



Doug Aitken, *House*, 2010, video projection, wood, and construction materials, dimensions variable, installation view. Regen Projects.

## Doug Aitken

Museum of Contemporary Art and Regen Projects

Los Angeles

In divergent works, Doug Aitken took the lead in the Los Angeles art scene last fall. The artist's theatrical inclinations were employed to the fullest in what he called a "Happening" at MOCA's annual gala. Under zigzagging tubes of white, pink, and red light, Aitken conducted as auctioneers popped up in various locations around the warehouse venue, singing arias of auction figures. The singers wore banners printed with words associated with the West: "waves," "outlaws," "cactus." As the cadence of these cries increased in volume, groups of drummers pounded mallets on Aitken's "Sound Tables" and singers added to the din. Nearing the crescendo, a single cowboy in boots and a Stetson jumped onto the center stage to perform tricks with a bullwhip that cracked and snapped like lightning.

After such a dramatic event, it was curious to encounter Aitken's poetic video *House* (2010) at Regen Projects. Not connected to his downtown show, it was more impressive for its restraint.

In the video an elderly couple—the artist's parents—sit across from each other, silent, as a house is torn down around them. Glass shatters and drywall crumbles, but the couple remain serene. Viewers watched on a screen mounted on the same wooden table featured in

the video, so that they are forced into positions similar to the subjects'. The perimeter of the gallery was heaped high with pieces of lathe, plaster, and board, the detritus of the actual house. This meditation on the passage of time, a suggestion of fragile yet profound relations between people and places, quietly revealed Aitken's immense talent.

—Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

## 'REAL'

Imago

Palm Desert, California

In its bid to encompass the many varieties of realism, this exhibition of mostly recent work featured more than 70 pieces on view on two floors. In both subject matter and media, the show ranged widely, from Bo Bartlett's oil-on-linen *America* (2007), depicting a prototypical family enjoying a swing set outdoors, to a series of miniature gold cat sculptures (2006–8) by Gwynn Murrill.

Although there was little to hold the show together, there were standouts in a variety of categories. Several of the paintings and drawings took up the photorealistic tradition. Three

pastel works by Zaria Forman (all 2010) portrayed the surface of the sea with a focus on the play between blue water and white sunlight, reminding the viewer of Vija Celmins's precision drawings. Other works injected notes of the surreal. Masaaki Sato's oil-on-canvas *Newsstand No. 42* (1989) looks like a faithful rendering of a contemporary storefront, until one sees that much of the type runs backward.

Still life was the most popular theme. David Ligare's oil-on-canvas *Still Life with Egyptian Vases* (2010) shows three narrow vessels against a three-sided box and the ocean in the background; the contrasts in scale, the definition of light and shadow, and the isolation of the scene recall de Chirico. A series of vividly painted bronze sculptures by Luis Montoya and Leslie Ortiz depicts mussels in a pot, escargots in a basket, and various combinations of fruit. The diverse shapes and textures would be convincing but for the cloyingly shiny patina they share. David Willis combines different media to potent effect. He creates lampworked glass leaves that are attached to photographic prints in stainless-steel frames to produce three-dimensional, nature-inspired works. His *full fathom five detail* and *get closer* (both 2010) are perfect encapsulations of autumn.

—Richard Chang



David Willis, *full fathom five detail*, 2010, lampworked glass, archival digital print, stainless-steel frame, 50 1/4" x 40 1/4" x 8". Imago.