

Jow. "Paris," 2013. Acrylic and polyurethane on panel.  
 Courtesy the artist and Marine Contemporary.

July 30th, 2013 by Carol Cheh  
 Word is a Virus | Armchair Travels

Two gallery exhibitions in Los Angeles this past year continue to linger in my memory: one by the artist Jow at Marine Contemporary, and the other by Tim Braden at Ambach and Rice. Each artist attempted to evoke faraway, exotic, and glamorous places, connecting distant places and ideas within a single body of work. Using diametrically different approaches—Braden manipulating nostalgia and memories where Jow manipulates symbols and codes—the artists vividly brought these sites to life and questioned the verity of popular perceptions and representations.

An L.A.-based, Canadian-born, New York transplant, Jow had her second solo show, titled *Tourist*, in the spring. Jow's work could be described, in the parlance of a Hollywood pitch, as the pop intelligence of Ed Ruscha meets the playful obscurity of Guy de Cointet. Such a cheesy shorthand description is actually not out of place when talking about Jow, who employs a light,

deadpan humor and is not afraid to traffic in clichés; one of the bright neon signs in her show read, "Wish you were beer."

*Tourist* featured abstract acrylic and polyurethane paintings named after popular destinations such as Tokyo, London, Paris, and New York. Each work was a Morse code translation of a song about a city in the colors of the country's national flag. Thus, the words to Ella Fitzgerald's "I Love Paris" formed a series of red and white dashes and dots across a blue background, while Joni Mitchell's "A Case of You" informed a small group of white marks on a red background, signifying Canada. These paintings carry a beautiful contradiction—loaded with history, nationalism, and sentiment but delivered via minimalist, mathematic code.

(cont...)





Cheeky drawings on vintage hotel stationery complemented the large paintings while also evoking clichés. On letterhead from the notorious party palace Chateau Marmont, the artist wrote, “things go better with” in a red glittered font (mimicking that of Coca-Cola) above four lines of cocaine. Stationery for the Peninsula Hong Kong bore the words “street girls bringing sailors into the hotel must pay for rooms in advance.” Jow evokes time and place through a jarring combination of communication and myth.

British artist Tim Braden typically mixes lush representational paintings and period-specific objects. His work is as saturated and detailed as Jow’s is dry and abstract. Braden is known for his romantic depictions of exotic adventures abroad, often inspired by literature, colonial history or found photographs. His 2008 exhibition in Amsterdam, *I spend my evenings sitting by the fireside hunting tigers* (named after a Gustave Flaubert quote), found him constructing an imagined 1950s boyhood filled with pinewood derby races, *matinée* serials, and explorers’ maps of the world. This idyllic fantasy world was built around a recreation of a classroom that may or may not have been his own as a child.

A similar elision of lived and imagined experience occurred in Braden’s fall 2012 exhibition, *Agence de Voyage*, at Ambach and Rice. Among the works on display were oil or gouache paintings of everyday scenes; weathered signs for places like

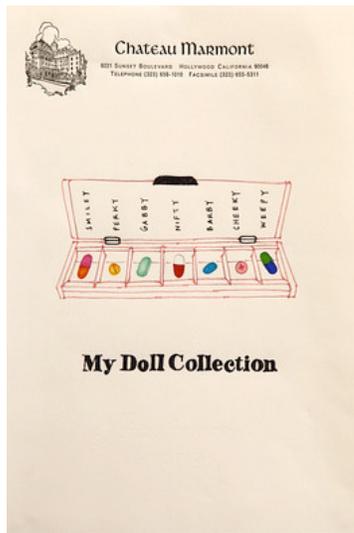
Hotel Badr and Restaurante Jorge Americano (the latter listing humble offerings like omelete and bife de porco); and a model of a rustic cabin. All of them were so richly rendered as to make you feel like you were there, however vague “there” might be.

