

10 Best L.A. Art Experiences of 2014

By Catherine Wagley

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In art, this has been the year of the gap — one version of the art world, a glitzy, market-driven one where youthfulness is a selling point, seems more and more distant from other art worlds.

It seems distant from the real world, too. When Art Basel Miami, that annual fair for which billionaires descend on Florida, opened early this month, the nation was still being rocked by protests over grand jury decisions to let off white cops who killed unarmed black teenager Michael Brown and asthmatic black dad Eric Garner. At Basel, as critic Christian Viveros-Fauné observed, "It was as if Ferguson and the Eric Garner verdict had never happened."

A week before, film critic A.O. Scott had asked in *The New York Times*, "Is our art equal to our time?" It may seem that it's not, in visual art at least, if you're looking at the paintings by the many youngish artists who say they're "excavating modernism" — i.e., recapitulating a minimal aesthetic that has proven itself desirable over the years. Or it may seem that it's not if you're looking at how many galleries are opening in L.A. or reading the many articles about hot new scenes. "Los Angeles seems to be having a New York moment," Maura Egan recently wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*.

But that version of the art world distracts from the one in which visual art is still an opportunity to explore what's possible. The exhibitions and events on this list did that by reviving exciting, overlooked histories or juxtaposing surprising objects and ideas in ways that felt provocative. Sometimes, they even connected two art worlds by bridging a gap.

9. Past and present expressionists

The Mistake Room's ambitious, flashy installation by New York-based Korakrit Arunanondchai told the story of a messy, narcissistic painter transforming into an ascetic. It became better in retrospect after a show of paintings by Matsumi Kanemitsu, the late, under-praised Japanese-American who spent years teaching in L.A., opened in the same downtown space (it runs through Dec. 20). Historic artist and younger artist talked to one another. Both grappled with how to be expressive and arresting amidst pop culture. And the fact that the Mistake Room could mine intergenerational overlaps such as this suggests that the new, buzzed-about gallery has promise.

<http://bit.ly/1J5mp5m>