

Art



Soul

L.A.'s art scene is as exceptional and ever-evolving as the city itself. Here's a look at the artists, curators, museums and more that are painting our city beautiful.

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← BASIC INSTINCT

Curator Viet-Nu Nguyen lets her gut guide her artistic edit.

"I've always liked collections that are a little quirky," says **Viet-Nu Nguyen**, a Harvard Graduate School of Design vet who has served as curator of the Ovitz Family Collection for the past 10 years. Nguyen's career path can also be described as slightly unconventional. Although the suburban Chicago native interned at The Art Institute of Chicago during school breaks, she worked primarily in the architecture department. "I wasn't even that interested in architecture at the time, but I guess that's where the seeds were sown for my graduate studies," she says. Post-grad, Nguyen moved to L.A., where she landed a job at the Sandroni Rey gallery. "The art world wasn't too market-driven quite yet, but young artists were actually able to make a living," says Nguyen. Now, the environment is quite different. "Unfortunately, everyone seems to be collecting with their ears, opposed to their eyes," she says. "It's hard to focus and even more difficult to trust your gut, but I hope that people slow down and actually look at things. They should take some risks and buy what they truly like." Luckily, here in L.A., inspiring options abound. "Ever since I moved [here] in 2004, people have been saying 'L.A. is the place to be,'" says Nguyen, who recently purchased a piece by local artist Kelly Akashi. "I like to say 'L.A. is the new New York, and New York is the new L.A.' I think I'm right about that. Have you noticed how bad traffic is in New York these days?"

↑ ONE TO WATCH

Nick Darmstaedter proves to be the next big thing in L.A.'s art scene.

"There's something romantic about the Hollywood dream and the people who move here to become stars," muses **Nick Darmstaedter**, reflecting on what drew him back to Los Angeles after a decade honing his talent in New York, first at the School of Visual Arts, and then as a member of influential Brooklyn art collective The Still House Group. The artist shares his native city's fascination with reinvention. His sure hand manipulates the simple detritus of American life—pennies, refrigerator magnets, car parts—into mesmerizing pieces that have earned him solo exhibitions at galleries ranging from Galerie Rodolphe Janssen in Brussels to Bugada & Cargnel in Paris to David Zwirner Gallery in New York. Not content to work on one thing or in one medium at a time, the artist is currently vibrating between three projects—a group of oil and enamel paintings on movie posters; an installation of found-object sculptures pedestaled on Amazon Prime boxes; and a series of oversize resin pieces, based on urinal screens—housed in three rooms of his sprawling, light-filled apartment in Koreatown's historic Talmadge building. "Even as far back as the gold rush, there's always been this sense of excitement in the West, this feeling that there's room for something new, that it's a place to grow and expand." In other words, it's the perfect setting for an artist whose star is shooting skyward.