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Demonstrators from the group [Liberate Tate](#) temporarily installed a wind turbine in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern in protest of BP's corporate sponsorship of the museum.

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From Los Angeles: Made in L.A. 2012

Group Show

Jun 02 - Sep 02

Hammer Museum

by [Matt Stromberg](#)

On the heels of the sprawling *Pacific Standard Time (PST)* series of exhibitions comes the Hammer Museum's inaugural Los Angeles biennial. Whereas the *PST* programming sought to recuperate, re-contextualize, and, in a sense, canonize, five decades of Southern California art, *Made in L.A. 2012* aims to chronicle the next chapter. The previous exhibitions showed us what Los Angeles art looked like historically; the Hammer exhibition asks, "What does it mean to be a Los Angeles-based artist now?" "Who will pick up the mantle of Charles and Ray Eames, Ed Keinholz, John Baldessari, Ed Ruscha, and Mike Kelley?"

Both *PST* and *Made in L.A.* address the perception of Los Angeles as a cultural desert, characterized by banal architecture, shallow denizens, and dozens of loosely connected neighborhoods linked by miles of freeways. As Ice Cube says in a [PST promo](#): "A lotta people think L.A. is just eyesore after eyesore, full of mini malls, palm trees, and billboards." In reality, it is the city's ahistorical sensibility, its lack of rules, and its geography without center that are its strengths. The wall tags for *Made in L.A. 2012* even list the neighborhoods in which participating artists live and work, thereby celebrating the city's fractured landscape. L.A.'s uniqueness as a city provides artists an amount of freedom and a range of visual and cultural sources on which to draw that they would be hard pressed to find in more established East Coast and European locales. Case in point: local print shop [Colby Poster](#) printed the poster for *Made in L.A. 2012*—their signature multicolored broadsides can be seen on lampposts throughout the city as a civic emblem that cuts across geographic and class lines. This freedom and polyglot vocabulary are on display in *Made in L.A. 2012*, alongside a healthy sense of optimism and humor.

The humor and optimism is evident as soon as one enters the Hammer Museum's lobby. On the wall above the staircase are Meg Cranston's frenetic floor-to-ceiling collages *California* and *Fireplace 12*, garishly announcing themselves. She borrows images from consumer culture, rendering forms in bright colors with a playful cut-and-paste aesthetic.

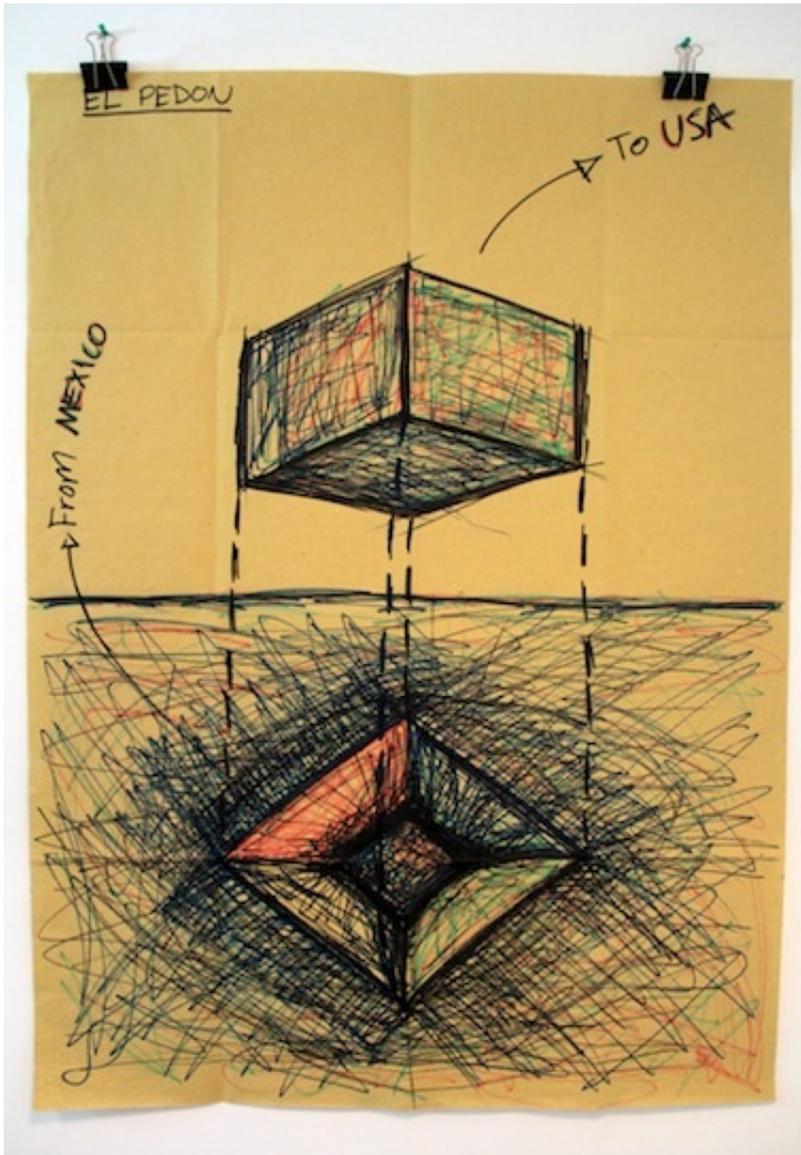
Characteristic of much of the work is conceptual rigor and sensitivity to materials, no doubt the results of the nexus of art schools ringing the area. Zach Harris creates modestly sized abstract paintings with ornately carved wooden frames that incorporate elements of medieval religious art, Buddhist mandalas, geometric abstraction, and psychedelic posters. The tension between painted and carved surface is baroque, obsessive, and completely enthralling. Roy Dowell's deceptively crude paper and cardboard sculptures subscribe to quite a different aesthetic, yet they share the same respect for materials. His works reflect the influence of Native American and African sources, yet they exist as totems of unknown origin; they honor their sources while being truly contemporary. In a similar way, Joel Otterson works within the vernacular American tradition of quilting to explore the changing meaning of community.

