

ANAT EBGİ

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Tammi Campbell messes with art's cannon. Think Baldessari, Albers, Ruscha - Subverted

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"Boring Art."

That's what Tammi Campbell has titled her show at the L.A. gallery Anat Ebgi. It's not what she delivers. Well, it is, and it isn't. Everything in the show, in fact, both is and isn't what it seems.

Campbell, from Saskatoon, Canada, more than nods with playful defiance to John Baldessari's 1971 "I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art" in this offering, her first in L.A. She builds upon his legacy of Conceptual, self-referential, biting, smart humor, gracing it with her own feminist-fueled wit and technical panache.

An earlier piece of Baldessari's is actually the truer touchstone for Campbell here. For "Quality Material" (1966-68), Baldessari hired a commercial sign painter to reinscribe, on canvas, a snippet of text from an instructional guide. It read, in all caps "Quality material --- careful inspection -- good workmanship. All combined an in effort to give you a perfect painting."

If his painting elicits a snort of recognition at the absurdity of such a formulaic definition of good art, hers invokes the same, plus a gasp. Campbell has re-created Baldessari's canvas at full scale, capping the corners with cardboard and the edges with packing tape, as if readying the piece for transport. Only it's not going anywhere, but hanging on the wall, itself an exemplar of exquisite workmanship: The corners and tape are really made of acrylic painting medium. The art material brilliantly masquerades as industrial packing material. And Campbell, like and not like Baldessari before her, subverts the traditional association of art with distinctive authorship, original touch. At the same time, she transcends that association. Outsmarts it.

In a half-dozen other pieces in the show, Campbell replicates works by Ellsworth Kelly, Josef Albers and Ed Ruscha, enclosing them in bubble wrap. Again, the packing material is not the cheap plastic cushioning it seems, but cast acrylic — in effect, a painting, sculpted. The trompe l'oeil finesse is on par with the exhilarating skills of Kaz Oshiro and Dan Douke.

The notion of packing up these works introduces other issues to, um, unpack. Sheathing representations of the 20th century art canon could read as an act of homage, of protection. But it could also signal a more revolutionary intent, that it's time to mute these masterpieces, all by men, to put them in storage and make room for something new, perhaps something by the hands of women. Something devious and daring. Something that bores — as in drills down and penetrates — in the guise of being boring.