As it turns out, Hotel Badr and Restaurante Jorge Americano were actually encountered by the artist who faithfully reproduced their signage, likely from photographs. And the model cabin, titled *Datcha* (2009–12), was inspired by a cabin that he saw on the outskirts of Moscow and recreated from memory. Braden’s scenes of daily life represented an intimate history too, but not one that he himself experienced; the images were derived from 1970s photographs in his wife’s family albums. Overall, *Agence de Voyage* illuminated the rich gulf between an actual place and time and the desires and associations that we project onto them.

The phrase *Agence de Voyage* means “travel agency,” a pun that conveniently sums up what both of these artists are up to. Although Jow has visited each of the places her paintings are named after, she chooses to ignore specifics and explore them through universal codes. Braden’s travels also find their way into his work, but he mixes his experiences and recollections with those of others, creating a blurred subjectivity and quasi-fictional sense of longing. Both of these avid explorers play tricks on would-be armchair travelers, complicating our reception of myth and inspiring more nuanced engagement.



# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



York Minute” is characterized as being rushed and immediate, to me a California Minute has more breathing room and is a space that has allowed me to dig deep and really take the time needed to create new and inspired work.

You seem to have a very sarcastic view of California and its trappings — particularly SoCal. Why is that?

The letterhead pieces are really a kind of play on the language — specifically the language of clichés. On one hand I think my sarcasm is directed at the insincerity and general “plastic” (both in terms of surgery and personality) that I have encountered in Los Angeles. On the other hand, the pieces are also only skin deep and play into clichés about the city. Really, Los Angeles is this complicated place that lives up to many of its clichés, but also has a vibrant and substantial creative community. Those of us that live and work here know that...so in that way, the joke is on the people that only judge the proverbial L.A. book by its cover...and they’re missing the really good parts.

September 14, 2011

## Artist Jow Enjoys Her California Minute

For the most part, all those who live here in Los Angeles — the land where dreams can supposedly come true — hail from someplace else. On any given evening at a party at so and so’s house or an opening at this or that gallery, one might see the equivalent of a mock meeting of the United Nations; in just a few hours you could meet people from Tanzania, Berlin and occasionally, Fresno.

The artist who goes by the singular name of Jow is one of those people. Originally she studied in Vancouver before making her way to the California by way of New York. Her first solo show at Marine Contemporary in Venice just debuted and is aptly called “A California Minute.”

Her primary concentration in this collection is based on the lyrics of songs that made Southern California famous in the 60’s and 70’s. But in addition to this part of her repertoire, a significant part of her work is focused on the art of words — how they can be skewed, misinterpreted, and played upon — especially when discussing the infamous Southern California lifestyle. Created predominantly on vintage letterhead, she skewers the L.A. cliché — with a wink and a smile and a nod to Dorothy Parker.

Speakeasy caught up with Jow, who looks poised to get a lot longer than a California minute in the spotlight.

### Why did you call it “A California Minute”?

The show is meant to be a play on the saying “A New York Minute.” I moved from New York four years ago and have had an incredibly rich creative period since I have been here. My life in LA is in many ways less complicated. While “A New

