

# Elliott Hundley

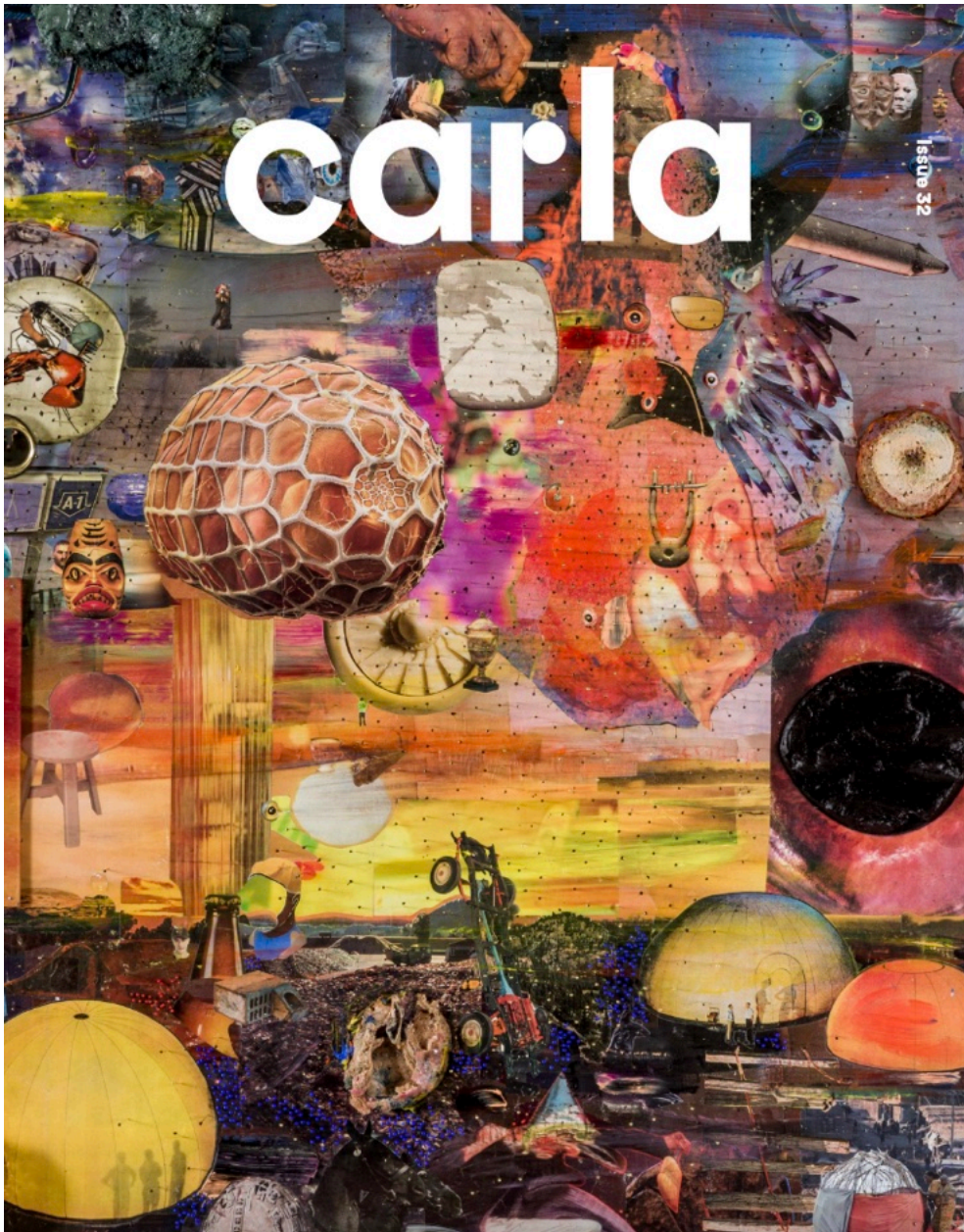
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## Interview with Elliott Hundley

SAMPSON OHRINGER

JUNE 1, 2023



# Interview with Elliott Hundley

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In Jean Genet's 1956 play *The Balcony*, Irma, the madam of a brothel, frantically seeks to build and maintain the fantasies of her clients against the backdrop of a revolutionary uprising in an unnamed city. Central to the play is the delicacy of these dalliances; they are vulnerable to shifting and shattering at a moment's notice. While multimedia artist Elliott Hundley's past work has focused on ancient Greek theater, including references to *The Bacchae* and *The Illiad*, his latest exhibition at Regen Projects took inspiration from Genet's work of deconstructionist theater. One of the highlights was a wall-length collage entitled *Balcony* (2021), for which the artist limited his intervention on the canvas to only where his arms could reach, leaving the upper edge empty. With this constraint, the piece highlights the play's intertwined themes of physicality, intimacy, power, and performance.

Entitled *Echo*, the exhibition investigated the conditions of both art-making and art viewing as Hundley transformed the gallery into a simulation of his Chinatown studio. This gesture emphasized the open-ended process by which he creates his densely composed work. Large sheets of purple foam affixed to the gallery's walls became ad-hoc workspaces for Hundley's extensive archive of images, which he pinned to the foam in enticing groupings alongside standalone artworks. Hundley's images are often sourced from pop culture and advertising media, but he also includes intimate photographs of close friends and

family performing staged scenes from classical theater in his studio. The artist meticulously cuts each figure out of the photographic prints, often abstracting them into a tangle of limbs and props. Sometimes, the images repeat, alluding to a seriality or narrative that never fully forms. At Regen Projects, the purple foam backdrop served as a connective tissue, linking together the studio archives, collages, sculptures, and paintings. The fluidity among these diverse media immersed the viewer in an atmosphere of ongoing artistic formation. On a long shelf in the gallery's eastern hallway, Hundley arranged a collection of found knickknacks, many set within individual plastic vitrines. Intermingled with potted plants, drawings, and ceramics, the grouping felt random yet deliberate, as if the objects took on significance simply by their placement next to each other. Nothing felt permanent.

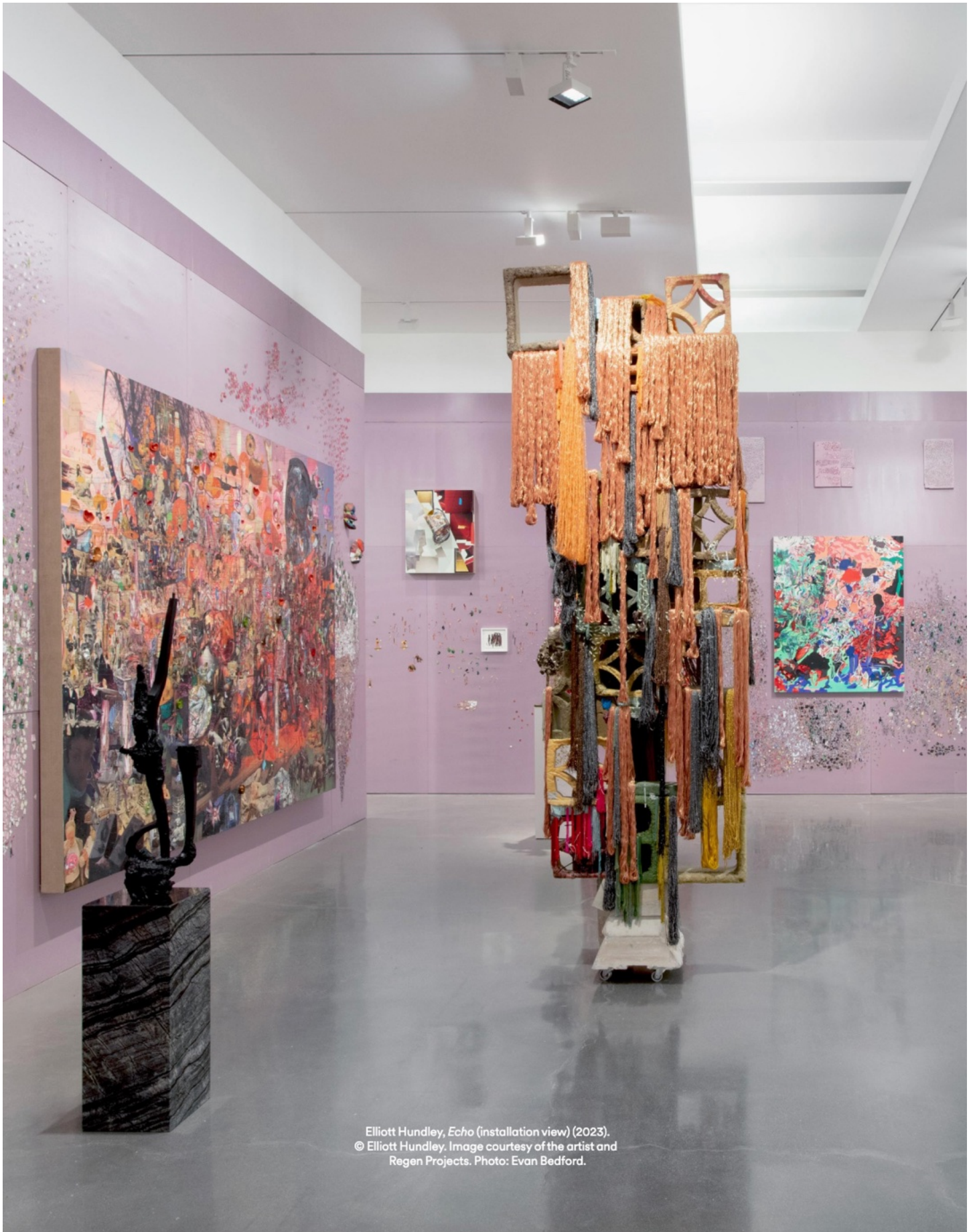
Though *Echo* highlighted more than 20 years of work, Hundley's installation allowed disparate works to bleed together, emphasizing the messy process of creation. This messiness was best expressed in the sculptural work *Echo* (2022), which gave the exhibition its name. *Echo* is also the name of Hundley's pet African grey parrot, who, during the process of creating the show, would constantly chew through the purple foam while the artist worked. Hundley chose to see these parrot-chewed scraps of foam as a new material instead of a burden.

