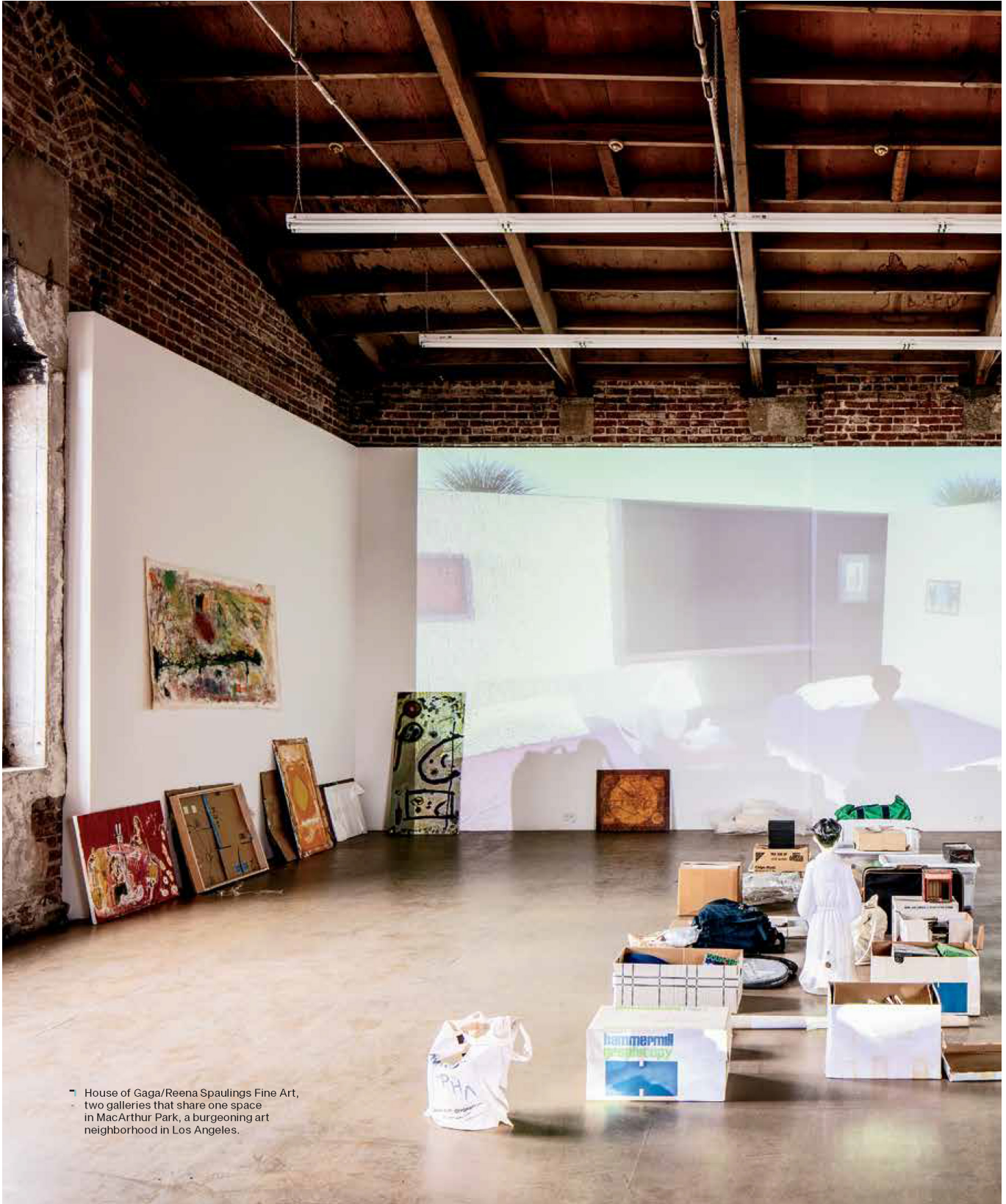


## DEPARTURES



House of Gaga/Reena Spaulings Fine Art, two galleries that share one space in MacArthur Park, a burgeoning art neighborhood in Los Angeles.



# L.A. ART

**MEET THE INNOVATORS AND IDEALISTS WHO ARE TURNING THIS CITY INTO A WORLD-CLASS CULTURAL CAPITAL.**

**BY ALIX BROWNE  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEFAN RUIZ**

**T**his fall, when Ai Weiwei makes his Los Angeles debut, it will be, appropriately enough, something of a blockbuster event. The Chinese art star will have no fewer than three major openings in the city, and the venues are particularly telling: He will show sculpture in Beverly Hills at UTA Artist Space, which is owned by one of L.A.'s most powerful talent agencies (Ai is, naturally, a client of UTA's recently minted fine arts division); he will take over the ground floor of the Marciano Art Foundation, a contemporary art venue established by jeans-wear magnates Maurice and Paul Marciano; and he will inaugurate art impresario Jeffrey Deitch's new Hollywood outpost. These days it seems everything is being consumed as entertainment: fashion, culture, politics, news, and, increasingly, art.

