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'Pacific Standard Time': Latin American Art Sweeps Southern California



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From Mexico Tourism Board

The Los Angeles-wide, multimuseum megaexhibition of Latin American art questions the very existence of borders, wall or no wall.

By Rebecca Milzoff on August 24, 2017

"None of us could have forecast where this country would be right now," says Joan Weinstein with a rueful laugh. The Getty Foundation's deputy director is thinking back to four years ago, when she and her team were first conceptualizing "Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA"—now a gargantuan collaboration across more than 70 arts institutions in Southern California, united in a mission to showcase Latino and Latin American art. Back then, the idea simply seemed like a natural extension of the first "Pacific Standard Time" initiative—an archival project that in 2011 resulted in 68 exhibitions all focusing on the history of art in Los Angeles.

"I think we always thought it was important for the history of Southern California to understand those roots," Weinstein continues. "But now the importance of maintaining our connections between north and south feels very important." And as the United States' relationship with its southern neighbors becomes increasingly hostile, this ambitious new iteration of "Pacific Standard Time" (September 15–January 31) feels as much like an act of resistance as it does like an art show.



Courtesy Manuel Delgado; Liliana Porter, *Arquitetura da Exclusão, Photo Digital, 2010*; COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GALERIA FORTES VILAÇA, SÃO PAULO; JUDITHE HERNÁNDEZ, *THE PURIFICATION* (2013); Omar Pimentá

The Getty's planning partners are the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and its downtown rival, the Museum of Contemporary Art; the Hammer Museum; and UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center. Chon Noriega, the director of the research center, ran with the idea of borders—those that exist and those that might be erased—in cocurating one of the major focused shows within "PST: LA/LA," namely LACMA's "Home—So Different, So Appealing" (through October 15). "It sure has become topical over the last six months," Noriega says, "but in some ways we're dealing with issues fairly persistent over the last 70 years, in terms of notions of what home is. Internal and external migration, flows of labor and capital across the Americas—that's always been there."

As Noriega points out, Latino and Latin American artists have often been presented only in an "ethnic-specific" way that emphasizes their differences, excluding them from the American scene. He hopes the universal concept of "home" will serve as a jumping-off point to "break those boundaries down to say, 'Where are the fuzzy edges?'" Noriega mentions a particularly moving piece among the diverse works in the show that illustrates his point. *María's Great Expedition*, a photographic series by Christina Fernandez, documents her greatgrandmother's migration from southern Mexico to the American Southwest as a journey parallel to that of Lewis and Clark—"putting the question of immigration in that same narrative," he says.

The subject gets a particularly deep exploration at the Craft & Folk Art Museum's show "The U.S.-Mexico Border: Place, Imagination, and Possibility." Museum director Suzanne Isken assembled a research group to travel to Tijuana and Juárez, Mexico; El Paso, Texas; and San Diego. "They really began to change their concept of the border," Isken says. "That there wasn't, like, a Mexico and a California. People go back and forth, live in one place and work in another." The border, as it's so often portrayed by politicians, isn't a clear-cut line, but "a lived experience" of "ongoing, interconnected community, all the way across to Texas."



Courtesy jdc Fine Art; Albert Chong; Photograph by Harry Shunk, The Estate of Juan Downey, New York, via The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gerardo Moterrubio; Courtesy Marie Orensanz and the artist; Laguna Art Museum Collection, gift of Nancy Dustin Wall Moure

Tanya Aguiñiga, an installation artist in Isken’s show who grew up in Tijuana, says the border “completely shaped me as a person and an artist. Growing up next to it and crossing it each day to attend school, I operate from a place that questions authority, seeks to unearth biases, and gives a platform to marginalized people.” (Her work will use sculpture to explore the experiences of transnational populations.) Other pieces in the show range from a Trojan horse that sits on the border (by Marco Ramírez, aka ERRE) to musical instruments made from objects gathered in the desert (by Guillermo Galindo).

“With Trump coming in and this whole wall idea—it’s sort of scary and shocking and a call to arms,” Isken says. “I think the message of this show will be loud and clear: Things aren’t that simple. It’s not black-and-white.”

The ambitions of “PST: LA/LA” extend beyond current issues and beyond Los Angeles. The initiative’s organizers intend it to set the stage for future scholarship, to establish stronger connections among museums and academic institutions in Southern California (including the frequently feuding LACMA and MOCA), and to continue a freewheeling spirit of collaboration long after its four months are over—a spirit that, one hopes, can spill over into the larger art world, where too often competition sets invisible dividing lines between institutions. “With each museum telling their piece of the story, there’s often overlap,” Weinstein says. “That kind of messiness actually helps audiences understand. In some ways, all of Southern California will be one great exhibition—and that tells a richer story.” *pacificstandardtime.org* (<http://pacificstandardtime.org>)

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