**LONDON**

**Jim Shaw**
*Senem Lee // November 19, 2015–January 6, 2016*

Shaw’s own paintings are almost as bizarre as the thrift-store canvases he notoriously collects and curates, mixing together various vernacular styles, from religious iconography to comic book superheroes to advertising imagery. Painted against found theatrical backdrops from the 1940s and ’50s, the sense is of American culture and history as a sort of macabre, hysterical masquerade, a performance of demented excess. The specific references—to historical episodes or Shaw’s own childhood—may occasionally be a little obscure, but the overall effect is quite captivating. —GABRIEL COXHEAD

**Ellen Hylmosem**
*Field // November 20, 2015–January 16, 2016*

The title of Hylmosem’s show—“Landscape Reconfigured”—may be a tad pretentious and over-reaching, but the works themselves are brashly alluring. The central idea is the contrast between natural, organic forms and ersatz or artificial materials: a suspended array of hillside-edged HDF panels swaddled in acid-lemon nylon; more nylon, paier and semi-transparent, wrapped around bulging, boulder-like stacks of concrete; ragged, dangling ribbons of paper dipped in bright acrylic paint. They’re simple pieces, but very effective at creating an atmosphere of slightly sinister sickness. —GC

**Pamela Golden**
*Moore/Gallagher Contemporary // November 11, 2015–January 9, 2016*

There are two sources for Golden’s large watercolor-and-ink works: schlocky sci-fi illustrations of prehistoric worlds and photographs of off-duty American soldiers surfing during the Vietnam War. The resulting mashups, featuring longboarders frolicking in lagoons also hosting dolphins, are strangely, powerfully evocative. With their bloomed or saturated colors, and their gauzy, almost filmic quality, they suggest a kind of dreamlike yearning for lost innocence, a fantasy of prelapsarian grace. —GC

**HOUSTON**

**Peat Duggins**
*Art Palace // October 29–December 19, 2015*

Boston-based Duggins draws viewers into the grotesqueries of the natural world to interrupt American mythologies—for example, a resin-cast coyote who birthers an endless litter of pups that squirm in the slime of afterbirth. Taking his cues from a 1917 Charles Bronson film, he conflates the elusive whale from Moby Dick with the white buffalo of Native American legend. A chandelier of cast and sculpted horns and a buffalo head flanked in white fur and mounted in a chased wood frame are death scenes that complete the life cycle begun by the coyote. Donor’s hair, mounted from behind by a male of the species, watches mid-coitus from a drawing. —RISA PULEO

**Leon Ferrari**
*Sidney Gallery // October 13–December 19, 2015*

Scrrored letterlike abanques accumulate into a dense thicket of markings that speak to language’s failure to adequately describe experiences of trauma. Legible texts articulate poignancy when words connect as symbols to their counterpart parts in reality. Sculptures consisting of tenuous networks of wire translate the graphic nature of the drawings into three dimensions, while a selection of work that pairs Catholic objects with images of global warfare offer a glimpse of the artist’s rarely seen representational work. —JF

**Pat Steir**
*Texas Gallery // October 29–December 12, 2015*

In each of Steir’s canvases, “zipz” down the center nod to Barnett Newman, offsetting and separating two fields of color in subtle dialogues that rival those of Josef Albers. Pain stains, bleeds, saturates, and drips onto the underlying canvas, animated by viscosity and fluidity in this study of painting-as-verbal. Inflected by the light, surfaces glow with iridescence and hum in different lusters of matte finish. Scaled to the height of the gallery, the monumental canvases transform the space into a painted room. —HP

**LOS ANGELES**

**Whitney Bedford**
*Suzanne Vielmetter // December 12, 2015–January 22, 2016*

In small panel landscapes, Bedford explores the boundaried between abstraction and figuration. In Forever August, 2015, cacti are rendered with a naturalist’s eye in black ink on the painting’s dusty-pink ground; gestural brushstrokes of mossy green, creams, mustard, hot pink, and browns mimic the vegetative shapes beside them. These studies are synthesized and streamlined into much larger works, such as Tender is the Late Night, 2015, where the vegetative patterns blossom in elegant gold on flat backgrounds. —GRANT JOHNSON

**“The Avant-Garde Won’t Give Up: Cobra and Its Legacy”**
*Blum & Poe // November 5–December 28, 2015*

The second installment of this exhibition extends the domain of Cobra, a lesser-known postwar avant-garde, into the present. Works by founding figures like Asger Jorn are smartly paired and well matched with later entries, such as Julian Schnabel’s Veramente Bastia V (Girl with No Eyes), 1988, or Mark Grobman’s Unfitted (Cloud and Pond William Mask M38 bi), 2015. In this blend of history, it is gauche to ponder who was ahead of his time and who, behind? —JG

**Michel Majerus**

In Overdose, 1997 (this show’s largest work, which spans an entire gallery wall), the cowboy doll Woody from Toy Story raises a hand to his tired brow, as if to comfort his troubled mind. Behind his back, other paper scraps hover in the picture plane: graphics advertising laundry detergent, nightclubs, and ice cream sandwiches are blown up and painted in oversized. This 15-panel work, an image made of visual fragments, aptly summarizes the pleasure and puzzle of Majerus’s post-Pop work. His intense, colorful, and gregarious appropriations remain incommensurate; they keep looking like just a partial view. —GJ