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ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

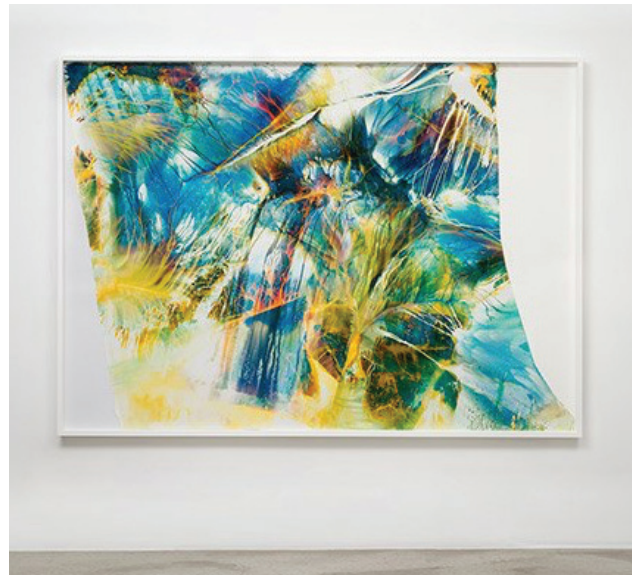
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MARIAH ROBERTSON'S BOLD PHOTOGRAPHIC INSTALLATIONS GO ON DISPLAY

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By Michael Slenske

On Valentine's Day, there were plenty of couples circulating the West Hollywood space of M+B Gallery for the carnivalesque opening of Mariah Robertson's "Photography Lovers' Peninsula" exhibition. To welcome them into her world of photographic revelry, the Brooklyn-based artist enlisted a bearded gentleman to pump keg beer in the nude, a Grim Reaper to dole out chocolate roses, and a mariachi band to serenade the crowd while an In-N-Out food truck stuffed them with Double-Doubles. The bacchanalian excess was only appropriate given the riot of colors jumping off Robertson's architectural photo installation inside.

Robertson invented her signature process almost four years ago, when she ruined a 40-inch-wide roll of Kodak metallic film paper in her Greenpoint studio. Rather than toss it, she decided to throw developer liquids in a variety of combinations and temperatures on the roll, and to her surprise the reactions teased out a series of chemical abstractions that resembled everything from Kool-Aid swirling in a fish tank to bleachy solar flares and bubbled graffiti gradients.



343, 2014, Mariah Robertson

In the ensuing years Robertson has added to the visual chaos by crumpling the sheets of film paper and showing works in rolls hanging from ceilings (in locations such as MoMA and Wesleyan University). She's also been cutting her works off the roll, leaving them with jagged edges. "They just get very banged up in the process," says Robertson, whose techniques are a response to the cultural edicts of photography that warn against using glossy paper, damaging the paper, or using darkroom chemicals in uncontrolled light and temperature conditions. "The project for me is in the making of the images and in exploring the materials, but slowly I get technically better."

That means Robertson can now create hot-pink propulsions via ketchup squeeze bottles or bright blue alluvial fans via hot water poured directly from the kettle. She even employs veterinary syringes and jugs of bleach to inject milky rivulets or spread white voids across the paper.

Culled from hundreds of works, the images at M+B conjure everything from Day-Glo Venus flytraps to Gerhard Richter squeegees. Ranging in height from six to 12 feet, the pieces are hung tightly along angled walls installed just for the show, with works grouped by colors so viewers can see the artist's tonal progressions. Robertson even has two sets of wood bleachers so guests can linger with the primordial psychedelia of her painterly compositions.

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"I love these white halos," says Robertson, pointing to a six-foot-wide piece with the bottom sheared off at a 30-degree angle and volcanic bursts of gold spilling over aquatic fields of black and blue. "I'd love to be able to do these at will, but to really have full control would just feel boxed in."

If the high jinks at the opening—which she devised partially in secret from her gallerists—were any indication, Robertson should have no trouble finding and thriving on chaos for years to come.

Through March 21 at M+B Gallery, 612 North Almont Drive, Los Angeles; mbart.com



254, 2014, Mariah Robertson
365, 2014, Mariah Robertson
232, 2014, Mariah Robertson