

# Villa Rosa



12th October–7th December 2019

Curated by Ian Williamson

Artists:

AVD

Esther Merinero

James D. Hopkins and Tori Carr

Sophie Rogers and Josef Shanley Jackson

Click. Type.

*Google Maps. Search.*

Click. Type.

*The Mountain of Beverly Hills, 4H4C+97 Los Angeles, California, United States. Search.*

Click. Street view. Click. Land. Arrival. I'm here.

I've vomited and gone to heaven.

I'm disoriented. Everything's so shiny– blinding me, staring at me. A palm tree sways steadily, cutting against the bluest of skies. I can't tell if the tree is alive or dead or artificial. I vomit again.

Gathering myself. I move down from the mountain top, moving further into a winding, meandering neighbourhood– there doesn't seem to be an exit or an end? A cavity!? There's so much surface here, so much material, so much marble, so much glass, so much varnish, so much lacquer, so much surface. I vomit again and continue on.

Gate after gate after gate after gate after gate. They intrigue me. They fascinate me. Every property has such a beautiful gate after gate after gate after gate after gate. Most of them are solid, minimal, synthetic, so you can't see in. They're strange. They glimmer and sparkle but seem to absorb all the light and energy around them. I stop for a moment, stroke one of them. Suddenly, I find myself at the edge of the mountain I've been descending, allowing me to look down over the rest of the neighbourhood. I still can't see an end? The gates can't stop me looking in.

Azure rectangles, crescents, peculiar shapes, infect the landscape below. Incandescent, coruscating brighter than natural light, the water shimmers yet spits. I breathe, heavily. I stare in. Further and further. And then something happens. I momentarily lose my footing, slipping slightly over the edge I'm standing on. Synchronously, a ray of light reflects from one of the swimming pools below, attacking my cornea, dazzling me. I vomit. I slip again. Vomit again, blinded.

I come to. Disoriented. My sight returns but things are different this time– the surfaces seem to be cracking, breaking, separating. Things don't look as reflective, not so shiny. I'm uneasy. I begin to walk with speed down the mountain, searching for an exit– the neighbourhood's still not ending. That's when I notice. The gates I had once marvelled, instead, frighten me. They now look more like border enforcement controls? No entrance or exit. They absorb everything, obsidian, gargantuan. I vomit. I run.

Without realising, I crash into a wheelie bin. Panicked, I pick myself up. But thousands of bins line the street blocking me. I force myself through, knocking some of them over in the process, scattering the glossiest of bin bags that seem to have the strangest of contents. Tails and paws sticking out? I vomit. As I sprint further into the neighbourhood, I turn my head back only to see the bins realigned, perfectly positioned! No bags?! How is this possible?! Desperately, I look around, crashing into something once again.

A hand reaches out, wanting to help me. But I push it away. Stumbling. Running for my life. I look around, hyperventilating. Workers, so many workers, armies of workers, surround the neighbourhood. They're maintaining. They're sustaining. Covering surface with more surface with more surface with more surface with more surface. They're maintaining. They're sustaining. I vomit. New property constructions erupt from nowhere, devouring the earth around them, devouring the workers, devouring me. I'm falling deep within the surface.

I turn a corner, screaming for breath. I'm almost blinded again as this area of neighbourhood seems to sparkle brighter than anything. Than anything I've seen before. I vomit. I'm running towards a dead end. Panicking, I keep going. But a property looms- so bright that I have no choice but to move towards it. I come to a stop. I pant. I stare.

I calm myself. It's strange. All that panic subsides. It subsides. I feel good again. The shine makes me feel good again. That was so unnecessary.

I stand in front of the house, unsure of what to do next. I then see. The property has a gate that seems to be open?! An exit?! An entrance?! Can it be?! It's dripping in some kind of secretion. Oh it's so shiny. So shiny! It's the shiniest of them all. I breathe. The gate's open. There's a sign. It reads;



*elcome to Villa Rosa, the house of surface, veneer, and shine!*

Villa Rosa looks to explore how surface level has become, in recent years, a contradictorily complex ground for negotiation and navigation. Drawing on research taken from aspirational 'lifestyle' films made to sell high end property, these glossy blinding exteriors are often more deceptive than first realisation. An insidiousness lurks beneath the surface.

