

LAMAG CURATORIAL WALK-THRU

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Hello. Welcome to the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, or LAMAG. My name is Stephanie Sherwood and I'm the assistant curator here at LAMAG. If you haven't heard of us, or you're just now learning about us, LAMAG was founded in 1954 and is an entity of the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, and is the longest running institution in Los Angeles devoted solely to exhibiting art.

The gallery focuses on artists from Los Angeles, particularly underrepresented artists whose work otherwise may not find a platform. For recent graduates to practitioners with years of experience, the gallery functions as a site of discovery for outstanding work from the city's most exciting artists. In continuing that legacy, we're excited to showcase new work and three solo exhibitions by Vanessa McConnell, Lukas Geronimas, and Nevine Mahmoud. Working variously in painting, sculpture, and installation, the artists share a devotion to their craft and a distinctive compulsion to make.

Although employing radically different methodologies, the artists all share a method of painstakingly working and reworking their materials be it paint, wood, or stone to create entirely new objects. In this way, McConnell, Geronimas, and Mahmoud all point to the alchemy in the creative process and invite us to consider our own subliminal responses to certain objects, shapes, textures, and colors.

Vanessa McConnell's exhibition features a selection of paintings and works on paper characterized by their thick impasto surfaces and distinctive brushstrokes. The artist creates densely textured abstract compositions by adding multiple layers of acrylic paint oftentimes working until her brush is too heavy with paint to be manipulated.

McConnell's paintings evince a powerful compulsion to paint. The acrylic is encrusted thickly on her brushes, clothes, and workstation from repeated dramatic use. Rips and tears sometimes open up in the picture plane. Unique found objects such as wooden frames and shaped panels find their way under McConnell's paintbrushes. One painting even includes materials such as string and steel worked into the topography of its surface.

It was important for us to include ephemera in the presentation of the works because it really offers insight into how she works and kind of her state of mind as she's working. It almost feels like these objects are kind of three-dimensional versions of the surfaces that she built up in her work.

The artist works on multiple paintings at once, and her practice is an intensely social one. She loves to dance and move about the studio to see what others are working on before returning to load up her brush with more paint and apply another decisive mark. This has been described as a conversation between the artist and the picture plane with brief pauses in between.

The inspiration behind the new series of works by Lukas Geronimas is the church-like floor plan of the gallery. As the artist's practice deals primarily with materials such as reclaimed wood and metals as well

as calling into question the nature of object worship and art, responding to the architecture directly was key.

The artist has explored the line of inquiry for a while. This is to deal with the nature of object worship in art. Specifically interested in how we approach gallery spaces and contemporary art with the same kind of reverence that we might in a place of worship. There seems to be some sort of overlap there that is interesting and the artist has been investigating that for many years.

Custom Hung Valance is a series of wooden racks which support pointed Gothic style windows made of polished aluminum, stretched muslin, and tinted plywood. The Gothic style windows are in reference to the architecture already present in the gallery and are also in reference to a clerestory in a Gothic style church.

Barnsdall Column was created in nine segments. Four wooden crosses and five 10-sided prisms made of custom resurfaced plexiglass. The wooden crosses are modeled after the unique column design in the gallery, and the old cedar sourced for them gives particular evidence of a life already lived.

Mayfair Column Remainder is a reliquary, or tomb, for a piece of wood Geronimas intended on using in his first column piece. The relic is an old railway tie soaked in creosote oil.

The significance with the piece of wood that spurred *Mayfair Column Remainder* is that it was a piece of wood intended to be used in a column sculpture that was more or less a failure. It failed to serve the purpose that it was originally intended for. And the artist is really interested in preserving even these moments of failure in the practice. It's really about trying to honor those moments.

Puzzlemaster is a polyform idol. It amalgamates elements from an array of devotional figures, such as the nemes head cloth and ceremonial beard from ancient Egyptian Pharaohs, the seated pose of royal ease from Dharmic idols, the multiple arms included in depictions of Hindu deities, and the heroic posture and musculature included in renderings of Greek and Roman gods.

The surface of the sculpture is covered in relief scrawling, and it is polychromed using ink and graphite powder.

In terms of the use of material for *Puzzlemaster*, the sculpture was created with an armature and then Styrofoam carved on top. The Styrofoam is then transformed to look more like an older material such as stone or another material with the polychroming. The artist is really interested in this transformation of materials so that they appear more of like a traditional sculpture or relic from a place of worship.

Puzzlemaster is very unique from the other pieces of the exhibition, as it's the only figurative piece. It is not as architectural as the rest of the work in the space so it operates as a very unique piece in that sense.

Nevine Mahmoud creates provocative sculptures from materials such as glass, steel, resin, and precious stones such as onyx, alabaster, and marble. Her work often takes the form of fruit or body parts, from curvaceous busts to brightly colored peaches.

After discovering an outdoor sculpture studio in Ventura, California the artist became immersed in the labor intensive process of cutting and polishing a single piece of marble, citing the physical aspect of the process as deeply meditative.

As enchanting as Mahmoud's sculptures are, the realization of the cold unforgiving nature of the materials gives way to the conceptual complexity in the work. Deeper consideration of the pieces reveals the conflation of food and bodies with disembodied busts and severed legs displayed alongside cherries and peaches.

The conflation of food and bodies I think is apparent and heightened by the curatorial decision to group the peaches together on stepped pedestals and to group the series of blown glass pieces on a single stepped pedestal. This kind of gives you the opportunity to really compare and contrast these forms and really gets into the idea of consumption or consumerism.

The way they're presented together on these pedestals does have kind of a reference to commercial stores and how they would display objects that are meant to be purchased or consumed.

The exhibition of Nevine Mahmoud's work here in the gallery actually represents several different lines of inquiry in her practice. You're able to see how she's explored objects of play, specifically, like the play mats, the beach balls, the abacus arm. You're also able to see how she's explored food objects such as cherries and peaches in different colors of stone. And you're able to see the figurative elements, the busts and the blown glass legs. So it is very unique in that sense because you're able to see so many different aspects of the artist's practice conceptually coming together here in the gallery space.