

Hammer Museum's "Made in L.A." Biennial 2014: Our Preview

Many artists in the exhibit examine how we really live, not art theory

By [Catherine Wagley](#) Thursday, Jun 5 2014



Mariah Garnett's video *Full Burn*

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You weren't allowed to take any photos inside the Guggenheim Museum during British artist Tino Sehgal's big show there in 2010. Sehgal makes what he calls "constructed situations," such as the situation of couples kissing in the Guggenheim's rotunda. The kissing was choreographed, the couples were dancers and, as Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly confirmed after multiple visits, they were always a man and a woman.

Gerard and Kelly, artists and dancers who work as a team, decided to document Sehgal's *Kiss*. But because of the no-photo rule, they put their phones to their ears and spoke into them, recording their descriptions of what they saw: "They continue rolling to the left, she rolls away from him." "They are swaying back and forth like a dance, still kissing."

Their recordings became a score, which they've used repeatedly in different ways in the four years since. A new version of the *Reusable Parts/Endless Love* performance, which uses that score, will debut during the Hammer Museum's 2014 "Made in L.A." biennial, a show that aims to highlight the work of underexposed or emerging Los Angeles artists. Over four 72-minute sessions, four performers work with Gerard and Kelly's initial interpretation of Sehgal's *Kiss*. One does the movements being described while another makes movements inspired by what he or she sees, and so on.

"It's like a very complicated game of telephone," Kelly tells *L.A. Weekly*.

"You start somewhere but you never repeat," Gerard adds.

The idea is that one can wander in at any point and see something that no one else who comes at any other time will see, and that the experience will be gripping enough to keep viewers there for a while.

The first "Made in L.A." in 2012 was bigger than this year's show, and it took place at multiple locations; this one is solely at the Hammer. The first one had five curators. This one has just two, writer-curator Michael Ned Holte and the Hammer's newly appointed chief curator, Connie Butler, who used to be at MOCA but left for New York in 2005.

The first "Made in L.A." felt as if it was angling to show how worthy of a biennial L.A. art is. The essay all the curators wrote together, called "Los Angeles Is Everywhere," had subheadings such as "On Mythology" and "Ersatz."

Based on the artists involved and the catalog, this new version, which opens June 15, isn't angling to prove much but instead is capturing a shift in focus. For much of the past 15 years, overly intellectually and self-consciously historically informed work has been so pervasive that too much of what was shown in galleries or "finger-on-the-pulse" group museum shows either seemed to be announcing, "Look, professor, I understood all the theory," or looked stuck, frustrated by its inability to escape its historical references.

A fair number of the artists in this year's "Made in L.A." are unself-consciously using art as a way to figure out how to actually live — and making work that overlaps with their own lives.

Devin Kenny's material, for instance, includes awkward text messages that he doesn't attempt to make into anything other than what they are. Danielle Dean has cast her father and sister in work

that explores how language — from news sources, books of theory, soap operas — does and doesn't resonate with people's daily lives.

Gerard and Kelly, who moved to L.A. for UCLA's interdisciplinary master's program, decided to stay after graduating last year. "Art is not the important industry here," Kelly says. "It's altogether not important in a really great way."

They realized that what interests them, and why they keep returning to the Sehgal performance, is the gap between how intimacy is portrayed (by a man and a woman in Sehgal's *Kiss*, or by photos of Neil Patrick Harris' conventional-looking, albeit same-sex, marriage in *Rolling Stone*) and the ways in which they understand or experience intimacy. In a performance in 2013, they tried to "de-couple," separating their lives from each other to see how their own relationship actually worked. Their current Lincoln Heights studio is next to Jmy James Kidd Studio, a space opened five years ago by dancer Jmy Kidd. She rents it out to dancers at an affordable rate and hosts events there — as an event space, it goes by the name Pieter, and the price of admission is a donation to the free boutique or free bar. The studio (not exactly Kidd herself) is in "Made in L.A.," because Holte and Butler have made it a priority to include alt spaces on their roster. So Kidd is building a stage in the Hammer's courtyard, which will be used for rehearsals and events throughout the summer. Then she's debuting a piece called *Friend*, which she began choreographing a year ago for her newly formed company, the Sunland Dancers.

"It's a little like 'choose your own adventure,'" she says. The seven dancers have a set of movements they're all repeating, but they have to make choices about what to do when and how, based on what the other dancers are doing.

It "relates to things I'm dealing with about being able to make good choices and what that actually means," Kidd says.

The strangeness of choices people make in life drew artist Mariah Garnett to the subject of *Full Burn*, her 20-minute video in "Made in L.A." Garnett, who does video documentation of magazine photo shoots as her day job, met a stunt man who had formerly been a Special Forces operative in Iraq. "He was on fire on a set when I met him," she says.

She found it fascinating that someone who had known real, wartime danger would seek out Hollywood danger, and she spent two years trying to talk to other marines or Navy SEALs who had

become stunt men. Most were happy to perform a stunt for her, but they were not as happy to talk about the resonances between what they did in the military and what they do now. She remembers one guy telling her he'd been asked, when taking a certain stunt job, if he had ever been on fire before; he'd responded, "Only once, when my helicopter was going down."

The video has a split screen, and you see a stunt man, a former marine, do the "full burn" stunt on one side, while other stunt men talk about their work on the other. Garnett appears in the video, as she often does in her work about relating to other people, receiving a massage from a Navy SEAL who now works in Roling, an especially intense form of massage therapy.

Jennifer Moon's "Made in L.A." installation is the second part of her Phoenix Rising Saga. Part one, called *This Is Where I Learned of Love*, appeared at Commonwealth & Council in 2012 and documented, through artifacts, Moon's time in prison for a robbery she'd committed during a drug-involved "downfall."

After her release, when she began art-making again, she started promoting *The Revolution*, a project that has its roots in thinking she had done as an art student in the 1990s. Back then, she had ambitions of modeling herself as a kind of superhero who would change the "fucked-up" world. Possibly when high, she made a pact with a cosmic entity, agreeing to give up romantic relationships for the sake of her work. The autobiographical objects in this installation — such as a Book of Eros printed on birch paper documenting all the crushes she's had — all relate to that idea of giving life completely over to some bigger project.

A free pamphlet Moon wrote, "Definition of Abundance," also will be available at the museum. It sets out the revolution's tenets: to establish a primary education that promotes hyper-aware, critical thinking; create a political, socially aware pop culture; redistribute wealth.

She's serious about these tenets. "When does *The Revolution* go out of the art context?" she wonders. "That's where I get messed up." She remembers curator Holte visiting her studio in the lead-up to "Made in L.A." "Is this art or revolution?" she asked. "Does it really matter?" he replied.

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