

Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA – the perfect exhibition for Trump's America

From themes of borders and immigration to its role in a city dealing with conflict between its Latino communities and the art world, this large-scale Los Angeles exhibition could not feel more timely



Ken Gonzales-Day's mural of actor Danny Trejo Photograph: Ken Gonzales/© 2017 Ken Gonzales-Day.

Lanre Bakare in Los Angeles

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Tensions between the Los Angeles art world and the city's Latino communities have been bristling over the last 18 months. Focusing around the east LA neighbourhood of Boyle Heights, art galleries that have tried to move into the area have been met with resistance.

Along with real estate agents, who promoted the area's lower rents as a selling point to outsiders, community activists viewed incoming art galleries as part of a wave of gentrification that had already changed other areas in the city with a strong Latino population, such as Echo Park, Silver Lake and Highland Park.

Groups opposed to gentrification have targeted spaces they accuse of "artwashing" – such as the United Talent Agency's Artist Space, which opened with a Larry Clark show 12 months ago, and the non-profit PSSST, which closed recently after a protracted campaign by those who opposed its presence in the area.

Defend Boyle Heights and the Boyle Heights Alliance Against Artwashing and Displacement released a statement celebrating the closure. "Boyle Heights will continue to fight against the false promises of development and community improvement that are supposed to benefit us, but end up displacing us from our home," it read. "Once again we call on all galleries in Boyle Heights to reconsider your position and leave immediately."

As Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, the city-wide exhibition that focuses on the relationship between Los Angeles, its Latino communities and Latin America gets under way, there are hopes that some of the butting of heads between elements of the art world and the communities they serves can ease.

Getty Foundation deputy director Joan Weinstein, who helped organize the more than 70 shows involved in the project, hopes it will help start conversations between art spaces and communities that have started to oppose them.

Weinstein said: "People have identified coffee shops and galleries as a sign that a local area is becoming gentrified and local population are being priced out of the neighbourhood. I think Boyle Heights became as a flash point, and one would hope for constructive conversations rather than the polarization which somehow sees art as the enemy in this conversation."



Rafael Bqueer, *Alice and the tea through the mirror* 2014 Photograph: to come

That conversation could be triggered by the different themes the exhibition offers from “borders, diaspora and displacement” to “definitions of identity”. Not only does the work chime with some of the issues taking place in the city’s art world but also the wider current political climate. The weekend before the exhibition started there were protests in Los Angeles over the termination of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (Daca), the latest White House move that has affected more than half a million “Dreamers” who live in California.

It’s something Weinstein and the exhibition’s organizers couldn’t have anticipated in 2012 when preparations started. “We began this project in a very different political climate, almost five years ago,” she said.

“There was a kind of an agenda here as we were re-writing art history from a different perspective. We were asking: what does art history look like if you write it from the position of Latin America?”

“Now it has taken on a very different feel with the current political climate. There couldn’t be a better moment for us to assert that we want to build bridges, not build walls and as we point out - borders are really political creations and they don’t fit into cultural production.”

Chon Noriega, director of the Chicano studies research center at UCLA, sees *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA* as an opportunity to rethink the way we see Latino communities in the US and the US’s impact on Latino and Latin American groups. (Noriega also curated the exhibition *Home - So Different, So Appealing* along with Pilar Tompkins Rivas and Mari Carmen Ramírez.)

“It’s given people a different way to think of themes like home and belonging,” he said of his exhibition at Lacma.

“When we think of home and think about the American dream, and a white picket fence, and segregated living communities - we wanted to look at the flip side of that, which is what did that dream do to the rest of the continent or hemisphere?”

“You can look at the instability of a country like Colombia because the primary exchange between Colombia and the US is cocaine - and that’s not going to the street that’s going to the upper middle class.”

Noriega and Weinstein see *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA* as a way to reassess Los Angeles’ relationship with Latin and Latin American art - and hopefully continuing that with research grants that are also part of the project.

“There’s a stereotype of Latin American art being Diego [Rivera] and Frida [Kahlo], and there isn’t much of that stuff here,” she said.

● *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA* runs from September 2017 to January 2018 at various venues in southern California

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