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Art

## Best of 2019: Our Top 20 Los Angeles Art Shows

Our favorite Los Angeles shows of 2019, brought to you by the writers and editors of Hyperallergic.



by Hyperallergic  
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Shirin Neshat, "Bonding" (1995) (© Shirin Neshat/Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels)

This year we've grown our Los Angeles list to 20 picks — there's just so much to highlight! As always, it's hard to distill our favorite shows in a city so dense with excellent art events. Below are some of the exhibitions that resonated with our writers as the months have gone by, from group shows illuminating California art history to thoughtful retrospectives of local and international artists.

### **1. *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972–1985* at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles**



Miriam Schapiro, "Heartland" (1985) (photo by Elisa Wouk Almino/Hyperallergic)

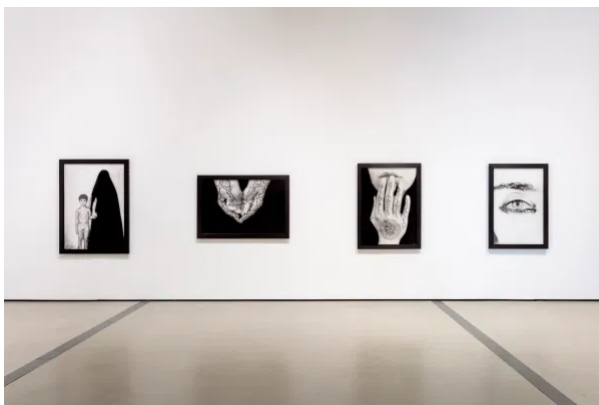
October 27, 2019–May 11, 2020

Curated by Anna Katz with Rebecca Lowery

This is not only a gorgeous show, but also an important one: it is the largest survey to date of the Pattern and Decoration movement in the United States, which spanned the 1970s and '80s and has long been overlooked for being too decorative, domestic, and feminine in nature. Cognizant of the renewed interest in craft, curator Anna Katz seized on the opportunity to revisit the Pattern and Decoration

artists. Befitting of the works on view, the organization of the show and the texts that accompany it are clear-eyed, sensitive, and refreshingly fun. *With Pleasure* is not to be missed. —*Elisa Wouk Almino*

## 2. Shirin Neshat: *I Will Greet the Sun Again* at the Broad



Installation view of Shirin Neshat: *I Will Greet the Sun Again* at the Broad (photo by Joshua White / JWPictures.com)

October 19, 2019–February 16, 2020

Curated by Ed Schad

It's not surprising that this exhibition is the largest one to date of Shirin Neshat's work — there are hours' worth of film and the display stretches across the entire ground floor. Her work, spanning the past 30 years, is stunning and the installation is striking: her large-format, black-and-

white photographs impressively dominate the space. Collectively, Neshat's oeuvre is

one of the most poignant expressions of exile and displacement, drawing on Iranian poetry that is translated for English-language readers throughout the show. Eight of her films are on display, and while they require time, they are absolutely worth it. —

*Elisa Wouk Almino*

### **3. *Black Is Beautiful: The Photography of Kwame Brathwaite* at the Skirball Cultural Center**

*April 11–September 1*

*Curated by Kwame S. Brathwaite with Michael Famighetti from the Aperture Foundation and Bethany Montagano of the Skirball Cultural Center*



Installation view, *Black is Beautiful* at the Skirball Cultural Center (photo by Colony Little)

**Black Is Beautiful** revealed the context behind the images that popularized a slogan synonymous with Black greatness. Brathwaite's **stunning** **portraits** of Black women in the 1960s

and 1970s expanded our definition of beauty, and his images documented the diverse artistic talents that coalesced around Black nationalism. The highlight of the show was its focus on the Grandassa Models, whose images are nearly indistinguishable from present-day editorial photoshoots. The exhibition's timelessness undoubtedly resonated with younger viewers, and it is my hope that the historical insights presented in the show were viewed in light of the important curatorial strides currently being made in contemporary fashion photography. —

*Colony Little*

### **4. *Something Revealed: California Women Artists Emerge, 1860–1960* at the Pasadena Museum of History**

*September 29, 2018–April 13, 2019*

*Curated by Maurine St. Gaudens Studio*

**This two-part exhibition** displayed around 350 artworks by 150 female artists who lived and worked in California between 1860 and 1960. Most of the artists are lesser known, having been obscured by their male counterparts and receiving less institutional support. The display was delightfully eclectic, ranging from self-portraiture to Walt Disney animations. The exhibition grew out of Maurine St. Gaudine's four-volume **book** on California women artists and **featured historically significant work**, including a rare 1890 still life painting

