

ARTslanT



[No Can Handle](#)

Conrad Guevara

City Limits

300 Jefferson St., Oakland, CA 94612

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Endurance training for the noncommittal

by Kara Q. Smith

At the heart of the works in *No Can Handle* is the ethos of endurance. Entering the exhibition is not unlike entering an interpretation of a physical training facility. Equipment-like inventions dangle from the ceiling and perch amidst the gallery space; there is even a painted panel squatting in the crease of a gym mat on the floor. Many of the works, like *Bow 4* (2014) have a suggestive tenacity. *Bow 4* is a delicately curved wooden pole bending like a “C” around an entire wall, held in place by the tension of the string connecting both ends. Its subtlety is beautiful and its precarity only slightly menacing. How exact is the science preventing it from snapping? How long can the svelte stick hold on?

Four abstract paintings dot the walls, each pinned to the wall by a shiny-coated metal apparatus, which partially obscures a section of the canvas. The shapes and the colors of each painting are similar, the markings precise and deliberate. This isn't abstraction for abstraction's sake; this is a meaningful endeavor to convey the power of restraint. In the middle of the room hangs *Switches* (2014). Two leather switches are gracefully suspended from the ceiling on polished silver chains. In the corner, an aesthetically pleasing rendition of a push-up-like bar, made of eucalyptus bark, quietly resides. A Lutz Bacher ball, from her installation [Stress Balls \(2012\) at Ratio 3](#), covertly rests against an upward reaching piece of shed timber, a nod to the conversion of something trite to something arresting.



Conrad Guevara, *Bar* (installation view), 2014, Eucalyptus bark, metal bar, acrylic, embroidery floss with Lutz Bacher ball; Courtesy of the artist and City Limits Gallery, Oakland

This exhibition is largely inspired by Guevara's youth growing up on a military base in Hawaii, which makes it difficult to not read the show somewhat literally. Picture men clambering on and around these sculptures. Drill sergeants scream and spit and threaten. The switches would be used as punishment, encouragement. Yet, there is no blood or sweat here. If a muscular person were to engage physically with any of these works, they would fracture immediately. It is the materials that are being tested, as if they, representing a refined artistic practice (that unstoppable force which we will go hungry, lose sleep, pursuing), must rise above their artist-placed limitations. The gestures here are loving, ethereal, and personal. *Shade* (2014) contains several stained glass forms, in the exhibition's trademark "official" blue, dangling from a polished chain attached to the ceiling. Hand-made by the artist's father at Guevara's request, the leaf-like shapes droop downwards and appear heavy compared to their slender silver cable but they don't evoke capriciousness. *Shade* is more of a beacon of the hyperbolic, the illusory nature of the overt references found in its existence.