

# Art Review: Jacob Berendes at Heavy Manners Los Angeles

By Laura Paul

**In a time when walking through Los Angeles might**

as well be watching *Wings of Desire*, Jacob Berendes's *Animal Year* is welcome work for pandemic grief and malaise. Originally conceived of in 2004, his series of handmade stuffed animals has found new resonance in our deeply uncomfy times. Heavy Manners Library founder Matthew James-Wilson contacted Berendes in 2021 about showing the project, the first LA opening for the Providence-based artist.

While Berendes's projects tend to create familiarity and connection out of institutionally-based models—the storefront, the newspaper, the artist residency (HBML, Mothers News, and CTRI Innovations, respectively), less has been written about how his works make use of duration and time. Like Mothers News, *Animal Year* charts and documents making art as ritual practice, not reliance on fickle spurts of inspiration. In this case, he made about one work daily for almost a year.

Connections to Mike Kelley's iconic childhood toys come to mind. Berendes's pieces overtly reference Man Ray, René Magritte, Claes Oldenburg, and Keith Haring. I found myself especially drawn to those creatures that tended to a sense of negation and absence. Some titles reflect this, like *Shadow of A Stuffed Animal Yet-To-Be-Made*, a dark patch of fabric mounted directly on the wall, and *Ghost Of A Person*, Possibly Thomas Edison, which hangs from the ceiling and is lit to refract shadows against the blank gallery space. *Afterimage Of A Person In A Black Hooded Sweatshirt* was moving to me, a white outline with a hole cut for a face that plays with color perception.



The inclusion of *A Pool Of Glamorous Blood*, a work presumed lost as stated in the mandatory booklet that accompanies the physical objects, may be missing from the collection, but scraps of the same piece were incorporated into a motley quilt that hangs in the back of the gallery. Many of the fabrics came from discarded clothing and donation boxes, and materials include denim, plaid, upholstery, and foam—whatever was on hand. It's as if our collective impressions also won't go missing, even when we're gone. There's something reassuring to see this art taking the form of figures traditionally made to soothe children in our current destructive atmosphere. These are items commonly held in the dark, named dearly, and clutched in bed, created out of the disregarded and left behind.



**Not only are there lost objects, events, and days,**

like one piece that spans more than 24 hours because of the artist's bout of sickness, but the lived, experiential capturing of temporality. Rather than an unrelatable attempt at objectivity, these are not only intimate but animate things. Like an alternative calendar system, one by the people, for the people, as the text also documents Berendes's own performances and attendance at local shows at the time. *Animal Year* systematically charts like a DIY Taryn Simon but reads on the wall like a lively street mural or a blown-up comic book. Less like collected specimens in a cabinet of curiosities and more like an abundance of life. A guest book of the good (and bad) times.

The fleeting may so infrequently go noticed, and yet here we are in a time of hauntings. But art can connect us, get passed around, even comfort dogs when they sleep, as Berendes's quilt once did. *Animal Year* teaches something about negotiating discipline and discomfort, perfection and improvisation, criticism and care. How thankful we should be for the life-affirming right now and the artists who choose close attention rather than indifference, as their practices.

**Jacob Berendes's *Animal Year*** was on view from October 6th-16th at Heavy Manners located at 1200 N Alvarado Blvd Unit D, Los Angeles, CA. For more information visit: <https://heavymannerslibrary.com/events/animal-year>

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