

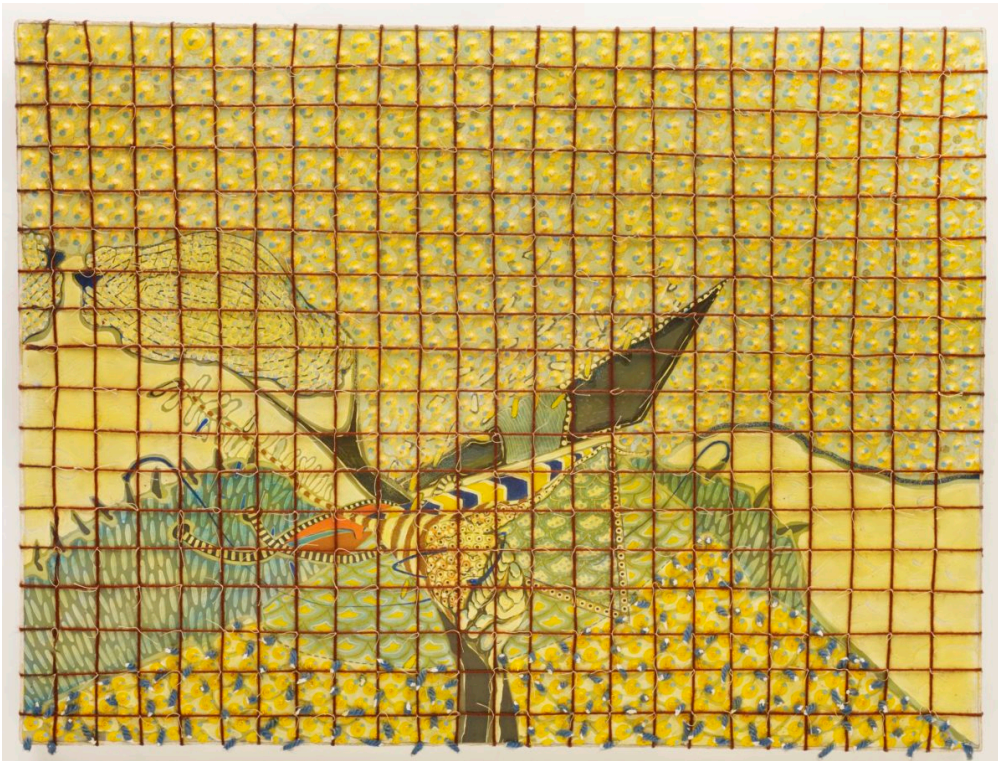


in other words

Everything you ever wanted to know about the art market but didn't know who to ask

LA's Best Shows Were Found Beyond the Museums

The real action was found in the commercial galleries



Franklin Williams, *Untitled* (1967). From "Dilexi Gallery: Seeking the Unknown".



BY [Jonathan Griffin](#)

writer and critic

Published 18 December 2019

In Must See

The museum landscape in Los Angeles is set to look very different over the next couple of years. Already, LACMA has shuttered its collection galleries as construction continues on its new building, scheduled to open in 2024. Admission fees will be a thing of the past at LA MoCA by January, which should have a marked impact on attendance. And two major openings are in the works: the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures is scheduled to open its doors next year while the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, founded by the film-maker George Lucas, is anticipated to open in 2021.

But this year, the real action was found in the commercial galleries. Aside from a few noble exceptions, including the retrospective of Lari Pittman's work at the Hammer ("Declaration of Independence", until 5 January 2020) and "With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-1985" at MoCA, the most exciting exhibitions were not in the museums.

Major, multi-city galleries including Matthew Marks and Hauser & Wirth have refused to patronize LA with second-tier shows (as cynics expected they might), while hometown players like Parker Gallery and Nonaka-Hill have contributed to the ongoing education of the city's art lovers. Here are my picks of the best shows of 2019—any of which would have been a credit to the institutions. **J.G.**

The Dilexi Retrospective, Parker Gallery,
Parrasch Heijnen Gallery, The Landing, Marc
Selwyn Fine Art, Brian Gross Fine Art, Crown
Point Press



Dilexi Gallery was co-founded and run by jazz aficionado Jim Newman and featured artists like Franklin Williams, whose work *Untitled* (1967) is pictured above. Courtesy Parker Gallery