In our recent conversation, Hundley and I discussed the importance of his studio as more than a production site for art, the relationship between preserving memory and openness to the future, and the central role of community in his practice.

Sampson Ohringer



Image courtesy of Kasmin, New York  
and Regen Projects, Los Angeles.  
Photo: © Max Knight.



Elliott Hundley, *Echo* (installation view) (2023).  
© Elliott Hundley. Image courtesy of the artist and  
Regen Projects. Photo: Evan Bedford.

**Sampson Ohringer: Can you talk about your relationship with the studio and how it may be different from that of other artists? Or how your studio takes on an artwork-like quality of its own?**

Elliott Hundley: I mean, the first thing is I insist on living in it, and I can't see another way. Whenever I've had a studio that's separate, I end up working in my home. I think there's something about the way that the things I put in my head... like right now, I've got two dogs on my lap, a bird. When I was working in the gallery installing, I noticed a lack of warmth that made me more self-conscious. Whereas the way that I work in my home, [making work is] seamless with everything else I do. It just doesn't feel like work. I think there's something about decorating, the idea of nesting and creating a space around yourself—I think of [decorating] literally, like it generates objects.

**SO: In Genet's *The Balcony*, which you reference in one of your work's titles, the brothel is described as a "house of illusions." At the recent press preview for your Regen show, you described taking on the role of the "madam" of your studio. I'm curious how you understand that role as a figure of authority who is running the show without necessarily exerting control.**

EH: Irma in that play is orchestrating [the liaisons]—she has a little tool that she uses to see every room. But she's scrambling the whole time. She has anxiety about what's going on outside [of the brothel]; she's constantly nagging everybody to do what they're supposed to do. She actually doesn't have that much control, she's more like a shepherd. I like to think of myself as a shepherd or a gardener. I try not to be scrambling. If the effect of my art is anxious, the process is the opposite. The process is a way to keep me quite balanced and calm and happy.

**SO: My understanding of *The Balcony* is that it is about the relationship**

**of this performance, or illusion, to power, and attempts to claim or legitimize that power. In some ways, there's a very cynical dimension to how the play understands what illusion can be used for—it shows how people crave illusion and performance.**

EH: It's like Baudrillard's simulacrum; [performance] gives us the illusion that things are comprehensible. It gives us the illusion that there's a structure.

**SO: Your work doesn't often get discussed in terms like "power" and "simulation." Can you expand on that?**

EH: My work is a simulation. It's a simulation of experience and memory. It's trying to tap into someone else's experience and memory and then, in the disorientation, practice discernment, interpretation, and make meaning. We're all making meaning constantly. By that I mean, gathering information, collating it with the past, and creating narratives about the future. A lot of us do that thoughtlessly. I think that's why doing drugs can be good for people, because it disrupts their patterns of thought. I'm not a big drug user, but I try to make my art another means to do that.

**SO: How do you understand your audience and their involvement with the work within this studio or "house of illusions?"**

EH: Well, the first audience is the subject of the photograph[s]. They see me photograph them and they understand my direction, and there's a certain attitude and autonomy and authorship that I want them to feel.

When I do that, I do not think about the audience. I don't really think about the person looking at the artwork until deep into the process. It primarily exists for me in the outset.

**SO: It seems that because your studio is so much a part of the work itself—it's not just a room to make a painting in,**



Top: Elliott Hundley, *The Plague* (detail) (2016).  
© Elliott Hundley. Image courtesy of the artist and  
Regen Projects. Photo: Evan Bedford.

Bottom: Elliott Hundley, *Echo* (installation view) (2023).  
© Elliott Hundley. Image courtesy of the artist and  
Regen Projects. Photo: Evan Bedford.

**for example—you're always aware of how the space presents.**

**EH:** For me, it's an invitation. It's as much for other people as it is for me. I invite everybody to my studio and I do exhibitions for other artists in my studio. I think that when people see how I live, they understand me and my values more. There's theatricality to it, certainly.

**SO:** The artist Kurt Schwitters and *Merzbau* (1923–37) (his home and studio, which he turned into a live-in sculpture) come to mind as a touchpoint for how you are thinking about your space.

**EH:** I really disdain domestic spaces. I don't want to live in a house. Kurt Schwitters was undermining the bourgeois idea of the home. He was choosing something else.

**SO:** Another way of living.

**EH:** Why don't we all create our own *Merzbau*?

**SO:** A significant part of your work, and a significant part of *Merzbau*, is the primacy of process and change. There is a porousness that is not about the objects themselves but the relationship between them. How do you balance that with the importance of collecting and preserving objects in your work?

**EH:** Because the archive is not porous?

**SO:** Or it often becomes fossilized.

**EH:** What's funny is I originally started putting objects in my life in vitrines because they were like barnacles on my life. For me, putting the object that I couldn't get rid of—basically, my archive—in a vitrine was a way to carve it off my body to keep it from weighing me down, so that I could become a new person. I didn't have to be defined by the sentimental attachment to the object.

But I will not let go of it. A lot of people let go and reject, but for me, that was not an option. I would rather be many people than forget who I was.

**SO:** I'm interested in this idea that the meaning accumulates with time. I've heard you use the phrase, "detritus of empire" to describe your use of found objects. There's a very real political dimension to displaying the stuff our society has discarded.

**EH:** I love *Mad Max* because it's about bricolage and repurposing... We live in an age of material excess, there's no doubt. It is beyond what it's ever been and it is not sustainable. That's just the environment I'm making art in. I'm trying not to contribute. I rarely buy new things. But it's just where we're at—peak oil. So to make art that doesn't acknowledge that would be humorous. Or delusional. It's not so much the subject for me as that I'm just a parasite on it. I'm just a scavenger.

**SO:** But also the fact that you save all of these found and personal objects is really meaningful—I've heard you say that you are "susceptible to nostalgia." Can you explain that? How do you ward it off in your work?

**EH:** How do you honor the past and stay in touch with it emotionally without longing for it? I don't want to long for another time. I don't think that's good. But I want to honor every experience I've had. That's just the key to successful living. How do you genuinely stay in touch with everyone you've been and honor and accept those experiences in the present without longing for the past or the future?

Nostalgia is intrinsically conservative because it honors what is known rather than what is unknown. And I am too intellectually invested in possibility to be nostalgic.

**SO:** I think that presents in the work in terms of this openness to contingency—



EH: And possibility and speculation.

[Echo interrupts the conversation with smoke-alarm-like chirps]

**SO: This might be a good time to ask about Echo's relationship to the exhibition. I know he participated in making one of the pieces, as well as gave the show its title.**

EH: He was tearing up the foam while I was working on it. I thought he was just mocking me. And then I thought, "You know, I'm pretty much that simple." I'm just tearing up material to nest. I just enjoyed thinking, "What if it's just that simple?"

