

REVIEWS: USA

A crowd of cast-off statuettes hangs precariously from the ceiling: a bevy of knick-knacks, a smattering of paddywhacks, the occasional bone. It's like a psychedelic Haim Steinbach rampaged in your grandmother's hoard of collectable figurines and in a flight of fancy decided the only appropriate place for them was of course on the ceiling. Or rather, a ceiling in Los Angeles.

A kind of sweet psychedelia pervades *EMOH*, the newest exhibition by German-born artist Friedrich Kunath. Kunath's work has long been about longing. His first show in LA since moving here from Cologne has all the sadly funny twist and emotion of previous work, but this time mixed with the joy of wanderlust and the sense of finding a new home, plus a sunshiny and quietly jokey SoCal psychedelic. Old-timey drawings are painted in black over huge colour-wash paintings like marbled tie-dyes or light shows at a happening, the connections loose at best. Perhaps we call things psychedelic when they're surreal without the menacing back-stories of Oedipal melting clocks or easily interpreted dream sequences. There are no such Freudian directives here.

The title of the exhibition, 'home' spelled backwards, in case you hadn't noticed, plays with the unfamiliarity and strangeness of something that ought to be most familiar. At the entrance to both galleries sits a snail, its slithering tongue of a body cast in bronze, its shell a modernist house cast in different 1960s pastels. Kunath's recent move makes all these possessions somehow poignant, though no less pleasantly absurd. In another sculpture, the constructed roof of a house rises only a few feet from the ground and is stocked with seemingly innocuous tchotchkes, which if the press release is to be believed are objects that give Kunath a sense of home.

Friedrich's work is a little sad, a little wistful, a little silly, difficult to dislike. Much of it borrows from the treasure trove of pop culture, often directly citing pop songs as inspiration, but this show references found photographs of various unrelated phenomena, though a theme of travelling emerges out of a few. Each of these mostly black-and-white snaps is overlaid with found drawings, pulled from different period styles, though many seem drawn by the same hand.

But if Los Angeles is Kunath's new home, he seems to have settled aesthetically into it like a local. One of my favourite of the wonky washes has a page torn from a book of quotations overlaying it. In the kind of juxtaposition that makes all accidents seem portentous, especially for a recent transplant, the list of quotations begins with 'longing' and carries on through 'looks' to 'love', with 'Los Angeles' fitting neatly in the middle. Or as Ogden Nash writes, quoted on the painting, 'Yes, it is true, Los Angeles is not only erratic, not only erotic, Los Angeles is crotchety, centrifugal, vertiginous, esoteric, and exotic.' The same could quite easily be said of Kunath. *Andrew Berardini*

Friedrich Kunath  
*EMOH*

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles  
24 October – 6 December



*EMOH*, 2008 (installation view).  
Photo: Heather Rasmussen.  
Courtesy the artist, Blum & Poe,  
Los Angeles, and BQ, Cologne