

Marcus Herse

GREENE EXHIBITIONS



View of “Marcus Herse,” 2015.

Visitors to Greene Exhibitions will likely brave that most persistent of LA clichés: terrible traffic. So those who came for Marcus Herse’s solo show were primed for a suite of six long videos, projected larger-than-life on each of the gallery’s three walls in loops of two, of the artist piloting his car through gridlock. The works were shot using a camera joined to an electric motor mounted to the vehicle’s inner roof, which allowed the lens to swivel from left to right in small, even increments. Herse posits driving as “durational” performance, like Situationist wanderings filmed by an autonomous camera-eye à la Michael Snow’s *Région Centrale*, 1971. Yet the program here is more masochistic than meandering; Herse keeps his hands at ten and two and doesn’t turn or merge (except when he runs out of lane). Above muffled road noise and the occasional polite tick of the turn signal, the dominant sound is the helpful voice of Herse’s Google Maps app, constantly giving directions, consistently ignored.

Reclining on one of five aftermarket car seats reupholstered by the artist and stuck to casters, the viewer scooted around a backdrop of freeway-adjacent geography, which offered a tour of the unplanned aesthetic of SoCal. Herse’s videos leave us unencumbered, able to look out the window—or at any rate, able to view whatever the apparatus happens to frame. At one point, #23 (*melancholy of departure (after De Chirico)*) CA-110N 20B – US-101S 1D 10 January 2015 (all works 2015), the left-hand side of the triptych, showed rain on the 110 North through downtown. #20 (*plycar*) I-405N 46 – I-405N 51 7 January 2015 (the middle projection) threw a good, even exposure of the 405 South; while on the right, #3 (*coruscant I*) I-10E 14A – I-10E 21 22 December 2014 presented a view of a far-flung Metro station at the magic hour (both in terms of light and traffic). Herse offers his viewers the local charms of car bodies, billboards, truck decals. The chair sculptures in particular, upholstered in “painterly” black/orange, black/white, white/green vinyl schemes and rigged with LEDs, formalize the

artist's mis-/unguided appropriation of developed vernacular forms. Casually, fleetingly, the camera composes the shadow on the back of the headrest, the back of the artist's head raked by fine California light, the dappled graffiti on dirt-brown walls. Are we so desensitized to the beauty hemming in our own commutes that we miss this daily spectacle? Does art draw our attention to what we would otherwise pass by?

Coyly alluded to in the show's press release (a screenshot of Google Maps directions) as the "starting point" for one of Herse's journeys is the Glendale Galleria, a hulking masterpiece of a mall that we know from LA lore, or from Herse's ongoing video series "Galleria," 2012–, or from just living here as a prime example of bastardized Nu-Urbanism. As a metaphor for the falseness of our present social architecture, the building haunted Herse's show like a partially realized blueprint for paradise. The "urban landscape" that rolls by outside Herse's window elicits a reel of emotional associations—the smack of ironic appreciation for LA's gaudy sprawl; the guilty pleasure of rubbernecking at a roadside accident; irritation at the promise of an auto-driven metropolis that never materialized. Yet Herse's curated traffic experience does little to heighten, illuminate, or relieve the dull, durational exercise of cultural passengerhood. The thrill of the simulacra, friends, is gone. So why not drive for real—while we still can?

More conceptually generous than Herse's program of chance imagery is his refusal to reach any of his preset destinations. If the artist were to obey the map app's instructions, the car might as well drive itself. Herse halfheartedly adopts the role of menial laborer who still pumps our gas or attends a parking deck—jobs soon to be phased out. In going straight—with the flow, as it were—he abdicates his self-imposed role as driver. If machines will soon do everything, is it left to humans to do *nothing*? This could be an update of Melville's frail Bartleby, who starved himself to death rather than submit to the newly metered timetable of the industrial regime. On his present course, Herse will never—indeed, would prefer not to—arrive at his destination. Still, we can already imagine the unsatisfying conclusion to this quotidian *dérive*: Herse's car, passing gas station after gas station, finally shuddering to a stop—its driver's futile act of refusal causing a not inconsiderable slowdown.

—Travis Diehl