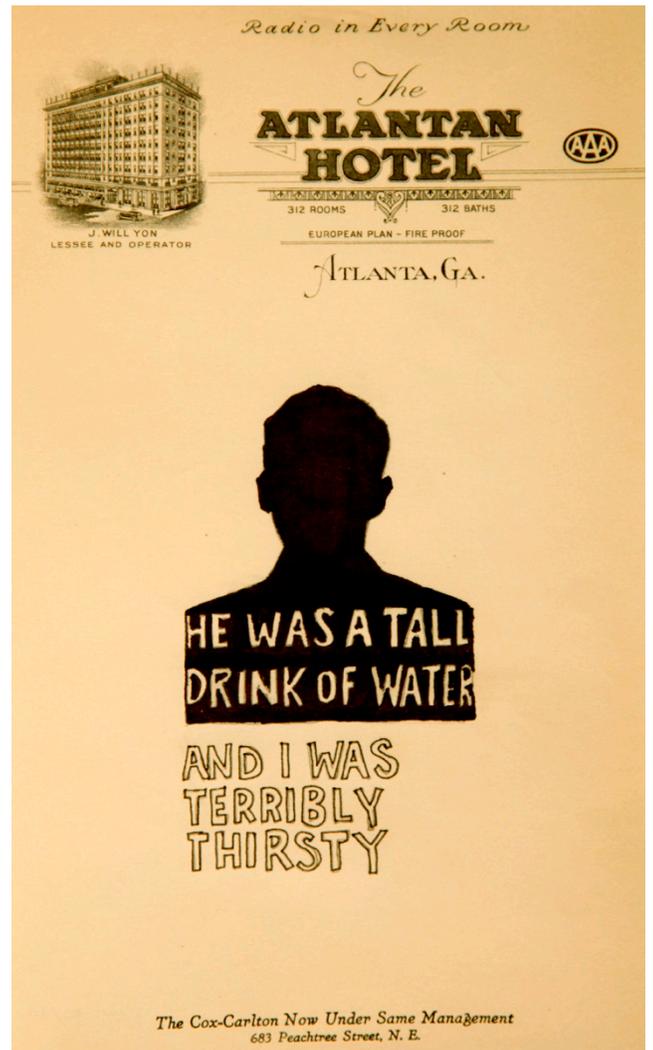
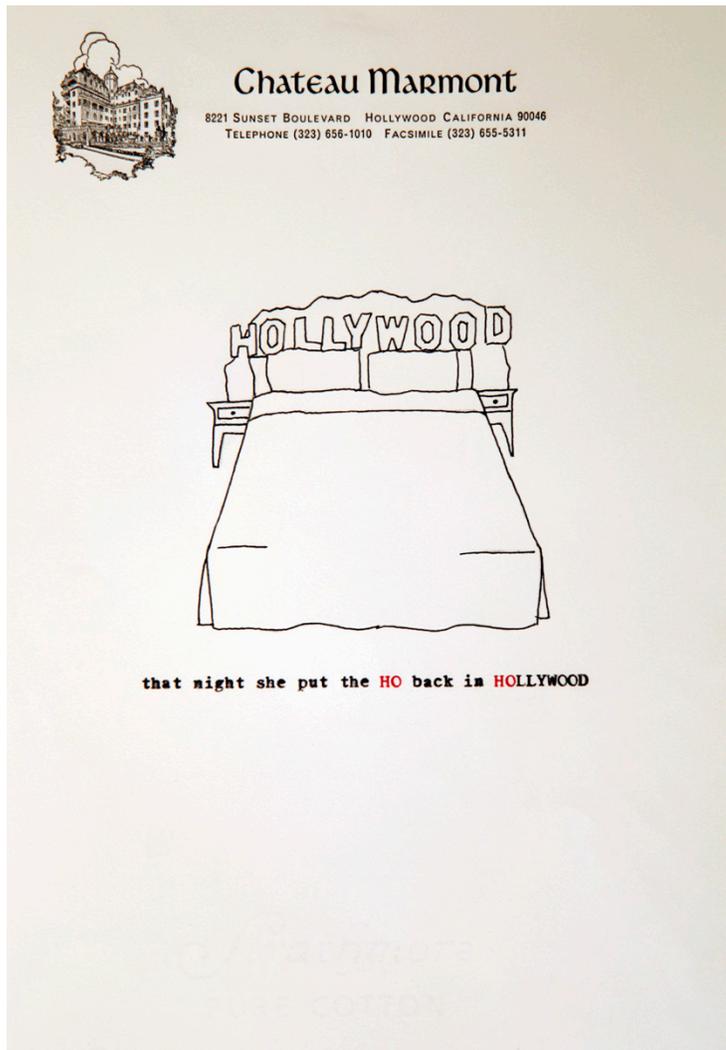
### Why Morse Code?

