

KCRW Art Insider

Top 3 This Week

Let Lindsay Preston Zappas curate your art viewing experiences this week. Here are our Top 3 picks of what not to miss. Scroll down for Insider stories.



1. Alison Saar at the Benton Museum of Art and The Armory Center for the Arts

It's the last week to catch Alison Saar's split-venue exhibition, *Of Aether and Earthe*, at the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College and the Armory Center for the Arts in Pasadena. The exhibition is a retrospective of Saar's figurative sculptures, drawings, and installations.

The Benton show focuses on works dealing with the elements of earth and water, while the Armory exhibit focuses on air, fire, and aether, a mystical essence that moves between the four elements. In Pomona, the sculptures feel rooted and in some cases weighed down, as in *Breach* (2016), a figurative sculpture in which a

women balances luggage, wash bins, and various objects on her head. At The Armory, however, the pieces take flight. The ethereal *Pearly* (2013), a bronze figure who gazes upward, is suspended from the ceiling via delicate gauze emanating from the figure's mouth, eliciting both the exercising of one's voice and the stifling of it.

Saar's work often deals in these dualities, celebrating autonomy and hope as much as it confronts racialized violence and trauma. At Benton, a disembodied head rests on a pedestal (*Conked*, 1997), its hair made of a thick, jutting wire that flows into the figure's open mouth before sprouting out from its neck. The title references conk, a gel that was used to straighten African American hair and that also contains lye. The work and title allude to how societal pressures can become dangerous and corrosive — and in this case, literally, choke the subject. But a throughline in Saar's sculptural works is the strength and stability of her figures; they emanate power even as they confront violent truths.

On view: September 01–December 18, 2021| [Open map](#)

On view: July 16–December 12, 2021| [Open map](#)

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The banner is split into two color sections: a dark blue left side and an orange right side. On the left, the UCLA Arts logo is at the top, followed by the text 'UCLA Department of Art' and 'GRADUATE OPEN STUDIOS' in large, bold, white letters. On the right, the text reads: 'Thursday, December 9, 2021 6 – 9pm', 'UCLA Margo Leavin Graduate Art Studios', 'Alice and Nahum Lainer Family Gallery', '3600 Hayden Ave., Culver City, CA 90232', and 'In honor and recognition of Margo Leavin (1936-2021) art.ucla.edu'.



2. Daniel Ingroff at Tyler Park Presents

The largest piece in Daniel Ingroff's solo exhibition at Tyler Park Presents is a painting of an open palm against a flat, forest green background (*Meridians*, 2020). The painting feels diagrammatic, but rather than denoting pressure points, various objects are painted across the hand like symbolic markers linked to past experiences or emotions. A ladder climbs the index finger; a spine hugs the outer edge of the palm; a cricket makes his way towards the thumb. This work indexes us within Ingroff's psychological mythology, in which human figures merge with various objects in dreamlike combinations.

In *Pools* (2020), a tiered fountain is superimposed over a face with the fountain's tip hitting the figure's third eye. In *The Double* (2021), a nude figure stands facing a wall next to a large house plant. The man holds his own shadow, which becomes limp at the neck, folding back on itself. The plant's own shadow is prominent in the painting as well, alluding to another kind of doubling between plant life and humans. In this way, Ingroff uses symbols and objects from the world around us to explore an unseen energetic plane.

On view: November 13, 2021–January 8, 2022 | [Open map](#)

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3. Will Bruno at Smart Objects

In the center of a vast ravine a clown with bright red oversized shoes hovers dejectedly, a small star floating by his head. This character, plopped inexplicably into a luscious desert landscape, isn't the only anomaly in Will Bruno's painting, *Rugged Beauty* (2021). One shirtless man sits hillside, pointing up and the clown and the other floating figurines, each seemingly pulled from a different toy set. Near the clown, a large cane-like symbol sits strangely on top of the scene, as if pulled from some classic rock vinyl album art and forced into the wild landscape.

