

# John Paul Rosenberg at Co-Lab Projects, Austin

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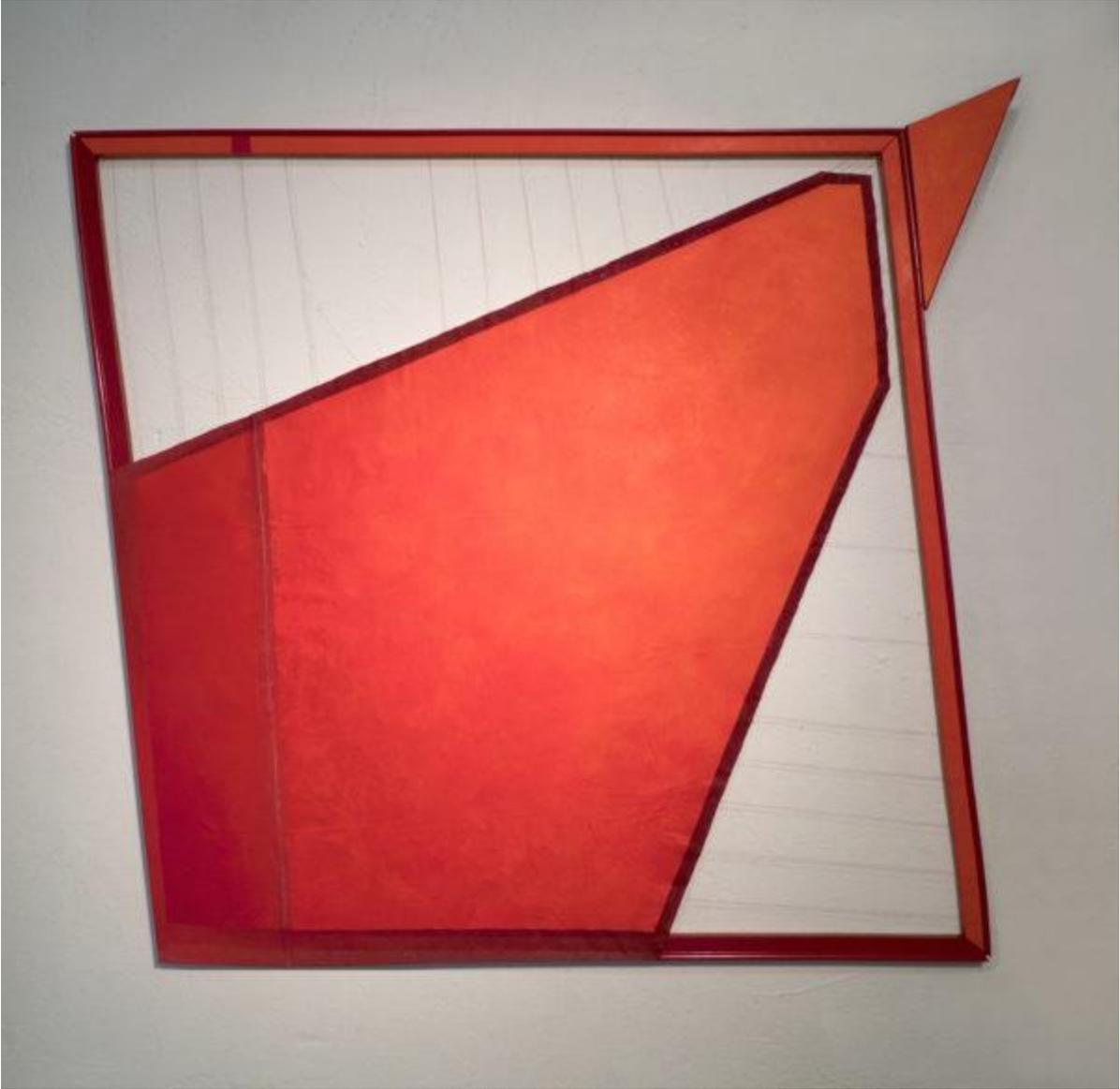
A few years ago I traveled in Mongolia. It was a surreal trip; I was going through a difficult time in my life and wanted to be somewhere remote. When I arrived in Ulaanbaatar I learned that most of the people who came to Mongolia usually stay for weeks at a time, while I was only meant to be in town for a week. This meant that I had to take a tour alone, just me and my guide driving through the vast expanse of the Mongolian desert and plains, usually off-road, in a four-wheel-drive Toyota van. The guide spoke almost no English, and I spoke literally no Mongolian. So we drove in silence and the trip was marked by pulling up to a tent where the guide would command me to “nap!” and then fling the canvas sleeve open to pure white desert light when it was time to do some tourist activity, like ride a camel or go see a stone phallus by a waterfall couples visited to alleviate fertility woes. What I remember most about the trip was the sleeve being pulled back and the experience of opening my eyes from slumber to a moment of confusion, reflection and limitless expanse.



I was acutely reminded of this experience with John Paul Rosenberg's show *There isn't any is*, at Co-Lab Projects in Austin. A series of pieces fusing "low" materials such as workman's tarps intermingle with "high" accoutrement such as felt, fur and tassels. The different colored tarps are folded at the corner revealing a white plane. As written in the exhibition's statement:

*"For this exhibition, the artist uses humble materials and techniques, like deconstruction of the traditional frame by cutting and transmuting the work's surface. These fragmenting techniques create voids in the work, but these spaces are not truly empty: they are spaces of potential. The 'nothingness' creates possibilities that allow the works to physically become a part of their surroundings, and symbolically act as a window for personal and communal conditions, connectivity, untapped potentiality and multiplicity."*

Like most gallery statements, this language is a bit grandiose and nebulous, but the show is imbued with a sense of possibility. There is an alchemic energy in the pieces, the collage of disparate materials fuse into mysterious and enticing portals, the white walls of the gallery space become infinite.





The rest of the pieces vary in impact. A few installed in response to the surroundings of the gallery fade into background. There is a nice set of pieces that resemble the sun and moon as inverses, but they lack much heft beyond aesthetic pleasantries. The four tarp pieces are the centerpieces of the show, unsentimental and elusive, conjuring memories in the viewer of moments of a break in the dull, dirge narrative of life, when the window slides free and open and the mind mercifully draws a blank.

*Through June 3 at Co-Lab Projects, Austin.*  
also by Neil Fauerso