Installation view of *Something Revealed: California Women Artists Emerge, 1860-1960* at Pasadena Museum of History (photo by Abe Ahn for Hyperallergic)

by Pauline Powell Burns, the first African American artist to exhibit in the state. —  
*Elisa Wouk Almino*

## 5. *Parergon: Japanese Art of the 1980s and 1990s* at Blum & Poe



*Parergon: Japanese Art of the 1980s and 1990s*, installation view, 2019, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles (courtesy of the artists and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo, photo by Heather Rasmussen)

*Part I: February 14–March 23; Part II: April 6–May 19*

*Curated by Mika Yoshitake*

**Parergon** cast light on a period of Japanese art history that bridges the austere formalism of mid-century Mono-ha artists with today's unselfconsciously commercial postmodernists. Curated by Mika Yoshitake, the two-part exhibition



featured works of diverse genres, styles, and disciplines, framing installation, performance, and mixed media works in context of a period defined broadly by formal experimentation and political transgression from the margins of Japanese culture. While institutional retrospectives of underground scenes always run the risk of ossifying what was once a chaotic and vibrant period, the exhibition, alongside satellite shows and live performances that took place throughout the city, helped capture some of the energy of a bygone era. —*Abe Ahn*

## 6. *Nayland Blake: No Wrong Holes* at Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA), Los Angeles

September 29, 2019–January 26, 2020

Curated by Jamillah James



Nayland Blake with "Ruins of Sensibility" (1972–2002), DJ equipment, records, plywood, cardboard boxes, painting (photo by Matt Stromberg for Hyperallergic)

Few artists are able to tackle weighty and tragic subjects with as much playful wit and humor as Nayland Blake. The work included in their 30-year survey *No Wrong Holes* addresses the AIDS crisis, BDSM, America's painful racial legacy, personal love and loss, with an array of materials from stuffed animals and costumes, to chains, shackles, and even Blake's sizeable personal record

collection. "Feeder 2" (1998) is a life-sized gingerbread house, simultaneously inviting and unnerving, which references both holiday celebrations and the carnivorous witch from Hansel and Gretel. Menace never seemed so delicious. —*Matt Stromberg*

## 7. *Betye Saar: Call and Response* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)



Installation view, *Betye Saar: Call and Response*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, September 22, 2019–April 22, 2020 (© Betye Saar, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA)

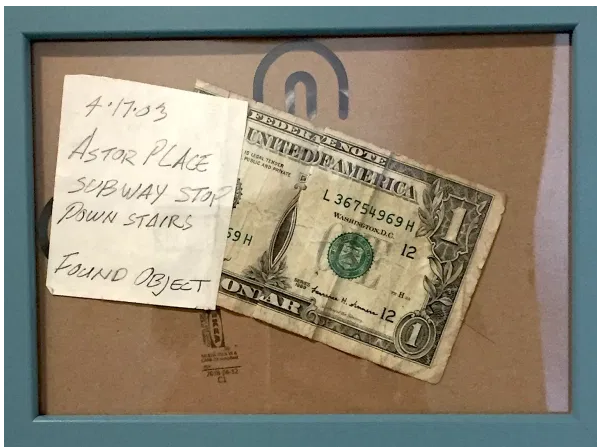
*September 22, 2019–April 5, 2020*

*Curated by Carol S. Eliel*

It's rare that such a small show has such a large impact. But Betye Saar's limited yet exquisite retrospective has the density and luminosity of a neutron star. Highlighting choice works from throughout her career, *Call and Response* exemplifies Saar's ability to reshape the world around her through uniquely configured

assemblages. Her notebooks, many on view for the first time, give insight into this important yet all-too-often overlooked artist and her process. While viewers at first might be tempted to wish for a larger selection, and understandably so, it is, in the end, equally if not more gratifying to spend time with the core of Saar's work that spans the better part of a century. —*Lorissa Rinehart*

## 8. David Hammons at Hauser & Wirth



David Hammons, "Found Objects" (photo by Colony Little for Hyperallergic)

