



## Los Angeles, City of Artists



*Christos Katsiaouni*“Eames Chair Sculpture” by Olga Koumoundouros on display at “Greater LA.” Behind it, paintings by Eduardo Sarabia.

“There’s no such thing as L.A.,” says the curator Benjamin Godsill. “There’s multiple, sometimes overlapping bits of community, ideologies and neighborhoods.” Organizing a group show around the theme of a major metropolis poses risks. Hyperbole, dime store anthropology and overlooked artists often crowd the presentation. But the best of these endeavors don’t seek to galvanize a scene, per se, but provide the most basic of contexts: place. In this way, the mercurial nature of Los Angeles provides a valid starting point for an investigation of its artists. This summer, two separate curatorial teams (both based in New York, funnily enough) will tackle the behemoth subject of art in Los Angeles with group shows staged far from home. “Greater LA,” on view until June 10 in SoHo, looks at the city’s contemporary artists, whereas “Venice in Venice,” which opens on June 4 at the Venice Biennial, revisits the city’s rebel artists from the 1960s and ’70s.

For “Greater LA,” a curatorial team representing a trifecta of art world interests scoured the city for six months to rein in 47 artists who they felt represented the city’s current atomized scenes. Benjamin Godsill is a curator, Joel Mesler is a gallerist and Eleanor Cayre, a collector. Their temporary exhibition is in a second-floor SoHo loft. And just as the show literature professes Los Angeles to be a “non-place,” this real estate prospect feels like a mirage: open, with the erased history of drywall scars on the floor, setting the stage for a precise, smart installation. If the wall-text becomes too tiresome with Los Angeles clichés on sprawl and its relation to New York, there’s much more to divine from the works themselves. As Mesler points out, many of the artists have an obsession with material. Scanning the galleries from any corner, you are struck by the sheer number of sculpture or panel pieces in varying outsize scales and media, many using found objects in assemblage. (The midcentury Los Angeles artist Ed Kienholz, who was known for scouring the city’s dumps for his sculpture, would be proud.) Brendan Fowler’s sculpture “Spring 2011 Wall (Andrew and Max Building the New Rack)” is a story in surfaces – a conflation of canvases, linoleum, plexiglass and photographs

framed out in lumber and soaring almost the entire height of the space. Sterling Ruby's "Cop, Cop, Cry, Cry, Cop, Cop" indirectly mimics the assemblage ethos: a stack of 6-by-15-foot extruded yellow wood and Formica cubes sits at the center of the exhibition, like an unruly compass, inspiring both movement and claustrophobia.



A gondola custom finished by the artist Billy Al Bengston to resemble a race car, which will be on display at "Venice in Venice" as part of the Venice Biennial

"Venice in Venice," on the other hand, is an adjunct program of **Pacific Standard Time**, a larger initiative on the part of the Getty Foundation to provide a broader historical context for Los Angeles's history as an art capital. The curators Tim Nye and Jacqueline Miro will bring the work of the "Cool School" and other itinerant artists active in the '60s and '70s to an ornately furnished palazzo in Venice during the Biennial. Kienholz will be there, too – represented in the palazzo's chapel by the piece "End of the Bucket of Tar With Speaker Trail No. 2," a wash basin-cum-coffin. Vessels less grim come in the form of two custom gondolas decked with racing numbers designed by Billy Al Bengston, who along with artists like Craig Kauffman, pioneered the Finish Fetish school. These were works made in resins and plastics in homage to the shimmering surfaces of car culture. "I like the fact that the gondola is the epitome of slow travel and Bengston's motorcycle finish implies the exact opposite," says Nye. Larry Bell will show his vacuum-sealed glass cube sculptures in a room completely covered with 18th-century mirrors. Miro expects the Venice light to thoroughly animate the space – a contrast to the bottom floor, where the catacomb-like rooms will house works from other so-called Light and Space artists including James Turrell, Ron Cooper and Robert Irwin. A "light sentence" sculpture by Laddie John Dill will illuminate the courtyard. Newer work from Ed Moses will also be included in the show – proof that some of these artists can't be held within the 1960s-70s narrative forever. "Tony Berlant still goes once a week on a studio visit to see Ed Moses," says Miro. "They're in their 80s, but they're still having a dialogue."