**SO: Your work is as much about a way of living as it is about what ends up in the exhibition.**

EH: I've changed the way I think about my work with this last show. I've started to think that maybe the subject of my work is creativity. It's about anxiety, it's about issues of scale, it's about power. But after I saw my last show [at Regen Projects], the culminating theme was the power of creativity.

For example, I try to do two studio visits with other artists a week. Or I have these shows in my house [for other artists]. Because for me, it isn't just about my creativity. My interest is all of our creativity. If I have somebody over to the studio, when I talk about my work, because I have to, it's much more interesting to hold it in relation to somebody else's art for a moment, and then, the next time they come, to hold it in relation to somebody else's art, so that the conversation broadens. I think it's enriched [me] instead of staring at my navel and expecting everybody else to be interested in what I'm interested in.

**SO: Part of creativity is about relating to others.**

EH: I think so. I think about it as generating ideas—and more than generating ideas, generating questions. Even the

idea of generating a bond socially is a creative act where something didn't exist previously. I also think the more I study creativity, [the more I think] that pretty much all artists are good. They just aren't understood. It always happens that the more I learn about an artist, the more I understand the depth of their ideas.

**SO: They all require their own models of thinking.**

EH: It's up to me to change my mindset. It takes an adjustment, it takes time.

Sampson Ohringer is a Los Angeles-based writer from Chicago. He is currently pursuing a Master's in Aesthetics and Politics from CalArts' School of Critical Studies. His research focuses on media studies, micropolitics, and critical ecology.

Elliott Hundley is a multidisciplinary artist based in Los Angeles. He was recently included in the 5th Prospect New Orleans triennial (2021) and has been the subject of major solo exhibitions at Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas; Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus; and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. His work is held in museum collections including The Broad, Los Angeles; Colección Jumex, Mexico City; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk; and Museum of Modern Art, New York; among others.



Elliott Hundley, *Balcony (detail)* (2021).  
© Elliott Hundley. Image courtesy of the artist  
and Regen Projects. Photo: Evan Bedford.

# Los Angeles Times

## Review: Elliott Hundley's 'Echo' exhibition at Regen Projects courts the pure pleasure of looking

CHRISTINA CATHERINE MARTINEZ

January 30, 2023



Elliott Hundley's "Changeling," 2020, Oil, encaustic, photographs and collage on linen. 80 1/4 x 96 1/8 inches (203.8 x 244.2 cm). (© Elliott Hundley, Courtesy Regen Projects)

Oh, God, run, don't walk, to Regen Projects in Hollywood for Elliott Hundley's latest exhibition. I've sought solace in these rooms for several harried afternoons now. I can't remember the last time I had this much *fun* looking at painting, assemblage, ceramics, collage, etc.

The show is part retrospective and part departure: Hundley's previous exhibitions have nearly always taken as their starting point a single text or work of literature, often a classical or modern play, exploded and suspended in riotous mixed-media works with contemporary references. The collage elements begin as photo sessions where the artist's friends and family act out parts of the play under his summary and direction. They don't necessarily read the play themselves, so this part is kind of like an Oulipian game of telephone-meets-dress-up, with neon lights and wearing cheeky handmade costumes, or often nothing at all. They're printed and cut out like paper dolls.



"Her House Smoldering," 2011. Polyurethane foam, bamboo, plastic, pins, wood, glass, ceramic, extruded polystyrene, paper, wire, metal, string, glue, shell, silicone, rope, foam adhesive, floral foam, spray paint, soap stone, coral, leather, photographs. 145 x 146 x 38 1/2 inches (368.3 x 370.8 x 97.8 cm) (© Elliott Hundley, Regen Projects.)

"Echo" is a series of different chambers courting different kinds of attention. Entering the gallery you're greeted first thing by "Her House Smoldering" (2011), a ruin-like sculpture made of foam cinder blocks held aloft with bamboo scaffolding and crawling with pins — it's a gate, an invitation to Hundley's histories and processes and spaces of play. The central galleries are meant to echo the artist's Chinatown studio but feel like a museum's craft and anthropology departments exploded in the blender. The cool lavender of the foam walls reminds me of the coloring of more sober, historical, conservative art

spaces — I'm thinking of the Huntington or the Norton Simon, anywhere old paintings tend to hang on dusty or jewel-toned walls, signifying history or depth.

Speaking of which, I don't like all this talk of the helplessly postmodern flattening affect of collage. Hundley does away with that myopic view right quick, mixing cutouts of his own photography subjects along with the obligatory ads and ephemera, adding the heat of subjective association in lieu of total observational detachment. There is a literal depth too. Get up close and you'll see how he arranges the individual elements of his pinned collages, most of them only a few centimeters in diameter, along different lengths of the pins. It's unnerving to be the audience for such gestures: operatic in their meticulousness, observable by dint of their tiny optical real estate.

Hundley takes full advantage of his myriad material mediums to offer a sensation rarely associated with modern theater: care. I feel — I'm not sure how else to say it — *cared* for by this work. Call it the transitive property of care. I feel the pleasure of this attentiveness, even if its undercurrent is anxiety (and how could it not be? The show is literally on pins and needles!). It fuels my pleasure in looking, of paying attention to *his* attention. The walls are thrumming with it, mainly through the way the mosaiclike collages wend between the works. Tiny sequins and pictograms are strewn all over the place like seeds thrown to Echo, Hundley's pet parrot and the exhibition's namesake. The pink foam sculpture "Echo" (2022) was made in collaboration with the many bite marks of the parrot's beak. It's collage in the negative.

I spotted the Kool-Aid man — *twice*, across two different works. A minor detail, and probably a coincidence. But Kindor (he has a name) is also an avatar who likes to break the fourth wall. Or any wall.



"Balcony," 2021, Encaustic, paper, plastic, photographs, fabric, pins, foam and linen on panel. 96 x 480 x 7 inches (243.8 x 1219.2 x 17.8 cm) (© Elliott Hundley, Regen Projects)

The star of the show is "Balcony" (2021) a 40-foot-long mural in the back room, taking as its starting point Jean Genet's satirical 1960s play of the same name. The play follows the comings and goings of an upscale brothel, helmed by Madame Irma, in an unnamed city in the throes of revolution. As the play progresses, the games of power and fantasy within the brothel collapse into the action of the revolution progressing just outside. Hundley's "Balcony," a medley of aforementioned collage elements interrupted by colorful pools of poured encaustic on large linen panels, is also a collapse of power and play, constructed one tiny element at a time over the course of lockdown. You have to get close and walk the length of it many times, and yet I doubt any two viewers could extract the same experience from it. It's hot and inviting. Hundley plays Madame Irma to whatever fantasies and associations we might bring to this incredible quilt of images.

Though each painting is a stage, “Echo” sometimes operates like a text in itself. The interstitial collage elements play the role of footnotes, or more accurately, the marginalia of a slightly older, wiser reader revisiting a beloved book. The show spans 22 years of work, and Hundley is kind to both himself and us in mitigating the impulse to edit older works by framing them with these little bits and pieces of elusive references, pinned like butterflies of memory to the margins of making.

Margins — this kind of textuality is always a bit kaleidoscopic, no? A bit freeform, a bit personal? I have many books, scripts and plays in my apartment, the texts wreathed with layers of notations in different colors; visits from different Christinas I have been. Here, the anxieties of the past all hang together in louche reconciliation. There’s a word for reconciliation with the past. Forgiveness? *Oof*. Can you look in the mirror and say, “I forgive you” without throwing up in your mouth a little bit? That’s perfectly normal. Go look at these collages instead.



Elliott Hundley, “The Plague,” 2016. Paper, oil, pins, plastic, foam, and linen on panel. 96 x 147 x 11 inches (243.8 x 373.4 x 27.9 cm) (© Elliott Hundley, Regen Projects)

Specifically, take some time in front of the big foam-backed one, “The Plague” (2016). It’s puckered with what looks like bright red mouths. For a moment, I thought they were the backsides of those novelty wax lips that at one point in this country were *somehow* considered candy. They are in fact hollow plastic tomatoes, halved and bent into the suggestion of lips.

During a walk-through, Hundley explained that he was thinking about the trope of an audience throwing tomatoes at a performer. Frozen into gummy smiles, these weird mouths demonstrate how the solidity of the self-forgiving clown can take on anything, even the disdain of the audience, catching it like a bullet in the teeth. It may knock some teeth out in the process, but there is nothing scattered that can’t be gathered up and put away for later, waiting its turn for salvation from a newer you.