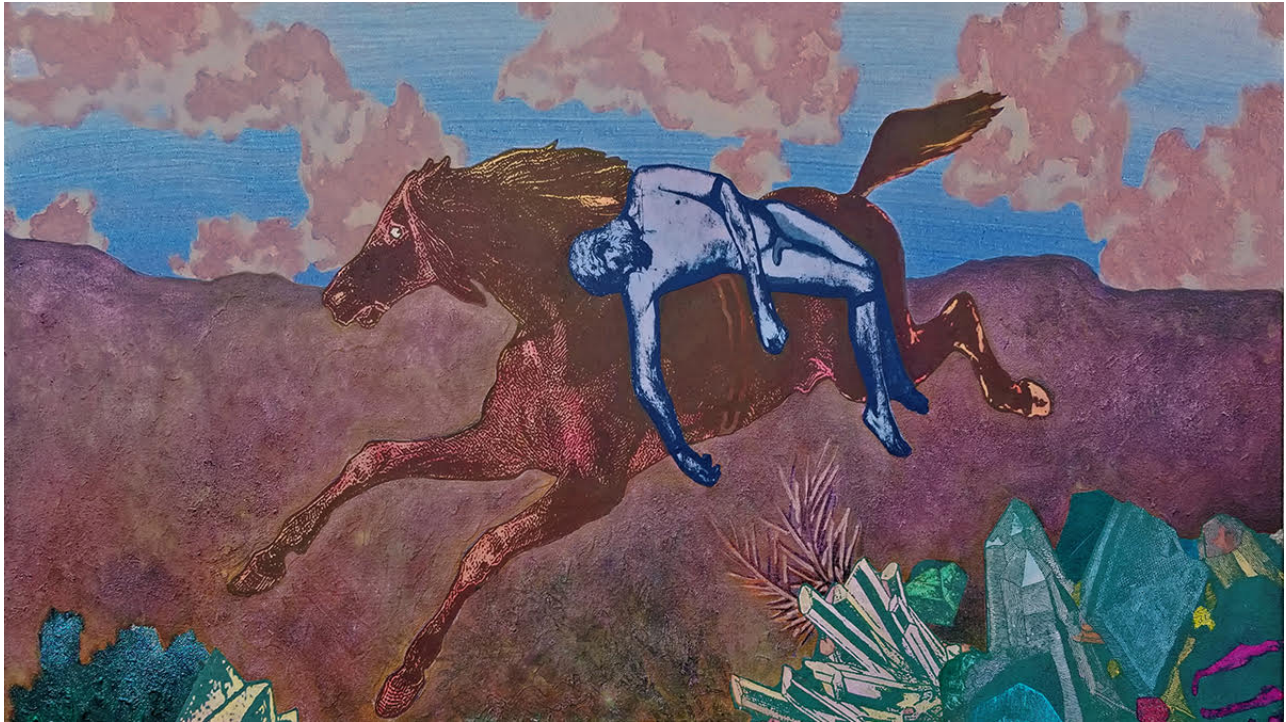
The exhibition of paintings on view at Smart Objects in Echo Park, titled *Methods for Regional Stewardship*, follows a similar logic. The artist faithfully paints scenes from New Mexico's mesas (where he lives) in brushy lavenders and warm ambers, and then collages these vistas with various figures and objects to build invented narratives that explore the history of the region while also inventing their own.

Bruno is invested in storytelling, and pulls narratives from the area's Indigenous populations, honoring their histories while also alluding to the violence of colonization and land development. At the same time, as the clown perhaps illustrates, magic and surrealism feature in his narratives to reinvent and upend staid legacies, tweaking fixed archetypes and reconsidering their meaning. At once dreamy and methodical, Bruno's painted allegories suggest that new, more equitable and fantastical stories can be told from the pieces and parts of the ones we've been telling.

On view: November 13–December 18, 2021 | [Open map](#)

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A Closer Look



Melding History and Fantasy

Two solo exhibitions in L.A. feature artists who blend fantasy, mythology, and history to create mystical abstract works. On view now at Smart Objects in Echo Park, New Mexico-based artist Will Bruno's show "Methods for Regional Stewardship" presents paintings whose colors reflect the ethereal yet rustic New Mexican landscape collaged with objects and characters from history and lore. Los Angeles based artist Aaron Morse's solo show "Mineral Mythology" on view at La Loma Projects explores similar themes of history through landscape as his paintings reflect the passing of time through an abstract view of the earth's natural processes. Last week I talked to Greater LA's Steve Chiotakis about the two exhibitions and how the artist's meld history and fantasy as a way of challenging society's dominant narratives.

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Gallery Talk

Gallery talk is your insider look into the stories of gallerists, curators, and artists in the Los Angeles art community.



Finding Yourself in the Art


In the early days of the pandemic, I did a series of Instagram Live artist interviews on my magazine [Carla's platform](#) and had the pleasure of speaking to Alison Saar, who joined one session from the backyard of her house, where she'd been quarantining. Her split-venue retrospective had been pushed back. Saar explained that she sometimes pulls references from "the dark news that we've been having for the last four years, and I try to take that and turn it around to be something that can somehow point toward a lighter era at some point." Yet despite specific political and historical starting points, Saar works to keep her art open-ended and accessible to a wide audience.

"I always have a specific narrative to the piece," she said, explaining that another series was inspired by her grandmother's Texan cooking. "But something exists beyond. Each viewer can glean their own history of that and find their own confluence with that piece of work by their own experiences. That's when it's nice that art can have this openness... and this history to it that people can find a bit of themselves in those pieces, which is what I hope happens... It's what I aspire to."

Lindsay Preston Zappas is KCRW's Arts Correspondent and the founder/
editor-in-chief of [Contemporary Art Review Los Angeles \(Carla\)](#).
[@contemporaryartreview.la](#)

 <p>UCLA Department of Art GRADUATE OPEN STUDIOS</p>	<p>Thursday, December 9, 2021 6 – 9pm</p> <p>UCLA Margo Leavin Graduate Art Studios Alice and Nahum Lainer Family Gallery 3600 Hayden Ave., Culver City, CA 90232</p> <p><small>In honor and recognition of Margo Leavin (1936-2021) arts.ucla.edu</small></p>
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