

THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

L.A.'s Hammer Museum Reopens With 40,000 Square Feet of New Gallery Space

The influential museum in Westwood will greet visitors March 26 with a new street-facing entryway and a major outdoor sculpture by Sanford Biggers: “For so long we’ve been kind of a hidden gem.” By Evan Nicole Brown



“For so long we’ve been kind of a hidden gem,” says Connie Butler, chief curator of the Hammer Museum, which opened in 1990 at the base of an office building in Westwood. In the more than three decades since, the Hammer has gained an international reputation for its talked-about contemporary [art](#) shows and culture-shifting programming, including its biennial Made in L.A. exhibition, but the museum always lacked a marquee street presence.

That changes March 25, when the final phase of a multiyear revamp will be unveiled.

L.A.-based architect Michael Maltzan, who was first commissioned in 2000 to create a master renovation and expansion plan for the Hammer, has designed what he calls a new “welcoming porch” at the corner of Wilshire and Westwood boulevards to welcome visitors. “For the first time really, we will have a proper museum entrance,” says Butler, adding that the new entry will include a large digital billboard displaying art and museum information.

Inside, the museum will gain 40,000 square feet of exhibition space by expanding into the area next door once occupied by City National Bank. Among the new shows opening March 26 as part of the reborn Hammer are installations by Berlin-based Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota (known for threading colored wool yarn through spaces to create “a very enveloping, very physical experience,” says Butler) and L.A.-based Rita McBride, whose work, *Particulates*, features 16 lasers (which are “activated by a gentle showering of mist that comes from the ceiling,” the curator notes).



At the corner of Glendon Avenue, the Hammer also will unveil a massive, 25-foot-tall bronze sculpture by artist Sanford Biggers titled *Oracle*, which had its debut in New York but will inaugurate the Hammer’s outdoor sculpture pedestal in its first presence on the West Coast. “Once the Hammer came about I was extremely excited because I deeply admire it, and was excited to have something not only at the museum but at that intersection because I spent a lot of my childhood in Westwood and passing that exact intersection,” Biggers tells *THR*.

Sanford Biggers' *Oracle* was commissioned for and installed at Rockefeller Center in New York in 2021. On March 26, it will be presented as an ongoing exhibit at the Hammer by the Art Production Fund with Marianne Boesky Gallery. DANIEL GREER

“This is such a big piece that it holds its own; it doesn’t really require much around it to be activated, just for viewers to have a good sightline to it,” the artist adds. “It’s also going to be very exciting to have a piece that has this type of visual gravitas and impact in Westwood. There’s many other places where it

could be in the city, but I think this specific area is going to lend itself to very interesting reactions and interactions with viewers.”

Adds Butler: “The idea of bringing it to Los Angeles where the artist is originally from as a way to mark our reopening and the reopening of the ground floor and the entrance of our building was a no-brainer, really,” Butler says. “It’s such an iconic, monumental piece.”

Marcy Carsey, chair of the Hammer Museum’s board, tells *THR* that she’s proud that the arts institution, overseen by director Ann Philbin, has remained open as it has expanded. “The museum has not been very disrupted by this; it’s been amazing,” says the TV producer, adding that she chose to align with the Hammer because of its ethics. “My interest is not in contemporary art in and of itself. What I am interested in is the social justice in its mission statement. It’s the Hammer Museum and Cultural Center, and it really does operate as both.” Upcoming programs include a talk on originalism and the Supreme Court and a discussion of feminist activism in the digital space.

The museum’s two-decade transformation does not represent any notable departure from the vision that first birthed it, but instead signals an investment in a space that already exists as a thriving destination in the city’s art scene and the belief that it will continue to be a valuable institution in the future.

Butler says she sees the museum’s growth as rising in tandem with that of the city it calls home. “We’ve seen L.A. go from being viewed kind of as an outpost,” she says, “to now being viewed as one very important center in the international contemporary art world.”