Comparably, the device of the cabinet or vitrine as a mode of artistic presentation has similar beguiling qualities. Glass fronted, spotlit, alluring; the status of the objects within are heightened, even fetishized from onlookers, seduced by the materiality and impossibility of touch. The vitrine, however, often conceals an internal violence: acquisitional, historical, pathological- bewitching our senses with the most vapid of desires.

A gated Beverly Hills mansion, a high quality digital image, a vitrine, are all the same mechanism! They allow us to dream big, consuming ideologies from the outside that we believe exist within. Due to their hyperreal and transitory existence, no genuine belief behind these ideologies of surface truly endures but only an artifice that can suddenly abandon, reverse, mutate. The pursuit of this can become violent and limitless, where the experience is a horrifyingly pleasurable one. Perhaps it is in this pursuit that we discover something tangible and authentic.

Villa Rosa brings together new contributions from a selection of contemporary artists that have adopted the dichotomies discussed above: desire and horror, pleasure and pain, surface and depth to address how viscerally synthetic our visual culture has become. A series of artist made objects and interventions that focus on an external and internal sensory experience exist within the cabinet space.

Welcome to Villa Rosa, the house of surface, veneer, and shine!





is the collaborative practice of Tobias Seymour and Lachlan KosaniukInnes. Originally conceived as an online gallery designed specifically to show works on mobile devices it has now spread into the wider digital realm and IRL.

### ***Zenscapes* (2019), interactive video installation (materials: faux metallic picture frames, fish gravel, iPhones, MDF)**

*Zenscapes* could, at first glance, be read as a mockery surrounding the bland emptiness of screensaver style images. However, we would quietly like to admit how seductive these views can be, hence their mass appeal and huge shareability. The interventions we've made with text and emojis on our own homemade screensavers aim to undermine this notion, unhappy with the fact that we've been drawn in by this quite basic facet of internet culture.

As it stands these *Zenscapes* are somewhat meaningless phone backgrounds, a 'nice' picture with an inspirational message. Shared between people to give them a bit of a pick-me-up, something to live your life by for 30 seconds but then immediately forgotten. They have a sense of compliance about them- they present a very palatable ideal. We have recreated these *Zenscapes* in a three dimensional space, adding to their hyperreality and then present a message which jars with their aesthetic. Partially to see if anyone notices but mostly to suggest that a complete state of zen is an ineffective ideal and that a more anarchic message can actually be more motivational.



## **Esther Merinero**

's work questions an existing hierarchy between the preconceived positions of subject and object, thus creating a new role-play. She understands the object not as such, but as another equal body with which we can interact and can feel autonomously. This responds to the need of an interdependence between formerly separated volumes; sentience and sensible. In order to explore these notions, Esther uses a variety of mediums generally ignited by the use of images or text pieces. This is continued by a decomposition, composing a fictional space through sculptural and installation pieces. Her surreal imaginary therefore articulates the balance between physical and narrative elements within and the inclusion-exclusion of the person experiencing the space.

### ***scratch / make out* (2019), video installation (materials: air-drying clay, fake acrylic nails, iPad, spray paint, synthetic fabric)**

For this work it is important to understand the text within the video in two ways. There is a romantic part, and expectation or preconceived idea of what a relationship can be. There, however, is also the bitter and sarcastic tone of it actually being and feeling crap. You selfishly want something/someone a lot, and you think it will work out for you and them but it ends up just being draining and empty. All the projections of a future disappear and the warmth in your stomach cools down. This is at the same time a metaphor to show some of the lives people dream of: success, money and luxury. Some parts from the text have been extracted from descriptions of Beverly Hills mansions currently on sale, showing a correlation between the dazzling outside it has and the potential letdown it can actually be.

## **James D Hopkins and Tori Carr**

are British artists that met whilst studying at Kingston University, London. They have exhibited domestically here in the UK and internationally, including locations such as, Madrid, New York, and Florida. In 2018 they undertook an artist residency as part of the chaNorth programme in upstate New York. As well as working as a duo, they are both members of DANKCollective who recently had their debut show at Harlesden High Street Gallery in Covent Garden, London. They have been featured in Rung Magazine and received an award nomination for a film that was shown at the 2019 Sick 'n' Wrong Film Festival, Orlando.

