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Culture Monster
ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

Art review: 'Gray Day' at Roberts and Tilton Gallery

Christopher Knight
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The Lost Decade is now finally coming to a close -- unless of course it's not, determined to drag on into the 'teens. "Gray Day," a large and unusually good group exhibition at Roberts and Tilton, gets the bleak tone just right, without shrill hectoring.

Organized by artist Noah Davis, "Gray Day" includes 38 mostly recent paintings, sculptures, photographs and mixed-media works by more than 25 artists. Gray is a prominent color but far from the only one. Present gloominess is more complex than that.

An aerial view of a full-immersion baptism in Ariana Papademetropoulos' disturbing painting shows a man dunking a woman, the tightly coherent image shattering into a chromatic flurry where the water's surface breaks. Capillary ripples of light hold in tense equilibrium a conflicted scene that merges hopeful salvation with inescapable violence.

Andrew Foster's lovely small painting, "Bread and Butter" envisions parsimony through luxurious paint, its torn crusts of bread and dense block of vaguely rancid-looking butter huddled on an empty table, like exquisitely rendered refugees from a Chardin still life. Samia Mirza collages pictures of Elizabeth Taylor as "Cleopatra" with a ruined sculpture of an ancient Greek goddess, creating a monstrous hybrid that relegates Warholian mass media to the status of ancient history.

A young man seated on a ledge looks out across an icy mountain lake in a Daniel Desure photograph, the grim beauty an invitation beckoning him to venture out onto a frozen surface that may not support his suddenly fragile-looking body.

Mark Dutcher's big pencil, wax and oil drawing "Shoulder" suggests geological layers of heavy sediment or a ruined wall; propped up on a wood and cardboard armature, however, its intimations of weight and gravity are as deceptive as a flimsy theatrical stage set.

A massive boulder on a bluff in a foggy canyon is eccentrically painted in mottled camouflage grays in Anthony Lepore's photograph "Cover-Up," creating its own mini-Mont Ste. Victoire of artifice that queries the visual integrity of digital imagery. And Allison Schulnik's creepy clown face, its coal black eyes formed from inch-thick



lumps of clotted pigment, stares you down with a deadened gaze.

There are additional fine pieces by Michael Hayden, Juan Capistran, Brian Wills and other artists, including a 1978 metallic vapor drawing by Larry Bell, making him the show's godfather. Some works are too blandly illustrative, like Desure's flat-footed sculpture of a disco ball that has crashed to the floor and landed in a puddle of black ooze. As an evocation of where we are now, however, curator Davis hit the mark overall.

-- Christopher Knight

Roberts and Tilton, 5801 Washington Blvd., Culver City, (323) 549-0223, through Dec 18.
Closed Sun. and Mon. www.robertsandtilton.com