



ART, CULTURE AND THE CITY

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A
Community
Issue
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in the time of
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Self-
Quarantine

—
with
Benjamin
Millepied
and his
L.A. Dance
Project
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DISPLAY UNTIL 07/01/2020
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Contributors



“Hiking through lush trees, in soft silks, with a group of interesting artists to laugh and be creative with—what a beautiful afternoon,” says photographer Nicole Mangiola of her shoot with choreographer Benjamin Millepied and his L.A. Dance Project company for this issue’s cover story. The California-based artist and Rhode Island School of Design graduate, who has collaborated with *Rolling Stone* and Urban Outfitters, experiments with analog and digital imagery to capture scenes and subjects in a way that encourages viewers to realign their perspectives and see the world a little differently.

GIOLA), PHOTO COURTESY OF CLARE CRESPO, RAFAEL HERNANDEZ, COURTESY OF CALARTS (RAJAN)

Clare Crespo is a fantasist whose art has appeared on *CBS Sunday Morning* and *The Today Show* and in collaborations with Design Within Reach, Entireworld and Target. Her dioramas, installations and other art permanently reside at Ace Hotel in Palm Springs, Beachwood Cafe in Hollywood, the new Maison de la Luz hotel in New Orleans—and now in this magazine. On pages 66-69, she lends illustrations of fantasy birds to a feature on jewelry designer Irene Neuwirth. “The birds I drew for *LALA* are from the same planet as the flowers that grow on Irene’s website,” says the CalArts graduate. “Irene is a delight. I tried to make joyful and fresh creations to keep up with her.”



SELF-PORTRAIT

Ravi S. Rajan is an accomplished musician, producer of collaborative mixed-media projects and the president of California Institute of the Arts (CalArts). The graduate of the University of Oklahoma and Yale University is also a member of the Tony Awards Nominating Committee, a fellow of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts in London and president of the Asian American Arts Alliance. In this issue, Rajan brings together artists Gala Porras-Kim, Barbara T. Smith and Laddie John Dill to discuss CalArts’s ongoing alumni art collection that is funding a new scholarship endowment. He says, “It is an extraordinary example of how our alumni continue to support the next generation of talent.”

Student Body of Work

For nearly 50 years, CalArts has educated and cultivated some of the world's most influential contemporary artists. In celebration of its upcoming anniversary and the centennial of its forebearer, Chouinard Art Institute, the venerable school has partnered with 50 of its most prominent alumni to create new work and establish an artist-led scholarship endowment. Having each contributed to the project that launched earlier this year, Barbara T. Smith, Laddie John Dill and Gala Porras-Kim reminisce about their time at two of the country's most progressive art schools and the artistic community that continues to inform their practices to this day.

BY **RAVI S. RAJAN** PRODUCED BY **ALLISON BERG**



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALARTS



IF CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF the Arts hadn't been established, would Los Angeles be seen as one of the most prominent and diverse arts cities in the world today? I'm not so sure. Back when Walt Disney conceived of his "dream school," LA was known primarily as a city for film. But Disney wanted his experimental institute to incubate new forms of work, bring together a community of artists from diverse métiers and embrace creative freedom.

Founded in 1921, Chouinard Art Institute merged with the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music in 1961 to create CalArts, assuring the continuation of a remarkable legacy of artists. Nearly 100 years on and five decades since the first students arrived on its Valencia campus, you can't talk about LA as an artist incubator and cultural epicenter without acknowledging generations of CalArts alumni and their impact. In fact, if you visit major exhibitions anywhere in the world, artists with roots in this community are fully represented—across disciplines and decades.

This is as it should be. As president of CalArts, my goal is to amplify artists' voices. Laddie John Dill ('68), Barbara T. Smith ('65) and Gala Porras-Kim ('09) demonstrate the continuity of our artistic community and achievement. They are among the artists participating in the upcoming 50+50: A Creative Century from Chouinard to CalArts.

At the heart of 50+50 is our collective drive to put arts education within reach for the next generation, no matter an artist's financial situation or background. Brilliance emerges from every corner of society—every culture, every income bracket, every socioeconomic category. I cannot begin to fathom what we miss when society fails to empower promising new artists.

Through 50+50, we see the fruits of unlocked potential. The celebratory collaboration, with a roster of 50 multigenerational international alumni, features new commissioned works, donated by the participating artists and produced by the talented Lisa Ivorian-Jones. The editioned works are being released in curated groupings over the next five years, and all proceeds will go toward establishing an artist-led School of Art Alumni Scholarship endowment.

