

Arcadia Missa ñ

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"Alt-Craft" Review of Stuart McKenzie and Brad Kronz, Galerina at Arcadia Missa

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The Old Grey Liver Test, Curated by Galerina at Arcadia Missa

There was no overarching theme in *Old Grey Liver Test*. A cursory glance at the artwork list, which reads titles like “Youth cult synthesis” or “Dead at 55” alongside the title’s explicit reference to a rock-defining 70s show, *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, makes clear an intention to reach a sardonic middle ground between sincerity and outright irony.

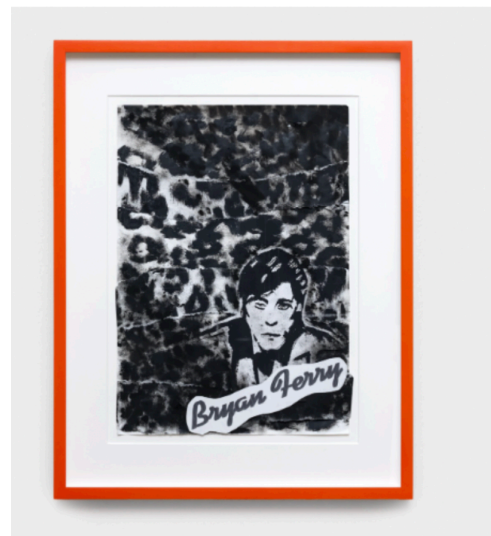
Youth Cult Synthesis, or Dead at 55, 2024, is contained within a neon-orange wood frame. Paracetamol instruction leaflets are layered on top of each other, the text sutured together through a technique (welting) particular to pocket making. As the show text notes, this skill was learnt in McKenzie’s days as a studio assistant for Vivienne Westwood - a fact that lends the artist’s late 90s works *And I’m Not going to let you wear me like a Tie Pin* (1998) and *Who Can Out Ferry Ferry* (1998) a punky gravitas. These earlier pieces combine tacky, collaged strips of leopard print, the words “Bryan Ferry” written in cursive and a brooding, B&W portrait of the 80s singer. The effect is a fantastically dated, fragmented image of what it is to be a metrosexual ballad singer. McKenzie’s work makes me wonder what it feels like to have one’s youth fetishised as a romantic idyll, your memories translated into collective nostalgia, and to laugh about it. Which discarded memories from our time might be framed: a fidget spinner, an obsession with identity, an ironic starter-pack meme?

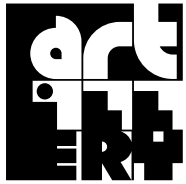
In Stuart McKenzie’s *Left Right, Left Right* (2024) the word “Alt” appears on a square of printer tape, hand cut from food packaging. Above, the words “Left, Right, Left, Right” appear printed, like military steps, from a label maker. This semi-serious commentary on our misguided, but ultimately regimented contemporary vision of “The Alternate” (alt-girl, alt-boy) contrasts with less political collages like *E’s ruining My Life* (2024) whose text reads “Mistaka” on one line and “E.E.E” on another, but is more obviously funny than *Gender Critical* (2024) which simply reads “He is He”. Sarcasm was inherent to the show - something that feels, now, far more refreshing than an outmoded sincerity.

Brad Kronz’s works are witty, but not about pop culture. In *80s, 70s*, a diagrammatic pencil drawing of a shaded square labelled “70s” containing a lighter square labelled “80s”. The paper is framed by two thick, wooden blocks where Kronz has placed strips of paper at an obtuse angle - acting as a sort of theatrical curtain for the minimal drawing. It’s a commentary on performativity within timelines and art historical nomenclature that is felt but not overstated. *80s, 70s* aesthetically pleases like a mid-century modern drinks cabinet, while commenting on something as nebulous and subjective as decades.

