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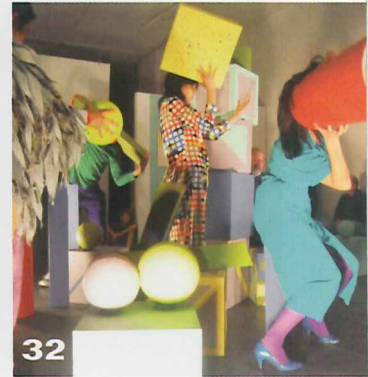
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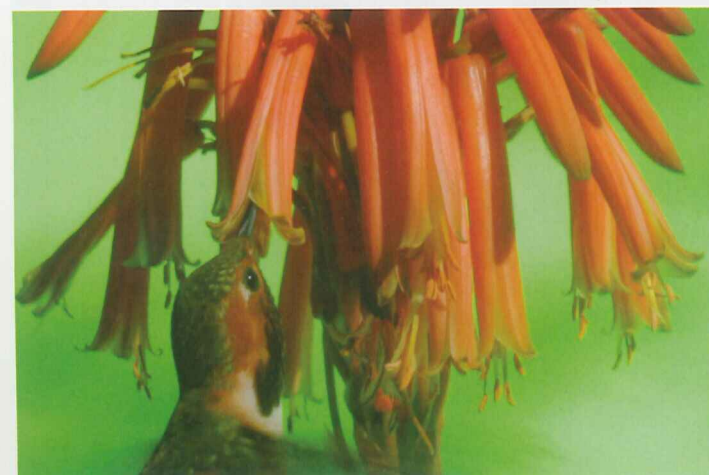
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"Made in LA"

Co-curators **Connie Butler & Michael Ned Holte**

discuss the process of putting together their incisive new LA biennial at the Hammer.

by George Melrod



How does one conceive a regional survey exhibition for a diverse, increasingly international metropolis that's always searching for community and constantly in flux? Perhaps by defining it right up front as a diverse, increasingly international metropolis that's always searching for community and constantly in flux. That's one of the canny insights of the new 2014 "Made in LA" biennial at the Hammer Museum, co-curated by Connie Butler and Michael Ned Holte. Although the Hammer has been staging a (roughly) biannual group show for a decade and a half, this marks only the second version of the "Made in LA" biennial; the inaugural sprawling take in 2012 was organized by five curators and spread out across two separate venues. In launching this year's iteration, Hammer director Ann Philbin turned to two very different figures, who in working together as a team, provided the yin to each other's yang.

Connie Butler had been a well-respected curator at MOCA for a decade, before heading east in 2006, as curator of drawings at the Museum of Modern Art; among the many exhibitions she has organized are "WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution" at MOCA, and "Greater New York," a 2010 survey at MOMA's PS1. Last July, she returned to LA as the Hammer's new chief curator. By contrast, this is the first major museum exhibition for Michael Ned Holte, a critic and teacher at CalArts, who sparked debate in 2012 with his less-than-gushy review of the previous "Made in LA" in *ArtForum*. To begin, he questioned the very purpose of such a "determinedly local biennial," and the implicit boosterish tone that propelled it. Philbin invited Holte to come on board in September 2012, just weeks after the previous show had ended. "I actually told her to hold her invitation until she had read it," Holte laughs. "I think in terms of planning the show and in writing my essay, and the conversations I had with Connie, the criticisms I had of the first show were an inevitable starting point in thinking about the second."

"We thought of it as a core sample, or—a snapshot of a moment in time, taking the pulse," Butler explains. "I'm not sure it was by design, but I think we're both very happy with the fact that it really holds together as an exhibition. It's not thematic, but partly because each of the artists were given very generous spaces, each room has its own coherence and logic, I think."

One of the things that gives the show its coherence, despite the wide range of practices, and mediums, on display, is the emphasis on

TOP TO BOTTOM:
 "UNTITLED (U)," 1989, **Tony Greene**
 MIXED MEDIA (OIL ON PHOTO MOUNTED ON BOARD)
 28½" x 32½" PRIVATE COLLECTION
 PHOTO: COURTESY OF DAVID FRANTZ

"LAMO/SAMOA," 2013, **Los Angeles Museum of Art**
 INSTALLATION BY **STEPHANIE TAYLOR**
 PHOTO: ROBERT WEDEMEYER

"THE POLLINATORS," 2014, **Sarah Rara**
 VIDEO STILL, SOUND, COLOR. RUNNING TIME NOT YET DETERMINED
 SOUND BY **Luke Fischbeck**, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



