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'Desire, Knowledge, and Hope (with Smog)': Los Angeles artists show at The Broad

By Luke Netzley, LA Downtown News Deputy Editor
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The “Desire, Knowledge, and Hope (with Smog)” exhibition will be on view at The Broad through Sunday, April 7.

Joshua White/Contributor

Paying homage to a diverse and perpetually evolving Los Angeles, The Broad has unveiled an exhibition made entirely of works by LA-based artists titled “Desire, Knowledge, and Hope (with Smog).” The exhibition was curated by Jennifer Vanegas Rocha and Ed Schad, who called it an “organic” blend of the city’s voices.

“Jen and I arranged the show to create natural dialogues in each gallery,” he said. “We were looking at interesting pairings that at first can seem to be big generational shifts or slightly counterintuitive, but hopefully once they’re on view we’ll create the spark that we’re looking for.”

The exhibition was originally set to run in April 2020 but was then delayed due to the pandemic's lockdowns, when The Broad's walls became filled with works that discussed and reflected on moments of global crisis. As time passed, Schad recalled that several new LA artists had joined the museum's collection.

"We thought that we would return again to the idea of looking at The Broad collection through the lens of artists that live and work in this city," he said. "'Desire, Knowledge, and Hope (with Smog)' features artists that live and work here, but the work isn't always directly about the city. It's more about what it means to be a creative, cultural leader here."

Schad added that the subject matter varies from direct depictions and portrayals of LA to artists that are commenting on global issues from an LA perspective.

Borrowing its name from a multi-panel 1985 work by John Baldessari, "Desire, Knowledge, and Hope (with Smog)" will feature over 60 artworks by local artists Doug Aitken, Mark Bradford, Robbie Conal, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Jack Goldstein, Sayre Gomez, Mark Grotjahn, Elliott Hundley, Alex Israel, Mike Kelley, Toba Khedoori, Barbara Kruger, Sharon Lockhart, Patrick Martinez, Catherine Opie, Lari Pittman, Joe Ray, Ed Ruscha, Diana Thater and Jonas Wood.

Hung alongside Baldessari's work are two pieces by Kelley, including his six-part drawing "Infinite Expansion," made in 1984 as one of his earliest performance works exploring psychedelia at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. The show will also feature Khedoori's large-scale paper works "Untitled (park benches)" and "Untitled (Black fireplace)," both of which depict quiet scenes of isolation amid LA's sprawling geography.

Schad shared that the exhibition's artists utilize different approaches like abstraction, realism, photography or political signage to capture imagery that represents the past, present or future. By pairing them together, he said his aim was to showcase their unique differences and "adjacencies." In one space, artists from three different generations are shown together.

"A gentleman who's in his 70s, Robbie Conal, who's famous for posting political posters all around Los Angeles and New York is paired with Mark Bradford, who's much younger and who uses that same signage as the raw material through which he makes his collages and abstract paintings," Schad said. "The two of them are joined together with Sayre Gomez, who's significantly younger and who's looking at signage through a super-realist painting gathered from various images of the city that he sees on a day-to-day basis."

Schad added that he's excited to showcase artists who are making their debuts at the museum like Ray, who he said has been a part of LA's artist community for several decades and whose painting "Daisy Lee" is dedicated to his mother; Martinez, who uses pieces of the city such as neon and the surface of buildings as visual material in his multimedia work; and Crosby, who was born in Nigeria and whose work observes LA through the lens of someone living in the diaspora of her country of origin.

"I think 60% of the show has never been seen in the museum before, so there's a lot that's on view for the first time and lots of surprises," Schad said. "I hope (museum visitors) think about the people that live and work here every day, and what trials and troubles and inspiration become the reasons why people move to this city and make art here, make theater here and make music here while LA continues to be an exciting and dynamic place to produce culture. That's what we're going for."

Schad called LA a "festival of moving parts" and a place that can hardly be universally understood. Playing with ideas of identity and reality, he said "Desire, Knowledge, and Hope (with Smog)" was born to hold a mirror up to the city.

"Los Angeles is a very open city, but it's also a city that's very difficult to know as a totality," Schad said. "The dream, paradise vision of Los Angeles for one person may be a nightmare for another person. ... There's nothing straightforward, nothing that is really universal about the city. Knowledge, desire and hope, and let's not forget the smog; it's about expectations versus reality. It's about what we project onto our city as opposed to what is actually true about our city, and a way of coming to terms with that."

"Desire, Knowledge, and Hope (with Smog)"

WHEN: On view through Sunday, April 7

WHERE: The Broad, 221 S. Grand Avenue, Los Angeles

COST: Free with general admission, advance general admission tickets are encouraged

INFO: www.thebroad.org