[A project](#) coordinated across six different galleries in two different cities, Los Angeles and San Francisco, deserves admiration if only for its logistical and diplomatic achievement. Organizing curator [Laura Whitcomb](#) managed to divvy up work shown at the [Dilexi Gallery](#)—which was co-founded and run by jazz aficionado [Jim Newman](#) in San Francisco between 1958 and 1969 and briefly in Los Angeles in the early 1960s. Highlights included the phantasmagoria of [Roy De Forest](#) and [Franklin Williams](#) at [Parker](#), and carved wooden sculptures by [Jeremy Anderson](#) at [The Landing](#). **J.G.**

“Parergon: Japanese Art of the 1980s and 1990s”, Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles; Blum & Poe, Los Angeles



“PART II – Parergon: Japanese Art of the 1980s and 1990s” was led by the independent curator Mika Yoshitake. Above, an installation view at Blum & Poe, Los Angeles. Courtesy of the artists and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo

Another project in which an independent curator—[Mika Yoshitake](#)—facilitated a collaboration between galleries, in tribute to a legendary historical venue. [Gallery Parergon](#) operated in Tokyo between 1981 and 1986 and showed many of the artists associated with [Japanese New Wave art](#). Unforgettable works in this exhibition included Yukinori Yanagi’s [Ground Transposition](#) (1987-2019)—two giant spheres of dirt, one floating on the ceiling—and Noboru Tsubaki’s warty yellow sculpture [Fresh Gasoline](#) (1989). **J.G.**

“Charles Ray: Two Ghosts”, Matthew Marks Gallery



Charles Ray's work *Two Horses* (2019) is a six-ton, 14-foot-wide slab of granite. The artist's works can take up to 15 years to complete © Charles Ray, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

A new sculpture by [Charles Ray](#) is a major event, given the artist's unhurried and thoughtful pace of creation—it can take 15 years to complete a work of art. *Two Horses* (2019) is a six-ton, 14-foot-wide slab of granite with a relief image digitally carved into its grainy surface of—you guessed it—two horses. This simple description fails woefully to convey the subtlety and sophistication of the sculpture, which nods to the legacy of artists such as [George Stubbs](#) and [Eadweard Muybridge](#), while remaining a thoroughly contemporary technological creation. **J.G.**

