

collection of vintage children's coloring books and drawings, she creates a collage of self-portrait narratives of fear, anxiety, power, spirituality and relationships. According to Lubicz, the process of assembling cut images of animals, children and plants combined with drawings facilitates spontaneity and new meanings. One standout example, *Life During Wartime* (2009), is a little girl holding birds and other images from coloring books that appear like Cubist collages. With a giraffe and plant to the left along with a jigsaw puzzle piece to suggest facial features, the work playfully explores self-portraiture. By pushing the collage boundaries with its multifaceted message about the human condition, *Life During Wartime* is reminiscent of collage works by Romare Bearden and Kay Brown.

Stephanie Mercado's 15 works examine the hegemony of the American Dream regarding the hunger to categorize, ownership of real estate, as well as the obsession to explore and conquer the unknown. While her dress sculpture explores symbols connected to success, it is Mercado's drypoint engravings that whisper with subtle humor a reexamination of unquestioned values about prosperity. For example, *All I Ever Wanted is Everything* (2010), a drypoint engraving with watercolor and gouache, is a reference to Queen Elizabeth standing on the map of territories that she governed.

The nude female emerging from the towering, lace-pattern cake that is surrounded below by miniature houses deconstructs the notion that "you can't have your cake and eat it too." Furthermore, this piece is a playful reminder about consumerism and exploitation. Her intricate, detailed lines are similar to works by Celia Calderon and Sarah Jimenez.

Upon leaving this show, I was challenged to explore not only definitions of self, but also perceptions about wealth. But, being a car owner was not something I questioned as I navigated my way through the LA traffic that evening.

— Richard May



Alpha Lubicz, *Nervous Mess 2*, 2009

NEW YORK
RAQUEL NAVE
Mountain Fold

THIS NEWISH GALLERY has gotten behind a winning and possibly gifted photographer who shoots Polaroids and blows them up (in digital C-print form), enhancing scratches, lint, chemical defects and other imperfections. Edited more astutely, "Live Free in Hell," Raquel Nave's solo debut, might have been a convincing exhibition, but too much mediocre work among the gems prompts concern that behind the camera, she doesn't yet know what she's about.

In front of the camera, it's another story. A professional model, Nave has been cast in a number of high profile ad campaigns. This experience shows in the poise of her self-portraits, which are funny and often morbid send-ups of the fashion industry. Each is beguiling; Nave knows her instrument. In one, she leans at the camera while a noose tightens around her neck and blood drips from her lips and down her breasts. She is supine in another, clad only in tight leather



Raquel Nave, *Untitled*, 2010

jeans; a couple of cement blocks crush her head. Nave play-acts characters, as models often do.

She operates in the manner of *Vice* magazine, but without the technical chops or subcultural interest. Is she driven to explore her vision, or does she snap away and hope that something in the frame is in focus? Given photography's ubiquity and accessibility, is there any difference?

Art is expression, sure, but also it is a language. The dialect of the snapshot has its guttersnipe poets. William Eggleston says he only takes one shot so he won't have to decide which one to print. His self-assurance obviates any suspicion that he was running low on film.

Some of Nave's pix are downright classical: a gyrating female nude, washed with red light and cupping her groin in her hands, billboards "desire." Coupling torsos washed in amber light preserve the magic moment of penetration. Nave engages art-historical tradition, but who knows if it's conscious. Has she looked hard at Rodin? When she stuffs the frame with visual incident in the manner of Lee Friedlander, is it homage or blind luck? Ring binders contained several dozen also-rans, allowing the viewer intro to the full range of Nave's styles, subjects and abilities. And quite a range it is.

There's some undistinguished stuff here: a lame rainbow, some moldy woods, people waiting to eat. Nave needs to take charge of her vocabulary relative to the twisted terms of fashion photography: narrative, persona, and the squishy interstices of public stance and private desire. It's sweet that she includes a couple of shots of herself with her dad, California prizefighter-cum-politico Paul Nave, but that scrapbook crap lets too much air out of the weirdness balloon.

Time will tell if the show's dozen or so memorable frames are lucky charms or the cream of wheat. Does Nave have the smarts, the skills, the balls? Probably not, but I'd love to be wrong about that. As comics theorist Scott Adams says, "Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep." Nave is practised at the former and in time she might master the latter.

—Stephen Maine