

**Exhibition:** *A Universal History of Infamy*

**On View:** August 20, 2017–February 19, 2018

**Location:** LACMA; Charles White Elementary School; 18th Street Arts Center



(Image captions on page 8)

(Los Angeles—August 16, 2017) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art presents *A Universal History of Infamy* featuring sixteen U.S. Latino and Latin American artists and collaborative teams who work across a range of media—from installation and performance to sculpture and video—and adopt methodologies from diverse disciplines, including anthropology, history, linguistics, and literature. Most of the works on view are new projects that began during two-month residencies at 18th Street Arts Center in Santa Monica. The exhibition spans three venues—a school (Charles White Elementary School), an artist residency complex (18th Street Arts Center), and an encyclopedic museum, LACMA—offering different perspectives, approaches, and scales in each location.

*A Universal History of Infamy* is presented as part of the Getty's Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA initiative, and curated by Rita Gonzalez, curator and acting department head of contemporary art at LACMA; José Luis Blondet, curator of special initiatives at LACMA; and Pilar Tompkins Rivas, director of the Vincent Price Art Museum.

The title for the exhibition is borrowed from Jorge Luis Borges's *A Universal History of Infamy*, a 1935 collection of short stories in which the Argentinian author draws on disparate literary sources—from Mark Twain to Japanese tales—to devise an incomplete encyclopedic volume on infamy. The “A” that begins the title announces the shortcomings of any “universal” history or comprehensive survey. Similarly, the artists represented here upend any notion of absoluteness—regarding what constitutes Latin America and its diaspora, the art that can be associated with this region, and how to approach the complex relationship between culture and place.

“*A Universal History of Infamy* addresses Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA’s concept of mutual enrichment and dialogue between Latin America and Los Angeles,” says Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. “With most of the featured works produced just this year, this exhibition presents a unique opportunity to experience artworks created by U.S. Latino and Latin American artists today.”

Co-curators Rita Gonzalez, José Luis Blondet, and Pilar Tompkins Rivas add, “One of the goals of the exhibition is to showcase compelling artists from different generations and various levels of international recognition. For many of the featured artists, this is their first time exhibiting work in Los Angeles.”

### **Exhibition Organization**

*A Universal History of Infamy* unfolds across three venues: *A Universal History of Infamy* at LACMA; *A Universal History of Infamy: Those of this America*, a project by the artist at Charles White Elementary School; and *A Universal History of Infamy: Virtues of Disparity* at 18th Street Arts Center. The specific mission and environment differ at each venue, highlighting curatorial nodes of the overall exhibition project: strategies of display via an encyclopedic museum (LACMA), pedagogy—or methods of teaching—through a school (Charles White Elementary School), and artist research at an artist residency complex (18th Street Arts Center).

The largest presentation of the three, *A Universal History of Infamy*, will extend from the facade of LACMA’s Broad Contemporary Art Museum (BCAM) to the gardens surrounding the museum, with artist interventions in the Art of the Ancient Americas Building galleries and additional outdoor spaces of the museum. At Charles White Elementary School in MacArthur Park—a school which LACMA has had an ongoing partnership with since 2006—objects from LACMA’s permanent collection will be selected by Los Angeles–based artist Vincent Ramos and placed in dialogue with artworks and texts by other local Latino artists and cultural producers. Bringing together small-scale works by artists represented in *A Universal History of Infamy*, *A Universal History of Infamy: Virtues of Disparity* at 18th Street Arts Center will be structured around themes of likeness and deception, and will consider the shortcomings of different systems of writing, transcriptions, and their contested relation to authenticity.

## Exhibition Highlights

Notably, the majority of the works featured in the exhibition were produced in 2017, with 15 works commissioned specifically for the show. Highlights from *A Universal History of Infamy* include:

Founded in 2012 by artists Jessica Kairé (b. 1980) and Stefan Benchoam (b. 1983), **El Nuevo Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (NuMu)** is the first and only contemporary art museum exclusively dedicated to supporting and exhibiting contemporary art in Guatemala. The museum's egg-shaped building, originally designed as an egg-selling kiosk, measures a mere 6.5 by 8 feet but accommodates dynamic installations, making use of the structure's interior and exterior. A one-to-one fiberglass replica of NuMu will be installed at LACMA during the run of *A Universal History of Infamy*, and will host rotating projects by two Guatemalan artists.

*Joaquín Orellana: Paisaje Sonoro* (Sound Landscape) explores the legacy of Joaquín Orellana (b. 1937), a Latin American avant-garde composer known for creating his own instruments. The exhibition features recordings of Orellana's most emblematic scores and also includes photographs, programs, and press clippings.

*Retrospective* presents 30 of Regina José Galindo's (b. 1974) performance-based works, represented by documents installed on the museum's windowpanes, as well as an anthology of 30 of the artist's poems. When this exhibition was originally presented at NuMu in 2013, it was the first survey of Galindo's work shown in Guatemala.