I have had a fascination with signs, symbols, and language for quite some time. I am interested in how we communicate and how many of the ways we communicate are also incredibly interesting visually. Prior to this show, I did a series of Braille drawings and the Morse code was a very natural segue out of the Braille. Visually both are quite minimal and beautiful yet they also have an important function in terms of communication. I am a sucker for beautiful form married with clear function.

### Do you have a particular favorite in the stationery series?

As this series is ongoing, I have many favorites along the way. In this most recent group of letterhead drawings “ Super Cali ” is the one that resonates with me the most. Not only does it incorporate some pretty funny references but I also love maps and have done a couple of informal cartography projects. Maps can be so beautiful and are really just a collection of different signs and symbols — the visual language of geography. Funny thing is, as much as I love maps I rarely use them. There is something to be said for occasionally getting lost but you need time and space for that, like a California Minute.





Jow: I'm in the Mood for Love and Salon Works 186-221

Salon: Works 186-221:

Lisa Borgnes  
Ching Ching Cheng  
Ron Griffin  
Felice Grodin  
John Latour  
David McDonald  
Mathew Picton  
Jill Sylvia  
Daniel Wilkinson  
Sam Winston.

If Martin Kippenberger had been born a woman, he almost surely would have made work like Jow, whose ecstatic drawings on hotel letterhead “channel a fictitious Girl Friday drawing on company stationary rather than doing her mundane job.” These riveting little drawings — and companion video piece — on view at Marine Salon are simultaneously riotous and contemplative, elegiac and saucy, sad and darkly witty, punctuated by short surreptitious bits of text like “not if you were the last boy on earth,” implying that love is, alas, only a savage little game.  
Eve Wood

And introducing The Bedroom, a project space for solo installations at Marine, featuring its inaugural show, drawings and a video by Jow.





### The 19th Century Salon, Reinvented and Redefined

Gone are the days of one on one conversation in an artistically aromatic environment – we’re too busy texting and chatting online to actually converse in person.

Yet every few months, there is a place in Venice that has been providing a safe haven for those dying to get away from it all – at least for a few hours. At Marine, a contemporary salon, there is an opportunity to not only have a face to face conversation, but to get your art on as well. Brit born Claressinka Anderson opens the doors of her home to those in need, not only providing a few delectable accoutrements but a wide array of artistic endeavors designed to invigorate the dying art of conversation.

Until October 30th, you can view the works of Jow, Lisa Borgnes, Ching Ching Cheng, Ron Griffin, Felice Grodin, John Latour, David McDonald, Mathew Picton, Jill Sylvia, Sam Winston and Daniel Wilkinson.





