Nick Angelo | *Edifice II*
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Sebastian Gladstone

Apophenia, the tendency to perceive meaningful patterns or hidden links in unrelated events that is at the root of conspiracy theory, is difficult to apply to the torrent of images we face under late-capitalist dopamine tyranny. In the glut, there is no pattern, only epistemological crisis. But Nick Angelo is making connections. He's abandoning his car under the 110/101 interchange in heavy traffic and going on a rampage with red string and Narcan.

Nick is watching the sky and making sense of the contrails. Or, he *is* the sky, looking down on the city and breaking it up into legible storyboards. He is *The Thomas Guide*. He's seen all the Los Angeles urban decay crime films, where the irresistible force of individual momentum meets the unmovable labyrinth-object that is society. Is this not also the artist at work?

Nick's conspiracy quilts are cooked up in his head and on his laptop and produced across the counter of a 24-hour print center on the grommeted vinyl you find zip-tied to chain-link fences. A map to both the city and the artists' mind. Possible navigation routes. Disclaiming all responsibility. Use at your own risk.

These pieces explore Nick's own psycho-geographic, cinema-addled, online and parasocial relationship to Los Angeles. He grew up and misspent his youth here as a loiterer, wanderer and drug addict. Since then he has worked in needle exchange, harm reduction, case management and re-entry. His works address the city, its histories, its citizens, its neighborhoods, its shops and homes and production studios and treatment centers, the films shot in those neighborhoods, how those stories and representations warp reality and memory, and the images the city produces, consumes, circulates and exports, in private and public, irl and online, at the very moment that the wall between the two comes down.

Not being their maker, the works remind me of a deep and vivid REM-sleep dream that connects all the dots and answers all the questions, but when you wake, you're just you again, laboring under a dull confusion, looking at a map you drew in the dark, estranged from the dimension where it applied. No command is claimed because no command is possible. Each step out the door every day commences a unique and unrepeatable path. Chance cards are turned over. Mysteries compound. Mises-en-abyme nest into infinity.

To wit, a few image-nodes within Nick's matrices: a former CIA outpost in Laurel Canyon that became actor Jared Leto's home; Leto in a photograph with Val Kilmer at the premiere of *Alexander* (2004); Kilmer in *The Salton Sea* (2002), a film about the Southern California meth trade; the Echo Park Pioneer Chicken–immortalized by Warren Zevon's "Carmelita," later covered by GG Allin–that is now a Little Caesar's, the Atwater Village Foster's Freeze where Ving Rhames and Bruce Willis exchange gunfire in *Pulp Fiction* (1994), the nearby apartment where Nick was first introduced to heroin in 2009, and outward to the opioid epidemic. Heroin trafficking brings us (allegedly) to Ron Launius, who was murdered in the infamous Wonderland killings, also known as the Laurel Canyon Murders, a crime often linked to nightclub owner Eddie Nash; Hollywood punk venue The Starwood, owned by Nash; The Germs, whose members met in the Innovative Program School (IPS) at University High School, which incorporated educational techniques associated with the Church of Scientology; the Incredible String Band, likewise linked to Scientology; Frank Zappa's Laurel Canyon cabin, a late 1960s countercultural hub frequented by the Incredible String Band; and Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point* (1970), shaped by the collapse of that same '60s counterculture and located a short drive from the Salton Sea. In 2003, the Laurel Canyon Murders became the subject of the film *Wonderland*, in which porn star John Holmes was played by Val Kilmer. And around we go. All of these images diagrammed and indexed in a (what else) zine.

I prefer to separate the art from the artist, but there is pretty clear collapse here. It is a feat, I think, to use popular images to tell your own story. To pick snowflakes out of the blizzard.

These are elaborations on the models the child builds to try to contain the world. They are the puzzles, games, and quests that form the realm of peculiar and unique thought, allowed to meander and be unproductive, like the Situationist dérive. Conducted at random. Designed to waste time. Nick is building mazes in which to be temporarily lost. Intuitive, circular, maddening, expansive, and maybe free.

Nick Angelo will shake out his carpet at Sebastian Gladstone Gallery on July 11, 2026.

— Mungo Thomson