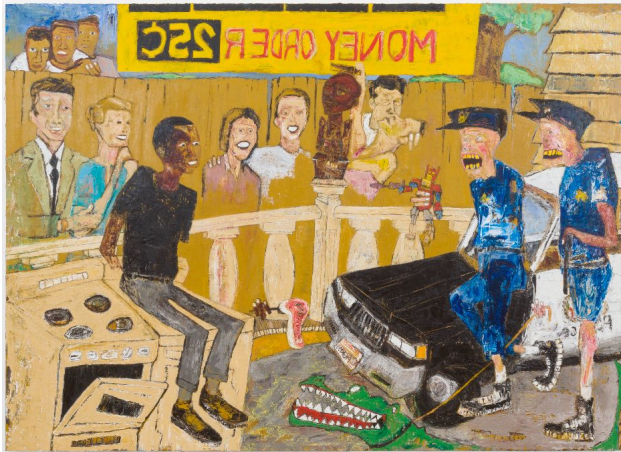


# M+B

## Los Angeles Times

### Review: Black man, white police and the sly tricks of the eye in Brandon Landers' painting

by Sharon Mizota | August 8, 2015



Brandon Landers' paintings are refreshingly blunt. The artist, who lives in Bakersfield, creates rough-hewn images inspired by his memories of life in South Los Angeles.

The six works on view at M+B depict everyday scenes: community gatherings, young boys at play and, ominously, a confrontation with the police. Executed with a palette knife, they possess a folksy quality tempered with strange spatial disconnects that keep things interesting.

The most ambitious work is "The Joys," in which two white police officers confront a young black man as a crowd looks on. The young man looks scared as

the officers, who resemble Beavis and Butt-head, bare their yellowed teeth in savage grimaces. Improbably, an alligator on a leash at their feet eyes a raw steak. Only on closer inspection do we notice the white hand holding the leash is detached, floating in midair. Another floating hand holds a toy robot pointing a gun at the young man, and a black hand, floating in front of the alligator, is holding the steak on a stick. We can't see the hands of the young man or one of the officers. It's as if their arms just fade away.

The disembodied hands reveal the underlying story. The young man is treated like a piece of meat; the cops act like children playing with guns, or savage animals, barely restrained. And the crowd of onlookers? Turns out most of them are only torn and faded advertisements on a fence in the background. Three brown-skinned figures peer over the barrier in the upper left corner, perhaps the only witnesses to this portentous standoff.

Stylistically, Landers owes a large debt to the raw, expressionistic figures of Jean-Michel Basquiat and also to the flayed-looking canvases of Leon Golub. Golub's depictions of torture and state-sponsored violence are particularly resonant, despite the lighter, more cartoonish tone of Landers' work.

The other images in the show are less weighty but no less surreal. "Unpaccin" is a raucous group portrait interrupted by a full-length image of a woman wearing only underwear and striking a pose reminiscent of Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)." A young boy clasps a Burger King box in "Ways." He's speaking so emphatically that his jaw looks dislocated.

Interestingly, the writing in Landers' images is rendered in reverse. Signs in the background, the lettering on the burger box — are all inscribed as if seen in a mirror. Perhaps it's an indication that painting, and art in general, is a way of holding up a mirror, of showing us ourselves, from the inside.