the art world, exposed in “ReadyKenlook by Rikidorex: This Is What Liberation Feels Like!”, a group show co-organized by Eisemann and the artist A.L. Steiner that ran concurrently with the exhibition. Steiner and Eisemann filled the museum with statements of political revolution generated by a broad swath of participants, from Leidy Churchman to Ellen Myles to Kara Walker. Eisemann brings this queer history to her materials and does so with an earnest desire to share it with the public. In her work, she encourages her viewers to look to the margins, where we might find Death corrugating with partygoers, or a nexus of multicolored pigments stuck to the canvas’s edge like barnacles. In learning to look with an unbiased eye, we can approximate a new mode of vision that takes into account diverse lives, stories, genders, sexualities, and modes of embodiment.

—William J. Simmons

CHICAGO

Lucie Stahl
QUEER THOUGHTS

Lucie Stahl’s exhibition at the venerable apartment gallery Queer Thoughts in Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood was a firing line project before the gallery relocates to downtown Manhattan. Known for featuring work that embraces the shape-shifting properties associated with the concept of “postidentity,” Queer Thoughts reaffirmed its agenda with a corporeally charged installation punctuated by several cast-polyurethane molds of hands and faces and three of Stahl’s characteristically polymeric coated inkjet prints of body parts submerged in gel. Stahl forayed into the private domain of the third-floor walk-up apartment, installing work on its kitchen walls, thus underscoring a link between postidentity hybridization and the breaking down of the distinction between public and private spaces. The tensions produced by contradictions between living space and diminutive gallery, and between visitors to the show and friends of Queer Thoughts, were exploited by the artist to emphasize on gestures of indeterminacy in her work.

The show’s title, “Pits,” was not the first choice for the exhibition’s didactic; however, one can understand it as a direct material reference. In her studio practice, Stahl mixes a reactive polymer compound with water-based acrylic, which gives the transparent plastic a tint of color. This watery addition also puts in motion a volatile chemical reaction, and the polymer medium becomes suffused with tiny air bubbles as it sets, resulting in semi-transparent impressions of body parts with pitted surfaces. The casts of intersecting-dimensional hands and faces encased in the material are then rendered not precious and glass-like but hard and sad-looking. In a two-second looping video on the gallery website, two buckets of animated viscera, here dyed red, demonstrate the alchemical reaction of Stahl’s plastic medium, a bubble goop antithetical to our usual experience of plastic as uniform and static.

Set within the small, brightly lit main gallery where Stahl’s plastic appendages dotted the walls was a homely walk-in closet with an old vinyl floor. Stahl had covered the closet’s interior with scanner-generated imagery depicting colonial portraits pressed into translucent gel, similar to those that hung democratically on the walls in the kitchen. A milky plastic hand was mounted to appear as if reaching out from the flimsy closet wall. Titled Hand (of Spirit) (all works 2014), it held a wise bottle and a burning white tapered candle that illuminated the tiny room. Here there was only enough space for one viewer, who was forced to close the door in order to approach the wearable hand. Once the door was closed, a one-way glass embedded into the cuteway closet door became visible, revealing the glazing white gallery outside the closet. From the exterior of the closet, this element of the installation, Woman in Wristlace T., appeared as a mirrored inset, with a face in glassy relief mounted at its center.

Attracted to the transformative properties of liquid and gelatinous states, Stahl has found a solution to the problem of capturing the visual impact of material transmutations. In her work, liquid, liquid, and solid states are scanned and printed; body parts are mold cast with mercurial compounds. These porous associations were equally at play in the wall text Stahl generated for “Pits”: “Tracking down a strange, loose narrative of the acutely violent aspects of power and resource distribution, informred by a female factor that runs like a bloody current pulling loose debris in from the shores of a male-dominated landscape, shouting is the only way to be heard over the roar of yourself. Woman in Wristlace T. Stahl’s ambiguous body imagery trumps powerful femine political implications into the postidentity unam. Yet it is her beguilingly sublime, alchemical approach to armaging that provide the most compelling challenge to identity norms.