*May 18–August 11*

This career-spanning show exemplified David Hammons's cheeky sense of humor and the ways in which he has poked fun at the art world for decades. The exhibition, dedicated to the jazz musician Ornette Coleman, also emphasized Hammons's improvisational spirit. On the one hand, the lack of exhibition text left some puzzling over the meaning and

intention of his works (are those crumpled dollar bills on the floor for the taking?); on the other, it seemed fitting for his art to trick and challenge the viewer. The one

installation where context would've been helpful was Hammons's sea of tents — resembling those in nearby Downtown Skid Row. Some noted that the installation, adjacent to a fancy restaurant, became more of a spectacle than anything. Nonetheless, the discomfort and conversation it stirred felt apt in a city and state that are increasingly hostile toward homeless populations. —*Elisa Wouk Almino*

## 9. *Balthazar: A Black African King in Medieval and Renaissance Art at the Getty Center*



Peter Paul Rubens, "Head Study for Balthazar" (about 1609–11), oil on paper laid down on panel (photo by Elisa Wouk Almino/Hyperallergic)

November 16, 2019–February 16, 2020

Curated by Kristen Collins and Bryan C. Keene

This is a small but rich exhibition that presents research not widely discussed. Balthazar, one of the three kings who visited Christ, was a Black man from Africa, though artists would not depict him as such until the mid-1400s. The Getty show attributes this shift to the presence of the slave trade in Europe. From illuminated manuscripts to paintings by the likes of Andrea Mantegna and Peter Paul Rubens, *Balthazar* considers the

enslaved people that likely served as models for these artworks and the colonialist history that underlies them. If you make it to the show (and I hope you do) make sure to read the wall text. —*Elisa Wouk Almino*

## 10. *Indian Country: The Art of David Bradley at the Autry Museum of the American West*

March 31, 2019–January 5, 2020

*Organized by the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Santa Fe*

Walking into David Bradley's show, you'll see saturated colors, busy landscapes, and lots of lively activity. When you look closer at his works (mostly paintings) you'll find a portrait of the American West that is at turns joyous and damningly satirical. Often focusing his eye on Santa Fe, Bradley comments on the commodification of Native American culture (he is of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe), while also

David Bradley, "End of the Santa Fe Trail" (1992), acrylic on canvas (Gift of Ernest J. and Edith M. Schwartz, Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, 57876)

capturing everyday moments along the beach or on a porch. You could spend a long time with each of his detail-packed paintings, which draw on influences as varied as Andy Warhol and Henri Rousseau. —*Elisa Wouk Almino*

## **11. *LA Blacksmith* at the California African American Museum (CAAM)**

*September 10, 2019–February 16, 2020*

*Curated by jill moniz*

**LA Blacksmith** takes as its unique focus the tradition of metalworking among Black artists in the Los Angeles area. The exhibition explores the West African roots of this tradition while also tracing the influence of the Watts Rebellion: in the aftermath of this historic event, artists such as Noah Purifoy and Timothy Washington collected the detritus left on the streets and made striking sculptures. The stunning work on view, by the likes of Alison Saar, Ed Love, Maren Hassinger, and Kehinde Wiley, is elegantly installed and demonstrates a sustained interest in metalwork from the 1970s to the present. —*Elisa Wouk Almino*





**Installation view of *LA Blacksmith* at CAAM**  
(photo by Elisa Wouk Almino/Hyperallergic)



Terry Allen, "*Ancient*" (2000–2001), multi-media,  
97 x 96 x 78 ¼ in. (photo by Matt Stromberg)

## 12. *Terry Allen: The Exact Moment It Happens in the West* at LA Louver

*June 26–September 28*

This was an exuberant 50-year retrospective of the work of Terry Allen. It showcased Allen's ability to shift between mediums, incorporating drawing, collage, sculpture, performance, and video — the through-line being his skill as a master storyteller. From early surrealist cartoons, to theatrical pieces, and text-based, expressionistic drawings, Allen's disparate oeuvre is filled with gamblers, veterans, cowboys, and sparring couples, whom he depicts with pathos, humor, and honesty. The visual work was interspersed with listening stations playing several of his country music albums, beginning with *Juarez* (1975), a concept album recounting a tragic story of two couples whose travels throughout the American West end in a violent rendezvous. For Allen, visual art isn't an illustration of the music, but a separate expression of similar ideas.

