

- 1\_ Roberta Smith, "A Bit of Hollywood, Minus the Tinsel," [New York Times](#) 30 May 2011.
- 2\_ Roberta Smith, "Made in Space," [New York Times](#) 1 Aug. 2013.
- 3\_ Los Angeles incorporated in 1850, the [New York Times](#) in 1851.
- 4\_ Conrad de Aenlle, "Los Angeles Art Scene Comes Into Its Own," [New York Times](#) 11 Mar. 2016; Jeff Gordinier, "Los Angeles: City of Breakfast," [New York Times](#) 23 Feb. 2016.
- 5\_ Bruce Hainley, "Artquake," [New York Times Magazine](#) 1 Oct. 2006. By virtue of its sheer competence, this piece transcends the genre.
- 6\_ In her 2016 exhibition "Ten Paintings" at the CCA Wattis Institute in San Francisco, LA-based artist Laura Owens incorporated a list of particularly laughable quotes from recent LA-boosting scene pieces, including several from the [New York Times](#).
- 7\_ Bryce Nelson, "If This Is Hell, Why Is It So Popular?" [New York Times](#) 2 Mar. 1991. The article notes that the author is a professor of journalism at the University of Southern California.
- 8\_ Smith, 2011.
- 9\_ Roberta Smith, "Boldly Go: A Gallery Guide By the Art Critics of The [New York Times](#)" [New York Times](#) 3 Apr. 2014.
- 10\_ Aline B. Louchheim, "Art in California: Patrons and Painters in Los Angeles," [New York Times](#) 29 Aug. 1948.
- 11\_ Michael Brenson, "City's Position Secure As Focus Of Art World," [New York Times](#) 28 Feb. 1983.
- 12\_ Grace Glueck, "Artful LA," [New York Times](#) 23 Nov. 1986.
- 13\_ Suzanne Slesin, "Downtown Los Angeles: The New Settlers," [New York Times](#) 12 Apr. 1984.
- 14\_ Andrew Yang, "A New Art Scene in Los Angeles," [New York Times](#) 3 Apr. 2005.
- 15\_ David Colman, "Welcome to the New Los Angeles: It's on the Hudson," [New York Times](#) 15 Nov. 1998.
- 16\_ Jori Finkel, "Artists Named for Hammer Museum's Los Angeles Biennial," [New York Times](#) 18 Feb. 2014.
- 17\_ Alex Williams, "Los Angeles and Its Booming Creative Class Lures New Yorkers," [New York Times](#) 1 May 2005.
- 18\_ Frances Anderton, "Out There: Chinatown Reborn As a Bohemian Outpost," [New York Times](#) 3 Jun. 2001.
- 19\_ Holland Cotter, "Are All-Women Shows Good or Bad for Art?" [New York Times](#) 16 Mar. 2016. See also: Anderton 2001; Randy Kennedy,
- "Boyle Heights Gallery Scene in Los Angeles is Still Growing," [New York Times](#) 30 Mar. 2016; Edward Wyatt, "Economic Realities Press on Artists' Outdoor Eden," [New York Times](#) 11 Aug. 2008; Solomon Moore, "Some Respite, if Little Cheer, for Skid Row Homeless," [New York Times](#) 31 Oct. 2007.
- 20\_ "Ms. Maccarone was tipped off to her building by Laura Owens, an artist involved with 356 Mission, a neighboring joint venture with the New York gallerist Gavin Brown and Wendy Yao, whose book and design shop is just inside the entrance. That art space was an early outpost in Boyle Heights, a part of the district that still has an anything-goes feel. "It still has a dangerous quality - I kind of like that," Ms. Maccarone said. 'I like that we spent a fortune on security.'" Melena Ryzik, "New Art Galleries Enjoy a Los Angeles Advantage: Space," [New York Times](#) 16 Sep. 2015.
- 21\_ Activists have directly protested galleries in Boyle Heights. In July 2016, one group demanded that the galleries "leave immediately." The LA Times and others have followed the story; the [New York Times](#) has not. See Brittny Mejia and Steve Saldivar, "Boyle Heights activists blame the art galleries for gentrification," [Los Angeles Times](#) 4 Aug. 2016.
- 22\_ Montgomery Schuyler, "Westward the Course of Empire: A Panorama of Our Country, in Eight Daily Tableaux, as Seen by a Passenger on the Los Angeles Limited," [New York Times](#) 21 Jan. 1906.
- 23\_ Williams.
- 24\_ Hainley.
- 25\_ At press time, De Aenlle's Twitter profile read, "Financial columnist and feature writer for The [New York Times](#) Reuters and MarketWatch.com, among other organizations."
- 26\_ De Aenlle.
- 27\_ De Aenlle.
- 28\_ Manohla Dargis, "In the Studios' Shadow, an Avant-Garde Eye," [New York Times](#) 8 Nov. 2004.
- 29\_ Cecelia Ager, "Antonioni Hero in Hollywood," [New York Times](#) 5 Feb. 1967.
- 30\_ Julia Chaplin, "Art Scene Heats Up in Downtown Los Angeles," [New York Times](#) 12 Feb. 2016.
- 31\_ Chaplin.
- 32\_ Adam Nagourney, "Lights! Cameras! (and Cheers) for a Rock Weighing 340 Tons," [New York Times](#) 10 Mar. 2012.
- 33\_ "'Culturally we've always been overshadowed by the film industry, and now the art world is at a weird parallel with it,' said Sterling Ruby, one of Los Angeles's most bankable artists,

