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## Artist Laura Owens to discuss her abstract paintings tonight for UCLA Hammer Museum's lecture series

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Artist Laura Owens previously had work showcased at solo exhibitions in New York, London and Los Angeles. She will be speaking at the Hammer Museum tonight.

Credit: HAMMER MUSEUM

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Art viewers may be missing out when they rely on a computer screen for their tenuous dose of fine art.

Laura Owens, artist and invited lecturer at UCLA, addressed this concern as she prepared for her UCLA Hammer Museum lecture tonight. She said that her PowerPoint lecture presentations may not do justice to the dimensions of her work because they should be seen in the context of a gallery.

\*Today, 7 p.m.  
 Hammer Museum, FREE\*

"Maybe I am old-fashioned, but I think there is something interesting about seeing the work of art in person. It's the actual object that has meaning, and it is different from someone telling you the story about it, or seeing a picture on the Internet," Owens said.

Owens' paintings linger between the figurative and the fresh abstract. Their moody hues cast an aura in the room where they are displayed.

Eye-catching, lush paint strokes complement her whimsical figurations. The effect is a pleasing grip of the senses.

According to Owens, to experience a piece as it is intended is to experience it in person, in context.

"I am not interested in making passive pictures that fall back into the wall like a window. ... I am more interested in activating the space, the room, with you walking between the paintings," Owens said.

In her lecture tonight, Owens will discuss the past 15 years of her paintings. Since the beginning of her career, Owens has incorporated architecture as an element in selecting the size of a painting, considering even the shadows cast on it by a room.

"I would (consider) a particular window and think about the view and have a painting in response to it, knowing it would be hung there or knowing that a pole will cast a shadow on the painting," Owens said.

Through sketches and detailed scale models of galleries, Owens decided what size canvases and stretchers to order based on how they fit on the walls. Her detailed consideration of the gallery space controlled the effect to maximize its optical pleasure.

"I feel like there's always been an interest in her to make a painting that is as pleasurable as possible to look at," said curatorial associate at the Hammer Museum, Elizabeth Cline. "There are things happening, seeping from the edges of the painting."

Owens has featured her collections in solo exhibitions internationally, including showings in London, New York and Zurich.

Her painting "Untitled" (2000) is currently displayed at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, where students can experience it up close.

Owens said that she has been influenced by mentors and peers like abstract artist Mary Heilmann alongside anonymous folk artists. She said that she has been inspired by countless subjects and philosophies that she has encountered in her lifetime.

"Folk art is like stepping into a new building in the history of art, getting outside of the Western canon and going into another building. ... but it's not any more interesting than 10 other things. It's all in the grab bag," Owens said.

Tapestries, which often decorated Renaissance homes, have also interested Owens.

In some of her work, she uses very subtle brush strokes to evoke a harmonious energy between colors and shapes. In this sense, she expresses her interest in tapestry as it relates to painting.

"I started to look at (needlework and embroidery) more as a different way of making a painting. A lot of the Impressionists looked at needlework because of the sort of small strokes of thread that were hatch marks of light that you might find because you are using a single color in rows," Owens said.

Owens' paintings are varied in tone, content and figuration. Her soft washes of color move accordingly to its context.

"I really enjoy starting over and not knowing what I'm going to do. I guess it's my concerns about spatial relations within the painting that I am interested in. I don't know if there is one recurring theme," Owens said.

Russell Ferguson, chair of the art department and one of the organizers of the department's visiting artists lecture series at Hammer Museum, agreed that Owens challenges herself to create a new relationship with each piece.

"If there is something that seems too easy or is becoming too easy for her, she tries to resist it," Ferguson said. "In general, people have a good immediate reaction ... in a direct way, but as you continue to look at them. ... she is always looking for new ways to relate to the viewer."

Ferguson said Owens is one of the most important artists working in Los Angeles today.

In Owens' pieces, the range extends beyond its canvas, becoming a dynamic force of art.

"I'm interested in what you are aware of when walking in front of the painting," Owens said. "The paintings activate the space. ... It's an active interaction with the viewer."

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