

# ICA LA

THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES (ICA LA) PRESENTS

**NO WRONG HOLES: THIRTY YEARS OF NAYLAND BLAKE**  
September 29, 2019 – January 26, 2020

Press preview: Friday, September 27, 2019

10am–12pm

[RSVP](#)



LOS ANGELES (June 26, 2019) — The Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles will present *No Wrong Holes: Thirty Years of Nayland Blake*, the first museum survey of New York-based artist, educator, and curator Nayland Blake (b. 1960) since 2003, and the artist’s most comprehensive presentation to date.

For over 30 years, Nayland Blake has been a critical figure in American art, working between sculpture, drawing, performance, and video. Heavily inspired by feminist and queer liberation movements, and subcultures ranging from punk to kink, Blake’s multidisciplinary practice considers the complexities of representation, particularly racial and gender identity. Blake examines desire, loss, and power through references to play and fantasy. The artist’s sustained meditation on “passing” and duality as a queer, biracial (African American and white) person is grounded in post-minimalist and conceptual approaches made personal through an array of materials, such as leather, medical equipment, tar, stuffed animals, and food.

In addition to presenting a selection of new works and a large suite of the artist’s drawings, the exhibition will highlight major works produced while Blake lived on the West Coast, first in the greater Los Angeles area as a graduate student at CalArts, followed by a decade in San Francisco—years bookended by the advancement of

the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and the “culture wars” of the 1990s. Since this formative period, Blake has continued to explore the radical potential of vulnerability and the complex intersections of identity and power.

The exhibition begins shortly after Blake completed their studies at the California Institute for the Arts (CalArts) in 1984 upon their relocation to San Francisco, where they lived for over a decade. Work from this early period, explored queering the visual austerity of minimalism with medical equipment and bondage gear, such as handcuffs, collars, and chains, to invoke associations of play, danger, pleasure, and control.



In the 1990s, Blake began exploring the use of costumes and toys, particularly puppets and stuffed bunnies, as their own surrogate or avatar in a continued exploration of play and fantasy as forms of exchange and understanding. In several works, Blake uses stuffed bunnies as actors in darkly comic scenarios: performing a sacrifice (*Satanic Ritualized Abuse* [1994]), attempting to persuade a viewer's affections by repeatedly sharing its negative HIV status (*Negative Bunny* [1994]), or dressed up in leather and studs (*Top Bunny* and *Bottom Bunny* [both 1994]). These works, alongside full-body costumes, use theatricality to entice and disarm viewers, challenging their perceptions and interactions with deceptively playful objects.

Personal narratives, focusing on identity, grief and loss, and kinship through community were introduced into the artist's work in the early 2000s. Blake invokes a number of racial tropes in drawings and sculpture of this period—the cascading metal links of *Chains II* (2000), rendered in heavy charcoal, could refer to consensual bondage or the bondage of slavery; and the white-on-white Confederate flags of *Triple Surrender* (2004), an enduring symbol of America's history of slavery and racial abuse rendered spectral, almost invisible. For Blake, the mining of racist iconography is a way to examine their own racial identity and familial history, generational trauma, and the ways in which identity is both lived and performed.

In recent years, Blake's work has focused on the relationships formed by social interaction and intentional community making. *Stab* (2013) is a video documenting Blake's visit with artist friend Liz Collins to mend a damaged sock monkey puppet bearing great sentimental value, with casual discussions about personal relationships, loss, and friendship serving as the backdrop. Their recent performance *Crossing Object (Inside Gnomen)* (2017–18) that debuted Blake's “fursona,” a fantastical, costumed representation of the artist. The performance allowed Blake's costumed presence to interact with the public, who were encouraged to whisper a secret to the artist and pin a pink ribbon on their fur suit as a symbol of this exchange. *Crossing Object (Inside Gnomen)*, considered alongside Blake's earlier costume-based sculptures underscores the artist's ability to navigate between different positions and articulate the contemporary experience of embodying many histories and identities.

*No Wrong Holes* will be accompanied by an exhibition catalogue produced in close consultation with the artist, designed by Content/Object, Los Angeles. The fully illustrated publication will include newly commissioned essays, key reprints, archival materials, and artist produced content from Blake and others. The publication will be the largest about the artist's work to date.

*No Wrong Holes: Thirty Years of Nayland Blake* is organized by Jamillah James, ICA LA Curator.

*No Wrong Holes* is made possible thanks to generous support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs.



ICA LA is supported by its Curator's Council, Fieldwork, and 1717 Collective.



Image credits: (top) Nayland Blake, *Starting Over* (video still), 2000, DVD video projection (color, audio); (in copy) Nayland Blake, *Magic*, 1990, Mixed media with puppet and armature; 30 x 48 x 24 in. All images © Nayland Blake and courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.

### About the artist

Nayland Blake is an artist, writer, educator, and curator. Born in New York City in 1960, they attended Bard College and then California Institute of the Arts. After receiving their MFA, they moved to San Francisco in 1984.

They have had one-person exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; University Art Museum, Berkeley; Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; and the Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College and their works are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art; the Whitney Museum; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Brooklyn Museum; The Studio Museum in Harlem; and many others.

In 1995 they were co-curator, with Lawrence Rinder, of the landmark exhibition *In A Different Light* at the University Art Museum, Berkeley, the first museum exhibition to examine the impact of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer artists on contemporary art. In 2018, Blake organized *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* for the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia.

They are currently the founding chair of the ICP/Bard MFA program at the International Center for Photography in New York. In 2012, they were awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. Blake is represented by Anglim Gilbert Gallery in San Francisco and Matthew Marks Gallery in New York.

### About the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA)

The Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA) is an epicenter of artistic experimentation and incubator of new ideas.

Founded in 1984 as the Santa Monica Museum of Art (SMMoA) and reestablished in 2017 with a new identity and home in Downtown Los Angeles, ICA LA builds upon a distinguished history of bold curatorial vision and innovative programming to illuminate the important untold stories and emerging voices in contemporary art and culture. The museum's 12,700 square-foot renovated industrial building—designed by WHY Architecture under the leadership of Kulapat Yantrasast—features ample space for exhibitions, public programs, retail pop-ups, integrated offices, and special projects.

ICA LA's mission is to support art that sparks the pleasure of discovery and challenges the way we see and experience the world, ourselves, and each other. ICA LA is committed to upending hierarchies of race, class, gender, and culture. Through exhibitions, education programs, and community partnerships, ICA LA fosters

critique of the familiar and empathy with the different. ICA LA is committed to making contemporary art relevant and accessible for all. Admission is free.

**Exhibition Hours:** Wednesday–Friday 11am to 7pm; Saturday and Sunday 11am to 6pm

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