

Timothy Taylor



Patrick Martinez, *Feathered Serpent Immersed in Flowers* (detail), 2024. Stucco, neon, shattered tile, broken dish tile, grout, acrylic paint, spray paint, latex house paint, stucco patch, ceramic tile, and tile adhesive on panel, 84 × 84 in. (213.4 × 213.4 cm)
© Patrick Martinez

This exhibition was conceived and finalised in 2024, before the devastating wildfires in Los Angeles. The gallery's thoughts are with Angelenos impacted by the fires, including artists in this exhibition. A portion of proceeds from the exhibition will benefit artists who lost their homes and studios in the fires.

California

23 January — 8 March 2025

15 Bolton Street, London

*That light: the late-afternoon light of Los Angeles—golden pink off the bay
through the smog and onto the palm fronds.*

—Lawrence Weschler

Timothy Taylor is pleased to announce *California*, a group exhibition featuring new work by multigenerational artists with deep connections to the American West Coast. Opening on 23 January in London, this presentation centres on paintings and sculptures that find resonance and inspiration in California's landscapes, cultures, and histories.

Distinctly shaped by multiculturalism and counterculture, histories of migration and enterprise, and above all, its sublime light and natural splendour, California cultivated major contributions to

twentieth-century American visual culture—from landscape photography and mural painting to the studio craft movement and Conceptual Art. As the precarious balance of nature and culture—so central to the state’s cultural identity—shifts with frightening speed, these themes become even more poignant and powerful. The 1960s saw radical developments in West Coast art. Invigorated by the region’s spaciousness, light, auto industries, and Hollywood—and encouraged by the state’s storied art schools and alternative exhibition spaces—artists experimented with materiality and strategies of display. In Los Angeles, the Light and Space movement emerged, as did a form of Southern Californian Minimalism known as Finish Fetish. There were major explorations of found-object assemblage and mosaic in South Central’s fertile art scene, while in Northern California, the Funk and Nut movements embraced figuration, humour, and satire in mixed-media and ceramic works. Across these scenes, the social and natural environments of the West Coast impacted artists’s perception and creativity alike.

The six artists featured in *California* variously engage materials and processes in ways that reflect these vibrant histories. Each has an indelible relationship to the region—most were born there and all now live there. Paintings by Hilary Pecis, June Edmonds, Sara Issakharian, and Hugo McCloud appear alongside a ceramic sculpture by Ruby Neri and neon and mosaic works by Patrick Martinez.

In the early 1990s, San Francisco’s Mission School group cultivated a style that incorporated graffiti, folk art, comics, and sign painting. Ruby Neri (b. 1970, San Francisco; lives in Los Angeles) was a core member of this community, and the voluptuous sculptures of women she has created since the early 2000s maintain sensibilities from her graffiti days. On towering, curvaceous ceramic vessels, Neri spray paints pink-skinned blondes inspired by Cycladic figurines, Roy Lichtenstein’s heroines, and the tragic bombshell archetype. Neri gives her figures a transgressive edge that connects to the work of Los Angeles sculptors Paul McCarthy and Charles Ray, while her dedication to handcraft shows the deep influence of the Bay Area Funk artists, including her father, the sculptor Manuel Neri.

Patrick Martinez (b. 1980, Pasadena, CA; lives in Los Angeles) has likewise been deeply influenced by California graffiti culture. His work across media reflects on gentrification, class, and urban life while engaging the materials of the city—stucco, spray paint, ceramic tile, neon, and house paint. In its mode of production, this work harkens to rich local histories of assemblage, from Simon Rodia’s *Watts Towers* (1921–54) through Noah Purifoy’s iconic 1966 exhibition *66 Signs of Neon*, featuring works made collectively from the debris of the 1965 Watts rebellion. Here, Martinez’s mixed-media mosaic features the bust of a long-tongued serpent surrounded by flowers and fragments of advertising text, suggesting the cross-cultural and transhistorical imagery that populates so much of urban environments. His neon works, fabricated to recall commercial street signage, feature quotes drawn from literature. Here, in brilliant purple, a line from James Baldwin hovers above a rose.

The Light and Space artists (including Robert Irwin, James Turrell, Larry Bell, and Mary Corse) also famously employed neon or other alternative, sometimes mundane materials in their mission to explore sensory phenomena and perception. Such material experimentation runs through the works in *California*. Hugo McCloud (b. 1980, Palo Alto, CA; lives in Los Angeles) describes his process as one of “building” rather than painting. He combines traditional pigments and woodblock printing techniques with unconventional industrial materials—tar, aluminium sheeting, plastic—in large-scale collaged paintings that reckon with class, labour, geopolitics, and the environment. The work on view belongs to a series that transforms ubiquitous single-use plastic bags into transcendent, painterly scenes.

The ambient environments the Light and Space artists achieved are often characterised by airy, sublime palettes inspired by Southern California’s surf, sand, and sky. Such atmosphere reverberates in several of the included works, even as their subject matter evokes other worlds. In Sara Issakharian’s (b. 1983, Tehran, Iran; lives in Los Angeles) ethereal, mixed-media paintings, everything is in flux.

Reflecting on issues of migration, state violence, grief, and women's rights, she paints complex, palimpsestic compositions inspired by early modernist depictions of war, Persian miniature paintings, Egyptian and Indian sculpture, and Greek mythology. Painting animals as proxies for human subjects, she centres on life's contradictions—the way aggression can be soft, humour can attend to pain, and home can be nowhere and anywhere.

California's natural and urban landscapes feature in or inform many of the included works, sometimes manifesting in relation to mosaic-like patterns. Two kaleidoscopic geometric abstractions by **June Edmonds** (b. 1959; born and lives in Los Angeles) draw on the palette of local flora. For more than forty years, Edmonds has explored the intersectionality of identity, Black history, and spirituality in dynamic abstract and figurative paintings of domestic and pastoral scenes. With these paintings, she imagines the fecundity of her neighbourhood before it was settled. Both compositions feature fragmented versions of the Riverleaf symbol, which for the artist represents a blockage to ancestral memory.

Vibrant fragmentation likewise appears in the paintings of **Hilary Pecis** (b. 1979, Fullerton, CA; lives in Los Angeles), who amplifies the hues and forms of her native Southern California. These subtle manipulations introduce psychological dimension to her still lifes and landscapes, which are animated by personal details. Pecis's work often reflects the way nature moves indoors in California; through open windows, houseplants, courtyard gardens, vases filled with blooms. Palm trees, succulents, and sage brush interweave with riotous geometric and floral motifs on domestic textiles, ceramics, and wallpaper. Her deft handling of pattern echoes the tessellating landscapes and interior scenes of Bay Area Funk artists Franklin Williams and Maija Peeples-Bright.

Collectively, the works in *California* reveal the ways in which today's artists pay homage to, elaborate, and depart from the region's defining art and cultural histories through innovative approaches to material and sensitive engagements with radiant colour.

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