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Anderson, Claessinka: *Exquisite L.A.: Volume 3*

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# Exquisite L.A.: Volume 3

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Photos: Joe Pugliese

*Exquisite L.A.* is a blueprint of a collective shape. Drawing on the history of the Surrealist Exquisite Corpse, we wish to create a communal portrait of the current Los Angeles art world.

Consisting of photographic portraits, and spanning a year of consecutive *Carla* issues, each artist photographed introduces the next, outlining their connection or interest in the artist that will follow them in the series.

Rooted in classical portraiture, the photographs presented capture the artists in a neutral space, isolated from their work or studio. Their individual gaze, pose, or gesture becomes a continuous visual marker for the exquisite corpse that is Los Angeles. Pervasive in these portraits is a connective tissue of words, invisible, floating over the artists' bodies and united by a thread of inspiration.

For volume 3 of the project, we start the journey this issue with Friedrich Kunath. (This volume of *Exquisite L.A.* will continue through *Carla* issue 22.)

A black door. A prism of rainbow light stretching into the eternal abyss. The words: "If You Leave Me Can I Come Too?" Everything about the human condition seems to be contained in this simple 2003 painting by Friedrich Kunath. An image of pathos, heartbreak, and paradox, it is a beacon for both the impossibility and inevitability of death. In a world that often balks at the idea of anything overtly sentimental, Kunath mines the language of sentiment with the right balance of sincerity, emotion, and melancholic humor. In other words, he gives us permission to feel.

Born in Germany in 1974, Kunath is unafraid to renew the language of German Romanticism, but does so with a droll ferocity. His works are serious comedy—always leaving us on the edge of something, unsure of whether to laugh or cry. In this tension lies the almost erotic pleasure of his work.

We are now entering our third volume of *Exquisite L.A.* When thinking about who should start the thread, I had to think, again, of an artist that represents Los Angeles—one that speaks to it with the complicated love of so many of its residents. Coming here by choice, Kunath is not an artist of exile, yet I am reminded of the words of Bertolt Brecht, who compared living in Los Angeles (instead of London) to living in hell. As a London transplant, I have always smirked at those words when feeling especially homesick.

