

LALAMA

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ART, CULTURE AND THE CITY

"There is no question about keeping my passion for art alive. The only question is of growth and sustainability as a career. Photographs are easy. Being a working artist is the hard part."

—Paul Mpagi Sepuya



WILD CARD

Meet Jay Ezra Nayssan, the gallerist who refuses to play by the rules.

BY **JANELLE ZARA** PORTRAIT BY **DANIEL TRESE**

BASED ON CO-FOUNDER JAY EZRA

Nayssan's description, West Hollywood's newly opened ANNEX sounds like a new-age wellness retreat. "We're championing a space of transition, encouraging artists to really spread their wings and flex their muscles," he says. "We provide them with an opportunity to restore fluidity to their creativity. It's quite difficult to do that on a six-week exhibition model when the gallery is doing eight fairs a year."

In practice, ANNEX is something between a gallery and a boutique—a cabinet of curiosities Nayssan founded with M+B gallery owner Benjamin Trigano and opened in January. Their mission was to provide a home for the kinds of artist creations that don't often make it out of the studio, the kind of interdisciplinary work that exists, "in the in-between, and doesn't necessarily mélange with their exhibition persona," says Nayssan—silk scarves by Max Hooper Schneider, for example, an artist best known for incorporating live ecologies into his work. The space also brims with various potions and medicinal herbs, and a potent undercurrent of erotica in the form of pre-written love letters by Andrew Berardini on Sunset Hotel stationery and latex underwear by artist Anna Gloria Flores. "We really wanted to send our message of generosity and abundance and acceptance and community," says Nayssan, which apparently means having a little something for everyone.

Nayssan, a Los Angeles native and first-generation American-Iranian, has a penchant for breaking with art world formality. Alongside ANNEX he also runs Del Vaz Projects, an exhibition space he opened in his Sawtelle-Japantown apartment

in 2014, with little delineation between the gallery and his home. When visitors enter, they're welcomed with tea and dates and a little chat. "Del Vaz comes from the Farsi phrase 'Dast o Del Vaz,'" Nayssan explains, "which means 'open hands and open heart.'" He showed Hooper Schneider there early on, followed by regular group exhibitions and frequent special events—a film screening, perhaps, or a class on floral arrangement as a healing ritual.

Nayssan's background is refreshingly devoid of a traditional art education: his credentials include a degree in anthropology from UCLA, an MBA from HEC Paris, and a masters in construction management from NYU. (By day, he's in his family's business of real estate development and management, and is known to oversee construction sites in a combination of Margiela and Carhartt.) He's found his so-called "outsider" status largely to his benefit. "I didn't go to an art school where everything is categorized," he says, learning instead the holistic approach of an anthropologist. "I did create these relationships in my head, between a filmmaker and a painter and a furniture designer, practices that were otherwise seen as disparate or incoherent."

In September, ANNEX is set to host an exhibition of Misha Kahn, his first on the West Coast. Nayssan describes Kahn's sculptural approach to design—furniture that is scrappy, amorphous and occasionally anthropomorphic—as post-functionalism, in which "scale, texture, and shape shouldn't be restrictions or parameters to work within but rather wild cards to throw on the table." It's the perfect fit within a space where the rules of the game no longer apply.

Jay Ezra Nayssan holding a sterling silver cutlery set by Oren Pinhassi on top of a Candlestick Holder by Greg Ito.



Annex's summer 2018 installation featuring from left to right: Alina Perkins folding screen, Brittany Mojo ceramic vessels, Skye Chamberlain aluminum stools, Mathew Brandt velvet burnout, Andiseh Avini carpet, Michael Parker stacking melon lamp and a Pedro Friedeberg desk.



PHOTOS BY ED MUMFORD

