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Rich in seduction, rich in allegory

Robert Longo made his mark in the 1980s with images of yuppies caught in struggles, or flinching as if controlled by external forces. With images populated by corporate minions, watchful eyes, warriors, fascist architecture, foreboding machinery and oversized guns, it's no surprise that his work has been interpreted in terms of power, control and emptiness.

At Margo Leavin Gallery, Longo offers a sampling of imagery that has preoccupied him more recently. Large charcoal drawings, as well as small studies in assorted media on velum, all picture colossal waves or offer frame-filling close-ups of red roses.

The wave images, which suggest black-and-white photos while balancing efficient handling of detail with appreciation of the charcoal mark, move from highlights in the unfettered white of the paper to the blackness of densely pigmented dark water.

The paper used for the rose drawings is first dyed an intense red; the image is then created by drawing in the shadows between petals.

The drawings deal with power, control and emptiness in different ways. Pulling you in with the delicacy of their marks, they satisfy up close. But they also fill your periphery, dominating your vision and overwhelming you. You are caught in the trough of the wave or seduced into the void at the center of the rose.

These works articulate a romanticism often sublimated in Longo's previous work but now offered at face value as he gets back to nature. But that doesn't mean he's getting away from culture or society. This is classic Longo in terms of the themes, but it's also new and improved, rich in allegorical layering. The drawings that look out to sea, across the corduroy of incoming sets of waves, sum up the feeling of the whole exhibition: alluring and dominating, and utterly relentless.

Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 N. Robertson, West Hollywood, (310) 273-0603, through Oct. 29. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

Making you feel like a giant

Kantor / Feuer Gallery's inaugural exhibition is an ambitious undertaking by **Phoebe Washburn**, who has converted the space into a walk-in landscape. Washburn, who works with large quantities of castoff materials, cobbles together environments

somewhere between planned architecture and improvisational bricolage, with her own structures taking on an almost parasitic relationship to the spaces that host them.

With scrap plywood and other materials over a substructure of 2-by-4 stud framing, she creates an undulating, deep valley with slopes descending from near the gallery's high ceiling to about waist-level. A trough is cut down the middle so you can walk through it like a giant.

The plywood scraps evoke tectonic plates and land parcels. Heaped upon the structure is soil from which grows plants and weeds fed by a watering system. There is a sense of logic that unfolds and mutates, with simultaneous implications of man's mirroring and messing with a divine or natural order.

A profusion of extras — surveying flags, pencils labeled with the word "bird," assorted hardware — seem intended to imbue the work with greater complexity. But in the end they seem fussy, distracting from the simple but impressive form that has defined some of Washburn's stronger works. Luckily, if you can get beyond the overdressing, that impressive form remains.

Kantor / Feuer Gallery, 7025 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles, (323) 933-6976, through Oct. 22. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.kantorfeuer.com

Finding a good use for art-speak

At the space known as Another Year in LA, **Joe Amrhein** begins with language culled from published art criticism to create an installation titled "Abecedarian." You won't likely notice specific quotations, as the artist plucks individual words or short phrases, many suggestive of art-speak; but most, once out of context, are only suggestive of art when returned to art's proximity by Amrhein. That is achieved via 26 sets of glass shelves, five shelves per set, each meticulously painted with words beginning with one letter of the alphabet.

Light shines down through the shelves and casts legible shadows on the walls. Amrhein often breaks a word into multiple sections across multiple shelves, so that the light, shone from a specific angle, reunifies the word in shadow.

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A few words are even painted in distorted form and then are corrected by the throw of the shadow.

The arrangements of words, offered in an endless array of fonts, vary from group to group. Some appear more like lists, others become a kind of concrete poetry, some verge on abstraction as the result of their layering. One can play endless associative and interpretive games.

The M section, dominated by the word "modernism," suggests an upward trajectory with all the words slanting from lower left to upper right. Almost every word in P is in a dynamic script font, perhaps apropos for "psychedelic," "Picasso" and "post-pop."

"Fixed perspective" is fixed in perspective, thanks to a deliberate correction of distortion in the F section. Though God is nowhere to be found among the G words, the presence of the supreme is implied by the downward, radial thrust of the arrangement.

Amrhein's play with words is engaging and provocative, but the compelling aspect comes from how the materialized and dematerialized come together. The experience enfolds the very pleasure and dilemma to which the work speaks as one attempts to navigate projection, reflection, shadow, overlap and alignment, distortion and correction, picking it apart and piecing it together as one goes.

Another Year in LA, 2121 N. San Fernando Road, Suite 13, Los Angeles, (323) 223-4000, through Oct. 28. Closed Saturdays. www.anotheryearinLA.com

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