Tori's solo work focuses on sugarcoating unpleasant subjects through a smokescreen of fluff, candy colours, and kitsch humour, whilst James' practice focuses more on the grotesque and the absurd, grounded in the idea of Kayfabe; a professional wrestling term describing staged events portrayed as if they were real. Together they work with costume, painting, performance, video, sculpture and installation, often combining these processes to create an immersive experience. Ambiguous figures, ritualistic symbolism, grotesque food, and amateurish horror have emerged as themes within their recent collaborative work.





***Dogs We've Seen Recently* (2019), installation (materials: bin bag, canvas board, clay, kinetic motor, modroc, paint, sellotape, speaker, tinfoil, thread, varnish, wadding, wood)**

*Dogs We've Seen Recently* centres around two encounters with dogs struggling to cope with their physical existence. The first dog was small and smooth, making eye contact with us as it pooped viscerally in the centre of a Camden street. It had such smooth fur we could see its butthole slowly opening as the poop squeezed out– this disgusted us but we could not look away; the image haunting our minds and collective psyches. The second was a slobbery, beefy bulldog struggling in the heat and under its own weight, desperately trying to keep up with its owner walking down Carnaby Street. It made a gargling, choking, growling sound as it walked and could be heard coming. Canines like pugs and bulldogs are often popular with the rich and famous, used as fashionable accessories for lifestyle and branding. However, underneath this sugary kitsch aesthetic lies a violence, where these highly stylised dogs have been so overtly bred that they are plagued with untold health conditions. *Dogs We've Seen Recently* looks to explore the idea of something being born to suffer.

## Sophie Rogers and Josef Shanley Jackson

Sophie uses digital software including Cinema 4D to create simulations of imagined places, settings, and scenes often inspired by world-building practices found in sci-fi. Rogers is based in London and has exhibited at the Stanley Picker Gallery, Barbican Centre, Tate Modern as part of Offprint London with Self Publish Be Happy and again with Future Late; the opening of the Switch House. She was selected to participate in Masterclass 2017 hosted by the Zabludowicz Collection and later presented her first solo exhibition as part of Academy Costumes Residency in partnership with Platform, Southwark. Sophie is currently undertaking a digital residency with Mansions of the Future, Lincoln.

Josef Shanley-Jackson is an artist creating works that encourage us to consider our relationship with our belongings. Using a seductive, technicolour language his work touches on our social and technological anxieties with humour. Using these techniques he hopes to draw people's attention to what is important to them. Josef has had solo shows at Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun, Leeds, and the Koop Project, Brighton. He was a member of (it's all) Tropical, an artist collective who produced many exhibitions, acting as a platform for emerging artists.

### ***Breezy Point* (2019), sculpture (3D prints, hand painted and dyed)**

Sophie and Josef have been researching into the concept of Heterotopias, a phrase coined by Foucault, which literally means 'other spaces'. Using digital modelling and CGI animation – processes which are often used within architecture and real estate to generate glossy, HD simulations – they have imagined their own space, and with it a kind of community. Taking the 'world origin' within the software as a starting point, they have created an activating object (a key) that is most commonly used to gain access to another space. Playing with ideas of interior/exterior, real and fantasy, the hand painted, 3D printed objects are not relevant to a specific time or place, referencing the absurdity of some urban heterotopias. Luxury holiday resorts designed in the style of Polynesian villages, theme parks or gated communities which intend to act as 'safe havens' from everyday life and society, but often result in exclusion and paranoia. The childlike motif of a smiley face, is a nod to childhood, the barriers of the gated community firmly in place, wrapped around its residents, ready to ward off any unknown dangers.

## Ian Williamson

is a Visual Artist and Curator, currently based in London but originally from the Southwest of the UK. He has exhibited, screened, and curated shows across the UK and internationally including such spaces as ArtLacuna, Enclave Projects, Stanley Picker Gallery, Harlesden High Street, and Espacio Vista in Madrid. Ian's visual practice confronts the increasingly unstable device of the image and its impact on delivering a coherent understanding of our global condition. Thanks to the image's increasingly autonomous and accelerated state, popular culture has entered into a new viscerally charged arena. Often his work takes the form of a video installation to address the physical and virtual position that the image so ambiguously navigates. Along with Williamson's own practice, he is also part of DANKCollective– a collective exploring performance, video, and online platforms.