# Tomorrow Is Today

It is impossible to write about Prospect.5, New Orleans’s citywide art triennial, without considering the reason for its existence: Katrina.

CAROLINA A. MIRANDA  
MAY 12, 2022



Alex Marks/Prospect New Orleans/Newcomb Art Museum of Tulane University, New Orleans  
Installation view of Elliott Hundley’s *The Balcony* (2020–2021) at ‘Prospect.5: Yesterday we said tomorrow,’ New Orleans

[EXCERPT]

While Chase-Riboud’s work reflected on the ways in which history is evoked, Los Angeles–based artist Elliott Hundley focused on the ways it can be a chimera—via an astonishing forty-foot multimedia collage titled *The Balcony*, after a 1956 satire by Jean Genet. Genet’s play is set in a brothel where customers pay to role-play powerful men, roles they end up inhabiting for real when a revolution interrupts their reverie and they continue their act before a restive crowd.

Hundley’s sprawling reimagination of those sordid scenes spans ten conjoined panels jammed with thousands of small images that have been clipped out of books, magazines, and photographs and impressively arranged by theme and hue. These included depictions of ancient and modern art, geometric patterns, architectural diagrams, bodies in various states of dress and motion, objects of desire like jewelry and fancy cars, contested monuments, symbols of protest, and sundry athletes, entertainers, warriors, and politicians, including Ronald Reagan—as shown in a black-and-white reproduction of *Thin Lips* (1984–1985), Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol’s painting that depicts the president as a bogeyman of Western capitalism, with various economic terms (“outlays,” “deficit”) stenciled over his face. In its entirety, Hundley’s collage reads like a staggering portrait of our fractured United States, one in which illusion and reality are hopelessly, dangerously conflated.

# ArtReview

## Elliott Hundley *Balcony*

EVAN MOFFITT  
NOVEMBER 2021

### Elliott Hundley *Balcony*

*Kasmin, 509 West 27th Street, New York 9 September – 23 October*

The ten large, intricately collaged and painted panels in Elliott Hundley's *Balcony* are each named after a character in Jean Genet's eponymous play; hung in a circle around Kasmin's open-plan gallery, they form a kind of theatre in the round. In Genet's *Le Balcon* (1957), the Queen, Madam, Thief, Bishop, General, Judge, Rebel and Sinner each enact their desires in a brothel under siege, like archetypes of a corrupt society ripe for revolution. From a distance, Hundley's panels appear to be colourful abstractions, but at close range they reveal collaged midcentury product labels, photographs of friends in costume and cartoon images depicting twentieth-century leftist political struggles, such as the Black Power

and decolonisation movements, of which Genet was a strong supporter. *Rebel* (all works 2021), for instance features drawings of Angela Davis and Che Guevara seemingly cut from graphic novels. *Madam* meanwhile stars a woman who resembles Pina Bausch in dramatic Butoh-like poses, opposite a coquettish Bette Davis in a penumbra of mostly nude young men, registering the subversive camp of Genet's literary output quite apart from his political radicalism.

That apartness is an uneasy tension in this show, in which revolutionary politics are repeatedly atomised and aestheticised. Ancient artefacts from Africa Asia and America also appear in a wunderkammer jumble as generic stand-ins for the oppressed Other. Melted

plastic pinheads appear to fix these images in place like insects in a nineteenth-century-naturalist's display. Genet's characters are only ciphers for the powerful institutions that he thought were destroying the postwar world and so Hundley has given us a view of history seen from the same allegorical distance – a balcony view perhaps, safely above the pitchforks and burning torches. Hanging in the centre of *Balcony* is *Chandelier*, inspired by the fixture that dangles over all of Genet's drama. Crafted from found pins, wood, metal plastic and neon, Hundley's luminaire casts little light into the gallery, as if to suggest that the prospects for a revolution now are dim. *Evan Moffitt*



*Madam*, 2021, oil stick, encaustic, paper, plastic, pins, photographs, foam and linen on panel, 194 × 199 × 10 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and Kasmin, New York

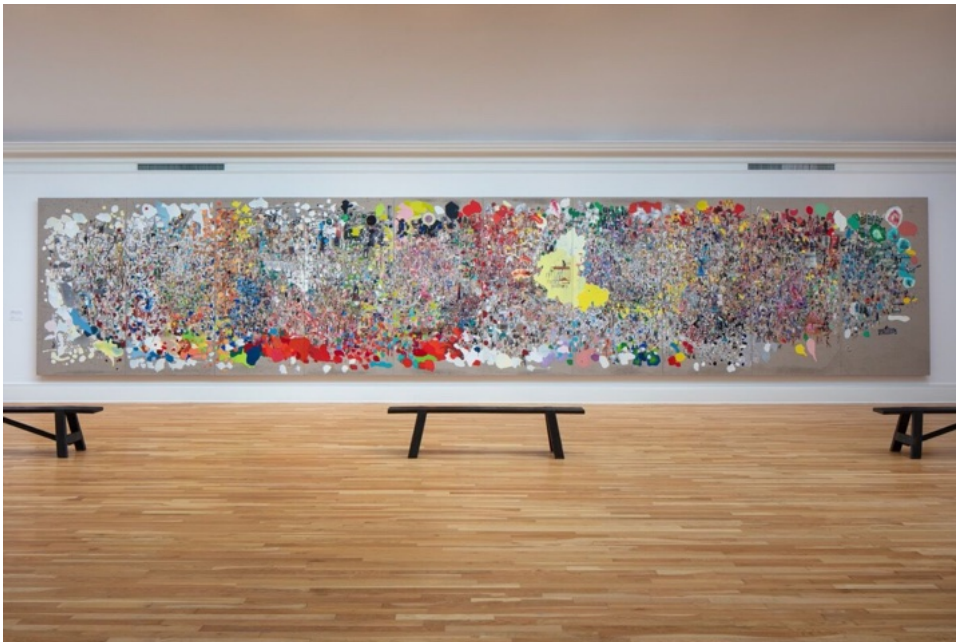




# At Prospect New Orleans, Artists Reckon with the Past to Address Crises of the Present

TORI BUSH

NOVEMBER 17, 2021



[EXCERPT]

Elliot Hundley, installation view of *The Balcony*, 2020–21, in Prospect.5 at Newcomb Gallery, New Orleans, 2021. Photo by Jeffery Johnston. Courtesy of the artist and Prospect New Orleans.

Elliot Hundley's epic collage and encaustic work *Balcony* (2020–21) completes the rhizomatic collection. The massive work intricately layers paper cutouts of historical and contemporary figures, body parts, numbers, and objects such as guns, plants, and animals. Each of the collage's panels reimagines ideas, themes, or imagery from Jean Genet's 1956 play *The Balcony*, which takes place in a brothel during a revolution. Hundley's interpretation ties together threads of history, materiality, the body, and the life of individuals to describe complicated, multifaceted realities.

# BOMB

## Inclusive Family: Elliott Hundley Interviewed by Osman Can Yerebakan

Collages as characters.

OCTOBER 11, 2021



Elliott Hundley's Los Angeles studio receives occasional visits from the local skunks. They approach the artist while he smokes in his alley, or they hang out with the stray cats. But that's okay because skunks are Hundley's favorite animals. The skunk Halloween costume that his mother made for the eight-year-old Hundley is currently sitting at his studio, a former sewing factory in Chinatown. The childhood keepsake, however, is hardly the only piece of memorabilia around. Piles of magazines, books, photographs, and other stuff are the artist's primary source for his large-scale collages which he finishes with painterly gestures.

Elliott Hundley, *Bishop*, 2021, oil stick, encaustic, paper, plastic, pins, photographs, fabric, foam and linen on panel, 76.5 × 78.5 × 4.25 inches. Courtesy of Kasmin.

Countless cutouts that Hundley has collected over the last twenty-five years, along with photographs he took of family and friends at his studio, now live across ten collages and a sculpture in his current solo exhibition, *Balcony*, at Kasmin in New York City. There are photographs of his first boyfriend from the late 1990s, for example, as well as scraps from stuff people drop off at his studio because they know he'll use them.

The exhibition's title refers to Jean Genet's 1956 play, which is the central theme for the work, so much so that each collage is named after a character, such as Madam, Queen, or Bishop. The play—which takes place in a brothel while

a revolution occurs outside in a nameless city—is typical of Genet with sex and power intertwined as both bodily and political entities. For Hundley, sex throughout the play is an auxiliary metaphor that hides the larger bartering of power. “It’s rather about identity and desire and relational power, less about the physical,” he told me.

