

ROGUE WAVE 07: 12 ARTISTS FROM LOS ANGELES

LA LOUVER GALLERY, VENICE

28 JUNE – 18 AUGUST

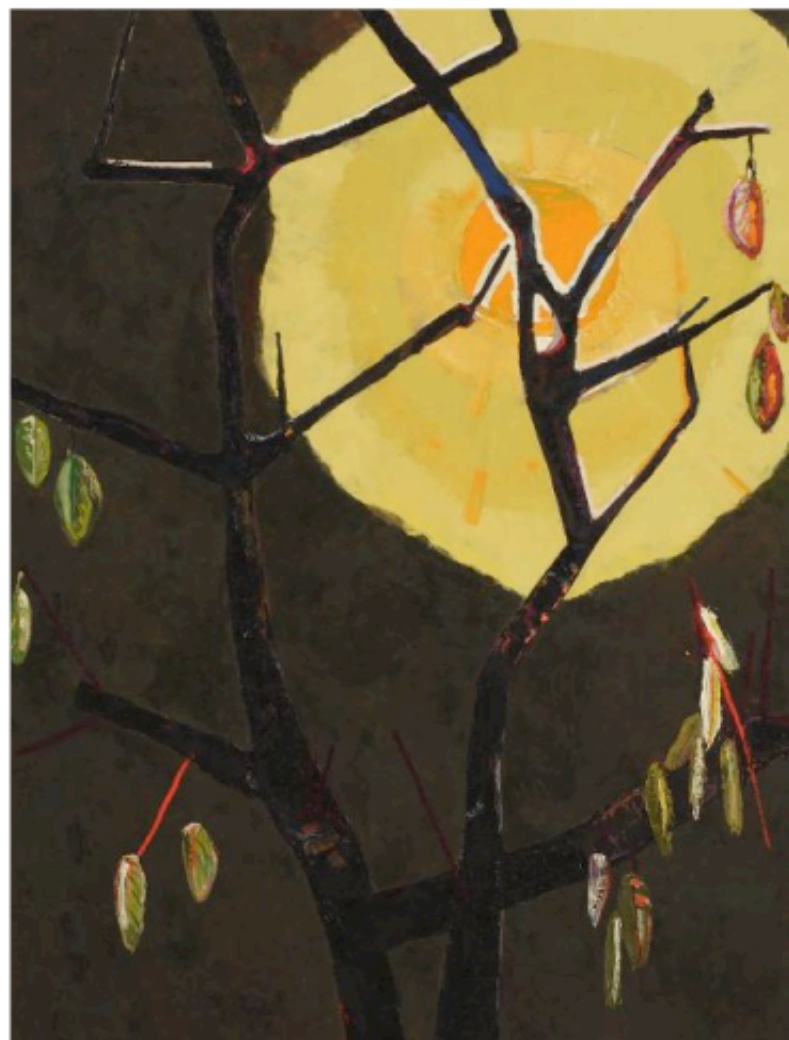
Into the inescapable tepid sea of summer group shows rushes LA Louver's *Rogue Wave 07*, the third in its self-curated series taking stock of the West Coast's most promising emerging talents, with a few young-at-heart stars thrown in for context. Though there's no claim made to a defining statement of current LA art – unlike the Hammer Museum's coinciding *Eden's Edge* – a character emerges nonetheless. The Hammer's is a survey of artists who institutional curators feel have made the best case for LA art's significance over the last decade; the Louver's presents what a powerhouse commercial gallery believes will come to define the next decade. Given those differences, crossovers of individual artists would be unlikely (there are none), but the pairing offers a rare and satisfying set of coordinates for anyone looking to define a recognisably LA aesthetic.

Common strategies include an affection for humour (it puts audiences at ease), a healthy awe of nature (LA is surrounded by majestic landscapes), a cynical intimacy with the construction of media-based manipulations (we know how it's done, we're the ones that do it) and an endearingly curious devotion to making things by hand when it isn't absolutely necessary. The artists of *Rogue Wave* address the paradox at the heart of Los Angeles, a city whose very existence defies nature's laws, and which has made it its business to efface its own history, the better to become all things to all people.

Joseph Biel's immense watercolour and graphite drawing *Compound* (all works 2007) presents a landscape depicting a structure in remote ruin, slumped amid a field of empty schoolroom chairs and scattered bricks, whose power resides not in its inscrutable narrative, but in the neurotic, Herculean task of its making. Sandeep Mukherjee's exuberant, hypnotic *Untitled* acrylic on Duralene paintings are every bit as exhaustingly wrought, with thousands of individual dabs of colour applied, removed and reapplied like a chimerical mosaic before resolving into kaleidoscopic images that embrace yet transcend the unpredictable, asymmetrical perfection of a marine wilderness. Portia Hein's muscular, unsentimental landscapes and

Timothy Tompkins's chipper large-scale shiny commercial enamel paintings of the military-industrial complex's nefarious deeds both acknowledge the nightmare hidden in the California Dream. Meanwhile Tom LaDuke's expertly rendered paintings of his own studio, reflected in the slate-grey of a TV screen, and Ben Jackel's lavishing of advanced sculptural technique on a flawless recreation of a fire hose in stoneware and ebony, deliberately place skill in the service of cheeky irony, indicting fetishism while careful to let the viewer in on the joke.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to experience these exhibitions in tandem is the very real sense of a torch being passed, a generational refinement of a consistent set of ideas. The older generation demonstrate a more discernible relationship to conventional form; never letting go their grasp on modernist abstraction, academic draughtsmanship and postmodern conceptual ambiguity. At Louver the new crop seems infatuated with cheeky stylisation, intellectual promiscuity in subject matter and socio-political purview, drawn to jazz and spectacle. But the threads of investigation into illusion, a frank examination of the spiritual bankruptcy of pop culture and an enchantment with the unimaginably pure life of the natural world not only survives but thrives in their hands. *Shana Nys Dambrot*



Portia Hein, *Untitled*, 2007,
oil on canvas, 122 x 91 cm.
Courtesy LA Louver, Venice