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MANHATTAN LOS ANGELES

Lopez, Pablo, "Concrete Island at Venus Over LA," *Contemporary Art Review*, March 30, 2017

Contemporary
Art Review
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Concrete Island at Venus Over LA Pablo Lopez, March 30, 2017, CARLA

Assembling a spectrum of work spanning six decades, *Concrete Island* is most fluent when it addresses contemporary vulnerabilities and concerns. Full of unease and maudlin sexuality, Kaari Upson's *Shadow Work* (2009) is a stellar 20 minute digital video that addresses the psychic contradictions of American life. Similarly, the raw qualities of Lazaros' *Shelter* (2011), an appropriated NGO-distributed post-disaster tarpaulin, negotiate the line between social awareness and didacticism.

Sharp contrasts across works give evidence to the range of sophistication in this exhibition. Alternatively, certain works, like Kim Gordon's *Not yet titled (glitter stick)* and *Not yet titled* (both 2017),



present few challenges to a viewer, and Kelly Akashi's histrionic altar, *Ways of being (figure) 2016*, diverges aesthetically from the show's attention to formal rigor. Conversely, several emergent artists stand up better alongside their established counterparts. Daniel R. Small offers a keen and foreboding vision of civilization and technology with his petrified sculptures (*A Petrified Past* series, 2017). And Jason

Matthew Lee's mixed-media and welded payphones are an anarchic and astute appeal to the pedestrian past as the technological drumbeat rolls on.

As the current political discourse grows increasingly toxic, the future can only be imagined with a modulated sense of anxiety. It's no surprise then that an exhibition with pre-apocalyptic undertones might be thematized as an island unto itself. *Concrete Island* is a timely show with attention to social tumult and misgivings about the future, although its overall impact is diminished by its broad curatorial approach.