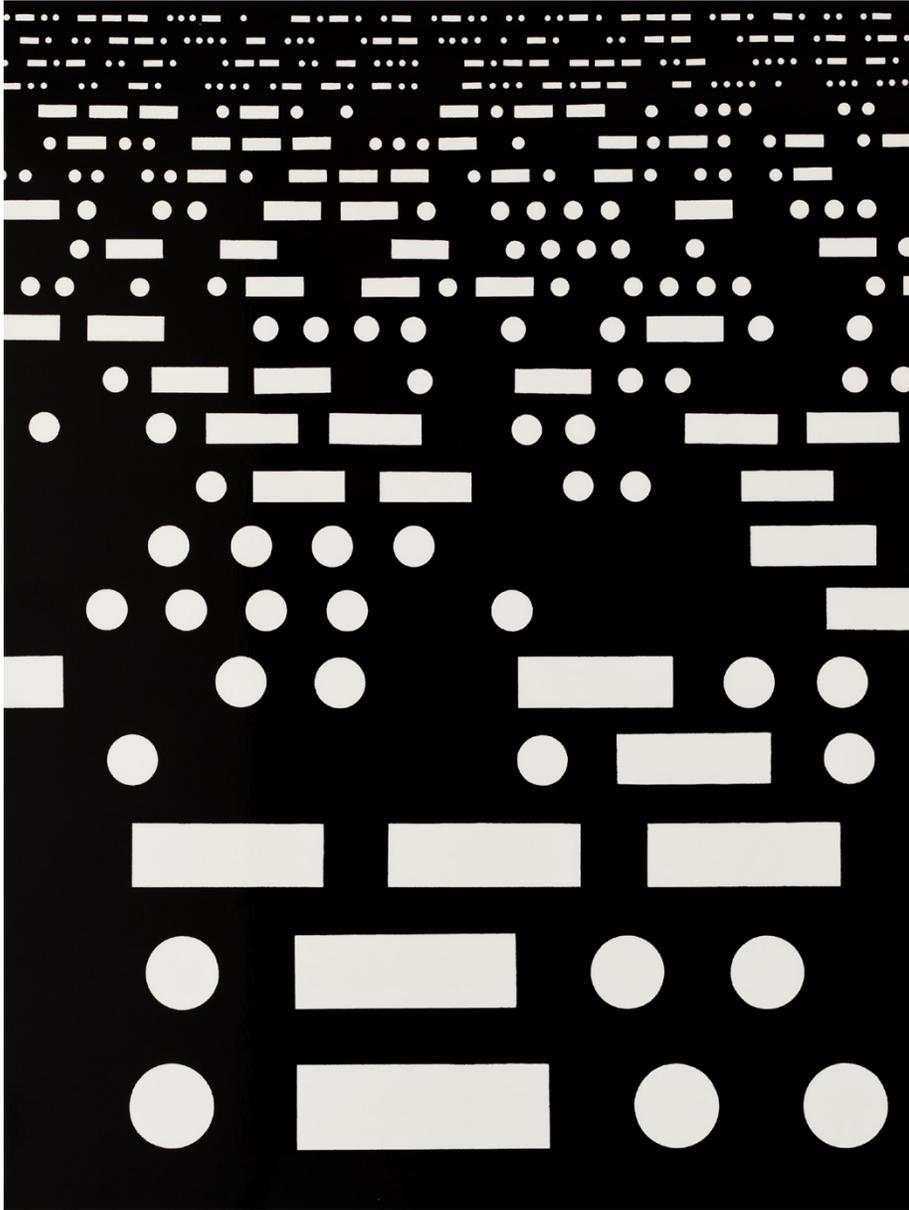
Jow

September 7 — October 3 2012

Tasty Space at Emergency Arts

Vancouver schoole, Los Angeles-based Jow comes to Tasty Space just as both entities are in a state of ascent. Jow's 2011 show A California Minute received glowing reviews from the Los Angeles Times and The Wall Journal, and locals are beginning to learn about the discerning eye of tasty Space curator Dana Satterwhite. This show of Jow's latest works featuring contemporary sayings ingeniously cut from vintage advertisements, is a perfect example of the right art in the right place.