The curious part of Kronz’s works is the presence of the figurative. For *Independent Artist* (2025) Kronz cuts out the internal corners of the frame, forming pockets of shadow that can’t be seen from a frontal view. Frame and drawing become subsumed into a singular artwork, contrasting the separation of the two in McKenzie’s pieces. Kronz’s soft, graphite lines depict, unnervingly, a cartoon fish with a woman’s face. Faintly naïve, slightly perverse, resembling a pre-millennium illustrated children’s character or a Henry Darger prepubescent girl.

Old Grey Liver Test is the antithesis of what is leveraged in the more mainstream, highly publicised art world. A show in summer at The Approach made it clear the veracity with which people impose the past onto an indifferent contemporaneity, comparing a new graduate class with the YBA’s, albeit, “more friendly, supportive, inclusive, diverse and international”. *Old Grey Liver Test* is curated by Galerina, a nomadic gallery run by two twenty-something’s. I felt a strange relief at seeing a show that was not groundbreaking. It neededn’t be; it was not trying to redefine, rehash, or rebut anything. The curation proposed a witty, slightly tongue-in-cheek conversation between friends about taste, material fetish and personal nostalgia, focusing on the artists’ careful attention to craftsmanship, wood-making and paper constructs, collage and sewing, word-play and framing.





BRAD KRONZ
Gaylord Apartments



For his untitled exhibition at Gaylord Apartments, Brad Kronz created what looked like a kind of deinstallation—the last few items left in an apartment before moving out, things you don’t know whether to leave or to stack on top of an already packed car: an auxiliary chair, a few Wi-Fi routers and wires, scraps of defunct wood furniture. But upon closer inspection the objects had each been carefully placed, some altered by the artist.

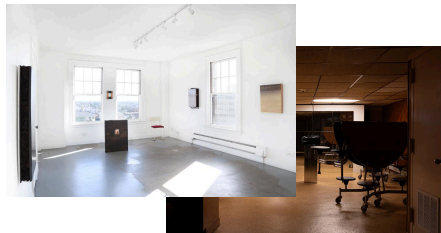
The wall works on view, several of which looked like finished wood floors or tabletops, left the viewer with an opaque surface where there should have been something to look into: a mirror, a window or a painting. Instead, a smoothed wooden surface on top of a layer of drywall conceals matter sandwiched between them. Around the edges of both Designer of the cross and Fake spirituality filled with darkness (all works 2024), something pokes out where insulation might be. In the former, it’s wool that looks like human hair; in the latter, a thick black cord is wound around the work’s interior. Kronz addresses a gap we don’t often see but only sense beneath the surfaces that surround us.



Floating in the middle of the room was a similar-looking piece, *Lives in NY, Works in Cincinnati*, a wood support and drywall surface with wool in the middle. But with this work there was something to look into. Mounted where a peephole might be is a sepia-faded photo of an open door. The work has a wire on its back as if it’s intended to be mounted on the wall. Kronz creates an infinity effect with these sculptures but with the end result of opacity rather than clarity. A door within a door, a wall on a wall; the viewer’s perspective hits a limit.

In the short text he wrote to accompany the show, Kronz offers a Duchampian philosophy: art offers to “resolve,” as he writes, the implicit problem posed by objects, suggesting that once it is art, “the object is never again your problem.” In making art with or about these random objects, Kronz develops a way to deal with their adjunct presence. The work that addresses this most directly is *My car lives outside*, a sculpture made of the bottom half of a stool turned upside down, its inverted legs supporting two pieces of bluntly cut wood that display two Wi-Fi routers with cords coiled in the space underneath. This is the most frustrating work in the show but perhaps the most evocative. It has a pesky stupidity—both as an inane subject for art and then in the impotency of its unplugged cords, which render it useless while leaving us to deal with its bluntly dull appearance. But Kronz doesn’t fuss too much over it, or push this imperative to find “poetry in the mundane.” In fact, he asks us to sit with the prosaic, the objects that may, in fact, be just objects—or art, which perhaps too, is sometimes just boring.

