

15 Female Artists Who've Shaped the L.A. ArtScene

EVA RECINOS | APRIL 3, 2017 | 7:32AM



Courtesy of Patssi Valdez

Many surveys of iconic L.A. artists might name a few familiar greats: Ed Ruscha, Chris Burden, Ken Price ... the list goes on. While these men are important to know in terms of art history as a whole, women artists often go overlooked in most mainstream art history texts.

This list looks at women artists who influenced the City of Angels through their art-making. Take it as a starting point for finding out more about the amazing women who've shaped the cultural production of this city — and will continue to make ways through both new work and the legacy they leave behind.

1. Judith Baca

Preserving, protecting and creating the great public artworks in L.A. isn't an easy feat. The city owes a big debt to Judith Baca, an artist, muralist and educator who has been teaching art since 1984. She's also the founder of SPARC, the Social and Public Art Resource Center. Her biggest contribution to the city (literally): spearheading the creation of The Great Wall of Los Angeles, a more than 2,000-foot-long mural in the Tujunga Wash, a flood-control channel in the San Fernando Valley. Another work you might recognize: the 1984 mural *Hitting the Wall on the 110*. Baca's presence in L.A. is important not just on a visual level but a political one as she fights to assert the importance of public art in the city.

2. Betye Saar

As one of the most important black artists in contemporary art history, Betye Saar has an especially important link to L.A.'s art history. She spent time at the Brockman Gallery, "one of the first galleries opened by members of the black community in L.A.," as she told *L.A. Weekly* back in 2011. At 90 years old, Saar shows no signs of stopping, with international shows planned. Angelenos will get to see her work at the Craft & Folk Art Museum in an exhibition titled "*Betye Saar: Keepin' It Clean*," opening May 28. Saar's influence is difficult to capture succinctly: She continues to serve as an important artist working through themes of violence, memory and history through the lens of black culture.



3. Catherine Opie

With multiple solo exhibitions, accolades and awards, Catherine Opie is known internationally as one of our most important contemporary photographers. In 2008, the Guggenheim Museum presented a midcareer exhibition, "Catherine Opie: American Photographer," which highlighted some of her career-defining work. L.A. continually influences Opie's practice, whether she's capturing its infrastructure (as in the series "Freeways"), its community ("Portraits") or its architecture ("Houses"). Beyond its aesthetic appeal, Opie's work serves as an important archive of the city.



Installation view, Hammer Projects: "Catherine Opie: Portraits," Jan. 30-May 22, 2016, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.



Make 'Em All Mexican: Cleopatra

4. Linda Vallejo

In taking familiar figures and making them brown (a series she calls “Make 'Em all Mexican”), Mexican-American artist Linda Vallejo challenges the viewer to re-examine the familiar icons of pop culture. Vallejo also looks specifically at the Latino community in Los Angeles, as evidenced in “The Brown Dot Project.” Though now in many variations, the idea started with analyzing the “Latino numbers and how the population is growing by leaps and bounds” in L.A., as explained on her site. The conversations sparked in her artwork feel especially familiar to anyone living in L.A., and her artwork is a deliberate action against erasure



Uta Barth, In the Light and Shadow of Morandi (17.01), 2017; face mounted, raised, shaped, archival pigment print in artist frame, 48¾ x 52¾ x 1¾ inches (framed); edition of 6, 2 APs.

5. Uta Barth

Chris Adler/Courtesy of 1301PE Gallery.

Known around the world for her unconventional style of photography, Uta Barth calls Los Angeles home and received her MFA at UCLA in 1985. Barth's compositions usually require that viewers allow their eyes to adjust a little; there seems to be nothing really there, but the faint shapes that come to the surface turn out to be haunting. Her work is a part of major museum collections including those at the Hammer Museum, LACMA and the Getty. She has a show up at 1301PE Gallery in Carthay that runs until April 22.



From Jo Ann Callis' "Cheap Thrills" series **Courtesy Rose Gallery**

6. Jo Ann Callis

In 1981, a gallery show in L.A. displayed the work of photographer Jo Ann Callis next to Paul Outerbridge's — and cemented her status as an important artist in the city and at large. Best known for her carefully arranged color photography, Callis has been instrumental in pushing the stylistic limits of the medium. Her work has been displayed in numerous galleries and museums in L.A. Many of her photographs feel cinematic and almost specific to L.A. in that they are so staged (though this is tongue-in-cheek, as with her pastry photography series, "Cheap Thrills").

7. Diane Gamboa

During the early '80s, Diane Gamboa captured the dynamic punk-rock scene in East L.A. through black-and-white photography. She also served as a "consultant, stylist and referee" for the Chicano art collective Asco for a few years. She often organized temporary events such as her "Hit and Run" paper fashion shows. Gamboa's work often explores portrayals of Mexican identity; through her curation and involvement in arts education, she's also been a driving force in the Chicano art scene.