Jow, CaliforniaNights, 2011, Acrylic and polyurethane on panel, 48 x 36 inches

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October 8, 2011

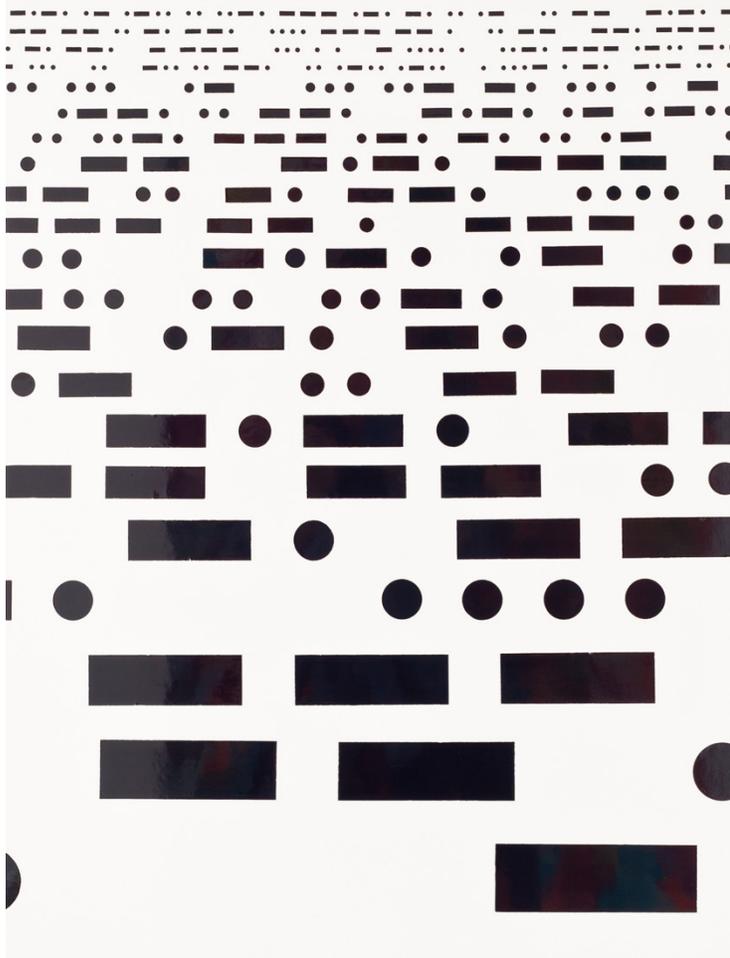
Haiku Reviews:

Jow's jokey conceptualism hides a tender side, and the homage she pays California throughout her show *A California Minute* is driven by an endearing sensitivity to the legend and sentiment historically surrounding the Vancouver native's adopted state. The "major" pieces are all word paintings without words per se; rather, they align Morse code translations of songs about California, from Al Jolson to Led Zeppelin, into rhythmic (almost follow-the-bouncing-ball-

esque) minimal compositions. Some drawing-collages rendered on Chateau Marmont stationery, and a neon sign or two, reveal the level of Jow's affection even as they amplify her snark. For all her almost haughty formal restraint, Jow is thoroughly smitten by the popular construct of "California." *A California Minute* isn't a big wet kiss planted on California; it's a hickey.



# Los Angeles Times



Jow, California 2011, Acrylic and polyurethane on panel, 36" x 48"

