

L.A. RECORD

ANNE ELLEGOOD: ALL OF THIS AND NOTHING

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Illustration by Jack Heard

Anne Ellegood served as curator of contemporary art at the Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in D.C. and as the associate curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York before relocating to Los Angeles to become senior curator for the Hammer. Ellegood collaborated with Chief Curator Douglas Fogle on the Hammer's sixth Invitational entitled All of this and nothing, an intricate extravaganza of local and international artists whose works traverse many media but remain connected by conceptual quandaries. Together they reject the monument, celebrate the

ephemeral, and cordially demand a slow, considered viewing. This interview by Drew Denny.

What about L.A.'s art scene appeals to you?

I came to L.A. in May 2009 to work at the Hammer. There is such a diversity of cultures here, and diversity of landscapes—it's a truly original place. Artists can find substantial space to work in L.A., and they can establish a community and support system here. The strength of the many art schools has meant that artists move to L.A. for school and then they stay because the city offers an affordable place to live and work. I really appreciate the kind of dialogue that occurs between generations of artists here. L.A. is a great city

for artists who need to isolate themselves in their studios and create worlds but then like to emerge periodically to participate in a creative community.

As galleries pop up and close and public artwork and performance recapture the city's imagination, how does the Hammer function within L.A.'s art institutions?

We like to think of ourselves as a community center, a place people will want to come visit often—for an exhibition, for a discussion about politics or art, for a screening, for lunch. People can be surprised at the Hammer. They can make discoveries. We are deliberate in our desire to bring culture and topics to the public that will likely be new to them—whether an exhibition by an artist they never heard of or haven't seen for some time, or a film screening of a new work, or an event through our public engagement program that visitors may chance upon unexpectedly—like a 'micro-concert' for two under the stairs in our coat check. The extension of this show to LAXART is very exciting for us. We saw it as an opportunity to collaborate with LAX and to provide additional opportunities for three artists to show their work beyond the museum. Two of these works are outdoor pieces—Fernando Ortega's billboard and Dianna Molzan's façade project. The gallery piece by Kerry Tribe is the third in a recent trilogy so we are able to include all three works, which we would not have been able to do otherwise. Two will be on view at the Hammer and the third at LAX. Our desire to collaborate with LAX comes from our admiration for the program that Lauri Firstenberg created and our shared missions working closely with artists, innovating in our approach to all aspects of museum practice. It allows us to expand the Hammer beyond the museum's walls and allows Lauri to stretch her wings into larger-scale projects with the support and partnership of a larger institution.

How does this Invitational represent your personal curatorial agenda?

I certainly consider the show to be an extension and continued exploration of some of the ideas I have taken up in other exhibitions, particularly *The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas*. *Uncertainty* was a medium-specific show that examined contemporary sculpture, but a very specific kind of sculpture and the show's examination of sculpture was a proposition that sculpture seemed to lend itself well to exploring certain ideas about the world ... how the uncertainty of the world—the intense layering, ambiguity and confusion that the world generates—could be reflected through a type of sculpture that reveled in precariousness and a sense of multiplicity, that resisted monumentality and completeness in favor of ephemerality and a deliberate openness. These ideas—material choices that are rooted in the everyday, and a desire to resist notions of artworks as complete autonomous objects whose meanings are fixed are taken up and expanded in *All of this and nothing*. The show includes work in all mediums, and fundamentally is an exploration of philosophical questions about what it means to be in the world and is an encouragement to notice the magical and the mysterious in the everyday. Like the artists in *Uncertainty*, the artists in *All of this and nothing* are deeply engaged with materials and process and work more from intuition than rationality. The work is more interested in poetry than logic. For me, these shows are arguments for what I think is the most compelling aspect of contemporary art—how it can encourage us to consider the complexities of our world, to connect with our surroundings. Art can engender curiosity, expand perception and promote skepticism, and I believe these are all fundamental to an

active-thinking culture.

Why did you choose to invite international artists to participate in this Invitational? How are the selected international artists influenced by L.A.'s conceptual genealogy?

