

Shotgun Review

Alika Cooper: A Cold Wave

by Zachary Scholz

MARK WOLFE

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Twiggy, 2009; gouache on paper.

Most of the pieces in this packed show are unframed works on paper that depict morosely staring film starlets from the 1950's through the 1970's. The works stretch across several walls including two large floating panels covered by expansive clusters of smaller works. The show's scope and celebrity focus brings to mind Elizabeth Peyton's recent outing at New York's New Museum. However, Alika Cooper, through her near monochromatic palette and confident, brushy handling of gouache, produces a richness of texture and emotion that Peyton's more colorful renderings in oil rarely posses. While Cooper works from film stills and press photographs, she manages to steep her images in a depth of melancholy only hinted at by their celluloid twins. The works embody the visibility of posing and the invisibility of neglect. They are beautiful and at times poignant, yet I can't help but wonder: are these moody portraits of Hollywood's past criticizing the strident sexism that chained these beautiful women to rigid expectations, or do they yearn for the glamour of these bygone days?

The non-starlet works in the show don't clarify Cooper's position, though they do broaden the melancholy--a pathetically

scraggly Christmas tree, an abandoned stuffed panda, and a forlorn phonograph. These images evoke a sense of loss that feels much more intimate and far more banal. I am intrigued by these images, but not satisfied with where these seemingly personal points of sadness intersect with Cooper's brooding depictions of the famous.

"Aliko Cooper: A Cold Wave" is on view at [Mark Wolfe Contemporary Art](#) in San Francisco through October 17, 2009.



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