## Jow: A California Minute

Marine Contemporary, Venice

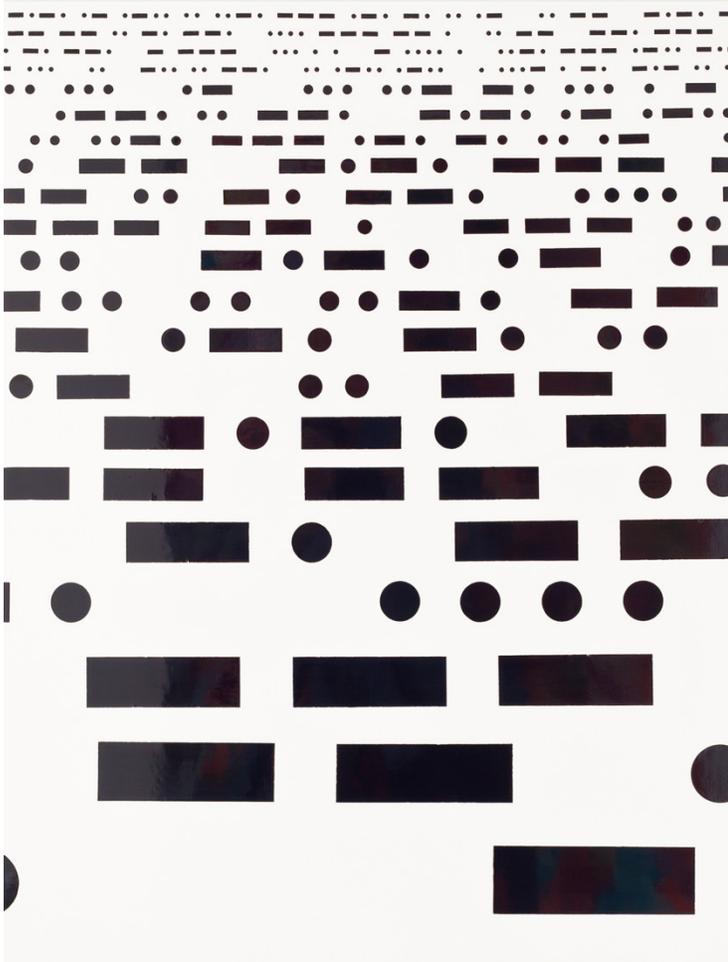
September 10 to October 15, 2011

Spoken language has its musicality, written language, a purely graphic presence as shape and pattern. How those shapes and patterns translate — or not — into meaning has long been fertile ground for artists. Jow, a Canadian transplant to L.A., enters the terrain close on the heels of Tauba Auerbach, whose paintings and books of the last half decade have cannily explored the visual pattern, of the visual potency of written alphabets. Jow, too, is drawn to code. In a previous series of works on paper, she took passages from novels set in New York and embossed them in Brialle, forming the city's silhouetted skyline out of the tiny raised dots.

In her slyly engaging new work at Marine Contemporary, Jow spells out song lyrics Morse code in high gloss acrylic and

polyurethane. The text on all eight panels derives from songs about California from the '60s and '70s, exactly when text/image interplay in art surged and when hard-edged geometric abstraction like was one of the norm as well. Jow courts a multitude of associations, creating wonderful visual/verbal double entendres like "California Nights", where the lines from a Lesley Gore song, in white dots and dashes against black, seem to recede in space like a light-speckled urban nightscape seen from above, a field of oncoming headlights, or — as suggested by the lyric that the shapes spell out — the moonlit froth of the incoming tide. A group of smart and snide drawings on old hotel letterhead and a mildly clever neon sign piece round out this snappy little show.





Jow: A California Minute — Megan Abrahams  
Marine Contemporary, Venice  
September 10 to October 15, 2011

Jow's recent exhibit at Marine Contemporary made this gallery an inviting stop along the rambling trajectory of Pacific Standard Time (PST), the current collaboration of more than 60 regional cultural institutions exploring the history of art in Southern California from 1945 to 1980. In this new series, Jow playfully transforms California's lyrical legacy into engaging visual imagery. The artist has used the words from popular songs about California as a point of departure for a series of paintings that appear abstract on one level, while paradoxically representing words. With a subtle touch, Jow has translated the lyrics into the precision dots and dashes of Morse Code, arranged in varied patterns. While the dots and dashes may have literal meaning, they assume their own graphic significance in carefully defined rows and different sizes - transcending the connotations of the words themselves.

Viewed together, this is a tightly connected series of abstract black and white images. There are eight paintings - acrylic and polyurethane on panels - all of them 36 X 48 inches in size. Each Morse code painting represents a different song, many of which came from the same time frame being celebrated by P.S.T. Individually, the paintings stand alone, have distinct merit; but seen together, they offer an indication of how the artist developed her theme from varied angles.

In California Nights, adapted from the 1967 Lesley Gore song, pristine white dots and dashes appear on the black background of nighttime. The coat of polyurethane gives the painting a lacquered finish, making the surface reflective. Beyond the hidden layers of the words beneath the symbols, deep inside the darkness, you can see your own shape and the colors of the room reflected in the glossy black, adding yet another (cont...)





Jow became interested in Morse code for its ability to communicate language, its sense of nostalgia, and its graphic qualities – which are reminiscent of the work of Minimalist artists. Although not derivative, this series echoes something of Cy Twombly’s exploration of visual language. Trained as a cryptographer by the U.S. Army in the 1950s, Twombly integrated codes and symbols in his art, sometimes giving it the effect of calligraphy. A contemporary of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, Twombly died earlier this year at the age of 83.