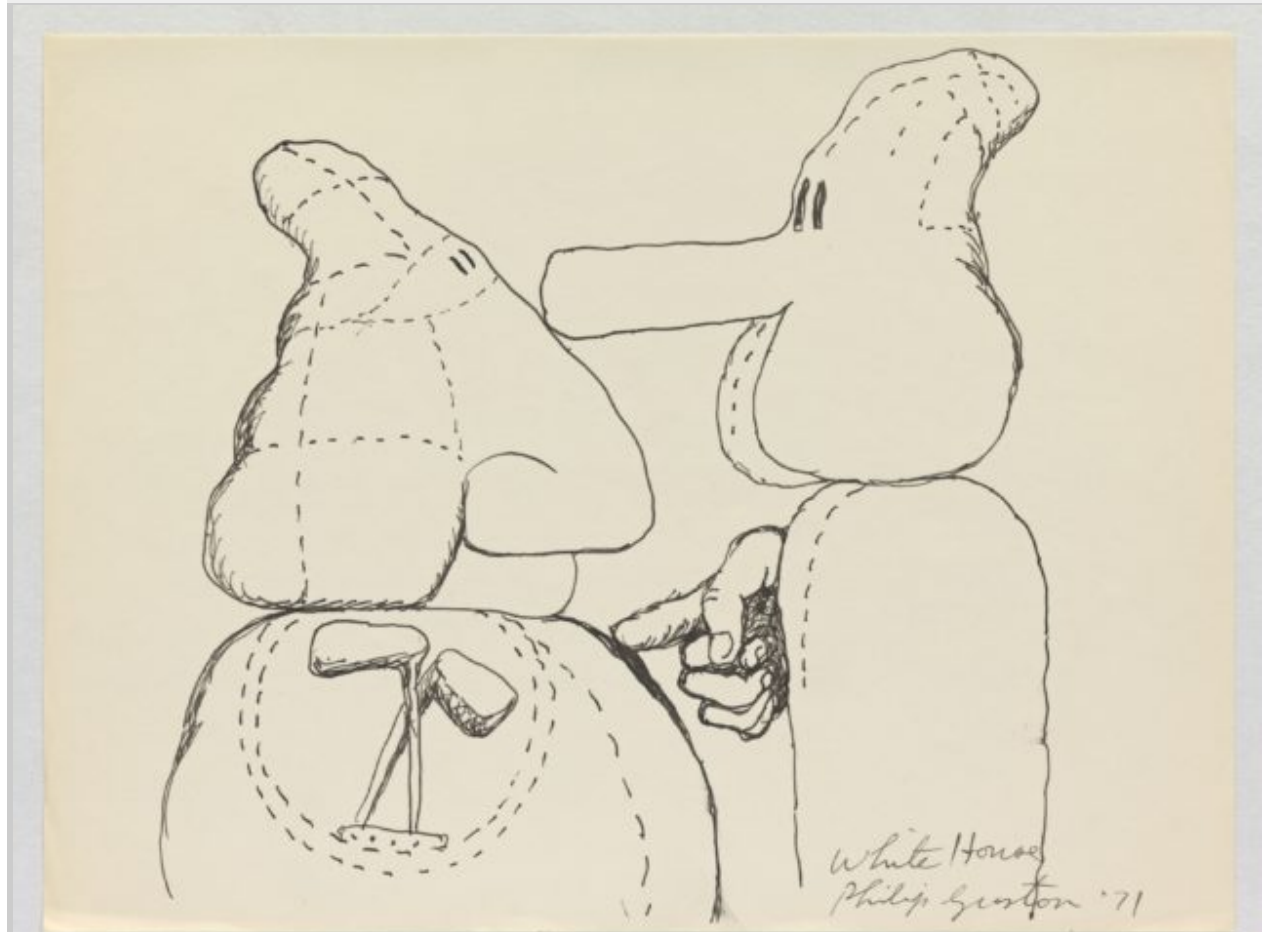
“David Hammons”, Hauser & Wirth



The central installation of “David Hammons” at Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles—a sea of shop-bought camping tents recalling the homeless encampments that abounded in Los Angeles—was especially hard to admire © David Hammons. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen Studio

Everyone wanted so badly to love this much-anticipated [career survey](#) from the reclusive cult figure. But when it finally opened, Los Angeles was thrown into hand-wringing consternation by a show that was recalcitrant, elliptical and ambiguously ironic (not to mention absent titles and press releases). The central installation—a sea of shop-bought camping tents recalling the homeless encampments that abounded in Los Angeles—was especially hard to admire. I chose to give [Hammons](#) the benefit of the doubt because I believe he is messing with us, the so-called liberal denizens of an art world that had so long denied him a seat at the table. **J.G.**

“Resilience: Philip Guston in 1971”, Hauser & Wirth



This was the moment in which Guston forsook Abstract Expressionism and unveiled his new, cartoony style. Above, Philip Guston, *Untitled* (1971). Photo: Genevieve Hanson. © The Estate of Philip Guston. Courtesy the Estate and Hauser & Wirth

A very different, though equally [momentous, exhibition](#) from the same gallery: this show focused on a single, cataclysmic year in the revered painter's career. It was curated by [Guston's](#) daughter, [Musa Mayer](#), who was uniquely placed to observe the torment he experienced with the adverse reception of his exhibition at London's [Marlborough Gallery](#) in 1970. This was the moment in which he forsook [Abstract Expressionism](#) and unveiled his new, cartoony style. Alongside tender paintings made in Rome, this deep-dive exhibition also included Guston's powerful political satires of Nixon. **J.G.**

“Laura Owens: Books and Tables”, Matthew Marks Gallery



“Laura Owens: Books and Tables” at Matthew Marks Gallery featured a selection of the artist’s handmade books, placed on tables. Image courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo by Annik Wetter

As with Charles Ray’s *Two Horses*, a description of [this exhibition](#)—a selection of [Laura Owens](#)’s handmade books, placed on tables—entirely undersells its invention, delight and complexity. Anyone familiar with Owens’s formal eclecticism will, perhaps, not be surprised at the variety of fabrication techniques included here, from wintergreen transfers to embroidery to pop-up books. Custom oak tables filled with hidden gadgetry offer additional wonders, including one that uses hidden magnets to move its books almost imperceptibly across its surface. **J.G.**