—Osman Can Yerebakan

**Osman Can Yerebakan:** Jean Genet’s text leaves the city outside undisclosed, but did you imagine a specific city while making the works?

**Elliott Hundley:** In fact, yes, New Orleans. The mural I will show at Prospect.5 was inspired by Mardi Gras and the idea of parade floats resembling balconies. New Orleans also has a history of brothels and balconies. I’ve been there only twice, so the city is in many ways still a fantasy for me. At one point, I had considered making collages after Tennessee Williams’s *Orpheus Descending*. Cy Twombly had also done paintings about that play. After reading it, however, it didn’t feel like the best match, but it led to my series about Antonin Artaud’s *There Is No More Firmament*.

**OCY:** Let’s talk about the photographs of your family and friends in the collages and the definition of family for you as a queer person.

**EH:** Family is definitely an inclusive term for me as a gay man, but my biological family members, like my brother and mother, are in the photographs as well. They span a broader community of my people in Los Angeles. They are familiar with my practice at this point, so they come to my studio, and I first tell them a little bit about the inspiration, because they mostly haven’t read the text.



Elliott Hundley, *Sinner*, 2021, oil stick, encaustic, paper, plastic, pins, photographs, fabric, foam and linen on panel, 76.5 × 78.5 × 4 inches. Courtesy of Kasmin

**OCY:** I always find collaging to be a queer act: collecting, saving, and even hiding cutouts from different worlds to create different versions for yourself. The make-do aspect has always been a part of queer art.

**EH:** After some personality test, I learned that I am a reconciler, which I realized is what I also do in art. Salvaging, mending, resuscitating all relate to collage and world building. I don't think it's the only way to make art, but this is a template that I use. Painting is a stage, and I am delivering something. I am a repressed performer who doesn't want to use his body in front of people, but I have a latent desire to do so.

**OCY:** Then how about studio versus stage, the first one meaning isolation and having no audience while the latter is for a crowd? Studio means process and stage is the final work.

**EH:** The difference between the two is time. If I could do my work in front of people, I would gladly do so, but it's against the work's nature. I need time to perform and deliver an idea.

**OCY:** Do you see collaging as a performance due to its physical aspect?

**EH:** Not in general, but in my case, yes. The works are as large as my hands can reach when I stand in the middle. They're inscribed with my activities. Even before making them, there are steps of going through the scraps and sorting them into trays. The collaging process is up close: I don't step away. I work on many collages at the same time, so I walk around the studio. They form themselves organically in small vignettes. I cut out stuff all the time, then label and file them. Every day, I go through the piles and pick pieces based on a content or, in this show, the character. For the character of General, for example, I put a lot of porcelain imagery to reflect breaking and vulnerability, power but also fragility, like a bull in a china shop.



Detail of Elliott Hundley, *Sinner*, 2021, oil stick, encaustic, paper, plastic, pins, photographs, fabric, foam and linen on panel, 76.5 × 78.5 × 4 inches. Courtesy of Kasmin.

**OCY:** What about the play's sexual power which reflects a bureaucratic authority with characters such as Police, General, and Thief? Genet attributes them the ability to both cause and control chaos. Do you consider your collages chaotic?

**EH:** I was initially confused by the play, which made it appealing to use as a source. It felt labyrinthine, like the illusions inside a house of mirrors. That effect is something I always strive for in my work: the viewer can get lost or disoriented in it.

**OCY:** Genet seems self-destructive to me, always choosing the painful path. I might be over-interpreting, but your strategy to use pins reads as an allusion to this pain.

**EH:** The work, and therefore the pins, are about memorializing, holding onto a memory or solidifying it. A pin to me captures not a sudden blow but rather a nagging, annoying, insidious violence that is undermining. I should note that I am not nihilistic, and my work is definitely not either.

**OCY:** When viewed from a few steps away, each work is a memory map that points to different moments in time through your filtering of them.

**EH:** The process is diaristic, all about memory. Altogether, they might as well be a scrap book. The two small works on both sides of the entrance are titled by the day I made them. They bookend the larger collages.

**OCY:** Those two might be viewers watching the larger works which each reflect a character with the chandelier hanging center stage.

**EH:** Definitely.

**OCY:** What is your strategy for collecting images that turn into cutouts?

**EH:** I've been collecting stuff in a passive way. Last night, I found a painting on the street while walking to my hotel. I eventually gave it to another person on the street, but I would have otherwise kept it to make art. The process is more about sensibility than activity.



Installation view of *Elliott Hundley: Balcony*, Kasmin. Photo by Photo by Christopher Stach. Courtesy of Kasmin.

**OCY:** The chandelier sculpture conveys the idea that the exhibition is a stage, something operatic which is not foreign to Genet. Both *The Balcony* and *The Maids* have been turned into operas, and that's not surprising because his characters act operatic in the sense that they refuse to submit to logic and make erratic decisions within the reality of their circumstances which are oftentimes dire.

**EH:** In his description of the set, the chandelier is the only thing that remains stable for the entire play. For me, it's a bell jar that holds the entire narrative while it's entirely fake. A chandelier is like the talisman or reminder to ground yourself in the fantasy, a frame within artificiality; reality is outside of it. The play's exterior scenes still have the chandelier.

**OCY:** There is also something queer about a chandelier. A seemingly utilitarian object that defies that role and chooses to be excessively flamboyant. It goes against the pressure of (re)productivity.

**EH:** Chandeliers are places for projection in both senses; they are interplays of light. They are not just objects that dissolve light but rather are transportive. They're symbols of fragility in a contractual society. My chandelier in the show has layers of materials. The base is an armature from a Burning Man float I found in a dumpster. It was perhaps made to look like a dystopian vessel. I took it, bent it, and added neon. The neon parts in this sculpture are from a collaboration with a glass bender who came to my studio. I wanted them to look like drawings. If you look closer, you see that the light is moving within the tube, which gives an electric or snaking effect.

**OCY:** There's a symphonic element to the collages as if they could create music. Do you listen to music while you work at your studio?

**EH:** I like the idea of them having the potential to make sound. I listen to 1980s Italian summer hits. Do you know Giuni Russo's "Un'estate al mare"?

# Galerie

## 7 Must-See Gallery Exhibitions in New York This September

From Alice Neel at David Zwirner to Ghada Amer at Marianne Boesky, these fall shows are not to be missed

JAMIE HOWIE  
SEPTEMBER 17, 2021



“Balcony” at Kasmin. Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Kasmin, New York

[EXCERPT]

Pandemic or not, New York is finally making a comeback. This week, Broadway theatres reopened after going dark for an unprecedented 18 months, and a slew of museums and galleries are continuing to open their doors to the public with exciting new exhibitions. Below, we’ve rounded up seven of the must-see art shows opening in the city this season, each offering visitors exceptional works and a captivating viewing experience.

### 2. Kasmin | Elliot Hundley, “Balcony”

Inspired by Jean Genet’s 1957 play *The Balcony*, Elliot Hundley takes his mixed-media style to a new level with exciting, eye-catching pieces that delve into various aspects of life including religious culture, fantasy, performance, moral and social hierarchies, as well as the artist’s own personal experience. Encapsulating complex narratives and diverse motifs, these large scale panels create a compelling experience for the audience as the eye tirelessly travels to every inch of the canvas.

# Los Angeles Times

## It's the Ultimate Cut and Paste Job

How do you curate 7,500 works into a 39-piece MOCA show? Scissors are involved, Elliott Hundley says.

DEBORAH VANKIN  
JUNE 16, 2019



Multimedia artist Elliott Hundley at MOCA, where he co-organized the “Open House” exhibition.  
(Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)

You could say that Elliott Hundley likes to collect things. The painter and multimedia artist is known for densely storied works with a teeming array of materials that he stockpiles in his cluttered downtown L.A. studio — paint, fabric, wood, wire, scores of photograph cutouts and found objects. Not to mention ancient myths and other narratives, which often course through his canvases.

Now, the artist, who has two exhibitions on view in L.A. and was recently awarded a 2019 Guggenheim fellowship, has pivoted. He’s still amassing and juxtaposing objects, a central part of his practice, but most recently, he has applied his approach to 39 works at the Museum of Contemporary Art for an exhibition he co-organized.



