

15 Female Artists Who've Shaped the L.A. Art Scene

BY EVA RECINOS

MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2017 AT 7:32 A.M.



Courtesy Patsi Valdez

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Many surveys of iconic L.A. artists might name a few familiar greats: Ed Ruscha, Chris Burden, Ken Price ... the list goes on. While these men are important to know in terms of art history as a whole, women artists often go overlooked in most mainstream art history texts.

This list looks at women artists who influenced the City of Angels through their art-making. Take it as a starting

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point for finding out more about the amazing women who've shaped the cultural production of this city — and will continue to make ways through both new work and the legacy they leave behind.



A portion of *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*

© Robin Dunitz

1. Judith Baca

Preserving, protecting and creating the great public artworks in L.A. isn't an easy feat. The city owes a big debt to [Judith Baca](#), an artist, muralist and educator who has been teaching art since 1984. She's also the founder of SPARC, the [Social and Public Art Resource Center](#). Her [biggest contribution](#) to the city (literally): spearheading the creation of *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, a more than 2,000-foot-long mural in the Tujunga Wash, a flood-control channel in the San Fernando Valley. Another work you might recognize: the 1984 mural [Hitting the Wall](#) on the 110. Baca's presence in L.A. is important not just on a visual level but a political one as she fights to assert the important of public art in the city.





[Larry Miller/Flickr](#)

2. Betye Saar

As one of the most important black artists in contemporary art history, [Betye Saar](#) has an especially important link to L.A.'s art history. She spent time at the Brockman Gallery, "one of the first galleries opened by members of the black community in L.A.," as she told *L.A. Weekly* [back in 2011](#). At 90 years old, Saar shows [no signs of stopping](#), with international shows planned. Angelenos will get to see her work at the [Craft & Folk Art Museum](#) in an exhibition titled "Betye Saar: Keepin' It Clean," opening May 28. Saar's influence is difficult to capture succinctly: She continues to serve as an important artist working through themes of violence, memory and history through the lens of black culture.



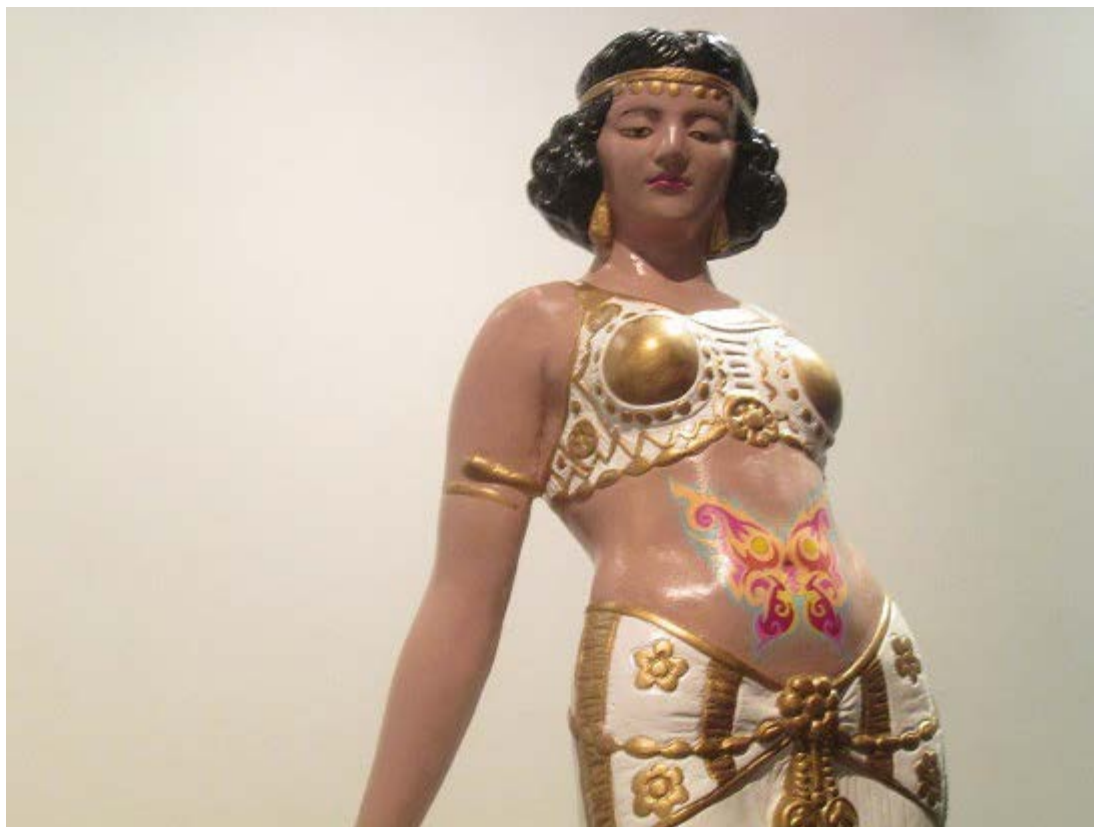
Installation view, Hammer Projects: "Catherine Opie: Portraits," Jan. 30-May 22, 2016, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

