

Culture Monster

All arts, all the time

Getty gives \$5 million to plan next PST, on Latino/Latin American art



The J. Paul Getty Trust has announced \$5 million in research grants to dozens of arts institutions for LA/LA, an array of exhibitions in 2017. They'll include LACMA's show on artist Carlos Almaraz, shown shortly before his death in 1989. (Richard Schulman / Getty Images)

By **MIKE BOEHM**

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Fueled by \$5 million in grants from the J. Paul Getty Trust, 42 museums and other arts institutions from San Diego to Santa Barbara have begun tracing the prominent Latino and Latin American strand in Southern California's cultural DNA, including how Latinos in L.A. and elsewhere in the United States have absorbed, reflected and grappled with the creative legacies of their mother countries.

The fruits of the planning and research that's now underway will be harvested starting in September 2017, when Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles/Latin America begins a five-month run at museums, universities and performance spaces around the region.

The focus on Latino and Latin American art and culture is Round 3 in the Pacific Standard Time initiative that the Getty, the world's richest visual art institution, began laying groundwork for in 2002.

The first effort, Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945-1980 in 2011, documented how individual artists and institutions helped make L.A. and its environs a global force in the art world in the decades after World War II.

The 2011 initiative was a unique attempt at uniting dozens of arts institutions for a sprawling, panoramic and multifaceted view of themes in visual art that have particular relevance for Southern California.

The Getty kicked in \$11.1 million in grants for that first chapter. Last year's Pacific Standard Time: Modern Architecture in L.A. used an additional \$3.6 million in Getty grants to consider architecture alone.

On Tuesday the Getty plans to announce the first round of grants for Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, as it's known for short. It also provided brief summaries of the exhibitions, film screenings and performances it's funding.

In many cases the focus will be narrow, sometimes on a single artist. But collectively, LA/LA aims to offer a wide-angle, panoptical view of the art Latinos have created in Southern California and elsewhere in the United States, together with creative paths forged in Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean.

The exhibitions will range from 1000 BC -- the starting point for a show on "Luxury Arts in the Ancient Americas" that the Getty is organizing with New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art -- to the speculative future, as manifested in "Critical Utopias: The Art of Futurismo Latino," an exhibition at UC Riverside's ARTSblock galleries on how science fiction has influenced the styles and sociopolitical visions of Latino and Latin American artists.

The Getty had announced the theme and title of LA/LA more than a year ago, but the grant announcements flesh out what will happen in 2017. So far, there will be 40 exhibitions, three film series and concerts by the Los Angeles Philharmonic at both the Hollywood Bowl and Walt Disney Concert Hall.

There's also \$60,000 for eight Latin American artists to have residencies in L.A. sponsored by the 18th Street Arts Center in Santa Monica, and \$65,000 for the Music Center to scout and recruit performing arts groups from across the region to put on shows related to the exhibitions.

The initial round of grants is only for research that will help curators shape the exhibitions. James Cuno, the Getty Trust's president, said in an interview that a second round of grants totaling at least \$5 million more will help cover the cost of turning the research into visible realities in galleries, where expenses can mount quickly from building exhibition layouts and shipping and unpacking artworks

being loaned for a show. The Getty will also provide grants for exhibition catalogs documenting the shows.

But as with previous Pacific Standard Time phases, the Getty doesn't foot the entire bill; each institution is expected to seek other funding to round out their exhibition and programming budgets.

The smallest grant announced is \$55,000 for the Chinese American Museum in downtown L.A. for an exhibition on ethnic Chinese artists who gravitated to Cuba and other Caribbean islands, adding their own flavor to the region's heavily African-influenced art.

The Japanese American National Museum, also downtown, will follow a comparable tack with a show documenting how Japanese expatriates or their descendants became part of the fabric of art in L.A., Brazil, Peru, Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America.

The Skirball Cultural Center will also take a crosscultural approach, focusing on ties between Jewish intellectuals and the Mexican avant-garde, especially as exemplified by works important to Anita Brenner, a Jewish Mexican American anthropologist and art critic who died in 1974.

The biggest research grant for a single exhibition is \$275,000 to the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, which is teaming with museums in Mexico City and Lima, Peru, for a show called "Memories of Underdevelopment" that will explore how artists, primarily from Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela and Mexico, found ways to get their work across outside the mainstream museum system from the 1960s through the 1980s.

