September is typically a pretty big month in the art world, with a roster of high-profile gallery exhibitions that is both exciting and overwhelming, and a cluster of Saturday evening destinations with a sprawling simultaneity that defies the laws of time and space. But not this year -- at least not the 6-8pm wine and cheese crosstown amazing race part. With pandemic disruptions pushing a lot of gallery content to the online space and forcing the open IRL venues to institute strict safety measures, this season, it's all about embracing the concept of by-appointment gallery-going. Most open places have easy-to-navigate online booking akin to restaurant reservation apps, and what's missing in terms of the social scene is replaced with the chance for a more profound, mindful engagement with the work -- which you will, wonderfully, have all to yourself. A person could get used to this.
Helen Rae at Tierra del Sol Gallery opens September 4

Helen Rae was nearing 80 when her art career finally took off. As a member of the First Street Art Center community (a progressive studio for adults with developmental disabilities in Upland), Rae perhaps seems an unlikely art-world darling. But the strikingly original, viscerally sophisticated, expressionistic and even Fauvist line and color of her fashion-inspired portraits defy both expectation and convention. With wit and powerful savvy, Rae transforms iconic couture ads into emotionally and optically rich works that have garnered the attention of audiences across the country and indeed the globe. Now 82, Rae has not slowed down one bit. As an exhibition of new works opens at her Los Angeles gallery on September 4, be prepared to be blown away. Tierra del Sol Gallery, 945 Chung King Rd., Chinatown; tierradelsolgallery.org.

Isabelle Albuquerque at Nicodim Gallery opens September 10

They say a dancer’s instrument is their body. But when a movement artist moves into the world of sculpture, that can become truer than ever. Isabelle Albuquerque is on that journey now, transmogrifying her background in performance, music, and artificial intelligence/tech into dimensional objects that, in a sense, continue to perform. Using her own body as the physical template for a series of surreal, sexual, and seductively strange sculptures enacting abstract poses and scandalous intimacy with musical instruments, Albuquerque simultaneously interrogates issues of identity, agency, humanoidism, fantasy, memory, and whimsy in bronze, metal, wood, and flame. Sextet, Albuquerque’s first solo exhibition with Nicodim, presents six sculptures from Orgy for 10 People in One Body series. Nicodim Gallery, 1700 S. Sante Fe, downtown; nicodimgallery.com.

myselfs at Kohn Gallery opens September 11 & 12

A group exhibition curated by Joshua Friedman, myselfs brings together 25 artists who investigate ideas about the fluidity of identity by deconstructing the conventions of their mediums. Examining the interlaced spheres of race, gender, sexuality, and heritage across painting, collage, sculpture, and mixed media, this anticipated exhibition offers not only a look at new art-making modalities, but at a generation of rising stars whose works, “confront the myth of selfhood’s unchanging rigidity and turn instead to its fertile nebulousness.” Kohn Gallery, 1227 N. Highland, Hollywood; kohngallery.com.

Skin in the Game at the Palos Verdes Art Center opens September 12

What does it mean to have skin in the game? For curator Brent Holmes, this is a question with a multiverse of answers -- but it starts with an acknowledgement that while we are all in the struggle for a more just society together, there are populations for whom the stakes are much higher, more immediate, and literally life and death. Bringing together work by 12 artists who have been engaged with the intersections of BIPOC identity with the urgency of this sociopolitical moment, Skin in the Game presents new work in video, animation, performance, VR, painting, photography, and sculpture by contemporary Black artists and allies. The exhibition will launch online at first, but with the reasonable assumption that PVAC will be able to host in-person visitors before too long. Palos Verdes Art Center, 5504 W. Crestridge Road, Palos Verdes; pvartcenter.org.

Leslie Vance at David Kordansky Gallery opens September 12

Some folks paint with their wrist, some their elbow, and some swing from the shoulder -- generating sweeping gestures that create a sense of scale and movement that discourse not only with the eye, but the space of the whole body. In the work of Leslie Vance, this physicality is augmented and amplified with a vividly chromatic sensibility that keeps vision and cognition in a constant state of flux and motion as well. From energetic engagement with the architectural space to a proliferation of emotional moments within each composition, Vance’s work creates a pocket universe of contemplation and agitation that speaks to the enduring power of abstract painting. David Kordansky Gallery, 5130 Edgewood Place, Mid-city; davidkordanskygallery.com.

