



Los Angeles Times

Review Devin Kenny at Aran Cravey

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MARCH 10, 2015, 7:00 PM

F or a show that's largely about Internet culture, Devin Kenny's exhibition at Aran Cravey is surprisingly tactile.

The artist, lately of L.A. now living in New York, skewers the foibles of online and high-tech culture, focusing on its implications for physical interaction.

On entering the gallery, the viewer is greeted by a plain wooden table, about the size of a desk, on which are arrayed a number of small, variously shaped wooden objects. The items, some rough, others smooth, are oddly familiar yet hard to place.

It turns out they are dumb, perhaps Platonic equivalents for everyday desktop items: mouse, mouse pad, wrist rest, etc. The viewer is invited to touch and manipulate them, highlighting the limited spatial range of a lifestyle tethered to a desk.

Corporate culture is parodied more explicitly in the music video "LANyards," in which a team of multiracial young people meets in a bright white conference room to pore enthusiastically over complex flowcharts, eat healthful snacks and high-five one another. For anyone who's ever worked in the "new economy," the spoof will ring hilariously true, as does the accompanying lyric, "You are the product."

Other works explore the tension between top-down control and emergent countercultures. A horizontal stripe at the top of one wall is painted in bright pink, anti-climb paint, which never dries, creating a slippery surface resistant to intruders and graffiti.

At the other end of the spectrum, Kenny has coated inkjet prints with frit, a sharp, ceramic sand. Used by those who put up unsanctioned postings, it makes the posters actually painful to remove. These very blunt, physical methods of control parallel the Web's two-faced promise of free expression and invasive surveillance and marketing.



The content of Kenny's inkjet posters also plays with these themes, alternating between faux advertisements for bands and inspirational sayings. The band posters at first appear like lists of gibberish culled from the Web — "HYPERDRUNKALWAYS," "IRONIC PAN." These are recast as band names with the addition of a cheeky, handwritten "All Ages!" The posters poke fun at the proliferation of nonsensical group names but also at the Internet as a babble-generating machine.

By contrast, the inspirational sayings are texts about religious belief and perseverance that you might find cross-stitched on a pillow. Here they are overlaid with degraded images of tacos, pizza and soft-serve cones: junk food for the body and the mind.

The connection between virtual and physical worlds is made still more explicit in the video, "Swipe right on 'em all and let G-d sort 'em out..." It consists of sequential close-ups of a thumb making a familiar swiping motion across a fistful of dollar bills, a smooth stone, and a smartphone screen displaying profile pictures from the dating site Tinder.

The video highlights a simple, repetitive gesture whose significance has grown exponentially. With complex information easily manipulated with the casual flick of a finger, our mental, emotional and social lives come down to the edge of a digit.