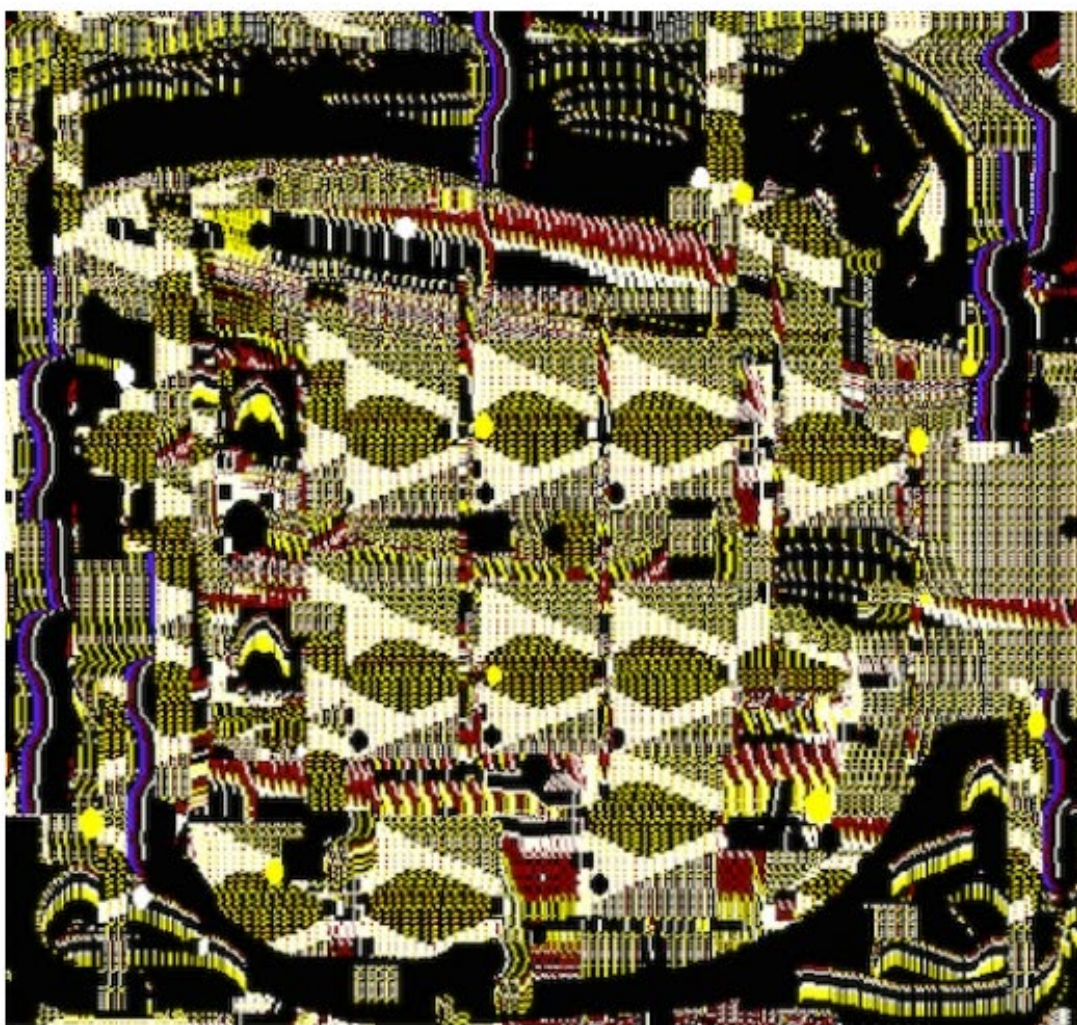


Highlights 2015 - Jonathan Griffin

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Lee Mullican, 'Computer Work', 1987

According to the East Coast press, Los Angeles is all in a tizzy over the recent renaissance in its commercial gallery scene. But the cavernous bow-truss warehouses beside the LA River, where many of these New York or European transplants have set up shop, were not really where the action was in 2015.

Aside from some really splendid institutional shows (a fortuitous succession of which – William Pope. L at MOCA, Charles Gaines and Mark Bradford at the Hammer and Noah Purifoy at LACMA – happened to feature black artists) what really impressed me this year were the exhibitions thriving in the less expected nooks and crevices of the city.

A barnlike garage behind a grand craftsman home in the Harvard Heights neighbourhood is the unlikely location of the gallery Reserve Ames, run by curator and artist Ben Echeverria. In the Spring, he mounted an exhibition by married couple Jenny Monick and Gedi Sibony; in the autumn, he invited curator Laura Fried to curate an encounter between work by Jay Heikes and Dieter Roth. Every visit to Reserve Ames is a revelation. Long may it prosper.

A few blocks to the west, Michael Thibault has been modestly hosting some of the city's most uncompromisingly ambitious exhibitions at his small eponymous gallery. Shows by Tobias Spichtig, Olga Balema & Anne De Vries, and most recently Bill Jenkins & Chadwick Rantanen (a two person show that felt like a collaboration) introduced me to work from far and wide that felt fresh and vital.

In a former hair salon in Beverly Hills, the gallery Equitable Vitrines (which normally occupies vitrines in the lobby of Koreatown's Equitable Life Building) hosted a generous survey of extraordinary work by Lee Mullican titled 'Shatter Special'. Ceramics from the 1960s to the 90s were arranged alongside paintings and abstract photographs. Most striking of all, however, were the wild computer drawings that Mullican made in 1987, projected onto the wall.



Parker Ito, 'A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night', Installation view at Chateau Shatto, Los Angeles

Respect is due, too, to Parker Ito, for the staggering installation presented in a rented building near his Downtown gallery, Chateau Shatto. Titled 'A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night', the evolving exhibition was the final chapter in a cycle of shows that had begun a year earlier with an anonymous display in an Atwater coffee shop. Strings of LED lights and coloured chains were slung from the ceiling alongside Ito's paintings, sculptures, and miscellaneous crapola. It started out nearly impenetrable, and got denser as the show progressed. That was January. In May, he followed it with a coup de gras at the gallery's main space, titled 'Epilogue: PBBVx4.5213418505240406714305462110190527PPPPPPPPPPPPPP'. Black water gurgled through tubes in and out of buckets and printers vomited jpegs. In a basement space hung perhaps the oddest self-portrait you could ever hope to see: the artist seated in his studio wearing a black latex nun's habit, a Burberry overcoat and a pink vinyl rucksack on his head. Love him or hate him, no one makes a splash like Ito.

Finally something a little more restrained. In November, the revered conceptualist Robert Barry transformed a Rudolph Schindler church in South Los Angeles into a work of text art. The dealer Thomas Solomon – whose gallery closed in 2014 – encountered the vacant church (built in 1944 and now in need of some T.L.C.) and approached Barry to make a work specially for it. Fifty one words cut from white vinyl were adhered at all angles to the white interior walls of the space: 'anything', 'almost', 'secret', 'looking' and so on. The language is unremarkable but the effect was anything but. On a grey day in December, it was a fittingly reflective way to close out an eventful year.

About the author



Jonathan Griffin is a contributing editor of *frieze* and a freelance writer living in Los Angeles.