

# ***Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947 – 2016*** **at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel**

**March 13 –  
September 4, 2016**

Feigned neutrality aside, I came into Hauser Wirth & Schimmel's inaugural exhibition with a fair amount of skepticism. Sweeping presentations like Hauser Wirth & Schimmel's *Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947 – 2016* tend to prove worrisome to the expectant critic. The efforts of curators Jenni Sorkin and Paul Schimmel's intensive focus rendered a selection of works that are revered and unarguably beautiful at moments. But this debut exhibition ultimately retreads the established lineage of (to use Lucy Lippard's neologism) *eccentric abstraction* and does little to relocate its peripheral relationship to the traditional Modernist story.

*Revolution in the Making* takes the customary Modernist narrative as its substrate and introduces the well-meaning catalyst of Feminism in what hopes to be a righting of a historically exclusionary record. While the exhibition's entirely female roster is much called for, it reinforces a kind of myopia that keeps women artists on the

margin of major art historical movements. The transubstantiation that traditional Modernism finds at the hands of the artists featured in this exhibition is framed as a part of a reactive narrative that preserves the status of famed male Modernists as initiators of certain forms and materials. Redemption in this particular context is the publicity and undeniable momentum that is afforded by the backing of an international commercial entity such as Hauser & Wirth.

This encyclopedic exhibition spans four galleries and uses chronology as its guide. The exhibition begins in the South Gallery with post-war works by Louise Nevelson, Claire Falkenstein, Louise Bourgeois, Lee Bontecou, and Ruth Asawa. Offered here is the primer for what is to come—the body in fragmentation; a scratching at the existential through abstraction. The body finds new forms in the reductive assemblies of Bourgeois' totemic *Personnages* (1947–1953) and Falkenstein's roiling metallic cocoons (1954–1962). Falkenstein's work reigns in the room by echoing the amalgamating impulse demonstrated in Nevelson's work (*Sky Cathedral/Southern Mountain*, 1959) and finding formal common ground with Asawa's delicate bulbous weavings (1950–1962).

(To reach the North Galleries one must cross the expansive campus of Hauser Wirth & Schimmel past a lone sculpture: Jackie Winsor's *30 to 1 Bound Trees* (1971–1972). The piece stands solitary at the center

of the massive outdoor courtyard, utterly detached from just about everything else. Anne Wagner said it best in the exhibition's accompanying catalogue: "Does a bonfire await? Or is this fuel for a pyre?")

The portion of the exhibition housed in the North Galleries is so wide-ranging in scope that abstraction is more a common denominator of the work than a driving force. Galleries seem grouped by punch-lines relying on formal commonalities rather than conceptual rigor or contrast. One grouping of works that strayed from this pattern was particularly striking: Yayoi Kusama's silvery phalluses (*A Snake*, 1974) snake between the spread of latex folds by Hannah Wilke (1970–1976), while metallic cataracts from Lynda Benglis (1969–1975; 1970) gush on one side and the ghostly skins of Heidi Bucher's performances (1974; 1976) rest on the other. The works all allude to the body—its orifices, its appendages, its folds, fluids, and skin—but are zapped of virility. This room becomes a poetic figure that is not shy of being embodied, but its elegant cohesion quickly fizzles away as the exhibition continues. The sequence of smaller galleries house clusters of works that rely solely on the sum of their formal parts: Senga Nengudi (*R.S.V.P. I*, 1977/2003) and Lygia Pape (*Ttéia 1, A*, 1979/1997/1999) are posed in opposite corners and call to mind a symmetry of form, but the two works are undeniably divergent in their origins; works by

Marisa Merz, Anna Maria Maiolino, and Liz Larner are sited side-by-side to offer equivalence among their rolled and coiled amalgams, which in turn denies each work the opportunity for a reading beyond cosmetic consideration.

