

Pentti Monkkonen at Jenny's

June 30, 2016

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The most powerful works of art stay with us long after we leave the gallery, transforming the way we look at the world beyond the white cube. Pentti Monkkonen's MUR MURS (a cheeky pun based on the French word for wall) does just that, bridging the gap between L.A.'s vernacular visual culture and a more rarified form of image making.

Into Jenny's humble office-space-cum-gallery, Monkkonen has inserted what appear to be sections of painted walls, textured with rough stucco and topped with terracotta tiles, mimicking L.A.'s typical residential architecture. These wall sections are actually carefully reproduced replicas on canvas; they reframe pieces of the streetscape as high art. Like Magritte, and Johns, and Kosuth after him, Monkkonen explores the disparity between an object and its representation.

The subjects of these paintings span L.A.'s geography; from a baha-clad skeleton holding an hourglass before an ocean sunset (recalling the beach murals of Venice), to a facsimile of Charles Felix's abstract, geometric Boyle Heights' housing project mural. The works also offer a mini art-historical tour, ranging from the 19th century British Arts & Crafts Movement (one work is based on wallpaper designed by William Morris), to mid-century abstraction, color field, and post-modern appropriations of text and image. Just when these historical references start to gain traction, however, the stoner landscape of T.R.E.A.M. (2016) brings us back down to street level with its bad-taste punk sensibility.

Here Monkkonen raises interesting questions of access and audience. By reproducing not just flat visuals, but their textural and material qualities, he alludes to a world outside the gallery walls. Inserting these commonplace images into an art historical lineage, he celebrates and elevates them, but also reclaims them for an aesthetic elite.