

Begging for mercy at LVL3; K.A. Letts adds it all up at Firecat Projects



The sparse installation for LVL3's "At the Mercy of" leaves plenty of room for interpretation. (LVL3)

Oh, mercy

If historians ever want to truly understand what 2017 felt like, they should consider the fact that "Mercy," "WWE: No Mercy," and "My Days of Mercy" hit our screens this year, all while folks fought about who was getting pardoned and who was getting sent to deportation prisons. We couldn't agree on what compassion looked like, but we still kept trying to decide who deserved it most.

In that light, LVL3's newest show "At the Mercy of" is the perfect way to close out this year. The Wick-er Park gallery hosts Berlin-based Stephen Kent, Chicago-based Sara Ludy and Nashville-based Lauren Taylor in a group show that uses materiality to merge memory and anticipation — both of which are at the mercy of how the artists understand the present.

"I very much like to work off of found material, whether it be hobby paintings or interior decorative elements, and then try to reflect them back into the ideological context in which they stemmed from," Kent told LVL3 in an interview. He described how a recent series evoked "Between the Golden Vessels and the Picture," a quote from Goethe. Kent uses it to speak to his own use of everyday objects.

"He was perplexed in that for the first time he would rather choose the painting over the opulent objects which the painting depicted," Kent continued. "For me, this moment of hyper-realism has a direct relation to the current democratization of image production through the smartphone camera and how people are consuming through images rather than through objects."

Meanwhile, Ludy and Taylor are also invested in the "physical transformation of everyday imagery to better serve a contemporary condition." Ludy uses digital processes and tools to excavate meaning from virtual spaces. Named one of the best digital artists of the 21st century by *Complex*, she is known for her performance of "magic tricks with pixels." Taylor, on the other hand, is grounded in the real world and finds the abject or fantastical in crumpled images of the quotidian, giving meaning — its own kind of mercy — to objects disregarded. Through Feb. 4, LVL3, 1542 N. Milwaukee Ave. #3.; lvl3official.com

K.A. Letts adds up art and theater

If all the world's a stage, how does visual art fit into the script? With a studio practice that bounces off her theatrical background, Detroit-based artist K.A. Letts tries to answer that very question. Firecat Projects is her latest venue, and in "The Some of Her Parts," Letts gets a solo show highlighting her rich, narrative drawings and paintings.

"My work looks both forward and back in time," she writes in her biography. "I employ techniques and strategies from painting's history to describe the present Anthropocene age where all of nature is touched by humans and all humans are touched by technology."

A graduate of Yale Drama School in set and costume design, Letts uses her unusual skill set and diverse approaches from art history's past to forecast a singular vision of a hybrid future. The classics still ring loudly in her work. Letts exudes an influence of early-20th-century European masters but folds in imagery from aboriginal art, outsider and street art to speak the distinct visual language. Letts is a storyteller first and foremost, bridging myth and prophecy. Her work reflects her hometown, a Rust Belt city galvanized by its legends. Through Jan. 20, Firecat Projects, 2124 N. Damen Ave., www.firecatprojects.org.