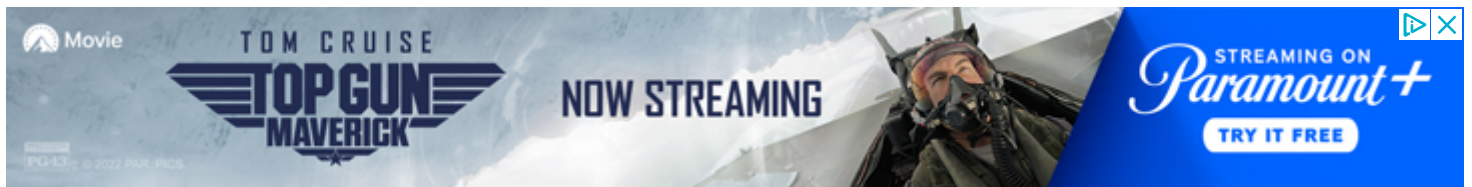




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CULTURE MONSTER BLOG

## Art Review: Camilo Ontiveros at Steve Turner Contemporary Art

BY CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT | ART CRITIC

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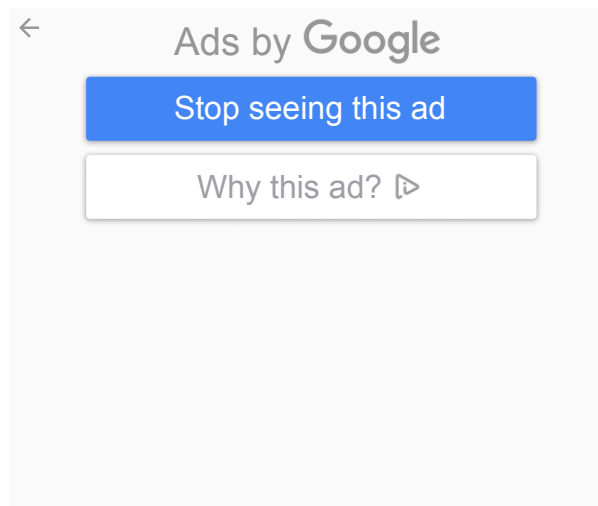


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In the Middle Eastern folk-tale of Aladdin, a sorcerer tricks Aladdin's unsuspecting wife into turning over a wondrous magic lamp by posing as a merchant who offers a deal that's too good to be true. He'll exchange new lamps for old. Something of that enchanted storytelling is at work in a quietly engaging show by Camilo Ontiveros at [Steve Turner Contemporary Art](#).

For his solo gallery debut, Ontiveros posted street signs offering to buy new or used washing machines and dryers, operational or not, for \$15 apiece. A lime-green sign is posted in the gallery window, together with two beat-up machines that he bought.

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Inside, the gallery looks like a used-appliance store, albeit with a twist. A total of 20 washing machines — Maytag, GE, Whirlpool and, especially, Kenmore, the popular Sears brand — are on display, most in varying states of rusting decay that mars their white, off-white and almond enameled surfaces. They're clustered in groups, the repeated boxy shapes suggesting the serial forms of Minimalist sculpture — except for one anomaly: Near the center of the room, an ancient drum-shaped machine, complete with old-fashioned wringer and vertical agitator, stands in splendid isolation.

Four other machines are also isolated, although each of these is pushed up against a different wall. Ontiveros sent these four to an automotive body shop for an exquisite paint jobs. Bright green, rich eggplant, hot pink (tellingly, a Lady Kenmore) and burnished gold — the machines have been transformed into hybrids of sculpture and painting.

Specifically, they've been endowed with the surface glamour of a 1960s-era Finish Fetish work by John McCracken, Ron Davis or Craig Kauffman. The industrial tools those artists put to the service of making excruciatingly pristine, techno-futurist art are here embodied in broken-down domestic machinery.

Juxtaposed with beat-up machines that might stand a chance for functional rehabilitation or, at the very least, eco-friendly salvage, Ontiveros' beautifully painted works assume a strange aura of suspended animation. They've been plucked from one

familiar commercial system of economic exchange and inserted into another — the market for durable goods detoured into the market for durable art.

Ontiveros doesn't elevate one system over the other; instead, he deftly positions them side by side. The resulting friction lights up different value systems. The battered machines face a dilemma, which is not without practical, social and even spiritual dimensions. Which is a more valuable path to take: restoration, transformation or sanctification?

In the rear gallery a set of three artist's books is placed on shelves. Their format is plainly meant to recall Edward Ruscha's classic 1966 artist's book, "Every Building on the Sunset Strip." On long sheets of accordion-folded paper, Ontiveros has printed photographs of metal-scrap salvage, appliance repair-shop business cards and loaded salvage-trucks.

Ruscha's famous chronicle of the low-rise commercial strip along Sunset Boulevard between Fairfax Avenue and Doheny Drive was made by mounting a motorized camera on the back of a pick-up and photographing every building he passed in one drive-by going East and one going West. The result dismantled the precious aura of refined imagery and exquisite printing that had deadened camera-work, desperate for legitimacy as a fine art; instead, Ruscha offered a witty, scrappy riff on "street photography."

As his washer-dryer installation does for the Finish Fetishists, Ontiveros' book trio does something similar for the Pop Conceptual strategy Ruscha pioneered more than 40 years ago. A keen homage to a master, it knocks "Every Building . . ." off the reverential pedestal on which it now stands and hauls it off to the salvage shop. The savvy installation in the other room cleans up another tired legacy, giving it a crisp, new sheen — while also announcing the arrival of a sharp young artist to watch.

[Steve Turner Contemporary](#), 6026 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 931-3721, through Aug. 15.  
Closed Sunday through Tuesday.

# --Christopher Knight

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Christopher Knight

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Los Angeles Times art critic Christopher Knight won the 2020 [Pulitzer Prize for criticism](#) (he was a finalist for the prize in 1991, 2001 and 2007). In 2020, he also received the Lifetime Achievement Award in Art Journalism from the Rabkin Foundation.

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