



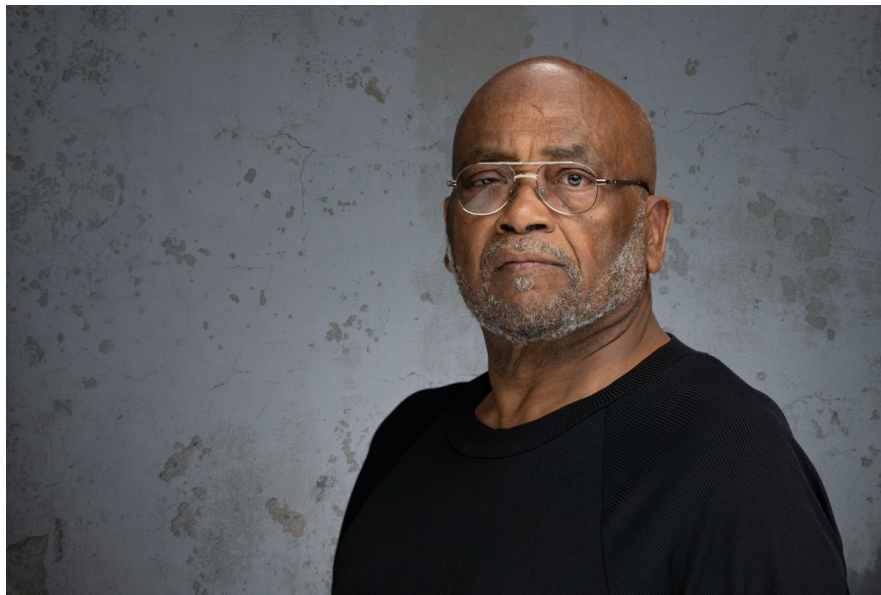
THE ART NEWSPAPER

Akinsanya Kambon wins Hammer Museum's \$100,000 Mohn Award

The prize, plus two others of \$25,000 each, are given to artists participating in the museum's "Made in LA" biennial

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Akinsanya Kambon
Photo: Antonio Gilbreath

Don't be surprised if you don't know their names. Too often, big awards accrue to the already lauded, but the three prizes tied to the Hammer Museum's popular *Made in LA* biennial are designed to do the opposite, singling out important work by underrecognised or emerging artists from the Los Angeles area—the purview of the show. Today the Hammer is announcing that the \$100,000 Mohn Award for excellence in the 2023 biennial will go to Akinsanya Kambon, with Pippa Garner winning the \$25,000 Career Achievement Award and Jackie Amézquita winning the \$25,000 Public Recognition Award.

That public award is chosen by popular vote by museum visitors, with the others selected by a jury that consists this year of Essence Harden from the California African American Museum, Carla Acevedo-Yates from the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and Ryan Inouye, who is co-curating the 59th Carnegie International (opening in 2026). The Hammer biennial, *Made in LA 2023: Acts of Living*, was curated by Diana Nawi, an independent curator, and Pablo José Ramírez, who recently joined the museum staff.

Their biennial, up until 31 December, is rich with hand-crafted sculpture, assemblage and other works incorporating an unusual amount of natural or organic materials. Kambon, 76, has contributed to the biennial a set of narrative ceramic sculptures and plaques exploring moments in the history of African colonisation and slavery. "Everybody has a different reason for doing art. I think art is a way of educating and uplifting humanity," he says, talking about his early days as a "lieutenant of culture" for the Sacramento chapter of the Black Panthers and his history of holding free art classes for kids in Long Beach.



Akinsanya Kambon, installation view, *Made in LA 2023: Acts of Living*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, until 31 December
Photo: Charles White

Garner, 81, has in the show a suite of drawings, and T-shirts, skewering—or “hacking”, as she likes to say—fixed notions of gender and identity, as well as consumer culture. She is particularly trenchant on the American obsession with cars as a form of transportation and self-expression. She says she has almost completely lost her vision due to glaucoma and hasn’t been able to visit the biennial. “It is ironic right now that I’m getting this attention for my work and I can’t directly participate. It’s an interesting sensation. My career is going in one direction, and my health is going in another,” she says.



Jackie Amézquita, *El suelo que nos alimenta*, 2023.
Photo: Joshua White

Amézquita, 38, has a new installation at the Hammer filling a wall with a grid of 144 slabs, each made out of topsoil she scooped up from different Los Angeles neighbourhoods mixed with masa, limestone, rain and salt. It’s called *El suelo que nos alimenta* (*The Land that Feeds Us*, 2023), and she has used the soil mixture as the medium—or “ground”, if you will—for etching everyday city scenes with pick-up trucks, food carts, palm trees and “defund the police” signs included. The installation was just acquired by the Hammer. “The work was made in Los Angeles,” she says, “and I’m really happy that this land will stay on this land.”

The \$100,000 Mohn Award has in the past marked a turning point in some artists’ careers, with Lauren Halsey receiving it in 2018, before her representation by David Kordansky Gallery, and Meleko Mokgosi in 2012, before his solo shows with Honor Fraser and Jack Shainman. Along with the money, recipients receive a monographic publication that follows the biennial.



Pippa Garner, installation view, *Made in LA 2023: Acts of Living*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, until 31 December.
Photo: Charles White

“Everybody focuses on the money,” says Jarl Mohn, the Los Angeles collector who, with his wife Pamela, funds the awards, “but I think the thing that has the most lasting value for the artist is the catalogues. For pretty much all of these artists, it’s their first serious publication, with photography and interviews and essays.”

Asked about his commitment to funding the awards in the future, Mohn says they have established three endowments for the Hammer. One is to help underwrite the *Made in LA* exhibition, another to finance the awards and the third to subsidize the publication. “We will fund this as long as *Made in LA* continues,” he says.