



Doris Sung in C.O.L.A. at LAMAG, installation view

Shana Nys Dambrot

Join the New C.O.L.A. Fellowship of Artists at Barnsdall and Grand Performances

SHANA NYS DAMBROT | APRIL 30, 2018 | 9:50AM

A remarkable new [exhibition](#) has just opened in Hollywood; a diverse array of artistic voices working in eclectic mediums, and every single one with a unique, wonderfully relevant story to tell. Each year, the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs awards a group of artists individual grants of \$10,000 each and gives them six months or so to finish whatever they're working on and produce a new body of work for exhibition. The results enacted by the Fellows in the 2017-18 grant cycle are now on view at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery atop Barnsdall Art Park in Hollywood.



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Traditionally, the grants go to artists described as “midcareer,” a status best described in the statement by Cultural Affairs grants administration division director Joe Smoke as “accomplished, influential and not yet ultra-famous.” With not only visual but also performance and literary artists included (and showcased in separate June events at Grand Performances), this annual can’t-miss show continues a long tradition of civic support for the city’s creative class. “C.O.L.A. Fellows are the types of unique civic entrepreneurs that we need in this city,” stated Cultural Affairs general manager Danielle Brazell, pointing to L.A.’s increasingly established status as a major international arts center.



Michele O'Marah in C.O.L.A. at LAMAG, installation view

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Sandra de la Loza, To Oblivion, 2018

Courtesy of the artist/DCA

The 2017-18 [C.O.L.A. Fellows](#) in the design/visual arts, literary arts and performing arts are: Dave Hullfish Bailey, Guillermo Bert, Terry Braunstein, Cassils, Sandra de la Loza, Michelle Dizon, Tim Durfee, June Edmonds, d. Sabela grimes, Peter J. Harris, Michele O'Marah, Julie Shafer, Doris Sung and Kristina Wong. Pro tip: There's a very affordable and beautifully produced catalog, designed by past COLA Fellow Susan Silton, which is very much worth acquiring, as it contains not only biographical and visual information but also critical essays on all the artists.

Although the selection and awards process is based on the individual merits of the artists and their proposals, with no preconceptions

as to theme or motif, somehow it has a history, of presenting coherent, interrelated storylines. Themes emerge of their own accord. This has been true no matter who the artists or the curator (in this case, the brilliant and professionally empathetic Steven Wong) have been. In a timely and synchronistic manifestation of this trend, this year all the artists can be said to have taken on issues of migration and displacement – whether in time, place, history, politics, identity, materialism or spirituality.

