

FABRIK

CONTEMPORARY ART & DESIGN

SUAL ARTS

DESIGN

REVIEWS

COLUMNS

MAGAZINE

FABRIK GUIDE

SEARCH HERE



74
Shares



73



1



Keeping It Real: LACE at 40



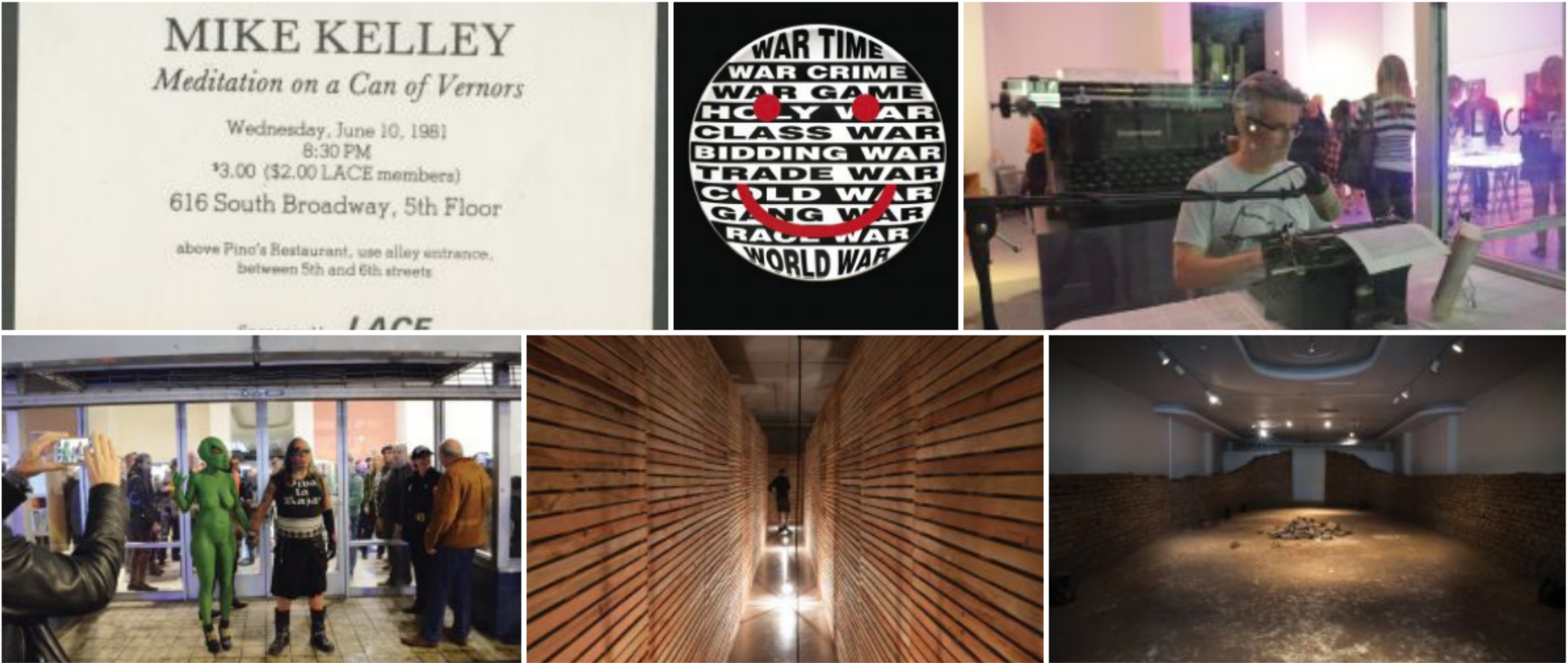
BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT



APRIL 20, 2018

Founded in 1978 by a group of independent artists who shared an enthusiasm for a transgressive, performative, homegrown avant-garde, LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) has never wavered from its mission. Reached for comment on the eve of its 40th anniversary, LACE’s current director, Sarah Russin, articulates this mantra with as much empathy and certitude as the day it was penned. In 40 years, LACE has presented work by some 5,000 artists through more than 3,000 programs, exhibitions and events.