On June 7, 2017 LACMA launched a month-long Kickstarter campaign and successfully raised funds for the NuMu journey from Guatemala to Los Angeles. Learn more about the project and the journey via LACMA's blog [Unframed](#).

NuMu's journey to LACMA is powered by Hyundai

For their work *Project 24: Variations on "House Taken Over"*, **Mapa Teatro** (Colombian artists Heidi Abderhalden and Rolf Abderhalden) brought objects and archival materials from LACMA's Bing Theater (a curtain, seats, glass parts of the chandelier, along with photos and documents) to the Fossil Lab of the nearby La Brea Tar Pits Museum, where they enlisted staff and volunteers to perform in the resulting video. *Project 24: Variations on "House Taken Over"* is screened using an improbable machine made from a Bing Theater relic retrofitted with a new projector. This video

will be played twice a month in the Bing Theater at 4 pm on the following dates: September 16, September 30, October 21, October 28, November 18, November 25, December 9, and December 30, 2017; and January 6, January 27, February 3, and February 17, 2018.

**Vincent Ramos's** (b. 1973) work *RUINS OVER VISIONS OR SEARCHIN' FOR MY LOST SHAKER OF SALT (ANTE DRAWING ROOM)* engages with the past and present through various forms of collecting and archiving. The artist gives as much weight to an advertisement from *TV Guide* as he does to primary documents drawn from historical archives. In this installation, Ramos has created an “anteroom” out of cast-off theatrical backdrops salvaged from local high schools. He populates this mini-museum with images of both Mexican American pop-culture icons, including singers with Anglicized names, and performers like Mary Tyler Moore and Bill Dana, who masqueraded as Latinos in the media. For his curatorial effort at Charles White Elementary School, Ramos considers the body as a transformative “tool” that both adapts to and resists the political, social, and cultural environments of its time and place in history. Ramos will draw extensively from LACMA's permanent collection and invite the participation of artists, writers, and social justice activists whose work engages with the overarching themes of presence, absence, memory, loss, resilience, and the potential for poetics during politically uncertain times.

Argentinean artists Dolores Zinny (b. 1968) and Juan Maidagan (b. 1957) have been working together since 1990. Equally interested in the histories of abstraction, architecture, and literature, **Zinny & Maidagan's** projects respond to the specific sites where they take place. The artists frequently work with textiles and curtains to create bland, temporary architectures that forward dormant stories of the place, the institution, or the city that receives their work. Invisible from inside the museum, *Word by Word: Décor for Distance* covers the south facade of LACMA's Broad Contemporary Art Museum (BCAM) with a layered banner that depicts palm trees and also includes cutouts that frame existing palms planted on Wilshire Boulevard. The piece is a direct response to Robert Irwin's *Primal Palm Garden*, which began on LACMA's campus in 2010. Comprising more than 100 palms, cycads, and tree ferns planted in the Kelly and Robert Day Garden, Irwin's palm garden, in its use of “primal” varieties, acknowledges the nearby La Brea Tar Pits and its Ice Age remains. Furthermore, the palm tree—an image associated with Los Angeles and tropical Latin America—functions as an ambiguous sign of something foreign that passes for authentic. The title references *Of Mere Being*, a poem by Wallace Stevens (1879–1955) in which the word “décor” was later replaced by the word “distance.” The artists requested the poem to be visible on the first floor

window of BCAM; the original poem by Stevens is in English, followed by the artists' personal translation.

**Naufus Ramzírez-Figueroa** (b. 1978) attempts to confront historical narratives with his memory or testimony through the use of mediums such as woodcut, drawing, installation, and performance. His relationship with Latin America's past comprises individual and collective experiences, as well as recurring references to myths. For this installation, Figueroa created props, costumes, and masks for the five characters—an oligarch, a dictator, a soldier, a cardinal, and a scarecrow—featured in *El corazón del espantapájaros* (*Heart of the Scarecrow*), a play by Guatemalan playwright Hugo Carrillo (1929–1994). Despite the critical success of the play in the 1960s, a 1975 student production faced brutal repression and censorship, which led to the cancellation of the show and the company's entire theatrical season. Throughout the run of the exhibition, actors will stage a series of performances in which they engage with these props.\*

In two related series **Ángela Bonadies** (b. 1970) explores the contentious history of two of the three murals Mexican social realist artist David Alfaro Siqueiros painted in Los Angeles. *Street Meeting* was commissioned in 1932 and was later censored, covered over, forgotten, then partially restored. Bonadies examines the shifting visibility of Siqueiros's murals, from the barely noticeable fragments of *Street Meeting* in a school kitchen to the highly mediated didactic panels that run alongside the censored and restored mural *América Tropical* (1932), shown in LACMA's BCAM.

