

Los Angeles Times

Review: A millennial artist takes aim at baby boomers

By CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT | ART CRITIC |

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Mark A. Rodriguez, "Account" installation view. (Park View / Paul Soto Gallery)

Baby boomers have a lot to account for. Mark A. Rodriguez has been keeping genial score.

At Park View/Paul Soto Gallery, an eccentric installation titled “Account” is introduced just inside the front door by a framed mass mailer from a Texas insurance company. Offering \$50,000 of family life insurance, all for a low, low rate of just a few dollars per month, it reeks of desperation and potential scam.

Rodriguez has cut up the mailer in the manner of a jigsaw puzzle. One piece has been removed and flipped over, a scribble of ballpoint ink testing out the artist’s pen. On the back of a clump of other pieces he’s scrawled, “A celebration of history. A negation of ourselves. The triumph of the baby boomers.” The background showing through is a black hole.

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Ouch. Death lurks not merely as an inevitability, but as another opportunity for exploitation. Rodriguez, a millennial born in 1982, is annoyed.



Mark A. Rodriguez, "Boomers," 2016, mixed media (Park View / Paul Soto Gallery)

Who can blame him, as the oceans rise while the powerful diddle? A half-dozen painted cut-outs of jaunty flowers in clay pots, each as tall as a standing person, sport grinning, wide-eyed faces. Chirpy but brutal, they're cheerfully accusatory mutants that Rodriguez arrays around the gallery like down-market signage.

More poignant, and even touching, is another group of stage-flat signs that the artist calls “Pushons.” Tall, flat, skinny, blobby, vaguely phallic amoeba shapes in mottled pastel blue, these twinkly alien creatures feature yearning smiles beneath liquid eyes. Pennies (from heaven?) are strewn on the floor.



Mark A. Rodriguez, "Pushon," 2019, acrylic and oil-based enamel on wood (Park View / Paul Soto Gallery)

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Foolish but endearing, the spiritual in art is both a promise and a sales-pitch, an asset and a liability. Rodriguez stabilizes these ethereal, free-standing forms with hefty metal scaffolding set in sturdy chunks of concrete — overkill, one could call it, for an environment marked by invisibly shifting tectonic plates.

The room is ringed with 14 identical shutters salvaged from the ticket booth at San Francisco's Winterland arena and painted a bland blue-green. As a lackluster token of a now-demolished concert venue for the Grateful Dead, these minimalist markers could hardly be more apt.

Park View / Paul Soto Gallery, 2271 W. Washington Blvd., L.A. Wednesdays-Saturdays, through April 20. (213) 509-3518, paulsoto.net

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