

5 Art Shows You Should See in L.A. This Week

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A Berlin-based artist builds a white plastic maze in Hollywood this week, and a Chicago-based artist exhibits framed Pop-Tarts in Culver City.

Between two wars

German painter Otto Dix served in a machine-gun unit during World War I, and was wounded on the Western front. The drawings he made about his war experience are nightmarishly violent, but also cartoonish, full of masked, exaggerated figures stranger than anything Tim Burton might devise. Some of Dix's war drawings hang in the first gallery of LACMA's "New Objectivity" exhibition, an over-full show about German art made between WWI and the Nazi takeover. Dix's work is a highlight. In subsequent galleries, you see his depictions of the German jazz scene, of illicit encounters and portraits of friends with lanky figures and pointy chins. Nearly all of Dix's paintings and drawings are eccentrically virtuosic and pessimistic at the same time. *5905 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; through Jan. 18. (323) 857-6000, lacma.org.*

Is crazy contagious?

French dramatist Antonin Artaud developed the "Theater of Cruelty" in the 1910s, in which "immediate violent action" ideally happens all around the audience. He also struggled with mental illness his whole life. His madness seemed contagious, argues French art critic and theorist Sylvère Lotringer, who just published his book *Mad Like Artaud*. Artaud's family members, his psychiatrist and even critics who have written about him "participate in his delirium," defending his strange ideas or believing themselves to be psychotic, too. Lotringer will talk about his book and screen his melodramatic new film, *Antonin Artaud: The Man Who Disappeared*, at Art Center this week. *950 S. Raymond Ave., Room A1, Pasadena; Mon., Nov. 23, 7 p.m.; free. (626) 396-4222, artcentermfa.net.*

Sad but cute

Artist William Pope.L had a Pop-Tart phase in the 1990s. He would carve and paint crude figures into the breakfast food and then place them in small frames. Now, 15 years later, they look ancient, like artifacts that have far exceeded their life expectancy. A few framed Pop-Tarts hang in "Forest," Pope.L's show at Susanne Vielmetter. It's a quite different show from "Desert," also up now at Steve Turner in Hollywood. "Forest" is gnarly, more guttural. It starts with minimal monochrome paintings with racist slurs inscribed on their surface. But soon you're standing in a room in which heavy green curtains cover multiple doorways. Above the doorways hang stuffed animals, the kind you'd find at Walmart, affixed to wood panels. They've been slathered in paint and peanut butter, which seems a more colorful version of tarring and feathering. Consumerism has been put to shame but even in their sad state, the animals pull at heartstrings. *6006 Washington Blvd., Culver City; through Dec. 5. (310) 837-2117, vielmetter.com.*

Sister vengeance

Berlin-based John Bock's new video, on view at Regen Projects, is set in a maze of skeletal, plastic white shapes. A man has been tied to a bedpost by a woman who may or may not be unhinged. He's sweating throughout the film, as the woman and her sisters clean, make music and discuss the crime he may have committed — is he guilty of infanticide? Bock has rebuilt the whole film set in Regen's main gallery, and it's enough of a labyrinth that one could get lost. Like the film, the set is clean and carefully produced, with new dark carpeting covering the floors. But the best works in this show are the roughly made sculptures installed on a folding table in the gallery foyer. They look and feel as messy and confusing as the narrative in Bock's film. *6750 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood; through Dec. 23. (310) 276-5424, regenprojects.com.*

Rebels past and present

The group COBRA, co-founded by Danish artist Asger Jorn, wrote its manifesto in 1948. It opposed bourgeois complacency and included artists from three cities: Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam. The group got its name, which sounds fiercer than its origins actually were, by combining the first letters of the artists' hometowns. The work they produced was often genuinely fierce and unruly, however. The paintings Jorn and collaborator Walasse Ting made of pin-up girls with bug eyes reclining in impressionistic gardens hang at Blum & Poe. So does Karel Appel's 1952 painting of a girl wearing a garish fish as a hat. Curator Alison M. Gingeras has interspersed this historic work with new paintings: Mark Flood's ghost figures against romantic landscapes, Dana Schutz's intentionally distorted figures. It's rare that a multigeneration show like this works; the older artists often far outshine their acolytes. But here the younger artists are impudent enough to hold their own. *2727 S. La Cienega Blvd.; through Dec. 23. (310) 836-2062, blumandpoe.com.*