



Jay Nelson and Rachel Kaye, "Pairings #2" (installation view). (Image courtesy of the artists and Chandran Gallery. Photo: Mariko Reed)

Jay Nelson + Rachel Kaye

Pairing #2

[Chandran Gallery](#)

Apr 22nd – July 3rd

By LEORA LUTZ, JUN. 2016

[Jay Nelson](#) and [Rachel Kaye](#) make art together, but they don't collaborate. What I mean is: they are a couple who have worked alongside each other in the same living and studio space for over fifteen years, creating separate works. Nelson is an accomplished craftsman who is known for his augmented motor vehicles and functional architectural spaces, including a treehouse that Nelson built on their property in the Outer Sunset neighborhood of San Francisco. Kaye has been exhibiting her meditative line and pattern drawings, and expressionistic, raw paintings for several years. Like art couple forebears such as Charles and Ray Eames, or Robert and Sonia Delaunay, the two are drawn together by their agility in supporting each other's creativity, and aesthetically influencing each other.

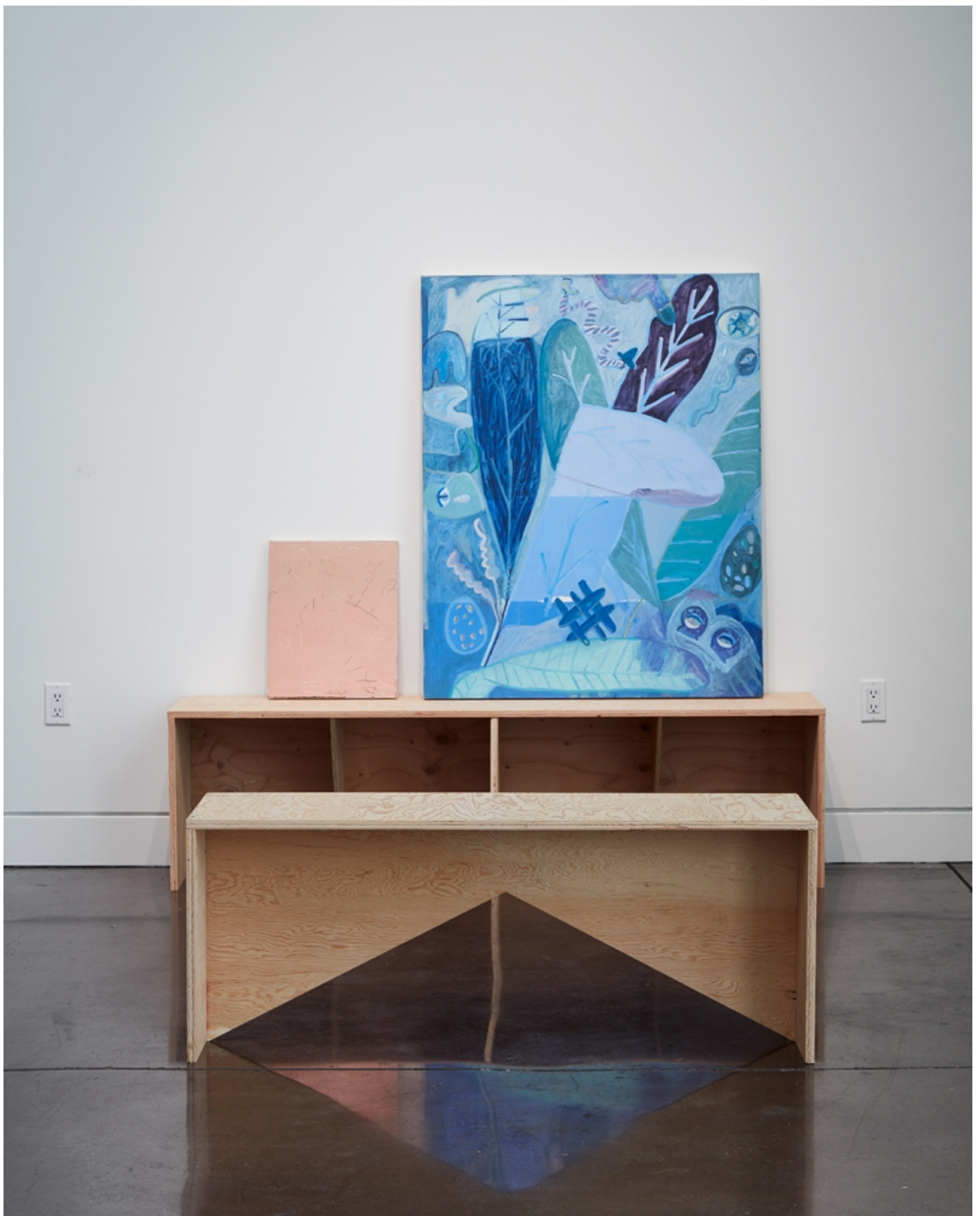
Last year the couple mounted an industrious exhibition titled *In Concert* at Johansson Projects in Oakland, which transformed the humble and semi-raw storefront gallery space into a completely immersive environment. *In Concert* encouraged interaction with the space and the accompanying visual art, which included pod-like plywood structures with seating areas and small windows and jutting walls that were constructed amidst the gallery existing walls. Kurt Schwitter's "Merzbau" comes to mind when recalling that show — making a space as art. Schwitters referred to his process of immersing art, architecture, philosophy and everyday life all together as one—or as he put it in playful terms: "merz," which is a nonsense word combined with the German word, "bau" for building. Similarly, for Nelson and Kaye's exhibition, *Pairings #2* at Chandran Gallery in San Francisco, they continue to expand viewers' understanding of how to look at art and where, ultimately questioning what gallery architecture means.



