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Identical Twins

Review: Parker Ito draws upon artistic connections

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Two new installations by Parker Ito in his Los Angeles solo debut diagram artistic relationships, no doubt underscored by the new realities of a digital world. That is both their considerable strength and an unavoidable weakness.

The front room at Steve Turner Contemporary features a sequence of large abstract paintings suspended at varying angles from the ceiling. Each was spray-painted as it leaned against one of the surrounding walls, where the residue of the action leaves painted marks outlining the now-ghostly places once occupied by the paintings.

Ito employed drywall rather than canvas as the paintings' support, blurring material distinctions between the art and the architecture. Positive and negative space merge on the walls, on the paintings and in the center of the room.

Another painting or print by another artist hangs on each suspended painting, transforming it into the floating equivalent of a wall. Ito's suspended assemblage is also a spatial marker, hovering above a decal by yet another artist affixed to the floor. (The four confederates Ito invited to participate are Artie Vierkant, Israel Lund, Skye Chamberlain and the collaborative Body by Body.) The ensemble is titled "See Also: Lai Fun, List of Pasta, Soba," which is part of the Wikipedia entry for "spaghetti."

The engaging structure of Ito's installation thrives on a seemingly unrelated but actually dense network of relationships among people, places and things — including art, which we have a casual tendency to regard as an individualist pursuit. There's a reason he suspends the agglomerations on extravagantly draped metal chains, since each is composed from links.

One only wishes that the separate components were each more densely engaging, instead of relying on simple, familiar motifs such as cartoons and graffiti splatters. Some of that deficiency is resolved in a rear gallery installation.

There, two pairs of abstract paintings and two pairs of abstract sculptures are similarly suspended from the ceiling on chains, all at topsy-turvy angles. As objects, the paired paintings and sculptures are identical twins, created in tandem with thick gestures of modeling paste on the canvases and pummeled clay for the two sculptures.

All four pairs were then sprayed with iridescent automotive paint. Its colors shift as a viewer moves around them, differentiating their otherwise identical appearance.

The pairs recall Robert Rauschenberg's famous 1957 Combine paintings "Factum I" and "Factum II," two seemingly identical but slightly different works that threw a monkey wrench into artistic assumptions about uniqueness and originality. The auto paint recalls work by Rubén Ortiz-Torres, the Mexican-born L.A. artist whose multimedia art has long transgressed established aesthetic and social boundaries.

Ito, who works in New York and Los Angeles, fused New York School abstraction with L.A. Light and Space art to come up with something that is both and neither. It will be interesting to see where he goes from here.

Steve Turner Contemporary, 6026 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 931-3721, through March 9. Closed Sun. and Mon. www.steveturnercontemporary.com