

For *City* :: *Christina van der Merwe & Ben K. Voss*
at Long Play Contemporary
visited on Feb 23, 2025
by Lou Dillon

Finally getting out of the house; driving crosstown to see the *City*. I am determined to see what LP is doing in these converted garage spaces. I have been trying—but now Fire. I see photographs of the current show online and need to know more. I need to get my body there. I sense a quality, a specificity, a freedom. I swing a U-turn crossing the narrow tree-lined Santa Monica numbered street and pull up in front of the old Spanish bungalow court.

Dumped out onto a beige back alley way walking toward—a single square door that is left open. The late afternoon light shines overhead and inside is appearing at first a cool shade in contrast then mixing with the halogen glow. Three adults, a child, and a delicate dog stand in a cluster looking around the room. The child is moving her arm around and points towards the ceiling in several places. LP turns toward me looking up, “we are counting the works!” I feel a warmth I am not accustomed to, I enter. Stepping across a teal line of paint that marks the threshold my eyes follow—a sensually carved soapstone of a similar hue set just behind where the door will close us in — curled at the corner like a coiled cat or seashell; a hard sculpture worn soft over time and ocean and civilizations past.

Compressed and made tangible inside the room is the residue of a conversation. I bear witness as the suspended echos of two artists in dialogue share more than what is in this makeshift room. There is tenderness as each gesture takes up space, and curves around the next. A structure, and a scattering—the rarity to coexist. I take the installation in as one song, a chord melodically struck—and sustain.

—one tone
a whisper
starts the line
(holds)
the other
body
with a spark
simultaneous traversing
articulating the terrain of thought
—scape—
city—mind—bod(ies)
that live together
one occupies space
the other fills a room
with the residue of light—

A small glass orb catches the light where a circular channel has been hollowed out through the center of the garage door. Like a conjurer or vaudevillian act LP gingerly opens and closes the overhead hinged door gesturing the visitors out to take in the alley side view. Pulling a delicate bronze leaflet that hangs at the end of a string an interior light flicks on. From a previous installation, this sculptural performance is now a permanent omission from the architecture and provides an exhibition with a condensed view. I am caught inside the space during one of these presentations. Unexpectedly I relish in a moment of privacy with the constellation of intimate works.

A child's eye gazes through the looking glass. Our eyes meet through the rear projection as Lorca's letters fade in transparency. "*The ancient forest pushes in—*"¹ Surrounded on three sides by four panels—are landscapes I could hold against my chest. Their soft illusory surfaces resist hardened focus. They remain *unknown and open to me*.² I feel simultaneously like I am falling in—to and skipping out of—and off—the surface of them. Like traces documented on a slide for study or proof of life; a color field thin as mist or thick as night—reveals an automatic drawing-like ancient or alien graffiti scrawl etched into a mossy garden wall or quietly dispersed behind floating algal film... One such canvas placed on a crease in the drywall where the dark treated wood has been left visible reads as a sign; it's murky green surface and squiggled marks float in front of the architecture hidden beneath the treated art space alluding to more organic qualities and inherent ferment amidst all that is built and glossed over and framed.

The melody of the phrase appears in sparkles and tones both alone, and in clusters as hardened gifts of a human spirit. A thin soprano voice peaks out past the drywall—here, there; bursting celestial, glimmering and whimsical, catching the light, then disappearing again. Each gathering multiple a unique hand carved miniature bronze cast—twenty nine molten moments made musical, and left inert in the rafters of the *City* night. Insectile, crawling life-like up toward it's limit and spiraling down: a concert in effigial form.

In the *City*, these are the marks that matter. "*But the forest is in the sea...*"³ The mixing of night and light and concrete and earth and sky and sand and stars stand clear—becoming—dust and a fleck of paper I carry home in my pocket.

¹ excerpt Federico García Lorca, *City*

² Ben K. Voss, *some notes*

³ excerpt Federico García Lorca, *City*