Aaron Garber-Maikovska at Blum and Poe opens September 12

Garber-Maikovska works across painting,
New Vanguard III at MOAH Lancaster opens September 12

The volatile romance between fine art and street art continues to evolve, and our visual culture is all the richer for it. For many years now, L.A.’s Thinkscape Gallery has operated at this intersection across exhibitions, institutions, installations, conventions, and festivals. Likewise, for the past few years, the Lancaster Museum of Art and History has embraced the vibrant, popular appeal of mural-based works and through collaborating with the global phenom of the POW! WOW! mural festivals, brought exciting public art to the Antelope Valley. This year’s POW! WOW! AV happens from September 3-12, with a dozen new murals blowing up across the region, coinciding with the opening of the MOAH exhibition The New Vanguard III – an exuberant look at the current moment in the world of international post-pop, latter day lowbrow, and street-influenced freshness. The exhibition is curated by Thinkscape, whose crew is also helming the muralizing, with several artists represented in both projects. The museum show is up through the end of the year, anticipating the return of in-person visitors; the murals will be ready for open-air viewing immediately. Lancaster MOAH, 665 W. Lancaster Blvd., Lancaster; lancastermoah.org.

Made in L.A. 2020: a version at the Hammer & the Huntington opens in September

The Hammer Museum’s hotly anticipated biennial series has been moving with the times since its first iteration a decade ago – and this “version” is no exception. For one thing, it takes place at two campuses – the Hammer itself and across town, the Huntington. Works by 30 Los Angeles–based artists comprising installation, video and film, sculpture, performance, painting and interdisciplinary pollinations will be installed at both locations – which is just as well, since only the Huntington’s outdoor spaces are open to the public at the moment. (The obvious hope is that this will change while the shows are installed through the end of the year.) The very gorgeous catalog is already out; and there will be plenty of virtual programming to scratch the biennial itch until reopening. The Hammer Museum, Westwood; The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino; hammer.ucla.edu.

45 at 45 at L.A. Louver opens October 6

Iconic Los Angeles gallery L.A. Louver has been in the business of creating and honoring contemporary art history for 45 years. And for most of that time, they’ve done it out of their lofty HQ at 45 N. Venice Blvd. Deadly serious about art but still loving a good pun, the gallery celebrates this occasion with what else, but a survey of 45 artists. Expect highlights of their own international program and its deep regional championing in work from stable stars like David Hockney, Ed and Nancy Kienholz, Alison Saar, Gajin Fujita, and Terry Allen alongside favorites from their extended family of stars and phenomenons like Eduardo Sarabia, Tacita Dean, Elliot Hundley, Lisa Lou, Rina Banerjee, Rebecca Campbell, Gisela Colon, Marcel Duchamp, Jimmie Durham, Kohshin Finley, Carmen Argote, Heather Gwen Martin, Jason Martin, Patrick Martinez, John McCracken, Alice Neel, Analia Saban, Matt Wedel and Gabriella Sanchez. L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice; lalouver.com.
L.A. WITCH PLAYS WITH FIRE AND MAKES MAGIC

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

It's been almost exactly three years since we spoke to Cali dark rock trio L.A. Witch, and back then they were on the verge of releasing their debut album four years after putting out their EP. So here we are in 2020, and as we speak via Zoom, they're preparing to release their second album Play With Fire. They don't like to rush things, spending months upon months touring between records, but this year's lockdown has allowed them to sit down and focus. Every cloud has a silver lining and all that, because the album is a gorgeous, intense yet dreamy, psych-rock beast. The evolution between records is clear, even to them.

"It's gotten more complex," says frontwoman Sade Sanchez. "We've all been playing with each other for a while now, so I think the dynamic has gotten a lot stronger. It already was natural, but lots of touring with each other and lots of spending time together, it's strengthened the sound." "The first album was kind of a collection of songs that we had been playing since the beginning of the band, so it didn't really represent where we were at the moment it came out," adds bassist Irita Pai. "A lot of it was older. For this album, a large portion of it was recorded in the span of a month or two months. So, it was very focused."

It certainly sounds focused -- recent singles "True Believers" and "I Wanna Lose" are saturated with punk energy and swathes of Sabbath-esque groove. The title adds a little extra incendiary edge.

"The theme is definitely fire, which is why it has that title," says Sanchez. "A lot of the songs branch off from the idea of fire being something that's very symbolic. In life it can be something that can lead to destruction or it can be like the warmth that gives life. I've always loved symbolism, and the imagery that can be in your mind that sometimes can communicate things that words can't. So, starting off with that helped me when writing lyrics. It gave me ideas and inspiration for themes within the songs. You'll find a little bit of that in every song, I think. Also, it's like a new beginning, and this being our first album in three years it feels like a phoenix rising from the ashes."

While the album was written before COVID kicked in, and recorded in February just before lockdown, Sanchez says that the themes feel like they tie into recent events.

