

Los Angeles Times

Critic's Choice

'Devan Shimoyama/Salomón Huerta': Two artists' portraits of the soul

Devan Shimoyama,
"With You Always,"
2014, oil, glitter,
sequins, graphite,
spray paint, found
objects on canvas, 60
by 50 by 7 inches.

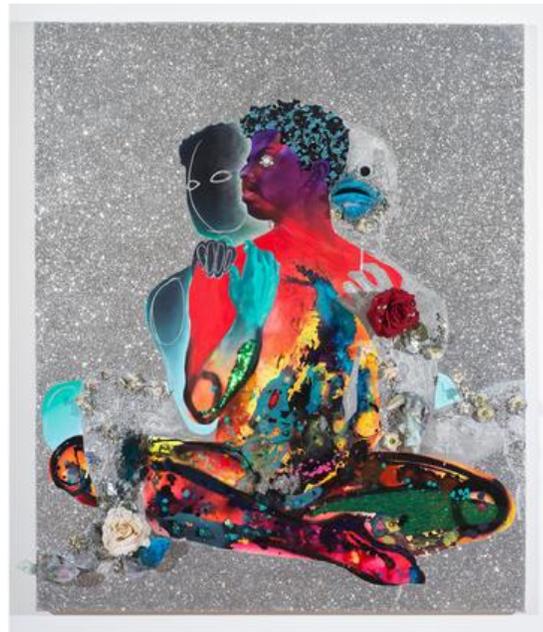
(Devan Shimoyama /
Samuel Freeman)
David Pagel

With just the right
mix of
purposefulness and
playfulness, the two-
artist exhibition
"Devan

Shimoyama/Salomón Huerta" at Samuel Freeman gallery sets visitors to thinking about what it means to be human while leaving us free to make up our own minds.

Such independence also matches the attitudes embodied by Shimoyama's glitter-sprinkled self-portraits and Huerta's charcoal drawings and oils on canvas, most of which are also portraits.

Pittsburgh artist Shimoyama's L.A. debut features six midsize canvases. Slapdash theatricality — and whip-smart intelligence — animates his potent pictures. Each combines a wild variety of techniques and materials. Delicately drawn images, hastily cut reproductions, quickly sketched backdrops and exuberantly painted passages make for a promiscuous stew of anything-goes intensity.



Glitter, sequins, rhinestones, beads, fabric flowers, plastic leaves and stuffed animals add color and rambunctiousness. This suggests that each painting is a miniature Mardi Gras parade and that human identity is all about strutting one's stuff.

In a series of small photographs, Shimoyama does exactly that. Wearing little more than a tinfoil codpiece and googly eyeglasses, he appears to be a dreadlocked shaman who has washed up from the deep.

In contrast, Huerta's paintings and drawings are understated. All were made in the early 1990s, just before Huerta got attention for painting pictures of the backs of people's heads. All are intimate, melancholic, restrained.

Tattoos figure prominently, as does religious imagery and just a hint of sexuality. The most confrontational is a small painting of a young Latino depicted as if he were Caucasian. In Huerta's hands, identity is not worn on one's sleeve. It is something to be discovered only when you get past appearances.

Paired, Huerta's early works and Shimoyama's recent ones reveal that identity is a slippery enterprise — and that what people identify with is even more difficult to predict, much less pin down.

Samuel Freeman, 2639 S. La Cienega Blvd., Los Angeles, (310) 425-8601, through Feb. 20.
Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.samueelfreeman.com