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HEATHER CANTRELL AT KINKEAD CONTEMPORARY

An exhibition of photography, both goofy and dry

BY CHRISTOPHER MILES

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A Study in Portraiture (Christina Mack), 2009

What has made Heather Cantrell such an interesting photographer over the last few years has been her ability to interrogate the underpinnings, conventions and functions of photography and its particular genres while nonetheless extending, and even honoring, the very traditions she problematizes. She is simultaneously conceptualist, classicist and critic in the most engaged sense. She's also — sometimes more goofily, sometimes more dryly — playful and humorous, and there's no better example than her current exhibition at Kinkead Contemporary, which strikes somewhere between goofy and dry. In a show curated by [Caryn Coleman](#), who exhibited Cantrell's work at her

sixspace gallery before hopping to London to study in the curatorial program at Goldsmiths, Cantrell turns what began as a 2008 studio project of inviting friends and colleagues to her studio for portraits with props and costumes into a project that is both nomadic and locational. Cantrell's theater of the portrait comes in acts, the second of which will turn up in London this fall. The first involves the conversion of Kinkead Contemporary's entry space into a vintage portrait studio, complete with racked costumes, props and painted backdrops. Passing through what is both work space and installation, you arrive in a backroom displaying small, framed black-and-white prints, all portraits of local art folk and culturati, ranging from Coleman the curator, done up anonymously yet self-effacingly in a sheep mask and holding a Ouija board; to [Laura Howe](#), one of the **doyens behind the Matrushka Construction clothing line and boutique, sporting a print dress in front of a draped print backdrop**; to Circus Gallery proprietor [John Knuth](#), standing proudly in front of a California flag. In collaboration with her sitters, Cantrell tweaks at the tradition of portraiture and its entanglements with the construction of identity and the establishment of class and tribe but embedded in what might seem like a mélange of in-crowd, inside jokes and critique from and for within is a humor and generosity that lends to the biggest risk this work takes — openness.

Kinkead Contemporary, 6029 Washington Blvd., Culver City; Tue.-Sat., 11 a.m.-6 p.m., through Aug 15. (310) 838-7400 or www.kinkeadcontemporary.com, For more info go to www.studyinportraiture.com.

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