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“Alien Nation,” a group show organized by New York-based curator Kenta Murakami, illustrates how in an alienated world, the utterly banal can be ominous. (Vivian Doering/Von Ammon Co.)

Alien Nation

Mark Jenkins // 23 JUL 21

Selling is a recurrent theme at Von Ammon Co., whose shows often include consumer products, usually fractured or decayed. That’s one way of representing what the current exhibition, organized by New York-based curator Kenta Murakami, terms “Alien Nation.” Among the abused items are Colette’s flood-damaged lamp, brown stains courtesy of Hurricane Sandy; halves of large wooden eagles, covered in tar by Helmut Lang; and an apple with a bite missing, the work of Puppies Puppies (a.k.a. Jade Kuriki Olivo).

The show was partly inspired by the legacy of Gretchen Bender (1951-2004), who went from D.C. printmaker to New York video and television artist. Bender often printed text atop glowing screens, such as “Dream Nation” on a small TV set tuned to the news and “Creatures” backlit on a tiny window that’s slit into a square of industrial steel. The polished metal of the second piece contrasts such seemingly corroded entries as Tishan Hsu’s machine-mimicking wood-and-metal “New Portable” and Catherine Czudej’s ceramic panels covered with bismuth crystals.

In an alienated world, the utterly banal can be ominous. SoIL Thornton's huge text-painting on cardboard gender-mashes 2018's Top 50 baby names to identify "political aliens" such as "Emmaliam" (a hybrid of No. 1 on the girls' and boys' lists). Pope.L uses vintage drinking glasses and carefully spilled water to stage a metaphor for the human body (or a few other possibilities, according to a gallery note). Most savagely, yet with cool precision, Kayode Ojo uses bullets, replica guns and other manufactured objects to construct assemblages, one of which invokes the memory of cannibalistic serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer. "Alien Nation" shares its title with an '80s sci-fi cop flick, so it's not too surprising that the show features a memento mori of a real-life horror movie.

ALIEN NATION runs until August 01 2021