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Hey LA!

I'm culture writer **Carolina A. Miranda** and I've been watching all the movies inspired by Homer's *Odyssey*. Don't sleep on Uberto Pasolini's *The Return* (2024), a stripped-down take hyperfocused on the moment Odysseus lands back on Ithaca after his journey. So far, it's my favorite.

👀 Before getting into the nitty-gritty, a small ask: Every week, ***Art Insider*** brings you the latest arts happenings. From museum debuts to small artist-run spaces, **KCRW** connects you to the city's art scene. Along the way, we help artists and art spaces find their audiences. Thanks to readers and members like you, this newsletter is **100% free** — but it's not free to produce. (Not with these gas prices.) If we have helped you discover a new gallery or artist, please consider supporting us — and give this newsletter a plug in the comments when you donate. My fellow critics and I would be deeply grateful!

Speaking of critics: this week, contributor **Leah Ollman** reviews artist **Susan Silton**'s ruminative show in Hollywood. Plus, I've got some must-see events:

1. ***Roy DeCarava: the sound i saw*, at David Zwirner.** A stunning compendium of images of jazz musicians mixed with scenes of daily life in New York City. Don't miss the fabulous listening room in the gallery's neighboring space. *Through October 31st; davidzwirner.com*.
2. ***America(!) The Beautiful (?)*, at the Ford**. The artist collective For Freedoms is hosting a live show inspired by collective action that will feature spoken word artists aja monet, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, and Xiuhtezcatl, as well as tunes by DJ Kai the Universe. *Saturday, October 3rd at 8 PM, tickets from $35; theford.com*.

Lastly, a correction: last week we listed **Rebecca Morse** as the curator of **Eileen Cowin**'s solo show at LACMA and somehow forgot to include her co-curator, **Britt Salvesen**. Apologies for the oversight!

At top: Haynes, Jones and Benjamin *(1956), from an ongoing exhibition of photographer Roy DeCarava's work at David Zwirner in East Hollywood. (Estate of Roy DeCarava)*

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THE COLLECTIVE VOICE

by Leah Ollman



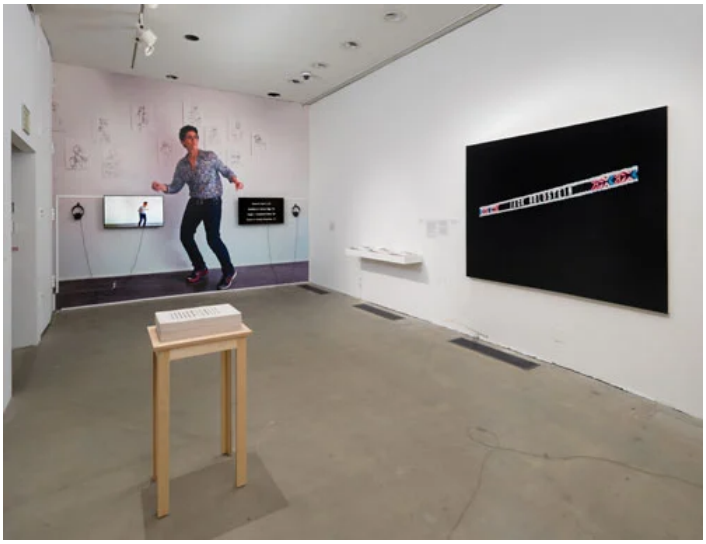
Susan Silton, In everything there is a trace *(2013), at the LA Municipal Art Gallery. (Brian Forrest)*

I heard whistling as I meandered through **Susan Silton**'s invigorating, wide-ranging show at the **Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery**. A brief, perky phrase hung in the air, disembodied. It was Silton's "Family Whistle" piped into the galleries, the coded call used among her loved ones to identify their position within a crowd, to signal, *Here I am*.

The tune is an especially tender component of Silton's ongoing ***Whistling Project***, which began in 2010 with the formation of a women's whistling ensemble, **The Crowing Hens**. Hens typically don't crow (that's the rooster's job), and women shouldn't whistle, since that's unnatural too, according to a musty proverb. The Crowing Hens reclaim audible space for women's voices with a wry subversiveness that threads through Silton's 40-year survey.

The show, curated by **Andy Campbell**, includes photographs, videos, installations, drawings, prints, graphic design, sculpture, documentation of performances, audio works and more. It's the first career overview for the L.A. native, whose work has been exhibited widely throughout California and beyond.

Silton studied English literature and creative writing as an undergraduate at **UCLA**. She wrote for the *Daily Bruin* and thought she'd become a journalist, or maybe a poet. "Poetry has always been a lifeforce for me," she told me when I visited the show. "No one is telling you what to think when you read a poem. You read it, and feel it. That's how it should be with visual art."



Susan Silton's survey examines themes like identity and grief. (Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery)

The title of the exhibition, ***Diving Into the Wreck***, comes from a poem by **Adrienne Rich**, which resonates with Silton's own fearless exploration of social wrongs, political messes, personal identity, and collective grief. "From the beginning, my work has been about finding language for the body, at first about being queer," she said. The throughline is voice itself, voice as a multivalent force, a manifestation of engaged witness, a matter of personal agency and collective strength, something to be defended when its free exercise is threatened.

