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Review: Barbed and bold paintings by John Tweddle



"Time Bomb" by John Tweddle, 1969, acrylic on canvas, 78.25 inches by 120 inches. (Brian Forrest / Kayne Griffin Corcoran)

By Leah Ollman

It's not uncommon for museums to encroach upon what used to be the exclusive turf of galleries, to indulge in a bit of reputation inflation by showcasing recent MFAs rather than waiting for them to season and mature. In turn, some galleries, driven by a different set of credibility-attuned motives, have assumed museum-like practices, mounting historically significant exhibitions, complete with scholarly publications.

Kayne Griffin Corcoran's John Tweddle show is of this ilk. It's guest-curated by Alanna Heiss, founder of PS1 (now MoMA PS1) in New York, and drawn from the once-formidable, now-dispersed Scull Collection. The show, documented in a forthcoming catalog, reintroduces Tweddle to L.A., where he lived and last exhibited in the late '80s.

Born in Kentucky in 1938, Tweddle is based in New Mexico. The nine large paintings and dozen drawings here date from the artist's New York years, 1968-73, when his jaunty, folksy jabs at the commodification of art resonated with a burgeoning Pop aesthetic. The canvases have undulating edges, like rag rugs or cartoon speech bubbles. They throb with color and an edgy exuberance. Dollar signs and simplified images of cars and trucks pattern the surface, each emblem of American consumerism an exclamatory icon.

Tweddle's work teems with the spirit of protest, filtered through playful buoyancy. If cynicism -- about selling out, sacrifice, the Vietnam War -- is what drives him, he delivers it with a chuckle rather than a sneer. Tweddle may be a lowercase name in the annals of recent art history, but his bold and wonderfully barbed work is worth knowing.

Kayne Griffin Corcoran, 1201 S. La Brea Ave., (310) 586-6886, through May 3. Closed Sundays and Mondays.
www.kaynegriffincorcoran.com