The Hollywoodization of the art scene in Los Angeles was, perhaps, inevitable. The annual LACMA





gala is always an art and film mash-up (last year's honorees were the artist Mark Bradford and the director George Lucas). Local artists regularly mine the treasures—and, on occasion, the horrors—of the dream factory in their work (Alex Israel has a studio on the Warner Bros. lot, where he has made work with the last remaining full-time painter from the studio's scenic department, and this fall Paul McCarthy is working on an epic project largely inspired by the 1939 John Ford classic *Stagecoach*). And in February 2019 the Frieze art fair arrives in L.A., pitching its tent on the Paramount Studios lot.

Bettina Korek is the director of Frieze L.A. and a member of the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, where she helped oversee the development of the Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative to ensure that everyone has access to art and culture. While Korek acknowledges that the opening of high-profile art venues like the Broad museum and the Marciano Art Foundation have helped to cement Los Angeles's reputation as a bona fide art capital, she says that it is the smaller, independent venues that are its beating heart. "The stereotype of the Wild West, that there is space for experimentation, still holds true here," she says. "I hope we never lose it."

#### UNDERGROUND MUSEUM

The painter Noah Davis believed that art is an essential part of a vibrant, just, and healthy society, and with that vision in mind, he and his wife, Karon, founded the Underground Museum in 2012. It's in a row of storefronts in Arlington Heights, where the couple also lived and worked. Through a groundbreaking partnership with MoCA, and with an enviable network of artists and high-profile supporters (Barry Jenkins, John Legend, Solange Knowles), the UM has been able to bring world-class art to this Central Los Angeles neighborhood, not to mention a bookstore, a regular film series,

and free meditation and yoga sessions. Noah passed away in 2015 at age 32 from cancer, but left blueprints for future shows. In October, the UM will present a solo exhibition by photographer Deana Lawson, who was its first artist in residence. It's also creating new traditions, like the annual Holiday Block Party, which debuted last year with a theater-in-the-round dance floor in the middle of Washington Boulevard that featured *Chorus*, a performance by world-renowned choreographer Ralph Lemon, and sound artist/sculptor Kevin Beasley. "Lemon's dance compositions explore how

history and geography make impressions on the body," says Megan Steinman, the museum's first director. "Much like the UM, his work seeks to merge art and life."

#### MACARTHUR PARK GALLERY SCENE

In this disjointed city, galleries tend to crop up in neighborhood clusters, like mushrooms on a log. A little more than a decade ago, the place to go was East Culver City, which is still anchored by Blum & Poe, or Chinatown, where David Kordansky got his start. Hauser & Wirth's mega-space, which arrived in 2016, provides a center of gravity for L.A.'s ever-burgeoning Arts District downtown. Deitch's space opens in Hollywood this month, within walking distance of Regent Projects and the new location of LAXART. But perhaps the most exciting and unexpected new art neighborhood is MacArthur Park, where recently a few galleries have set up shop. Their names are unusual (Visitor Welcome Center; Commonwealth and Council) and the spaces largely unorthodox (Park View/Paul Soto gallery is a 350-square-foot apartment). House of Gaga/Reena Spaulings Fine Art, on the other hand, is two galleries in one. They are offshoots of galleries in Mexico City and New York City, respectively. Under this unusual partnership, each gallery takes turns showing in the space, so one month you may walk in to find the work of Kim Gordon and another you might encounter Peter Fischli. "We basically looked only at MacArthur Park, with a few exceptions," says Gaga's Fernando Mesta. "We had friends living there, and we liked that there were places you could go to without driving—and being Mexican, we really felt at home." The area has a rich history, as ArtCenter College of Design, Otis

From left: Damon, Karen, Paul, and Mara McCarthy in Paul's studio at the family's home in Altadena.

▼ Norwegian photographer  
Torbjørn Rødland in the backyard  
of his Laurel Canyon home.

▣ Curator Erin Christovale  
at the Hammer Museum  
in Westwood.

College of Art and Design, and the Chouinard Art Institute all started out here. Mesta adds that the new LACMA space opening up here will make it even more interesting.

