

On the Edge: 'Grimy Rhymes' at City Limits



She *ght, 2014*

By **Sarah Hotchkiss**

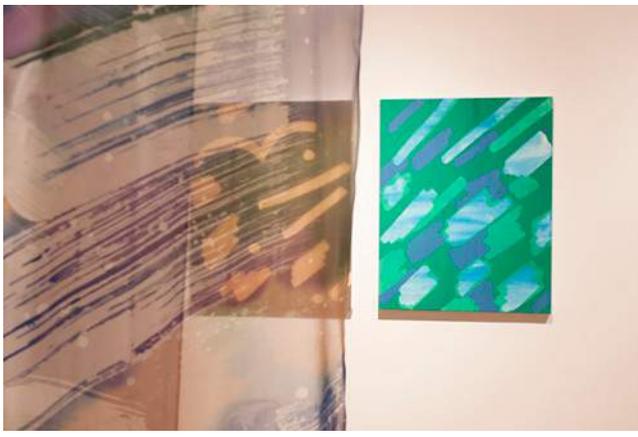
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Though the current batch of stories traveling the airwaves might lead us to believe there's few art venues left in the Bay Area, hopefully we all know that's just not the case. While rising rents and evictions force some art spaces to shutter their doors and relocate, others carve out what room they can.

Creative solutions to space problems are by no means new, but these spots tend to be quieter than their large-scale commercial counterparts. Pay a visit to any one of the Bay Area apartments, back rooms, garages, or basements that double as alternative art spaces, and you'll witness the collective energy of an experimental and still-vital art scene.

One such space is City Limits, an artist-run gallery in Oakland's Jack London Square. Occupying the corner of a warehouse turned art studios, the modestly-sized gallery is off the beaten track, nestled between BART and Port of Oakland railroad tracks on the edge of the neighborhood's nightlife.

Originally an apartment gallery in San Francisco's Outer Mission, City Limits still lives up to its name. Run by Evan Reiser and Alyssa Block, the current incarnation of the gallery opened in December 2013 with a solo show by Jonah Susskind. Since then, City Limits' calendar boasts a healthy mix of tightly curated group shows, one and two-person exhibitions, and even some non object-based programming.



Andrea Bergart, *Soft Hook Shot* (foreground), *Seascape* (left), *Mountain Lake* (right); courtesy of City Limits

The gallery showcases both local talent and emerging artists from farther afield, as seen in the current exhibition **Grimy Rhymes**, featuring New York-based artists Sheryl Oppenheim and Andrea Bergart. Full of large gestures and scintillating patterns, the artists borrow from “craft” methodologies, creating abstractions of swirly, explosive color on canvasses, stretched fabric, and diaphanous silk.

Inspired by marbled endpapers, Oppenheim’s paintings layer vibrant pigment on unexpected grounds. In *First Marbled Painting*, blue and red acrylic flows across a striped canvas surface, creating a near-moiré effect on an intimate scale. Though the paint is long dried, Oppenheim’s pieces retain a free flowing quality. The marbled colors are liquid, luxurious, and mesmerizing.

This is especially the case with *Black Light*, an accordion-fold 14-foot long book of marbled pages. On thick black paper from Dieu Donn , the layers of paint pop like psychedelic posters in a stoner’s basement lair.



Andrea Bergart, *Central Park Hot Dog*, 2014; courtesy of the artist

Two ghostly batiked (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batik>) silk pieces from Bergart nicely frame Oppenheim’s dense book. Where Oppenheim experiments with opacity and additive color, Bergart uses masking to erase layers of paint in controlled patterns. In *Mountain Lake*, she reveals a horizontal blue wash behind diagonal strips of green. Isolated, they resemble puffy clouds. In *Central Park Hot Dog*, the masking renders cartoonishly large brush marks and droplets across the canvas.

Admittedly inspired by fabric patterns, Bergart's pieces seem cut from larger wholes. There is nowhere for the eye to rest, no self-contained movement to follow across the surface. Evenly spaced repeated marks, and a penchant for the 45-degree angle, make Bergart's five 25-by-20-inch paintings look like large studies. They need proximity to one another for the clash of colors and shapes to interrupt the more contained pattern on each individual work.

Her most interesting painting is possibly the weirdest of the bunch: a small work on YUPO paper titled *Dirty Linoleum*. The pattern it mimics is more familiar than any batiked fabric — the scuffed floor below, tinged with the colors of countless paint splatters, showing the dirt tracked across its surface and worn into its curled edges. Imagining repeated tiles, *Dirty Linoleum* becomes an abstract version of the daily studio grind (and grime).



Sheryl Oppenheim, *Open Container*; courtesy of the artist

Oppenheim and Bergart share a passion for repetition and serial processes. On Oppenheim's impressive *Open Container*, screen printed black and white patterns stack and overlap like high contrast photocopies. The unstretched linen with its messy edges is well matched by *Nice New Outfit*, a particularly trippy marbling on top of a black and white striped button-down. Its corner dangles off the stretcher frame like an untucked shirt.

If it's not already obvious, both artists make excellent use of titles, matching their descriptions with dry humor. The entire show is a thoroughly enjoyable experience, filled with flurries of color, luminous overlaps of abstraction, and exciting new takes on old patterns and inspirations. **Grimy Rhymes** is all the more special because without City Limits, I might never have seen either artist's work.

Grimy Rhymes is on view at City Limits through May 31, 2014.