



10 best L.A. Art Experiences of 2014, by Catherine Wagley (December 17, 2014)

In art, this has been the year of the gap — one version of the art world, a glitzy, market-driven one where youthfulness is a selling point, seems more and more distant from other art worlds.

It seems distant from the real world, too. When Art Basel Miami, that annual fair for which billionaires descend on Florida, opened early this month, the nation was still being rocked by protests over grand jury decisions to let off white cops who killed unarmed black teenager Michael Brown and asthmatic black dad Eric Garner. At Basel, as critic Christian Viveros-Fauné observed, "It was as if Ferguson and the Eric Garner verdict had never happened."

A week before, film critic A.O. Scott had asked in *The New York Times*, "Is our art equal to our time?" It may seem that it's not, in visual art at least, if you're looking at the paintings by the many youngish artists who say they're "excavating modernism" — i.e., recapitulating a minimal aesthetic that has proven itself desirable over the years. Or it may seem that it's not if you're looking at how many galleries are opening in L.A. or reading the many articles about hot new scenes. "Los Angeles seems to be having a New York moment," Maura Egan recently wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*.

But that version of the art world distracts from the one in which visual art is still an opportunity to explore what's possible. The exhibitions and events on this list did that by reviving exciting, overlooked histories or juxtaposing surprising objects and ideas in ways that felt provocative. Sometimes, they even connected two art worlds by bridging a gap.

10. Enjoy poverty

At the Box in Little Tokyo, Dutch artist Renzo Martens exhibited a blue neon sign that said "Enjoy Poverty Please" and a video in which he tries to help a group of men in the Congo profit from their own poverty. Other people, like the photojournalists lurking around, do; why can't they? Part of Martens' ongoing probe into the ugliness of globalization, the video is offensive, unpleasant and impossible to forget.

9. Past and present expressionists

The Mistake Room's ambitious, flashy installation by New York-based Korakrit Arunanondchai told the story of a messy, narcissistic painter transforming into an ascetic. It became better in retrospect after a show of paintings by Matsumi Kanemitsu, the late, under-praised Japanese-American who spent years teaching in L.A., opened in the same downtown space (it runs through Dec. 20). Historic artist and younger artist talked to one another. Both grappled with how to be expressive and arresting amidst pop culture. And the fact that the Mistake Room could mine intergenerational overlaps such as this suggests that the new, buzzed-about gallery has promise.

8. Open-source art history

The art website East of Borneo launched its Unforgetting L.A. effort in 2013, to write Wikipedia entries for significant but underrepresented aspects of Los Angeles art history. It hosted five events this year, including one focused on art spaces and another on African-American art in this city. Anyone can suggest subjects, and anyone can show up to edit.

7. Glittery tongue attack

The night before Halloween, artist-playwright Asher Hartman, who also appeared on our year-end list in 2012, debuted *Purple Electric Play!* in Machine Project's Echo Park basement. A flamboyant but self-protective actor tried not to engage in politics, while his captivating young colleague embraced all her revolutionary impulses. The play often descended into stream-of-consciousness, both visually and verbally, and it was comic, sexual and sensual even when serious. It ended with a senseless death and a red, glitter-covered tongue leaping out at the audience.

6. Poseur and the moonwalker

Norwegian artist Sille Storihle was researching nationalism when she came across fantastic old photographs by Marie Høeg, who had been a commercial photographer in Norway in the 1890s and early 1900s. In their spare time, Høeg and her partner, Bolette Berg, staged gender-bending portraits, posing convincingly as explorers or self-important teens, making fun of masculine stereotypes. Storihle and her own artistic partner, Liv Bugge, installed Høeg's long-hidden portraits at USC's One Archive alongside work by contemporary Swedish artist Klara Lidén. Lidén melancholically moonwalks along city streets in one video, a different sort of pose.

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5. Momentum

"Unsparing Quality," the exhibition curated by artist Farrah Karapetian at Diane Rosenstein Fine Art, included what should have been too much work, some more than half a century old, some brand new. There was quite a bit of hair. In Robert Therrien's *No title (Beard cart II)*, a substantial white plaster beard hung from two hooks. In Mie Hørlyck Mogensen's *Toothbrush*, the toothbrush bristles trailing from the artist's mouth were long and unruly, like the hair on her head. The prisoner Tim Hawkinson sculpted in bronze had not hair but chains draped like hair from his wrists, arms and tongue. What was it about this show? Maybe it was the visceral momentum, the way draping and hairiness became throughlines that pulled you fluidly from depictions of self-maintenance to bondage.

4. Old icons, mad city

The ritualistic, addictive, two-channel film Kahlil Joseph made to accompany Compton-based hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar's memoirlike album, *good kid, m.A.A.d. city*, played at the Underground Museum this summer (it will show at MOCA next spring). It was part of a group show called "The Oracle," which included stoic 18th- and 19th-century sculptures from West Africa, some made to ward off evil. The old sculptures felt like guardians who had "been there and done that" but were patiently standing by while the characters in Joseph's film figured things out.

3. Avoid the hipness

Papillion Gallery's choice to open in Leimert Village, in a building that has housed many historic shows and performances by black artists, instead of burgeoning Hollywood or downtown's Industrial District, is a hopeful one. If you believe diverse neighborhoods can and should have smart art scenes — or have them again, in the case of Leimert —

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and act on the belief, maybe it will come true. (Papillion's first year of programming included an interesting summer video series and a good painting show by Noah Davis.)

2. Room for tough stuff

Most artists in this year's Un-Private Collection lectures, leading up to next year's Broad Museum opening, were male, and conversations had that "looking back on a successful career" feel. But the last artist, Kara Walker, was a woman who talked incisively about her recent work in New York, a massive sugar sculpture of a mammy who was also a sphinx. It was a racial stereotype and a kind of goddess, made out of material tied to slavery's history. "I do what I'm feeling and what I'm feeling is, I think, monstrous," Walker said.

1. Perpetual love seeker

Eagle Rock-based Siglio Press' new book on artist Dorothy Iannone, an 81-year-old artist who left her husband and social mores behind in the late 1960s, reads like a graphic novel. The visuals, many from rarely seen artists' books, are ornate and risqué in a sweet sort of way. Iannone is always in search of love, fond of authoritarian men (she reads Norman Mailer, falls for masculine artist Dieter Roth) but assertive. In the era of Lena Dunham and *Lean In*, Iannone's journey to be powerful while feminine and vulnerable is especially gripping