As part of MOCA's 40th anniversary, the museum invited artists to collaborate with its curators on re-installations of the permanent collection. "Open House: Elliott Hundley," which centers on contemporary collage and assemblage art, kicks off the series. Colombian-born artist Gala Porras-Kim's take on the collection will open in October. With more than 7,500 objects to choose from, where does an artist-tuned-curator even start?

With a pair of scissors, Hundley says, shaking his head at the enormity of the project during a recent walkthrough of the exhibition.

Cutting up and stockpiling minuscule images to use in his own art is something Hundley does in his downtime to relax, he says. It's a calming, meditative, almost performative part of his art-making. He approached the MOCA show in the same way. After combing through three enormous binders listing thumbnail pictures and descriptions of every work in MOCA's collection, Hundley requested a second set of binders to cut up, carving out each individual artwork and making piles on a tabletop.

"I made a pile of things I didn't know about, I made a pile of things I loved," Hundley says. "I made a pile about drawing in space, and a pile about skin. I'm a visual person, so I wanted to see how the works related to one another. For me, it wasn't as cerebral. It was a very tactile process."



Michel Majerus' "MoM-Block II" (1996), on view at MOCA for the first time in "Open House: Elliott Hundley."  
(Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)

He and MOCA assistant curator Bryan Barcena whittled down the works before having maquettes made, so they could further play, rearranging the tiny pieces on a model of the museum. The resulting "constellation" of artworks, across three MOCA galleries, represents a sort of three-dimensional assemblage work itself, one that explores approaches to collage in painting, printmaking, photography, sculpture and video as it also draws connections between artists.

“The sensibility that the material process engenders is one of reconciling dissonance,” Hundley says. “They’re all taking materials and images and symbols out of their context and putting them in a new context within a new group of symbols and materials — and the result is that everything gets transformed.”



“Senorita” (1962), by Bruce Conner, is one of Hundley’s favorite artworks of all time.  
(Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)

Hundley included one of his all-time favorite works, Bruce Conner’s “Senorita” (1962), which he saw for the first time more than a decade ago on a tour through MOCA’s storage vault when he was in grad school. He included works by influences such as Robert Rauschenberg and Betye Saar, along with his former UCLA professor Lari Pittman. There are discoveries he didn’t know MOCA owned, such as Raymond Saunders’ “Palette” (1983), along with works that had never been displayed at the museum before, like Michel Majerus’ multipanel painting “MoM-Block II” (1996). Hundley included his own ornate banner, the sculptural assemblage “Hyacinth” (2006), which references a Greek myth about love and death.

“I was trying to put things together that maybe don’t belong together, but where one can intuit an underlying logic or shared, maybe, values,” Hundley says.

Many of the works, such as Jose M. Fors’ sepia-toned family photo collage “Los Retratos III” (2001) and Leonardo Drew’s grid of burnt, stained canvas blocks, “Untitled” (1994), speak to memory and the passage of time, a through line in much of Hundley’s work. They’re hung near Brenna Youngblood’s equally distressed “3 dollar bill (dirty money)” (2013).

“The distressed surfaces, these are things — images and materials — that have been resuscitated and repurposed,” Hundley says.



The distressed surface of “Untitled” (1994), by Leonardo Drew.  
(Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)

Spending more than a year immersed in MOCA’s catalogs sparked a renewed appreciation for the depth of the museum’s holdings, Hundley says, but he also noticed voids in the collection.

“I saw that there were gaps in the representation of some local, very important artists,” he says, adding that two of the works in the show are on loan: Saar’s assemblage “The Destiny of Latitude & Longitude” (2010) and Noah Purifoy’s “One White Paint Brush and a Pony Tail” (1989).

“MOCA does own a Betye Saar, but it’s a small work, and I think she’s a master of assemblage and was central to the idea for the show,” Hundley says of why he borrowed a more significant work from the artist. “And Noah Purifoy, it’s the first piece you see when you walk in the show. Again, he’s a local who’s a master in this way of working.”



Betye Saar's "The Destiny of Latitude & Longitude" (2010)  
(Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)

As Hundley was organizing the MOCA show, he was making work for an exhibition now on view at Regen Projects gallery. The enormous abstract, sculptural landscapes in "Clearing" are partly influenced by Hundley's MOCA experience.

Barbara T. Smith's wall assemblage "Blue Shards" (1997-99), for example, inspired Hundley to collect materials for his canvases as she did, stumbling upon discarded objects while on long, meditative walks, as opposed to scouring thrift stores or dumpster-diving.

"No one would know that; it's not a part of the meaning of the work," Hundley says. "It's just a part of the process of me trying to learn about her, and in learning about her and her method, grow myself as an artist."

The five new works in "Clearing" are explosions of color and texture that are dizzying up close and form loose, disjointed landscapes from afar. Some of the artists featured in "Open House," such as Rauschenberg, are represented in the collaged canvases, but the two shows are not meant to be in dialogue — in fact, the opposite. The Regen works are devoid of any sort of imposed narrative.

"I've had so many exhibitions, one after another, about works of literature and drama, and I felt the need to make a physical and material advance," Hundley says. "And to do that, I didn't want to be tethered to predetermined content."

The show is a "clearing" on many levels, Hundley says. "Clearing" refers to using 20 years' worth of materials in the new works. It's a meditative clearing of the mind, and the landscapes allude to a physical, spatial clearing.

“It’s about taking stock of the past to create a foundation to move forward,” Hundley says.

MOCA’s “Open House” series might do the same for the museum, he adds.



Elliott Hundley’s “Clearing II” (2019), on view at Regen Projects.

(Elliott Hundley / Regen Projects)

“The more artists become really knowledgeable about the collection, the more it will be seen in the community as an archive and resource for study, not just for display,” he says. “And having artists with their hands in it may also help them point out ways to tell the kind of story they feel is representative of our communities.”

# Los Angeles Times

## Critic's Notebook: MOCA on the rebound? Three strong shows and free entry are welcome signs of change

CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT  
JUNE 12, 2019



Jessica Stockholder, "White Light Laid Frozen," 2005, mixed media

In a resurrection myth from ancient Greece, the powerful god Apollo accidentally kills Hyacinth, a beautiful Spartan prince, when a playful game of throwing a metal discus goes tragically awry. The mortal youth, struck in the forehead, dies in his divine lover's arms

Later reborn as a notably phallic spring flower to assuage Apollo's grief, Hyacinth, a representation of cycles of decay and renewal, makes an excellent motif for an anniversary celebration at the Museum of Contemporary Art. The renowned institution has had its troubles for the last decade, both financially and in terms of leadership. But as its 40th birthday rolls around, MOCA wants its public to know that the calamities are past. A new flowering is underway.

Time will tell, of course. But one artist is musing on Hyacinth and renewal.

“Open House: Elliott Hundley” is the first in a planned series of exhibitions that has become a general museum staple. Artists represented in the collection will be invited to select a show from among the museum’s holdings. Art does come from art, after all.

Hundley slyly built his show around “Hyacinth,” his elaborate 2006 collage composed from photographs, bits of cloth, painted papers, fringes and other fragile materials all pinned to a large wooden armature. Eight feet tall, just slightly larger than life, the construction leans against a wall.



Elliott Hundley, “Hyacinth,” 2006, mixed media (MOCA)

Classical depictions of Hyacinth’s death typically show his exquisite, lifeless corpse held gently in despairing Apollo’s arms. Hundley’s subtly arranged composition recalls a body draped across a painting’s stretcher bars. In this exceptional mixed-media work, painting is likewise embraced and mourned.

Collage and assemblage are mediums born of the modern Industrial Age of mass production. The role that paintings historically played in Western cultural life changed. Hundley chose a diverse range of about 40 related works from MOCA's collection — including everything from paintings to films.

At one end of the spectrum is "Small Rebus," a 1956 hybrid masterpiece by Robert Rauschenberg, who also regularly riffed on classical myths. At the other is Betye Saar's 2010 "The Destiny of Latitude & Longitude," sailing ships and bundles of mottled gray hair housed inside an extravagant birdcage, silently singing a mordant refrain of freedom and captivity.

To elucidate his own collage, Hundley installed smartly chosen works on either side.

To the right, Alexis Smith's "Blue Denim" features old posters for "Young, Willing and Eager" and "The Young Go Wild," '60s B-movies about thrill-seeking youth. The clamps to a coil of actual jumper cables grip pictures of sexy young women, who jump-start the action.

To the left, Brenna Youngblood's mixed-media painting "3 dollar bill (dirty money)" slips a trio of enlarged portraits of George Washington into the brushy soup of a large abstract painting's badly scarred and bandaged surface. It's as queer a take on the market domination of art as can be imagined.

