THE ARTIST WHO STRUNG ALONG AN AUDIENCE, ALWAYS CONCERNED WITH THE "BIG PICTURE," IS FADING INTO THE DISTANCE.

That blends to delirious effect, passages of absurdist mini-mall architecture with the panoply of exotic, obscure products that might be found within. Frields, Katie Grinnan, and Lim are similarly inclined toward an all but impenetrable density, planting their respective sign-forests in a lateral sweep or an ascending cluster. Semiotic play becomes politically motivated, to some degree, in the work of Kim, Bradford, and Newkirk, all of whom address the sex- and race-specific politics of grooming. Even here, however, it is less about dislodging the stereotype than teasing it into ingenious patterns, as in Bradford's painterly grid of permanent-wave tissues.

As with any grouping of this scale, there are bound to be some spectacular omissions, but then also some standouts. For my money, Schlingelhoff's custom-drawn bios of all the included artists are heartbreakingly apt in their mixture of hyperbolic flash and crude, transient materiality. In her single-channel video piece, Lacusta similarly plays mouthpiece for the language of others—in this case, intoning the phrase "You're a lousy lover" every which way, without ever ceasing to implicate LA's fickle, star-crazy audience. And, finally, there are the drawings by Chasteen, which strike a beguiling pose between infantilism and hypersophistication. As muddy ink blobs and smudges give way to delicate line drawings of floating ships and locomotives, one is reminded that the process of artistic maturation can be imbued with the everyday sadness of leaving home.

These standouts exemplify certain tendencies shared by the lot, especially in terms of process: a semi-random accretion of repetitive elements with mutation built-in over time, in which the source material, though not insignificant, is typically overshadowed, and occasionally subsumed, by its unapologetically lightweight buildup.

There is, in fact, a sort of automatism at work here, however highly diluted, that suggests a renewed confidence in the potential of the creative self, in the eye to see and the hand to transform—ideology be damned. The artist who strung along an audience from one work, one show, to the next, always concerned with the evolution of the "big picture," is fading into the distance as the consistency required to render the long-term ambitions of authentic investigation or exploration legible becomes a thing of the past. Only the language remains behind, mummified in the catalogue copy, a holdover from the Enlightenment that has never seemed more inappropriate and basically lost.