Just this March, the Getty Research Institute acquired the LACE archive—documenting the first four decades of the institution’s programs and exhibitions. Some of the best-known early adopters of LACE were Mike Kelley, John Baldessari, Bill Viola and Gronk—but with thousands of names to peruse, that list could be 20 times longer, stretching from Barbara Kruger to Dynasty Handbag. The sheer breadth, depth and volume of the LACE archive represents its own epic cultural and scholarly resource, now digitized—which you’ll have a chance to see for yourself, as a show based on its excavation runs through December.



In recent years LACE has continued to host its share of breakout programs. In 2015 Rafa Esparza launched his current phase of artworld superstardom there with a majestic, performative sculptural installation involving 5,000 adobe bricks, guest artists, architecture, craft, history and spectacle. And what's about to happen this summer—an exploration of the artwork of the Black Panther movement, including collaborations with the Zapatistas, concurrent with a summer residency promising “A maximalist Queer/Trans Femme Cave installation and performance series” —proves the vision of LACE and its underwriters is still fresh and fearless to the core. And busy: In the weeks surrounding this interview, LACE hosted the powerful group exhibition *Names Written in Black*; Guillermo Gómez-Pena in a rare political performance activation, a cultural exchange series with French artists, a Jewish operatic theatre group and Sharon Loudén's #Metoo event with Rachel Mason and Future Clown, “to inject a bit of parody into a serious conversation,” and illustrate the ways in which performance art is uniquely suited to tackle political issues.

“When I came to LACE four years ago it wasn't from a curatorial background,” said Russin. “But I believed in the core mission and that hasn't changed: to present experimental and socially relevant art, and not be afraid to get political. But even there, I've wanted it to come from the artists, not from me. I never wanted that director-as-curator model, it was important to me to expand that.” One of Russin's first initiatives was the Emerging Curators program, essentially switching to an open call for exhibition proposals instead of for individual artists. Russin moved to LA in 1987, “only ten years after LACE opened,” she noted, “and I've always been aware of it. You know at this point it's been in Hollywood longer than it ever was in DTLA!” LACE famously relocated in 1993, and has served as a cultural anchor on Hollywood Boulevard ever since. In fact, they've produced frequent programs riffing off the Hollywood context, which many artists find irresistible. For example Tim Youd, who in 2016 retyped John Rechy's underbelly masterpiece *City of Night* in the storefront window, during Warren Neidich's fraught yet scholarly installation *The Palinopsic Field* about McCarthyist witch hunts of gay men in Hollywood. The current show makes use of the perspective of Hollywood as both a place and an idea. It features curators from Dublin and is keyed to the theme of spectacle. “They have the most famous performance artist in Ireland,” said Russin, referring to artist Amanda Coogan. “Her work takes on issues like abortion and same-sex marriage.” Incorporating LA-based performance artists too, *Activating Pangea: Acts to Objects* runs March 15-April 29, 2018.

The exhibit, *The Archival Impulse: 40 Years at LACE*, also opened March 15 in the above-mentioned Project Room (they're calling it the Rainbow Room for the occasion). The installation was curated by Matthias Veigner, who has unearthed a king's ransom of original documents, objects and so much ephemera there will be constant giveaways. The Getty acquired the LACE archives in December, in what will be an ongoing relationship with future contributions and collaborations. For example, everyone knows the Ed Ruscha book *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, but he also did a version featuring Hollywood Boulevard in 2002, which the Getty made into a video during the the 2013 PST initiative *Modern Architecture in L.A.* LACE will feature that video in their window for the next year, along with *Thank You*, a sculpturally performative donation box sculpture installed in the lobby. That's a cheeky way for Russin to remind everyone to support LACE, and not just during its legendary auctions (the next one is May 30.) “We have no endowment,” she said. “We make our budget from scratch every year. People think we're way bigger than we are, but we're just super scrappy! I like to say we are halfway between MOCA and four people in a garage. We're not the typical commercial gallery, but not an institution either. We have a different responsibility to engage our audiences.” As their URL says, “welcometolace.org.”



WRITTEN BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT

Shana Nys Dambrot is an art critic, curator, and author based in Los Angeles. She is currently LA Editor for Whitehot Magazine, Arts Editor for Vs. Magazine, Contributing Editor to artltd., and a contributor to Flaunt, Huffington Post, Montage, Desert Magazine, Porter & Sail and KCET's Artbound. She studied Art History at Vassar College, writes loads of essays for art books and exhibition catalogs, curates and/or juries a few exhibitions each year, and speaks in public every chance she gets.