

City of culture: how Los Angeles has become an unlikely creative capital



A cactus garden perched on the south of the Getty Center, with the Los Angeles skyline in the background CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

By **Caroline Roux**

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When the team in charge of Pacific Standard Time (PST)—a huge event offering 70 art exhibitions all around the Los Angeles area—a few years ago started looking for a theme for its 2017 edition, the relationship between Los Angeles, its Latino communities and Latin America felt like a good a line of enquiry. It delivered its own snappy title, too: LA/LA, as in Los Angeles/Latin America. But by the time it opened in September, with the country’s controversial new president in place, it could hardly have been more appropriate.

“I don’t think we ever imagined quite how relevant it would become,” says Deborah Marrow, the director of the Getty Foundation, which has co-funded and -organised this proliferation of art offerings. “We have something to thank Trump for – he did our marketing for us!”



Adrián Villar Rojas's installation *The Theater of Disappearance*, 2017, on display at MOCA as part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA CREDIT: JORG BAUMANN

But there's even more to the Los Angeles art scene than PST. New commercial galleries have gradually come to town. A beautiful version of the respected German business Sprueth Magers has taken up residency in an elegant 1960s building opposite the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (itself undergoing a staggering Peter Zumthor-designed reworking). A real Art District has sprung up, taking the lead from Mara McCarthy's The Box, which took over the former industrial space of fashion designer Michèle Lamy in 2007. (Mara is the daughter of radical LA artist Paul McCarthy, Lamy the partner of fashion designer Rick Owens.)

Ever since the Broad museum opened two years ago in Downtown, locals have happily queued for 90 minutes to gain entry to Yayoi Kusama's Infinity Mirrored Room, an immersive world of endless reflection and top-level Instagramability. When the first tickets for a survey show of the Japanese artist's work (on until January 1) went on sale in September, they sold out in mere minutes. "People are incredibly engaged here, we're feeding a real need, and a deep interest," says Graham Steele, senior director of Hauser & Wirth, the leading commercial art gallery—with spaces in Zurich, London, Somerset and New York – that last year gambled on opening a radically new kind of operation near The Box. The LA variant combines food, craft shopping and exhibitions. "It's a completely different model," says Steele. "The idea is to come, have dinner, buy a book, then see a museum-quality show."



Valeska Soares' Un-rest, 2010, on show at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art

The Art District, which spreads out around E 3rd Street, is walkable, amenable, and expanding. The LA Institute of Contemporary Art has a home nearby – and has given a room over to fashion designer Christina Kim, of the label Dosa, who has decorated its walls with delicate fabrics and made artefacts for sale. By next spring both Dover Street Market – the fashionista favourite run by Comme des Garçons – and Spring Studios (top-level photographic facilities and a members’ club) will have opened nearby. The New York label Phillip Lim has moved to the area, with a shop mixing fashion and design.



Kim West's mural No Way Home in the DTLA arts district

In LA, where the movie business is still *the* business, other arts are happy to mingle. At the ultra-high-end Just One Eye, which occupies Howard Hawks’ old art deco studio off the beaten track in Hollywood, owner Paola Russo shows her not-insignificant art collection (major works include life-size sculptures by the manga-inspired Takashi Murakami) alongside labels such as Alexandre Vauthier and the hard-to-find Beau Souci. What is more, the city that

was once considered a fashion desert is becoming a destination and having a marked effect on current trends. “It’s the influence of celebrity culture,” says Charles Worthington, part of the team at Just One Eye. “If Hailey Baldwin or Kylie Jenner wears something, it matters more than any advertisement or magazine shoot. LA is central to the market now.” Burberry took notice and hosted its most lavish event to date at Griffith Observatory in 2015, and in 2016 Louis Vuitton hired 200 limos to ferry guests to a show in Palm Springs. This October, Dior defied logistics by staging a star-dusted event in the Santa Monica mountains. When Haider Ackermann took over as creative director at the classic menswear brand Berluti recently, he opted to open his first store in Beverly Hills.



The ever-popular Broad museum

“For a long time, much of high fashion’s inspiration has come from LA street style – from rock and roll style at Saint Laurent to athleisure to hippy dresses,” says Vincent, a young stylist I’m introduced to fresh from a shoot with January Jones. “It’s only now that the city’s gaining credibility.” In truth, designers from Europe’s major fashion houses have been scavenging the huge reserves in the city’s many excellent vintage stores for “research” samples for years. But now the secret is out.

Late-night drinks

Dinner done and set on a last hurrah? Head for the pretty glamour of Perch in Downtown and its twinkly outdoor terrace with superb city views. Or go rock and roll at the luxurious and legendary Sunset Marquis in West Hollywood, designed with Mediterranean villas in mind. A music-industry favourite, it should come as no surprise to bump into Courtney Love or John Mayer in its tiny BAR 1200.