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Left: HomeLA dancers on the LA River. Right: Artist Dave Muller. (All photos: Andrew Berardini)

Rain Dance

By Andrew Berardini | July 20th, 2015

A RUMBLE SHUDDERED across the sky and lightning set fire to palm trees as the hot wet spatter of a tropical storm washed over a startled Los Angeles this past weekend. It hardly seemed to discourage the hordes that capered across the city for a deluge of openings and performances. Dave Muller began the weekend early on Tuesday with the inauguration of a year's worth of his legendary Three Day Weekends at Blum & Poe. Muller manned the turntables, spinning records so strange it felt like he invented them. "This one's psychedelic reggae," he said. Inside, posters from Muller's collection angled in weird places, Ricky Swallow sculptures sat next to the bathroom sink, a green glow courtesy Julian Hoeber covered the office fluorescents, and poems by seventy-one-year-old poet Aram Saroyan were painted by Muller behind the DJ booth. CRICKETS CRICKETS CRICKETS . . . flowed down the window, over and over. "This is thrilling," said Saroyan. "It's my Los Angeles debut, and right at the top!"

I thought of the sweet chirps of crickets the following Saturday afternoon as I sat at the top of an embankment listening to raindrops splash into the surging Los Angeles River. Two women danced in men's button-down shirts on the concrete lip over the water, part of HomeLA's dress rehearsal at the Women's Center for Creative Work. The dance troupe, run by Rebecca Bruno, performs only in homes, though today the domestic-ish space was WCCW's home along the water. Artist Soyoung Shin reluctantly canceled her performance that involved climbing a flagpole, which she concluded was inadvisable in a lightning storm, opting instead for a consciousness-raising talk. Inside, Constance Strickland hollered and convulsed, emoting a mysterious domestic trauma, while in the kitchen a couple spun and fought while making cookies.



Left: Poet Aram Saroyan. Right: WCCW founder Sarah Williams and HomeLA's Rebecca Bruno.

For the finale, Samantha Mohr, in a diaphanous dress and roped to a drainage channel, gyrated like a spooky Ophelia near the water. “Seventy-five percent chance of rain,” one of the dancers told her beforehand. “But you look cute so you’ll be fine.” Midway through, a perplexed ranger warned the assembled crowd of a potential flash flood before heading back to his truck to watch the rest of the performance at a safe distance.



Left: Artists Kate Costello and Jedidiah Caesar with writer Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer. Right: Dealer Jeff Poe.

I headed south to a wet barbecue celebrating the opening of two group shows at François Ghebaly and Fahrenheit. Curator Jesse McKee walked me through his “Stopping the Sun in Its Course” at Ghebaly, which featured the druidic smear of paintings by Lucy Stein, three years’ worth of queer exuberance at English discos by Dick Jewell, and a blown-up comic by Walter Scott following his benighted avatar Wendy: “Palm Trees. Symbols of paradise,” it read. “And Yet. The aspirational green foliage BETRAYED—by a history laid before us. Revealed in the dead hanging leaves—the decimated HUSKS of a private life made public. Just like my LIFE.”

This exuberant, muddy ball-gown of a show lifted its skirt for a French tickler as I set off down the hallway to “Faux Pas,” curated by Parisian alt-space Shanaynay, in residence at Fahrenheit. With a John Wesley bathing suit, flaccid knockoffs of Ettore Sottsass vases, and a giant pink mural of a silhouetted woman’s ass getting fingered, it felt like a lascivious grin, summed up by a lusty man in a Playboy cartoon by Eldon Dedini who announced, bottle of wine in hand and standing over a well-endowed naked lass, “We’ve had French. Let’s try Californian!”



Left: Dealer David Kordansky and Tala Madani. Right: Dealer François Ghebaly.

Twenty minutes later I was in a gallery in Culver City, standing next to a lovely chiffon sheet of pastels and palms that stretched over the imposing two-by-four skeleton of a building, a bow-tied bartender placed in my hands a heavy ceramic goblet by Shoshi Kanokohata filled with a particularly stiff twist on the Zombie. This was all a part of “New Babylon,” curated by Michael Dopp, at Roberts & Tilton. The skeletal “house,” painted a bright blue (a shade called “Safe Harbor”) and designed by Joakim Dahlgvist, filled the gallery, and works by fourteen artists hung from its naked frame. I gulped my drink down quick and motored around the corner to glimpse a trio of solo shows by Victoria Fu, Kenneth Noland, and Kaz Oshiro at Honor Fraser and arrived just in time to miss a Ryan Gander performance at China Art Objects curated by Lauren Mackler/Public Fiction.



Left: Artists Nicole Miller, Max Maslansky, and Diana Molzan. Right: Artist Michael Dopp.



Left: Filmmakers Ben Russell and Basma Alsharif. Right: Chiara Giovando

I left the rich umbers and mauves cracking the storm clouds of the sunset behind me and headed east toward La Brea to openings for Tala Madani at David Kordansky and “About Face,” curated by writer Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer and former dealer Kristina Kite, at Kayne Griffin Corcoran. Walking from one show to the other, collector Michael Austin raved about Madani, noting the timing of the Tehran-born artist’s exhibition so close to the signing of the accord with the Islamic Republic. Across the street, powerful ladies in funky colors populated both the walls and front courtyard. “This show is amazing,” painter Rebecca Morris told Lehrer-Graiwer. “All the artists are going crazy in there.” When asked if she was stressed out from the installation, Lehrer-Graiwer said, “Not at all. My cheeks are flushed from smiling so much.”

Though I was tempted to join the fray at MoCA’s Step and Repeat or KCHUNG’s closing at per-space or Joshua Petker’s opening at Ashes/Ashes, instead I rode the freeway to my last stop at Night Gallery, where hundreds of people surged under the shiny panels of a drop ceiling hanging above the summer party organized by the New Art Dealers Alliance.



Left: Artist Lucy Stein. Right: Artists Kathryn Andrew and Piero Golia.



Left: Curator Jesse McKee and Fahrenheit director Martha Kirszenbaum. Right: Artist Walter Scott.

An installation of videos curated by Marc LeBlanc included a moving (and loud) trio of projections by artist James Richards. Nine years ago, the upstart art fair hosted a sunset party at the West Hollywood Standard to an invite-only crowd. This was almost the exact opposite of that starchy professional conclave: open, free, ecstatic, all sound-tracked by the crash and hum of underground acts organized by musician Tim Leanes. Night Gallery's Davida Nemeroff summed up the evening as an "ambient rave." Ted Byrnes of AQH virtuosically pounded his drum kit in cacophonous splendor. The crowd sat down to listen to the witchy allure of curator and musician Chiara Giovando, who layered her voice electronically under the syncopated strum of an acoustic guitar. Around midnight, the crowd began to thin, but Sam Rowell's beautiful combination of sound and light came through the warehouse like electronic thunder. I left after the last act quit the stage, the pulse of dance music following my footsteps through the puddles into the hot wet Los Angeles night.



Left: Artist Shoshi Kanokohata. Right: Musicians Chiara Giovando and Sam Rowell.



Left: Lucky Dragons' Luke Fischbeck. Right: Curator Lauren Mackler and musician Andrew Bulbrook.