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ART

Overlooking the Port of LA, an Exhibit Considers Sustainability

Raquel Gutiérrez March 29, 2016



Daniel J Martinez, "Beneath the Asphalt, the Beach" (photo by Josh Cho)

SAN PEDRO, Calif. — According to its history page, [the Port of Los Angeles](#) — the number one port by container volume and cargo value in the entire United States — handled 8.1 million units in 2015 alone. As the primary entry point for trade between the United States and Asia, the port and its shipping suppliers manage the coming

and going of cargo in state-of-the-art marine terminal facilities, along with the largest workforce of skilled longshore labor in the country, warehouse and trans-loading centers to meet the needs of every shipper, “the nation’s largest and newest drayage fleet, and rail connections that offer frequency and speed-to-market access to major freight hubs across the U.S.”

The Port is situated upon one of the most gorgeous stretches of the Pacific coastline, creating a visual dissonance where 20th-century mechanical aesthetics compete with the oceanic nature that continues to serve as an inspiration to countless artists and curators. All of this is evident in the current exhibition [Hold Up](#), organized by Curator of Community Engagement Martabel Wasserman at the Angel’s Gate Cultural Center (AGCC) in San Pedro. Participating artists were invited to respond to a prompt about sustainability as it relates to its own Latin origin: *sustinere* (from *tenere*, “to hold,” and *sup*, “up”). The phrase evokes a set of conflicting images, such as obstruction and foundation.

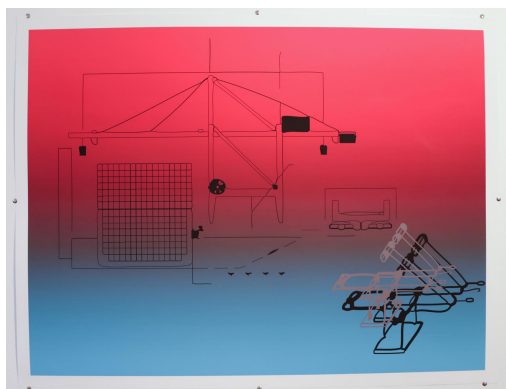


'Hold Up,' exhibition view with José Córdova's "Bridging Blue and Green" (2016) (photo by Madeline Bartley) (click to enlarge)

The mission of this ambitious exhibition proposes the idea that “to change personal and collective patterns to ensure that life on the planet can be sustained will create roadblocks, rerouting us to explore uncharted terrain.” The exhibition gestures to the land and sea present in the artistic imaginary of San Pedro, where viewers get to take in “reimagined vehicles wobbling across scrutinized infrastructure,” such as in the installation work “Bridging Blue and Green” (2016), where artist José Córdova presents a 3-D version of the signature San Pedro bridge as an activated conceptual route where birds announce the arrival of seasons and ocean temperatures indicate climate change. Córdova’s installation, presented in hues of green and blue, also invites spectators to write upon his mini-structure as a way to understand the imagined relational tensions between the port and the ocean, modernity and nature.

Hold Up is Wasserman’s first exhibition at AGCC, and the show avows the inextricable link that her curatorial approach has to political organizing, including work from artists like Ken Ehrlich, who explores these themes in three wall-sized drawings of the internal organs of the shipping containers endemic to the port. His elaborate titles — such as “Untitled (By going global with its supply chains, capital is creating the opportunity for global working class struggle. In order for such struggles to succeed we need to know how the present composition of capital

works. The craft worker and the mass worker knew how the system produced commodities in their day; we need to develop such knowledge today. – Brian Ashton)” — espouse Marxist theory in abstracted textual stanzas, thus producing an understanding of the evolution of the container crane in the Port’s history while focusing on tactical organizing. Ardent is Wasserman’s desire to appeal to a diverse group, including union members, the Los Angeles left, artists, students, and locals who regularly attend Angel’s Gate Cultural Center events. Wasserman, whose work makes clear her goal of bridging community art with emerging and established artists outside San Pedro, sees the imperative of opening up a space for play and praxis that is anchored to a place with such a layered history.



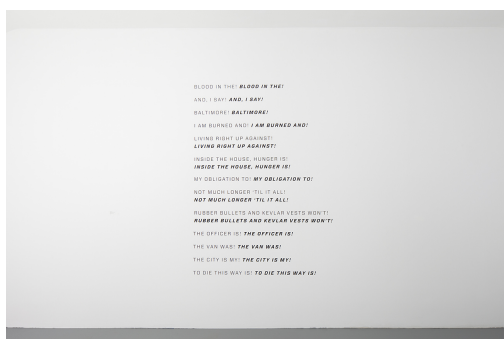
Ken Ehrlich, “Untitled (By going global with its supply chains, capital is creating the opportunity for global working class struggle. In order for such struggles to succeed we need to know how the present composition of capital works. The craft worker and the mass worker knew how the system produced commodities in their day; we need to develop such knowledge today. – Brian Ashton)” (2016), drawing (photo by Madeline Bartley)

“The built and natural environments surrounding Angels Gate make it a uniquely charged place,” Wasserman told Hyperallergic in an email interview. “Many aspects of the site are preserved as part of Historic Fort MacArthur. Overlaid with military landmarks are clues that this is a sacred site for the Tvunga, such as fire pits where sweat lodges used to be.”

Other artists in the show balance political critique with a measured, abstracted approach. One of the highlights of the exhibition is “A Portrait” (2015) by photographer Johanna Breiding, which, as expressed in the piece’s artist statement, “begins with death and ends with the sea.” This piece references an anonymous letter to Bill Gates after his acquisition of a 1885 Winslow Homer painting called “Lost on the Grand Banks,” which Breiding signals to in the video

element of the installation. In addition to showcasing Breiding's photography practice, "A Portrait" is an intertextual and pleasurable genre-promiscuous work that extends her photographic work into video and installation, yielding an experiential pathos upon the quiet meditation she gifts to viewers on art, commerce, and her friendship with the late American photographer, writer, filmmaker, theorist, and critic Allan Sekula.

Viewers are also treated to textually immersive wall works by poet and artist Marcus Civin, whose "Baltimore Call and Response" (2016) is the kind of exhortation that gets the blood boiling as it produces questions that pry open possibilities against aggressive accounting, for life under capitalism, impromptu performance, and long-term action. Civin's other piece, "Act Like Americans 2" (add year) dropkicks with a biting critical attention to the attenuated ways that debt continues to saturate our creative realities in the harsh belabored landscape that runs parallel to the exhibition's leitmotif.



Marcus Civin, "Baltimore Call and Response" (2016), vinyl on wall (image courtesy of Angel's Gate Cultural Center) (click to enlarge)

The exhibition will close with a live performance by Ba Na Na, composed of Drew Denny and JD Samson (founding member of electro-punk bands MEN and Le Tigre, respectively), that interrogates the implications of easily espoused beliefs about environmentalism as a performative gesture to the physically impressive landscape that surrounds the grounds of Angel's Gate Cultural Center. Be sure to arrive with plenty of time to take in the sunset over both the ocean and the sea of industrial machinery.

[Hold Up](#) continues at *Angel's Gate Cultural Center* (3601 South Gaffey Street, San Pedro) through April 4.

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