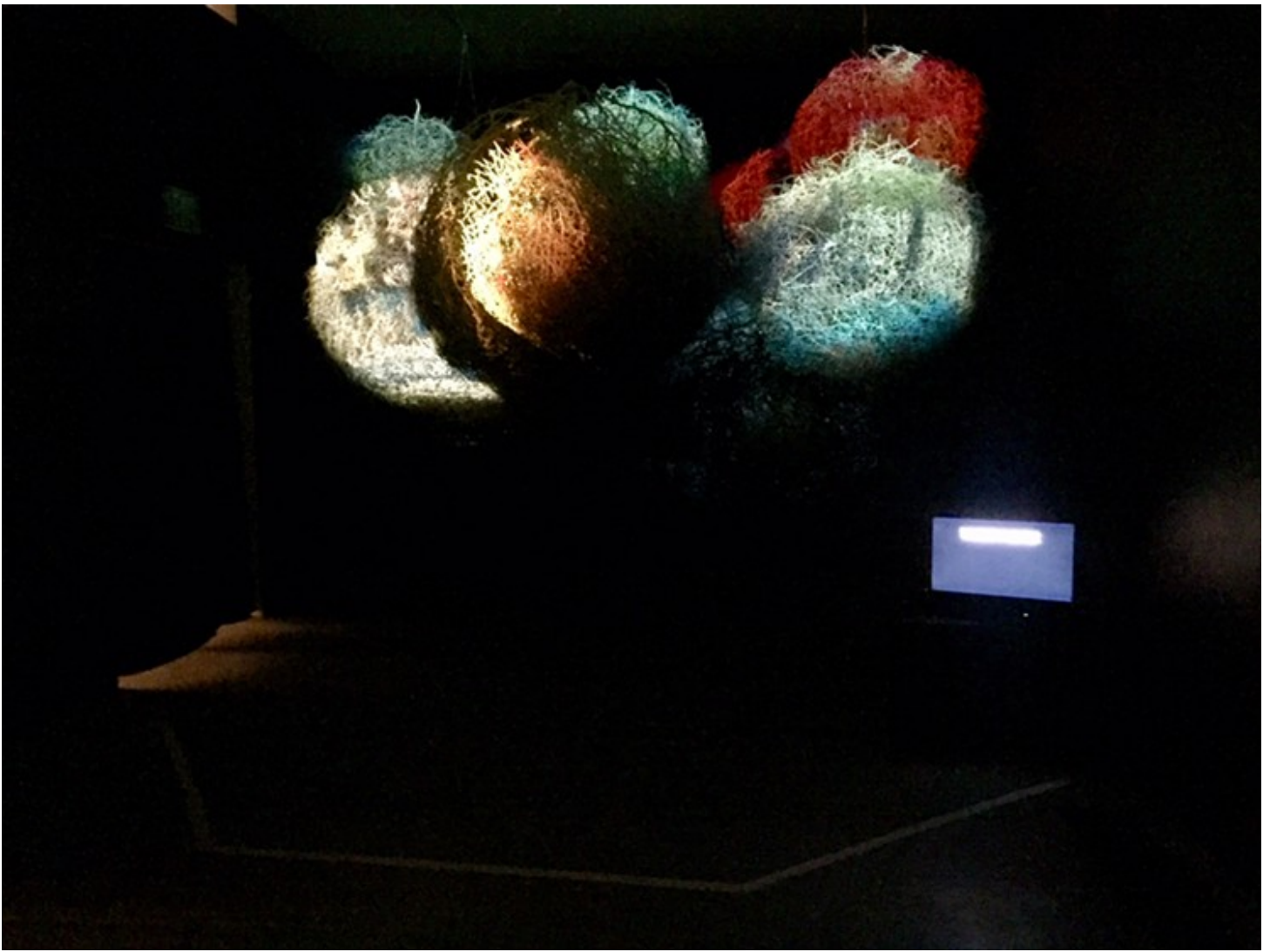
For example, see Sandra de la Loza's investigation into the history of California's infrastructure, which in this case looks at the Pacific Electric Railway's Sierra Vista Line. The site was an intersection of ambition, immigration, labor activism, violence and cultural exchange in the early years of the last century – all of which is represented in the diverse elements of her installation.



Julie Shafer in C.O.L.A. at LAMAG, installation view

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Julie Shafer's two-part suite of photographs and stone rubbings were made at a site along the Oregon Trail famous for its forked path, which forced would-be immigrants to make a life-altering decision, which they often commemorated in rock carvings before setting off into the chosen unknown.



Guillermo Bert in C.O.L.A. at LAMAG

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Guillermo Bert's sculptural audio/video installation "Tumble Dreams" presents testimonial video and poetic imagery, projected onto a cluster of large tumbleweeds as sculptural forms suspended in a black-box room. The speakers tell stories of migrations throughout the Latin American continuum. The personal narratives are compelling, but the power of this installation comes from the evocative image of tumbleweeds, torn up from their roots and blown across desert sands by the winds, paired with analogous human experiences. Through rich color and distressed texture, you can see and feel – as well as hear – their living histories.



David Hullfish Bailey in C.O.L.A. at LAMAG

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David Hullfish Bailey photographs the progressive entropy of life in the remote Salton Sea town of Slab City. Terry Braunstein's dystopic yet fantastical, hand-cut, theatrical, shadow-puppet dioramas evoke the game of Life, or Chutes & Ladders. June Edmonds pursues a vigorous reinvention of traditional Ghanese motifs within the context of modern abstract painting.



