

GLANCING INWARDS FROM THE SET

A PHOTO-OP IN TWO PARTS

THE WORK OF PIERO GOLIA AND ALEX ISRAEL AT THE NASHER SCULPTURE CENTER



Left: Piero Golia is a Los Angeles-based artist who collaborated with architect Edwin Chan on the *Chalet Dallas* installation at the Nasher Sculpture Center. Photography by John Smith. Right: Alex Israel at Beverly Gardens Park in Santa Monica, California. Photography by Bode Helm

BY BRANDON KENNEDY
PORTRAITS OF THE ARTISTS BY BODE HELM AND JOHN SMITH







To adapt the guise of fashion and not-to-be-missed status, some secrecy and planning are a must. The same may sometimes be said of the contemporary art scene, at once adopting the methods of the seasonal model in establishing a provocative push-and-pull of what's ahead of the curve, while making us feel like it all was well worth waiting for in the end. Shortly thereafter, the promise fulfilled and appetite sated, we move on to the next choice offering, just as hungry, if not more.

The two artists exhibiting at the Nasher Sculpture Center this October currently reside in Los Angeles—Piero Golia (a transplant) and Alex Israel (a native)—both interested in mining aspects of conversation, architecture, and viewer interaction. Whether scripted or not, somewhat of a cool detachment resides within their works while operating at opposite ends of scene-setting and overall environment.

The information I had initially gathered was relating what had occurred before in similar situations, not to be replicated exactly at the Nasher nor really shared as to what each iteration would hold. Furthermore, it was to be gleaned that a little mystery—or even potential exclusivity to take part in some aspects of the future events—was part of the overall idea: A desire for taking part in the unfolding of the unknown in luxurious surroundings as in the case of Golia or for basking in the soft-core glow of La La Land's vapid

gaze with regards to Israel.

The word “chalet” can conjure up snow-capped eaves, boozy rescue hounds, and things generally worlds apart from the environs of LA or Dallas. Throw in the promise of exclusive contemporary art happenings and world-class architect Edwin Chan.

Golia set the chalet concept in motion last year in Hollywood in the storage area of an artist-run space over a period of many months and claims to have amassed massive credit card debt to fully realize the project. The reviews and magazine mentions spoke directly to the off-the-beaten-path location and coolness factor of even just knowing about it, preferably before you read it in their pages. Then the laundry list of participating A-list artists, musicians, a pair of Alpacas, celebrities, dancers, endless Veuve Clicquot, dealers, and art professionals started making the rounds and giving it the allure and cachet so demanded by such a scene.

All this will shift once the chalet lands in Dallas at the Nasher this October. The day-in, day-out workings of the sumptuous surroundings built within the corner gallery of the museum may just keep the chance visitor peering in curiously from the safe confines of the doorway, but the big to-dos and late nights may be for members only, I would presume. For an idea presented by the artist “as a tool to create community,” and which has been

branded in their press materials as “a legend in the making” and “an intimate gathering spot for influential and creative minds,” it seems the die has already been cast.

While writing this article, I found the same roll call of blue-chip artists in the Hollywood version is advertised for the Dallas rendition as well: Mark Grotjahn, Pierre Huyghe, Christopher Williams, et al. Granted, we should all be so lucky to have such remarkably talented friends to outfit our latest relational aesthetics clubhouse, but I admit to being a little disappointed at the lack of a later unforeseen reveal. After all, the brochure spoke of “magnificent artworks, along with the most refined materials, make the chalet a monument to its time...” I want to be genuinely surprised and take part in a temporary community that harkens back to the “legendary salons...of Lorenzo De Medici and Gertrude Stein’s Paris apartment.” I really do.

Alex Israel weathers us with airbrushed ‘80s lingering pastel skies, sometimes jagged, scalloped, or curved, alluding to the architectural details from which their contours were cut. Hung like paintings, leaning against the wall and sometimes freestanding, they beg for an object to be placed before them or the viewer caught in the act. Occasionally, the LA native provides “props” on horizontal plinths as the Hollywood set motif dictates. Otherwise, a passing participant will suffice, activating the twilight-toned objects carved of negative spaces, preferably with a glass of Chardonnay in hand. The backdrop as object, props as art substitutes, viewer as actor. Selfies won’t be resisted, Instagram flooded.

In other artistic incarnations, Israel applies photographic vinyl images of varied flora and interspersed parking meters to the white

walls of a gallery, inviting the mundane just inside for a very minor provocation. Other sculptural attempts have found a few single candy-colored sunglass lenses of differing hues resting against white walls in a barren room. These oblong ovoids elevated by fashion’s seasonal cues skirt celebrity anonymity while they’re scaled just above the viewer’s heads. And yes, there is product placement too—*Freeway Eyewear*, with the designs aptly named for the cursed numbered thoroughfares that tangle through the City of Angels, ready for purchase at a registered domain name near you.

The super-stylized self-portraits seem to borrow from campy illustrator, Patrick Nagel and Maui Jim aesthetics. As fixed formulaic profiles, complete with manicured beard and ever-present eyewear, they are available in a variety of color combinations, with some even outfitted with a photographic landscape detail or odd movie set prop. A painted stencil on the wooden verso of the work reads “Made at Warner Bros. Studios.”

In the end it’s all about appearances anyhow, or is it just because we have to design the set and book the talent before they waltz in already playing the part? We can all appreciate the disaffected nerdy chic of Joan Didion with her white Corvette and constant cigarette, but few can unlock the dread and psychosis of her So Cal stories with a slight nod in YouTube talk-show format. B-list actors, aged stars, wannabes, and faux-celebrities, back a set of looming tinted tablets, Van der Rohe repro chairs, and an opening montage of LA locales and predictable theme music, replete with sax solo. **P**





Opposite: Alex Israel, Installation view at Carl Kostyál Gallery, Stockholm, 2013. Above: Alex Israel, *Self-Portrait (City Lights)*, 2014, Acrylic and bondo on fiberglass, 96 x 84 x 4 in. Private Collection. Photo courtesy of the artist. © Alex Israel