*Revolution* in its final leg presents specially commissioned work from contemporary artists in the East Gallery. Among them the clear alpha is Phyllida Barlow's *GIG* (2014); the crisscrosses of polychromed scaffolding climb to the ceiling, tangling themselves among the trusses. Barlow's sculptural kerfuffle teases the space—her sculpture has nothing to uphold but itself. Despite the fun of *GIG*'s massive pom-pom pendants, the scale of the work dwarfs everything in the gallery: Laura Schnitger's tribe of tensile bodies (2007–2015) lost its humorous appeal, and the small trio of sculptures by Jessica Stockholder (1988–1990) appeared as literal footnotes in Barlow's shadow. Such cramped mounting does a disservice to the number of works made of delicate arrangements of quotidian materials. What appeared to be the addressing of Minimalism, by bringing subjectivity to formerly objective shapes (in Rachel Khedoori's collapsing LeWitt; Kaari Upson's couch-ified L-Beams; Abigail DeVille's junked Serra), gets lost among the gallery's preserved factory patina that resembles the forlorn alleyways that buttressed this building for years before Hauser Wirth & Schimmel arrived.

For those using *Revolution in the Making* as an initial gateway to art history—it is a useful tool—the spread of works in time and form are sweeping and historical. But for those looking to Sorkin and Schimmel's exhibition to chronicle and continue the revolution of abstract sculpture (as the title implies it is still “in the making,”) the exhibition falls short. *Revolution's* focus on women artists and their abstract work is an attempt at feminist revisionism, but by ignoring the complicated and differing frameworks of production for each work (and their maker), *Revolution in the Making* offers essentialization—of gender and form—as a passable re-weaving of a complex history and understanding of both womanhood and abstraction.

## Carl Cheng at Cherry and Martin

May 21–  
July 30, 2016

It doesn't take much to grasp the recent enthusiasm for that cross-section of art, architecture, and design from the late '60s and early '70s, now codified as “Hippie Modernism.” The converging interests in ecology, media, and technology at the heart of the Hippie Modern corpus provide a compelling antecedent to our own techno-optimism and 21<sup>st</sup>-century bad trip of

impending environmental collapse. Equally, the hippies employed a heightened vernacular aesthetic—prismatic and geodesic—which they often wrought in the materials and processes of consumer commodities, just as the fetish of the digital in much of today's art frequently entails a fascinated mimesis of current styles of consumption.

Carl Cheng's ingenious little machines and enclosed ecosystems, on view at Cherry and Martin's survey of this pretty much-unknown Los Angeles artist's early work (*Nature is Everything – Everything is Nature*) would have done just fine in the Walker's exhibition *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*. There's molded plastic, colored plexi and blacklight—hints of Pop, mod, and psychedelia. There's organic matter—water, grass, insects, rocks—housed in Space Age dioramas, glossy little gizmos that evidence Cheng's time in the industrial design program at UCLA in the mid-'60s.

There he also studied photography under Robert Heinecken, and the earliest works in the show combine the two disciplines: the artist clipped images printed on photographic transparencies and then vacuum-sealed the cutouts, creating swollen, smoochy forms, arrayed in clear plexiglass cases. *Sculpture for Stereo Viewers* (1968)—included in MoMA's 1970 exhibition *The Photographic Object*—features an identical pair of cutout pictures of a man holding aloft a vast bouquet of balloons. The figure has been

photographed from behind, and one has the urge to peek around and glimpse his face. But the work, exhibited against the wall, has an orientation closer to that of a picture and plays on the seen and unseen, the proximate and distant, two- and three-dimensionality. With images filtered through successive layers of transparent plastic, Cheng's photographic sculptures read as neither exactly photographic nor sculptural, suggesting instead the subsumption of content *and* form within a kind of McLuhanite television media ecology.

The photo works serve as a prologue to the sculptures that constitute the bulk of the exhibition. In plastics—again, of several varieties—they mimic the look and feel of the era's highly designed consumer electronics, while enclosing material, and life forms, extracted from the natural world—as if in quotation. *Supply and Demand* (1972) contains two chambers encased in translucent green plexi, one a breeding ground for insects, the other a patch of Venus flytraps. A tube connects the two plexi canopies, the larger of which arches high in the back and slopes down toward the viewer, recalling a turntable dustcover. It's all set into a dark, dense plastic base from which protrude three thick green switches that look like they came from the control panel of a cartoon rocket ship.