On first entering the gallery, Jow’s bright yellow neon sculpture, *A Golden State of Mind*, set a lighthearted tone for the show. As a counterpart to the Morse Code paintings, mounted along the back wall was a collection of her witty drawings on vintage California letterhead. Among these, *SuperCali*, is a hand drawn outline of a California map on vintage paper from the Beverly Hills Hotel and Bungalows. Arrows indicate “super” spots of interest, starting in the northwest with “super trees”, to a location a little further south and inland, “super winos,” and much further south, where arrows point out hot spots like: “super stars,” “super sized,” and “super tanned.” In *Super Cali II*, rendered in ink on pencil crayon on vintage letterhead, Jow plays with song lyrics once again:

“\$UPER  
CALI  
FRAGILE  
MY\$TIC  
EX  
\$PREE  
A  
LA  
DOUGH  
\$HU\$H”

Born in Vancouver, Jow studied fine arts at Capilano College and the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design before relocating to the United States. *A California Minute* is her solo debut at Marine Contemporary. From the point of view of another Canadian expatriate who has spent a few rainy winters in Vancouver, it’s not difficult to understand how Jow could be infatuated with sunny California - enough to embrace it as an absorbing theme for her artistic exploration.

dimension to the image. In her rendition of *California Dreamin’*, taken from the 1965 song by the Mamas & the Papas, she develops the concept further. Here, most of the dots and dashes are black, so they are subsumed into the dark background. We still see their shapes, slightly raised above the surface of the panel, while the white dots and dashes are flat, forming a pattern, as Jow manipulates the code to fit her own agenda. Reflected on the surface, is the silhouette of anyone gazing, along with a miniature of *California Nights* - the painting on the opposite wall.

In *California*, (Joni Mitchell, 1970), Jow flips the switch. Black dots and dashes pop out of a white background. Some of the symbols go off the edge of the frame, half dots and three quarter dots, waxing and waning. At the bottom of the panel, the shapes are larger and more widely spaced apart. *California Soul* (5th Dimension, Marlena Shaw, 1968) takes yet another twist. Raised white dots and dashes are barely discerned on a white background. Alone on the bottom right, three back dots and dashes emerge - meaning CA, the abbreviation for California.



# INARTFUL



May 15, 2013 — Shana Nys Dambrot

Jow — just Jow — has her second solo show right now at Marine Contemporary in Venice. TOURIST closes this Saturday, May 18, and you really should try to catch it in person if you can — partly for the small, fine details on the hilarious and intelligent hotel-stationery drawings; partly for the hyper-bright effect of entering the main room full of glossy, peppery pigment fields; and partly for the sexy sparkle of each of those paintings up close as their changeable surfaces are activated by your motion across them. Besides the (abstract) large-scale acrylic on panel paintings, and a series of my favorite (text-based) drawings ever, she's also made two (text-and-light) neon sculptures which are pretty hilarious.

The color theme is certainly striking — yet the exuberant and crisply hi-definition red, white, and blue reads as neither boosterism nor as irony. Instead, she remixes her self-limited

chromatic and marking vocabulary in a manner akin to operating the levels on a mixing board to achieve a range of emotional and stylistic variations meant to evoke New York, Paris, London or San Francisco, and Vancouver. And of course, the same colors are in the flags of France, Japan and Canada as well as the US. The way she deploys them is intended to “describe not so much a literal place traveled to or from, as the cultural nostalgia associated with a particular city. Jow’s approach to this is transitional.” That sounds right. Her use of Morse code as a visual signifier is about both universality and inaccessibility — hinting lightly at the cross-sectional, pluripotentiality of interpreting and reconfiguring information. It’s almost like infographics, and almost like abstract painting. Essential, but ambiguous — and worth seeing up close and personal, especially in the presence of the full series.