Many of the artists in the show engage directly with art historical precedents albeit with a fresh viewpoint. Brian Sharp's paintings are playful responses to hard-edged geometric abstraction; he imbues them with an offbeat humanity. Similarly, Lisa Williamson's sculptures make Minimalism approachable by fusing its techniques with [Memphis Milano](#) zaniness. Mark Hagen's sculptures also tackle the legacy of Minimalism, suggesting alternatives to its endgame. His sculptural installation *We've Seen the Future and We're Not Going* is a grid of roughly cut black glass plates mounted onto an aluminum frame, which enlivens the stiff

base structure with some randomness. His standout *To Be Titled (Additive Sculpture, Los Angeles Screen)* resembles a mid-century architectural screen, but he has cast the cement units from plastic bottles and tiles from the infamous Rampart Police Station, injecting problematic content into a pristine modernist object. Problematic for different reasons, Kate Costello pairs photographs of nude women striking poses from historical paintings with abstract graphics, but the juxtaposition falls flat in its efforts to challenge the gendered gaze of the original works. Meanwhile, Analia Saban has produced a smart and funny body of work that riffs off the monochrome in a ways that allow paint to come to life and call attention to its objecthood.



Meg Cranston. *California (Full Size)*, 2012 and *Fireplace 12*, 2012; installation view, *Made in L.A. 2012*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, June 2 to September 2, 2012. Photo: Brian Forrest.



Camilo Ontiveros. Sketch for *El Pedón*, 2012; ink on paper; 48 x 24 in. Courtesy of the Artist and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

As L.A. is home to dozens of different ethnic groups—according to the [last census](#), 56.4 percent of Los Angeles County speaks a language other than English at home—it’s not surprising that identity was also addressed throughout the exhibition. Spanish-born Patricia Fernández has constructed a wooden structure referencing her grandfather’s role as a wood carver. She has affixed onto it delicate fabric works as a poetic endeavor to recover her unstable family history by recreating and repurposing objects. Camilo Ontiveros displays an empty pedestal alongside video and written documentation of his failed attempt to transport a cube of earth from Mexico to the museum. Thwarted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents citing the dangers of “foreign organisms,” this absence of dirt thoughtfully highlights the bureaucratic border between nations. Meleko Mokgosi’s large representational canvases, among the only in the show, address the rift between representation and truth. Born in the Republic of Botswana, Mokgosi depicts scenes from postcolonial Africa. His images are unfinished, however, calling into question the very verisimilitude that draws us in.



Mark Hagen. *We've Seen the Future and We're Not Going*, 2012; installation view, *Made in L.A. 2012*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, June 2 to September 2, 2012. Photo: Brian Forrest.

This being L.A., no survey of contemporary art would be complete without video artists. David Snyder's *Me TV* is a hysterical take in every sense of the word on contemporary media saturation. He has constructed a fun house, the inside of which he filled with screens depicting himself feverishly hawking wares in multiple faux telemarketing videos. It reminded me of the 1988 Tim Burton film *Beetlejuice*: loud, annoying, and a little threatening, but thoroughly entertaining. The flipside to this manic piece is Dan Fisel's insufferable *The Space Between You and Me*, which chronicles some sort of triangle between Fisel, actress Farah Fawcett, and artist Keith Edmier. In the videos, they are caressing large mounds of clay that are reproduced in the gallery. The work is so concerned with its own making that it doesn't matter what we think of it.

Among the young and mid-career artists was the surprising discovery of eighty-year-old Channa Horwitz's work. A conceptual- and system-based artist, Horwitz uses predetermined rules to fill sheets of graph paper with brightly colored undulating patterns. Hopefully, her inclusion in this show will bring some long overdue recognition to her oeuvre. What makes her inclusion among other contemporary artists so exciting is that it attests to the fact that Los Angeles's art scene is broad, diffuse, and contradictory. This first biennial is a welcome addition and, with an art scene as dynamic as this, every two years may not be often enough.

Made in L.A. 2012 is on view at the [Hammer Museum](#), in Los Angeles, through September 2, 2012.

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