# Hell Heats Up

*How the New York Times covers LA art—and why Angelenos should care.* by Travis Diehl

"Basically, this show seems to have blinked," writes Roberta Smith, senior art critic at the *New York Times* "when it came to the risk of showing New York something it didn't already know." The camera-shy show? "Greater LA"—"a sprawling survey of recent art from Los Angeles arrayed in an immense, unrepentantly raw SoHo loft." (1)

But does Smith's paper likewise blink every time it gets an eyeful of Klieg light?

Smith notes in her 2013 review of another LA coterie effort, "Made in Space," that, in Los Angeles, "studio space is cheaper and more plentiful" than in New York. (2) Her take on the title's joke nearly encapsulates the *Times's* outlook. Yet for those of us living in this always-second city, "Made in Space" is also a coy rejoinder to boost-erish exhibitions like "Made in LA," the Hammer Museum's biennial since 2012, which hungrily claim artists fresh from the grad schools that drew them here. There's also lots of space, as in spacing out—as in outer. But, like, totally whatever. Even as Angelenos wince at beachy, baked clichés, enough of us throw them on like fun outfits for them to pass fact check.

Thus the rhetorical symbiosis: New York is. Los Angeles will be. But it isn't, yet.

A survey of one and a half centuries (3) of NYT articles on LA art indicates that the tics of recent coverage—such as, days apart in spring 2016, "Los Angeles Art Scene Comes Into Its Own" and "Los Angeles: City of Breakfast" (4)—follow reams of dedicated, wary, and sometimes lofty appraisals of our perpetual coming-of-age:

"Art in California," 1948; "Art on the Los Angeles Front," 1956; "Making Like Competition in LA," 1965; "Los Angeles Now the 'In' Art Scene," 1971; "Art in a City of Angels," 1979; "Artful LA," 1986; "For Art, Coastal Convergences," 1989; "The Los Angeles Art World's New Image," 1992; "Chinatown Reborn as a Bohemian Outpost," 2001; "Artquake," 2006; (5) "The Art's Here. Where's the Crowd?," 2007; "Southern California Stakes Its Claim as a World Art Center," 2011; "Art Scene Heats Up in Downtown Los Angeles," 2016. (6)

NY thrills to style LA as a golden-hour dreamland that never quite wakes up; LA gladly concedes to NY the status of the overbearing and immutable reality it rejects. As with any good rivalry, each sustains the other. Even complaining about the *New York Times* has become an LA standard—as slighting LA (and indeed, any city that's not New York) must be for the aptly named *New York Times*. But who does this dynamic really serve? Who are these articles for? And—forget the scene—what about the art?

The *Times* titles its review of Mike Davis's cynical LA history *City of Quartz* with a haunting question: "If This Is Hell, Why Is It So Popular?" (7) Maybe LA is lucky that the paper sees fit to fly over its best writers as often as it does, if only to reiterate the problem. From our coast, the question may be just as hard to face. When top critics and arts reporters cut their copy with little snubs, or when the *Times's* Travel or Style sections run condescending trend reports, or when all its contributors hold up LA's art scene to Manhattan hotspots and to Hollywood, why does it bug us so much? Why should LA artists care?

