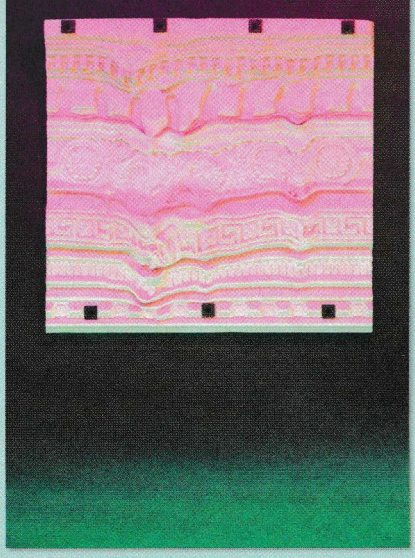
Château Shatto, Los Angeles

Keeping the floor 'junked up' is a term for making casino renovations and construction work visible to the gambling public, the point being to entice the casual player or tourist back with the promise of something new. According to Norman Klein in his 2004 book *The Vatican to Vegas: A History of Special Effects*, leaving some of the casino's edges frayed is also a psychological ploy – a bit of wear and tear implies the house is not all it is chalked up to be, and maybe you can take it, maybe you can win. These spaces are in constant flux, adapting to the current tastes and kitsch: yesterday's Monte Carlo is today's Venetian. In 'Composite Arcade' at Château Shatto, Cayetano Ferrer's first solo show in Los Angeles, the artist traced this simulacral relationship of the faux to its source and back again to its staging. Focusing on what is lost in architectural translation seems to be the slippery territory on which Ferrer finds his footing; he approaches serious cultural inquiry with a splash of showmanship.

An unearthly green hue greeted visitors to the show. A number of the gallery's halogen lights had been replaced with blacklight and green bulbs, conjuring the atmosphere of a high-end nightclub in the early hours of the morning. In the centre of the room, large marble slabs sat on simple Modernist bases at coffee table height. At first glance, they looked deceptively sleek, reminiscent of this-or-that Modernist's work or so-and-so's boutique-catalogue of contemporary decor. On closer inspection, the blacklight revealed that the marble patterning did not line up and the colour was uneven. Ultra-violet lighting is used not only in club culture, but also as a tool for conservators to detect shoddy repairs. Ferrer's slabs were made of smaller chunks of the pricey stone, rendered geometrically whole using PVC with a marble print.

The same thinly veiled *trompe l'œil* effects were evident in a plaster relief hanging high on the wall. It was patterned with various styles of cornices stacked one on top of the other like a core sample of crown moulding style or a Greek architectural history lesson. At the centre, the patterns seem to melt, melding into each other as if heavy with their implied historical weight. Nearby, a tall cinder block wall divided the main room. Each block was etched with a different pattern, ranging from Modernist grids and squares to brightly coloured confetti. Elsewhere, piles of unpainted plaster tiles were stacked on the floor and leaned against the walls. They were embedded with layers of patterning that could be Aztec, Egyptian or American Apparel.

The final work in the gallery was a mirrored infinity room, empty except for a central column and a rhythmically thumping soundtrack. In a bit of show business gimmickry, the base of the column was actually a scavenged ashtray from the old MGM Grand Casino in Vegas. Ferrer made casts stacking them to form a column, stretching its art deco relief into an impressive pillar.



3

Video was projected onto the column from two directions, a colourful patterning tracing the angles of its forms, building geometric patterns into visual peaks before deconstructing them again – a process Ferrer related to a corrupt hard drive that allows information to bleed, becoming unreadable.

As a show about symbols losing touch with their sources, 'Composite Arcade' leaned heavily on Jean Baudrillard. It made its points with panache and intention but without feeling dated. It was refreshing to see this level of specificity of conceptual form amongst today's many elastic, anti-structural shows that lack a sense of commitment. Ferrer himself keeps close to his sources, using material he has been focused on for some time. This particular body of work is a significant shift for him, marking an increased use of allegory, history, symbols and forms. The pieces describe narratives of cultural artifice using a baroque grammar, one that composites and reorders visual hierarchies. This is done with a similar logic to casino facades, which make historically and geographically famous places at once more attainable yet interchangeable. Ferrer consciously keeps his illusions and artifice on the surface, allowing viewers an 'ah-ha' moment of discovery as they spot them. Everyone likes to think they can take the house.

SUMMER GUTHERY