"It's like the drawings were on one wall, the songs were on the other," he said, "you're in the middle and that's what the piece was about — kind of what happened to you in that middle ground." There was also documentation of his 1994 piece "Cross the Razor," which was composed of two vans on either side of the US-Mexico

border outfitted with loudspeakers. Anyone could step up onto a platform and say anything they wanted to the other side, thereby creating their own meaning in a very different kind of middle ground. —*Matt Stromberg*

### 13. *Tony Cokes: Della's House* by Hannah Hoffman Gallery at the House



*Tony Cokes: Della's House*, installation view (2019) (image courtesy the artist and Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles, photo by Elon Schoenholz)

*February 12–March 22*

Tony Cokes's videos are disarming in their simplicity. Sans-serif histories or narratives trail across the screen, set to popular music, and you follow — until some quote or anecdote drops, so full of discriminative irony and illogic it makes you recoil. In *Della's House*, his site-specific exhibition by Hannah Hoffman Gallery in architect Paul Williams's streamlined 1951 Lafayette Square home, it was the fact that

Williams, the first black member of the American Institute of Architects, learned to draw upside-down for white patrons uncomfortable sitting next to him. Williams designed landmarks like the LAX Theme Building and celebrity homes for Frank Sinatra and Lucille Ball, but couldn't live in the neighborhoods he built. And so the garbled crooning in the accompanying Radiohead remixes becomes a poignant reminder of productivity familiar to people of color: keep your head down, work twice as hard, be extra polite. *Della's House* also featured three older works and two bracing new videos on Aretha Franklin. —*Alex Jen*

### 14. *American Monument* at Beall Center for Art + Technology, University of California, Irvine

*October 5, 2019–February 8, 2020*



lauren woods, *American Monument* at the Beall Center for Art + Technology (photo by Will Yang)

*Curated by Kimberli Meyer*

In 2018, lauren woods made headlines when she pulled this project from California State University Long Beach, an act of solidarity and protest over the firing of former Museum Director Kimberli Meyer's firing. A year later, the University of California, Irvine has finally unveiled woods's ambitious exhibition, a monument to

Black lives lost to police brutality. The museum is filled with custom-made records spinning on turntables, each playing a recording of the victim's confrontation with police right before they were killed. The audio, doggedly gathered from FOIA requests, is constructed from witness recordings, police reports, and court testimonies. When *American Monument* makes its way to future venues it will grow larger because lauren woods will keep pace with the murders, adding new audio every time another death surfaces. —Renée Reizman

## 15. Suzan Pitt: *Joy Street* at Hunter Shaw Fine Art

*March 31–May 5*



Installation view of Suzan Pitt: *Joy Street* at Hunter Shaw Fine Art (image courtesy Hunter Shaw Fine Art)

This year saw the passing of artist and animation legend Suzan Pitt, whose 1995 animated short *Joy Street* served as the crux of her exhibition at Hunter Shaw Fine Art. The film depicts the story of a woman saved from suicide by a fairytale mouse who transforms the uncaring streets of New York City into a tropical jungle so beautiful that upon awakening from

her fantastical dream she feels inspired to carry on. In an art world that often prides itself on emotional detachment and intellectual coolness, Pitt's oeuvre serves the

same purpose as the mouse in her story, reminding us not to make work simply for market value or as a demonstration of academic prowess, but for joy. —*Jennifer Remenchik*

## 16. Leidy Churchman: *For the Moon There Is the Cloud* at Gaga & Reena Spaulings Fine Art



Leidy Churchman, "For The Flower There Is The Wind (Perky Snowlion)" (2018), oil on canvas, 18 x 25 1/2 in. (photo by Natalie Haddad)

November 11, 2018–January 12, 2019

Comprised largely of jewel-hued landscapes, Leidy Churchman's *For the Moon There Is the Cloud* was a reminder of how fresh traditional painting genres can be. However, the works were far from traditional. Churchman's soft, impressionistic brushwork is intimate and inviting. An extraordinarily gifted colorist, his emerald-green clearings, tinged with

golden light, and oceanic blue skies and seas are populated with trees, boulders, and clouds whose quiet life-force suffuses the scenes. A handful of evocative abstract and figurative paintings hinted at a philosophical subtext to the images. Churchman is clearly among today's most talented painters; *For the Moon There Is the Cloud* was a beguiling look at his visual worlds and the depth of meaning behind them. —*Natalie Haddad*

## 17. Gordon Parks: *The Flávio Story* at the Getty Center

July 9–November 10, 2019

Curated by Amanda Maddox and Paul Roth

I was struck by this show not because of the images, but rather the discourse around the images and their cultural moment in US history that the exhibition takes pains to recount. While it could be a case study on the limits of liberal





