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Considering Nevine Mahmoud's Three Isolated Effects

By E.D. Noice
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On a lonely hill above Los Angeles I find myself texting a complete stranger in order to be taken to an exhibition I know nothing about. Typically when I'm asked to write about art, I've at least heard of the gallery, and if not, I'm able to familiarize myself prior to visiting the show by reviewing photos and reading a press release. A barren website and a cryptic appointment e-mail containing the word 'access' confirming my reservation are all that lies between myself and the exhibition.

The stranger turns out to be Lewis Teague Wright, the 'Gallery Director' for transient art space Lock Up International that has hosted shows in London, Frankfurt and Mexico City. On this particular day Nevine Mahmoud's Three Isolated Effects exhibition, running from April 18 to 24, is showing in a 10×10 space in a Public Storage facility in Los Angeles' Elysian Park neighborhood and is made up of three sculpture pieces by London-born and LA-based Mahmoud.



Nevine Mahmoud, Three Isolated Effects, 2016.

The abstract ambiguity of Mahmoud's pieces marry perfectly with their surroundings. Contained within the walls of a storage unit, we understand there is value. There is worth in the work. In the same way that value is given to art objects displayed in the white cube, Mahmoud's Three Isolated Effects, too, feels right at home in a space with its function of storing a person's valuables.

With construction going on both above and below the unit that houses the show, I become acutely aware of the delicacy of viewing art in a way I'd never realized. The floors and walls of the space are made of creaking and groaning plywood—the kind that noise and movement flow through freely. The banal act of walking from one piece to another to view it becomes a disruptive and self-conscious one. At times it leads me to focus on factors outside of the art, influencing the viewing experience.

Mahmoud's most formally recognizable and least abstract piece is a colorful, to-scale beach ball. Without a list of titles or materials to refer to, I'm left to observe exactly what's in front of me. Its glossy finish and stillness leads me to believe it is made of ceramic—making it a replica of a delicate, light object made of a different, yet equally fragile material. Diagonally across from the ball is a free-standing fibre-glass piece of what I can only guess was once a jacuzzi or bath. Smooth and white like the faux-porcelain of any domestic tub on one side, and rough and painted a bright, chalky, Pepto-Bismol pink on the reverse.

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Almost invisible due to its hue and broad surface is a golden, canary yellow panel to the right. It lies nearly flush against an already yellowed plasterboard wall, creating a subtle and atmospheric piece that complements and observes the installation alongside it, without leaving an intrusive impression. The pieces conjure nostalgia in both their formal and conceptual existences. The colors and materiality of all three artworks make them familiar, even when a piece's shape or size is surreal.



Nevine Mahmoud, *Three Isolated Effects*, 2016.
Installation view. Courtesy of Lock Up International.

It's rare to see a show with a title, environment and works that so succinctly combine and freely converse between themselves. *Three Isolated Effects* achieves what many Los Angeles art shows miss out on; existing outside of the city's influence. Blanket statements about a place as diverse and complex as this one are typically invalid, but there are two truths that are proven exceptions to this rule: that Los Angeles has a lot of space and light. Although the white cube is an equalizer, it's hard to ignore how these two physical elements exist and inhabit this Californian city. Mahmoud's show, like others put on by Lock Up International, become truly free of existing in any one location.

As curator Teague Wright leads me through the labyrinth of identical hallways and safety-orange metal unit doors, in a generic Public Storage facility, in an ordinary residential suburb, these two truths of LA fall away—we could be anywhere. This anonymity, and the Lock Up International website's lack of explanation, leads to an art exhibition palette cleanser, one that asks you to forget the white cube. Instead you're invited to pay attention only to what is around you, and in front, lending itself tremendously to Mahmoud's show, as abstract sculpture typically requires even a modest suspension of disbelief. This return to basics is both refreshing and eye-opening, leaving me glad to know that the places and modes of how we view art have a dialogue all their own, being hashed out on an international scale.**