—Michelle Grabner

AUSTIN

Do Ho Suh
THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN

So many weighty themes are piled onto Do Ho Suh’s fabric sculptures, it seems remarkable that his diaphanous structures don’t collapse under their heavy load. History and biography, longing and belonging, migration and globalization—these are only a handful of the ponderous currents in Suh’s work. The associations are perhaps not surprising, given that Suh’s work addresses architecture, a perennially symbolic subject, and specifically the home—surely the most intensely symbolic of architectural spaces. Indeed, in his more literal moments, Suh has not hesitated to exploit architecture’s unique capacity to function as a highly legible reflection of relations of power, politics, culture, and identity. For example, Fullen Star 1/5, 2008–11 (not on view here), is a scale model depicting the traditional Korean house that was Suh’s childhood home in Seoul crashing through the walk of the Providence, Rhode Island, apartment building that was his first habitation in the US. (Culture shock, it would seem.)

Such rhetorical gestures have an undeniable resonance with Suh’s peripatetic and globalized personal history. (The South Korean-born artist was educated first in Seoul and later in the US. He now splits his time among New York City, London, and Seoul.) But they also rely heavily on the semantic play between dear stylistic markers—the neatly redbrick and Georgian moldings of Suh’s American apartment pierced by the tile roof and intricately carved tawers of his Korean home—and interpreting Suh’s work primarily by reading buildings as signs therein.
SAN FRANCISCO
Chris Finley
STEVEN WOLF FINE ARTS

Chris Finley is a restless maker, and the results of his unfailing labors—a new series of sculptures and paintings—packed the industrious artist’s first solo show in five years. During that interregnum he was voraciously collecting and upcycling the mass-produced bonanza of everyday life: an old pair of jeans, a too-slip bath mat, a broken window screen, a shoe, vinyl place mats, a deflated yoga ball...In air he seek love (animal) (all works 2014), two 1970s-era Jim Henson puppets—along with various bits and pieces—are nested between seemingly hopelessly disks made from mismatched puzzle pieces bound by a mess of wood glue. The conspicuous informality of Finley’s assemblages makes them appear to be the spills or accidents you’d find in a forgotten corner of a garage, but in fact they are carefully composed constructions whose materials often bear personal meaning for Finley himself. The only way to really make sense of these sculptural palimpsests was to ask a gallery attendant to pick them up, take them apart, and put them back together again. (Handling the objects oneself is ideal, but it is a privilege reserved for those who purchase them.) As with Finley’s earliest works, the viewing experience became one of playful kinetic discovery, here reinforced by a surrounding ring of geometric paintings whose supports are children’s board games.

Paradoxically, it is precisely this distance that brings Sol’s work closest to architecture, by allowing him to rethink many of the representational and spatial problems that define that field. Architecture, after all, is at bottom a series of negotiations and translations—between the conceptual and the material, the representational and the real. If an architect must transform the two-dimensional space of the drawing into a spatial structure, Sol begins with a fully realized building and, via an exhaustive process of measuring, converts it back into flat fabric components (creating what is essentially an enormous garment pattern), which he stitches together to re-create an enclosure. The acute difficulty of these multiple translations makes for poignant moments, as when a modest, doughnut-shaped doorknob must be divided into no fewer than twelve fabric faces, patched together to provide some approximation of its smooth three-dimensionality.

And while an architect labors to transform an imagined space into a real one, Sol renders the solid stuff of architecture as ghastly ether. This lightness allows him to translate some of the spatial and temporal displacements and collisions he has explored metaphorically elsewhere into the realm of actual experience. The two homes in Apartment A, for example, occupy different floors of the same building, and Sol lived in them at different times. Yet, in Austin, one could stand in the kitchen of one and look into the bedroom of another, their translucent spaces dissolving into each other, blending rooms and furniture in eerie superimpositions. The effect is something like walking through an architectural drawing or computer model: inhabiting the analytical framework of a virtual structure alters the immediacy of a real one, allowing visitors to reflect on the ways in which architecture shapes not only space but our experience and memory of it. In this way, Sol’s work reminds us that architecture’s symbolic power is neither inherent nor purely conventional, but rather accrued through the daily interactions through which spaces lodge themselves in our minds.

—Julian Rose