

Parker Ito

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ARTFORUM



View of “Parker Ito: A Lil Taste of Cheeto in the Night,” 2015.

*Crammed into 7,500 square feet of leased space behind Château Shatto Gallery in downtown LA, Parker Ito’s current exhibition is a stunning, vertiginous private museum multiplied hundreds of times. The show is over a year in the making, and it’s not finished yet: Ito will continue amending the paintings and installations on view until the exhibition is reprised as an “epilogue.” “A Lil Taste of Cheeto in the Night” is on view until May 2, 2015.*

I WANT TO MAKE EXHIBITIONS where there is always a potential for the work to be shifting. There is a sensation that I’m chasing: an exhibition beyond the pacified white cube, something indigestible, something profuse. The question became how to make something that feels like my website, where I’m always making new work and adding things on. In a sense, my website is my masterwork: It’s like a grand edit of everything I’ve ever done, and it takes on a life of its own where things are infused in a bigger structure.

I came up with this two-year project of trying to make something so total and intricate it couldn’t be comprehended—where you could zoom in on the details endlessly, but never zoom out completely. “A Lil Taste of Cheeto in the Night” played out in several stages. It began with a prelude in the beginning of 2014: I hung eight paintings in an Atwater coffee shop. They were completely anonymous and ambient. After the exhibition, the paintings came back to my studio to be painted on some more, and they now hang in this show on the back of larger double-sided paintings.

Part one was at Smart Objects, a project space in Los Angeles, in May 2014. It was the first time I considered the whole building as a medium. I left the main space of the gallery empty. A nonsensical neon sign was hung facing out toward the street. There was a disused, three-story elevator shaft in the building and I broke through the wall to hang a bronze sculpture inside the shaft. Wallpaper was installed in the bathroom, and I hung a series of paintings throughout the second-floor apartment where the dealer lived. I painted a mural on the roof, too.

Part two was at White Cube in London last July. I considered this a trailer for “A Lil Taste of Cheeto in the Night.” This was an effort to make an exhibition that spilled beyond the confines of the designated exhibition space. Children of the gallery’s staff contributed to some of the paintings that were hung throughout the offices, and flower vases made by other employees were scattered around the show. There was also a video piece, which is an episode of another ongoing work, and the receptionists wore pairs of bespoke slippers for the duration of the show. We added live parrots for the documentation. The show was credited as the work of Parker Cheeto and my eight studio assistants. People thought it was a group show.

The content in the current LA exhibition goes through a process of absorption. There are numerous sculptures riffing off the iconography of the local company Western Exterminator; my works feature an iconic top-hatted man with a mallet that sits atop company buildings and vans. They’re something you see often in LA because you’re constantly on the freeway, and Western Exterminator has depots at several freeway locations—off the 101, the 405. I think about how part of being alive is having to constantly process so much information that you’re pushed to a space where you don’t really know what the thing is—it’s just floating. I wanted to be able to incorporate as many media, processes, and strategies, as many kinds of content, as I could grasp. With such a density of information, the chemistry between things becomes unpredictable. The exhibition reaches a point where there is no one-to-one correlation between a reference and its meaning. It’s like when people who don’t read Chinese get Chinese characters tattooed on their bodies. Often those phrases are mistranslated, but it doesn’t really matter to the person what the characters say. They’re mostly interested in the qualities being conveyed by this kind of typography. That’s how I think about content: It’s not equivalent; it’s a filter. I’m invested in the sensation of things.

*- As told to Chris Kraus*