



Isaac Resnikoff
 (see *The New Verisimilitude*)
Stack of Chairs, 2010, carved wood, 51 x 44 x 274 cm, unique.
 Courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles

Scott Benzel
Counterfeit Nike 'Heaven's Gate' SB Dunks, 2011, and *Original Posters for 'The Trip' (1967) with Original Stickers*, 2011. Courtesy Human Resources, Los Angeles



THE NEW VERISIMILITUDE

The New Verisimilitude

M+B and François Ghebaly Gallery,
Los Angeles

14 July – 2 September (M+B)

16 July – 20 August (François Ghebaly)

The Wikipedia entry for ‘verisimilitude’ kicks off with the uncharacteristically weighty line: ‘The problem of verisimilitude is the problem of articulating what it takes for one false theory to be closer to the truth than another false theory.’ It is productive to think of the two-gallery exhibition curated by François Ghebaly not as a parade of impressive stabs at reproducing reality but as a series of failures, albeit failures that unfold in different and expressive ways.

The New Verisimilitude never really reveals just what is new about the various forms of verisimilitude on show, nor does it explain how they are linked. At M+B, the larger of the two venues, a captivating videowork by David Levine, *Present/Not Present [excerpt]* (2006/9) is placed not far from Peter Rostovsky’s *Miami Stadium* (2008). The former shows footage of two men sitting in chairs and fidgeting. Only the list of works reveals that one is an actor and one is not, but which is which? The latter piece is a large painting of an American football stadium seen from high above; though competent, it is not photorealistic (in that it couldn’t be mistaken for a photograph), but nor, I think, does it try to be. It’s hazy and atmospheric, and it encourages a feeling of drifting away from reality, not screwing it down.

There is an important distinction to make here: ‘verisimilitude’ equals neither photorealism nor hyperrealism. In fact it has its etymological roots in drama, and more often refers to a convincing presence than it does to appearance alone. You can tell that Victoria Gitman’s exquisite paintings of beaded handbags are copied from life, not photographs. They have an immediacy (born, paradoxically, from painstaking production) that Karl Haendel’s pencil drawings lack. But Haendel’s work is about mediation itself: the laboured process of transcription from object to photograph to pencil drawing to abstract collage – as with *Pencil Stubs in Strips* (2010), which he slices into Daniel Buren-style diagonals – is

intended to create distance. If there is presence, it is the presence of the artwork, not its subject; if there is truth, it is philosophical rather than experiential.

The selection of works at Ghebaly’s own, smaller space was stronger than at M+B, principally because it made a virtue of diversity. Alongside Haendel’s *Pencil Stubs in Strips* and Gitman’s *On Display* (2008), Isaac Resnikoff carved a wooden sapling tied to two stakes, and a towering totem pole of stacked chairs. Both works had physical presence in spades, even if they had none of the accuracy of Yoshihiro Suda’s *Camelia* (2006), a perfect wooden bloom that sprouted from high up on one wall. Dan Finsel’s collaged *SelfBox#1* (2011) returns the conversation to drama: throughout his work, Finsel method-acts a character named Dan Finsel; the ‘self-box’ is an art-therapy exercise in which participants decorate a box to reflect their interior and exterior selves. He teaches us that while representations can be perfectly accurate, their subjects can still be false.

JONATHAN GRIFFIN

SCOTT BENZEL

Scott Benzel: *Mal-dis-tri-bu-tion*
Human Resources, Los Angeles
9–23 July

Things never end up the way you intend. Best-laid plans, so on and so forth. Right now, a tattered copy of Shakespeare’s *Henry V* (c. 1599) is propping up my wobbling bookshelf. I mean no offence to Shakespeare or his army of acolytes, or to Henry V, for that matter, but it just happens to be the perfect thickness for the job. Such practical handlings can be called a form of recycling, but they’re more accurately a kind of repurposing.

Sometimes repurposing has more sinister intentions or conceals more dubious origins, however. In the old projection room at the converted movie theatre housing art and performance space Human Resources, composer

and artist Scott Benzel’s exhibition has the feel of a backroom contraband dealer, from the route up the rear stairwell down to the pristine vitrines plopped onto the scuzzy carpet.

Though it may resemble a blackmarketeer’s disparate showroom, the items on display begin to tell a subtle story. For example, miniature plastic roses sold in glass vials can be found at every liquor store in Los Angeles. I’ve rarely considered this romantic kitsch while buying cigarettes, but on display here I see how easily that vial can become a crack pipe, especially as next to it on the shelf are a series of sneaky weed pipes that impersonate tubes of lipstick or markers. On the same shelf sits a roll of stamps, for which the USPS designer pulled as clip art the Statue of Liberty, not realising it was really Lady Liberty’s doppelgänger outside a casino in Las Vegas. A pair of bootleg Chinese Nikes sit in a case by themselves, the genuine line rumoured to have been suspended by Nike for its similarity to shoes worn in the 1997 Heaven’s Gate mass suicide. A minidisplay within this contraband shop surrounds the existence of a Charles Manson-composed song on a Beach Boys album right before the Family went on its killing spree.

A thesis emerges from all these items, one that Benzel, in an accompanying essay, calls ‘maldistribution’. It’s a word which usually refers to the unequal distribution of wealth, but which Benzel employs to define a kind of repurposing that creates ambiguity in its reception. Beginning its life one way, the thing in question eventually ends up being reinterpreted in another way (often either nefariously or contrary to its intentions) and creating confusion.

Common objects are not the only ones pulled into Benzel’s display cases. Shelved beneath the pipes is the artworld-infamous advertisement from the pages of *Artforum* of a nude Lynda Benglis manhandling an impressively veined dildo. This ad led to the resignation of two of *Artforum*’s editors and the founding of the academic journal *October*, the first issue of which, in Benzel’s case, lies open to an illustration accompanying Michel Foucault’s essay on the phrase ‘*Ceci n’est pas une pipe*’, from Magritte’s painting *The Treachery of Images* (1928–9). Fingering a trail from crack-pipe roses to Michel Foucault, it’s not hard to come to the conclusion that, in Benzel’s hands, not only images can be treacherous.

ANDREW BERARDINI