

## MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

1062 North Orange Grove, Los Angeles, California 90046 323-654-1830 matthewmarks.com

# Los Angeles Times

ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

## Review: Artist Laura Owens makes books unlike any other books you've seen



Part of Laura Owens' installation "Books and Tables" at Matthew Marks Gallery in Los Angeles. (Annik Wetter / Laura Owens / Matthew Marks Gallery)

By DAVID PAGEL DEC. 6, 2019 | 7 AM

Last year, Laura Owens went big.

Her midcareer survey, organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, filled six large galleries and a couple of long hallways at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles with more than 60 paintings (and

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matching furniture) she had made since the mid-1990s. Flamboyant and grand, the L.A. artist's exhibition went toe-to-toe with billboards, often stopping visitors in their tracks and making us think differently about the image-saturated reality we inhabit.

This year, Owens has gone small.

At Matthew Marks Gallery in West Hollywood, "Books and Tables" presents the handmade books and custom-designed tables Owens has made over the last year. Her quiet, bookstore-style installation turns its back on the eye-grabbing dynamics of social media — and the heavyweight expectations of mural-scaled paintings — to make room for experiences that unfold slowly and subtly, gently and freely, casually and intimately.

On six tables in four rooms Owens has arranged 90 books. Her inventory is extraordinary: Flip books, kids' books and how-to books can be found among beautifully reprinted diaries, handmade scrapbooks and hand-drawn songbooks. Bee, bird and turtle books rest next to books about ants, horses and wildflowers, as well as volumes focused on cats, carrots and cream puff makers.

Forgers, gas lighters and the U.S. president tell their tales in books arranged around bootleg versions of an out-of-print catalog Owens published years ago. Also reproduced on wonderfully textured pages — in a variety of typefaces and ink colors — are ancient treatises about spirits, apparitions and witchcraft, as well as fortune-telling, dream analysis and other magical practices.



Laura Owens' "Books and Tables" installation is at Matthew Marks Gallery through Jan. 25. (Annik Wetter / Laura Owens / Matthew Marks Gallery)

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Another detail from Owens' "Books and Tables" at Matthew Marks Gallery. (Annik Wetter/Laura Owens / Matthew Marks Gallery)

Picture books figure prominently. Some feature eye-popping reproductions of advertisements for candy cigarettes, frosted doughnuts and double-decker hamburgers. Others depict ghosts, gravestones and cemeteries in pencil, pastel and watercolor. Owens also employs glitter, sand and coffee grounds to illustrate her one-of-a-kind publications.

Her imagery is similarly freewheeling. Cartoon skeletons, romantic ravens and references to the reality of the Battle of Bataan (and its horrifying aftermath) make for an exhibition that invites the imagination to leap and bound.

There's too much to see. Some of Owens' books include enough drawings, watercolors and paintings on paper to be an exhibition unto itself. Others include audio and video. Still others are bound so beautifully you can't help but think of them as sculptures. That's particularly true of the ones that fold out, like maps or accordions and the pop-up books, which are filled with so many surprises that it's easy to get lost in their nooks and crannies.

That experience — of being free to lose oneself in aimless reverie — is built into Owens' tables. All have drawers that open to reveal more books. Some of the drawers have drawers. Appropriately, and poetically, Owens' drawers-within-drawers house books-within-books.

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As you immerse yourself in their details, strange things happen around you. Eight volumes slide slowly across one tabletop, randomly stopping and starting. Dots of light dance across other tabletops, making it seem as if your eyes are playing tricks on you. And videos appear on adjoining walls next to one table, making you wonder if you might be hallucinating.

At a time when the number of bookstores is dwindling, and people seem to race through exhibitions faster than ever, it's heartening — and satisfying — to visit Owens' antidote.



Another view of Owens' "Books and Tables" at Matthew Marks Gallery. (Annik Wetter / Laura Owens / Matthew Marks Gallery)

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### Laura Owens 'Books and Tables'

**Where:** Matthew Marks Gallery, 1062 Orange Grove Ave., West Hollywood

**When:** Tuesdays-Saturdays, through Jan. 25

**Info:** (323) 654-1830,  
[www.matthewmarks.com](http://www.matthewmarks.com)

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