Though we might see these electric-kinetic microcosms as successors in a legacy of mechanical sculpture, they share

neither the exuberance of the modernist "machine aesthetic" (for example, Moholy-Nagy's *Light Prop for an Electric Stage*, 1930), nor the mordancy of Jean Tinguely's *Metamechanics*. Rather, Cheng's sculptures evince a cool and ambivalent take on the consumer commodities whose forms they assume and distend. Made under his corporate pseudonym, John Doe Co., they come across almost as camp, a mannered performance of commodification and consumption in the age of polypropylene and integrated circuitry. At the same time, he says of his machines that they "model nature, its processes and effects for a future environment that may be completely made by humans."<sup>1</sup>

But that future doesn't look so bad. The four *Erosion Machines* (1969), for example, seem to take pleasure in the malleability of nature. These plastic yellow boxes are divided vertically into two compartments, each exposed to the viewer through windows. The left contains a refrigerator-like display of handmade rocks of compacted sediment, covered in Day-Glo paint. They sit on metal racks, bathed from above in black light, while in the adjacent compartment, water continuously cycles through as a rock slowly disintegrates. Or take *Emergency Nature Supply Kit (E.N. Supply, No. 271-01)* (1971), in which a small base holds a two-inch square patch of grass, fed by a tube, while a cute little speaker, of roughly the same dimensions, issues bird sounds. The

highlight of the piece is the intricate and clever packaging and the velvet-lined, pyramidal carrying case: The fate of nature may be in doubt, but the future of the commodity form looks bright. More than ecological warning, Cheng's sculptures seem to demonstrate Fredric Jameson's claim that late capitalism marks the "moment of a radical eclipse of nature itself": the Sublime contained in Plastic.<sup>2</sup>

## Joan Snyder at Parrasch Heijnen

April 30–  
June 10, 2016

As the 44<sup>th</sup> presidency draws to a close, a steady trickle of retrospective articles have begun to explore Barack Obama's time in the White House, several of which refer to his administration's preferred principle of "soft power." A concept coined by the political scientist Joseph Nye, soft power advocates the use of subtle persuasion rather than strong-armed coercion—via policies, politicking, and the media—to bring other worldviews into line with one's own. Eight canvases recently on view at Parrasch Heijnen by Joan Snyder, an established New York painter and early feminist artist, deploy a similarly restrained and compelling maneuver.

Since Snyder (now in her 70s) uses a traditional

1. Cherry and Martin press release.

2. Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991. Print.

Claire  
de Dobay Rifelj

medium, a bright multi-hued palette, and abundant references in her titles and materials to things coded female (the exhibition was titled *Womansong*), one could expect to encounter a room full of pictures that might traditionally have been written off as surface-level or critically undemanding. However, while Snyder's paintings do offer moments of beauty and attraction, her heavily impastoed surfaces and abstracted traces of refuse add an element of repulsion that complicates any assumptions of easy-viewing or gendered forms. In so doing, the paintings utilize a soft, insinuating power that punches subtly but firmly.

Take *Lady* (2015), for example. At a glance, the work's layered, energetic composition and colorful, confetti-like flecks of paint convey an agreeable whimsy. Upon closer examination, the pink outline of a supine woman comes to the fore; so do the heads of large dried flowers that have been smashed into splotches of oil paint, which the artist lets trickle down the canvas. At the waist of the painting's curvaceous body, strokes of minty green and vanilla mingle with black-brown, as if a fallen ice cream cone were melting into a muddy sludge across its midriff. Here, unseemly ingredients pollute both the work's initial pastoral lightness and its ghostly image of busty, idealized womanhood, so pervasive in today's advertising and Instagram culture.

Snyder likewise conjures—and then promptly

quashes—the trappings of female prettiness in *Heart of the Fugue* (2016). Heart-shaped signs are scrawled into a central, reddish-purple form that doubles as a beating heart and vagina; and across the linen support, Snyder has affixed half a dozen bundles of flower stalks, tied together with pink silk ribbons. More daubs of Technicolor paint, many in pink, provide a loose grid that structures the otherwise free-flowing and organic-looking gestures. Anything but lovely, by contrast, are the periodic smears of brown pigment, which connote abject notions of decay, dirt, and even finger-painted excrement. These passages in Snyder's work add a female-oriented twist to the exuberant, male-centered scatologies of her contemporary Paul McCarthy and, more recently, the female painter, Tala Madani.

