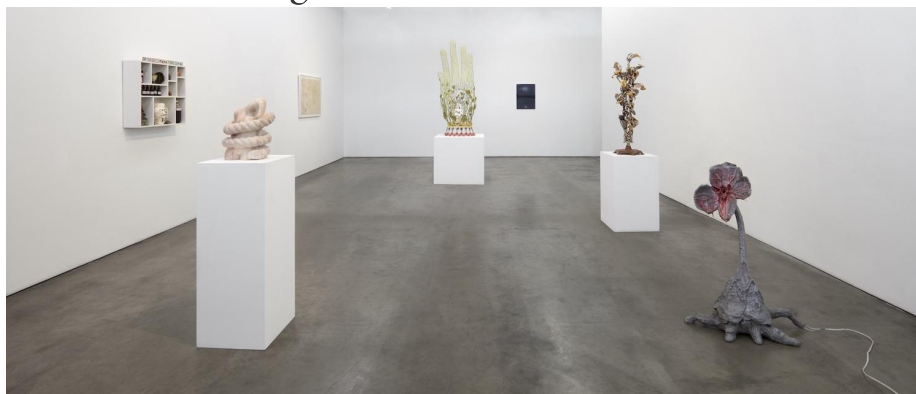


3 Los Angeles Exhibitions Exploring the Nature of Things

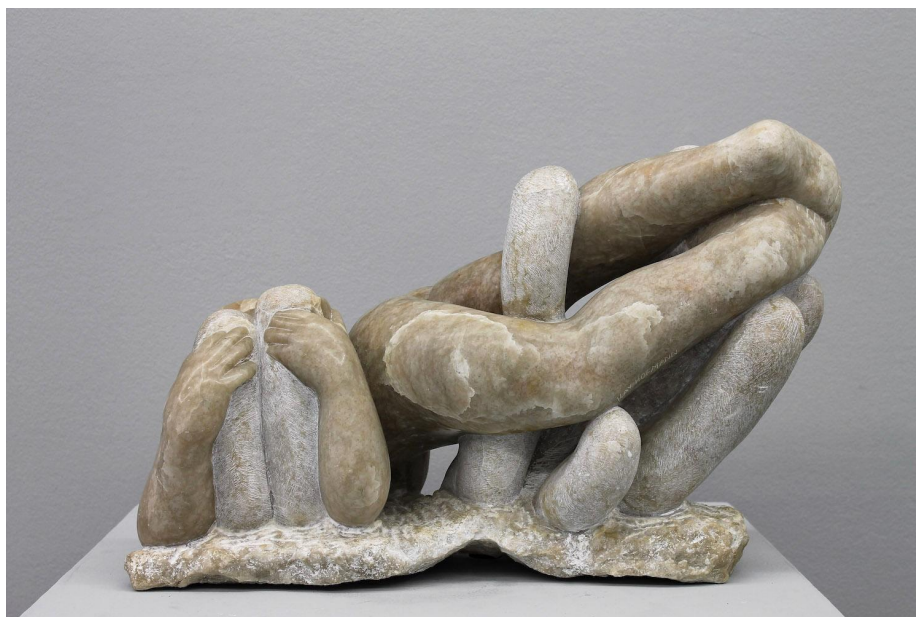


COURTESY FRANÇOIS GHEBALY, LOS ANGELES

Installation view of *Materia Medica* at François Ghebaly.

Summer is traditionally a time for thematic group exhibitions, which provide galleries the opportunity to introduce new artists to their collectors, and three Los Angeles dealers are currently presenting some notable shows.

In this selection of L.A. group exhibitions, we discuss *Materia Medica* at François Ghebaly, *Did I Ever Have a Chance?* at Marc Selwyn Fine Art, and *Riders of the Red Horse* at The Pit. There are scores of fascinating artists and artworks to discover—so sit back, take a look, and let your imagination make the rounds.



