

and DV cam footage documenting her experience. A selection find their way into the exhibition, pinned to the interior of a yellow-and-white tent, which also contains a six-minute animated video. In a way, this multi-media installation is simply a surrogate for the artist. The compilation of materials documenting the Es' personal Exodus provides insight into the thought processes that lay behind the completed works on view.

The mixed-media works on birch panel are abstractions inspired by small houses spread out near the border of the west entrance of Joshua Tree. These pieces range in size from 10 by 10 to 36 by 36 inches. The images could not be described as representational, for very little beyond an old-fashioned TV antenna in "Sleep Lander," a telephone pole in "Round House" or two slightly diagonal brushstrokes depicting the roof line in "Sky House" suggest "house" to the viewer. Instead, the homes are comprised of those trademark patches of fabric and roughly painted irregular shapes stacked on top of one another. Far from being realistic images, these are abstract portraits, with the colors and prints suggesting the interior life of those who live in these remote dwellings.

The paintings are based on photographs taken by the artist of the national park's unique landscape. Es then transforms the environment with her Crayola®-hued color palette, childlike simplification of the scenery and the insertion of imagined elements ranging from spaceships to playground equipment to symbols, and cymbals, with autobiographic associations. In "Drum Lab" an abandoned drum set sits in the open desert. A Bert-like finger puppet sits atop the clutch of the hi-hat cymbal, staring directly out at the viewer. It's an image that provides a surreal element of comic relief. The throne seems to point into the distance, suggesting that perhaps its recent occupant has journeyed out of our view and into the vast desert, embarking on — as the exhibition titled suggests — an exodus. It is worthwhile noting that the artist started playing the drums at age 11. She later recorded and toured in bands for many years. The drum set, therefore, acts much like the signifier of the "empty chair," suggesting the presence of the artist, even while she is absent.

"Ladder to Dad" evokes nostalgia

for the past through the addition of a hobbyhorse and hobby "frog" in the desertscape, while in the background a kelly-green ladder extends beyond the limits of the picture plane, connecting the heaven and earthly realms. The rocks of the desert are re-imagined in tones of pinks, yellows, grays, browns and magentas, resembling a makeshift quilt. Taken alone, this work can be seen as the artist's personal meditation on the loss of her parents. Collectively, however, the exhibition, curated by Anne Hromadka, celebrates the imagination and signals a transition for the artist from "going back" to "going out." In the artist's words: "My past led me to seek refuge into the desert; however, it was my future that I followed home."

Molly Enholm

## SHARON FEDER

(George Billis Gallery, Culver City) Denver-born artist Sharon Feder has the ability to metamorphose the banal into the extraordinary. The objects in her paintings give the impression to be more than, say, rail tracks, telephone poles, power lines or buildings to provide shelter or work space. They are like skeletons, providing evidence of the core structure of the energy of the people who designed and relied on them. Feder regards all of this at something of a distance, as objects representing our cultural heritage and civilization. Her paintings, mostly created by applying color on top of a red and brown-toned underpainting via brush and palette knife, also depict nature's interaction with the made environment, such as the sun reflecting off buildings, causing different atmospheres, in contrast with how human beings create energies through our pure being, or what Hegel refers to as "Dasein." One can't miss Norman Lundin's influence, under whom Feder studied at University of Washington in Seattle, on her exploration of light and shadows and the search for resulting geometric forms.

Alternatively Feder's paintings can offer a place of calm, or insinuate the tension within the human psyche. "By learning to appreciate what may



Sharon Feder, "Station No 7," 2012, oil on canvas, 48 x 36".

seem to be the least lovely aspects of my environment, I am also learning to love what are my own least lovely qualities," Feder says. "I paint buildings for the same reason I listen to audio books of historical fiction while I create: I am fascinated by the choices we humans make and I am compelled to understand the nature and consequences of those choices." Her paintings are rendered in the grey zone between abstract and representational art. At first glance they seem representational, but it they are more about color combinations (like ochre against blue hues, red-orange against brown hues) and how paint is applied than subject matter. It is an approach inspired by Colorado artist Ed Marecak (died in 1993).

The works in "Curb Appeal" range from small 6 by 6 inch scale to larger ones measuring 40 by 60 inches, and are painted from a streetwise perspective. The show also includes several selections from her previous series, "Industrial" and "Buy." In "Inglewood No.1", one can see a mixture of storefronts in various colors with spiraling wires — reminiscent of a tablature for composition — loosely hanging above their roofs. It is presented as a giant still life in which the shadows of buildings create parallelograms and other geometric shapes. The curb in this image not only creates a horizontal line, but also a contrast to the colors of the sidewalk and street.

"Broadway No.1," "Buy" and "Your Message" all reflect Feder's background as a muralist and sign artist. The first is a sparkling composition of a building on a corner at Broadway

on which shadows of tree branches create a delicate pattern, topped by the words "Say Yes" that serve as an invitation for the viewer to notice nature. The ironically titled "Buy" depicts an old warehouse, which feels like a cautionary tale about the negative impact of American mass consumerism on society and nature. "Your Message" features an empty and somewhat window-less industrial building in Los Angeles with the words "Your Life" painted on its front façade. As Feder describes it, "On the building were huge painted words, along with terrific tagging on top of the windowpanes, the juxtaposed geometry of billboard and bridge, the angles created by light and shadow. All this intrigued me, visually, in the sense of urban archeology..." It reminds me of the quote in which Gandhi said, "My life is my message." Feder's paintings are at once an aesthetic expression and a spiritual engagement.

Simone Kussatz

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tle. Kerstens's approach is a mix of painting and photography, referencing Old-Master dark backgrounds and poses. His careful handling of light and the subtle treatment of skin evokes the delicate and focused mentality of 17th-century Dutch portraiture. He blends this together with 99¢ Store accessories such as a bubble wrap headdress, a plastic shopping bag cap, cloth napkin and towel hats. There is an ever so carefully arranged aluminum foil head-cover. A collection of doilies are stacked around Paula's neck so as to mimic ruffs of that time, so there can be no mistaking the reference. Photographs they may be, but this work is painterly in its sensibility. There is a playful air of humor in the costume-like combinations of hats and caps he creates for each pose. Bordering on the ridiculous at times, we don't immediately see them in good part due to the deadpan expression on Paula's face. Once you pick up on the joke, of course, you can't miss it. These images are also the serious effort of a parent's desire to document his child's growth over time. They are at once classically beautiful, misleadingly conventional and hilariously absurd (Museum of Photographic Arts [MoPA], San Diego).

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