Voice doesn't necessarily take the form of speech in Silton's work (consider the whistlers), but words are ever present. Two lines from Rich's poem — "The words are purposes. / The words are maps." — encircle a huge, sculpted wrecking ball hanging at the exhibition's entrance.

Anchoring the exhibition is the sculptural installation, ***In everything there is the trace***, which also serves as a site of collective performance. Silton conceived of the project in 2013, creating a circle of interlocking desks where 10 volunteers at a time sat and retyped **John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*** on manual typewriters with inkless ribbons. For this iteration, typists will reinscribe **Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower***. The first shift took place at the show's opening reception, with Silton and nine others generating a glorious, percussive clamor, turning out pages of blind-embossed text. The noise yielded something visually silent. (You can sign up to participate here.)

Such slippage and misalignment abound in Silton's work. Mouths don't always produce the sounds or voices expected of them. Stereoscopic images refuse to align into a coherent whole.



The artist's work straddles performance, audio, and graphic design. (Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery)

In ***WE*** (2020), a sequence of 16 photo intaglio prints, Silton gently conjures the friction between one eye and another, one I and another. Each sheet contains a pair of landscape images that are nearly the same, but not quite. Silton made the pictures in the **Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve**, where she was fascinated by the constantly shifting light. The view changed from moment to moment, but even if seen at the same time, it wouldn't look the same to any two observing souls. Each pair of printed images is captioned with a conjugation of the phrase, "We See it Differently, You and I," "We Would See it Differently," "We Will See it Differently," and so on. Distinct subjectivity is natural and inevitable, the piece suggests, and can coexist with commonality. The work is titled, and the phrase begins, after all, with *We*.

At the end of my visit to Silton's show, I heard The Crowing Hens live, in the galleries. They wandered individually through the reception, stopping to face one visitor at a time, issuing the Family Whistle and awaiting a reply in kind. When approached, I gladly whistled back, and was graced with a striped fabric armband, marked as a member of the flock. For the evening and perhaps beyond, my *I* joined the larger *We*, and in that process lurked hope.

MORE LIKE THIS...
Sound is crucial to much of Silton's work. For a sonic sample of *The Whistling Project*, follow this link to a video clip of The Crowing Hens' debut performance at LAXART (now the Brick) in 2010, and this one for a peek at a typing session at USC in 2013.

Leah Ollman is a SoCal-based critic and editor of Ensnaring the Moment: On the intersection of poetry and photography (Saint Lucy Books).

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Upcoming Performance from MOCA and Wild Up

Democracy Sessions presents the US Premiere of Oliver Leith's *Garland*, on Saturday, October 3rd at 3:00 PM and 6:00 PM at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA in Little Tokyo. *Garland* is a large-scale work for orchestra and community chorus featuring 130 performers arranged in a spectacular procession of music, movement, and sound. Alongside the orchestra and massed voices, Leith constructs a sonic world from handmade instruments and everyday materials — tuned corrugated plastic straws, whirly tubes, button whistles, planks of wood, ceramic shards, carts, bicycles, scaffolding poles, and a horse connected to the chorus by a garland of bells.

Get Tickets

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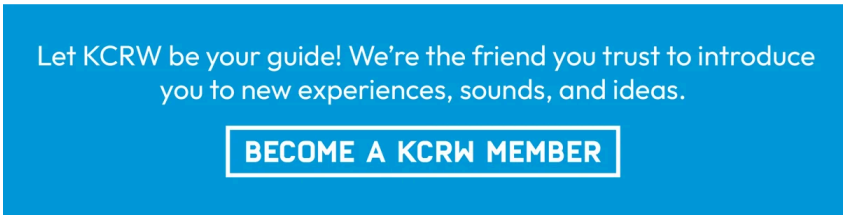
- A fascinating dive into the history of the once-thriving Japanese American community on **Terminal Island**.
- **Trump** wants to turn his triumphal arch into a military complex.
- **Philip Kennicott** comes through with the most insightful review I've read of **the Lucas Museum**.
- An incredible story about how the work of an important **Bolivian artist** was rescued from a dumpster.
- **Hakim Bishara** has a terrific interview with the Chilean-born artist **Alfredo Jaar** about the meaning of "America."
- **Jessica Simmons-Reid** profiles installationist **Lita Albuquerque** in advance of her solo show in Palm Springs.
- **Ed Ruscha** designed the poster for **Alejandro Iñárritu**'s latest film.
- *Times* classical music critic **Mark Swed** is retiring after 30 years! Find his final column — which is, fittingly, about **John Cage** – here.
- **Jonathan Abbott**, whose background is in public broadcasting, has been named **MOCA**'s sixth director since 2008.
- **The Rabkin Prize** is celebrating its latest crop of winners, which includes LA writer **Jan Tumlir**.
- **Javier Bardem** playing an ambitious architect? I'll watch that.
- Signing off with this hilarious essay about **"Derek,"** the evil half-brother that Hollywood invented for **Captain Ahab**.

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