* (2015), a glossy-skinned man squats with his legs open, penis resting on what appears to be a jeweled barrette in a swirl of blond hair. In *The Divine 1* (2015), Honarvar infuses a heavily retouched image of a woman holding open her vagina with real corporeality by overlaying a skull onto her face and pink innards onto her chest.

IN *EVE'S HOLLYWOOD*, her 1974 memoir of growing up in L.A., former ingenue, artist, and muse Eve Babitz explains the disproportionate number of beautiful



Alex Israel and Bret Easton Ellis, *The Uber Driver*, 2016, acrylic and UV ink on canvas, 84" x 108". Gagosian.

girls in her high-school class: "People with brains went to New York and people with faces came West." Frank Gehry has been quoted as saying, "Tip the world on its side and everything loose will land in Los Angeles."

The city is big enough for everyone—the starlets and the arguably even more glamorous misfits, all with a shared desire to be seen—and it's not just a backdrop. It's its own character. And as New York galleries rush to build West Coast outposts, it's interesting to see the ways that the city wills its influence onto them. At **Team Gallery**—a space best known for representing next-generation artists like Cory Arcangel and Ryan McGinley—the freestanding wooden cutouts of animals and (often dancing) people in Danish artist **Jakob Kolding's** solo show "Another World with Difficulties" alluded less to the Internet or youth culture than to

19th-century dioramas, carnival characters, and theater sets.

In an extreme example of this L.A. effect, **Gagosian Gallery** in Beverly Hills timed its exhibition of large collaborative paintings by artist **Alex Israel** and writer **Bret Easton Ellis** to open just before Oscar night. Set in a range of typefaces, Ellis's short texts march across Israel's found stock images of the L.A. landscape. Israel—whose first feature film, *SPF-18*, based on '80s teen films, will premiere later this year—had the paintings (actually ink-jet prints on canvas) fabricated at Warner Bros. by a crew trained in Hollywood set production. The works are ripe with narratives about trying to make it here. (The gallery's press materials call the show "a surreal film pitch," and I don't disagree.) The image in *Born and Not Made* (2016), for example, is a terrazzo floor with the shadow of a palm tree falling

over it, while the text reads, IN LOS ANGELES I KNEW SO MANY PEOPLE WHO WERE ASHAMED THAT THEY WERE BORN AND NOT MADE. In the show's strongest piece, the words I'M GOING TO BE A VERY DIFFERENT KIND OF STAR hover in the night sky above the illuminated downtown skyline.

Describing the allegorical, Old Master-style photographic portraits in her current exhibition at UCLA's **Hammer Museum** (on view through May 22), **Catherine Opie** said, "Very few of the subjects look back at you. This one [series] is all about being able to gaze upon." How can anyone become a different kind of star in a culture of excess and celebrity? What does it take to be gazed upon? Perhaps one shaves one's head, or releases a golden egg from one's stomach, or sits nude on a man's face. There are many ways to dream in Los Angeles.

EMILY RAPPAPORT