The writer of this review is weary of the proliferation of diaristic, subjective first-person accounts in art writing. She has declared it a rule for now not to write directly about herself and her personal experience. She is therefore reluctant to disclose her relationship to the artist and venues in question even though she appreciates the concept of the disclaimer as a means to unhide nepotistic relations or else to confess kinship in art criticism.



American artist Bradley Kronz opened two exhibitions consecutively in the winter of 2024. One in late February at the Gaylord Apartments, Los Angeles, to a tacit spring, the second a month later to the day, at Gandt in ice cold Astoria, New York. This move – if one assumes this temporal squeeze or protracted *tour de force* to be part of the artist's intention – made for a particularly strange if candid form of institutional critique cum artistic self-reference.

To start on the West Coast: the Gaylord Apartment building was constructed in the early '20s on Wilshire Boulevard in Renaissance Revival style and was once one of the city's first fully furnished co-op buildings, if only to be dissolved in the '30s. From the original signboard advertising the apartments: "Starting Thursday Feb. 21 all apartments in the magnificent Gaylord, completely furnished, will be sold as 'Own Your Own Apartment'". As a latter-day high-rise, it has the charm of a slowly decaying, full board hotel with lobby et al. The eponymous gallery is artist-run from an apartment on the 14th floor. The 180-degree view across the sprawling metropolis is astonishing even in a city of hillside vistas and the windows that puncture the walls of the main exhibition space are the backdrop to any art shown here.

ed for eight discrete sculptures, noticeably
installational integration within the Gaylord

environment. If anything, the objects all clearly betrayed their common provenance in a place not quite here. *Designer of the Cross and Fake spirituality filled with darkness* (both 2024) are dark stained wood pieces mounted on the wall that, on sidelong inspection, reveal inner contents wedged by more wood. In the former, conduits and cables are wrapped around the inside of the wood-and-drywall wedge along with more verily detritus, such as dry leaves and paper: The wood board a giant spool, the gesture of wrapping a formal as much as a practical one. In the latter, it is wool that is being used as stuffing (or insulation?) nudging us ever closer towards thinking of these objects as panels with additional purpose (soundproofing?). However, the wool appears strangely human-cherub-lock-like and therefore eerie enough to set off any pretension to practical home construction. In these gestures, the unresolved relationship between decoration and utility is at its most striking.

Moving on to *Lives in NY, Works in Cincinnati* (2024) one finds another wood panel – drywall wedge now free standing on the gallery floor – again stuffed with black wool, adorned with a sepia-toned photograph and equipped, on its back, with a makeshift wire loop to potentially suspend it. Unlike the former wall-borne pieces, the question of functionality has shifted here towards the decorative as such. The stubbornly sculptural artwork sits on the floor while it could be suspended, as if extracted from its fictional home and life. The conflict is not between spool and painting but between the purpose of art as an object of decoration and its attending environments.



Another work in the exhibition shows neutered electronic appliances rid of their cables (used elsewhere?) arranged on even more middle-class esoteric looking wood, as if plucked from an old terrarium and placed on an injured stool. Its title *My car lives outside* (2024) introduces a humorous antipode to the deadpan conventionality of the geographical work-life-split in the New York-Cincinnati piece – a commute for which a car probably comes in handy. A dark wood world of kitsch: one way of understanding it is through the decorative aspect of the utility, the fruit bowl as exotic tree and the crocheted toilet paper covers in cars of the 70s. Life in this piece appears more gutted, though. One fears for the car and although the Gaylord looks out on Wilshire boulevard's 4-lane-traffic, the notion is still that of a place not quite here.

