

# Los Angeles Times

## 'Made in L.A. 2016': Hammer Museum biennial proves a thoughtful place to ponder the possibilities

by Christopher Knight  
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Where is Todd Gray?

The artist is one of 26 included in the latest installment of the Hammer Biennial, "Made in L.A. 2016: a, the, though, only." The diverse survey of recent art opened last week at the Westwood museum, but Gray's work is nowhere to be seen.

That absence is by design.

Gray, a well-known commercial photographer in the music industry as well as an artist whose work is included in numerous museum collections, is restaging an extended performance piece suggestively located at today's perplexing crossroads of art culture and celebrity culture. Its title is "Ray."

For a full year following the 2013 death of his friend Ray Manzarek, keyboardist for the classic rock band the Doors, Gray wore only clothing that had belonged to the musician. In the Hammer's lobby, an unobtrusive wall label says that he is doing it again for the duration of the museum show.

Should you bump into the artist as he goes about his daily life between now and the show's Aug. 28 closing, you will certainly experience his work. The clothing is a public "second skin" — an outward sign of an inward life, which is a pretty good description of most works of art.

You might not even know it, though, depending on whether you recognize Gray and are aware that a performance is underway.

Even if you don't encounter the artist, however, simply knowing about the performance means you are aware that he is out and about somewhere in the world doing something. Going to the grocery store. Meeting friends for dinner. Hiking in the hills.

One can only wonder: Will you have a sighting of this elusive figure? That's a pretty good characterization of celebrity, where the intersection of public and private life is a contested blur.

The title of Gray's performance also makes a wry nod in the direction of Charles Ray, the celebrated L.A. sculptor who made his own ordinary wardrobe a centerpiece in works like "All My Clothes" (1973), a series of documentary Polaroid photographs of exactly that, and "Self-Portrait" (1990), a conventional department store mannequin dressed like him. Their echo in the Hammer show neatly ties art and celebrity together.

Hammer biennials focus exclusively on art made in the L.A. region and have "an emphasis on emerging and under-recognized artists," to quote the press materials. Gray's italicized performance ponders whether a tree falling in the forest makes a sound, if no one is there to hear it. He has lodged his tongue firmly in cheek with a sly performance in which "under-recognized artist" takes on literal meaning.

The 2016 biennial was organized by Hammer curator Aram Moshayedi and guest curator Hamza Walker of Chicago's Renaissance Society museum. (It's the first time in three biennial outings that a curator from outside L.A. has been invited to participate.) Their hefty, thoughtful catalog lays out a variety of considerations undertaken in their selection of artists.

It begins with the city's distinguishing feature as image capital of the world, which has an effect on art made globally. (See – or don't see – Gray, former personal photographer for Michael Jackson.) Its 26 artists are fewer than in earlier biennials – 35 last time and 60 in 2012 – and a third are foreign-born.