Terry Braunstein, in C.O.L.A. at LAMAG, installation detail

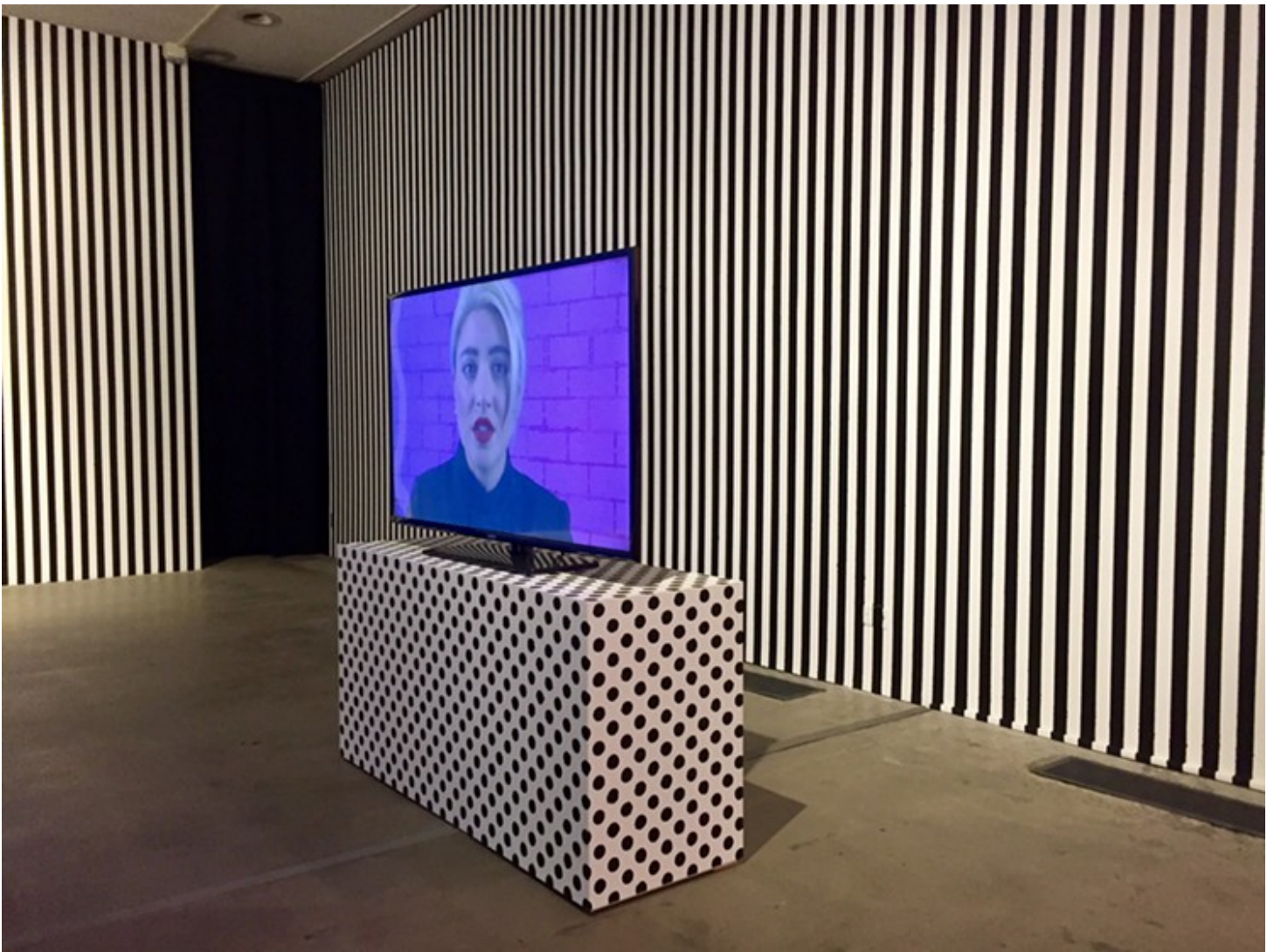
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June Edmonds in C.O.L.A. at LAMAG

