

Whitney Biennial 2014: L.A. Artists Represent, Again

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- Oliver Walker, courtesy Susanne Vielmetter
- My Barbarian's adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *The Mother*, performed at Susanne Vielmetter in July 2013

A flurry of excitement went through the Los Angeles art world late last week following the announcement of the artists selected for the 2014 Whitney Biennial, which remains the largest and most watched survey of contemporary art in America. Out of a total of 103 artists or artist collectives, 26 are based in Los Angeles, representing over 25 percent of the roster, a slight increase from previous years. The 2012

biennial featured 11 L.A.-based artists out of 54 (20 percent) and the 2010 edition had 12 out of 55 (22 percent).

In a bit of a new twist, three curators from outside the Whitney Museum -- Stuart Comer (chief curator of media and performance Art at MoMA), Anthony Elms (associate curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia), and Michelle Grabner (artist and professor in the Painting and Drawing Department at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago) -- were appointed to organize the exhibition, with each one taking over an entire floor of the museum. The overall roster represents a progressive and diverse mixture of artists from different generations working in a variety of media, including some outside the realm of what is traditionally called visual arts, such as writers and dancers.



- Manuel Vason, courtesy Luis De Jesus
- Zackary Drucker and Manuel Vason, from the series "Don't Look at Me Like That"

Zackary Drucker, Rhys Ernst and A.L. Steiner, who have all dealt explicitly with queer themes in their work, are included in the mix, a fact that met with approval in local circles. Luis De Jesus, the L.A. dealer who represents Drucker, observed that exhibitions like this "amplify art's reach into other communities and acknowledge their importance as partners and collaborators in shaping new ideas." Drucker and Ernst, who are exhibiting together, will show a new series of photographs and a video installation. They will also organize

site-specific tarot readings by their mentor, drag legend Flawless Sabrina, who coincidentally lives across the street from the Whitney.

See also: [5 Artsy Things to Do in L.A. This Week](#)



- Courtesy the artist and Thomas Solomon Gallery, Los Angeles
- Miljohn Ruperto's *Seven and Five* installation for the Hammer Museum's "Made in L.A."

Miljohn Ruperto, whose *Seven and Five* installation in the Hammer Museum's "Made in L.A." exhibit last year was the favorite of many critics, and who will show new work in the Whitney Biennial, likes the inclusion of more artist collectives this year: "The surprising amount of collaborations is quite notable. I like pushing the idea of art as a collective effort and I am excited to see how the biennial presents this."

Performance art favorites My Barbarian, who recently had a well-received show at Susanne Vielmetter's gallery in Culver City, will also be in the biennial. The trio -- composed of Malik Gaines, Jade Gordon

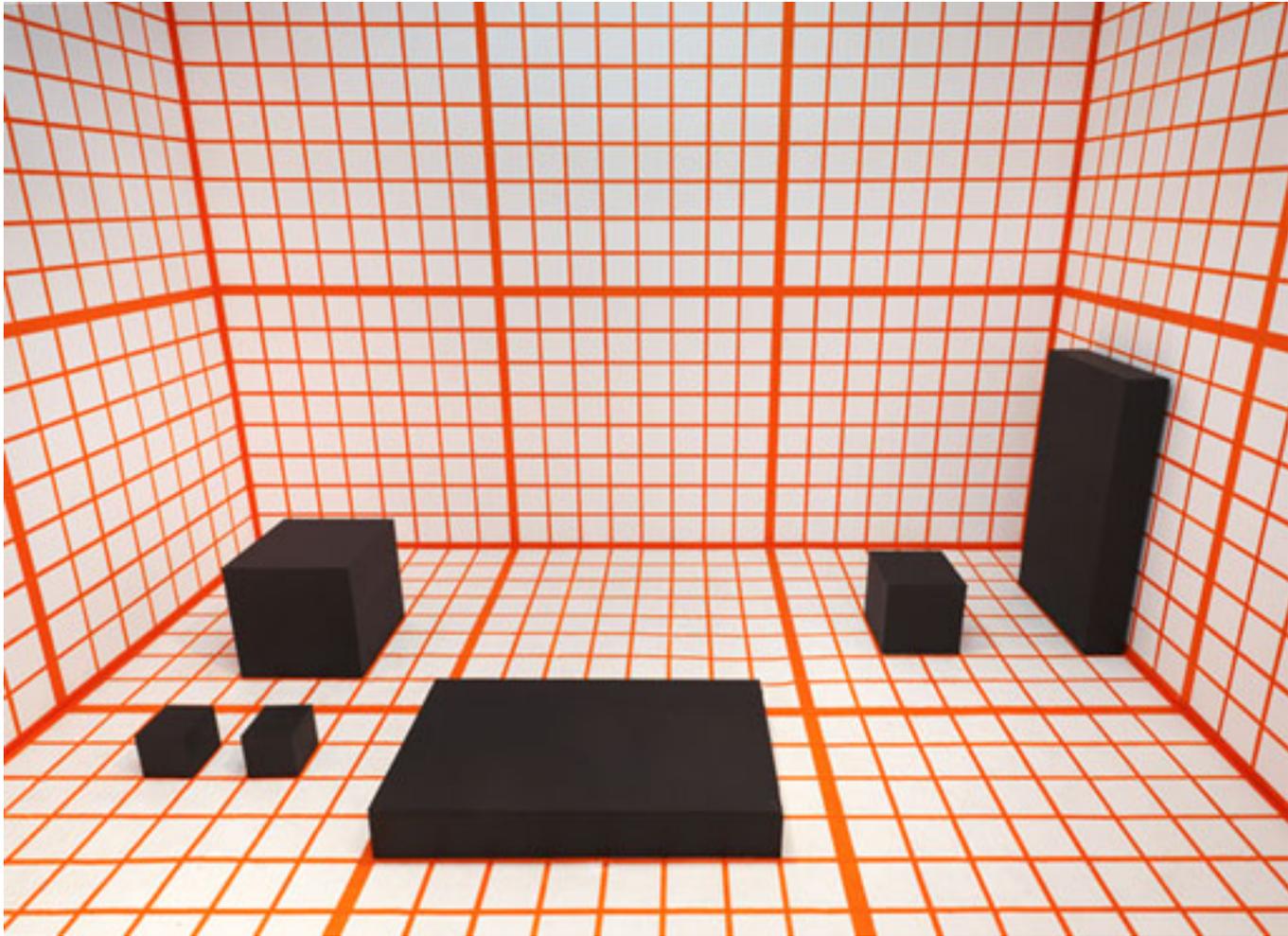
and Alex Segade -- will present their video work, *Universal Declaration of Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in the Creative Impulse* (2013), along with "a new performance piece that is partly a series of improvisational participatory games and conversations and theatricalities with the audience, and partly a scripted adaptation of a play by Bertolt Brecht, to be performed within a temporary installation we are also making."



