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Laura Owens Retrospective Coming to the Whitney

By RANDY KENNEDY JAN. 11, 2017



“Untitled” (2014), by Laura Owens. Ms. Owens is known for an unpredictable, often gleeful style that mixes painterly and pop-culture elements, some of which are screen printed instead of being created with brushes. Laura Owens/Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Laura Owens, one of the most celebrated painters of her generation and a force in the Los Angeles art world, will have her first major New York retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art opening in November, the museum announced.

Ms. Owens, 46, is known for an unpredictable, often gleeful style that mixes painterly and pop-culture elements, some of which are screen printed instead of being created with brushes. The novelist Rachel Kushner once wrote that while many young artists struggle with painting’s weighty past, Ms. Owens “seems to have opened her umbrella and floated over the art-historical baggage collecting on the tarmac.”

Scott Rothkopf, the Whitney’s chief curator and deputy director for programs, who is organizing the show in close collaboration with Ms. Owens, described her as “a central figure in the growing debate about contemporary painting.”

“When I talk to artists, young and old, she’s someone everyone is looking to,” he added. “And it made perfect sense that she should be the artist for the first midcareer survey to be presented in our new downtown home.”

The show will feature approximately 60 paintings, from the mid-1990s until recently — drawn from the museum’s own collection and many others — as well as custom-printed wallpaper and artist’s books made specifically for the show.

Ms. Owen’s work was featured prominently at the Museum of Modern Art in the 2014 exhibition “The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World,” and she has long shown with the New York gallery Gavin Brown’s Enterprise. But the Whitney show, running through February 2018, will represent her most significant presence in New York and her first major museum exhibition in the United States since an early career survey organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in 2003.