

# **ARTSCENE™**

**The Monthly Digest to Art in Southern California**



**PATTI OLEON  
“SIDEWAYS”**

**MICKALENE THOMAS • SENG NENGUDI • WU  
BIN • CHAD ATTIE • AND MUCH MORE**

in “Quanikah Goes Up” (2001/2005), another self portrait, Thomas appears harried against the metallic sheen of an elevator. Her makeup is exaggerated, her hair dyed blond, her expression dazed, but with an air of desperation. Throughout the photographs in “Muse,” Thomas explores varying female attitudes, desires and passions. Their presence asserts, “do not dismiss us, ignore us, direct prejudice toward us as we are beautiful, sensual, sexual and deserving of attention.”

In both her paintings and photographic imagery Thomas is concerned with pose and posing. She uses photography to explore how “perception is put onto the black body.” As she has stated, the work “was really about me searching, a discovery of myself, trying to understand some of these stereotypes that were a little mysterious to me ...”

Jody Zellen

## PATTI OLEON

(Edward Cella Art + Architecture, Culver City) Patti Oleon’s five paintings, slated for a show dubbed “Sideways” (after the title of one work), prompt the question: What’s the ceiling on painted architectural interiors? That can be taken literally, in the sense of challenging the relevance of such modes. Is it an overplayed trope, and/or ultimately placating to the market? It’s also as a pun-like take on one of Oleon’s recurring motifs, in which ceilings double as floors; in the case of “Danielli” — perhaps the strongest among these new paintings — it’s not clear whether we’re seeing ceiling or sky. The oil-on-panel (and linen-over-panel) paintings, ranging in size from two-feet to four-and-a-half-feet high, qualify as jewel-like, and clearly offer eye-candy splendors in their re-interpretations of grand European lobbies, hotels, hallways and opera houses from locales such as Istanbul, Venice and Prague.

When, though, do the works transcend fetishization? Most likely when they fully embody one of Oleon’s ongoing themes: deception, disorientation, and perhaps a touch



Patti Oleon, “Danielli,” 2017, oil on linen over hardwood panel, 55 1/2 x 42”.

of Escher-like ambiguity. “Sideways,” the four-by-three foot panel of the show’s title, represents one of her recurring Photoshopped tweaks: take an interior image from about eye-level up to the ceiling, then crop, copy and flip it so that the ceiling then also doubles as the floor. It’s a simple pictorial technique but one that’s effective in evoking more than just an abstract articulation of vertigo, possibly a mild sense of déjà vu. Who hasn’t at some point, particularly as a youngster, laid on the bed with head hung backwards over the side, fantasizing that the ceiling is now the floor, our ordinary environs turned extraordinary? Additionally, “Sideways” proffers an odd, one-off quirk. In a vocabulary of interiors otherwise devoid of people, here a young man with an upturned collar, from chest level to head as seen from the back, floats in vertically mirrored double at the near end of a baroque, lamp-lit, wood-paneled hallway. In terms of whether the ploy of his inclusion is a success, it’s too difficult to come down on one side or the other through reproduction alone; but it definitely gets points for straying outside the artist’s usual box.

With “Danielli,” meanwhile, we don’t know exactly what we’re looking at. Is it an interior or exterior? The floor or the ceiling? Mezzanine or lobby? That emphasis on ambiguity is necessary for the paintings to live longer lives of sustained viewing, as opposed to being quick if luscious reads. Another piece, “Istanbul Lob-

by,” takes more of a pictorial middle road: we know that we’re seeing a quasi-Rococo loveseat-type number, sitting on a rug and being reflected on the lobby’s marble floor, but the way in which the reflection begins beyond the rug supporting the furniture leads to a peculiar floating effect: the rug has been turned into a flying carpet.

One of my favorite Oleon paintings, from a 2016 exhibition and so not on view in the current show, is set neither in a classic European city nor even in an interior with much vintage. Rather, it’s a modern carpeted hallway with simple wallpaper but otherwise completely unadorned. In the middle distance, the space — perhaps a lobby for that floor, or maybe the artist’s manufactured break — completely whites out, emanating its reflections onto the foreground hallway’s walls; a dark continuation of the hall resumes on the other side of the blinding white. It’s title? “LA Apartment Hallway.” I bring it up because it suggests that incorporating contemporary locales into her heavy diet of historical ones could be an effective way to mix things up.

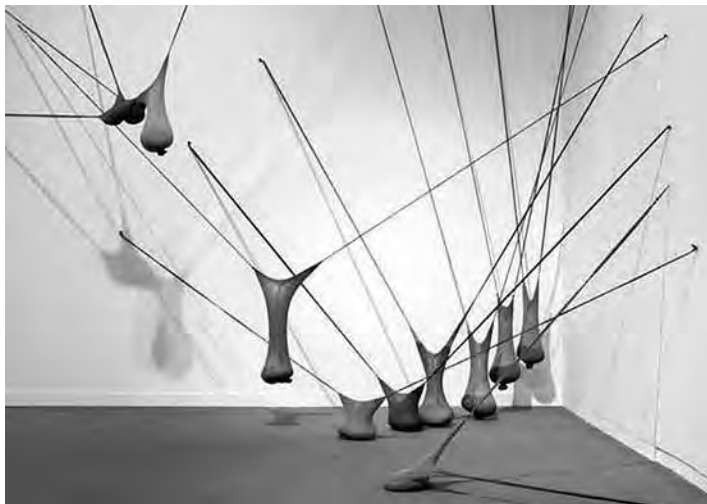
Michael Shaw

## SENGA NENGUDI

(USC Fisher Museum of Art, Downtown) Senga Nengudi came of

age as an artist in Los Angeles and New York in the 1970s, a pivotal era when young artists felt free — even obliged — to experiment with materials and methods. Artists also joined in the urgent political discussions of race (Nengudi is African American) and gender then percolating in the air. Early on she began using nylon stockings in her work (pantyhose being closely identified with women) and, as she once said in a talk at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, “When a woman wears pantyhose, it’s usually under a stressful situation. They’re going on a job interview, they’re going to a dance ... there’s a lot of tension when you’re wearing pantyhose.”

“Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures” includes 14 of her mixed media works, which incorporate nylon and other materials, plus four works on paper, six videos, and a number of photographs. It features selections from her best known series, “R.S.V.P.,” including a classic photograph from 1977 which depicts her nylon sculpture being activated by Maren Hassinger, a fellow artist who had also studied dance. In the photo Hassinger is balanced on her buttocks, legs pointed skyward in a V shape. The nylon has been stretched from points on the wall to her forehead, torso, and legs. It speaks eloquently to both tension, the nylon being a visible manifestation of the taut pull between two points, and to



Senga Nengudi, “Untitled (R.S.V.P.),” 2013, stretched nylon and sand, dimensions vary.