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art has received \$335,000 for research on three exhibitions. "A Universal History of Infamy" will use a variety of venues around L.A. to focus on living Latin American and Latino artists, including some new works. There's also a big survey, "50 Years of Design in Latin America, 1920 to 1970," and "Playing With Fire: the Art of Carlos Almaraz," the first large retrospective on the artist, who died in 1989 after emerging as a member of the L.A. art collective "Los Four" that played an important role in the Chicano cultural awakening of the 1970s.

Also to be shown at LACMA, but organized by the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA with help from a \$210,000 Getty grant, will be the exhibition "Home," focusing on about 30 Latino American artists since the 1950s who've grappled with questions of whether they work in an American art tradition, a Latin American tradition, or fall "betwixt and between."

The Hammer Museum will survey women artists in Latin America from 1960 to 1985 and L.A.'s Museum of Contemporary Art will delve into abstract art from Latin America from the 1930s through '70s. The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens in San Marino will look at the natural world of Latin America, as depicted by natives and European colonizers alike from the time of Columbus.

The Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach will examine "Spirituality in the Art of the

Caribbean,” including works associated with Santeria and Voodoo, and the Vincent Price Art Museum at East Los Angeles College will explore interest in Latin American art and furniture by Hollywood collectors including Price, Edward G. Robinson, Kirk Douglas, Otto Preminger and Natalie Wood.

Chon Noriega, director of UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center, said that the initial Pacific Standard Time sequence on L.A. art before 1980 included six shows about Latino artists, and that the ripple effects of those exhibitions have included subsequent shows in Mexico City; Nottingham, England; Amsterdam; and Marseilles.

With LA/LA, he said, there's a potential for several different far-reaching effects -- some of particular concern to art historians, while others relate more broadly to museum-going among the Latino public in Southern California. Noriega's research center at UCLA helped plan the broad outlines of LA/LA along with the Getty, LACMA, MOCA and the Hammer Museum.

Traditionally, Noriega said, Latin American art -- the output of artists living in Latin American nations -- and Latino art -- the work of minorities with typically Spanish surnames who live in the United States -- have been seen by art historians and curators as distinct areas of study. LA/LA, he thinks, has the potential to show links between them that haven't been clear before.

“There's been a bit of a divide, a boundary, with U.S. Latinos and Latin Americans seen as doing fundamentally different work and coming out of a fundamentally different context,” he said. “The way LA/LA has been framed is a way of breaking that down a bit to explore the complexity of what has been done.”

LA/LA gives each participating institution the freedom to take its own approach, so there's no requirement that every show must explore creative crosstalk between Latino artists from Southern California and the art traditions of Latin America. But Noriega expects connections and contrasts to emerge organically as viewers see a diverse array of shows in a relatively short time.

He thinks it's possible, but not a given, that LA/LA could be a watershed in how Southern California museums advance their hopes of reaching the region's huge Latino public. One issue, he said, will be how much bilingualism to deploy on wall texts that describe the works on view.

“It's something museums are going to continue to grapple with, the logistical and financial questions of ... signaling to [Latino] people that it's their institution as well,” said Noriega.

As American museums began to consider how to nurture the general public's interest in art in the early and mid-20th century, Noriega said, the focus was on “assimilation” -- driving home a binding cultural heritage that was heavily Eurocentric. Now “the demographics have shifted considerably, and the dynamics are different,” so LA/LA could be a chance for museums to become more creative in engaging a large Latino public.

“It'll be interesting to see whether [the Latino community's interest in LA/LA] evolves from the ground

up, or whether there's a way to actually market the aggregate of seeing shows with artists with Spanish surnames as a point of identification," Noriega said.

The Getty's Cuno said that LA/LA won't mark an end to the Pacific Standard Time sequence. "We intend to continue with the project so long as it sustains interest and there's material to work with," he said.

Cuno thinks Southern California may be uniquely suited to region-wide art collaborations.

One big factor is the Getty itself, and its willingness to tap its endowment of more than \$6 billion to share the wealth with neighboring institutions. Besides that, Cuno said, "Los Angeles has a vast number of cultural institutions that is different from most other places, and there's a youthful, sunny disposition from our colleagues to join together and produce something greater than the sum of its parts."

While LA/LA was quickly embraced during planning for the next phase of PST, Cuno said, another "obvious one we touched on was the idea of the Pacific Rim" and its connections to Southern California.

"We want to know more about what that means before we go forward with it," Cuno said. "Both are obvious ones, given the history of Los Angeles and its demographics. But [Latino and Latin American art] is part of the history of art that has been neglected more than the Pacific Rim, so we could make the biggest contribution at this time" by focusing first on the subjects being tackled in LA/LA.

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