Themes such as landscape, the body, music, the brushstroke, and the grid have been recurring concerns within Snyder's work since her career first took off in the late 1960s. Living in New York, fresh from a master's program at Rutgers University, her work received early recognition: solo exhibitions in New York and San Francisco in 1971; a major article in *Artforum* that same year by curator Marcia Tucker; and inclusion in two of the Whitney Museum's then-annual exhibitions.<sup>1</sup> In this early period she was deep into her “stroke paintings,” canvases that examine and catalog a range of expansive brushstrokes and brusque dabs

of paint. One example, *Spring* (1971), is installed at the entrance to Snyder's recent exhibition, where it offers not only a chronological counterpoint to the more recent canvases, but also evidence of her long-standing treatment of paint at once as a material, a language, and a skin of its own. The positioning of historical and contemporary works together is especially well-suited to Snyder's cyclical return to particular motifs and pictorial strategies.

Between these temporal poles of early and late career, the artist has followed a mantra of “more, not less”—a conscious departure from the 1960s dicta of late-modernist criticism and Minimalism alike? Rejecting flatness and opticality on the one hand, and the concept of a self-contained, depersonalized object on the other, Snyder instead infused her abstract paintings with collaged materials, bodily traces, and narrative suggestion, just as the feminist art movement was beginning to gain steam.

Unlike many of her feminist peers, including Judy Chicago, Faith Ringgold, and Martha Rosler, Snyder did not delve into alternative media such as performance, installation, or video. Rather, she stood steadfastly by painting, working to dislodge its largely masculine associations with authorial gesture and power. At different points in each subsequent decade, Snyder's canvases have veered towards an overabundant accretion of material and text that

1. Tucker, Marcia. “The Anatomy of a Stroke: Recent Paintings by Joan Snyder.” *Artforum*. May 1971: 42-45. Print.

2. Snyder first articulated this phrase in a manifesto penned in the mid-1970s; see Joan Snyder, response to “What is feminist art,” ca. 1976-77, Woman's Building records, 1970-1992, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

crowds the picture plane and dims the potency of her work's important political thrust. Yet her aesthetic pendulum has always swung back to paintings that are more compositionally open, and in which each stroke and collaged bit is able to function as effectively and affectively as possible.

Though soft power was first theorized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in relation to foreign policy, it has lately become an exploratory strategy for global Feminism in the 21<sup>st</sup>. So too in the arts, locally: "Soft Power" was the winter 2016 programming theme at L.A.'s Women's Center for Creative Work. Adding to this dialogue, the all-around sweet, sensual, messy, and grotesque elements of Snyder's recent paintings advance one model of quietly infiltrating and upsetting established art world norms—which, like any entrenched system, will need many more years of work to bring into balance.

Snyder herself has long expressed a belief that her work, and work by women in general, brings with it certain essential elements of femininity—an understanding she shares with other feminists of her generation. Yet the juxtaposition of the grotesque and the feminine ideal in her recent work, and its ties to nature and decay, suggests a further-reaching and inclusive notion of gender and feminist potential.

## Eleanor Antin at Diane Rosenstein

May 14–  
June 18, 2016

You are what you buy. As a child of the '80s this understanding has been programmed into me since the commercial breaks of Saturday morning cartoons. 20 years before I ever set eyes on an American Girl catalogue, Eleanor Antin was already acutely aware of the abilities of material possessions to tell the story of an individual.

Previously a painter before moving on to assemblage, Antin had already begun her career-long exploration into identity with her first conceptual project, *Blood of a Poet Box* (1965–1968), by gathering blood samples from poet friends and storing them on glass slides. Then in 1968, Antin traded the retail *Wunderkammer* of New York City for a sleepy beach town outside of San Diego. Shortly thereafter, she found her Rosetta Stone in the Sears catalogue. This bible, of sorts, contained a vast array of consumer goods, making it the perfect palette for Antin's method of matching material objects to personhood. "The Sears catalogue was especially crowded with objects from lowly brush shavers to corsets, from ladders to wedding gowns," she explains in the introductory text for the exhibition. The series of portraits, created from various catalogues, became

two exhibitions: *California Lives* (1969) and *Portraits of Eight New York Women* (1970). The combined work from both was on view recently as a single exhibition, *What Time is It?*, at Diane Rosenstein Gallery.

Shopping as portraiture makes a handy form of identity abstraction—most people need a table or a pair of shoes at least—and in the high-consumerist world taking shape post World War II, the possibilities for interpretation were infinitely multiplied. The assemblages from *California Lives* in particular are not flashy, but rather clusters of quotidian materials arranged nonchalantly in the gallery. *Howard* (1969) consists of a pair of dress shoes with a pair of rolled up socks and a watch tucked inside. *The Murfins* (1969), where a partially completed brick wall stands behind a ladder on which rests a forgotten can of Fresca, conjures a scene in which the subjects have stepped away for a quick break and will return any moment to take up where they left off.

