

Contemporary
Art Review

.la

Nut Art at Parker Gallery

June 15, 2017
Text by Matt Stromberg



Robert Arneson, *How About a Little Cookie?* (1971/2001). Edition of 10, plus 2 AP, painted bronze, 15 x 13 1/2 x 13 1/2 inches. Copyright Estate of Robert Arneson/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Image courtesy Parker Gallery, Los Angeles and Brian Gross Fine Art, San Francisco.

Matt Stromberg, "Nut Art at Parker Gallery." *Carla* (June 15, 2017), accessed online.

Flanking the entrance of Parker Gallery are several lumpy pots sprouting beak-like noses: the work of LA-based artist Calvin Marcus. Each one holds a bizarre-looking, hallucinogenic San Pedro cactus, foreshadowing the heady trip to follow.

For their inaugural show, Parker Gallery has mounted a historical exhibition of Nut Art, a movement that developed in Northern California in the late '60s. While other dominant trends of the time were paring the art object down to its essence, Nut Art went in the opposite direction, drawing on Pop, low-brow cartoons, Surrealism, and personal mythologies to create messy, boisterous works that abandoned both traditional artistic hierarchies and good taste.

Although stylistically distinct, the Nut Art members were united by their exuberance, whimsy, and (often dark) humor that responded to the era's tumult and strife with tragi-comic absurdity. Peter Saul's Styrofoam and fiber-glass sculpture *Relax in Electric Chair (Dirty Guy)* (1965) features a life-sized, contorted, yellow-skinned figure, tongue bulging out of his mouth. David Gilhooly's table-top ceramic sculpture *The End of the World* (1970), depicts an earth ringed by fire and explosions—apocalypse as collectible tchotchke. Maija Peeples-Bright's expressionistic paintings accented with bits of fur and Franklin Williams's painted and sewn organic abstractions offer different takes on Nut Art's open-ended formula.

At Parker Gallery, work by founding members of the movement rub elbows with contemporary contributions from young Angeleno artists, like Marcus, who share a kinship with their Bay Area predecessors. Benjamin Reiss' *Conditioner (and Follicle)* (2016), a fantastical multi-media sculpture that resembles a blown-up scientific model of an unknown organism, and Hannah Greely's playful linguistic personification, *J-o-B* (2017), make the case that the true heirs to Nut Art's refreshing weirdness may well reside in the Southland.

There is an unassuming, laid-back attitude to many of these works at odds with the white cube, or even with the stately, refined house where the Parker has taken up residence. Of the many movements that have railed against the stuffy parameters of "fine art," Nut Art seems an especially unlikely candidate to receive institutional approval—instead of the cool remove we've come to expect from much post-war art, this group of artists is more interested in letting it all hang out. 50 years on, it retains so much of its ability to delight and surprise.

Nut Art runs from May 28 – August 5, 2017 at Parker Gallery (2441 Glendower Ave., Los Angeles CA 90027).

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Franklin Williams, *Baby Girl #5*
(1970). Acrylic and yarn on
canvas, 32 x 46 inches. Courtesy
of the Artist and Parker Gallery,
Los Angeles.



Clayton Bailey, *Underwater
Chase* (1970). Low fire ceramic
and underglaze, 30 x 72 x 12
inches. Courtesy of the Artist
and Parker Gallery, Los Angeles.

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Calvin Marcus, *Untitled* (2017).
Ceramic, potting soil and
cactus. Dimensions variable.
Courtesy of the Artist, David
Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles,
and Parker Gallery, Los Angeles.



Chris Unterseher, *Rincon Bay*
(1968). Earthenware and glaze,
31 x 9 x 5 1/2 inches. Courtesy of
the Artist and Parker Gallery, Los
Angeles.

Matt Stromberg, "Nut Art at Parker Gallery." *Carla* (June 15, 2017), accessed online.



Maija Peeples-Bright, *SeaSaw Beast* (1965). Acrylic on masonite, 37 x 49 inches. Courtesy of the Artist and Parker Gallery, Los Angeles.



Installation view of *Nut Art*. Image courtesy of Parker Gallery, Los Angeles.

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