



Pomona, between 1969 and 1973, had the most radical art program, not only in California, but probably in the U.S.," says Rebecca McGrew, senior curator at the Pomona College Museum of Art. Yet for decades, Pomona has ended up as a footnote in artists' biographies. Such is the nature of the L.A. land-

scape: its vastness and impenetrability can keep even the most outrageous events veiled in obscurity. But not for much longer.

◀ **Lili Lakich's *Vacancy/No Vacancy*, 1972, is in the show "Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building," at Otis College of Art and Design, part of "Pacific Standard Time."**

Beginning in October, more than 60 institutions around Southern California—the Pomona College Museum of Art among them—will unveil a string of exhibitions devoted to the art of post-war Los Angeles.

Conceived and led by the Getty Foundation and Research Institute, "Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980," as the series is called, will document the region's important artists, movements, and locations—in the hope of reevaluating L.A.'s place within the larger art universe.

"The whole story of modern art looks very different when told from the West Coast," says the Getty Research Institute's deputy director Andrew Perchuk, who is codirector of "Pacific Standard Time" and cocurator of "Crosscurrents in L.A. Painting and Sculpture, 1950–1970," one of the Getty Center's related shows. "Yes, there were some good Abstract Expressionist painters here, but that wasn't the big thing. Instead, you had hard-edge painting, a kind of minimalism that existed here before it was in vogue anywhere else. You had ceramic sculpture, which would have been unthinkable in New York. And, of course, you get something like Robert Irwin's Light and Space art."

In order to tell the rich and complex story of the Los Angeles art scene,

## L.A. Stories

Shining light on uncatalogued archives, misplaced works, and undocumented careers, more than 60 venues in Southern California present shows on the art of postwar Los Angeles

BY CAROLINA A. MIRANDA

Claremont, California, is not exactly the kind of place that jumps to mind when considering cutting-edge centers of art production. Tucked into the far-eastern fringe of Los Angeles County, it is best known for its liberal-arts colleges and quaint downtown area. But for a time, beginning in the late 1960s, the city—specifically, Pomona College—was at the center of some highly experimental art making. It was there that James Turrell unveiled his first light pieces and Chris Burden propelled lit matches at a naked woman in one of his notorious performances. It was at Pomona College that Michael Asher reconfigured the school gallery by ripping out the building's front entrance.

"Very broadly, one could state that

institutions participating in “Pacific Standard Time” had to bring order to the narrative. Like the landscape, the historical record of postwar art in Southern California is diffuse, held in the archives of individual collectors, alternative art spaces, and university galleries. The bulk of it lay uncata-



▲ **Little Big Horn, 1959, by Peter Voulkos, appears in “Crosscurrents in L.A. Painting and Sculpture, 1950–1970,” at the Getty Center.**

logued. In many cases, institutional knowledge has rested with particular artists, curators, and historians. Making the puzzle harder to piece together is the fact that media coverage over the years has been sparse. “Many things that happened here got no critical response at all—or maybe a single paragraph in the *L.A. Free Press*,” says Perchuk, “which you have to go dig out on microfilm.”

In 2002, the Getty responded to this

predicament by launching a local oral-history program. And not a moment too soon—significant players, such as Ferus Gallery cofounder Walter Hopps, have since passed away. To help uncover material, the Getty followed up with research grants to institutions around the region.

The time and money spent sleuthing has proved worthwhile. Out of garages and warehouses emerged documentation and forgotten works. A 1970 sculpture, long thought destroyed, by “finish fetishist” DeWain Valentine turned up at a bank branch in Kansas. (It’s now on view in the Getty’s “Crosscurrents” exhibition.) One of the Chicano art movement’s earliest murals was discovered in a shipping container behind an artist’s studio. (That one can be found in “Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art Movement,” at UCLA’s Fowler Museum, opening October 16.)

Kellie Jones, the scholar and curator behind the Hammer Museum’s “Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960–1980,” combed through private collections to find pieces like John Riddle’s *Ghetto Merchant* (ca. 1965), a sculpture crafted from a cash register he rescued from a burned-out store in the wake of the 1965 Watts Riots. “If you go online, chances are all you’ll find on John Riddle is his obituary,” says Jones. “But go to the homes of African American art collectors and they’ll all have his work.”

Collectively, the years of research have resulted in a more complete view of art in Southern California, one that goes beyond the genres typically identified with the region: Light and Space sculpture, conceptual landscape photography, and Modernist design.

For decades, the city’s far-flung corners were home to a multiplicity of practices. At Otis College of Art and Design, on the west side, artists created ceramic works that challenged traditional notions of form and scale. At Pomona College, they embraced boundary-pushing conceptualism. Feminist figures, including Judy Chicago, gathered at the Woman’s Building, downtown. On the south side, African Americans pioneered new

types of politically infused abstraction. “I think L.A. enters the international consciousness through a handful of painters, like Ed Ruscha and the Ferus Gallery cohort,” says Chon Noriega, a UCLA professor and curator who has helped organize four exhibitions tied to different aspects of postwar Mexican American art. “Exhibits like this bring a needed dimension to the art history of the period. There were lots of things happening at the same time.”

Curators and historians also studied ways in which art from the region may have influenced practices elsewhere. Early conceptual work at Pomona College would feed into the so-called Pictures Generation of the ‘70s and ‘80s. Assemblage artists such as Ed Kienholz and Noah Purifoy pushed found-object sculpture into sprawling installations that engulfed the viewer—a common sight in today’s galleries. And the staggering variety of practices heralded a time when there would be no one dominant school of thought.

Paul Schimmel, chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, is overseeing the behemoth survey “Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974–1981.” The show features more than 130 artists making work at a time when the national economy was in tatters and the Vietnam War was coming to its ignominious conclusion. Works in the show include a tableau sculpture about airplane hijackings by Eleanor Antin, Robert Arneson’s controversial ceramic portrait of assassinated San Francisco mayor George Moscone, and Mike Kelley’s first-ever installation (an environment that reimagines a little girl’s room).

The work, says Schimmel, is daring and risky. It reflects a plurality of unorthodox styles. “What happened here in California in the ‘70s—especially in the areas of media like video—has played an extraordinary role,” he says. “Its impact is still being felt today around the world.” ■

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