Several Invitationals have focused on L.A. artists, and these shows were vital to bringing attention to the abundance of activity within our artistic community. On the heels of these shows, Douglas and I felt that it would be meaningful to expand the scope of the show this time around. ... In part, this is an acknowledgement that artists in L.A. are part of a much larger dialogue, an international dialogue among artists from all over the world. The decision also speaks to our awareness that the ideas in the show—the preoccupations of the artists—are not exclusive to L.A., but are important to artists everywhere and to art in a more general sense. The broad concepts of the show about what it means to be an artist—what it looks like to examine the world through a particular lens and to put it forward for others to consider—are fundamental to artistic practice and not specific to a particular place or region.

What are these artists critiquing?

They are critiquing the idea of monumentality in art—the expectation that art should be a complete autonomous object that can be easily understood and digested, that it is simply a commodity to own or a straightforward idea to be consumed, rather than a provocation, an inquiry, a curiosity that is part of a larger conversation.

How much of the work was created specifically for this exhibition?

Ian Kiaer made a completely new work for the show. Karla Black has created a new floor piece, which will be created site-specifically, and we selected two other existing pieces, so it's a combination of new and existing. Evan Holloway has two new sculptures and two new photographs. These are works drawn from the studio—works he was making and not for the exhibition per se, but all new. Dianna Molzan made all new paintings for the show. Mateo Tannatt has created all new works for the show in a range of mediums. Frances Stark has created two new large-scale collages for the show. In other cases, such as Charles Gaines, there were specific pieces that we responded to enthusiastically and really wanted in the show.

How will performance be incorporated in this Invitational?

We will present Kerry Tribe's *Critical Mass*, which she first did at the Whitney Museum last spring in conjunction with the Whitney Biennial. *Critical Mass* is a staging of Hollis Frampton's film from the 1970s—a structuralist film in which a man and a woman have an argument, which Frampton takes apart and edits into a meandering, stuttering, cyclical dialogue. Tribe painstakingly created a script of what was an improvisation with untrained actors and has worked with two trained actors to recreate this film as a live performance. We will do a live performance of the musical compositions in Charles Gaines's work *Manifestos*—a string quartet and piano performing the scores he created by correlating the letters from four manifestos—Black Panthers, Zapatistas, etc.—into musical notes. The music was recorded for the work but has never been performed live.

One of Fernando Ortega's works—*The Transcription*—includes a musical performance, which will happen unannounced in the galleries several times a week. *The Transcription* is a score based on the sounds of a mosquito buzzing in your ear. Visitors may come across the performance by chance as they walk through the exhibition.

What will be this show's lasting effect?

Many of the works have a quiet contemplative quality to them. Our hope is that the works will encourage visitors to move slowly, to look closely, and to spend time enjoying the works. Even those works that are larger in scale—like Black's floor piece or Macchi's wallpaper installation or Gedi Sibony's *The Cutters*—are not at all spectacular. They are, rather, poetic interventions into the galleries that will make visitors reconsider the space. Ortega's works are often quite subtle. His work, *Leak 2*, in our lobby gallery is a clever provocation that uses very simple means to create anticipation and toy with chance. I have no idea what the show's lasting effect will be! But I hope the show makes an argument for how meaningful contemporary art is in our culture—how it genuinely encourages active participation with the ideas, objects, and events that make up our world. I hope that when visitors leave the exhibition, they look at the world slightly differently... that their awareness is heightened, their sense of perception expanded ... perhaps they will be slightly more aware of the small wonders around them, perhaps they will feel more connected to their surroundings, perhaps their sense of curiosity will be peaked and they will enjoy a sense of exploration and discovery without feeling the need to understand everything around them.

***ALL OF THIS AND NOTHING* FROM JAN. 30 TO APR. 24 AT THE HAMMER MUSEUM, 10899 WILSHIRE BLVD., LOS ANGELES. COMPLETE SCHEDULE AND PROGRAM INFORMATION AT HAMMER.UCLA.EDU.**