These works and our collaboration together illustrate the influence that our artist community has forged not only in LA, but around the world, and the vital role artists such as Gala, Laddie John and Barbara continue to play in our school.



Barbara T. Smith's *Invisible* (2018)

Gala Porras-Kim: I know a lot of artists in LA, not necessarily because we went to school at the same time, but because we're all CalArts alumni. CalArts was geared towards a more conceptual framework of making art that wasn't so commercial. We ended up all being very poor and in debt together, with little skills on how to actually technically make work, but with really great ideas!

Laddie John Dill: Except for Ed Ruscha, who was successful from the word go—but he didn't study painting at Chouinard. He studied advertising.

Barbara T. Smith: I actually was at Chouinard in the year that they transferred over to CalArts. It was the '60s, so it was a very volatile time. Our whole class of artists quit and boycotted the school when it didn't rehire Connor Everts, who was a teacher there before he was accused of violating obscenity laws with his work and was arrested. It was very dramatic and fantastic. He was exonerated. I was 30-some years old and married and had children, so I wasn't a typical student. I'd already gotten my degree and just went back to work with Connor.

LJD: I was at Chouinard from '64 to '68. I forgot to pick up my diploma. I finally got it one day, and it was a CalArts diploma. I

said, "I didn't go to CalArts; I went to Chouinard." But it's really worked out. I actually taught there for a little while when Allan Kaprow was in charge.

BTS: I was a good friend of Allan's too. He would talk to me about how they hired the most far-out thinking, avant-garde people to teach there, and the students were the most exciting potential artists as well for the first year or two. Then of course, Disney didn't realize how radical they were, and it began to get more conventional.

LJD: But as far as the teachers, I mean gosh, Stephan von Huene was there, and Morton Subotnick was teaching music, and Allan was running the place.

GPK: Hearing about those times now, I remember thinking, "Wow, if Allan Kaprow was there, I wanted to be there. The Woman's Building, I wanted to be there." My time had Michael Asher, and that was magic. Every single section was like some chapter in the art history book.

LJD: It was good that way. Most of the teachers really thought outside the box. I remember one teacher we had for about a month. His name was Man Ray.

BTS: You mean the original Man Ray?

LJD: Yeah, he was there showing some of his "rayographs," where he would black out areas and then use regular darkroom stuff to make these prints. I was fascinated by photography. They had great photography classes there. That place, a lot of times you couldn't tell the students from the teachers. The point is the teachers were working artists, showing artists.

GPK: My greatest influence was Michael Asher's post-studio class, where we talked about one artwork for like four hours at a time. It was the longest I had ever looked at a piece of art before, and from then on, I've wanted to make work that can maintain attention like that.

BTS: In my case, I was about 14 years older than all the other students, so I already had my own art framework developed, but I wanted to work with Emerson Woelffer on these black glass paintings I was doing. Being there didn't influence what I did, except it gave permission. It was validating.

LJD: That's a good way to put it. It was kind of a laissez-faire situation. It was very self-motivating. It was a dump at Chouinard, which actually was like a gold mine. We would just work, get ideas and find materials in Downtown LA.

BTS: There was a lot of refuse and things that people had thrown out, like wood and stuff. You could cruise up and down the alleys and get materials right off the street. It was really fun.

GPK: In Valencia it was so different. We were stuck in the desert, so we might as well spend all our time in the studio, like there's no distraction—maybe Six Flags. In a way, it was like a retreat—good and bad—separate from the actual sort of commercial real professional life as an artist where you could really just focus on how to make work without any of the other stuff.

LJD: It did go through some little bumps in the road, but I think it smoothed out to be a really damn good school. Although it's a little expensive.

GPK: It's so expensive! I actually just finished paying it off after 10 years, and that's fast. I live pretty sparingly, so every single cent that I've ever made has gone to that loan. And I had some financial aid, so I didn't even pay full tuition. That is why I wanted to be a part of

50+50. It's already so difficult to make money with your art. How can you ask a young person to spend \$100,000 on an education that in the end, they probably will never be able to pay?

LJD: Chouinard was \$250 a semester. And that was a stretch!

GPK: And you had Allan Kaprow!

LJD: At Chouinard, being poor and living on nothing had more prestige than money. I jumped on this project because it will go towards scholarships.



