

Exquisite L.A.

Volume 2

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Photos by Joe Pugliese

Exquisite L.A. is a blueprint of a collective shape. Drawing on the history of the Surrealist Exquisite Corpse, we wish to create a communal portrait of the current Los Angeles art world.

Consisting of photographic portraits, and spanning a year of consecutive *Carla* issues, each artist photographed introduces the next with a short text accompanying their portrait, outlining their connection or interest in the artist that will follow them in the series. This is an ongoing story of Los Angeles—its twists and turns, side streets, and freeways.

Rooted in classical portraiture, the photographs presented capture the artists in a neutral space, isolated from their work or studio. Their individual gaze, pose, or gesture becomes a continuous visual marker for the exquisite corpse that is Los Angeles.

Volume I began in *Carla* issue 5 and concluded in the summer of 2017 in issue 8. For volume 2, we start the journey here with Anna Sew Hoy.

The communal nature of Anna's work inspired us to think about what we could do to further unite the participants and bring the spirit of their connection to the portraits in a more intimate way. In volume I, we had each artist write about the artist they chose after we photographed them. For this new iteration, we are adding an audio component: each artist will be recorded speaking about the artist they have chosen to be next in the series. Then those words will be played during the photo session with that artist, allowing for the presence of the previous artist in each portrait, furthering the idea of a collective body. Pervasive in these portraits is a connective tissue of words, invisible, floating over the artists' bodies and united by a thread of inspiration. Now the exquisite corpse is connected by the human voice. We, the observers, are stepping even further back, leaving the artists to hold space with and for each other.

Claressinka Anderson on Anna Sew Hoy

Not long after I moved to Los Angeles, I visited the Hammer Museum in 2007 for the first time, to see *Eden's Edge: Fifteen LA Artists*, which included the work of Anna Sew Hoy. I was new to America, and I wandered the exhibition spaces looking for some sort of marker that might hint as to what it means to be an artist in this city. Gary Garrels, chief curator and director of exhibitions and programs at the Hammer at the time, wrote in his essay about the exhibition, "The artists featured...share a perspective toward landscape and figure that investigates complex contradictions, which are inherent to life in Los Angeles and more broadly to contemporary American culture."¹ I felt those tensions immediately in Anna's work. Nonchalantly strung with metallic candy colored chains, feathers, and other small curiosities, her clay dream catcher sculptures enticed me with their shiny surfaces. Some of the shapes hung like suspended anatomical hearts, made vulnerable by the ventricular nature of their construction. They simultaneously felt like protective cages built around something intimate.

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One of the sculptures was of beer cans constructed into a knot. Who drank from these cans? There is a depth of feeling, of wanting to commune with Anna's work. Her sculptures feel like an extension of her own body, one that is intricately linked to the fabric of Los Angeles. Her work manages to be both private and communal, secretive and open. It brings us right to the edge of the collective and the personal, wrapping it up in bands of connecting clay and fabric.

In more recent years, works like the oversized tissue dispensers made of clay and placed on elevated pedestals could be viewed as tongue in cheek but also bring to mind people crying in a group therapy session. Each person that grabs a tissue becomes part of the piece: a multiplication of wipes, of tears, of human experience. Los Angeles tries to be a public city, but it is, at its core, deeply cloistered. People wonder about the lives behind high hedges and security cameras and silhouettes made out through the dark tinted windows of cars.

My move to Los Angeles directly followed an almost four year stint in Auckland, New Zealand, and I was surprised to read that Anna was originally from Auckland. At the Hammer, I looked to see if I could find anything comforting from that small island country on the edge of the earth lurking in her sculptures. Knowing no one here, I wanted to grasp at a chain from one of the dream catchers and let it be a rope that might connect the two of us. But what I experienced was something entirely unknown. This both thrilled and terrified me. Standing alone and motionless in that room, all I felt was vast, empty, untouchable space. I looked out beyond these shimmering, dark objects to a pink, flat horizon—an imaginary L.A. sunset—something a little dirty, a little hopeful.

1. Gary Garrels, "Essay," *Eden's Edge: Fifteen LA Artists*, 2007, <https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/2007/edens-edge-fifteen-la-artists/>.



Anna Sew Hoy on Guadalupe Rosales

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Lupe and I spent our teen years across town from one another in the late '80s, early '90s. Her project, *Veteranas and Rucas*, archives Latino youth culture from then—the ditch parties, the hard techno, the clothes, and make up. Lupe's work exists as a social media feed and its accessibility echoes the spirit of its subject. Lupe's collecting of images, ephemera and music from those teen years creates visibility for her crew in that moment, some who have passed and some who are still around. It's about wearing your personal history as a badge of honor.

