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MARC CHAGALL AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY DESIGNS FOR THE STAGE

LACMA'S GENRE-DEFYING SUMMER OF PACIFIC STANDARD TIME LA/LA

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Carlos Almaraz, Sunset Crash, 1982, Collection of Cheech Marin, Pacific Palisades, California, © Carlos Almaraz Estate, photo courtesy the Collection of Cheech Marin

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To Angelenos, Southern California's importance to the history of art and architecture may be a virtual no-brainer, but for much of the country, L.A.'s cultural contributions have tended to fall under the radar until recently. The first Pacific Standard Time (PST) collaboration, which focused on art in L.A. from 1945 to 1980 and took place between October 2011 and April 2012, was an effort to change all of that. Supported by grants by the Getty Foundation, this initiative convened over 60 arts institutions scattered throughout Southern California to explore the region's artistic and architectural legacy. Despite its vast and sprawling topography, the city's youth and heterogeneity worked to its advantage. Such collegiality and collaboration across these far-flung institutions, some said, could happen only in L.A.

Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980 focused on the Los Angeles of the postwar era, a time when the city's population doubled, mass-produced housing tracts colonized vast stretches of the San Gabriel and the San Fernando valleys, and cultural critics such as Reyner Banham and Peter Plagens put L.A. at the vanguard of postmodernism. This initiative included exhibitions on everything from the Ferus Gallery to Cliff May's rancho aesthetic to the impact of the Watts Rebellion on African American artists like Noah Purifoy and Betye Saar to the first major study of California midcentury modern design. LACMA presented five exhibitions, including the first-ever retrospective of Asco, the creative iconoclasts who infamously spray-painted three of their names on a LACMA footbridge after a curator dismissed East L.A.'s growing Chicano art scene as "folk art." *Asco: Elite of the Obscure* was among the handful of PST exhibitions focused on Mexican and Chicano artists and collectives that critics singled out as the tip of an enormous cultural iceberg.

They were on to something. Not only did California belong to Mexico until 1848, but successive waves of Latin American immigration—Mexicans during the 1920s and 1940s, Salvadorans during the 1980s, and Guatemalans during the 1980s and 1990s—have left an indelible mark on the city. This fall, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA (PST LA/LA) will continue to flesh out these stories. PST LA/LA is bigger and broader in scope than PST: Art in L.A. 1945–1980, spanning ancient Mesoamerican figurines to contemporary performance art found all over the Latin American diaspora. It is also more ambitious. Indeed, the first three out of five PST LA/LA exhibitions to open at LACMA this year take aim at the labels and categories we use to make sense of our world.

Beatriz González, *Cama para (cocodrilo)*, 1971, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Museum purchase funded by the 2007 Latin American Experience Gala and Auction, 2007.1294, © Beatriz González, photo © The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Opposite: Installation view of María Elena González's *Magic Carpet/Home*, 2003/2017, for the exhibition *Home—So Different, So Appealing* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, June 11–October 15, 2017. © María Elena González

PST LA/LA at LACMA kicked off on June 11 with the opening of *Home—So Different, So Appealing: Art from the Americas since 1957*. A collaboration among three institutions—the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, LACMA, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston—the show examines how U.S. Latino and Latin American artists throughout the Western hemisphere have addressed the social and physical environments of the Americas through the lens of "home," a social unit so basic, elementary, and hardwired into our consciousness that it seems to predate culture itself. Home, we learn, is a loaded term, layered with complex and sometimes contradictory meanings. It's a synecdoche for community, but also evokes the painful challenges of assimilation. It conjures the intimacy of private life as it underscores raging public debates about migrations, borders, and nations. With nearly 100 works displayed, the exhibition reminds us how much the home has structured our interpersonal interactions, a point that is beautifully conveyed by María Elena González's outdoor sculpture *Magic Carpet/Home* (2003/2017), a full-scale recreation of a six-room housing project floor plan in South Los Angeles built as an undulating wooden platform, which is then covered in fire-retardant rubber flooring (the kind often found on playgrounds) upon which visitors can walk.