"POLYTOPE SOAP," 2013, **Channing Hansen**
HANDSPUN AND DYED MERINO, CORRIEDALE, CHEVIOT, HOLOGRAPHIC POLYMERS
ROMNEY, AND TEESWATER LOCKS, YAK DOWN, SILK NOILS, COMMERCIAL THREAD,
COTTON, VISCOSE, POLYAMIDE, AND CEDAR, 58" x 56"
PHOTO: JOSHUA WHITE, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THE HAMMER MUSEUM

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artistic collectives and collaborations. Among them are Public Fiction, an unmarked storefront space in Highland Park, founded by Lauren Mackler in 2010, that “is less a finite space than a social context for critical, discursive, and aesthetic experimentation.” Others include LA Museum of Art (LAMOAA), a platform created by sculptor Alice Könitz in 2012 in the driveway of her Eagle Rock studio; KCHUNG Radio, “a creative hub of artists, musicians, philosophers and tinkerers broadcasting live on 1630 AM from a studio above a pho restaurant in Los Angeles’s Chinatown”; and James Kidd Studio, a dance platform founded by a multivalent dancer/choreographer and costume designer in 2011. As Holte notes, most of these groups are new additions to the LA scene, having only started in the last 2-3 years.

“I think what Public Fiction does, or what KCHUNG does, is extremely important, and very well-known to a certain generation of artists in Los Angeles,” Holte says. “And they’re all things that have emerged, not since the last ‘Made in LA’ but, close to that.. So they seem really relevant and incredibly dynamic.” That they represent a kind of localized, self-created network of artistic dialogue already going on in the city—outside the traditional frameworks of museums and even art schools—makes them uniquely reflective of the current zeitgeist in LA. It also exemplifies a phenomenon Holte calls “microclimates.” As Holte explains, “There are a lot of social connections in the show, and those won’t be obvious to every viewer who comes to see the show. They’ll be very obvious to a number of younger artists in Los Angeles who are very aware of Public Fiction and KCHUNG, and how those collectives operate socially. But I think there’s so much in the show that it doesn’t need any explication for people to appreciate and enjoy.”

By inviting these collectives, the curators are also expanding their curatorial rubric to allow for shows-within-the-show, with their own, dynamic programming. “I think, in a way, it opens up the authorship of the exhibition,” Butler says enthusiastically. “We didn’t know what KCHUNG would do, but they made a proposal, and they’re doing it. It’s something we couldn’t have imagined. And I think the same is true of Lauren Mackler and Public Fiction, even Alice Könitz and LAMOAA. We knew we wanted to represent that project, but what she actually has done in the gallery is something that’s completely her own invention.”

In a sense, the emphasis on alternate conduits of cultural discourse also provides a corrective of sorts to the marketplace orientation that tends to dominate the larger cultural capitals. “Even in New York, with... the art market, the part of it that exists on steroids and this kind of global consumption... you see artists just completely turning away from that,” Butler says. “Because most artists have nothing to do with that, you know? So you could say that it’s a political rejection, but it’s

Pauletta Chanco: *Living on Shifting Sands*

July 19 - August 21

Reception: Saturday July 19, 3 - 5 p.m.



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Pauletta Chanco, *Dancing in the Midst of Sorrow*, 2014
photo: Maia Nichols

"One of the things we've talked about is our own interest in trying to see the art world in the way that artists are seeing it. And especially artists who are recently arriving in the city," Holte says.

actually just like—if that art market's not going to be a part of what we do, and isn't going to pay attention, let's do something else. And coming together to make spaces, to make collective practice, to make whatever, in response to that."

