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Art review: 'The Long Range' at ltd los angeles

by Christopher Knight, October 27, 2011



"Objects on the horizon are closer than they appear," says a snappy collage by Christopher Michlig, made from found advertising posters whose letters have been scissored and pasted like a kidnapper's ransom note. Black letters on an acid-green background cascade down in a widening triangle, like an aggressive eye-chart merged with a legend adapted from an automobile's rear-view mirror.

Are we coming, are we going, or are we already here? Past, present and future collapse into one another, creating a leitmotif for an engaging group show of mostly recent work at ltd los angeles, co-curated by Shirley Morales and Jan Tumlir. Think of it as a skeptical rejoinder to Pacific Standard Time, the Getty-sponsored extravaganza mining the city's art historical past.

A monumental Cindy Bernard photograph shows a similarly huge ham radio antenna, surrounded by shaggy palm trees, striving to pull in signals of ostensible civilization in the vastness of the Mojave desert. Ginny Bishton's pen and ink drawing accumulates rectangular shapes with an obsessive precision, but for a purpose that is obscure and open-ended. Dave Hullfish Bailey's elaborately note-covered worktable endlessly worries over building projects that cannot possibly be constructed for a remote landscape outpost.

Anton Lieberman's ghostly white sculpture grows spindly asparagus inside sliced-up bits of cactus scattered on the floor, tethering them to a tall plant like a satellite connected to a mother-ship. A revolving slide-show of indecipherable charts -- or maybe they're abstract paintings -- by Karthik Pandian is a Power Point presentation on the fritz.

Finally, 20 smashing black-and-white photographs from 1990-92 by John Divola make Los Angeles -- city, mountains, desert and sea -- seem remote and far-off, a wild country resistant to anything but puzzled observation. They offer a historical anchor whose photographic style drifts back in time from the 1980s to the 19th century -- past Judy Fiskin, Lewis Baltz, Ansel Adams, Carleton Watkins and more. Apparently objects on the horizon up ahead really are closer than they appear.