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INFLUENCERS



Make No Mistake

Mexican-born, California-bred curator Cesar Garcia's The Mistake Room adds an international flavor to the landscape of downtown Los Angeles. by Carol Kino

In only two years, The Mistake Room has made its mark on Los Angeles. Opened by the scholar and independent curator Cesar Garcia in January 2014, in a 4,500-square-foot warehouse space downtown, it's one of the city's few independent nonprofit cultural institutions dedicated to international art—a place where local artists come to encounter new work from abroad, and international curators discover new artists from the area.

Garcia named The Mistake Room

for a 2011 performance by A. Bandit (aka the magician Derek DelGaudio and the artist Glenn Kaino) whose premise is that creative growth only happens if you take risks and make mistakes. Yet its rise has been spectacularly sure-footed.

Garcia opened the art space with a sprawling installation by Oscar Murillo that anticipated the smoking hot Colombian artist's commercial gallery debut at New York's David Zwirner, by several months. After a short break for renovation, carried

out by the Tijuana- and New York-based architect Alfonso Medina, it reopened in July 2014 with a video installation by the Thailand-born Korakrit Arunanondchai, coinciding with the artist's first solo museum show at New York's MoMA PS1.

More fascinating exhibitions followed: drawings and paintings by the Japanese-born Matsumi Kanemitsu, who enlisted in the US Army before Pearl Harbor and began making art in military detention; a survey from Ed Clark, an African American born in the segregated South, who built his career in Paris; and most recently, the Los Angeles solo debut from the Chinese multimedia artist Cao Fei.

Born in Mexico City, but raised in Los Angeles, Garcia conceived the idea for The Mistake Room while working for local institutions such as the alternative space LAXART, where he was associate director and senior curator, and the Hammer Museum, as part of the team that organized the first Made in LA Biennial in 2012. Concurrently, the ambitious 30-year-old also travelled widely in Latin America and the Middle East while researching his dissertation on alternative art spaces for a doctorate at UCLA.

So while Los Angeles was getting high on its own history, prompted by the Getty Foundation's first iteration of "Pacific Standard Time" in 2011-2012, Garcia was feeling the urge to broaden its horizons. "There was so much fuss going on about Los Angeles," he says, "and I wanted to see if an institution with an international scope could do well here." He was also inspired

Cesar Garcia, founding director and chief curator of The Mistake Room.

by the network of non-collecting exhibition spaces and kunsthalls he saw elsewhere—places like The Kitchen in New York and the Beirut Art Center—which seemed in short supply locally. So Garcia decided to open one with "a staunchly international mission" that would give major shows to artists who'd been born or built their careers outside America.

Mindful of the many other LA experimental exhibition spaces he'd seen rise and fall, he built his board carefully. "I wanted to create a model that would be sustainable," Garcia says. Hoping they'd bring new energy and ideas, he deliberately chose business leaders from industries outside of the art world, like Tina Perry-Whitney, an executive with the Oprah Winfrey Network, and the Guadalajara real estate developer Roberto Hemuda. (Many of his board members are artists too, including Kaino, Murillo, and the Argentina-born Analía Sabán.)

But Garcia's savviest move may be The Mistake Room's curatorial residency, which invites one international curator a year to give a talk or curate a show—while also providing a car and driver and a schedule of studio visits. So far, it has hosted Hendrik Folkerts, formerly a curator at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum, now in residence with Documenta 14, and Clara Kim, formerly of the Walker Art Center as a guest curator. Next year, The Mistake Room welcomes Magnolia de la Garza, deputy director of the Mexico City-based Isabel and Agustin Coppel Collection. "Bringing curators to LA to engage with the local scene is a way to support our local artistic community," Garcia says. "We create opportunities." **ABMB**

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