Courtesy of Corey Helford Gallery

8. Camille Rose Garcia

Pop surrealism can often feel like a boys club, but Camille Rose Garcia has cemented herself as an important painter within the genre. Her pieces often feel like pages of a strange fairy tale — coincidentally, her illustrated version of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland became a New York Times best-seller. Garcia often toes the line between reality and illusion, life and death in her intricate compositions. It's hard not to fall headfirst into the worlds she so carefully constructs.



Courtesy Patssi Valdez

9. Patssi Valdez

The biting critique of the four-person L.A. collective Asco is captured mostly in photographs, their actions quick and temporary. As the only core female member of the collective, Patssi Valdez especially stands out. She's the woman taped up to the wall in *Instant Mural*, a conceptual piece that asked viewers to rethink the Chicano mural beyond traditional religious and Aztec material. Asco also challenged institutions, spray-painting the artists' names on LACMA to protest the lack of Chicano artists in the museum (Valdez also poses in a photo of this piece). As a continually working artist, Valdez continues to pave the way for female artists working not only within conceptual art but also painting, collage, fashion design and more.



Mildred Baldwin/Flickr

10. Judithe Hernandez

Finding inspiration in everything from Mesoamerican cosmology to Greek sculpture, Judithe Hernandez has been creating work in and out of Los Angeles for decades. She was a member of the East L.A. artist collective Los Four and has influenced the city not only through her museum-worthy art but also through her murals. Just last year she created art for the Downtown Santa Monica Station; the piece wove together visual language from “ancient myths and legends of Europe, Mexico, Japan, India” and more. Hernandez’s work will be on display soon through the Getty initiative Pacific Standard Time LA/LA as well as a major solo show at Long Beach's Museum of Latin American Art in 2018.

11. Barbara Carrasco

In her work, Barbara Carrasco takes apart stereotypes — both cultural and societal — with immediacy. Her self-portraits capture the struggles of living as a Chicana in L.A. through the ways that both American culture and her own heritage viewed her. Her work takes on feminist themes in a way that still feels essential today. Her 1999 portrait of friend Dolores Huerta has become one of the best-known portrayals of the activist. The artist and muralist is praised internationally and is an important figure in the history of female artists of color.



Martine Syms, installation view, "Made in L.A. 2016: a, the, though, only," June 12-Aug. 28, 2016, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

12. Martine Syms

A self-proclaimed “conceptual entrepreneur,” Martine Syms wrestles with topics such as violence against black bodies and black culture depicted in television. Her work manifests itself in a variety of mediums; she also founded *Dominica*, which she describes as “a small press dedicated to nowhere shit.” For the 2016 edition of the Hammer Museum’s *Made in L.A.* biennial, Syms presented *Laughing Gas*, a video piece that referenced a 1907 silent film that portrayed a black female main character for one of the first times in contemporary film history. Syms’ mixed-media approach to topical issues makes her an important figure to follow in today’s art scene.



Courtesy of Laura Aguilar

13. Laura Aguilar

Starting her artistic journey at East Los Angeles College, photographer Laura Aguilar has gone on to show her work internationally. The upcoming show “*Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell*” — on view from Sept. 16, 2017, through Feb. 10, 2018, at the Vincent Price Art Museum — will showcase three decades of her work. In an interview with *L.A. Weekly*, Aguilar said she’s glad her work will be on display in East L.A., where she fought to prove its importance. Her photographs are essential work for anyone interested in art that deals with feminism, cultural identity and sexuality. As a Mexican-American female photographer, Aguilar is filling a major void in the art world, both in L.A. and at large.

14. Christina Angelina

Born and raised in Venice, Christina Angelina, aka Starfighter, has beautified plenty of areas in L.A. (not to mention other major cities around the world). Angelina excels at large-than-life portraits — spray-painted figures that seem realistic even as they're painterly. She often collaborates with other artists, like Ease One and Fin DAC, to create large murals that immediately grab your attention. Her work has transformed walls everywhere from South-Central to Marina del Rey to downtown L.A., and she's consistently working on something newer and bigger.



Rebecca Morris, installation view, "Made in L.A. 2016: a, the, though, only," June 12–Aug. 28, 2016, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

15. Rebecca Morris

While some might see painting and abstraction as bygone modes of making art, Rebecca Morris argues that both are very much alive and well. Her work puts an emphasis on making marks on the shapes that make up almost collage-like compositions. The large-scale works invite viewers to stay a while, to start to piece together a few recurring symbols and shapes from one canvas to the next. Morris recently displayed her work at the 2016 Hammer Museum biennial, where her works added a distinct vibrancy to the white walls on which they were hung.