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Nelson and Kaye's installation intentionally responds to the rustic and

outdoor elements of the gallery. In particular, they have installed two untitled structures (I will refer to one as a box and the other a building). There is a large cage-like box with paintings attached to it, and a two-story small building that has the feel of an enclosed patio that includes paintings and a bench with a ramp to climb to an upper deck. In addition there are several drawings and paintings situated in various areas of the gallery and within the two structures, plus a large mural in the gallery courtyard. The architecture of the gallery is unique: a street level entrance that includes concrete pillars and vintage brick walls on one side and clean white drywall on the other, accented by aged wooden floors. A modern-design staircase with inlaid wooden steps and glass siding leads to the subterranean gallery below, featuring a huge two story window that leads to the exterior courtyard. The presence of Nelson's box and building are strange yet impressive, and could easily be re-situated elsewhere even though it is clear that they are intended for the space.



Left to right: Jay Nelson, "Rachel Plant Copy" (2016), oil on canvas, 14" x 17"; Rachel Kaye, "Blue" (2015), oil on canvas, 36" x 45" (installation view). (Image courtesy of the artists and Chandran Gallery. Photo: Mariko Reed)

Both the box and the building incorporate cage-like treatment for the walls which demands that the viewer incorporate the background architecture of the gallery into her view, and as a result they are less precious "art objects" than accompaniments to the space itself. The box is light and see-through, unlike a monumental minimalist sculpture which would have a heavy presence. Paintings are threaded through the cage's strands of metal, making them look like permanent fixtures; the whole structure is now one art piece with no distinction between painting, sculpture and architecture. Construction is meticulous and straightforward; nothing is hidden; viewers can see the black stained panels and the nails that support the paintings on the inside of it. Despite this permeability, the structure implies a closed feeling, almost like an animal coop or terrarium, where living things are on display but are prevented from escaping or being touched from the outside. Visitors cannot enter the box, further emphasizing containment.



Rachel Kaye, "Boot Talk" (2016), oil on canvas, 24" x 30."

(Image courtesy of the artists and Chandran Gallery. Photo: Leora Lutz)

By contrast, people are allowed to walk inside and climb on the building. Here, paintings are also threaded through the cage-like walls, but the paintings are double-sided, and feature different artworks on both sides. The spontaneity of the paintings compliments the accessibility of the building as a complete work of art. Hanging near the entrance is Kaye's "Boot Talk," a multi-colored expressionist canvas with blue-, tan- and rose-toned shapes amongst washy green, clay and mauve backgrounds; hinting at almost child-like musings. On the other side of her painting is Nelson's "Somebody Something Someplace Someone." The words of the title are scratched through a layer of thick black paint with streaks of color in the under-layer showing through; reminiscent of the elementary school activity of completely covering coloring book pages with black crayon and then scratching off the top layer.

Visitors can walk inside where there is a bench to sit and contemplate the work (as would be a standard offering in a museum). To the left is a ramp with pegs and a thick rope to climb up to the second floor. Once there, we are again surrounded by a cage, but it's open at the top and we can look beyond it to the rest of the gallery; down at other visitors; or simply hang out for a while. Again, memories of childhood seem to creep in, sparking memories of being in a park where kids would play on the jungle gym and adults would watch. Here, anyone can climb on — except we "know" to behave ourselves (since we are in a gallery after all). Still, Nelson and Kaye offer ever more opportunities for viewers to engage in casual and intimate ways with the work.



Jay Nelson, "Somebody Something Someplace Someone" (2016), oil on canvas, 24" x 30." (Image courtesy of the artist and Chandran Gallery. Photo: Leora Lutz)





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Adjacent to the room with the building is a patio, where visitors can sit outside in the fresh air, surrounded by plants and Kaye's delicately blue line-drawn mural, which is over ten feet tall. Back inside, another painting/bench vignette features Kaye's painting "Blue." One of the more, if not the only representational paintings in the exhibition, its monochromatic color palette defies total reality and favors a dream-like state. Next to it rests Nelson's "Rachel Plant Copy," a smaller piece in a pastel, peach-nectar color. The title clues the viewer into the relationship of the two artists, and how they play off of each other, mirroring and inspiring each other while not stepping on each other's toes. Nelson's small piece is almost like a humble homage to Kaye's larger piece. In viewing the mix of everything they created here, it is evident that their time together in the studio is an integral part of their practice, and their works transport the viewer to witness the seriousness and playfulness the artists share with each other. If there can ever be a site for reminding us that we are not alone, this is the place to experience it. **WM**