COURTESY THE ARTIST; PATRON GALLERY, CHICAGO; AND FRANÇOIS GHEBALY, LOS ANGELES

Kay Hofmann, *Fond Memories*, c. 1990.

Materia Medica (<http://ghebaly.com/work/materia-medica/>)

François Ghebaly

July 22 – September 4, 2020

Presenting artworks that are about nature and also derived from it, *Materia Medica* offers a combination of pseudo-scientific and surreal pieces to illustrate the perils of our exploitation of the environment. Curated by multidisciplinary artist Kelly Akashi, who poses the questions “What does nature own?” and “What will be inherited when humans are gone?” in her esoteric exhibition statement, the show focuses on materials and working methods that address our fragile relationship with the natural world.

Hugh Hayden (<https://www.artandobject.com/press-release/creation-myths-examines-history-slavery-and-american-identity>) contributes a white, flocked Adirondack chair with giant wooden thorns protruding from it that's titled *NIMBY*, which is a name for a person who opposes unsightly urban projects in his neighborhood but not elsewhere. Janis Miltenberger presents a giant glass hand with a smaller silvered blown-glass hand inside that sits on a base defined by symbolic keys in her remarkable 2012 sculpture *A Room For Our Wonder*. And Ann Craven displays three dark, small-scale paintings from a 2006 series of canvases depicting the moon bewitchingly reflected in a body of water at night.



COURTESY FRANÇOIS GHEBALY, LOS ANGELES

Installation view of *Materia Medica* at François Ghebaly.

The surrealist influence is inescapable in the extraordinary sculptures of Kay Hoffman and Nancy Youdelman. Hoffman shares a selection of figurative alabaster pieces, in which female bodies are caught canoodling with and cuddled by abstract, organic forms, while Youdelman presents a fanciful plant-like structure in her 2019 assemblage *Silent Tower*, which incorporates kitchen utensils and pearl necklaces. Likewise, Catalina Ouyang's 2020 sculpture *font III* offers a curious combination of soapstone, kombucha mother, horse hair, raw egg, and glue to fabricate a bizarre form of birth on the gallery's floor.

Although Akashi's own artwork is not on view, her poetic sensibility and love of materials is evident throughout the show, particularly in its dynamic display, which coaxes new meaning from the juxtaposition of the pieces. In the marvelous mixture of Hayden's thorny chair and a Craven moon painting with a Miltenberger sculpture of a figure composed of glass branches and leaves, Akashi stages a scenario straight out of a dreamlike Dalí or Magritte painting (<https://www.artandobject.com/articles/magical-paintings-rene-magritte>).



COURTESY THE ESTATE OF MARTIN WONG AND P-P-O-W, NEW YORK

Martin Wong, *Did I Ever Have A Chance?*, 1999.

Did I Ever Have a Chance? (<http://www.marcselwynfineart.com/exhibitions/did-i-ever-have-a-chance#tab:thumbnails>)

Marc Selwyn Fine Art

August 15 – September 19, 2020

Co-curated by the galleries Gordon Robichaux in New York and Los Angeles's Marc Selwyn Fine Art, where the exhibition is currently on view, *Did I Ever Have a Chance?* features recent and historical works by artists addressing important issues of social inequality—including racism, misogyny, homophobia, poverty, endless war, and ecological injustice.

Visionary artist and minister Reverend Joyce McDonald reveals recently sculpted clay heads, which she made more realistic through Whiteout and markers, of Ahmaud Arbery, Sandra Bland, and Eric Garner, whose lives were cut short by confrontations with the police and vigilantes. Ugandan-born, Brooklyn-based artist Leilah Babirye employs ceramics and carved wooden sculptures mixed with found objects to create captivating LGBTQ characters with symbolic titles, such as *Nankulu we Kibuga (Female Mayor of the City)* and *Abambowa (Royal Guard Who Protects the King)*. And self-taught artist Otis Houston Jr., who regularly creates art installations along New York's FDR Drive, takes on poverty in his sign-like, 2018 painting *The Enemy*, which displays the phrase "Poverty is the Enemy" rendered in red, blue, and green markers on the backside of a stretched canvas.



