

Wu, Su. "Art Matters: A Biennial in, and About, Los Angeles," *T: The New York Times Magazine*, 13 June 2014.



"42" by Channing Hansen (2014) is on view at "Made in L.A. 2014" at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. Credit: Daniel Trese

In his infamous Artforum review of the first "Made in L.A." biennial in 2012, the critic and curator Michael Ned Holte used some choice language: the survey of nascent L.A. artists at the Hammer Museum had a "boosterish tone," he wrote. He even name-checked every Angeleno's favorite "Saturday Night Live" sketch, "The Californians," with its memorable recurring finale in which all the characters crowd in front of a single mirror.

So call it a savvy move to hand the gauntlet to the person who threw it down. Shortly after filing his critique, and despite never having organized a museum exhibition, Holte was tapped by the Hammer Museum director Ann Philbin to co-curate the biennial's 2014 edition with the museum's chief curator Connie Butler. "I asked some pointed questions that now I'm trying to answer," Holte says. He started by "crossing 60 names off the list" – everyone who was in the show the last time – and then, in fine California tradition, turned mirror-gazing into soul-searching.

The resulting exhibition, open to the public on Sunday, is a starkly honest look at the town's deep circles of allegiance. One artist, Sarah Rara, is included four times over, as a solo artist, multiple collaborator and member of the band Lucky Dragons. She might be the show's most networked artist, but not by much. Like the city it studies, "Made in L.A. 2014" is sprawling – it's the first time the Hammer has ever devoted its entire space to one show – and, as in L.A. itself, the ways that artists and curators bump up against one another is often more interesting than the ways in which they go at it alone.

Photo

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"Thank You" by Samara Golden (2014) features the faces of everyone she met during her first six months living in L.A. Credit: Daniel Trese

Holte jokes that he went "hyperbolically local" in his approach, hence the inclusion of the radio station KCHUNG 1630 AM, which will be creating television broadcasts from the lobby of the museum, and a screening of Wu Tsang's "Wildness," a 74-minute homage to a series of underground transgender parties that took place at the shuttered MacArthur Park nightclub Silver Platter. Samara Golden's installation, at the entrance to a gallery, features the floating cut-out heads of everyone she met in her first six months in Los Angeles. Another door is flanked by a wallpaper of candid portraits by A.L. Steiner, the arts-industry labor organizer and a member of the collective Chicks on Speed, of her friends and lovers.

"Made in L.A. 2014" does include its fair share of newly minted M.F.A.s. But the list of contributors also exemplifies Los Angeles's perpetual appeal to transplants, with artists from Nairobi and Naples, Tehran and Guadalajara. "I feel like I've blossomed as an artist here, but I'm not from here," said the U.K.-raised Danielle Dean as she installed a new video piece continuing her exploration of how fragments of material life – in this case, sneakers – coalesce into cultural distinctions. Clarissa Tossin, from Brazil, documented her journey in a Volkswagen Brasilia to see Oscar Niemeyer's only residential project in the United States, the Strick House in Santa Monica, Calif. "Connie and I were interested in the way artists were seeing the city," Holte says. "That there are so many reasons people came to Los Angeles seems to be a good indicator of how conducive the city is to work in as an artist."



"Still I Rise Above" by Juan Capistran (2013).Credit: Daniel Trese

Other kinds of back stories are also represented. Jennifer Moon, who first got noticed in the late '90s, continues her return to the art world after heroin addiction and a prison stint for attempted robbery. The ceramist Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, a current art-world favorite,

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and the color-field painter Marcia Hafif, both born in 1929, are also included. "We're convinced all the artists we've invited to be in the show are worthy of more attention," Holte says. "No artist in the show had heard of every other artist."

This collective discovery reflects how Holte and Butler shared curatorial responsibility with others. Pieces are on display from the permanent collection of the Los Angeles Museum of Art, a wooden shed in the artist Alice Könitz's Eagle Rock yard. And as part of a yearlong revival of the artist Tony Greene that began at this year's Whitney Biennial, David Frantz, the curator of the One Archives Foundation, has assembled a show-within-a-show devoted to queer artists living in Los Angeles during the late '80s and early '90s. It's a historical touchstone of supportive tribalism and a reminder that big institutions – and biennial surveys – will later reflect the communities that, by necessity, once formed outside of them.

"Made in L.A. 2014" runs from June 15 to Sept. 7 at the Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles. For more information, visit [hammer.ucla.edu/made-in-la-2014](http://hammer.ucla.edu/made-in-la-2014).

Correction: June 16, 2014

An earlier version of a picture caption misspelled the surname of an artist. He is Channing Hansen, not Hanson.