

Downs & Ross

96 Bowery, 2nd Floor, New York NY 10013

JOSHUA NATHANSON

Forest Lawn

November 3–December 17, 2017

The last beam of sun softly cuddles the skin. Children's groans can be heard dissolving in the rocky ochre landscape as the strong yet gracile fever that stems from the first glass of absinthe rings the end of the day and the beginning of the long-awaited aperitif. This Provençal scene taken from the patio of a Mas overlooking the Aubagne lowland could have been the daily rituel of Joshua Nathanson. A Marcel Pagnol ecstasy that has haunted an incalculable amount of T Magazine readers. Yet, Nathanson has not grown desperately seeking the maternal shadow of a cedar tree. He has instead been shrouded by Los Angeles' purified and controlled air conditioning system that connects all of the metropolis' interior – Frank Gehry's poorly renovated mall in Santa Monica to the diffuse atmosphere of the Los Angeles Athletic Club.

Nathanson's paintings depict Californian scènes de vie that are captured on site via pencil drawings, routed through his iPad's drawing apps, and become the basis for paintings accrued of both computed and caressed gestures. While technically bearing allegiance to the assimilative method of the light-based realm started in the late 50's with Gerhard Richter and prolonged by Albert Oehlen, his research sidesteps the materialist critiques of contemporary image-making. Instead, his plein-air digital renderings reflect life at some closeness to the screen. At this range, the internet savvy concept of attention deficit disorder becomes all the more apparent. If Nathanson shares the Impressionists' ambitions to translate contemporary modes of perception, he is less concerned with light, and its reflections on the variegated textures of modern life, than with showing a conflation between the city's early-20th-century pastoral dream and an Oldenburgian distended optimism. Forgotten is the time when the Californian pavilion for the World Exhibition in 1893 was a massive bell composed of fresh citrus; yet, even then, nature was treated as a brand. In a city which has obliterated the concept of public spaces, Nathanson wanders between Vito Acconci's Mobius Bench II in Pasadena and the Borghesian Forest Lawn Memorial Park. Housing a complete collection of replicas of Michelangelo's sculptures, the park sits dangerously close to the Warner Bros. Studios.

Only now it is possible to picture Nathanson walking through The Grove like Walter Benjamin did in the arcades of Paris, a post-situ explorer capturing Hollister tee-shirt buyers, synthetic pink ice-cream consumers, agitated conversations at the Cheesecake Factory, and kids in Lisa Frank under palm trees. Like Rousseau in Ermenonville, he is the promeneur of Huntington Park. A dreamer who has integrated the beauty of impermanence and the variation of flux into his contemplations. An acute observer who mobilizes different registers of perceptions, seizing the picturesque, appropriating the poetry of the place, feeling its romantic emanation. No great divide – forget Frankfurt school and French post-structuralism. The flâneur in Los Angeles collects expensive Uber bills and has a desperately high carbon foot print. Here, if there is a kind of pastoralism cherished by Le Lorrain or Poussin it has been screened out with the degraded image produced in Paint. The spectacle of seasons is dissected with a loose, balletic hand. Chronicler of the transitory, amateur of enchanted nights, or simply a Baudelairian chatbot in the city of Quartz.

By Pierre Alexandre Mateos & Charles Teyssou

Joshua Nathanson (b. 1976, Washington, D.C., lives and works in Los Angeles, CA) received his BFA from the School of Visual Arts, New York, NY, and his MFA from Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA. Recent group exhibitions include: The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Whitechapel Gallery, London; the Yokohama Museum; ARNDT, Singapore; and 356 S. Mission, Los Angeles. Solo exhibitions include: Various Small Fires, Los Angeles; Luce Gallery, Turin; and Kaikai Kiki Gallery, Tokyo. His work is the subject of an upcoming solo exhibition at Yuz Museum, Shanghai, in 2018, and is included in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

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November 3-December 17, 2017

Wed-Sun, 12-6pm

Exhibition Checklist

First Room (clockwise from elevator):

Processing, 2017

HD video with sound

0m11s video loop with 1m16s sound loop

(Animation production by Angela Stempel,
Sound design by Abishek Ramesh)

How Do You Trust Yourself?, 2017

Acrylic on canvas

95 × 69 inches / 241.3 × 175.2 cm

Second Room (clockwise from entry):

Totally Fine, 2017

Acrylic on canvas

74 × 54 inches / 187.9 × 137.1 cm

cool rocks, 2017

Acrylic on canvas

84 × 61 inches / 213.4 × 154.9 cm

Oscar's Raisins, 2017

Acrylic on canvas

74 × 54 inches / 187.9 × 137.1 cm

Shitty Kaleidoscope, 2017

Acrylic on canvas

84 × 61 inches / 213.4 × 154.9 cm

Office (clockwise from entry):

Forest Lawn, 2017

Acrylic on canvas

84 × 61 inches / 213.4 × 154.9 cm

Already There, 2017

Acrylic on canvas

84 × 61 inches / 213.4 × 154.9 cm