

REGEN PROJECTS

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Art Review: Elliott Hundley at Regen Projects II

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Two years ago, Elliott Hundley's second solo show in Los Angeles took visitors on a mind-boggling journey filled with enough emotional turbulence to last a lifetime—or two. Starting with junk-picked detritus, thrift-store leftovers and glossy snapshots of friends posing like B-movie extras, the young artist's madly cobbled collages (in two and three dimensions) borrowed scenes from Euripides' "Hekabe" to capture the tenor of our times: a dirty stew in which tragedy and farce have curdled, leaving individuals to our own devices, sorry and otherwise.



At Regen Projects II, Hundley's new exhibition, inspired by Euripides' "The Bacchae," is even more magnificent — and no less conflicted. Its torment, aimed inward, replaces the theatrical rage of much public speech with the doubt-laced anxiety of a self-reflective consciousness pondering its place in the world. Everyman ordinariness and divine omnipotence commingle, confusing viewers who want their art clear and simple.

At once delicate and powerful, trashy and sublime, each of Hundley's three mural-size wall reliefs, three skeletal sculptures and two spatially fractured paintings appears to be a world that, once upon a time, was complete unto itself but has imploded, blowing jagged fragments every which way.

The inventory of things in Hundley's wall reliefs is unremarkable: ink-jet prints, cut-up snapshots, ransom-note lettering, sequins, pins, string and old-fashioned magnifying lenses. But what Hundley does with these mundane materials is inspiring.

Using his skills as a colorist and his acumen as a decorator, not to mention his labor-intensive devotion as a dyed-in-the-wool hobbyist, he builds sophisticated compositions that hum, pulse and throb with electrifying energy. Abstraction and figuration work in concert.

It's impossible to see Hundley's huge, densely detailed works from one place or angle. Each is 9 feet tall and 16-, 20- or 24 feet long. And each contains tens of thousands of distinct, often one-of-a-kind components.

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From afar, each of the three masterpieces seems to be a digital version of a Cubist collage. Space and time collapse and expand, catching you in the emotional undertow. Up close, exquisite details and sexy vignettes accumulate, suggesting inescapable, wildly satisfying diversions.

But Hundley never lets you get lost in such pleasures, which are great — just not all-consuming. Instead, his gigantic constellations forge connections across time and space, linking actions to consequences, individuals to groups, moments to histories.

His freestanding sculptures and freewheeling paintings similarly stitch together far-flung elements, fashioning Frankenstein-style hybrids at once organic and artificial, emaciated and weighty, cultivated and vulgar. In Hundley's hands, a 2,500-year-old story of lust, betrayal, revenge, torture, murder and religious duty comes alive to shed chilling light on the present. That never gets old.

-- David Pagel

Regen Projects II, 9016 Santa Monica Blvd., L.A., (310) 276-5424, through July 1. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.regenprojects.com

Images: Top, Elliott Hundley's "the high house low!"; bottom, Hundley's "a foot against his ribs." Credit: From Regen Projects.

