

Sadow Birk

Los Angeles Times

Weekend Gallery Report: Cut-ups, abstraction and the Quran illuminated

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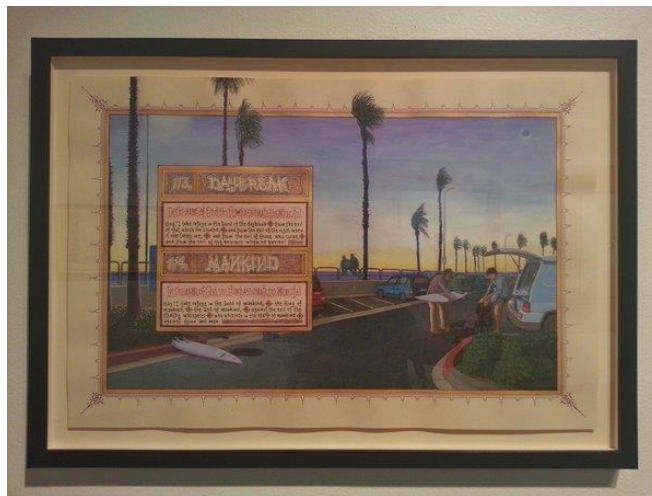
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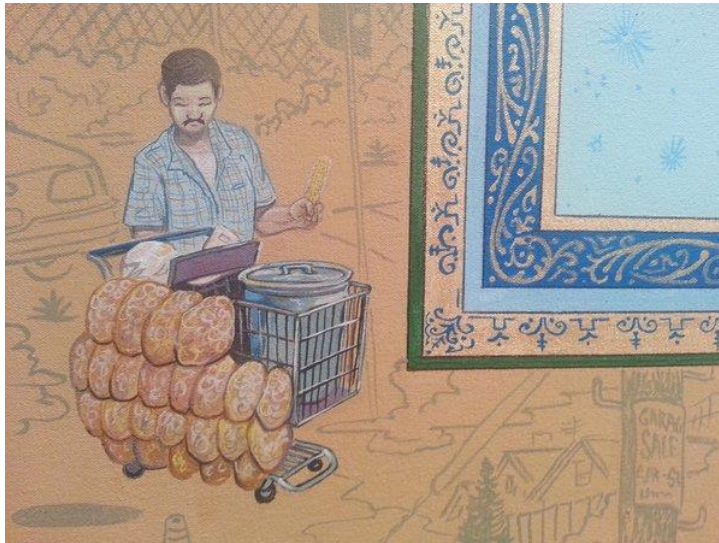
By Carolina A. Miranda
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Chinese sculpture, Iranian video, abstraction, figuration, cut-ups from the 1960s and an American artist who has taken it upon himself to illuminate the Quran. This past Saturday, I managed to get in a round of gallery hopping in the afternoon hours. It was a bit of a testosterone-fest, with works that were big and bigger. (I may have to make up for it next time with a ladies-only report.) What follows is a very informal tour of what I saw:



EVERYTHING IS ILLUMINATED. After Venice, it was on to Culver City, where Koplin Del Rio is featuring the work of SoCal artist Sadow Birk. For roughly a decade, Birk transcribed, by hand, the entire Quran and illuminated it with scenes from everyday American life. The series, which Birk started showing in early installations in 2009, has been well covered in the media ([here](#) , [here](#) and [here](#); plus Birk has an explainer on his website), so I won't go into its whole history. But even if you've seen them before, these works are worth revisiting for their meditative qualities. I particularly like this depiction

of Sura 113 — "Say, 'I take refuge in the Lord of the daybreak'" — one of a series of invocations that offers protection from evil. Here, Birk shows it against a sherbet-y California sky at dawn, a time when surfers are conducting their own daybreak rituals. (Birk, by the way, is a surfer.)



THE ACT OF LOOKING. Birk's show is not the sort of thing you can rush through, since his ink-and-gouache illuminations are not only laden with text, they also feature myriad images in the background and margins. This image is from a larger painting titled "The Material Realm: The Heavens (Yuri Gagarin and Neil Armstrong)" and shows a common L.A. sight: a corner street vendor likely selling champurrado.

Sandow Birk: "American Qur'an" at Koplin del Rio through Oct. 17. 6031 Washington Blvd., Culver City, (310) 836-9055. koplindelrio.com.