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frieze

Condo

VARIOUS VENUES, LONDON, UK



A.L. Steiner, *Greatest Hits*, 2016, installation view Arcadia Missa, London. Courtesy Arcadia Missa; photograph Lucie McLaughlin

Let me begin with a disclaimer: my experience of the inaugural edition of Condo involved a group of six people visiting eight galleries in six hours; between them, these galleries are hosting 16 additional galleries, showing work by a total of more than 40 artists. It also involved Hong Kong-style noodles that induced tears, obligatory team photos and an unforgivable number of taxis for which I still owe someone a lot of money. So, apologies if I present highlights and not a comprehensive account.

Initiated by Vanessa Carlos, director of Carlos/Ishikawa, London, Condo identifies as a ‘collaborative exhibition’ for the Airbnb generation: an alternative to today’s dominant art fair model, which aims to open a dialogue between young galleries and strengthen networks of support.

This collaborative drive is immediately recognizable in the southernmost depths of the city at Arcadia Missa, Peckham, where work by London-born Phoebe Collings-James is paired with pieces by Miami-based A.L. Steiner, represented here by Munich gallery Deborah Schamoni. Across one wall, Steiner has plastered *Greatest Hits* (2016), a photographic autobiography of the artist’s daily life that captures peaceful inertia, domestic space, performance, pets, nudity and everything in between. But while the collage shows Steiner from her own perspective – to use the artist’s words, a ‘skeptical [sic] queer eco-feminist androgyne’ – an overlaid four-channel video work presents an alternative and, perversely, more conventional version of femininity, tapping into the media’s tireless objectification of women. With the sound muted, the looping videos show Madonna gyrating, squatting and taking a riding crop to her crotch.

Collings-James picks up on these explorations of identity with her watercolour series of intentionally child-like beasts: *tfw* (all works 2016), a purple horse, rearing on its hind legs; *She-Wolf & Snake*, a confrontational Capitoline Wolf, a blood red and inescapably phallic serpent at its legs; *Out Of Many, One People (she-wolf composite small)*, an aggressive group of wolves that could be cats, bearing their teats for all to see. (Cats would make more sense, collective noun: a glaring.) Communicating recognizable, almost human personalities through animals, Collings-James removes notions of race, gender and sexuality from her portraits, safeguarding them against culturally over-determined definitions and offering a glimpse, both funny and dark, at what true identity might resemble. For all intents and purposes, let’s call them spirit animals.



Installation view, The Sunday Painter, pictured, back right: Laura Aldridge, *Display-scape no. 2 BRICKwork – A misleading, whole new way to do things (or so they say)*, 2015. Courtesy Koppe Astner, Glasgow & The Sunday Painter, London

This marrying of likeminded artists lends the exhibition a focus and an ambition that, in their shoulder-to-shoulder presentations of disparate artists, galleries like The Sunday Painter and Supplement, who are each hosting three galleries in addition to showing their own artists, might have benefitted from. But while an integrated curatorial approach was attempted to lesser effect at both Project Native Informant and Southard Reid, homogeneity was not the only curatorial approach available.

At Rodeo gallery, where New York's Callicoon Fine Arts has taken up residence, less obvious parallels are drawn between the works on show. In the first room hangs the work of brothers Ramin and Rokni Haerizadeh and their childhood friend Hesam Rahmanian – roommates in Dubai since 2009 – each of which takes turns to playfully poke fun at scenes of supposed importance. A collage depicts a putto expelling a worryingly lurid stream of urine onto a bride, figures in military garb are overlaid with painted moustachioed faces, and footage of Femen's 'topless jihad' protests in 2013 is re-imagined as an LCD-tinged *Animal Farm* (1945).

In Rodeo's second room, however, past James Hoff's disorientating sound work *Crickets* (2013), light-hearted lampoonery gives way to unadulterated light-heartedness with *The Scarecrow's Holiday* (2015), a towering sculpture by Tamara Henderson. Henderson's biography describes her as a 'nocturnal being' who translates 'dreams into forms and colours' and, inspecting the scarecrow's golden fabrics, dyed aquamarine sand and bundles of feathers and twine, you would be hard-pressed to deny it. With its patchwork legs precariously balanced on bulbous orthopaedic shoes, the structure is an ugly duckling: unwieldy, awkward and protruding in all the wrong places, but lovable all the while.



Tamara Henderson, *The Scarecrow's Holiday*, textile, wood, glass, sand, pigment, rope, 260 x 112 x 56 cm, 2015. Installation view, Condo, Callicoon Fine Arts, New York, with Rodeo, London, 2016



Installation view Southard Reid, 2016. Courtesy Southard Reid London, Jeanine Hofland Amsterdam, Frutta Rome

Like several galleries involved in Condo, Callicoon and Rodeo have a pre-existing relationship, so their deft integration of dissimilar artists was not a huge surprise. The merger was perhaps trickier at Carlos/Ishikawa, tasked with hosting Essex Street (New York), Mathew (New York/Berlin) and Freymond-Guth (Zurich). The most diverse presentation of the bunch, the east London space features colour-inverted Cézanne replicas from Megan Francis Sullivan, a set of globular pendant lights by Than Hussein Clark and Fred Lonidier's extensive series of satirical adverts, to name a few. In addition to this, Carlos/Ishikawa have contracted fifteen artists affiliated with the gallery to produce unique and edition items of clothing – for a confusing night in, why not pick up Stuart Middleton's chastity belt and Richard Sides's *Taser Hoodie* (2016)?

Rather than force this plethora of works to cohabit and risk lessening their impact, Carlos/Ishikawa – uniquely – has physically divided the gallery space into three, relegating their own artists to the hallway-turned-boutique. Granted, this was not an option for the likes of Chewday's – hosts to Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler from Berlin – whose confined quarters demand Nicholas Cheveldave's brooding collages and Daniel Keller's rocky assemblages invade each other's personal space, but curatorially the booths are a shrewd choice (something art fairs have long recognized).



Than Hussein Clark, *Broadway Cruise or Julian Devours The Moon*, 2016, enamel and Perspex and the 'For Julian' series, 2016, blown glass, steel, lacquer, wire, filament, bulb, strutting, installation view Carlos/Ishikawa, London. Courtesy Mathew, Berlin



Ruairiadh O'Connell, *Palms*, 2016, silkscreen on wax with metal frame in 2 parts, 1.2 x 2 m. Installation view at Project Native Informant, London. Courtesy Project Native Informant

Condo is defined by its many oppositions: there is quality but mediocrity, risk but politeness and, most importantly, collaboration as well as co-existence – two very different things. That said, on a rainy January afternoon it was genuinely refreshing to witness something of a community form around these smaller spaces: to discuss the merits of each presentation, to map approaches, to meet so many travelling to an exhibition in a south London railway arch, only to be reunited six hours later to compare notes.

As rents in the capital soar, arts funding resides in a state of constant dubiety and the gulf between blue chip galleries and the rest refuses to close, it seems that, more than ever, galvanizing projects like Condo might become a necessary part of the landscape for young galleries. Community and collaboration might be the way to find new solutions to abiding problems; or, to borrow a closing line from Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926): 'We could have had such a damned good time together.'

Harry Thorne