## SELF-CENTERED TIMES

It's understandable that an international but New York-based newspaper of record would consider its home city the one to beat. The terms of the contest, however, have shifted—from merit to market. In her "Greater LA" review, Smith ventures "that New York long ago accepted [Los Angeles] as an equal in the production of art." (8) But, she qualifies in 2014, "New York remains

the center of the gallery world, and galleries are the bedrock of any truly thriving art scene." (9) In 1948, Los Angeles "artists exhibit locally but keep weather-eyes on Fifty-seventh Street," and the uptown money. (10) An unequivocal state-of-the-city address, appearing a year ahead of Los Angeles's second Olympic Games in 1984, states that "New York City's position as the capital of the art world seems, at the moment, even more invincible today than it has been in the last 25 years." (11) Again and again, the *Times* rushes to reassure its readers that what makes an art capital isn't art, but capital. In this regard, "Los Angeles is still," and will always be, "a far cry from New York." (12) When Downtown LA gentrifies, it's "much as New York's SoHo has." (13) "Like a nascent Chelsea, in New York," one writer notes of Culver City, "white-box art galleries are sandwiched between industrial supply stores and auto-repair shops, including one that only repairs classic Mustangs." (14) When another reverses the formula, it's not meant as a compliment: "Big, whitewashed art galleries in low industrial buildings, their garage-style doors giving onto broad, sunny streets that are dead quiet except for the fit-for-life types in-line-skating westward toward the water. Is this a description of the latest art district in Los Angeles? In fact, it is West Chelsea." (15)

These articles often come padded with quotes from former New Yorkers, confirming the biases of current ones. Jori Finkel, easily the best LA-based arts journalist on the *Times* roster, calls "Made in LA" "the West Coast answer to the Whitney Biennial." (16) Ann Philbin, now director of the Hammer Museum, describes her town as "like New York in the '80s." (17) "This could be our West Village," says Peter Frank, a local critic and one-time writer for the *Village Voice*. (18)

Lost in this refrain is the question of why gallery districts on both coasts tend to flare up and move on like the burning edge of a newspaper, leaving neighborhoods transfigured. Few *Times* articles mention gentrification in Los Angeles; fewer link the trend to art. The most damning, a review of Hauser Wirth & Schimmel's inaugural show, ends with a warning: "For some years now, we've seen the same kind of growth in New York," admits a *Times* critic, "where money drains art of blood, and slow death by gentrification is far advanced." (19) Far more plentiful are pieces that gloss LA art as merely a bonus of the abundant, magic-lit, and (relatively) affordable "space" available on the city's industrial fringes. New York dealer "Michele Maccarone, in a flowy black jumpsuit, was striding across the cement floor of her cavernous new gallery here last week," ledes a 2015 article. "'There's just, like, this endless amount of really incredible space,' she said. . . . In true Los Angeles fashion, the broker drove prospective clients around from the front door to the back, judging it too big simply to walk through." (20)

## HELLO TO ALL THAT

Abstract districts redeveloped without fallout, (21) a discourse as breezy as the hillsides, and hot new galleries teeming with artists (never mind the art): no wonder they're all slouching West. "It was an old friend . . . who, happening to visit the coast last year, fell an unresisting victim to its charms," read a 1906 special to the paper, "and now declares that he is not going back to New York 'until he has to.'" (22) Fast forward a hundred years: "The wagon train mentality, it seems," reads the Style section, "is taking hold among the L train set: Go west!" New Yorkers "grumble that their own city is becoming a sterile playland for the global-money set (Dubai with blizzards, basically)," while "Los Angeles

**Correction: February 21, 2016**

An article last Sunday about the rise of art galleries in downtown Los Angeles misstated the age of the painter Sojourner Truth Parsons. She is 31, not 27.

**Correction: May 10, 2015**

An article last Sunday about New Yorkers who move to Los Angeles described incompletely the Los Angeles living arrangement of a former New Yorker. Christina Turner shares her bungalow with a roommate; she does not live alone.

**Correction: July 18, 2013**

An earlier version of this post misstated the title of the artwork by Katie Grinnan. It is "FYI," not "TMI."

**Correction: October 14, 2011**

Because of an editing error, an article on Thursday about the Pacific Standard Time art festival, at 130 museums and galleries in Southern California, misstated at one point the name of the Los Angeles museum where Jeffrey Deitch is the director. As the article correctly noted elsewhere, it is the Museum of Contemporary Art, not the "Los Angeles Modern." (There is no museum by that name.)