Gala Porras-Kim's *Composite Artifact* (2019)

BTS: Me too, and it became a vehicle for me to make something I really love. I hope it makes money for the school.

GPK: Oh my God, your piece was awesome.

BTS: They asked me if I'd do some sort of edition for this project. Traditionally that would've been a print, and I didn't want to do that. I immediately got the idea to do a big drop of blown glass in this amorphous shape, about two feet tall, and inside there's water. I went to Vermont and spent a week with the glassblower Robert DuGrenier while he figured out how to fabricate this thing, fill it with water and seal it in such a way that it's there forever. It was freezing cold outside, and inside his glassblowing studio, it was 100-plus degrees. It was a wonderful experience. It's called *Invisible* because it's made of all these things that are supposedly invisible: water, glass and air. How about you, Laddie?

LJD: It's funny; mine's made out of glass too. I used to be a printer, and I was also not interested in doing a print, so I hand-made all these pieces using argon gas and neon systems. Each one is unique and actually lights up. I did them in a hot shop in Sun Valley, another place that's a hundred degrees inside.

BTS: Nice. So you plug it in, and it lights up?

LJD: Yeah, I wanted to make it totally self-contained. I designed a metal box for it to be easy to ship without breaking the glass. They could just keep it like that. It's all mounted, and it has a small transformer on the back.

BTS: It sounds great!

GPK: The work that I made is sort of a reconstitution. I was thinking about these specific rocks that were found at the bottom of a river in Mexico—how they could have been artifacts that went back to being natural elements because of erosion or pollution, and how I could make this composite reconstruction of the hypothetical potential shape by joining two that could have been, at some point, one object.

BTS: I can't picture what this is.

LJD: Do you want to run that by me one more time?

GPK: The physical shape is these two rocks that are both originally from Mexico. They're made out of the same material, and they come from the same location, but they're two different forms that at some point could have been one shape together, but maybe became separated. My project was to make proposals of the two going together into one original shape. I've never really made editions as my work, so each is a one-of-a-kind sort of composite.

BTS: Oh! That's so interesting.

LJD: 50+50 was a nice thing to do. There's a lot of really good artists out there that are totally broke, young artists that could easily benefit.

BTS: The prospect of an artist making a living in his lifetime is pretty low. I mean, I didn't hurry. I had my very first exhibition in a gallery when I was 75 years old.

LJD: Wait a minute. Barbara, how old are you?

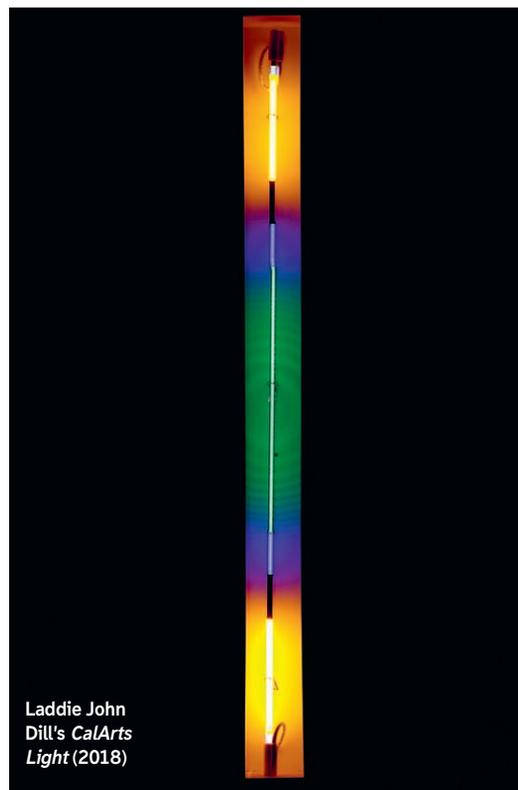
BTS: I'm 88.

LJD: You don't look it!

BTS: Isn't that amazing? Anyway, as a performance artist, I had nothing to sell, so that's part of the problem. I could always show the work, but I couldn't sell it. Being this age of person, I am now finishing up old projects. In 1971, I did a very big piece called *Celebration of the Holy Squash*, and I created a kind of a religion around the Holy Squash. Now I'm putting together the Bible from my religion.

GPK: Rad. I want to join.

BTS: It's so easy. If you like squash—any form of squash—you're already a member!



Laddie John
Dill's *CalArts
Light* (2018)