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Brenna Youngblood BY ROBERT SUMMERS

Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles CA May 19 - June 23, 2007

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Brenna Youngblood's first solo outing is definitely a walk on the Wilde side. A recent MFA graduate from UCLA, with a Hammer Projects and various bicoastal shows already under her belt, Youngblood manipulates color photographs and mixed media to feign what otherwise have the look of paintings—realistic images of sofas, light bulbs, trees, Jesus, cherubs, and old TV sets all stand out against decaying Ab-Ex or color-field grounds. The end result is vaguely chic and even modernist-classical, rather like Rauschenberg's early "combines" with which these canny exercises in the decay of painterly lying have been compared.

Standing at the portal to Margo Leavin, as if to illuminate the show inside, is *Scene* (all work 2007), depicting what look like two light bulbs hanging against a grimy back wall. Yet far from providing a simple exercise in trompe-l'oeil illusionism, whose classical role was to give the lie to the "fullness" of staged reality, here the presence of "real" screws among "fake" ones "holding up" precariously held "light bulbs" points to a greater philosophical conundrum and the very opposite of what Rauschenberg was suggesting: not that (as he once famously said) "painting is more like the real world if it's made out of the real world," but precisely that the world appears more real if made to look like a painting. Specifically, a light suddenly switches on in our heads once this "scene" can be "seen" as the false theater of "painting."

The same tongue-in-cheek gestalt switch animates *The Backbone of Resentment*. Seemingly erupting out of a ruddy crack in flowery abstract "wallpaper" is a posy of literal, though patently no less real wallflowers. In *The Pause*, a splotchy, broken computer monitor dribbles white ectoplasm over an old TV screen, both

covered with the same acrylic "medium" that otherwise dots the "all-over" color field. *Down by Law*, a kind of Pollock-action-meets-Kiefer-lead-painting with Richter undertones (though one might well be looking at blowups of certain Leonardo da Vinci or Hieronymus Bosch details), enacts a series of figure-ground inversions on all points of the painting compass. Another false front belies the deeper meaning of *Money*, whose two adoring golden cherubs and dilapidated, paint-bleeding monitor with telltale flash can't begin to match all the glorious scratches, drips, and overlays behind.

But the show's chef-d'oeuvre is clearly *Jesus and Sacagawea* (2007). Composed of a found image of Jesus collaged to a virtual tattered Shroud of Turin, its title alludes to Christ's striking resemblance to the U.S. Sacagawea dollar coin depicting the Shoshone "interpreter" who accompanied Lewis and Clark. This coin, first issued in 2000, not only misinterprets a contemporary Shoshone woman (Randy L. He-dow Teton) as the symbolic face of "first contact," but in itself symbolizes the final nail in the coffin of Native American reintegration. What strikes the death knell is the brown inverted proscenium that partially cuts the picture in two. Added to this is the "John Campbell" assigned to the Christ/Sacagawea/Teton image, making it almost impossible to halt the endless chain of similitude. The Old Greeks loved to tell of a staged contest between two renowned painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, the first of whom charmed the birds out of the sky to peck at his painted grapes. But when Zeuxis impatiently asked his opponent to draw apart some very tattered curtains to reveal his own prize, he was crushed to discover it was the curtains themselves. Perhaps Youngblood is painting's new Parrhasius.



BRENNA YOUNGBLOOD, (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) *Scene*, 2007, COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS, ACRYLIC PAINT/MEDIUM, MARKER, SPRAY PAINT, COLLAGE ON PANEL, 48 x 72.38 IN. *THE PAUSE*, 2007, COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS & ACRYLIC PAINT/MEDIUM ON PANEL, 22.75 x 18.88 IN. *JESUS AND SACAGAWEA*, 2007, COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS, ACRYLIC PAINT/MEDIUM, SPRAY PAINT, COIN, COLLAGE ON PANEL, 73 x 72.13 IN. COURTESY MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY, LOS ANGELES.