Taking the artist-written press release as a clue, this place could simply be construed as the artist's studio or

home with its attending sculptures as vestiges of provisional living: "One thing art can do is resolve physical objects in your life. Any item with a burdensome duty or heavy sentimentality can enter a higher realm of attention and care simply by declaring it as art, or more abstractly as finished. In this transaction the object is never again your problem. It is possible here too that actual feelings contained in the object are moved to the more benign category of symbolic feelings. We should not take this for granted as it may only be a temporary aspect of the field, and instead enjoy it while it lasts." But at stake is more than the artist, symbolically recycling clutter by rendering it conspicuous and perhaps commodity. All these objects and their transferal into the dramaturgy of the sunset drenched Gaylord Apartment insist on decoration or aesthetics, if you will, despite the impermanence of space. If one allowed for a generalization here – in the artist's life as a self-chosen problem within an economy of means to "rent" – admitting to the ostensibly visual aspect of art and rendering it through space (despite not being able to "Keep Your Own Apartment") is the only, if at times Beckettian, antidote to complete cynical dematerialization.

Moving on to the "enjoy it while it lasts" of the East Coast. The second exhibition at Gandt in New York had a title: *I had all the tools even at a young age*. Without any knowledge of the contents of this exhibition but now attuned to the artist's temporal poesis, it felt like a backhanded pun to the '70's wood-paneled, former hobby basement that is Gandt in Astoria – another artist-run space – with the artist the gifted child armed with finger paint and plasticine. In a structural sense, although not strictly representative of the average housing in either city mentioned, the imaginary climb from Gaylord to Gandt felt like a proverbial journey from top to bottom, psychologically regressing towards the clandestine stuff that perversion is made of and perhaps a little bit like these jump-and-run games played in hobby basements.

Down below the steep staircase one encounters a roughly five-meter-wide plain wall, flush against the low ceiling barring the back of the large main room. As if built to hide or store something, it is uncannily thick and definitely thicker than is needed merely for the sake of blocking the view or to hang things on. Facing the remainder of the room, twelve square mirrors hung upon it in a grid. Three identical classic American cafeteria tables (*Indigo Children*, Oslo City Limits and Harmful Solidarity, all 2016) have been arranged in front of the mirrors. These objects consist of a round, wooden tabletop hinged along the middle and eight round,

plastic stools, all connected by stainless steel pipes resting on casters. In their folded condition they resemble early childhood stick figures, arms and legs protruding directly from a large half circle head. Unlike at the Gaylord, the materiality and content of these objects align with the basement as a space for leisure and conviviality, only they didn't quite seem to fit if folded out – basement and tables stunting each other.

"The objects in this show are similar but not the same as those from an exhibition in 2016" claims the press text, revealing the pieces to have returned – from where one is not given to know – to haunt this exhibition and, in comic relief, the artist as "items with burdensome duty". The only other exhibit is a projector placed on top of a mirrored plinth facing the mirror-grid and covered with a homemade faux-leather sheath. The cutout in the leather – intended to spare the projector's lens – is zipped up, reducing the projection to a blob of light emanating through the white fabric of the zipper. According to the press text, this work has also been shown before, unzipped and thereby projecting the images now denied. Whether or not *Chromatic (Inner Projection)*, by way of its time altered state, represented a stunting of potential, a move to guard that which is private or the whim of the artist-as-entertainer drawing the curtain on former fun was unclear.

If anything, the symbolic inwardness and self-historization rendered this exhibition of Kronz visually more theatrical and the objects themselves less formally satisfying as sculptures but gaining in ominousness. The atmosphere heightened a sense of time not as healer but as unapologetic principle. Throughout the opening, the overarching sentiment of the nervously shuffling crowd, unable to step outside for long because of the brittle New York City cold, was that of a first unclear than very much clear discomfort: the mirror panels did more than reflect back the slightly altered setting of *similar but not the same* objects from eight years ago: most of all, it forced people's grimaces back at themselves, now eight years older, to enjoy them while they last.

Bradley Kronz
Gaylord Apartments, Los Angeles
February 24 – April 1, 2024

Bradley Kronz *I had all the tools even at a young age*
Gandt, New York
March 24 – April 21, 2024

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