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Tim Durfee's sculptural construction is a model government monument made of hundreds of tiny plastic picket signs, lit from above by neon drones. Performance and video artist Michele O'Marah takes on the psychic and emotional aftermath of the last election cycle, in painted settings that heighten the cognitive dissonance and circuslike theatricality of the experience.



Michele O'Marah in C.O.L.A. at LAMAG, installation view

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Michelle Dizon organizes a multiscreen slideshow that presents a kind of Latinx Futurism whereby she weaves connections between her ancestors and her family's future generations, in order that their history not be forgotten, and that in the present we are able to imagine ourselves inside the flow of history.

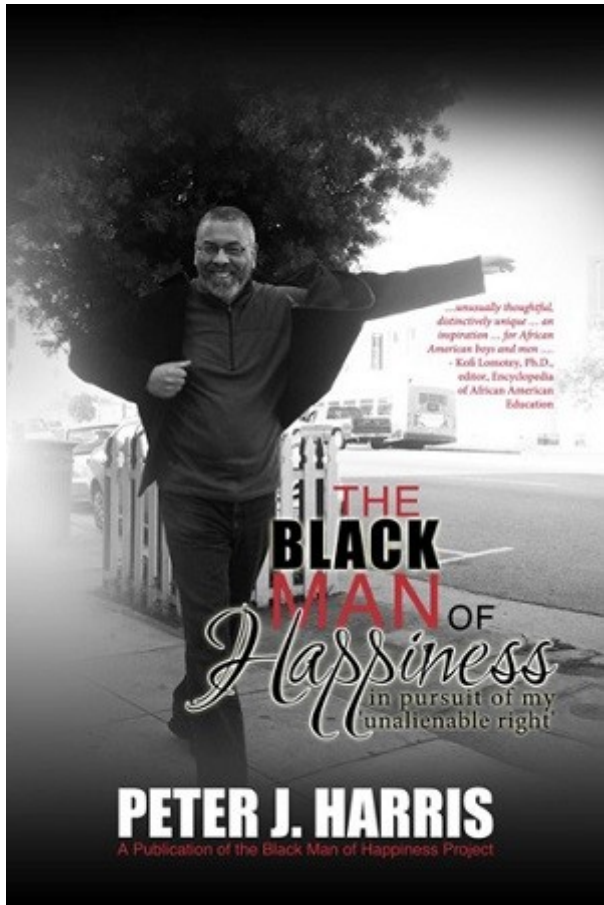


Michelle Dizon in C.O.L.A. at LAMAG, installation view

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All of the artists in some way seem to be considering what one might call the underlying structures of society, and with those, their own places in culture and history. At the same time, despite this didactic, they have all produced vibrant, engaging work of aesthetic power and material inventiveness, making it possible to enjoy even the more difficult teachable moments on offer.

This dynamic is very much at work, not only in the visual contributions, but is also clearly expressed in the joyful, fraught satire of performance artist Kristina Wong, the poetry of author Peter J. Harris (best known for penning award-winning book *The Black Man of Happiness*, and the emotional, conceptually crisp choreography of d. Sabela grimes – all of whom perform their works live on June 15 and 16 at [Grand Performances](#), downtown.



Peter J. Harris

Courtesy of the author

C.O.L.A. exhibition: Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Art Park, 4800 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood;
(323) 644-6269. Runs May 3-June 24, Thu.-Sun., noon-5 p.m.; free.

COLA performance and reading event: **Grand Performances** at California Plaza, downtown; Fri.-Sat., June 15-16, 8 p.m.; free.



Kristina Wong

Courtesy of the artist/DCA

