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[PRE-
2024](#)

Unconscious Rationale @ Anglim Gilbert

AUGUST 6, 2018

by [Julia Couzens](#)



Benji Walen, Complex, 2017, cardboard and acrylic, 7 x 8 inches

Summer group shows all too often deliver the visual equivalent of beach reading: light-hearted works that slide off the psyche like a chilled Jell-O mold. Unconscious Rationale: Artists Amend Reality tacks in the opposite direction, presenting formally inventive works that address identity, cultural aspects of landscape and dark, folkloric scenarios of magic and desire. Spanning four decades from 1972 to the present, the exhibition employs intricate fabrication as a common denominator to unite a wide array of works that mix anxiety, nostalgia, whimsy and deep yearning.

With the linear detail and intricacy of an etching, **Dean Byington's** large oil painting *Divided City* (2015), presents a black-and-white landscape as an unending public works project — a labyrinthine maze of cellblock-like huts, scaffolding and brickwork. Either either undone or under renewal, it depicts a mismanaged future, an allegory of Big Plans and half-starved dreams.

Tony Oursler delves the hallucinatory, vaguely demonic underworld of inner dialogues with his Cronenberg-esque mixed media sculpture, *Adumbration Affray* (2013). It's a globule of



Tony Oursler, *Adumbration Affray*, 2013, steel stand, projection and mixed media, 24 x 12 x 12 inches

doll heads, a toy skeleton a skull, fake pearls and a chain link onto which the artist projects tiny moving images of disembodied faces that read as extraterrestrials. They mutter and bleat, darkly probing semi-conscious desires.

Lynn Hershman Leeson's *Ghosts Have No Reflections* (*Vertighost*) from 2017 is a photographic riff on Alfred Hitchcock's film classic, *Vertigo*, about the manipulation of beliefs. A woman reminiscent of Kim Novak's character sits with her back to us before a mirror, her image duplicated ad infinitum in a not-so-subtle allusion to layers of consciousness and identity.

Judith Linhares' small gouache of an aloe plant being watered by a skeleton, *Grow* (1972), and *Dance II* (2017), of couple deep in

the throes of a ballroom move, are deft examples of her direct, painterly expressiveness. Eschewing technical finesse and virtuoso feats of illusionism, Linhares' blunt-force, open-handed painting projects deep empathy for everyday human dramas. **Joan Brown's** self-portrait, *The Cosmic Nurse* (1978), situates the figure in a field of flickering dashes of paint, creating a ground of visual static. Walking across the surface of the painting, the nurse is composed and ready; yet her skirt hem is held in the mouth of an animal, a dog or a cat, posing questions about the nature of duty and grace.

Quotidian materials and flat-footed fabrication are the stuff of **Benji Whalen's** small-scale tabletop sculptures. Constructing eight to 13-inch tall totems by piling scraps of fabric over an



Judith Linhares, *Grow*, 1972, gouache on paper 7 x 10 inches

infrastructure of corrugated cardboard boxes and wooden coffee stir sticks, Whalen creates endearing, gestural abstractions that behave like winsome, post-apocalyptic geishas. *Complex* (2018), an assemblage of small cardboard squares glued into a chunky multifaceted structure, suggests an ad hoc architectural model. The work charms with its artlessness, but also calls into question the value of technological advances and aspirational consumerism.

Rather than allay persistent anxieties, *Unconscious Rationale* brings them to the fore.

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Unconscious Rationale: Artists Amend Reality @ **Anglim Gilbert Gallery** through August 25, 2018. The show also includes works by Terry Allen, Enrique Chagoya, Jerome Caja, Travis Collinson, Bruce Conner, Jean Conner, Nathaniel Dorsky, Bruno Fazzolari, Ken Graves, Paul Kos, Richard Shaw and Katherine Sherwood.

About the Author:

Julia Couzens is a Sacramento-based artist and writer whose work has been widely shown, most recently at [Transmitter](#) in Brooklyn. Her drawings and hybrid objects are in museum and public collections throughout the U.S. These include the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts; Berkeley Art Museum; Oakland Museum; Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina; and Yale University. She lives and works on Merritt Island in the Sacramento River delta.

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