

Art in America

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PROFILES



Christine Y Kim Curator, LACMA
Los Angeles
6/6/12

After eight years as associate curator at New York's Studio Museum in Harlem, Christine Y. Kim joined the Los Angeles County Museum of Art as associate curator of contemporary art in September 2009. Born in Newport Beach and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, she has returned to her roots, landing a prestigious position with a world-class retrospective in the works.—AMY ABRAMS

Tell me about LACMA's upcoming James Turrell retrospective.

For three years, I have been working with LACMA's director, Michael Govan, on a major survey of Turrell's 40-year career. The show opens May 26, 2013. Born in Los Angeles and raised in Pasadena, Turrell was a leading figure in the Light and Space Movement and went on to create the Roden Crater project in northern Arizona—the conversion of a natural volcanic crater into an epic work of art. Our retrospective will run concurrently with two more focused exhibitions of Turrell's work, at the Guggenheim in New York and at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The Guggenheim's installation will use the oculus above the Frank Lloyd Wright rotunda space as the light source to create an extraordinary site-specific piece. The exhibition at MFA Houston will display a selection from the vast holdings of Turrell's works in the museum's permanent collection. The LACMA retrospective examines Turrell's work from the early years—starting in 1966, when he rented the former Mendota Hotel in Ocean Park for \$125 a month—through 1969–71, the time of his historic collaborative exploration in the Art and Technology Program at LACMA, right down to the present. The show will take up over 30,000 square feet.

Are you also organizing shows from the permanent collection?

When I first arrived at LACMA, Franklin Sirmans and I co-organized "Human Nature: Contemporary Art from the Permanent Collection," which presented about 75 works in diverse mediums by artists who have made defining contributions to the art landscape from 1986 to the present. The show included a recently acquired neon piece by Glenn Ligon and a newly acquired series of photographs by Lorna Simpson from her most recent body of work,

alongside wall drawings by Sol LeWitt, a Mel Bochner text work-and more. Now I am organizing a more intimate installation, *The Figure in Contemporary Photography*, opening on July 22, which looks at contemporary figuration, including self-portraiture, and other motifs represented in our photography collection.

Let's talk about your previous work at the Studio Museum in Harlem...

I organized numerous solo and group shows, such as "Kehinde Wiley: World Stage Africa" and "Flow" in 2008; "Philosophy of Time Travel" and "Henry Taylor: Sis and Bra" in 2007; "Meschac Gaba: Tresses" in 2005; "Black Belt" in 2003 and "Africaine" in 2002. I also co-organized survey exhibitions, including "Frequency" and "Freestyle." It was an exciting time for a revitalized culturally specific museum in New York.

What artists are you working with in L.A.?

While at the Studio Museum, I consistently worked with L.A. artists and was attracted to their discourses, practices and trajectories. When I co-curated "Freestyle" in 2001, with director Thelma Golden, we exhibited Mark Bradford, Kori Newkirk and Eric Wesley for the first time in a major museum context. I came out to L.A. to do studio visits with them.

As often happens with curators when working with emerging artists, I found numerous communities of artists-including CalArts, studios in Chinatown and various alternative spaces. I went on to work with Edgar Arceneaux, Rodney McMillian, Charles Gaines and Malik Gaines. A number of artists living and working here have interesting professional relationships outside of L.A., such as Alex Olson, Yutaka Sone, Mark Bradford, Brenna Youngblood, Sharon Lockhart and Kerry Tribe.

With the art schools here, as well as the arts communities and spaces for making art, it makes a lot of sense that they would live and work in L.A. and also have great resonance and exhibition opportunities internationally. I have always loved the work of Bruce Conner, David Hammons, James Turrell and Paul McCarthy, and I see real opportunities to show both emerging artists and established L.A. artists in dynamic contexts at LACMA.

When I arrived at LACMA, I had discussions with Michael Govan, Franklin Sirmans and Rita Gonzalez, exploring how to develop an encyclopedic context-a new challenge for me. To serve the collection and not just exhibitions, Rita and I re-envisioned "Art Here and Now" (originally "New Talent Award") to more actively acquire work by emerging L.A. artists. We are reinvigorating existing models to better serve the community and support holdings in the permanent collection.

Tell me about your work outside of the museum.

Soon after I moved to L.A. from New York, I co-founded the Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND), a nonprofit public art initiative committed to curating site- and situation-specific contemporary art projects in Los Angeles and beyond. I envisioned more intimate and nuanced artistic gestures, collaborations and projects around L.A.-not just large-scale or big budget-that could really have an impact for an artist and contemporary art. My recent and upcoming projects include two iterations of Art Public at the Bass Museum for Art Basel Miami Beach in 2011 and 2012. I will be a curatorial advisor for Prospect 3, New Orleans, in 2013. I also serve on boards and advisory committees at several institutions and organizations, including the nonprofit LAXART. For me, involvement, dialogue and participation are key.

What are some of the most meaningful aspects of your career?

Coming out of undergrad at Connecticut College, where I got a dual degree in art history and French, and then finishing grad school in 1998 at NYU, where I concentrated on critical theory and American studies, I never imagined having the opportunity to work with the mentors I was fortunate enough to have in the years that immediately

followed—namely, Lowery Stokes Sims, Thelma Golden, Karin Higa, and Li-Ian, all profoundly brilliant and creative women of color.

It's exciting to see—today—how many opportunities exist for young people to pursue careers in the arts. Of course, there is a lot of talk about difficulties with museum funding and nonprofits, a lot of which is valid, but there are more professional and alternative possibilities now than when I came of age as a curator in the '90s, a tremendous result in part from the so-called age of multiculturalism. I feel great promise for those starting out at this moment in both institutional and independent settings. There's a proliferation of chances to work in overlapping ways in art—making, curating and critical discourse—all of which are happening now in L.A., as they did in the '60s and '70s, but newer and bigger.

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