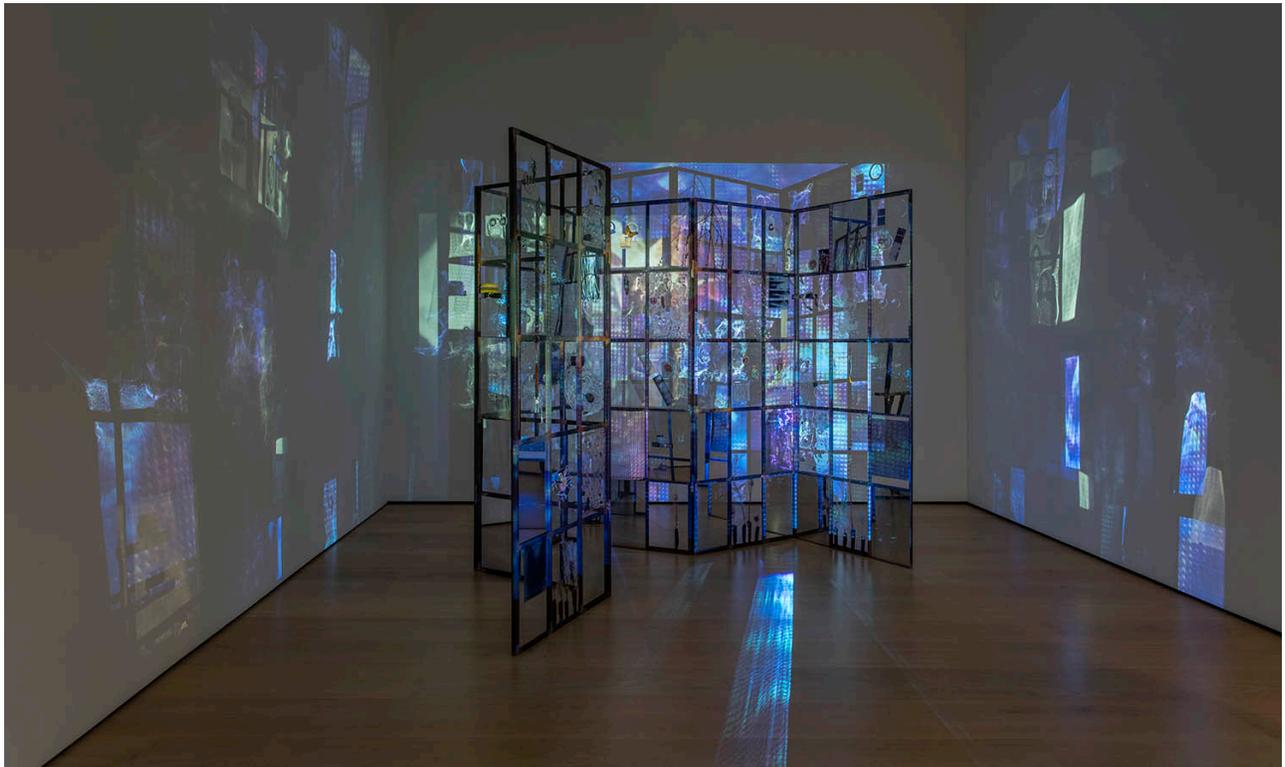


Kayne Griffin Corcoran

Contemporary
Art Review

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Unfinished Finish Fetsh *On Made in L.A. 2018*



Rosha Yaghmai, *Slide Samples (Lures, Myths)*, 2018. Found and personal artifacts, resin, glass, steel, rust.
Image courtesy of the artist and the Hammer Museum. Photo: Brian Forrest.

Biennials, with their clockwork two-year progressions, provide a snapshot of the present moment in art-making. So it surprised me that, while walking around Rosha Yaghmai's prismatic sculpture *Slide Samples (Lures, Myths)* (2018) in the Hammer Museum's *Made in L.A. 2018*, the reference point I kept turning to was 50 years in the past. In 1968, a *Made in L.A.* exhibition of new Los Angeles art would have given significant real estate to Finish Fetish: painting and sculpture that employed industrial materials and methods to generate clean-edged, pristine, and often monumental objects. Artists such as Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, and John McCracken were interested in both the elegance of the objects and spaces they were creating, as well as the phenomenological, subjective encounter of the viewer.

A work like Yaghmai's evokes this SoCal artistic past in its use of translucent plastics, washes of colored light, and a commanding and minimal central structure – a large folding screen – that encourages perambulation. But from here, the artist refreshes the tropes of the 1960s "L.A. look." The clear resin panes checkering Yaghmai's screen are not flat and immaculate. She embeds and overlays them with bits and pieces of simple things and childhood relics such as eyeglass lenses, chair caning, plant cuttings, cellophane sheets, and an evil eye medallion. The rainbow-like light streaming through these elements has a decidedly familiar source: abstract slides shot decades ago by Yaghmai's father as a recent Iranian immigrant studying in California. At every turn, Yaghmai trades the whole for the fragmented, and the dispassionate for the intimate.

That characterization appears throughout *Made in L.A. 2018*, where – in notable contrast to nearly all exhibitions mounted 50, or even 10 years ago – the artists are exceptionally diverse in gender, ethnic background, and age. The fetish at work, if any, is for the unfinished. Not in terms of fabrication (there is much polish on display), but rather in the open-ended and iterative nature of so many of the biennial's projects. Discrete objects are consistently rendered complex and variable. Alison O'Daniel's *The Tuba Thieves* (2013-present) is an ongoing film-in-progress whose interlocking prompts and narratives have also spawned echoing sculptural works, and will continue to do so; taisha paggett's multilayered sound and video installation, built from recordings of friends and collaborators, will be activated and altered at different times by performances. Candace Lin's dayglow magenta mound of earth, seeds, and guano seem to be budding untold organisms, while, like Yaghmai's work, giving a nod to and updating late 1960s Los Angeles sculpture with its minimalist primary form, lights (in this case, grow lights), and reflective plastic wall coverings.

To be unfinished is to leave room for ambiguity, multiplicity, and evolution – arguably what is needed most at this crossroads moment of reactionary white supremacism in the U.S. The diversity of the artists put forward by the biennial curators, which reflects the city's makeup significantly more than past *Made in L.A.* exhibitions, provides a hopeful blueprint for how to move forward by using and altering past models.

-- Claire de Dobay Rifelj