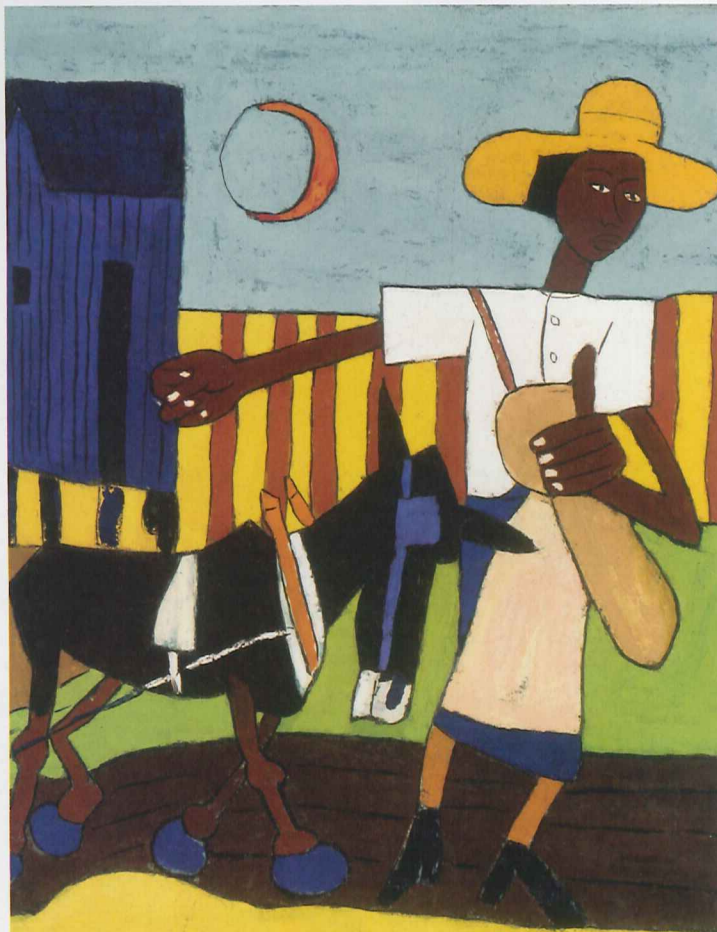
If anything, the show evidences an eagerness to see LA's art world from the inside out, in terms of both how it functions and why it's so appealing, and conducive, to newcomers. "One of the things we've talked about is our own interest in trying to see the art world in the way that artists are seeing it. And especially artists who are recently arriving in the city," Holte explains. Butler adds, "You can be anywhere in the world, but—people are talking about coming to LA. There is a real interest in what's happening here. And a real international community." Continues Holte: "One of the things that makes Los Angeles attractive, even more than real estate, or you know, any of those kind of pragmatic or economic considerations, is the idea that things are still being defined and redefined. That it's a place where an artist can actually come and have an impact."

Among the numerous newcomers and émigrés in the show are Gabriel Kuri, who was born in Mexico and lived 10 years in Brussels; Brazilian-born Clarissa Tossin, whose work addresses the utopian modernism of Oscar Niemeyer's capital city of Brasilia; and Piero Golia, who was born in Naples and arrived in 2005, whose best-known artwork in Los Angeles is a light atop the Standard Hotel in West Hollywood, which goes light or dark depending on if he's in town. So the show makes a conscious effort to represent a "regional global biennial" in Holte's words, starting from the premise that "the fluidity of the Los Angeles art scene has always been one of its most reliable characteristics," as Butler explains.

Yet within these parameters, it also makes pains to engage a gamut of diverse practices, some with potent visual impact, from Channing Hansen's elaborate, multi-colored "knitted paintings" derived from scientific and mathematical formulas, to Brian O'Connell's handsome gum bichromate photographs, which seem at first glance to mimic abstract modernist paintings. Born in Belgium, O'Connell has lived in Germany, Amsterdam, and New York, and was a participant in the 2010 survey "Greater New York." Beyond the recent grads and immigrants, older generations are represented by ceramicists Magdalena Suarez Frimkess and Michael Frimkess, photographer Judy Fiskin, represented here by a new video work, and 86-year old Marcia Hafif, who creates her seemingly monochromatic paintings as a form of installation art.

One of the more potent segments is another show-within-a-show, curated by David Frantz, on Tony Greene, who died of AIDS in 1990 at age 35. Also highlighted in the recent Whitney Biennial, and a new show currently at the MAK Center, Greene's work is contextualized here with an exhibit documenting the queer art community of the era, amid other, related artworks. As Holte observes, of Greene, but perhaps as well of countless other artists, and the quixotic, yet implicitly hopeful vision that impels shows such as these: "I think there's a kind of an important lesson in thinking about how quickly an artist, who might seem so central to his or her moment, and his or her community, can actually be forgotten."

"Made in LA" runs June 15 – Sept 7, 2014, at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. www.hammer.ucla.edu



African American Art

Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Era, and Beyond

JUNE 29 – SEPTEMBER 21, 2014

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William H. Johnson, *Sowing* (detail), ca. 1940. Oil on burlap, 38 1/2 x 45 3/4 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, gift of the Harmon Foundation.

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