Apollo's eventual resurrection of the beautiful Hyacinth, who attained immortality, has wry resonance for an art museum. Hundley's savvy show is a superlative launch for the series.



# Los Angeles Times

## Putting time under a magnifying glass

A Broad exhibit, with a painting by Elliott Hundley, explores rage, history and more.

DEBORAH VANKIN

JULY 31, 2018



Elliott Hundley's "the high house low!" (2011), on view at the Broad, is part of the exhibition "A Journey That Wasn't."  
(Elliott Hundley and the Broad Art Foundation)

Time is fluid and malleable in Elliott Hundley's three dimensional, mixed-media painting "the high house low!" (2011), an explosion of color and texture that sucks the viewer into a visual drama sparking with fire and rage.

The four-panel assemblage work measuring more than 16 feet wide — a vortex of collaged and pinned cutouts from photographs and letters along with mounted jewelry wire, decorative fans, sequins, bits of fabric and other found objects — has gone on view at the Broad museum. It's part of the exhibition "A Journey That Wasn't," a reinstallation of the permanent collection that explores the passage of time.

The show's 55 paintings, photographs, sculptures, films and installations are by 21 artists. They address memory and perception, aging and evolving identity, history, creativity and art appropriation, among other themes. Hundley's work, an ode to Euripides' 400 BC Greek tragedy "The Bacchae," fuses all those ideas and more.

Each panel depicts the same passage from the play but different translations of it from 1959, 1968, 1998 and 2008. A giant, sliding magnifying glass hovering over the canvas allows viewers to peer into Hundley's dense worlds, which are teeming with itty bitty objects conveying big ideas.



A detail of Elliott Hundley's painting "the high house low!" (Coley Brown / The Broad Art Foundation)

The Los Angeles artist cites Robert Rauschenberg, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Richard Tuttle and Cy Twombly as inspirations along with the poet Anne Carson and the late San Francisco artist Jess Collins.

Hundley has been working in large-scale assemblage for more than a decade. It's a format that's purposefully transformable, he said in this edited conversation.

"The implication is you can rearrange the piece by taking the pins out and putting them in different places or moving the magnifying glass around," Hundley said. "One of the reasons I like using the pins in these open configurations, is I'm creating a work that is porous and penetrable and changing. That's the worldview that I believe in."

### **Where did your style come from?**

It started because I had really small studios, and I'd make work the size of my walls, 16 feet. I tended to work a lot, but I had a small space, so I'd just cover every surface. And the work is about that, the discrepancy of scale.

For me, it's about how we interface with information and culture or existential threat. There's a lot in our world that can make us feel quite small, and how do we reconcile that, and what's the beauty in that? So it feels quite natural to

work in such a large scale. These figures are also bigger than life size when you see them in person, so it increases the theatricality of it all.



Artist Elliott Hundley, photographed at his studio in Los Angeles with his dog Spicoli. (Myung J. Chun / Los Angeles Times)

### **Where do you find the objects you use in your paintings, and how do they inform the work?**

I go to antique stores and thrift stores and flea markets. It used to be a constant part of my practice. Now, I have such an enormous pile of stuff that I don't have to do it as frequently, but it's something I really love doing.

Often, the actual object might inspire a new work with a certain idea or form. Like when I found that magnifying glass. It was from an antique store in Pasadena. It was used in the '50s or '60s in front of a tiny television to make the screen bigger. I was already at a time in my work where I was thinking about a shift in scale from something really small to really big. I found that and thought: This is a way to take that further, to stretch that out — this really big painting with really small parts.

I think of the found objects like I think of the singular images removed from their context. Basically, I'm giving them a new purpose. I also like sculptural objects because they reference recycling and repurposing; collage is appealing to me because it's a metaphor for resuscitation and life and Earth cycles, giving something new purpose.

Sculpture is intrinsically more physical; so if there are objects in the piece, it calls attention to the idea that the whole collage is made of little objects, which can be handled and touched. It renders the piece more performative and tactile.



Elliott Hundley's painting "the high house low!" installed at the Broad. (Coley Brown / The Broad Art Foundation)

**Tell us about "The Bacchae." How is your painting also a performative work?**

It's a revenge play. Dionysus comes back to Thebes so Thebes can acknowledge he's actually the son of Semele and Zeus. And the king of Thebes won't acknowledge him, so he wreaks havoc by revenge. It ends on quite a gruesome tragedy. So this painting depicts the moment in the play when Dionysus makes the king of Thebes hallucinate. It's called "the high house low!" because he creates the sort of hallucination for the king that his palace is burning and crumbling to the ground and destroyed.

One of the aspects that's not necessarily evident is that I have people whom I know perform the play, and that's how the work begins. I take photographs of this private, improvised performance and print those large and make all the collages from there. I think of these works as allegorical, so it's a way to use an antique narrative but tie it to the present.

**You use a lot of hot colors and reflective surfaces in the work. How do the materials intersect with the narrative?**

I was thinking about this piece like it was a disaster painting that was also like a Klimt. If you look at it from an earthly perspective, it looks like destroyed architecture and fires and desert landscape, so it feels like John Martin's concept of the hysterical sublime or hell. If you look at it from Dionysus' perspective, it feels like a Klimt portrait — more ethereal, untouchable. I thought hot colors were really about a sense of fire and destruction. The reflectivity is really coming from religious iconography — altar pieces. I did want it to feel like a version of hell.



Hundley with Sweet Pee Oui and Spicoli. (Myung J. Chun / Los Angeles Times)

**The Broad show “A Journey That Wasn’t” is about time. How does your painting address the concept?**

I picked antique literature not because I’m necessarily into antique culture but [because] I’m interested in the time between their culture and now, basically all that could be retained or lost. One of my favorite paintings is in the Villa of Mysteries in Pompeii, a dining room fresco. It was preserved because of all the ash; it was just so incredible. But we don’t really understand what they’re depicting — these Dionysian rites and rituals. It’s not 100% clear what’s going on in the painting.

I’m also interested in translations. I included them because it’s four subjective iterations, over time, through cultural moments and points of view. There’s an original text, and it keeps changing over time, through different perspectives and languages.

To me, that’s what’s really fascinating about time — how we view our own past and how, actually, the ground that we’re standing on is not nearly as firm as we’d like to believe. Which means, also, the present isn’t as clear as a lot of people would like to believe. Which promotes criticality and sensitivity and empathy. One should not be so secure in their personal belief system.

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

## Elliott Hundley's Kaleidoscopic Artworks

MAYER RUS  
MARCH, 2013



Artist Elliott Hundley in his Los Angeles studio with a group of works in progress.

Stepping into Elliott Hundley's Los Angeles studio is a lot like standing before one of his monumental wall-hung assemblages—you're not quite sure where to look first. Both are laden with a kaleidoscopic mix of seductive images and mysterious items, and both reward closer inspection.

A native of North Carolina, the artist began attracting savvy collectors—among them Eli Broad and Peter Brant—shortly after receiving his MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles in 2005. A solo show of his work at the Hammer Museum a year later introduced viewers to his enigmatic combinations of painting, sculpture, collage, and photography in a densely imbricated installation. That display also revealed many of his signature themes, including antiquity, theater, and other subjects that have captivated Hundley since his five-year sojourn in Rome before graduate school.



Soon . . . (2012). Photo courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles © Elliott Hundley

“The shock of seeing so many historic epochs collapsed in a single building or street was astonishing,” he says of his experience abroad. “I was making gestural abstract paintings at the time, but the energy of Rome really spurred my interest in narrative art.”

Storytelling is essential to his practice, as evidenced by his celebrated series “The Bacchae,” a rapturous fugue on Euripides’ tale of ecstasy and violence. After building sets for his imaginary production of the play and photographing friends and family as the characters, Hundley incorporated the images into hallucinatory tableaux he refers to as “billboards,” which are also embellished with thousands of found objects, magazine clippings, sequins, flowers, text passages, and magnifying glasses—all obsessively layered and secured with glue and an army of straight pins that extends the picture plane outward into three dimensions. The series debuted at New York’s Andrea Rosen Gallery and L.A.’s Regen Projects before traveling to museums.



*Untitled* (2012). Photo courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles © Elliott Hundley



*A Clearing IV* (2009). Photo courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles © Elliott Hundley

Hundley promises that his next show, at Andrea Rosen later this spring, will reveal the behind-the-scenes action of his pretend production. “It’s as if the curtain came down on *The Bacchae* and now you’re backstage,” he explains of the new work, which—as usual for him—will span multiple media. The play, it seems, is still the thing.