- Courtesy Semiotext(e)
 - New series of Semiotext(e) pamphlets to be exhibited at the 2014 Whitney Biennial
- Writers and the alternative press will have a significant presence as exhibiting artists in the biennial, a move that speaks to the influence

and popularity of literature and theory in the production of contemporary art. The late author David Foster Wallace, who committed suicide in 2008 in Claremont, will be recognized posthumously, in a format that's still to be announced. Semiotext(e), a groundbreaking literary and intellectual press founded in 1974 and credited with bringing French theory to North America, will be showing a new series of single-essay pamphlets, some historic memorabilia and video interviews with influential figures, in an installation to be designed by L.A. artist Jason Yates. They will also launch a new issue of their provocative journal, *Animal Shelter*, and organize a series of readings and screenings. Semiotext(e), which was founded in New York but now has offices in L.A., is co-edited by Sylvère Lotringer, Chris Kraus, and Hedi El Kholi.

Two beloved L.A. artists who recently passed away are also included in the biennial: Channa Horwitz, who was "discovered" at the age of 80 through her inclusion in "Made in L.A." last year, and Allen Sekula, an influential instructor at CalArts. In an interview last week, a visibly emotional François Ghebaly, Horwitz's dealer, said that it was always the artist's dream to be in the Whitney Biennial, and he was sad she could not be here to see it come true. Whitney curator Michelle Grabner came to see Horwitz's show in Ghebaly's Culver City space after she passed away, and the decision to include her was made soon thereafter.



• Courtesy François Ghebaly

- Channa Horwitz's "Orange Grid" at François Ghebaly Gallery
- The 2014 biennial also includes some repeat offenders from L.A.: For Laura Owens, who recently caused a major art world stir with her suite of gigantic warehouse paintings, it's her second time at the rodeo, while for independent filmmaker and artist Morgan Fisher, it's his third. For Fisher, the third time might be the charm; the first two times he exhibited films, which ran on schedules and tended to be ignored by most museum visitors. This time, he's exhibiting a large sculpture: "It's a special case of sculpture, almost a kind of installation. Although it's a new category for me, my interests or methods or whatever you want to call them have been consistent from the beginning, in the films, in the paintings, and now in this new kind of work. My way of working turns out to be elastic in its applications."

But of course, it's not all wine and roses, as the Whitney Biennial would not be the Whitney Biennial without someone getting offended. Local artist Lee Lynch griped about the inclusion of "mumblecore" pioneer Andrew Bujalski, whose films he sees as filled with "smug, privileged nihilists." On Facebook, several members of the ceramics community were up in arms over the inclusion of middlebrow ceramicist Shio Kusaka, with one person remarking that her simple tableware pieces "look like something from Ikea." You really can't please them all, no matter how hard you try.