COURTESY MARC SELWYN FINE ART, BEVERLY HILLS

Installation view of *Did I Ever Have A Chance?* at Marc Selwyn Fine Art.

Words also play important roles in Jenny Holzer's 1981 cast-bronze plaque *Damage is done by the tacit understanding...*, which vividly reproduces the phrase "Damage is done by the tacit understanding that certain aspirations are unsuitable for particular groups of people" and Sister Corita Kent (<https://www.artandobject.com/video/art-life-rules-nun>)'s graphic, 1968 serigraph *E eye love*, which combines the letter E and an illustration of an eye with a quote from French Nobel Prize-winning author and philosopher Albert Camus that reads, "I should like to be able to love my country and still love justice."

As powerfully as language is utilized in this show—alongside additional visually potent pieces by Lorraine O'Grady and Martha Rosler—it's hard to top the final work of art created by Martin Wong, a 1999 painting that lends its title to the overall exhibition. Portraying a gun-toting Patty Hearst as Kali, the Hindu goddess of death, with the decree "Did I Ever Have a Chance?" written above her and rows of dead rabbits below, it was defiantly painted by the artist in his hospital bed as he was dying from complications related to AIDS.



COURTESY THE ARTISTS AND THE PIT, GLENDALE

FriendsWithYou, Spirit Animal, 2020.

Riders of the Red Horse (<https://www.the-pit.la/rider-of-the-red-horse>)

The Pit

July 21 – August 29, 2020

Marking the gallery's re-opening after four months of closure due to the pandemic, this exhibition presents 55 recent works by 34 contemporary artists and collectives, whose creative efforts The Pit's team greatly admire. Highlighting people, spaces, nature, and animals, which the gallery's directors said were "All things that were dearly missed while we were locked down in our homes," the show is a hodgepodge lodge of colorful paintings, ceramics, drawings, and prints that comment on the lighter—often irreverent—side of life.



COURTESY THE PIT, GLENDALE

Installation view of *Riders of the Red Horse* at The Pit.

Allison Schulnik paints a charming pair of cats in *Gin & Juice on Pink*; Keith Boadwee renders the comical canvas *A fish smoking a cigarette* as a red monochrome; Sharif Farrag surreally envisions a glazed porcelain jar as a nail-biter with its hand in its mouth; Heather Rasmussen hilariously fancies a bent daikon spooning with a pointed foot in her digital pigment print, and Adrienne Rubenstein amusingly imagines a new form of hybrid produce production in her painting *Broccoli Apple Tree II*.

Things get even crazier in Devin Troy Strother's paintings of cartoon characters with psychedelically expanded minds and death pillaging in the name of funk and John de Fazio's glazed ceramic bong of Elvis as a vampire, Spock with a smiley face emoji on his uniform shirt, and R2D2 bursting into flames. But the artist collective FriendsWithYou restore a level of tranquility to the mix in their peaceful portrayals of spirit animals, compellingly rendered in an Impressionistic style of painting with colorized Plastiline clay in wooden frames.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Read more stories from Paul Laster

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Paul Laster is an artist, critic, curator, editor, and lecturer. He is a contributing editor at *ArtAsiaPacific* and *Whitehot Magazine of Contemporary Art* and writer for *Time Out New York*, *Galerie Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar Arabia*, *Architectural Digest*, *Cultured*, *Garage Magazine*, *Ocula*, *ArtPulse*, *Observer*, *Conceptual Fine Arts* and *Glasstire*. He was *Artkrush's* founding editor, started *The Daily Beast's* art section and was art editor of Russell Simmons' *Oneworld Magazine*, as well as an Adjunct Curator of Photography at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, now MoMA PS1.

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