## Review: Elliott Hundley

PATRICIA MORA  
MARCH 2, 2012



*eyes that run like leaping fire* (2011) Elliott Hundley

While ancient Greek texts are being jettisoned for "economically viable" collegiate fare, they still offer trenchant material for artists. "Elliott Hundley: The Bacchae" at the Nasher Sculpture Center is a case in point. It's a glammed-up hybrid of layered and complex visual texts that conceal and reveal in equal measure. In the traditional dichotomy of Apollonian versus Dionysian mythologies, Hundley opts to show us riot rather than rigor. He gives us the wild post-party dance rather than the seated dinner party. It's energetic; it's complicated; and it's terrific.

As almost any veteran of college classes treating Greek plays will recall, a dichotomy of Apollonian order and rationality is typically thrown into relief with stories of wild debauchery and Dionysian (Bacchanalian) revelry. Euripides examined the twists and bloody turns of madness and lopping off of heads as well as any poet in the Greek pantheon. In fact, his work is still such compelling stuff that it continues to emerge in new and unsettling ways. Thus, the work of Hundley is pinned and hinged, cantilevered and torqued in ways that grant us ingress into this ancient text via new and interesting means. If we're worth our salt, we'll find it impossible to look away. In fact, we'll want to see more, know more, evolve more.

Hundley's "swarming over" is simultaneously elegantly wispy, layered and riotous. It constellates our gaze such that we see through it and with it. It's a tangle of apertures so engaging that it seems perfectly reasonable to leave dullish, Apollonian stuff behind. This new world is literally bent and hanging and we couldn't wish for more. Hundley's "eyes that run like leaping fire" is a long walk in the hot sand of deciding how we opt to see things. Figures and grounds merge and create a cacophony of past-present; verb-noun; text-image. In fact, we're furnished a kind of curtain through which we view details of a riotous landscape. In other works, we're given circular apertures that are either clear or brilliant blue. In both cases, they expand the work. They're windows we utilize to closely witness a world wildly dismembered, then reassembled and remade. We're lured into examining how we curate our thoughts and how we view and remember the world. "What more could we ask for?"

In fact, I wonder if Hundley paused on the seventh day and looked out over his spectacle of pins, images, typography and thread-like curtains and thought, "This is good." It's really good. He does with collage what Cormac McCarthy does with Olivetti typewriters. Hundley's work outstrips our wildest expectations when we enter the doors of those august institutions we call museums. It's all too rare that we, indeed, get to muse. Here's your sparkly, white-hot chance.

## Elliott Hundley: The Bacchae

CATHERINE TAFT  
SEPTEMBER, 2011



Ambitious, dramatic, and earnestly personal, Elliott Hundley's assemblage-based practice is forged from ancient narratives and contemporary realities, sublimating notorious characters and plotlines into cyclonic images or structures. "The Bacchae" will feature a dozen works made in the past two years, all drawing from Euripides's tragedy. Including quasi-figurative sculpture and billboard-size prints, paintings, and collages, this body of work breaks down the revenge story into discrete elements—gendered accoutrements of bacchic ritual are poised like spindly shipwrecks on the gallery floor; a semiabstract portrait of Pentheus renders the young man at once whole and torn to pieces at his mother's hands. And with essays by curator Christopher Bedford, poet and classicist Anne Carson, critic Doug Harvey, and art historian Richard Meyer, the accompanying catalogue should further tempt the imagination, providing rich perspectives on Hundley's modern-day interpretations of the classics.

## Critics' Picks: Elliott Hundley

TRINIE DALTON

JUNE 17, 2011



View of "Semele," 2011

"Semele," Elliott Hundley's latest exhibition and his second interpretation of the themes and interpersonal dramas in Euripedes's *The Bacchae*, again showcases his characteristic conflation of collage with painting and sculpture, and his even more compelling blend of visual art with textual narrative, to wondrous, decadent effect. His assemblage materials—gold leaf, shredded tapestries, metal wires, pine cones, and lobster legs, to mention only a few—have a luxurious, fertile irony and drag sensibility as symbols of the debauched Greek tragedy's focus on a spurned Dionysus's return to his birthplace to violently avenge his mother, Semele.

The show is made up of three monumental, multipaneled collage paintings and three wispy, precariously balanced sculptures whose messy, scavenged ephemera resemble bowerbirds' nests or wrecked kites. On the wall furthest from the gallery's entrance, two loosely rendered, abstract oil paintings provide a tertiary introduction to Hundley's fantastic, theatrical imagination. They are like color keys or tonal studies for the other pieces that are more immediately demanding of the viewer's attention for their figurative and macro/micro scale experiments.

Hundley's effort to display what he has called "the narrative of production" works best, though, not in the abstract paintings but in the large wall works, where he litters sweeping compositions with excruciatingly detailed minutiae

(thousands of beads, sequins, and found objects) pinned delicately to flat surfaces. Notably, these pieces are bejeweled with images he shot of his friends campily reenacting *The Bacchae*, as if to channel Jack Smith or Derek Jarman. Formally, each wall work transcends its Greek connection with its devotion to an element: For example, *Eyes that run like leaping fire* (all works 2011) feels fiery for its red color scheme, and the fierce, warlike imagery aerated by a layer of rainbow fringe obscuring the surface's pictorial frieze. *The Lightning's Bride* undulates with watery blues and purple motifs, while *earth is represented in the high house low!*, a copper-leafed, volcanic explosion of terrestrial imagery ranging from gems and minerals to architectural ruins to photos of a person stomping through a landscape. Just as the bricolage panels beg to be seen from afar and up close, Hundley's exhibition embraces paradoxical slippages between romance and horror, violence and ecstasy, and gender binaries, not to mention antiquity and modernity.

# Art in America

## Elliott Hundley: Andrea Rosen

STEPHEN MUELLER  
OCTOBER, 2010



Elliott Hundley: *Agave*, 2010, wood, photographs, pins and mixed mediums, 96 by 192 1/2 by 14 1/2 inches; at Andrea Rosen.

Elliott Hundley, in his second show at this gallery, expanded his more-is-more esthetic to great effect. Titled “*Agave of The Bacchae*,” the exhibition was intended as a visual exploration of themes in the play by Euripides. Five paintings and three sculptures (all 2010) gave new life to the term bricolage, with all kinds of materials attached to surfaces by means of pins, glue and what appear to be long specimen needles. Tiny bits of images, sticks and a bull’s horn are fair game, as are found paintings, sequins and elaborate ransom-note-style sentences (sometimes the length of short stories). The paintings resemble ‘80s Neo-Expressionism at its wildest.

There are narratives implied, along with scientific or philosophical allegories and fantastic extremes of ornamentation. The large-scale *Dionysus*, 8 feet high and 16 feet wide, includes such materials as soundboard, inkjet prints, kitakata paper, photographs, found paintings and the bull’s horn. A monklike man, bald and robed (*Dionysus* arriving from the East?), is seen four times in four panels, elevated above a landscape teeming with activity. Tiny naked men convene in a circle, and hundreds of the specimen needles pierce the surface at graduating angles, creating a wave effect. The whole glows a brassy amber-to-orange. The work feels familiar in its elements, yet one senses that, in its totality, the imagery has never been seen before and cannot quite be apprehended.

Aside from the connection to *The Bacchae*, the narrative seems to jump around in time, like episodes in early Persian painting or scenes collaged in an epic movie poster.

*Agave* is similarly grand, materially lush, and also has a cast of thousands. It culminates on the right side with the image of a woman, saintly or mystical, with an aura around her head. She is making a theatrical gesture while holding a rainbow-colored garland. Perhaps this is *Agave* herself, who in *The Bacchae* kills her own son during Dionysian rites but realizes it only when she sobers up.

Hundley's work has been compared to Rauschenberg's and Twombly's, but Schnabel feels more apt than Rauschenberg. Insofar as Twombly consistently references ancient Greek myth and theater, as does Hundley (in his titles and sheer extravagance), that comparison seems reasonable. Still, it is in the sculptures that we feel a stronger relationship to Twombly. *Thyrsus for Ino* (7 by 5 1/2 by 4 1/2 feet) cantilevers interlocked metal spheres and a conflagration of wood strips, paper and paint off one side of a four-legged, twisting piece of driftwood. In all of Hundley's work the metaphor is massive and crosses boundaries of time, taste, tragedy and stuff a housekeeper won't touch.