



ELI LANGER
Wharton+Espinosa
8687 Melrose Avenue, Suite B275, Los Angeles, CA 90069
September 19, 2012 - November 2, 2012

Gravitational Pulls by Arely Villegas

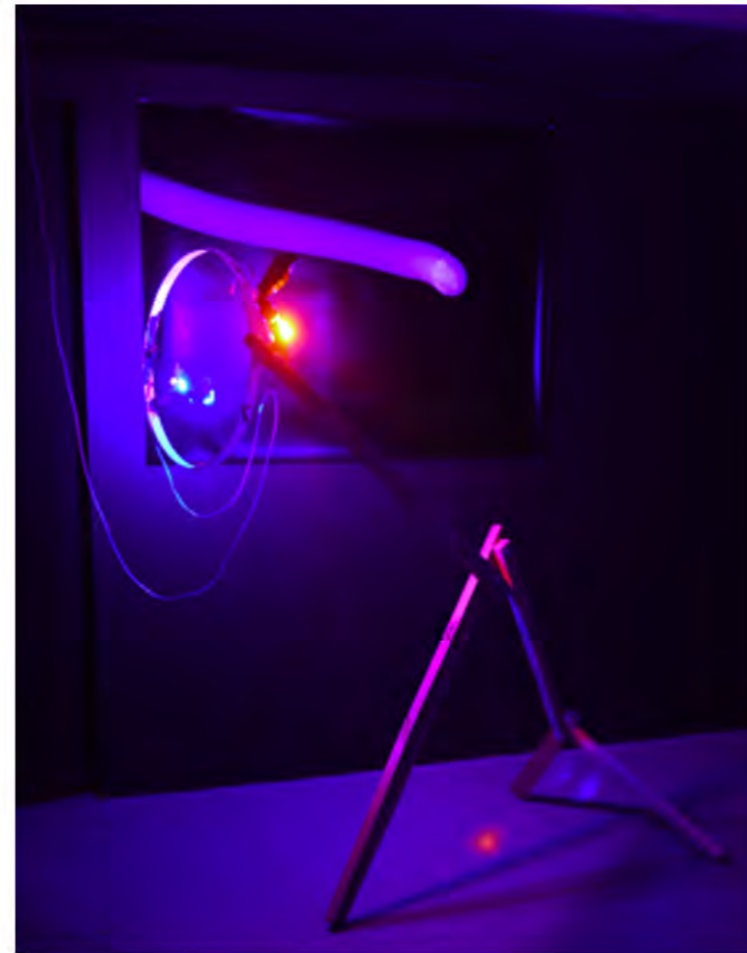
The first time I met Eli Langer was in a book. In Chris Kraus's *Where Art Belongs*—a collection of essays that begins with words on the now defunct underground space, Tiny Creatures. Full of kaleidoscopic stories, the essay touches on the “golden age” of the eastside’s art and music scene in Los Angeles—the flux of spaces in Chinatown and Echo Park. One of my favorite descriptions of the now infamous Part Time Punks club is told by Kraus in her essay:

“... where people who’d grown up as misfits with obscure musical tastes danced for the first time outside their bedrooms.”

Kraus also recounts individual stories from the circle of Tiny Creatures—artists, musicians and writers. In one of these stories, artist Eli Langer is mentioned regarding his relationship to “the phenomenology of lines”—a relation that speaks to the contours and movement in his installations, paintings, and narrative drawings.

Recently, writer Catherine Wagley made the observation of Langer taking the role (forced upon him, or not) as one of the characters of a new semi fictional book: “...his paintings keep popping up in Sheila Heti’s new book *How Should a Person Be*.” The novel was brilliantly reviewed by Kraus in *The Los Angeles Review of Books*—the novel focuses on Heti’s approach to a work of fiction based around the lives of her friends. Whether the writing presents itself as either fictional or stripped from actual events is only for the reader to decide:

“Then that night, around a fire burning in a can, she and Eli spent several hours talking about color and brushstroke and line. They went on to email for several months, and she was briefly converted into the sort of painter he was—a painter who respected painting in itself.”



Out of coincidence, the day I visited Wharton+Espinosa to see Eli Langer’s current exhibition, Ariel Pink’s music played throughout the space, activating the dark trance in “Waves and Particles”, a series of paintings that hang from the walls and wooden sculptures like pages from a pop-up book. Langer’s “Experimentations in Abstract Painting” series in the first gallery feel like preliminary sketch drawings for future work, in this case, the spontaneous mobility of Langer’s sculptural light fixtures and retro-reflective sheets. After all, painting is contained movement and Langer pushes the boundaries of painting on canvas and on mounted reflective sheets, allowing for waves, lines, and movement to overflow out of the work. An overflow, similar to the sap from trees or the gravitational pulls of the moon in the series of photographic drawings, “Influential Moon”.

An obvious transformation of the walls of the gallery from day to night, light to dark might be accidental, but it evokes feelings of visiting the artist’s studio, which gradually changes throughout the day. The only items missing are his collection of shelved books and scattered pots for plants (amongst other material that lives in nooks or on desks and kitchen tables). Of course, significant settings as carefully curated window panes and the view of Hollywood Boulevard are missing from the confined space of the gallery, but you get the idea that this show encompasses the full spectrum of mediums which seem inescapable to Langer. The gravitational pulls of the moon, the sea. Movement and inertia—writing and writers—painting and light.

Having been introduced to Langer through books makes him strangely prolific, but I’m also fighting the fact that it occurred this way. Such analogy often pictures Langer under the tragic story of “the artist who died too young” (or any of the other tragic storylines, even though his is of course alive and well) leaving a vast collection of loaded art to pull from—becoming only a character to meld and bend as material for writers. However, the fact that Langer himself is a writer might have a lot to do with it. A set of narrative drawings hang, erratically in unison, and a stream of consciousness essay written by the artist accompanies the show:

“Somebody does the seeing
Somebody does the being seen.”

—Arely Villegas