Claressinka Anderson on Friedrich Kunath

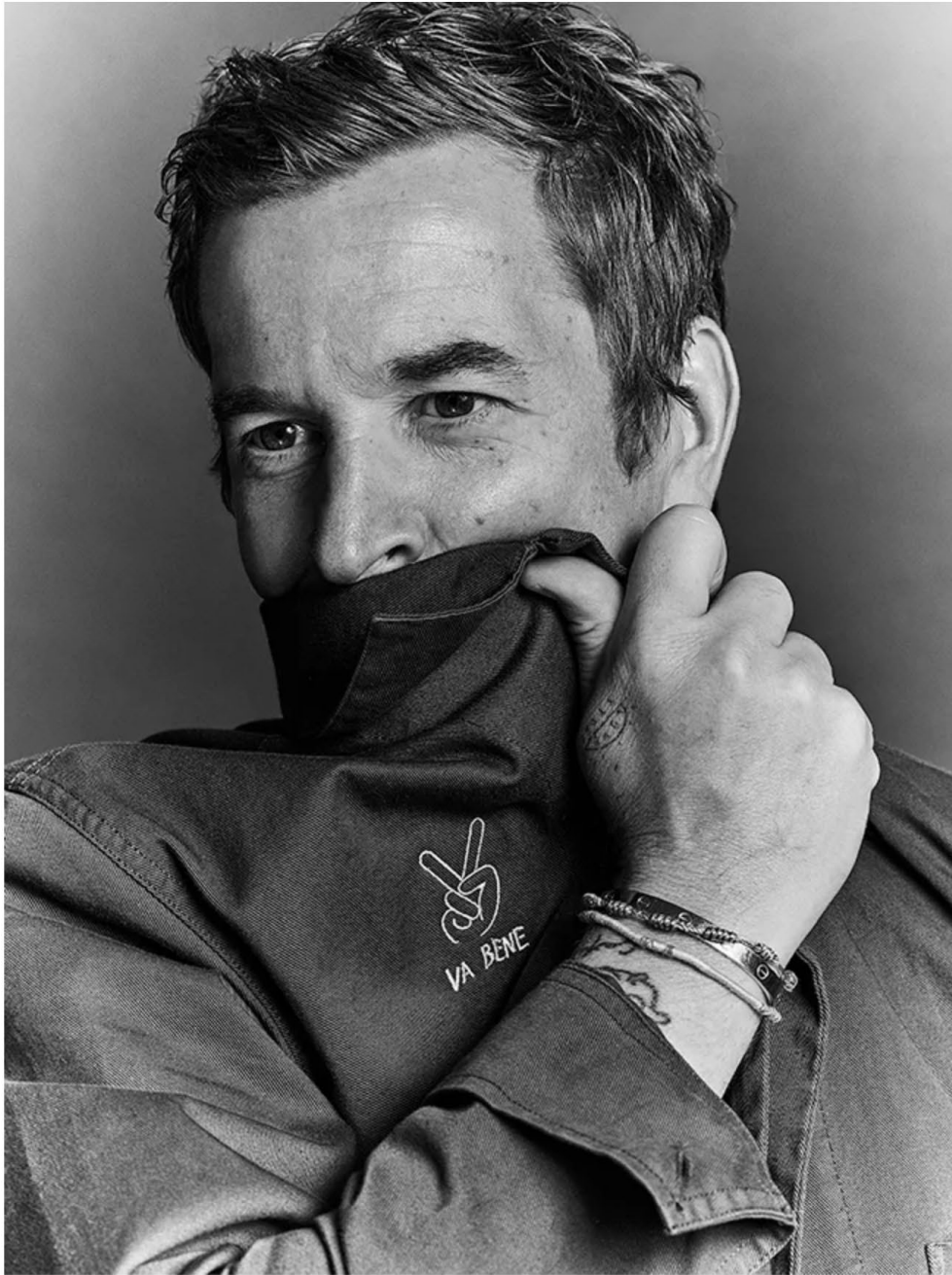


Photo: Joe Pugliese.

Kunath's is the work of someone who is clearly not from Los Angeles but is still deeply rooted in its mythology, and the word "homesick" pops up often in his paintings. He can appreciate the city as only an outsider can: be enamored, seduced, and perhaps even horrified by it in a way that someone from a place—who is truly of a place—cannot. Kunath's 2011 sculpture, titled *The past is a foreign country*, is a man in a Hawaiian shirt standing with an oversized glass snow globe on his head. Eyes closed and nose red, he stands rigidly in a forest of pine trees and snow.

Time folds in Kunath's paintings. From Dürer inspired engravings to 17th century vanitas and Caspar David Friedrich's cliffs overlooking a William Turner sea, centuries of imagery coexist on one visual plane. His work embodies a post-Pop aesthetic wrapped up in the spirit of L.A.'s heyday—the hippy hues, the white smile consumerism of the 1970s. There are snowmen with suitcases in the desert and an orange with a sleepy smile masquerading as a vanitas on a Malibu beach. In a 2013 notebook painting of a California sunset, shadowed palm trees stand dark under a setting sun whose center is a snowy mountain village. Like so many who come to Los Angeles seeking the light, warmth, and promise of freedom, there is always a pull to the past—to what is lost in the incessant, gleaming sunshine. And what is homesickness, if not missing yourself? If not longing for who you once were?

*Claressinka Anderson is a Los Angeles-based poet and writer. She has worked as an art dealer, adviser and curator, and is the founder of Marine Projects. Some of her writing can be found at Autre Magazine, the Los Angeles Press, Artillery Magazine, and The Chiron Review.*

*Joe Pugliese, a California native, specializes in portraiture and shoots for a mixture of editorial and advertising clients. He has recently completed projects for such titles as Wired, Vanity Fair, Men's Journal, and Billboard magazines, as well as advertising campaigns for Netflix, Sony, and AMC.*