



LOS ANGELES

Ramiro Gomez: "On Melrose" at Charlie James Gallery

Ramiro Gomez's "On Melrose" takes as both its subject and conceptual starting point the artist's own neighborhood and the road east from there to Hoover Street, and the edge of Downtown—the new center of city culture. For Gomez, a naturally intense observer of his surroundings, this is a road oft traveled in life, and oft considered in the painting studio. The works that result from this combination of casual familiarity and deliberate scrutiny merge art historical references and social commentary in furtherance of Gomez's most identifiable style. His particular gift is for merging those elements into strangely compelling, solid and fresh images.

"Melrose Avenue—Eastbound" is a series of 11 mid-sized, adjoining paintings tracking the journey eastbound on Melrose Avenue from West Hollywood to Hoover Street. It's an even more overt reference to Ed Ruscha than the overall show title, reinforced by the installation of them end-to-end in a single line across the wall. The gradual transformation from fancy shops to lower class residential is remarkable when considering the series as a whole—and it's precisely that commentary on this economic spectrum that makes this uniquely a Gomez, and not only a Ruscha homage. Aside from the lively ziggurat of the work, its presence telegraphs that Hockney is not the only iconic LA painter with whom Gomez considers himself to be in dialogue. (There's also a dollop of Baldessari in the treetops of certain spindly palms.)

Beyond his expert mimicry of Hockney's flat pink sun-blasted style in the service of a specific sociopolitical narrative diverted from the stream

of art history, these newest paintings are what it looks like when Gomez paints the way he wants to for himself. His use of a very large scale evokes the presence of the architecture itself. On a small scale, the work has the quick and sexy gesturalism of a sketch, yet is more resolved than studies. As an attender of detail, his privileged rendering of dense verdant foliage (the exterior of Fred Segal), and the scale-to-textured-color-field relationship of architecture and person (the striated frontage of the PDC; the staccato honeycomb of the Broad), are patient, obsessively folkish and organic, providing backdrops against which to set off the angular, stylized figures of people who work in those buildings. This is mainly a population leaf-blower-wielding, orange-cone deploying landscape maintainers and ladder-dragging paint toucher-uppers. Like the pool maintenance crew in his most famous Hockney homages, these folks are faceless in the paintings not because Gomez doesn't see them, but because we don't see them.

—SHANA NYS DAMBROT

"PAUL SMITH STORE, LOS ANGELES," 2015

Ramiro Gomez, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 72" X 72" PHOTO: COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CHARLIE JAMES GALLERY