

Molitor

Lisa Jo

Trouble Every Day

Opening:
Friday 26 April
6—9 pm

Exhibition:
26 April —
30 May 2024

Lisa Jo's compositions are on the brink of collapse. She's after the suspended image—precarious pause—before things fall apart. In the new paintings that comprise *Trouble Every Day*, Jo continues to cultivate a noir style that she has long sought in her work. This sensibility is something lifted from her native Los Angeles, tapping into the tension between elusive foreboding and glaring sunshine that spurred the first cinematic incarnations of noir. The Berlin-based artist nods to the potent moment of exchange between Europe and Los Angeles in 1940s Hollywood, where intellectual exiles were integral to the development of film noir's erotic, strange, and unnerving vision. As Mike Davis describes it in his *City of Quartz*, “the complex corpus of what we call noir is a fantastic convergence of American ‘tough-guy’ realism, Weimar expressionism, and existentialized Marxism — all focused on unmasking a ‘bright, guilty place’ (Orson Welles) called Los Angeles.”

Aaron Sorkin called LA a town so mediated it is “nearly unviewable save through the fictive scrim of its mythologizers.” It's as if Jo abstracts that fictive scrim, or takes the process of its construction as subject. Such an unmasking is central to Jo's painterly project, which mediates a process of revealing and concealing. An initial impression of flatness belies an intricately layered composition, while glimpses of body parts or hints of architecture crop up only to be truncated or unraveled just as abruptly. Addressing painting's perennial concern with its surface, Jo plays with negative space, as graphic cut-outs rendered in thinly-applied paint destabilize the distinction between background and foreground. Any illusion of immediacy is emphatically just that: an illusion.

There's something daring in the palette—mottled browns, uneasy yellows—evocative of a line from Rebecca Morris's iconic abstractionist manifesto: “Black and brown, that shit is the future.” Jo resists painting's ploys for easy seduction and instead engages the viewer in a kind of edging. Recent installations accentuate the corporeal quality of these encounters by pulling paintings off the wall so they become entities approached with one's whole body. Informed by research into Carlo Scarpa's exhibition design, this mode of interaction echoes the anti-hierarchical formal qualities of the paintings themselves. These paintings function like broken codes or unfinished sentences, leaving one to fumble through fractured picture planes. And find what? No proverbial truths, but discomfort, and moments of grace.

Kurfürstenstrasse 143, 10785 Berlin

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Lisa Jo was born in Los Angeles in 1983 and attended New York University, receiving a BFA in 2005 and living and working between LA and New York until moving to Berlin in 2018. Jo's work has been shown at galleries and institutions in New York, Los Angeles, Zürich, London, Paris, Cologne, and most recently at the Kunsthalle Zürich.

Trouble Every Day features lamps made in collaboration by Joseph Bourgois and Lisa Jo.