

Wood, Eve, "Unmade in L.A.", WHITEHOT MAGAZINE, July 2012.

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Op-Ed: Unmade In LA: One artist/writer's visceral disappointment in some key points about the Hammer Museum's 2012 Biennial, Made in LA UCLA Armand Hammer Museum, LA Municipal Gallery at Barnsdall Art Park, and LAXART in Culver City June 2 through September 2, 2012

The definition of the "quintessential" LA artist has certainly undergone a radical transformation in recent years. Artists like John Outterbridge, David Hammons, Wallace Berman, John Altoon and Craig Kauffman just to name a few, forged a vibrant, energetic history born of the steaming heat rising in no particular configuration from the uneven streets of the Los Angeles experience, and this excitingly diverse city has earned its dark wings over time. This is why visiting the Hammer Museum's most recent exhibition, *Made In LA*, was so terribly, and poignantly disappointing. If nothing else, this exhibition is proof positive that commerce is not only "in bed" with art-making, but engaged in what appears to be more of a 50-Shades-of-Grey stranglehold that could possibly ring the death knell for the primacy of contemporary art museums in the cultural legend.

What is particularly upsetting is that the Hammer museum jumped so wholeheartedly onto the commercial bandwagon, going so far as to publicize an art competition where people can vote for their favorite artist from among a short list of judge-selected finalists. At stake is a \$100,000 prize and published monograph. For any artist or critically astute person, this rings hollow, or worse, insulting. Why not simply invite Paula Abdul and Simon Cowell for lunch and have them venture an assessment? The publicity alone would be worth it, and really who cares about "art" in the end anyway, when money and all that goes with it, is so much sexier? Good art is often painful to look at. It frequently makes viewers uncomfortable, reminding them of their own mortality, or their responsibility to the slowly dying planet. But exhibitions like this seem to declare themselves firmly on the side of pill-popping pop trends at the "endless party" which has become the art world.

The Hammer Museum appears to be largely interested in putting on the biggest party, and they are good at it. But in my estimation, the art suffers in the process. The curators of this dreary, unimaginative exhibition seemed to have compiled a list of friends and/or recent Cal Arts graduates, yielding many of the usual suspects: Sarah Cain, Liz Glynn, Pearl C. Hsiung, Zackary Drucker, etc. Like Drucker, an alarming number of artists working today are mining an unremittingly self-referential territory that has little or no interest in connecting to a larger human tapestry. The work all too often reads like reality television or some silly DJ anthem: "Look at me! I am rich and gorgeous and glamorous, flying all over the world and going to fabulous parties, and nothing else matters!"

There are however a small number of artists in this exhibition who make fiercely engaging work. Allison Miller, on view at the Barnsdall location, delivers a group of provocative, deftly rendered paintings that have at their core an uncompromisingly astute sensibility. These paintings open into increasingly compelling areas each time you look at them. Scoli Acosta's wall of mixed-media drawings are simultaneously quiet and sophisticated, and surprisingly mild-mannered compared to most of his practice. Using simplified imagery that includes images of birds and dogs and the human heart, Acosta's drawings amplify a singular moment that might be serious, strangely bizarre or just downright funny.

Besides these and other high points, especially in the video genre, this exhibition and others like it only serve to undermine the efforts of the many tremendously talented artists who will probably never get the opportunity to exhibit their work at the Hammer Museum because they are not the sorts that get invited to the party.

