

Ensemble at Château Shatto

June 9, 2021
Text by Nayat Yohannes



Steve Bishop, *Far And Near At Once (detail)* (2019). Found paper and photographs in frames, five parts: 9 x 5.75 and 4.25 x 3.5 inches each. Image courtesy of the artist and Château Shatto.

In their current group exhibition, *Ensemble*, Château Shatto forgoes a theme, instead banking on the potential for intuitive connections. Entering the gallery feels like stepping into the glistening din of a late-night house party at its peak. A cacophony of personalities cling to the walls of the fete and, in some cases, lie crumpled on the floor. A syrupy voice emanates from Barbara Hammer's 16mm short film *Double Strength* (1978), asking, "How are you feeling?" with an earnestness that gives pause. The question felt pointed: how is one meant to feel when experiencing a group show that introduces itself as themeless? Themes offer cues for reception: somber press releases make visitors assume the solemn gait of a funeral procession, while sensually-framed shows elicit an air of sophisticated composure that's undercut by the occasional stifled giggle. Themes, though often too prescriptive, are a grounding force. What happens when a show takes the ground out from under you?

In its effort to eschew thematic, *Ensemble* culminated in a mixed-media show featuring eight disparate artists. Rather than getting stuck on the dissonance between works, the exhibition makes a case for community and speaks to the natural human desire to find connection—a result only heightened by the extended period of isolation so many of us have endured.

The gallery's inescapable panoramic view, which overlooks the restless sprawl of Downtown Los Angeles—rows of cars navigating traffic and piles of skyscrapers—sets the tone for Steve Bishop's *Good Habits* (2019), a work which consists of three book pages and a found photograph hung in a line in simple clip frames. The first page is the red-orange cover to the book *The Uses of Beauty and Order*, which prominently features a black ink drawing of irises in a modest water glass. Next are the two page-long excerpts (presumably from the same text) that border on existential as they meditate on the cultural conditioning that rigidly upholds good housekeeping habits. A nostalgia-tinted photograph of an ordinary dining table leaning against a darkened window finishes the set. In another work on view, *Far And Near At Once* (2019), Bishop pairs an image of unremarkable patio furniture with text from *The Human Situation*. In lieu of a cohesive theme and within an overall minimal exhibition, Bishop's work, which is made up of pages taken from a cult organization called Re-Evaluation Counseling's publications, provides context. His pieces ascribe sentimentality to ubiquitous, everyday objects as a means for evoking questions about mortality and social life and offer a lens for better observing relatability.

In this way, Bishop's works bind *Ensemble*, suggesting that everything can be read in relation—even the impudently loose oil paintings (by Emma McIntyre), minimalist three-legged birch stools (by MingYan Helen Gu), and delicate yet graphic pencil drawings (by Christian Santiago) on display, which seem incongruous at first glance. Gu's works, for instance, are location-contingent and operate relative to their space. Gu uses reference images and 3-D models from furniture manufacturers to replicate conventional birch exhibition stools by hand. The works' titles change according to where they're displayed—here, they are all titled *CS-011863-MG (Three-legged Stool in Birch)* (2020). The stools still serve their aesthetic purpose in the gallery space, but their intended role—for sitting or stepping atop—is not served. Instead, they are arranged around the room like the patio furniture and dining table in Bishop's selected photographs, which, without bodies to sit in them, are isolated from their function. Without prescribed or thematic logic for their inclusion in the exhibition, the stools are contextualized by their environment. Similarly, Santiago's drawings contain their own carnal narratives, but within *Ensemble*, their sensual overtures spark a more intimate version of the inherent connectivity Bishop insinuates.

Ensemble is an open-ended gathering that fills the room with varied resonant conversations and encourages each new party guest to listen closely as the different voices coalesce into a resounding hum of humanity. The notion that it is themeless by design challenges visitors to reconsider the function of a theme, and offers the opportunity and authority to draw unique connections between the works on view.

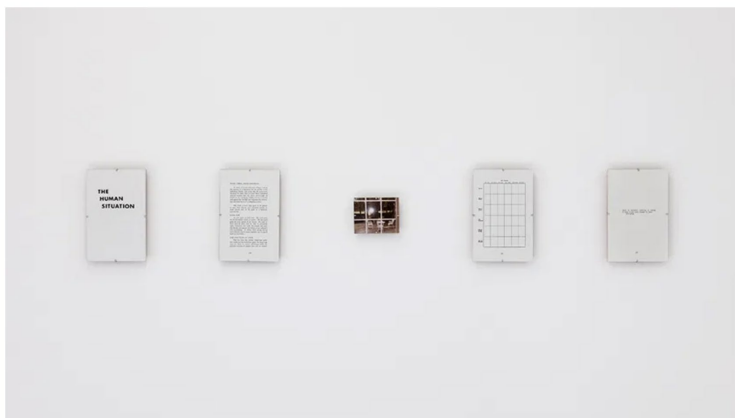
Ensemble runs from May 1–June 26, 2021 at Château Shatto (1206 Maple Ave #1030, Los Angeles, CA 90015).



MingYan Helen Gu, *CS-011863-MG (Three-legged Stool in Birch)* (2020). Paper and cardboard with double-sided tape, adhesive, and vinyl, 21 x 15 x 15 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Château Shatto.



Steve Bishop, *Good Habits* (2019). Found paper and photographs in frames, four parts: 8 x 5 and 5 x 3.5 inches each. Image courtesy of the artist and Château Shatto.



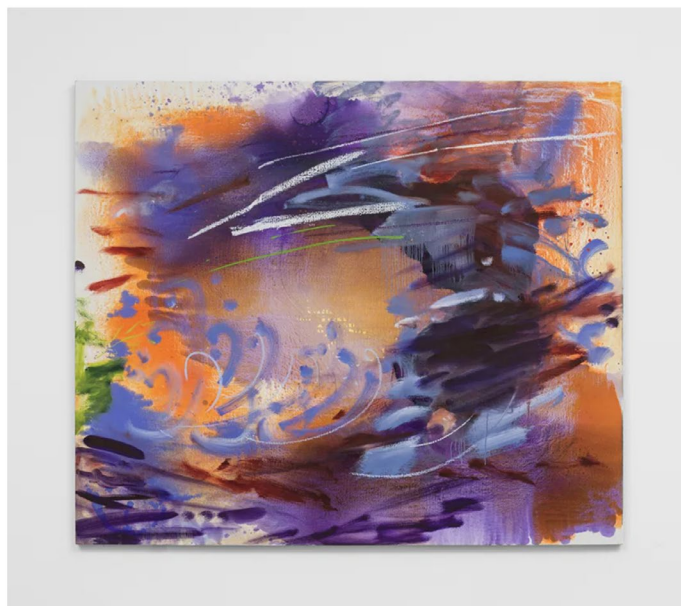
Steve Bishop, *Far And Near At Once* (2019). Found paper and photographs in frames, five parts: 9 x 5.75 and 4.25 x 3.5 inches each. Image courtesy of the artist and Château Shatto.



Ensemble (installation view)
(2021). Image courtesy of the
artists and Château Shatto.



Christian Santiago, *Robby Rims*
(2020). Pencil on smooth Bristol,
19 x 24 inches. Image courtesy of
the artists and Château Shatto.



Emma McIntyre, *Those wanton
mauves* (2021). Oil and oil stick
on linen, 66 x 78 inches. Image
courtesy of the artists and
Château Shatto.