

Meliksetian MB Briggs

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Todd Gray: Everything is Everywhere

[SHANA NYS DAMBROT](#) | MARCH 8, 2019

[Todd Gray](#) is one of those artists whose career, like his art, has taken many turns and had many phases, parts and twists. He is, of course, like every human, a reflection of the sum of all those parts — and so is his art. From intimate and undocumented performance art to more public engagements, through an

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education in the conceptual underpinnings of image-making, an early and long-standing gig as a young Michael Jackson's official photographer, and an ongoing interest in travel study, especially in continental Africa, Todd Gray has acquired a large and utterly unique archive of parts with which to sum.

His fascinating fine-art career has picked up momentum recently, with his inclusion in the Hammer's Made in L.A. Biennial in 2016 and a breakthrough solo show with [Meliksetian Briggs](#) in West Hollywood in 2018, it was announced this week that he will be featured in the next [Whitney Biennial](#), opening in New York City in May. Closer to home, a landmark exhibition is planned for [Pomona College Museum of Art](#) opening in September. In the meantime, "[Pluralities of Being](#)" is on view at the Palm Springs Art Museum through April 7.

"Pluralities of Being" is a solid name for a show that features not only a broad selection of his photo-based works but also a series of drawings so new, Gray calls them his first. But it is also a good way to understand Gray's own approach to art-making, which is to synthesize not only esoteric influences from a diversity of sources but physical components as well.

For example, his multi-image constructions are neither blended nor collaged; instead, images are cropped and displayed in shaped frames, which are themselves stacked and attached in ways that highlight visual juxtapositions (hair and tree roots, dancers and abstract shapes, landscapes and crowd scenes) even as they obscure crucial details of the scenes. On the whole, these works seeks to compare and contrast Gray's experience of African-American culture with a process of discovery of heritage and enduring cultural traditions outside of America.

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The suite of small and midsize drawings is inspired by experiences in Nigeria as well as cave painting such as at Lascaux — but Gray wanted to access more than information. He was charmed by the prospect of that liminal dynamic, where art can spring from a place that was pulled from within his own imagination, rather than, say, documented or scripted external events.



To exercise his hand, he tells *L.A. Weekly*, he began with circles, the automatic movement cognitively unlocking his right brain like some kind of surrealist party game. The drawings, which began on paper but in the case of PSAM soon migrated to the wall and grew exponentially in size, do in fact read as part ancient anthropological mark-making, part abstracted portrait, part textile motif even. In this way, the relationship to the photo-based images he's known for is more conceptual than aesthetic, but it's still all about layers, hybridity and mystery.

It's quasi-performative, too, in that there's something about their proliferation of dense, rhythmic detail that makes you imagine him in the process of making them, his hand and arm moving on the paper and even more so on the wall. Asked if he plans to continue, the answer is a resounding yes, and in fact, the September Pomona show will have a site-specific wall drawing of its own.

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Palm Springs Art Museum, 101 Museum Drive, Palm Springs; (760) 322-4800, psmuseum.org. Sun.-Tue. & Fri.-Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thu., noon-8 p.m. (free admission 4-8 p.m.); regular admission \$14.

—Shana Nys Dambrot



Todd Gray, "Pluralities of Being," installation view at Palm Springs Art Museum photos: Lance Gerber