

SUSAN MOGUL AT JANCAR GALLERY

Susan Mogul is better known these days as a video artist/alternative filmmaker who has spent a career finding ways to spin the specifics of her own background — never married, childless, Jewish in the age of feminism and assimilation — into works that function as both a kind of autobiography and as accessible, cathartic, comedic essay. But the earlier years of her practice on the West Coast, which began when the New York transplant wanted to study in the Feminist Art Program at CalArts in 1973, were defined as well by performance and photo-based works, which, along with documentary material and ephemera, comprise the bulk of this small but significant exhibition. Vintage documentary photos suggest performances that fused situational aesthetics, the ethos of the happening and transgressive strategies with a kind of feminist- and feminine-infused borscht belt shtick, and while it's hard to get at the specifics of these bygone events, the sense of humor still emanates. Stealing the show are a series of collaged photographs from the late-70s, in which the artist inhabits Moses Mogul, a hippie-drag wanderer alter ego who seems equal parts Janis Joplin, Bette Midler, Phil Silvers, Sid Caesar and Moses as played by Charlton Heston. Via cut and pasté, Mogul inserts this character, in some cases multiplied

Art Around Town
by Christopher Miles

into an army or tribe, into scenes in which montaged postcard and travel photos, some of them of L.A., double as epic biblical backdrops. Mogul's sense of humor is front and center in one image, in which the Disney-era animation trope of picturing the hand drawing the very scene of which it is part, makes for a representation of God as a well-manicured woman's hand penning an 11th Commandment that reads like an abridged version of the Equal Rights Amendment (a household topic at the time Mogul made the work). What's humorously poignant about this and other images of the series is that, with their Dada-meets-old-masters aesthetics, they seem to have been nostalgic and elegiac even from the moment they were created, simultaneously hopeful and wistful regarding dramedies of class, gender and culture, which still play like old movies.

JANCAR GALLERY

961 Chung King
Road, L.A.; Wed.-
Sat., 12-5, through
December 19.
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jancargallery.com