**ERIN CHRISTOVALE**

In the summer of 2017, Erin Christovale was hired by the Hammer Museum as an independent curator to help organize the next iteration of the Made in L.A. biennial. At some point during the process, she decided to stay. Now, as the assistant curator at the Hammer, Christovale, who cofounded the annual short-film program Black Radical Imagination, has a solid platform from which to tackle issues of identity, race, and historical legacy. "Artists are thinking about the iconography and fragility of our environment, the vulnerability of the body, the desire to preserve certain cultures and communities that are in the midst of being gentrified, and in general, there are a lot of personal narratives that are being shared in order to comment on larger political issues," she says. Having taken the temperature of the city at large, she is currently focused on the work of the philosopher and conceptual artist Adrian Piper. A retrospective of her work opens at the Hammer on October 7. Says Christovale, "Piper has always been an intellectual pillar for me in challenging notions of race, politics, performance, and nationalism."

**DAVID KORDANSKY**

David Kordansky has no problem with his space being thought of as a very L.A. gallery. In fact, he's made a point of it. "It's an attitude that cuts across everything we do," he says, citing the indoor/outdoor sunlit spaces, where a taco truck or a







David Kordansky in his gallery with works by Will Boone.

group of jazz musicians might roll in for an opening. Indeed, the program is steeped in traditions of Southern California culture. "The majority of my artists live and work in Los Angeles," he says. "Many were educated out here. Kathryn Andrews and Mary Weatherford worked for Mike Kelley." A graduate of CalArts, Kordansky started out by showing the work of friends and other artists of his generation. While his roster has expanded over the past 15 years to include some 30 artists of all ages (one of his current stars, the African American painter Sam Gilliam, is 84 years old), what ties them together, he explains, is that they are all "makers" of some kind. "The hand is always present as a force and a feeling," he says.

#### **KULAPAT YANTRASAST**

Few people have made as strong an aesthetic mark on the Los Angeles contemporary art landscape as the architect Kulapat Yantrasast, a principal of the design firm wHY. Since arriving in the city in 2003, he has worked on some 30 projects, including a new gallery for David Kordansky, the renovation of a Masonic temple for the Marciano Art Foundation, and the transformation of a downtown textile warehouse into the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. And when Frieze debuts in Los Angeles next year, it will do so under a tent of his design. Yantrasast, who was born in Bangkok and worked for the Japanese architect Tadao Ando, is quick to dismiss the cliché comparison between Los Angeles and New York City. "L.A. must be seen within its own merit among cities of similar open spirits—Berlin, Mexico City, Rio, or Mumbai," he says. Much of the vibrancy of his adopted hometown, he observes, comes from the arts community: people who, much like himself, came to Los Angeles for the space, the light, and the perceived freedom. "It felt like new things can still happen," he says. "You can experiment and make mistakes."

Architect Kulapat Yantrasast at the Institute of Contemporary Art Downtown, which he designed.



#### TORBJØRN RØDLAND

Torbjørn Rødland is a fairly recent transplant to Los Angeles, but the Norwegian artist seems uniquely suited to the city's particular atmosphere. "It's easy to see how flawed Los Angeles is as a city, but its flaws seem compatible with my own." His highly constructed and narratively ambiguous images are glossy on the surface, fetishizing objects or situations in the vein of photographic media (advertising, magazines) that are hell-bent on selling you something. But if his work is selling anything, it's a "quasi-magical state of mind in which representations are perceived to be as alive, unruly, and unpredictable as what they represent." Take images like *Arms* (2008), in which the tentacle of an octopus emerges from a woman's sleeve, intertwining itself almost tenderly around her hand, or *Two Puppies* (2007), which depicts—more or less—what you might expect. His current studio is in the residential hills of Burbank, but for a few years he worked out of the Pacific Design Center, the decorators' paradise on Melrose Avenue. "Unlike artists who seek the neutrality of an empty, white studio space, I look for exciting surfaces, materials, doors, and nooks that I can work with to spice up and balance my photographic images," he says. "I don't know how to build a world from scratch."

#### PAUL, KAREN, DAMON, AND MARA MCCARTHY

With its complex of soundstages and departments devoted to the creation of sculptures, animatronics, and special effects, Paul McCarthy's studio in Downtown rivals that of Paramount or Fox. But even as McCarthy embraces Hollywood's methods of production, the mirror he holds up to the consumer-entertainment economy is wildly distorted. The motion-picture

content-rating system would have a hard time defining a suitable audience for most of McCarthy's filmed performances. So you might be surprised to learn that for McCarthy, art-making is very much a wholesome family business. His wife, Karen, is his executive producer. His son Damon has been his artistic collaborator since 1995. And Paul's daughter Mara opened her own gallery, the Box, in order to show the work of under-appreciated artists from her parents' generation and, on occasion, that of her dad and brother. (This month she is running a solo exhibition of the early L.A.-based conceptual artist Eugenia P. Butler.) "I came into this project with a vision of a place that allows for open conversations, realizing that art is not just for viewing and consuming," says Mara, "but is a catalyst for the gentle opening of otherwise closed realms of thought." 🐾

▲ *Sanctum (large)* by Lianne Barnes in the garden of the Underground Museum.