

ARTFORUM

Pentti Monkkonen

JENNY'S

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Venice Beach's public murals of acid and Pixy Stix-hued, airbrushed tableaux are a setting for drama—a particular style of street theater contained within a wraparound frieze. They haven't always featured neon-saturated animals wearing sunglasses and psychedelic wave abstractions, but the area's aesthetic has invariably defined the community's borders with surreal compositions, from 1941 post-office murals to the gloom of 1961's Night Tide to current fever dreams of MDMA visualized.



Originally named Venice of America when it officially opened, as a Los Angeles-adjacent resort town accessible by miniature railroad and gondola, on Independence Day, 1905, it was a slum by the 1950s and reached such a level of languor that the Beat poets moved in. The following decades of speculative wantonness seem to be the time that produced Pentti Monkkonen's recent series of paintings, in an exhibition that shares its title, "Mur Murs," with Agnès Varda's 1981 documentary that captured the boardwalk's sun-bleached stars. Painted on rectangular canvases simulating sections of scaled stucco wall and roof, one such work, titled T.R.E.A.M. (all works 2016)—which stands for "time rules everything around me"—is an apricot-and-cotton-candy-colored composition depicting a Baja-hoodie-sporting skeleton holding an hourglass precisely aligned to the crisp strip of turquoise shoreline behind it. This is perhaps the most typically Venice Beach work in its subtlety, or lack thereof, illustrating the ruin of a provincial idleness, while Hair Nails (pink) has a shop window with the titular services painted on in magenta block letters, as well as a single saccharine rose held up with dainty fuchsia nails filed into daggers—a postcard of, and to, aging neighborhood charms.

- Jennifer Piejko