**Correction: June 7, 2011**

An art review on Wednesday about "Greater LA," at 483 Broadway in Manhattan, misidentified the city where an organizer of the show, Eleanor Cayre, is based. It is New York, not Los Angeles.

**Correction: February 19, 2011**

An earlier version of a map with this article misspelled part of the name of a street in Los Angeles. It is Cesar Chavez Avenue, not Sezar.

**Correction: February 1, 2016**

An earlier version of a picture caption with this post misstated the provenance of a rock sold at the Paramount Ranch art fair. It was reimagined by the artist Emily Mast, not sourced from Quartzsite, Ariz. by the artist Andrea Zittel.

**Correction: August 3, 2013**

An art review on Friday about "Made in Space," at the Venus Over Manhattan gallery and Gavin Brown's Enterprise in Manhattan, misstated the given name of one artist in the show and misspelled the given name of another. They are Josh Mannis, not John, and Laeh Glenn, not Leah. The review also omitted a co-owner of Night Gallery in Los Angeles, where the show was first seen. Besides Davida Nemeroff, the gallery is run by Mieke Marple.

**Correction: July 19, 2016**

An earlier version of a map with this article misidentified the location of the Farmers' Market in Santa Monica. As the article correctly notes, the market is at Arizona and Second streets, not Main Street and Pico Boulevard.

**Correction: February 10, 2008**

A Style article on Jan. 27 about Emi Fontana, a Los Angeles curator and gallerist, misidentified the typeface used in collages by one of the artists, Barbara Kruger, featured in Fontana's new production. It was Futura Bold Italic, not Helvetica.

**Correction: November 22, 1998**

A picture caption on Nov. 1 with an article about the changing art scene in the Chelsea section of Manhattan misidentified a gallery with an interior described as "antiseptic and awkward." It is Leslie Tonkonow Artworks and Projects, not the Andrea Rosen Gallery.

is enjoying a renaissance." (23) As early as 2006, "thanks to no major earthquake in more than a decade and brutalized New Yorkers' finding respite here," LA stalwart Bruce Hainley foresaw the doom of objectively cheap rent. (24)

Climate is a metaphor for ease. You're not likely to freeze to death in your giant LA studio. Nor, the thinking goes, is LA's local art market likely to freeze out your abstract painting. A hapless 2016 feature by Conrad de Aenlle not only combines unqualified bicoastal rivalry with voyeuristic clips of blue-chip lifestyle; it also offers a uniquely unsubtle clue as to its target audience: De Aenlle is a financial columnist. (25) "For art to flourish in a city," he begins, "it helps to have well-off individuals and institutions with a desire to keep and exhibit it. Diverse, lively, colorful neighborhoods also come in handy, and if they have plenty of room for reasonably priced studio and gallery space, so much the better." His sources include a director of Art Basel and the head art advisor at Citigroup, a bank. (26)

"Los Angeles has not taken as firm a hold on [artist] Jordan Wolfson," offers De Aenlle. "Being from New York and also traveling, I don't feel like LA has culturally arrived yet," said Mr. Wolfson, who is 35 and single. (27) This article appeared in the international edition, and (despite Wolfson's and the author's hedging) is the latest to announce LA's arrival as a serious city. That an artist's dating status made the cut insults the intelligence of readers far and wide. Yet more notable is the implication that, while Los Angeles hasn't "culturally arrived yet," it will—and you'll want to buy in before it does.

**SUN, SHADOW; LONG TAKE**

At least De Aenlle describes Wolfson's work—albeit, in the light-and-spacey terms of the Southland's two major exports, as "projects combining elements of film production and aerospace technology." Even though just a tiny fraction of Angelenos work in film, the industry nonetheless provides an easy metaphor for our city's ongoing aspiration. "Hollywood casts a long shadow," writes the *Times*, "and nowhere does that shadow seem darker, more enveloping and inescapable, than in Los Angeles." (28)

The paper rarely argues otherwise. You won't find much about Ferus Gallery, mid-century's most famous "LA Cool" art clubhouse, until it's gone. Yet a 1967 celebrity profile of film star David Hemmings mentions

