

Art Pick

LA WEEKLY *Art+Books*

Words, and Worlds, Gone Mad

Alexandra Grant and Robin Kandel

By Peter Frank

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Alexandra Grant's paintings — and to a lesser extent works on paper — seem to be cityscapes of a kind, but there are relatively few buildings or other urban indicators in these pileup pictures. Rather, Grant's contemporary Babylons are built out of babble, myriad words encased in bubbles all jammed up against one another in what seem like so many futile attempts to form coherent phrases. Or perhaps they're successful attempts to avoid forming meaningful sentences; you get the feeling Grant revels in the cacophony of cities, not least by the fact that the words are all rendered in mirror image, and are thus that much less legible. As soon as you get beyond the need to read (primed by her sensuous painting and linear bravado), you can share in the exhilaration Grant derives from a discordant, multi-voiced urbanism, a sort of ecstatic negative utopia that, unfashionably, takes pleasure in the modern.



Robin Kandel, still from the video *Dress Up* (2007)

Robin Kandel's words are oh so legible, but they are no less dense than Grant's — if a lot less painterly. In her installation — where the facts are mainly on the wall and the artful amplification mainly on the floor — Kandel literally maps out many lives: those of her parents and of the families, peoples and places from which they came. Her father's tales of surviving the Holocaust contrast with her mother's recollections of growing up among Jewish (and other) mobsters, and the twist to their coming together in Detroit is that they were cousins. But that's the front story; the back is, as usual, where the art is, and Kandel's cartomania and chartomania serve her well in weaving a visual as well as verbal construction that tries to make sense of a world — make that various worlds — gone mad. *Alexandra Grant at MOCA, 250 S. Grand Ave., dwntwn.; Thurs. 11 a.m.-8 p.m., Fri. & Mon. 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Sat.-Sun. 11 a.m.-6 p.m.; thru Aug. 13. (213) 626-6222. Robin Kandel at Sherry Frumkin Gallery, 3026 Airport Ave., Santa Monica; Wed.-Sat. 11 a.m.-6 p.m.; thru Aug. 11. (310) 397-7493.*