Gordon Parks, *Untitled* (Flávio da Silva), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (1961), gelatin silver print, 14 × 11 inches (the Gordon Parks Foundation © the Gordon Parks Foundation)

documentary (Martha Rosler's 1981 essay on documentary photography came to mind), it's also a deep dive into one image maker grappling with the ethics of his work and a lifelong investment in his subject's life. —*Abe Ahn*

## 18. Xu Zhen: *In Just a Blink of an Eye* at MOCA Grand Avenue

*July 27–September 2*

*Curated by Amanda Hunt, with the assistance of Alice Teng*



***Xu Zhen's*** *In Just a Blink of an Eye* at MOCA Grand Avenue (photo by Renée Reizman)

### **Zhen's gravity-defying choreography**

is the first piece of performance art MOCA acquired for its permanent collection. Humans become living sculptures frozen in time, turning the split-second moment of falling into a scrutable, enduring motion. Pulled out of Zhen's native China, the performance takes on new meaning with its American performers floating in baggy hoodies and jeans. Are they

victims of violence, or tripped by another ominous force? —*Renée Reizman*

## 19. Hugo Crosthwaite: *TIJUAS! (Death March, Tijuana Bibles and Other Legends)* at Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

*November 9, 2019–January 4, 2020*

Hugo Crosthwaite, "Death March" (2010-2011), installation view at Luis De Jesus Los Angeles (Collection of Richard Harris, Chicago)

I have never before seen an artist who can sidle right up to Goya's *Caprichos* or *Desastres de La Guerra* and not only survive the comparison but generate mutual enrichment. Hugo Crosthwaite's **TIJUAS!** at Luis De Jesus presents a breathtaking collection of drawings ranging from small to mural-size, as well as video animations and books, all made over a period of over a decade.

Crosthwaite's work addresses life on both sides of the US-Mexican border where he conveys the feeling of life bottled up beneath a merciless cork, his observations packed with violence, tenderness, pain, boredom, and his mind-boggling draftsmanship. —*Daniel Gerwin*

## 20. *Mariah Garnett: Trouble* at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery

*February 14–April 14*

*Curated by Ciara Moloney*

Mariah Garnett, "Trouble" (image courtesy the artist and Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery)

Mariah Garnett's experimental **film** (which **the exhibition** is named after) is an intimate re-enactment of family and political histories alongside a fascinating dive into contemporary Ireland. It's creative nonfiction focused on performative truth over journalistic accuracy. Garnett plays a sympathetic

protagonist in her (and her estranged father's) stories, while I came away feeling both disturbed by and wanting to know more about the Troubles. —*Abe Ahn*

## Honorable Mentions:

### ***Genesis Belanger: Coins for the Ferryman at François Ghebaly***

*May 11–June 15*

Genesis Belanger, "Reception" (detail) (image courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly)

For her first solo exhibition with the gallery, Belanger presented an array of technically proficient, politically poetic sculptures using materials such as porcelain, fabric, and stoneware. At turns humorously ironic and tragically sincere, the work explored ennui, liminality, and "feminine" consumption, depicting the many

objects we mindlessly accumulate in our ongoing attempts at self-soothing and self-care. Smashed cigarette butts, droopy pens, and half-eaten chocolates — the sculptures, much like passengers on the river Styx, feel caught in an in-between state of time. —*Jennifer Remenchik*

### ***Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power 1963–1983 at the Broad***

*March 23–September 1*

*Curated by Sarah Loyer*

Installation view of Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power at the Broad (photo by Pablo

Another favorite of this year, Soul of a Nation at the Broad, topped last year's NYC list, so we decided to give the spotlight to some of the other fantastic exhibitions that passed through Los Angeles in 2019. But we would be

Enriquez, courtesy of the Broad) remiss to not mention this historic show tracing the contributions of Black artists from the civil rights movement to the present day. It was especially exciting to see how [the Los Angeles iteration](#) focused more deeply on West Coast artists such as Betye Saar, Charles White, and Noah Purifoy. —*Elisa Wouk Almino*

**Correction:** *A previous version of this article stated that the With Pleasure exhibition at MOCA Los Angeles was the first museum survey of the Pattern and Decoration movement. This is incorrect; the Hudson River Museum held a survey in 2008. The article has been updated to reflect that the MOCA show is the largest survey to date.*

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