

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Wallpaper*

Mixed media: Bret Easton Ellis and Alex Israel join forces at Gagosian Beverly Hills

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At the Gagosian's Beverly Hills outpost, artist Alex Israel and writer Bret Easton Ellis have dug deep into the shallow Angeleno psyche in a way that only two LA natives can. Photography: Jeff McClane. Copyright Alex Israel and Bret Easton Ellis. Courtesy iStock and Gagosian Gallery

At Gagosian Beverly Hills – the powerhouse gallery's outpost in the land of sunshine, celebrity, and extreme ego-centricism – Alex Israel and Bret Easton Ellis have dug deep into the shallow Angeleno psyche in a way that only two LA natives can.

The unexpected duo unveiled a set of collaborative paintings last week, the opening timed as a precursor to the Gagosian's annual star-studded Oscars party. The works take new samples of Ellis's text – brief narratives on the trials and tribulations of seeking fame – and lay them across quintessential stock images of LA that Israel selected and purchased the licensing to. (The actual labour, meanwhile, was carried about by the Warner Brothers production crew that regularly fabricates Israel's work.) It's a millennial interpretation of Los Angeles' heritage of text-based paintings, in the tradition of both Ed Ruscha and John Baldessari (who, coincidentally, opened a show of new text-based paintings in LA just before).

In the gallery, familiar tropes of the Los Angeles quest for celebrity abound: musings on Instagram, Uber, and Chateau Marmont; images of the Downtown LA skyline, the pastel ocean sunset and palm trees galore. The two together were meant to look like the credits that float over the opening scenes of a film.

‘In Los Angeles, I knew so many people who were ashamed that they were born and not made,’ one reads, over a backdrop of hot-pink terrazzo and the familiar shadow of a palm frond. Another, foregrounded by the silhouettes of palm trees that seemed to be swaying in the wind, reads ‘I’m going to be a very different kind of star’.

Different kind of star is a wholly accurate description for Ellis and Israel. As author and artist, they officially live outside the realm of Hollywood, but the two have risen to fame, in LA-parlance, Hollywood-adjacent. Their respective works have relied heavily on their distillation of LA cliché and iconography, which inextricably revolve around The Industry, but they perpetually blur the fine line between criticism and celebration. Ellis’s 1985 breakout novel, *Less Than Zero*, surveyed the depraved landscape of privileged LA excess. ‘I’ve thought about the book as a readymade,’ Israel told Ellis in a 2010 *Purple* magazine interview. ‘Its text seems plucked right out of life.’