



Contemporary Art Review

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Catharine Czudej *Imagine All the People* (2019) (installation view). Image courtesy of the artist and Michael Benevento. Photo: Marten Elder.

Keith J. Varadi | 30 May 2019

Catharine Czudej at Michael Benevento

So often, artworks are viewed on or through the lens of the Internet. Blogs and Instagram accounts tend to privilege work that photographs well and is well-represented on a flat, digital interface. *Imagine All the People*, Catharine Czudej's current exhibition at Michael Benevento, disregards the digital, and instead favors an in-person experience that is nearly impossible to



capture for on-screen consumption. Upon being buzzed into the gallery and stepping into Czudej's show, visitors are immediately confronted by *Cheering Crowd* (2019), a wallpapered stock photo of well-disposed and generic people needlessly and ceaselessly fawning. Are they especially enthusiastic about the artwork in their presence, or just elated to see each new person that approaches?

As repeated images of these fake folks continue to applaud along certain walls, forged flat-screen televisions (*The TVs*, 2018-ongoing) made of polyurethane hang around on other walls. In documentation, these idiot boxes fall flat (as matte and monochromatic facades), which is kind of a funny art-joke in itself—people always wonder how to best document video works. But with these analog sculptural pieces, the artist removes the would-be videos, and thus also removes any trace of narrative or imagistic qualities. In doing so, she turns the screens into sardonic satires of Greenbergian desire—ah, the superiority of flush, pedantic, black, and blue surfaces! But up close, the finessed material subtleties allow these molded props to unexpectedly pop, like hi-def blemishes on celebrity skin.

In the back rooms is *Waterworks* (2019), an elaborate, chaotic network of fountains, composed of buckets, hoses, phone books, plastic piping, and power cables. The buckets are filled with water, coins, and other sundry objects. Poking up out of them are cast, mask-like faces and cartoonish, gloved hands giving the sign of the horns. During my visit, water was spraying out of this system's figurative forms at such an unpredictable pace that the gallery employee seemed visibly nervous about Czudej's playful anarchy potentially soaking the space. Art can be so predictable these days, especially online; it's always pleasant to be surprised, especially in real life. When you spend such an excessive amount of time stressing over hashtags, shout-outs, clapbacks, and call-outs, it's easy to forget how beautifully messy and human things can get once you log out and check in.

Catharine Czudej: Imagine All the People runs from April 21–June 8, 2019 at Michael Benevento (3712 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90004).