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ON SITE

MADE IN L.A. 2014

TV, 2014. Performance view, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, June 21, 2014.
From a *KCHUNG* TV, 2014.

TWO YEARS AGO, Los Angeles's hometown biennial launched with a presentation that, in terms of sheer sprawl, aptly mirrored its host city. Installed at three venues, the exhibition featured sixty artists and was received as a representative, if cumbersome, cross section of several generations of artistic production in the region. Made in L.A. 2014 cut the roster nearly in half, with thirty-five individuals or teams, and confined itself to one site, the Hammer Museum. But if the show was smaller than its predecessor, it was no less ambitious. It was clear that what was on offer was an established, regular accounting of the state of artmaking in that expansive, not always cohesive or self-understanding metropolis known, for convenience's sake, as Los Angeles.

The show was organized by Connie Butler and Michael Ned Holte and was dedicated to the memory of Karin Higa, who was part of the curatorial team until her untimely death, in October 2013. A tender citation in the catalogue describes Higa as "a tough and incisive thinker, unfailingly curious and generous," a watchword for this iteration of the biennial. One striking aspect of the exhibition was its riposte to the truism that painting doesn't make much sense in LA, a proposition belied by works like Lecia Dole-Recio's layered constructions and Channing Hansen's baroquely knitted extravaganzas. But the major discovery was the prevalence of collaborative projects, from creative partnerships like that of Magdalena Suarez Frimkess and Michael Frimkess, who have been colluding on a wild concoction of high-end ceramics and folk-pop decoration for more than fifty years, to looser collectives that have come together in defiance of economic realities and the antisocial geography of the city. Perhaps the signature group at the Hammer was *KCHUNG* Radio. In operation for three years and broadcasting live at 1630 on the AM dial from a space in Chinatown, *KCHUNG* is a confederation of some one hundred DJs—artists, musicians, and sundry others—who host more than seventy-five shows each month. *KCHUNG* provides its listeners, who mostly access the programs online, with a lively platform for connectedness. If you want to understand a core interest animating a certain constellation of younger artists in LA today—what I'd describe as a networked interdisciplinarity—this is an essential first stop.

For *Made in L.A. 2014*, *KCHUNG* expanded its reach to television and set up an impromptu studio in the Hammer lobby to record live shows, presenting events and setting a mildly anarchic tone. Once in the galleries, visitors encountered Samara Golden's installation *Thank You*, 2014, an uncanny

group portrait featuring 3-D photos of LA art-worlders (the images surreally affixed to mannequin heads) plus a live feed that incorporated Hammer viewers into the work. Around the corner waited the Los Angeles Museum of Art, an institution founded by Alice Könitz in the driveway of her Eagle Rock studio. At the Hammer, the LAMoA took the form of three “visionary display systems,” one of which resembled the boxy “pavilion” designed by Alison and Peter Smithson for the seminal show “This Is Tomorrow” at London’s Whitechapel Gallery in 1956. But whereas the members of the Independent Group mixed architectural theory, the art of their moment, and popular culture to make a grand theoretical point about their view of the future, Könitz used a similar mash-up to create an intimate space in which to exhibit and discuss friends’ work, while also slyly critiquing the necessary elitism of contemporary museums. A similarly convivial atmosphere pervaded the Hammer’s courtyard, where Jmy James Kidd’s *Gold Stage*, 2014, was used for performances, rehearsals, and less defined hanging out.

These overlapping projects were variously occupied by many of the same artists, creating an impression of interlocking circles of influence and involvement, and all shared an off-kilter sense of engagement. Such projects constitute generously discursive spaces—improvisatory, imaginative platforms for experimentation. There is a politics to this, although an older generation of activists is likely to find it unconvincing. Yet in this bewildered age, a whimsical resistance may be more effective than forms of organized protest that seem little more than bad theater. As if to reflect on such oblique politics, Butler and Holte (who, full disclosure, is a colleague of mine in the School of Art at CalArts) included a small memorial exhibition centered on the extremely aestheticized paintings Tony Greene made in the late 1980s, as he was dying of AIDS. (Some were on view in the most recent Whitney Biennial.) The curator of this show within a show, David Frantz, marshaled a group of Greene’s contemporaries, queer LA artists dedicated to the celebration of a melancholic aesthetic that, though dramatically different from the in-your-face tactics of Gran Fury’s East Coast artist-activists, seems resistant nonetheless. Work by Greene, Monica Majoli, Millie Wilson, and others in this coterie presages the kind of art that predominated at Made in L.A. 2014, evincing what Jennifer Moon (whose revolutionary self-help project is in the show, and who also participates in KCHUNG Radio) has described as “a combination of anarchism and punk with faith and love”—a formula that, at present, seems as promising as any.

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