Interview with Brenna Youngblood
By Rosanna Albertini
September, 2013

Activation, a painted description of our wrinkled, fragile and wonderful life, by Brenna Youngblood, in the space of Honor Fraser Gallery, Los Angeles, September 12 - October 26.

Rosanna Albertini: In seven years your photography, multimedia collage and paint work have been in prestigious galleries in LA and have started to migrate to New York and Europe. How do you feel about it?
Brenna Youngblood: Lucky.

RA: How did you start doing art?
BY: I always drew as a kid. From twelve on I grew up in Victorville, a high desert quite depressed city. Before, my family lived in Miraloma, a rural community near Riverside among cows, chickens, horses, no sidewalks. I only came to Los Angeles, as a kid, with an uncle who was a preacher in a church next to Watts. In high school I started to take B &W photographs of the desert. Sometimes I am asked if my paintings describe urban life. It's funny, I come from suburbia.

RA: Then you moved to UCLA in 2003, after undergraduate school in Long Beach.
BY: Yes, I also had to have a job. Mark Bradford was important for me, as well as curator Kris Kuramitsu, supporting me to these days. And my fellow-classmates: Brian Bress for instance, and Annie Lapin. Jeff Wall, David Hammons, William Eggleston, painter Alison Miller, Cartier Bresson, and John Divola are my favorite artists.

RA: About understanding your recent paintings, I need to break into your vision, as mine is covered with cultural references brought up by vague similarities of colors and forms: Cy Twombly, Jasper Johns, or Rauschenberg, often considered an artist with whom you share something. Or not? Let's pick a painting, Lawn of the Dead. (The title was suggested by a Zombie movie: Shaun of the Dead.)
BY: It plays between an interior and an outdoor space. The TV is outside, as if it was your neighbor peeking over the fence into your yard. There is nature in the TV, a photo of a plant painted over with transparent varnish, but I don't enjoy it.

RA: Does human nature come first? Look at the cigarette butt glued on the right.
BY: Nice way to tell it.
RA: *The first exhibition was in 2005, what kind of work did you show?*
BY: In 2005 I was in a two person show with Macrae Semans at Hayworth Gallery in Los Angeles, where I exhibited photomontage works in found frames.

RA: *How does your art and life mix together?*
BY: My life is art, from the minute I wake up until I go to bed, I am making work or engaging with art or the art world in one way or another.

RA: *A year of painting at Honor Fraser: What did you have in mind making these intense surfaces in which images and alphabetic letters, papers or threads appear to be transitory visitors; lines are very thin, other lines are filled with so many joyful colors that geometry becomes a crack in the skin, and smiles?*
BY: I definitely wanted to create a variety of surfaces using both colorful and muted palates. Surface is and has always been integral to my practice. The transformation of the surface of my paintings mimics objects, materials, and textures from the real world (i.e. rusted metal, wood). At the same time I scaled back the layering on a number of paintings so that natural wood grain was only thinly veiled by washes of color. I like introducing familiar objects like the light bulb, the door handle, and wood grain. The paintings are “a slice of life,” if you will. They definitely reflect the everyday not just for myself, I think for others as well. They are not only for looking at.

RA: *ONLY is the only painted word emerging as a strong statement...*
BY: The “only” references carpool only signs literally but taken by itself it’s a word suggesting isolation or even alliterations like lonely. Something poetic and existential emerges from a common signifier - something that we see every day.