"That wasn't the intention, but it just shows that it's something that has been rooted deeply in us," she says. "Not necessarily the pandemic, even though writing did feel a little bit like a pandemic -- at least for me, because it felt like a quarantine. Trying not to get a lot of outside influence and really focusing on writing and having this timeline to write. A lot of anger with things going on. Not to get too heavy into things, but I think there's a lot of unhappiness with the way things are in life in general."

Ultimately, though, the musicians say that the rollout of the album went ahead pretty much as normal, as far as the singles building up to the drop and the release date. Of course, they can't take it on the road.

"We definitely can't tour, which is I think the number one thing you do to bring attention to your album, especially nowadays," says Pai. "It's really hard. You don't sell CDs anymore and stuff like that. It's been interesting. We're trying to adapt to the new times, like doing interviews on Zoom all the time. I think we've gotten pretty good at it at this point." They certainly have; they're free flowing with the anecdotes, such as this one about recent single "I Wanna Lose."

"When we first were writing the song down, I was spelling it 'loose,'" says Sanchez. "I didn't realize that I was misspelling it. I sent it to my friend, and he was like, 'Yo dude, are you ok? Why is your song called I Wanna Loose?" I was like, 'Oh shit.' Now, I know how to spell lose. What that song is about is dropping the ego, and that feeling when you celebrate your failure -- realizing that it can make you stronger. That experience when you're so down and feel so defeated, and at that moment there's this feeling where you're like, 'Fuck it all, I don't care anymore.' It's because you had that feeling of having nothing to lose and everything to win. That's kind of the message behind that song."

Strong stuff, and a clear reminder L.A. Witch is in this thing to succeed. Already super-talented, they're driven by a desire to improve -- to push themselves and each other. That drive has helped keep them sane during lockdown.

"I've been practicing a lot," says drummer Ellie English. "I was also in New York for three weeks because my sister got married, so we had to do a mandated quarantine where they check up on you every day and make sure you're quarantining so that was crazy. Then just working."

"I'm trying to stay busy as much as possible within the rules and regulations," adds Sanchez. "Riding my motorcycle a lot, which has been cool. Hanging out with my dogs. I started a boxing class yesterday -- that really kicked my ass. Finding all sorts of weird shit to do to keep my mind occupied."

They have plenty to keep them busy, including the launch of this album as well as planning a livestream.

"We're still figuring out the details for that," says Sanchez. "It's complicated because of the whole COVID stuff. We have to get tested on the day of. I don't know if a certain amount of people are allowed in -- like 20 people. Something weird like that. So, we're trying to figure out the details. We don't have a specific date yet, but it is in the works."

Besides that, they'll keep writing and working on new music until the day comes that they can tour again. They'll keep getting better and stronger, because that's what L.A. Witch does.

L.A. Witch's new album Play With Fire is out August 21 via Suicide Squeeze.
THE ART OF OUTDOOR DINING - LE PETIT BELVEDERE

The new outdoor dining concept at the Peninsula Beverly Hills combines LOVE and a French brasserie

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

The Peninsula Beverly Hills has opened its outdoor courtyard for a new concept that combines a California style brasserie menu on the hotel's garden terrace with pop art. Named after its currently shuttered lobby restaurant, Le Petite Belvedere is a casual feast for the eyes - currently featuring the iconic LOVE sculpture by Robert Indiana as a focal point of the terrace.

Verdier piece is also proudly displayed, commissioned specifically for the signature restaurant.

Indiana's LOVE print, first created for the Museum of Modern Art's Christmas card in 1965, was the inspiration for the sculpture and became the famous LOVE U.S. Postal stamp in 1973. The sculpture now calls the courtyard it's new home, making a statement at a time when the oversized notion of caring is most needed as a constant reminder. The sculpture is a traveling piece not owned by the hotel but is expected to remain well into 2021.

Speaking of love, the new menu is French, indulgently taking advantage of summer's best offerings, including a peach and fennel salad with white balsamic dressing and apples topped with almonds. There are also brasserie standards like a tender steak au poivre filet and mussels with frites, as well as a decadent chicken crêpe with wild mushroom, fromage blanc and braised endive.
The ultimate indulgence in the airy outdoor space is a lobster flatbread from the boulangerie section of the menu. The crust is paper thin, topped with generous mounds of lobster, shaved fennel, crème fraîche and dotted with caviar. The charred Caesar is a sweet, caramelized mix of crispy Brussel sprouts, kale, garlic croutons and anchovy dressing.

The amour-inspired French desserts by a very animated executive chef David Codney are the pièce de résistance. Try the Grand Mariner soufflé with vanilla orange Anglaise or ask for the off-the-menu LOVE gateaux - a passion fruit mousse covered in chocolate garnished with a replica of LOVE stamped on the plate, similar to the original postage stamp. No lunch service as yet, but in appreciation of its guests, there’s a free champagne toast to the patio every evening at 8pm.