"Ferus-Pace," where he's curating a show with Dennis Hopper. (29) "A glittery film premiere this was not," reports Julia Chaplin, taking stock of a video screening by New York artist Maggie Lee at 356 Mission Rd. (30) The "booze-soaked openings" at nearby Night Gallery, a former warehouse, "are like populist galas." (31) And when LA bureau chief Adam Nagourney covers the procession of Michael Heizer's Levitated Mass from Riverside to LACMA, the piece bears the headline: "Lights! Cameras! (and Cheers) for a Rock Weighing 340 Tons." (32)

Granted, LA artists and institutions seem to crave the role. (33) LACMA's Art + Film Gala, "billed as the West Coast's version of the Costume Institute Ball at the Metropolitan Museum of Art," has proved irresistible to *Times* party hounds. (34) ("Gucci," said Michael Govan, the museum's director, when asked about his black tuxedo.) (35) Randy Kennedy describes a taping of *General Hospital* at MOCA PDC: "Jeffrey Deitch, a small, trim man in a double-breasted navy suit with a little makeup dabbed on his cheeks and forehead, stood encircled by television cameras, preparing to play a character called 'Jeffrey Deitch, director of MOCA'—a role he had just taken on in real life..." Fair is fair: "The sprawling soap-at-the-museum operation was Mr. Deitch's idea." (36)

The Deitch tenure, it bears repeating, is what happens when art takes its cues from Hollywood: museum directors emphasize the director and forget the museum, artists become stars, and the whole production makes dazed concessions to patrons and paparazzi. Chaplin thrills at 356 Mission's barbed wire and passing trucks; she seems less curious about the content of Lee's "art film." (37) Yet for all these oversights, the *Times* nonetheless registers our fears about what LA art can be: a gentrifying force, an investment prospectus, and, worst of all, just another entertaining product.

**PAPER MIRROR**

The three iterations of the Paris Photo art fair's LA franchise garnered mentions in no less than five articles in the *Times* and in *T Magazine*, the paper's style supplement. It's not hard to see why. "Dozens of exhibitors have traditional booths inside some of Paramount's biggest soundstages," reads one report, "while others set up shop in the storefronts of the legendary 'New York Street' backlot. . . . It is an art fair that feels like entertainment," says the *New York Times*. (38)

As early as 1927, a *Times* columnist chides a man dissatisfied with Los Angeles culture. "Instead of the busy, young, healthily growing town which has hardly had time to think about the arts as yet," says the NYT, "he would have a city pervaded by an atmosphere of Greenwich Village 'artiness.'" Never mind that California-style salons do exist. The Los Angeles art scene's biggest worry is that we might (or already do) subscribe to *New York Times* values. As that paper's city gentrifies beyond thaw, one critic sends up a flare: "The news media dotes on the idea of Los Angeles and New York as cultural rivals," writes Holland Cotter. "But Los Angeles can do much better, look much higher, by taking New York as a cautionary example and paying close activist attention to itself." (39) Sometimes a critical eye is the most needed correction.

So forget the *Times*. Past that codependent striving, we'd need to face the question that rises in the East each morning, and each booze-soaked Western evening sets unanswered: What goes on, exactly, in these sweltering neighborhoods of ours? Without the *Times* to get it nearly wrong, we'd need to have a look ourselves. ■

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ABOVE\_ Recent corrections from the Arts and Style sections of the *New York Times*

who has a four-acre studio complex in Vernon, Calif., an industrial city just south of the Arts District." Chaplin.

34\_ Peter Haldeman, "In LA, Art + Film + Fashion," *New York Times* 30 Oct. 2012

35\_ Haldeman. See also Finkel, "Kanye West-Steve McQueen Video to Have American Premiere in Los Angeles," *New York Times* 19 Jul. 2015.

36\_ Randy Kennedy, "Museum Role Fits a Former Art Dealer," *New York Times* 30 Jun. 2010.

37\_ Chaplin. See Wendy Yao, "1000 Words: Maggie Lee," *Artforum* 54, no. 8 (April 2016): 211.

38\_ Steffie Nelson, "The Distinct Californication of Paris Photo LA," *T Magazine* 1 May 2015.

39\_ Cotter. To this end, a few hopeful examples: *LAist* revels in cataloguing the *New York Times*' awkward West Coast coverage; Carolina Miranda of the *Los Angeles Times* demolishes De Aenlle's fumbling accounting on Genius, the annotation website; Even *The Source*, a blog published by the *Los Angeles Metro*, disputes a *Times* piece about the new Expo Line.