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Will Pacific Standard Time Rewrite L.A.'s Place in Art History? The Experts Weigh In



Courtesy of Diana Lee Photography via Flickr
Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) is one of many museums involved in Pacific Standard Time

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By **Julia Halperin**

Published: October 7, 2011

The product of a decade of research and \$10 million in grants from the **Getty Research Institute**, the **Pacific Standard Time** initiative is unprecedented in size and scope. The work of a staggering 1,300 artists will be on display at nearly 140 different galleries and museums during the six-month-long event, which is devoted to reexamining the art of Los Angeles from 1945 to 1980. "Nothing like PST will happen again soon, if ever," **Robert Storr**, dean of **Yale's School of Art**, told **ARTINFO**. But the long-term influence and ripple effects of Pacific Standard Time are more difficult to determine than its immediate significance.

Most of the 100-plus Pacific Standard Time shows will not travel beyond California. One exception is the Getty's anchor exhibition, "Crosscurrents in L.A. Painting and Sculpture, 1950 to 1970," which will open at the **Martin-Gropius-Bau** in Berlin this spring. The Getty approached both the **Pompidou** in Paris and the **Whitney Museum** in New York about hosting the show, but neither institution was interested. (The Pompidou thought it would be too similar to its 2006 exhibition "Los Angeles 1955-1985"; the Whitney did not return a request for comment by press time.)

The research that led up to PST may have more of an enduring impact than the event itself, according to many in the Los Angeles museum community. "PST's long term impact will be first and foremost research based," said **Chon Noriega**, director of the **Chicano Studies Research Center** at **UCLA**. His center is currently applying for funding to commission writers to build lesson plans for high schools, drawing on its new research.

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Over 20 major scholarly publications have been published in conjunction with Pacific Standard Time, which will serve as a starting point for curators and students worldwide looking to do research on previously under-documented postwar Los Angeles artists. "If a curator in Sweden wanted to do a show that looks at the connection between some L.A. artists and some French and Scandinavian artists, the previous starting point would be to come to Los Angeles for three months and do primary research," said **Andrew Perchuk**, deputy director of the Getty Research Institute. "Many institutions and individuals are not in a position to do that."

The process by which the **Getty Foundation** [funded individual exhibitions](#), also has "huge implications for the field in the future," according to Perchuk. Typically, institutions pitch an exhibition idea and receive a single grant, which encompasses both research and exhibition production. Institutions participating in Pacific Standard Time, by contrast, applied for funding in two separate rounds: one for research, another for production. "Many of the shows changed radically from the initial thought to the final result," often due to unexpected discoveries, said Perchuk. "Typically, if you don't do the thing you applied for the grant for, you can get into trouble," he

explained. "I think this has radical possibilities for the field and really is the reason so many of the shows are so well done."

But the event's influence extends beyond the realm of museums. Several new fairs, such as [Art Platform – Los Angeles](#), [Pulse Los Angeles](#), and [Fountain L.A.](#) have sprung up this month to capitalize on the PST buzz. Of the galleries to open in Los Angeles recently — including **L&M Arts**, **Nye + Brown**, and **Perry Rubenstein Gallery** — several cited Pacific Standard Time as a factor in their decision. (Nye + Brown and Perry Rubenstein Gallery have scheduled their first shows in conjunction with the event.) "There is much more energy in Los Angeles right now than there is in New York. I always thought New York would be my engine and Los Angeles would be much more conscious of keeping the overhead down, but now Los Angeles has really become the engine," said **Tim Nye**, founder of Nye + Brown, whose Chelsea space, **Nyehaus**, also promotes artists from the 1960s with California roots. Nye says he expects the majority of Nye + Brown's business to come from local collectors, a group he says is rapidly growing.

PST may also change the way those who live in Los Angeles feel about their own art history, having lived so long in the shadow of New York's art world. It is "a marker that identifies Southern California as a cultural hub for something other than entertainment," said **Bettina Korek**, founder of L.A.-based arts nonprofit **ForYourArt**. "It is a provocation for Angelinos to engage with their city as an art capital." In recent days, plans for two new L.A. art spaces have been announced: the director of the **Palais de Tokyo** [will open a temporary arts center there](#) next year, and **LACMA** will partner with the **Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences** [to build a film museum](#) that is set to debut in as soon as three years.

Beyond its substantial contributions to art historical research, however, the legacy of Pacific Standard Time may be constrained by the very thing that makes it historic: its scope. Indeed, it is impossible to see all of PST, and impossible to replicate the effects of its numerous exhibitions elsewhere. "I fear that too few people who lack a foothold in L.A. will make the effort to go there — or in the case of students be in a position to afford to go there — much less to see all of it, so that the kind of exposure to actual works and the curatorial nuances of its presentation will go largely unnoticed," said Storr.

Pacific Standard Time's influence on those who write and teach art history is difficult to determine. **Michael Cothren**, chair of the art department at **Swarthmore College** and co-author of "Art History," a survey text published by **Pearson**, was unfamiliar with Pacific Standard Time before being contacted by ARTINFO. He said the initiative could have an influence on the book if the university professors who review new editions object to the absence of certain postwar Los Angeles artists in light of what they have seen at PST shows.

The current edition of "Art History" serves as a reminder of just how uneven the art world's understanding is of L.A.-based artists from the postwar period. The textbook includes **Judy Chicago** and **Judith Baca**, as well as

Hispanic artist **James Luna** — but, shockingly, not **John Baldessari**, **Ed Ruscha**, or **Robert Irwin**, artists who most Pacific Standard Time curators assume are already part of the canon. "Ruscha I know....I'll be looking into the other artists you've mentioned," Cothren said when asked about the presence of these artists in "Art History." "I've got them written down."

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