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HOLLYWOOD MYTHS AND LATINX ART HISTORIES AT LA'S FRIEZE PROJECTS

by Matt Stromberg



Will Boone, *Frankenstein*, 2017, enamel on bronze, 30 5/8 x 20 x 41 1/2 inches

This week, the second iteration of Frieze Los Angeles will open at the famed Paramount Studios in Hollywood. However, outside the main tent, filled with some 70 exhibitors from around the world, a more focused, and less overtly commercial, presentation will be on view at the studio's New York City-themed backlot.

Frieze Projects is curated by Pilar Tompkins Rivas, the director of the Vincent Price Art Museum, and Rita Gonzalez, a curator and department head of contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). The installations will feature solo projects by 16 artists who explore themes of representation, history, fantasy, and place.

"We didn't think of Paramount Studios as a neutral backdrop. We were really interested in mirroring debates and divisiveness in media discourse — Time's Up, #MeToo, Oscar's So White — all of these things are percolating up in the media landscape. It's an intense moment politically. We wanted to bring in other dimensions to our selection," Gonzalez told Hyperallergic.

Gonzalez says they took a global approach, looking at Latinx and Latino art histories, and how those are manifested in Los Angeles and refracted through a Hollywood lens. "We can't be so LA-centric. The city is global, and we wanted to bring in the Americas," she said. "Pilar talks about the palimpsestic nature of LA. It's a Mexican city, and there are motifs, even at Paramount Studios, of a Spanish California fantasy, fantasies they've created and perpetuated."

While some of the commissioned artworks came through proposals submitted by participating galleries, other featured artists have no representation at the fair. "You want to find ways to include artists who may or may not be participating in that kind of structure," Tompkins-Rivas explained to Hyperallergic.

One of those non-affiliated artists is Vincent Ramos, who mined Paramount's cinematic archive for his Frieze project. "He has been working around issues of representation for Latinx people in media, museums, cultural contexts, merging with historical timelines in LA pertaining to communities of color," Tompkins-Rivas said. Another artist who examines Latinx representation is Gabriela Sanchez, who has produced a large-scale mural, which will hang from backlot's tower. Through her playful juxtapositions of text and image, Sanchez highlights the complexity of Mexican-American identity.

Several other artists engage with the site, exploring Hollywood's legacy of myth-making and image creation. Channing Hansen will take over one of the backlot's brownstones, creating a weaving during fair hours throughout the weekend, inspired by Duchamp and string theory, but mainly the ninth episode of the original Star Trek series called "The Tholian Web."

Working with Hollywood prop fabricators, Sayre Gomez has created a sculpture based on a cell phone tower palm tree, the faux flora seen throughout Los Angeles. The piece touches on a double layer of artifice, since the ubiquitous palm trees that have come to define SoCal life are not native to the area, but introduced by settlers, first by Spanish missionaries in the 18th century, and later during a massive planting campaign in the 1930s.

And Mexican artist Mario García Torres's video installation will look back at a moment in the early '80s when Muhammad Ali talked a suicidal person off the ledge of an LA building, alongside video footage of Pasadena-born hard rock band Van Halen's 1983 hit "Jump."

Will Boone's bronze sculptures scale up and transform small model kits of classic Hollywood horror figures, as well as the iconic LA mountain lion P-22. "I like that idea of LA lore making its way into the projects," said Tompkins-Rivas.

A number of artists will perform live over the course of Frieze. Mexican artist Tania Candiani's textile-based performance will look at the history of interned Japanese women forced to weave camouflage for the military during World War II, drawing a connection to contemporary internment camps along the border. Los Angeles-based artist and Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors will organize a collective dance performance of the electric slide, with participants donning headphones to move silently in tandem. Naama Tsabar and a partner will perform with a double-faced, conjoined guitar, creating a composition based on cooperation and compromise. Gary Simmons will revive his "Backdrop" project from 1993, for which he brought 13 different painted backdrops to Harlem's Rucker Park basketball courts and the African Street Festival in Brooklyn, offering visitors the chance to pose in front of them for a polaroid which they could take home.

On the backlot, Gonzalez and Tompkins-Rivas have curated a program that responds to issues that are too often decontextualized in the market-driven confines of the discreet fair booths. In this city-as-stage, they have selected artists who acknowledge its artifice by both celebrating and subverting it. "Here we had Paramount Studios, so the responsiveness is not so much the outside of the fair tent, it's the city or the entertainment complex," Gonzalez said. "We have these different layers which we can be attentive to. I feel like we had more freedom. The artists were eager to participate. It's about that kind of excitement."