

Stanya Kahn at The Pit



Art about the environment can often be a dud, but Stanya Kahn's current exhibition at The Pit plays with scenes of nature in a disarming manner. The six small landscapes that form the show's focal point turn the idealization of landscape painting inside out; their acidic sense of humor short-circuits the genre's straight face. Brightly colored mountains and rivers drawn in oil stick on pre-colored blue canvases function like tentative happy spaces. Hung low as though for a child, they are restorative yet anxious in their naïveté.

In dialogue with Kahn's landscapes, two works intervene with the genre of contemporary portraiture. One drawing on paper shows a woman taking a selfie as her baby crowns during childbirth. In the other work (on canvas), a reclining orange figure takes a selfie in a sea blue grid-space. These orange humans may be protests against comfortable numbness (Pink Floydian bathos intended), dramatizing empty narcissism in the face of a warming planet. They generate as much unease as they provide relief.

Other works in the exhibition provide context for Kahn's fantasy lands and nebulous figures. A pale green snake eating its own tail (ouroboros) appears repeatedly as a totem animal in two brightly colored canvases and an accompanying video. As the multiplied snake devours itself, the video hums with ascending and descending electronic chords as though trying to incant positive energies to ward off self-destruction. Palliative, the show precisely channels the small capacity of Art to remedy the terrors outside.

Heatstroke is on view from September 18–October 23, 2016 at The Pit (918 Ruberta Avenue, Glendale, CA, 91201).