

Art Reviews

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Happy Faces: Trippy vibes from the summer of love echo faintly in Michael Lazarus' new paintings, as does the intimation of something more sinister. At Marc Foxx Gallery, the Brooklyn-based painter's variously scaled enamels on panel play polar opposites in a Jungian drama smoldering with silent intensity.

At least one smiling mask appears in each of the 14 works in Lazarus' L.A. solo debut. Recalling jack-o'-lanterns, blackface, Mexican wrestling costumes and Freddie Kruger's hockey mask, these menacingly happy faces are often paired with their upside-down reflections, suggesting that every strong emotion is haunted by its shadow.

Lazarus' stark pictures hide as much as they reveal. Like mutant fusions of the ancient Greek symbols for comedy and tragedy, they convey antithetical outlooks with sign-like clarity. Painted in bright colors, with collaged elements and asymmetrical patterns, they can be read very quickly.

However, Lazarus' emblematic paintings never let viewers off the hook with pat messages or hollow platitudes. Ambiguity reigns in these works, where things are just what they are and a whole lot more.

Born in 1969, Lazarus is too young to have experienced the chaos and promise of the 1960s first hand. But being at one remove does not diminish the impact of his art or imply that it's an empty sign of bygone times.

On the contrary, his promising paintings are part of his generation's move away from Freud and toward Jung. In contrast to works celebrated for expressing personal sentiments, Lazarus' idiosyncratic panels never form private narratives that presume to take viewers back to the artist's inner feelings and hidden traumas. Instead, his graphic, gregarious works take their place in the shared public space of the visible world, where they boldly address the desires and responsibilities of viewers.

• *Marc Foxx Gallery, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 857-5571, through July 24. Closed Sundays and Mondays.)*