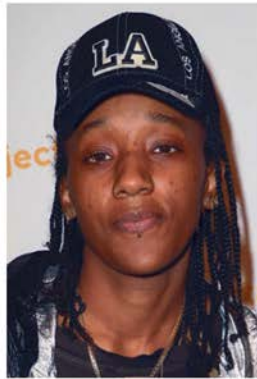


INTERVIEW

Lauren Halsey

California colossus

The Frieze Artist Award winner on making big work in L.A. By Nancy Kenney



furniture. I thought the cave could function as this resilient space that held these gorgeous moments, content from signage to cookbooks to audio to knick-knacks from discount stores, to describe a potential South Central future.

Apparently you changed the installation during the run of the LA MoCA exhibition.

I was there every two weeks – live, in the space, adding to it, taking away. The best part was interacting with people pretty naturally.

You obviously have a commitment to South Central. Can you tell us about your childhood there?

I feel like I inherited a lot of neighbourhood pride and love from my family, who have been here for multiple generations. My childhood there was wonderful. It was fantastic. I grew up on a street where a million kids played outside, where everyone was best friends. Fast-forward to now and a few of them actually build my work with me. As far as my childhood, it was a lot of basketball, ice-cream trucks, bike riding, summer camps, freedom – I don't know, fun, playing tennis in the street, thinking we're Serena and Venus [Williams].

"If I was attempting that work in NY, I would still be in miniature mode"

Your work blends historic architectural forms – an Egyptian temple – with contemporary references. Do you feel a connection to Egyptian culture?

My dream is to go see the pyramids. I inherited, I would say, myths around ancient Egypt in a few ways. My father is a pretty deep student of certain dynasties within ancient Egypt, so as a kid, pretty naturally, in the kitchen, getting a popsicle, coming into the house, at half-time during the football game, and [he would relay] information to me and my mother and brother about Pharaoh such-and-such. Then there was Parliament-Funkadelic, who appropriated ancient Egypt as a site for black genius in their albums. I'm a huge fan of their cosmology. Then there were people like Sun Ra and the people I was meeting in LA and Harlem, who were taking it to a whole other level, where they never lived outside of the myths of ancient Egypt. I started thinking about hieroglyphs as this permanent record of a pharaoh's world, as told by the scribes, and I thought it would be interesting to appropriate the function of the hieroglyphs to describe communities.

Lauren Halsey, the winner of this year's Frieze Artist Award, was born and raised in Los Angeles, and much of her work explores community-building in an urban environment. The award provides her with a budget of up to \$25,000 to make a work of art for the fair's New York edition. Halsey's project is an installation dedicated to Nipsey Hussle, the rapper who was gunned down in Los Angeles on 31 March. Visitors will be able to move around two columns whose surfaces offer tributes to Hussle, as well as images of hair models, ideological pyramids, Afrofuturist myths and ephemera from South Central, the neighbourhood in which Halsey grew up. We talked to her about her passion for South Central, her evolving aesthetic and her fascination with pharaonic architecture.

an artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum of Harlem. Is there any distinction between creating art in New York versus the West Coast?

My move back to LA had everything to do with scale. I did the artist-in-residence at Studio Museum in Harlem, which allowed me to maintain my scale of these maximalist structures. I wanted to continue [on] that path, exploring that ethos of building big, and building with people, so I knew I had to come to LA to fulfil that goal. It's easy to me to be in Los Angeles, making big work, because I'm able to function in a million

people's backyards; I can have multiple studios at once. If I was attempting that work in New York, I would still be in miniature mode – making models that were surrogates for the real thing.

At the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, you built a system of caves that viewers were invited to linger in. Was this meant to evoke anything particular?

When I initially made the cave, I was thinking about it as a warehouse – a warehouse for culture, for people, for their stuff, their records, their paintings, their sculptures, their



In 2018 Lauren Halsey (top) created *we still here, there* (left), a system of caves that visitors could linger in; *Genocide* (2012) is a work in ink on posterboard with a social message

THE ART NEWSPAPER: What issues does your installation explore?

LAUREN HALSEY: I've created two 12ft-tall columns of 2ft in diameter that, as far as their surfaces go, describe ephemera, iconography, symbols, text and portraiture that I've gathered in Los Angeles. These columns are prototypes for larger columns I intend to build in my neighbourhood. For me, they're markers – moments of aspirational messaging.

After studying at the California Institute of the Arts, you earned your MFA at Yale and then were