This economy of materials does not diminish the power of the personal narratives that Antin depicts. Each detail contains a clue; from the saucy, pink-lipstick-stained cigarette in *Jeanie* (1969), to the depressingly insufficient fruit tray that accompanies soldier *Tim* (1969) off to war. To aid the viewer in unraveling her subjects, Antin provides brief character texts about each (and the occasional footnote scrawled on the wall in pencil).

Katie Bode

## ***Performing the Grid*** **at Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design**

**January 23–  
 May 15, 2016**

These briefs are installed in a single room in the gallery along with the noisiest of her works, *Molly Barnes* (1969). Barnes seems to have neglected to turn off her electric razor following a kerfuffle in which she spilled her pills and powder. The vibrating razor rests on a delicately soiled pink bath mat, its insistent buzzing audible to the viewer throughout the show.

After *California Lives* was poorly received upon its debut in New York, Antin doubled down on her methods but altered her subjects, creating *Portraits of Eight New York Women* (1970), each inspired by a prominent female member of New York's avant-garde community. Reflecting the often performative lives of these women, the arrangements become more dramatic in this body of work. There is the show-stopping *Carolee Schneemann* (1970): a dramatic sweep of red velvet is personified and preening in front of a mirror, yet is still grounded by the earthy jar of honey at its feet. The work is haunting and elegant. Meanwhile, a more playful *Yvonne Rainer* (1970) balances a heaping basket of flowers atop her Exercycle, her sweatshirt lingering on the edge of the seat. And what exactly does *Hannah Weiner* (1970) plan to do with that hammer? The tool rests threateningly amongst an otherwise saccharine picnic arrangement complete with gingham-clad, heart-shaped chairs.

Here too, the issues of subjectivity and identity bubble up to the surface.

One work, the portrait of *Rochelle Owens* (1970) was deemed inaccurate by its subject; in its place, a wall label reads "Rochelle Owens Removed/ Piece Did Not Live up to Subject" According to the text accompanying the exhibition, only one woman wanted her portrait after the show. But, after a year "she called to say the piece was making her nervous and her therapist suggested that she give it back."

These are portraits that both celebrate and scrutinize their subjects. Antin does good work digging into the complexity of people's (and particularly women's) identities and relaying those specific details with simple goods considerately placed. The sculptures resonate by capturing the imperfections and nuances that people project into the world, encompassing style, poise, and presence, yet also a darker internal turmoil that many of us contain under the surface. Her portraits celebrate and expose the complexities of each of our inner lives, while also unmasking a dependence on capitalist structures to express the self. These objects become stand-ins for the body, infused with the energy of life, and the pathos of mortality.

The grid occupies a seemingly contradictory place in our culture, representing both dystopian rigidity and utopian perfectibility. Take for instance, the architecture of prisons v. that of modernist utopian art movements. As organic bodies, we are caught between the two: simultaneously defined and corralled by the dystopian, and striving toward and illuminated by the utopian. The recent exhibition *Performing the Grid* at Otis College of Art and Design's Ben Maltz Gallery, brought this tension to a sustained vibration, bringing the eccentricities of the body into relief. Here, bodies perform the grid, but also confront, are dwarfed by, give rise to, and abide within grids both monolithic and evanescent.

One of the pleasures of the show was its inter-generational roster, as well as the range of media within which the artistic investigations took place. Dance and performance were well represented (on video) with iconic works like Bruce Nauman's *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square* (1967); *Dance*, Lucinda Childs collaboration

**Molly Larkey**

with Sol LeWitt and Philip Glass from 1979; and David Haxton's strangely affecting *Cube and Room Drawings* (1976-1977). More recent performance and video works included *Sense and Sense* (2010), Emily Roysdon's video of the artist MPA's awkward and somehow tender attempt to walk on her side along the grid of a notorious Stockholm public square. Neil Beloufa's *The Analyst, the researcher, the screenwriter, the cgi tech and the lawyer* (2011) dislodges any notion of fixed perspective by bringing together divergent narratives around an ambiguously surveilled city block.

