

# NICODIM



## Mihai Nicodim on the Wild West, Los Angeles, and the New Cultural Milieu

Artsy Editors  
23 January 2014

“Once you’re faced with the breadth of art’s potential for the first time it sticks with you,” says Mihai Nicodim. For the L.A.-based dealer, who moved to the United States from Romania just before the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, his own art awakening took place during a visit to early-’80s Berlin, on the heels of a creative education under Communist dictatorship—which was academic, regulated, and far-flung from the perspectives he’d later develop on contemporary art. In Berlin, Nicodim discovered work by artists like Martin Kippenberger that were antithetical to the way he’d been taught to think about Western art, and was quickly lured. “I remember it being the first time I had been confronted with work which forced me to take time in understanding intent, meaning and even ‘process’ as a concept in itself,” he says. “I apply that rudimentary experience to my work now when looking at prospective young artists—it’s given me more patience with certain types of new media and genres.”

Since he opened his gallery in Los Angeles in 2006 (in response to the creative energy surrounding the city of Cluj), Nicodim has sought to bring young European artists into the local art market. “L.A. has become and is becoming one of the most exciting art capitals in the world; it’s my intention to add to the diversity of the artistic community here with voices perhaps outside of the West Coast alone,” he says, and for nearly a decade, he’s done exactly so. This fall, Nicodim will move his gallery and roster, which includes Serban Savu from Romania and Daniel Pitin from Czech Republic, to Los Angeles’ Downtown Arts District as part of what he calls the “mass exodus from Culver City”—and a strong indication that the art scene is finding its footing. “For so long L.A. was really only a haven to artists, now it’s becoming a real center for the market as well—yet it still manages to maintain the mystique of the ‘Wild West.’”

This week, as the spotlight falls on the city for Art LA Contemporary, the fifth iteration of the West Coast’s international fair, Nicodim will investigate artists taking on “re-negotiation with materials,” including work by Adrian Ghenie alongside the young British artist Jack Lavender, collages by Belgian artist Michiel Ceulers, and paintings by up-and-coming Romanian artist Mihut Bosco.

# NICODIM

“All of these artists are under 40, however I am interested less in age and more in themes these generations seem to be tackling as a group,” he says, “most specifically in which new media has affected their formal structures as a whole.”

*So what should you watch out for?*

Jack Lavender, *Chubby Green Window*, 2013

“The work is reminiscent of Calder, constructed in vague reference to a mobile but functioning more organically. The material sags, the additive components are soft and flimsy. As in most of Jack’s work, there’s always an allegoric dialogue between material and function. The sculpture is green and covered in verdant ephemera, which alludes to something natural; however each component is clearly faux, manufactured and acrylic. Nevertheless, Jack’s work always looks so syncopated—one is left wondering if the entire piece is found-object or completely fabricated to look as such. Here is where his work draws me in—the way he plays with authorship in a way that feels very fresh. This is something many in his generation do via the digital realm but Jack has managed to give this conversation a formal language all his own.”

Michiel Ceulers, *Untitled*, 2013

“Michiel’s collages have become my new favorite component to his practice. So much of his work surrounds ideas of deconstruction and reconstruction, resolution only being found when the work physically leaves the studio and enters the physical world where it finds function. The new collages are quite raw and abrasive; he’s using more color, neons, etc. There seems to be a distinct paring down of the work he did in his well known grid-series. In fact some of the new collages are constructed from sliced and diced grids he has hacked into something more energetic and process-based—almost performative.”

Adrien Ghenie, *Burning Books*, 2013

“While Ghenie’s work always impresses on a formal and visceral level (evocative even in it’s pure materiality, the way he understands painting as a language is unprecedented in my opinion) this new piece in a quiet diversion. The work pictures an abstracted young girl witnessing or participating in an assumed book burning. Ghenie’s pejorative view on the subject matter is expressed by his corruption of the painting’s surface—burning, singing and melting the canvas through paint-application. The gorgeous, abstracted, almost aggressive use of pure color above the bonfire’s crackling is demonstrative of the artist’s idiosyncratic touch—the way he conserves gesture, the economy of his stroke—yet somehow the work is elegant and cohesive. I keep going back to the painting myself trying to understand it’s structure and pathos. It is truly something not to be missed.”

*Mihai Nicodim Gallery, Art Los Angeles Contemporary 2014, Section LA, Jan. 30th – Feb. 2nd.*