



Laura Owens

TEXT BY HOLLY MYERS | PHOTOGRAPHS BY NOAH WEBB

IN 2003, AT AGE 33, OWENS became one of the youngest artists ever to be given a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. She hasn't had a painting show in her hometown since. "I've made all my paintings here and I've sent them all elsewhere," she says. It is a surprisingly common phenomenon among the city's best-known artists, and Owens recently responded as have many of her local colleagues, from Robert Irwin to Jason Rhoades to Mike Kelley: She set out to find a place of her own.

"It's an idea I've had for two years," she says, "to find a space in L.A. where I could do a show but use the space first to make the show. I looked at a number

of contained spaces like churches and movie theaters, but I've done things like that before, situating paintings in a really specific architecture. I decided to go the opposite route with this big, industrial, vacant space: make it a sort of grand, straightforward painting show."

The now-studio and soon-to-be exhibition space, which Owens maintains in addition to a studio behind her home in Echo Park, is a comfortably cavernous brick warehouse on a gritty industrial thoroughfare just east of downtown, with high exposed-beam ceilings and two walls consisting almost entirely of windows. She moved in this past spring and aims to mount the first exhibition—

which will include a dozen new large-scale paintings, all in the early stages on the day of our visit—in mid-November.

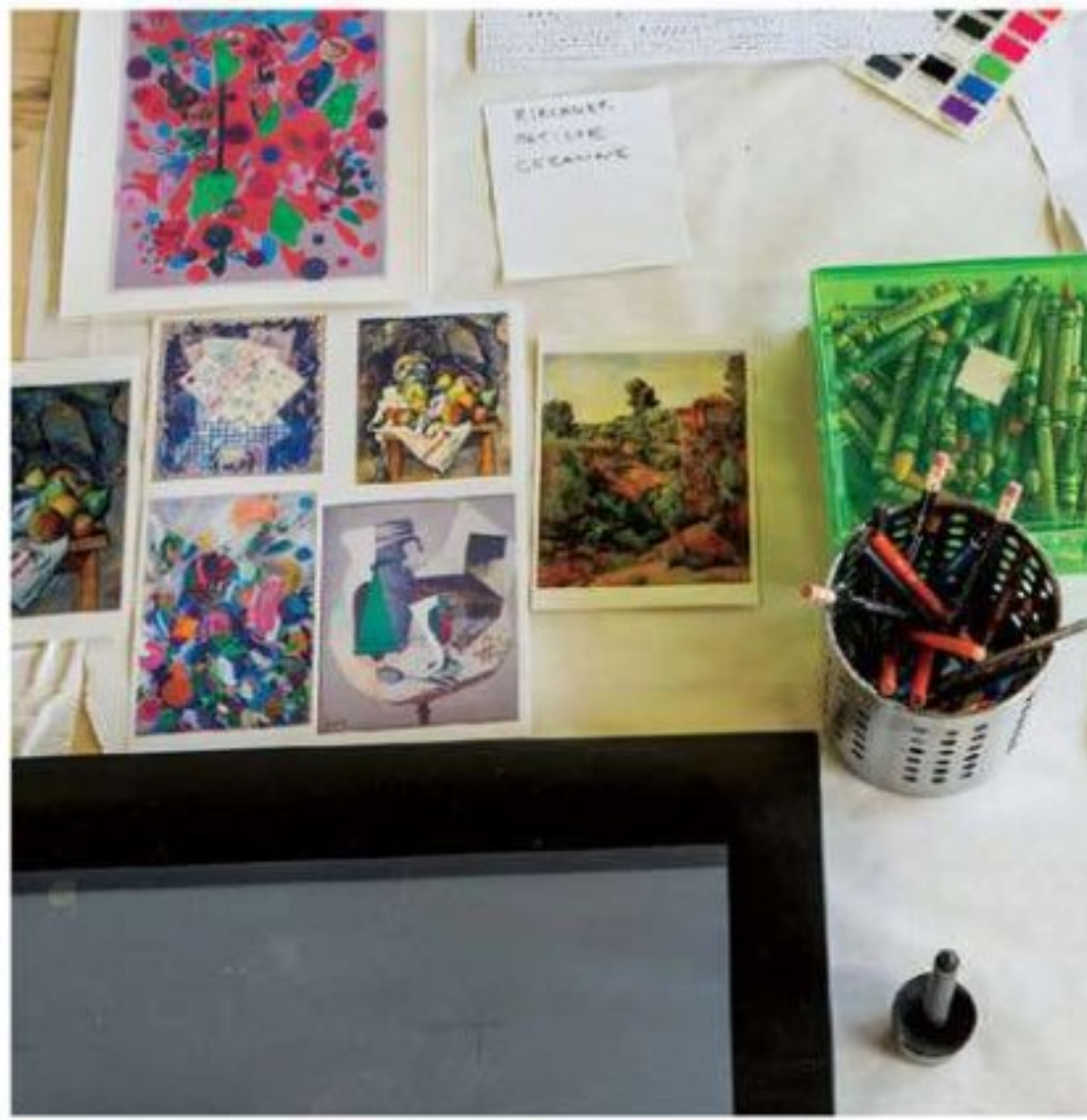
Then she will pull out and invite others in, retaining the lease but allowing the space to develop an organic institutional identity. Owens mentions the possibility of bookmaking workshops; alternating karaoke nights, concerts, and film screenings; a makeshift residency; and exhibitions of other artists' work. "It's pretty open-ended right now," she says. "There's no name for it or anything like that. That's kind of the point: to see what happens when you're not tied down to a rigid concept of how you show the work." MP

PAINTS

"Usually I mix stuff on these glass tables. Because of the scale I'm working with for this show, the sheer quantity of paint I've had to get is mind-boggling. I've done so much research on how to make the oil paint have volume, because it's astronomically expensive to cover this much painting real estate."

POSTCARDS

"I thought I knew Cézanne, but for the last two or three years I've been having this mind-blowing experience understanding the intentionality behind the decisions he was making, how he slowed it down, and how each mark was so deliberate and yet so casual. It reminds me of the people I'm really in awe of who are still alive, like Mary Heilmann, Richard Tuttle, and Charles Ray—people who have this formal specificity, where there really couldn't be another placement, but where that's not the point, the point is something else. There is this intense paying-attention-ness to the thing that's being made. I think Cézanne is the god of that."



LISTS

"I see the scale of the studio as a temporary situation. It's getting bigger in order to do this project, but I really go crazy if I don't work alone. So I have a part of the day where people are helping me, because I couldn't physically do it myself. I literally couldn't lift the paintings. But I do the real work—the thinking and actual painting—at night, when they're gone, or I tell them to take the day off."

BOOK LAYOUT

"I make books, too. This one I'm doing for a benefit. We just screened on all these pages. The text is from another book I did called *Fruits and Nuts*, which basically comes out of that conservative joke from the 1960s about L.A. being the land of fruits and nuts. I used all these newspapers from the late '60s—a radical newspaper called the *Berkeley Barb*—and I thought the classifieds were so interesting I made these silkscreens of them to make another book."

CLASSIFIEDS

"I'm working on setting up the possibility of something happening. I'm just setting things in motion. I'm working with all these silkscreens, for instance, because some of the people who work for me are really good at silk-screening, so I said, 'If you do that well, let's do that.'"

KARAOKE MACHINE

"With the karaoke machine I've been singing to the paintings. I have this idea that I'm going to imbue the space with intention but then be open to whatever happens. It's like I'm trying to throw wrenches into my work, I think."