Brian Forrest

3. Catherine Opie

With multiple solo exhibitions, accolades and awards, [Catherine Opie](#) is known internationally as one of our most important contemporary photographers. In 2008, the Guggenheim Museum presented a midcareer exhibition, "Catherine Opie: American Photographer," which highlighted some of her career-defining work. L.A. continually

influences Opie's practice, whether she's capturing its infrastructure (as in the series "Freeways"), its community ("Portraits") or its architecture ("Houses"). Beyond its aesthetic appeal, Opie's work serves as an important archive of the city.



Eva Recinos

4. Linda Vallejo

In taking familiar figures and making them brown (a series she calls "Make 'Em all Mexican"), Mexican-American artist [Linda Vallejo](#) challenges the viewer to re-examine the [familiar icons of pop culture](#). Vallejo also looks specifically at the Latino community in Los Angeles, as evidenced in "The Brown Dot Project." Though now in many variations, the idea started with analyzing the "Latino numbers and how the population is growing by leaps and bounds" in L.A., as explained on her site. The conversations sparked in her artwork feel especially familiar to anyone living in L.A., and her artwork is a deliberate action against erasure.

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Uta Barth, *In the Light and Shadow of Morandi (17.01)*, 2017; face mounted, raised, shaped, archival pigment print in artist frame, 48¾ x 52¾ x 1¾ inches (framed); edition of 6, 2 APs.

Chris Adler/Courtesy of 1301PE Gallery.

5. Uta Barth

Known around the world for her unconventional style of photography, [Uta Barth](#) calls Los Angeles home and received her MFA at UCLA in 1985. Barth's compositions usually require that viewers allow their eyes to adjust a little; there seems to be nothing really there, but the faint shapes that come to the surface turn out to be haunting. Her work is a part of major museum collections including those at the Hammer Museum, LACMA and the Getty. She [has a show up at 1301PE Gallery](#) in Carthay that runs until April 22.



From Jo Ann Callis' "Cheap Thrills" series

Courtesy Rose Gallery

6. Jo Ann Callis

In 1981, a gallery show in L.A. displayed the work of photographer Jo Ann Callis next to Paul Outerbridge's — and cemented her status as an important artist in the city and at large. Best known for her carefully arranged color photography, Callis has been instrumental in pushing the stylistic limits of the medium. Her work has been displayed in [numerous galleries and museums in L.A.](#) Many of her photographs feel cinematic and almost specific to L.A. in that they are so staged (though this is tongue-in-cheek, as with her [pastry photography](#) series, “Cheap Thrills”).

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7. Diane Gamboa

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During the early '80s, [Diane Gamboa](#) captured the dynamic punk-rock scene in East L.A. through black-and-white photography. She also served as a “consultant, stylist and referee” for the Chicano art collective Asco for a few years. She often organized temporary events such as her "Hit and Run" paper fashion shows. Gamboa’s work often explores portrayals of Mexican identity; through her curation and involvement in arts education, she’s also been a driving force in the [Chicano art scene](#).



[Courtesy of Corey Helford Gallery](#)

8. Camille Rose Garcia

Pop surrealism can often feel like a boys club, but [Camille Rose Garcia](#) has cemented herself as an important painter within the genre. Her pieces often feel like pages of a strange fairy tale — coincidentally, her illustrated version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* became a *New York Times* best-seller. Garcia often toes the line between reality and illusion, life and death in

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her intricate compositions. It's hard not to fall headfirst into the worlds she so carefully constructs.

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