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Review: Painters Simone Kennedy-Doig and Antonia Showering capture the pastoral dreams and urban realities of young Londoners

BY DAVID PAGEL

The paintings by London-based artists Simone Kennedy-Doig (b. 1994) and Antonia Showering (b. 1991) don't look anything like one another. But at Baert Gallery in downtown Los Angeles, their pairing makes for a quietly insightful exhibition that rewards visitors who look beyond the obvious. Organized by guest curator Louis Blanc-Francard, also from London, its thoughtfulness is infectious.

Kennedy-Doig uses saturated colors and blocky shapes to bring viewers into her East London neighborhood, where many immigrants from Trinidad live. Like urban communities everywhere, elements unique to the place (local bars, clothes and automobiles) appear alongside generic features (fast-food chains, crowded streets and public toilets).

Young women trying to find their place in the mix is Kennedy-Doig's big subject. And she handles it masterfully, painting friends and strangers engaged in everyday activities as they search for epiphanies amid the confusion. Her nearly life-size figures appear to pop from the picture plane.

In contrast, Showering paints with a light touch, often creating diaphanous landscapes that recede into the distance. The golden tones of her oils on canvas, accented by wine reds and seasoned greens, make you feel as if you are looking into her inner world, where bittersweet memories swirl around pleasant reveries about how life might turn out.

Despite significant differences in style, subject and paint handling — as well as attitude and outlook — both artists invite us to ponder the elusiveness of identity, particularly as it plays out along the permeable borders between appearances and reality.

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