### List of Featured Artists

Ángela Bonadies (Venezuela)

Mariana Castillo Deball (Mexico/Germany)

Carolina Caycedo (Los Angeles)

Josefina Guilisasti (Chile)

Tamar Guimarães (Brazil/Denmark) and Kasper Akhøj (Denmark)

Runo Lagomarsino (Sweden/Brazil)

Fernanda Laguna (Argentina)

Michael Linares (Puerto Rico)

Mapa Teatro (Colombia)

Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa (Guatemala)

NuMu [Stefan Benchoam, Jessica Kairé] (Guatemala)

Gala Porras-Kim (Colombia/Los Angeles)

Vincent Ramos (Los Angeles)

Oscar Santillán (Ecuador/The Netherlands)  
Carla Zaccagnini (Argentina/Brazil)  
Zinny & Maidagan (Argentina/Germany)

### **\*Performances**

Scheduled performances by Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa's *El corazón del espantapájaros (Heart of the Scarecrow)* will take place in the Rodin Sculpture Garden on August 20, 2017, at 3 pm; October 26, 2017, at 5:30 pm; January 19, 2018, at 4 pm; and February 16, 2018, at 4 pm.

### **Related Public Programming**

Join us for a walkthrough of *A Universal History of Infamy* with one of the exhibition curators Rita Gonzalez, José Luis Blondet, and Pilar Tompkins Rivas.

BCAM, level 2, LACMA

Thursday, October 12, 2017 | 7 pm

Thursday, December 7, 2017 | 7 pm

Thursday, January 25, 2018 | 7 pm

Gallery talk with artist Gala Porras-Kim

Saturday, December 2 | 2 pm

Gala Porras-Kim's project for *A Universal History of Infamy* involved research into the history of the Proctor-Stafford Collection of Western Mexican antiquities at LACMA. Porras-Kim will lead a walk-through of the Art of the Ancient Americas collection with a focus on issues of provenance, attribution, and museological display.

Visit [lacma.org](http://lacma.org) in the coming weeks for additional exhibition-related programming.

### ***A Universal History of Infamy***

**Los Angeles County Museum of Art**

**August 20, 2017–February 19, 2018**

5905 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday: 11 am–5 pm

Friday: 11 am–8 pm

Saturday, Sunday: 10 am–7 pm

### ***A Universal History of Infamy: Those of this America***

**Charles White Elementary School**

**December 9, 2017–October 6, 2018**

2401 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90057

Saturday: 1–4 pm

## ***A Universal History of Infamy: Virtues of Disparity***

**18th Street Arts Center**

**September 9–December 15, 2017**

1639 18th St., Santa Monica, CA 90404

Monday–Friday: 11 am–5:30 pm

**Credit:** This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

*A Universal History of Infamy* is part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, a far-reaching and ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles, taking place from September 2017 through January 2018 at more than 70 cultural institutions across Southern California. Pacific Standard Time is an initiative of the Getty. The presenting sponsor is Bank of America.



Major support is provided through grants from the Getty Foundation.



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All exhibitions at LACMA are underwritten by the LACMA Exhibition Fund. Major annual support is provided by Kitzia and Richard Goodman, with generous annual funding from Lauren Beck and Kimberly Steward, the Judy and Bernard Briskin Family Foundation, Louise and Brad Edgerton, Edgerton Foundation, Emily and Teddy Greenspan, Jenna and Jason Grosfeld, The Jerry and Kathleen Grundhofer Foundation, David Schwartz Foundation, Inc., Taslimi Foundation, and Lenore and Richard Wayne.

### **About LACMA**

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes more than 130,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through

exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles, which also contains the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum and the forthcoming Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles.

**Location:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. [lacma.org](http://lacma.org)

**Image captions:**

Left: NuMu (Nuevo Museo de Arte Contemporáneo), *Nuevo Museo de Arte Contemporáneo*, 2017, © Stefan Benchoam & Jessica Kairé, photo courtesy of the artists

Center, left: Vincent Ramos, 2017, © Vincent Ramos, photo courtesy of the artist

Center, right: Zinny & Maidagan, *Word for Word: Décor for Distance (Palabra por palabra: décor por distancia)*, 2017, courtesy of the artists; commissioned by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art for *A Universal History of Infamy*, © Dolores Zinny & Juan Maidagan, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Right: Carolina Caycedo, *Wall, Water and Waterfall*, from the *Serpent River Book*, 2017, artist book, courtesy of the artist, © Carolina Caycedo, photo courtesy of the artist

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**About Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA**

Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA is a far-reaching and ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles taking place from September 2017 through January 2018. Led by the Getty, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA is a collaboration of arts institutions across Southern California.

Through a series of thematically linked exhibitions and programs, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA highlights different aspects of Latin American and Latino art from the ancient world to the present day. With topics such as luxury arts in the pre-Columbian Americas, 20th century Afro-Brazilian art, alternative spaces in Mexico City, and boundary-crossing practices of Latino artists, exhibitions range from monographic studies of individual artists to broad surveys that cut across numerous countries.

Supported by more than \$17 million in grants from the Getty Foundation, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA involves more than 70 cultural institutions from Los Angeles to Palm Springs, and from San Diego to Santa Barbara. Pacific Standard Time is an initiative of the Getty. The presenting sponsor is Bank of America.