



The L.A. Art Invasion

CULTURE, TRAVEL BY KEVIN MCGARRY AUGUST 19, 2014 6:00 PM

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Sun-soaked isolation seems just the thing to spark inspiration.

When Thomas Demand and Ryan Trecartin relocated to Los Angeles in 2010, they added momentum to the city's burgeoning status as an art capital to rival New York, London and Berlin. Of course, its abundant light and space have always drawn a certain kind of artist — members of the Light and Space movement, for instance, like Bruce Nauman and James Turrell. But now, with new gallery neighborhoods in Hollywood and Downtown, the endless expansion of LACMA and the impending arrival of the esteemed FIAC art fair, it seems that everyone, major figures and young guns alike, wants to call L.A. home. In the past two years, David Benjamin Sherry, Sam Falls, Gabriel Kuri, Silke Otto-Knapp, Amalia Ulman and Jordan Wolfson have relocated to the Southland, while others, like Liz Craft and Amy Yao, have returned, choosing its sprawl over more cosmopolitan art meccas.

L.A.'s appeal lies in "the possibility of disappearing," says Ulman, an Argentine who previously worked in London and Spain. "I'm so autonomous here," Wolfson adds. "I have my studio, my house and my small life." Both artists create work that explores isolation: Ulman shoots selfies in airplane bathrooms and five-star hotels; Wolfson's scantily clad robotic dancer at David Zwirner caused a sensation this spring. "In L.A., artists can test things out without the glare of the spotlight," says Ali Subotnick, a curator at the Hammer Museum, who moved from New York in 2006. "The proximity to the entertainment industry guarantees that the art world will never be the main industry in this town, so artists are able to work on the sidelines." Anonymity has become its appeal: Like no other place, L.A. offers artists the ability to be alone, together.

A Primer on L.A.'s New Arrivals

Liz Craft

Arrived from: New York City

L.A. gallery: none

Style: Craft's fantastical, dreamlike sculptures often veer in the direction of nightmares: they include glossy, upended spiders, functionless house-like constructions, goopy unicorns, baby carriages and assorted monsters.

Sam Falls

Arrived from: New York City

L.A. gallery: Hannah Hoffman Gallery

Style: Falls creates sculptures and paintings that he exposes to the elements, then takes photos of them to document how they change over weeks, months and sometimes years.

Gabriel Kuri

Arrived from: Brussels

L.A. gallery: Regen Projects

Style: Kuri's playful sculptures repurpose materials from the manmade and natural worlds, combining them into forms that frequently comment on the role of commodities in society.

Silke Otto-Knapp

Arrived from: Vienna

L.A. gallery: none (shows with Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York)

Style: Otto-Knapp applies soft, ethereal layers of gouache and watercolor to produce muted representations of performance and place.

David Benjamin Sherry

Arrived from: New York City

L.A. gallery: OHWOW

Style: Sherry photographs grandiose American landscapes and tweaks them with vivid, monochromatic tints.

Amalia Ulman

Arrived from: London and Gijon, Spain

L.A. gallery: LTD Los Angeles

Style: Ulman has riffed on contemporary decorations: Ikea paintings, aphorisms spelled out in romantic scripts and those wavy willows people stuff into vases. Lately, she has also documented cosmetic procedures via social media.

Jordan Wolfson

Arrived from: New York City

L.A. gallery: none (David Zwirner in New York and Sadie Coles HQ in London)

Style: Wolfson makes films, videos and installations that merge a cartoonish love for aesthetic variety (and cartoons themselves) with an underlying nihilism. This year, his animatronic stripper wearing a witch mask has become an art-world lightning rod.

Amy Yao

Arrived from: New York City

L.A. gallery: none (Canal 47 in New York)

Style: Yao's work spans virtually all mediums: painting, sculpture, photography, performance. But it's her objects — umbrellas adorned in funereal garb or a top hat and sequins; folding fans with attached pearls or cigarettes; brightly colored sticks with equally brightly colored hair extensions — that offer a through-line in their crooked anthropomorphic qualities, suggesting serious jokes about contemporary life.



Amy Yao at 47 Canal, "Skeleton, no. 2 (basic needs and the right to the pursuit of a good life)," 2013. Joerg Lohse, courtesy of 47 Canal, New York