

# Los Angeles Times



## “Cozy To Say The Least”

Leah Ollman, reviewing for the L.A. Times, May 29, 2009

We're all feeling squeezed in this economy, but try navigating the interior of the trailer parked inside the Samuel Freeman gallery and you'll feel the effects of downsizing in a whole new way. There's a comfy, cushioned seat at one end, but getting to it requires a sideways slide—breath held, arms raised—through an inordinately narrow slot between stove and nonfunctional fridge. The dining nook at the other end looks equally charming but can't accommodate humans with knees (or legs at all, for that matter).

Blue McRight's hyper-economical living space brings to mind the “comfort units” and “living units” that Andrea Zittel made in the '90s, except McRight's is more emblematic than practical. She's taken an already abbreviated, provisional form of housing—a 1958 Mascot trailer by Holly Travel Coach of Holly, Mich.—and compressed it further, italicizing it right out of the realm of viability. She literally took a slice out of the middle of the original trailer and patched the parts back together, seamlessly. The vehicle, striped in retro aqua, looks complete from the outside, but at 3-and-a-half feet wide, it registers inside as a storybook environment, cozy quarters for a smaller species.

“Holly Mascott” is endearing, down to its deliberately misspelled name, and it bears the L.A. artist's trademark sensibility: an appealing, accessible fusion of the poignant and goofy. But it's not much more than a crafty one-liner. The other works in McRight's show flirt more convincingly with substance.

In 50 small oil paintings on paper, McRight touches on birth, otherness and a variety of longings while maintaining a tone of quirky, offbeat humor. All of the impeccably rendered scenarios are untitled, but each has a parenthetical title that serves as a catalyst to thicken the image's meaning or launch a pun. “You Haul” pictures a barefoot woman crouching as she grasps the hitch of a trailer. “Someone You Know” issues a blunt reminder of mortality with its representation of a single human skull amid greenish atmospheric haze.

Trailers crop up frequently in the paintings, as home bases and vehicles of escape; as structures to be occupied; and as anthropomorphized entities in possession of their own personalities and temperaments. “Tramp” leaves its door open at night. “Rumor” sports a teasingly jaunty striped awning.

The works fall somewhere between sketches and snapshots. They are tightly crafted but also have an air of casualness, painted on pages torn from a 6-by-9-inch spiral-bound sketchbook. Many feel slight and silly, but plenty are tender. For instance, there’s one showing two boys, heads on pillows, lying beneath slender trees, subtitled “More Than You Bargained For, Less Than You Wanted.” Another replaces a woman’s head with an egg-filled nest. McRight’s splendid color scheme oscillates between chalky, flat, old-fashioned hues and vibrant tangerines and chartreuses.

If there is an undercurrent of loss in some of these works on paper, it emerges as full-fledged brooding in another section of McRight’s show. In a separate side gallery, she has suspended (or mounted on the wall or pedestals) 11 birds that originated as plastic models but have been wrapped in black elastic bandages and thread. The effect is haunting. The forms have a strong presence, whether suggestive of tribal fetishes or funerary votives. Most trail thick plaits of black thread, like inky, linear shadows.

McRight has long proved herself versatile with materials. In addition to painting, sculpture and installation, she has completed numerous public art commissions. With “Flock,” a chamber piece in a decidedly minor key, she demonstrates the breadth of her emotional range as well.

-- Leah Ollman