The two- and three-dimensional works in the show also highlighted the unmanageability and temporality of the body, as grids made by hand go happily askew and/or become opportunities for spontaneity. With titles like *1,000,000 Days Away* (2009), Xylor Jane's hand-drawn grids translate the ineffability of time into complex visual systems. Even when the mark of the hand isn't present, the grid is a structure against which improvisation can occur: the mysterious curve and the shifting green of Kathleen Ryan's *Wave* (2015) transforms an imposing chunk of gridded metal fence (rendered innocuous on its back) into something vegetal, aspirational, and airy. Conceptually and formally, these and other works in the show demonstrated both the transcendental and the oppressive qualities of the grid, contrasted with the delightfully unreliable, always shifting human body.

On a Sunday afternoon during the run of the show, MPA held an event called *Interrupting the Grid*. This included a lecture on her research into the future colonization of Mars and its relationship to current life on Earth. The talk was held simultaneously with an exercise called *Walking the Grid*, which was performed by former students of the artist. The design of the exercise caused the performers to haphazardly run into each other—and the audience—as they walked imaginary grids. Afterwards, everyone came together to discuss the lecture and how it felt, as actors and spectators, to participate in the performance.

Since the grid is about definition and demarcation, the separation of audience and performer during the event—and the occasional lack thereof—brought to light the kind of psychological structures that function like physical grids, but are invisible. The performance produced an acute awareness of how codes of logic and separation inform our bodies and their movement: classifications that inhibit us, hierarchies that structure our movement, and value systems that delineate our relationships to each other. Ultimately, these psychological grids serve the logic of capitalism, which benefits from defining us and our relationships solely in terms of the roles we play as actors in its system.

MPA's performance, and the exhibition as a whole, gave form to the ways that our bodies are vulnerable in relation to

these physical and imagined grids. However, coming together in a non-hierarchical formation to discuss what it *felt like* to be bodies relating to each other seemed like a radical departure from the unconscious ways that we usually engage with the various grids in our lives. Changing our relationships with each other changes the structures that limit us.

## Laura Owens at the Wattis Institute (L.A. in S.F.)

April 28–  
July 23, 2016

The current Laura Owens solo exhibition, *Ten Paintings*, at the Wattis Institute in San Francisco, is a perplexing visual poem. What are the “paintings,” and how are they paintings? The walls in the first room are plastered floor to ceiling in 70 clay-coated, silkscreened, drawn and painted-on sheets of paper. Throughout the space, there are architectural nods to both Owens' studio space and the exhibition space itself. Overt and implied optical illusions abound, but Owens never regresses to impressing, and this is perhaps what is ultimately most impressive. The show has been rigorously conceived as a totalized environment, filled with repurposed works and reclaimed spam emails. It reveals hints of intimacy,

Keith J. Varadi

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and revels in advertisements for detachment.

Despite the lack of discrete canvases on display, Owens still insists on deeming the works “paintings.” This insistence feels equally sincere and satirical, and the motif carries on into the next room, where she includes a few of her (now) semi-signature paintings and a salon-style installation composed of pieces made by her own family members (her grandmother’s embroidery, her brother’s childhood drawings) along with a curious collection of other sundry small-scale two-dimensional works. Even when she deploys a gimmick—visitors can send text messages to the applied wallpaper, eliciting a robotic response—the result doesn’t feel forced; it feels time-sensitive.

This sensitivity to time (and timeliness) is astounding, and can be tied to one of the simpler statements that the curator, Anthony Huberman, makes about this work in his associated text: “Many tag Owens’ work as ‘Painting 2.0.’” Largely, this refers to Owens’ actual use of Photoshop, her emoji sculptures, and Instagram-influenced subject matter. The literalness of this angling (by both artist and curator) is timely; *i.e.*, hashtags pointedly tend to have a quick expiration date. Owens though, unlike most other contemporary artists infatuated with the mimetic processes of online networks, has figured out a way to utilize the ephemeral nature of browsing and scrolling.

Owens has made herself gradually, and increasingly, available in her work, while also understanding and citing history (painting and otherwise) throughout her most recent exhibitions. In *Ten Paintings*, her incorporation of vintage local newspaper listings (via back issues of *The Berkeley Barb*) becomes an explicit micro-gesture, whereas her construction of a flattened-out, pastel-infused black-and-white pixelated labyrinth of muddled content, evocative of the ethos of ‘70s conceptual art, is more of an implicit macro-gesture. This holistic approach allows her to be as generous as possible with her audience, while simultaneously acknowledging the myopic solipsism of a solitary studio practice—a complexly self-aware balancing act.

