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REVIEW ARTS & CULTURE ENTERTAINMENT

Where to find fantastic beasts? At Big Pictures Los Angeles' 'Airtight Garage'

By DAVID PAGEL APR 17, 2018 | 5:45 AM



In 1976, the French cartoonist Jean Giraud (also known as Moebius) created “The Airtight Garage,” a story about a pocket universe on an asteroid in the constellation Leo. Overseen by a mad scientist with all kinds of wild ideas about creativity, the miniature multiverse was a tinkerer’s paradise, a utopian society and the best studio an artist might imagine.

In it, visionaries and inventors did their thing: Dream up and deliver original worlds that inspired others to think more freely, act more boldly and never stop marveling at the magnificence of it all.

At Big Pictures Los Angeles, artist and guest curator Laurie Nye has made her own airtight garage.

She has covered one wall and the entire floor of the gallery, which is about the size of a three-car garage, with pegboard panels. You get the sense that you’re in the weekend workshop of someone whose ambitions are not measured by common sense or constrained by practicality.

In place of the tools that usually hang above workbenches, Nye has installed 27 works by 19 artists (herself included). Each painting, sculpture, drawing and print is a world unto itself — and a whole lot more.

None has been made with an eye on what’s trendy or marketable. Each reflects the vision of an individual wholly dedicated to discovering something that satisfies inner needs — which may not be known until the art gets made.

Visitors experience similar epiphanies, which multiply as you move from one work to the next. No single principle, theme or idea holds the show together. That’s another way of saying that there is no sun (or center) around which all of its works orbit.

Yet chaos does not reign. Lots of links connect lots of works, forming clusters that overlap with other clusters.

For example, fantastic beasts appear in paintings by Andre Ethier, Helen Rebekah Garber, Rema Ghuloum and Aaron Morse. Figures populate many pieces, including Jennifer Rochlin’s inside-out diptych, Hayley Barker’s atmospheric abstraction, Erin Trefry’s whimsical

assemblage, Jade Gordon's enigmatic mask and Max Maslansky's fleshy reverie. Neither category is mutually exclusive, with many works doing double-duty by fitting into both — and others.

Likewise the landscapes. The pictures by Kristy Luck, Spencer Carmona, Tyler Vlahovich, Brian Fahlstrom, Laurie Nye and Maysha Mohamedi have one foot firmly planted in the world of animated cartoons and the other in the reality of gestural abstraction. The combo sizzles.

The most mesmerizing shape shifting unspools in Fred Burton's "Diptych for Zap Mama" and Adam D. Miller's "Lava Lizard Mini" as well as JP Munro's Pointillist overdose and Jasmine Little's exquisitely detailed pair of stoneware sculptures.

With Nye's "Airtight Garage" a short trip away, you don't have to travel far to leave reality in the rearview mirror.