

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 7)

(Los Angeles—July 5, 2017) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art presents *A Universal History of Infamy*, a multisite exhibition engaging 16 U.S. Latino and Latin American artists and collectives whose practices defy disciplinary boundaries. These artists and collaborative teams work across a range of media—from installation and performance to drawing and video—and adopt methodologies from diverse disciplines, including anthropology, history, linguistics, and theater. Most 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—an encyclopedic museum (LACMA), a school (Charles White Elementary School), and an artist residency complex (18th Street Arts Center)—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 iniquity. The “A” that begins the title points to the limitation of a singular “universal” history or comprehensive survey. Similarly, through their artworks, artists in the exhibition challenge any notion of absoluteness with regard to what constitutes Latin America and its diaspora in the United States, the art

that can be associated with it, and how to approach this complex region.

“*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 project by Vincent Ramos at Charles White Elementary School, and *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*, *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 to raise funds for the NuMu journey from Guatemala to Los Angeles. Learn more about the project and the journey at lacma.org/kickstarter.

For their work *Project 24: Variations on Casa Tomada*, 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 the help of the staff and volunteers to perform in the resulting video. *Project 24; Variations on Casa Tomada* is screened using an improbable machine fabricated with an old relic from the Bing Theater which has been retrofitted with an HD projector. Throughout the run of the exhibition, three guest performers will respond to the findings "excavated" by Mapa Teatro.*

Vincent Ramos's (b. 1973) work *RUINS OVER VISIONS OR SEARCHIN' FOR MY LOST SHAKER OF SALT (ANTE DRAWING ROOM)* dialogues simultaneously with the past and present through forms of collecting and archiving. Ramos gives as much weight to a page from a *TV Guide* as he does to primary documents drawn from historical archives. His work reinterprets notions of memory, time, and place within the social, cultural, and political arenas of American society by fusing strains of popular culture with specific historical events. 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 Ramírez-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.*

Mariana Castillo Deball (b. 1975) works at the intersection of archaeology, literature, and the sciences, appropriating methodologies and practices common to these areas. Her installations, publications, and performances explore the ways these disciplines describe the world, and how they present versions of reality that inform and mix with one another. In collaboration with LACMA’s Art of the Ancient Americas department, the artist researched the use of pigments in Mayan and Aztec ceramics. As a result of this investigation, Castillo Deball will develop a new series of drawings in which she explores these ancient techniques.

List of Featured Artists

Ángela Bonadías (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 Mapa Teatro and of Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa's *El corazón del espantapájaros (Heart of the Scarecrow)* will take place at LACMA during the run of the exhibition. Visit lacma.org in the coming weeks for updates on performance dates and times.

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

Visit lacma.org in the coming weeks for additional exhibition-related programming.

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

Charles White Elementary School November 18, 2017–June 10, 2018

2401 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90057

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.



Presenting Sponsors



Major support is provided through grants from the Getty Foundation.



This project is supported by a generous grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funding provided by the AMA Foundation, the Pasadena Art Alliance, and the Wallis Annenberg Director's Endowment Fund.



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

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: Dolores Zinny, Juan Maidagan, *Word for Word: Decor for Distance*, 2017, © Dolores Zinny & Juan Maidagan, photo courtesy of the artists

Right: Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa, *Breve Historia de la Arquitectura en Guatemala (A Brief History of Architecture in Guatemala)*, 2010–13, single channel video installation, © Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa

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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.