This question of community and belonging shifts from the conceptual to the individual in *Playing with Fire: Paintings by Carlos Almaraz*, the first-ever survey to focus on the influential 20th century artist's paintings and opening on August 6. An inventive, intellectually restless, and prolific pioneer of L.A.'s Chicano art movement, Almaraz (1941–1989) always managed to undermine the categories the art world has used to define him. He began his career as a muralist in the 1960s activist tradition, but he is best remembered for his later work as a studio artist. He helped found the Chicano artist collective Los Four, but he frequently incorporated European aesthetic conventions into his work. In the show, we see Mesoamerican

Livia Corona Benjamin, *10,000 300 Square Foot Homes*, 2009, courtesy of the artist and Parque Galería, © 2009 Livia Corona Benjamin

Livia Corona Benjamin, *47,547 Homes*, 2000, courtesy of the artist and Parque Galería, © 2000 Livia Corona Benjamin

Nuevo Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (NuMu), 2017 © NuMu, photo courtesy of the artists

Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa, *Breve Historia de la Arquitectura en Guatemala (A Brief History of Architecture in Guatemala)*, 2010–13, single channel video installation, © Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa

allegorical figures striding along quotidian L.A. cityscapes, and fatal car crashes on overpasses rendered in terrifying, convulsive beauty. We can't put Almaraz in a box, the show suggests; the best we can do is to submerge ourselves in his hallucinatory, kaleidoscopic world.

If LACMA's first two PST LA/LA exhibitions leave us with more questions than answers, the third one throws the very notion of the "exhibition" out the window. Opening on August 20, *A Universal History of Infamy*, the title of which is lifted from a collection of Jorge Luis Borges stories, published in 1935, probes our understanding of archives and narrative and explores the performative aspects of contemporary art. Can any exhibition, no matter how meticulously researched, ever tell the complete and comprehensive story of anything? Even the show's title undermines the optimistic, Enlightenment- era approach to organizing knowledge that the encyclopedic museum underwrites; the claim to tell any "universal" story being deftly deflated by the indefinite article preced- ing it. Little wonder that the show, co-organized by LACMA and 18th Street Arts Center, challenges the conventions of visual display. Not only does art spill out of the galleries and onto the museum's exterior walls, but the exhibition also takes place in three locations: Charles White Elementary School in MacArthur Park, 18th Street Arts Center in Santa Monica, and LACMA. Perhaps the most exciting museums of today are mobile, and come in all shapes and sizes, a point conveyed by *A Universal History of Infamy*'s inclusion of one of the world's smallest museums—the Nuevo Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (NuMu)—a 2.5x2 m egg-shaped structure that will be brought to LACMA via a multi-day pilgrimage from Guatemala City.

Like the first PST initiative four years ago, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA explores the breadth of Southern California's visual culture, revealing its complexity and multidimensionality. And while it would be foolhardy to claim that LACMA's exhibitions fully explain how Latin America helped shape—and in turn became shaped by—the art and design of Southern California, they illuminate an incredible range of new people, places, objects, and stories, opening up new directions for research and collaboration. More than anything, these shows invite us to reflect on the powerful cultural work that art can do: allowing us to think about our past, present, and future through continuously shifting lenses and points of view.

Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA
Latin American & Latino Art in LA

Home—So Different, So Appealing, Playing with Fire: Paintings by Carlos Almaraz, and *A Universal History of Infamy* are part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, a far-reaching and ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles, taking place from September 2017 through January 2018 at more than 70 cultural institutions across Southern California. Pacific Standard Time is an initiative of the Getty. The presenting sponsor is Bank of America.

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Playing with Fire: Paintings by Carlos Almaraz was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Bank of America is the presenting sponsor of *Playing with Fire: Paintings by Carlos Almaraz.*

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