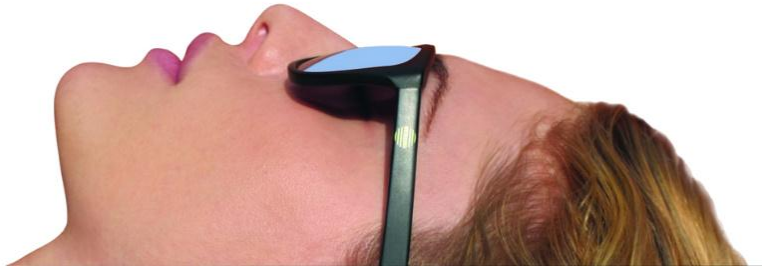


ForYourArt

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Alex Israel Talks with ForYourArt About His New Mural on Abbot Kinney Boulevard



This Friday marks the unveiling (and subsequent party, 7-11pm, ribbon cutting at 8pm) for a new mural created by native Angeleno Alex Israel. The commission has been spearheaded by Esther Kim, the proprietor of a recently opened gallery on Abbot Kinney in Venice called VARIOUS SMALL FIRES (the name comes from a 1964 book by Ed Ruscha, who also kept a studio in Venice). The mural features imagery iconic of Los Angeles, from the lifestyle and the ethos of the Venice neighborhood to city's nearby beach culture, all of which are prominent and recurring in Israel's work.

For the artist, who also founded the sunglasses brand Freeway Eyewear as part of his practice, Southern California regional aesthetics have provided a constant theme throughout his work; from his web series Rough Winds and his work with Hollywood props, to the subjects he interviews for Purple Fashion Magazine. Israel just closed a show at Peres Projects in Berlin and will be having a solo show at Reena Spaulings Fine Art in New York in March. Below, Israel speaks about the inspiration for the mural.

Alexis Johnson: What initiated this mural?

Alex Israel: I've known Esther Kim of Various Small Fires Gallery since we took Introduction to Drawing together at college in the fall of 2000. She, along with her neighbors at Sea-thos Foundation, a non-profit organization whose offices share an exterior facade with [the gallery], decided to initiate a public mural program. The building that they inhabit happens to have 100 feet of prime frontage on Abbott Kinney Blvd. in Venice Beach, one of my favorite shopping and dining streets in L.A. Esther approached me about proposing something and I quickly got to work.

Johnson: Where did your inspiration come from?

Israel: The visuals were loosely inspired by Duchamp's iconic 1918 work *Tu m'*. The work is in the collection of the Yale University Art Gallery, where we went to school. I've always been drawn to the work, and it was a regular stop on the tours of the gallery that I gave on weekends while I was a student. The seminal work brings into

question painting's object-ness, painterly technique, and ideas about authorship; in one long horizontal fell-swoop, Duchamp deconstructed traditional notions of painting, and predicted the art form's future. For these reasons and because the long horizontal composition of the work relates to the building's facade, the painting stuck with me as a natural starting point.

Johnson: What influenced the imagery you decided to use?

Israel: I started to play around with some of the tricks Duchamp had investigated in his work: tromp l'oeil, the relationship between real and illusionistic shadow effects, and images of the color chart. I found the curvilinear shapes of Duchamp's Standard Stoppages to be strikingly similar to the lines of a sunglass style, L.A. Rays by Freeway, which I've been producing since 2010 as part of my line, Freeway Eyewear. Other than the glasses image, which comes from my brand's website, and the portrait of the woman wearing the glasses which I myself took, the imagery I selected for the mural is mainly stock photography that I purchased online—these images function for me as a photographic equivalent to the readymade.

Johnson: And the portrait?

Israel: I wanted the mural to reflect the magical elements of Venice Beach life: the neighborhood's climate, coastal location and design sensibility. I asked Casey LaBow, a friend of mine who lives in Venice, just blocks from the mural, to pose for it. I wanted a socially active community member to be represented in the piece—to almost welcome community passersby who might recognize her to take a closer look. She is wearing L.A. Rays by Freeway.

by Alexis M. Johnson