Huberman claims, “Objects, images, or videos need a frame or a context in order for them to *seem* like art. Painting doesn’t.” Of course, anyone can recognize a painting as art, and often, they do; but context affects painting as much as any other art form. If one’s aunt or uncle purchases a painting from a thrift store, it ends up in their living room. If Jim Shaw makes the same transaction, the painting ends up in the New Museum. Owens does not overlook this ironic reality. Each aspect of her practice—the application or execution of any given idea—illuminates or complicates the others.

Since Owens first came to prominence out of graduate school at CalArts in the late ‘90s, she has

continued to push on painting, sometimes taking multiple left turns, and often landing at unpredictable destinations. Yet, it wasn’t until the recession hit in 2008, and many people seemed to give up on the market (and, with it, painting), that Owens really began to own the medium. In the face of futile impossibility, Owens went into full-on swagger mode and began building the framework for her most confident and ambitious works to date.

These ideas sharply coalesced three years ago when Owens exhibited a series of large new works, *12 Paintings* (2013), as the inaugural show at her (then) newly unveiled warehouse space, 356 Mission, in Los Angeles. These paintings were bold in their Pop art color schemes and directed compositions, and brash in their unflinching, unwavering *laissez-faire* attitude. This relentlessly multifarious yet deferential outlook on one’s own standing in a bigger, broader community—again on both the micro- and macro-level—ideally serves as a generative point to cycle through ideas in a profoundly productive manner. In principle, this malleable form of reflexivity comes with some distance; the harder one squints, the clearer the picture. Although, the risk one certainly runs with this strategy is that so much time will be spent naval-gazing that the individual will simply develop astigmatism.

In any case, the past few years have seen Owens’ specifically squinted vision willfully straddle the printed

and digital, the real and virtual, the personal and professional with egotistical dexterity and assumed vulnerability. In an extremely tenuous election year, in which galleries are closing, auction houses are scrambling, artists are being taken advantage of, and another recession looms as a real possibility, alternatives seem to be the only source of hope. Owens here, at the top of her painting game, in a city presently so sure of solutions, proves once again, with “paintings,” that alternatives must be sought and (can be) found.

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*Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947–2016* (Installation view) (2016). Image courtesy of the artists and Hauser Wirth & Schimmel. Louise Bourgeois: Art © The Easton Foundation/ Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Photo: Brian Forrest.

2

Carl Cheng, *Supply & Demand* (1972). Venus flytrap, insects, plastic case, humidifier, wiring, grass, wood pedestal, grow lamps, 47 × 24 × 18.6 inches. Image courtesy of Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles. Photo: Jeff McClane.

3

Joan Snyder, *Spring* (1971). Oil, acrylic, and spray enamel on canvas, 78 × 108 inches. Image courtesy of Parrasch Heijnen Gallery.

4

Eleanor Antin, *Margaret Mead* (1970). Umbrella, chair, binoculars with case, thermos, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist and Diane Rosenstein, Los Angeles.

5

*Performing the Grid* (Installation view) (2016). Images courtesy of Ben Maltz Gallery at Otis College of Art and Design. Photo: Chris Warner.

6

Laura Owens, *Untitled* (Installation view) (2016). Acrylic, oil, Flashe, silkscreen inks, charcoal, pastel pencil, graphite, and sand on wall paper. Image courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York; Sadie Coles HQ, London; Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. © Laura Owens. Photo: Johnna Arnold.

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## Exquisite L.A. Contributors

Claressinka Anderson has worked as an art dealer, advisor, and curator in Los Angeles for the past 10 years. Originally from London, England, she is the owner of Marine Projects and a published writer of fiction and poetry.

Joe Pugliese, a California native, specializes in portraiture and shoots for a mixture of editorial and advertising clients. He has recently completed projects for such titles as *Wired*, *Vanity Fair*, *Men's Journal* and *Billboard* magazines, as well as advertising campaigns for Netflix, Sony, and AMC. His images have been honored by the Society of Publication Design, *American Photography*, and *Communication Arts*. He lives and works in Los Angeles.