



Ahead of ALAC, How Los Angeles Is Fostering the Next Generation of Emerging Artists

When the Art Los Angeles Contemporary (ALAC) fair opens on January 28th for its seventh edition, we in less temperate climes will be girding ourselves against the January chill. It seems only sensible to follow in the footsteps of artists like Ed Ruscha and John Baldessari (or more recently Math Bass, Ryan Trecartin, and David Benjamin Sherry) and go west.

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Left to right: Portrait of Rosha Yaghmai, courtesy of the artist and Kayne Griffin Corocan, Los Angeles; Portrait of Despina Stokou, courtesy of Katharina Bauckhage from artflash.de; Portrait of Derek Paul Boyle, courtesy of the artist.

ALAC, though expansive, is locally grounded, with 25 of its 73 exhibitor booths occupied by Los Angeles-based galleries. This year the fair will also include a section called Freeways, for emerging galleries under four years old, and another devoted to independent publishing. A new program of lectures and talks aims to address the changing conditions for artmaking in Los Angeles—and those conditions are increasingly sunny. According to Marc LeBlanc, curator of events and programming for the fair, L.A. has seen an influx of dealers and galleries in recent years. “My friends in Berlin, London, and Paris are more interested in coming to see L.A. than New York,” he muses. “Maybe it has an art community that’s identifiable, one that people can actually see and feel like they have a grasp of.”

Although reluctant to generalize about the city's appeal, LeBlanc notes that the price is right: "L.A. has all the things that Berlin has going for it, including a really low price per square foot."

Curious how these changes are impacting young artists, I asked several of ALAC's up-and-coming artists about what drew them to L.A., and how making art in the city has influenced their practice.

Despina Stokou

ON VIEW AT ALAC: DEREK ELLER GALLERY



Despina Stokou
Stuck Inside the Memphis Blues Again (right), 2015
Derek Eller Gallery



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Stuck Inside the Memphis Blues Again (left), 2015
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Stokou is a Greek-born artist, known for translating swathes of online data onto canvas. Layers of text flirt with legibility beneath abstract smears and swipes of color, as if Basquiat had lived long enough to see the internet. Drawn to L.A. by its location "at the end of the Western world," she noticed that the city's abundant light has changed her work: "My palette has gotten brighter for sure. Plus there are so many spectacular plants here—they've crept into my mostly non-representational paintings."

"The light!"

Stokou's recent work features rows of emoji—culled sets of the icons recently used by her friends, some rendered in brightly colored collage and others left as simple charcoal outlines (as in *Recently Used 8971*, 2015, shown at Galerie EIGEN + ART last November). Emoji interest her because they're universal, yet entirely subject to interpretation; a symbol that represents good luck in one culture might suggest very bad

luck in another. Stokou sees her work as a loose and shifting narrative, “like the memory of a story your grandmother used to tell you and change a little bit every time.”