

Ruth Pastine:**PRESENT TENSE****March 15 - May 24** CARNEGIE ART MUSEUM

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CONTINUED AND RECOMMENDED, FEBRUARY 2015

Hal Fischer, "Signifiers M Response" from "Gay Semiotics," 1977, carbon pigment print on 270 gsm Canson PhotoGloss Premium RC paper, 20 x 16", is currently on view at Cherry and Martin 2732.

This gallery may be credited with bringing to light overlooked photographers from the 1970s and 1980s. The first art photographer they celebrated was Robert Heineken, the next Lew Thomas and now San Francisco based **Hal Fischer**. Fischer, one of the photographers at the forefront of the California conceptual photography movement, is best known for his project "Gay Semiotics." Originally created in 1977 and not shown in its entirety for nearly forty years, this series of black and white photographs is a prime example of structuralist photography — where language and images work together or in opposition so as to direct the interpretation of the work. In this piece Fischer presents codes of sexual orientation as a series of photo/text images that explain in a tongue and cheek tone, for example, what keys or earrings on the left or right side of the body might signify. It was past time that this series be presented in its entirety and recognized as an important contribution to West Coast conceptualism as well as gay culture prior to the AIDS epidemic ([Cherry and Martin 2732](#), Culver City).
Jody Zellen



Blue McRight, "Siren," 2014, mixed media, 60 x 11 x 52", is currently on view at Samuel Freeman.

Few artists can take the found objects route as adeptly and as wittily as **Blue McRight**. For the last year and a half she's been working on a series of works that delve into her interest in water and seafaring. The results in the show "Drink Me" also reference the current drought in California and our troubled relationship to water in this part of the world. Most of the work is sculptural — including free-standing pieces that marry tape-wrapped tree branches or hoses with vintage brass watering nozzles and propellers; plus two installations incorporating vintage Boy Scout water canteens.

In the former series, McRight has covered the tubular shapes of tree branches or hoses with continuously wound tape, sometimes blue and sometimes black. One might see it as the "body" of the work. For the artist, the blue evokes the Blue-ringed Octopus — although beautiful to look at and much sought after by underwater photographers, it produces a deadly venom when provoked. The centerpiece in the main gallery is the sculpture "Siren," which evokes that same beauty/danger paradox — "siren" being the name of the mythical female creatures who sat on rocks and sang alluring songs, drawing sailors to crash their boats on their shores. This "Siren" is nine-feet long and suspended by wire in the middle of the room, its body twisty and undulating (a large tree branch underneath), tipped with a couple dozen threatening-looking nozzles pointing in different directions. It is also reminiscent of another mythical monster of Greek mythology, the multi-headed Hydra.

In "Siren" and a series of much smaller pieces sitting on shelves in the next room, McRight has carefully wrapped the form in tape, and threaded the surfaces to help them keep their shape. An old propeller has been added to a couple of the smaller pieces, which overall seem more humorous and less threatening, due in part to their tabletop size; but each retains a lively character unto itself. Elsewhere, a wall of elegant drawings of nautical objects on white panel — including a propeller, an anchor, a ship — nicely rounds out this excellent exhibition ([Samuel Freeman](#), Culver City).
Scarlet Cheng

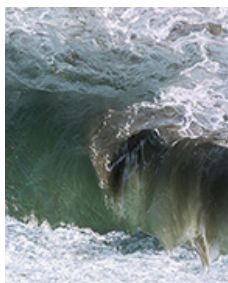


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Amir Zaki, "Sliver 1," 2014, framed ultrachrome archival pigment photograph with UV coating, 75 x 60", is currently on view at ACME.

In "Seeking Clarity," photographer **Amir Zaki** returns to his roots, images of the sea — albeit with more skill and a different motivation than earlier works done while still a graduate student. In his pre-digital images he illuminated the sea by adding his own lights, literally shining an incandescent lamp on the night ocean. In these later works he seamlessly merges disparate photographs of the raging ocean creating disorienting images of waves that crisscross and explode in impossible angles. The blue, green and foaming white tones associated with the ocean merge in a sea of abstraction. The sea photographs are interspersed with close-up images of palm tree seed pods which become another kind of abstraction. Suspended in front of a nondescript background that appears to be a wall, the intricate nuances of each strangely beautiful object are highlighted via its illumination. The object and its shadow, while so different than the images of the expansive sea, share many of the same textures and mysteries. Zaki's exploration of the natural landscape continues to confound as he clearly delights in taking a given and making it into something else ([ACME](#), Miracle Mile).

JZ



Peter Voukos, "Untitled Plate," 2000, woodfired stoneware, 7 3/4 x 20 1/2 x 21 1/2", is currently on view at Frank Lloyd.

Six of the twelve late 1950's-era drawings produced by **Craig Kauffman** and recently released by his estate for this exhibition have a dynamic, free flowing, Zen-like quality that lends a spontaneous zest to his use of ink and paint. Similar investigations into the possibilities inherent in the medium of clay transport the ceramic work on display concurrently by **Peter Voukos** from craft into the province of sculpture. Both artists repeatedly test interactions of circular forms with linear elements. But Voukos further enriches his cutting, denting and scraping of lines in works such as "Untitled Plates," from the late 1970's, with admixtures of mists of earth hued glazes. The opportunity to view Kauffman's drawings with nearly twenty sculptural works and a handful of prints by Voukos, gives support to Peter Plagen's praise of Voukos in his 1974 survey of West Coast art, "Sunshine Muse." Not only does the critic laud Voukos' influence on other L.A. artists through his ceramics workshop at Otis Art Institute (as it was then called), but Plagens also credits Voukos with having created "Southern California Abstract Expressionist ceramics" ([Frank Lloyd Gallery](#), Santa Monica).

DC



Mask with Protruding Eyes, c. 1250-1100 BCE, bronze, excavated at Sanxingdui, Pit II, is currently on view at the Bowers Museum.

China continues to surprise with its archaeological finds. "**China's Lost Civilization: The Mystery of Sanxingdui**" is a medium-sized exhibition but a landmark. It features some 120 artifacts (and clearly marked replicas) of a Chinese culture that existed about 3,000 years ago, then was lost to history until thirty years ago. In 1986 construction workers came upon what turned out to be two pits at Sanxingdui, 24 miles outside Sichuan's capital of Chengdu — which eventually yielded a treasure of ancient jades, weapons, animal bones, and bronzes. This has triggered a rethinking of the Yellow River basin, 750 miles to the northeast, as the "cradle" of Chinese civilization. The Sanxingdui finds indicated a sophisticated culture with advanced bronze techniques and social/religious systems — though no writing.

Among the most spectacular of these finds were "masks" made of bronze, sometimes covered with a thin layer of gold, and several are included in the exhibition. These were like nothing that had been found in China before — they had large, protruding eyes and prominent noses. Some are so large they could not have been worn, but must have been carried or otherwise displayed during ceremonies. The same type of head is sometimes found atop a standing figure, whom seems to be holding something in his two hands. Given the position of the hands, it has been posited that these figures were holding a curved elephant tusk, long since disintegrated. The Sanxingdui culture clearly prized elephant tusks, and a photograph shows an area of the dig where there was a whole stack of them, piled high. In 2001 archaeological finds were made in Chengdu itself, at the Jinsha site, which may have been where the Sanxingdui culture ended. The Jinsha culture had similar objects and motifs but comes at a later time, and the "Sanxingdui" exhibition closes with some of them ([Bowers Museum](#), Orange County).

SC