

Los Angeles Times

"Sadie Barnette: 9 captivating artworks to see in L.A. that explore what it means to be American"

By Shana Nys Dambrot

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(Illustration © Gibson Kochanek; images from LACMA, The Huntington, CAAM, The Skirball, The Broad)

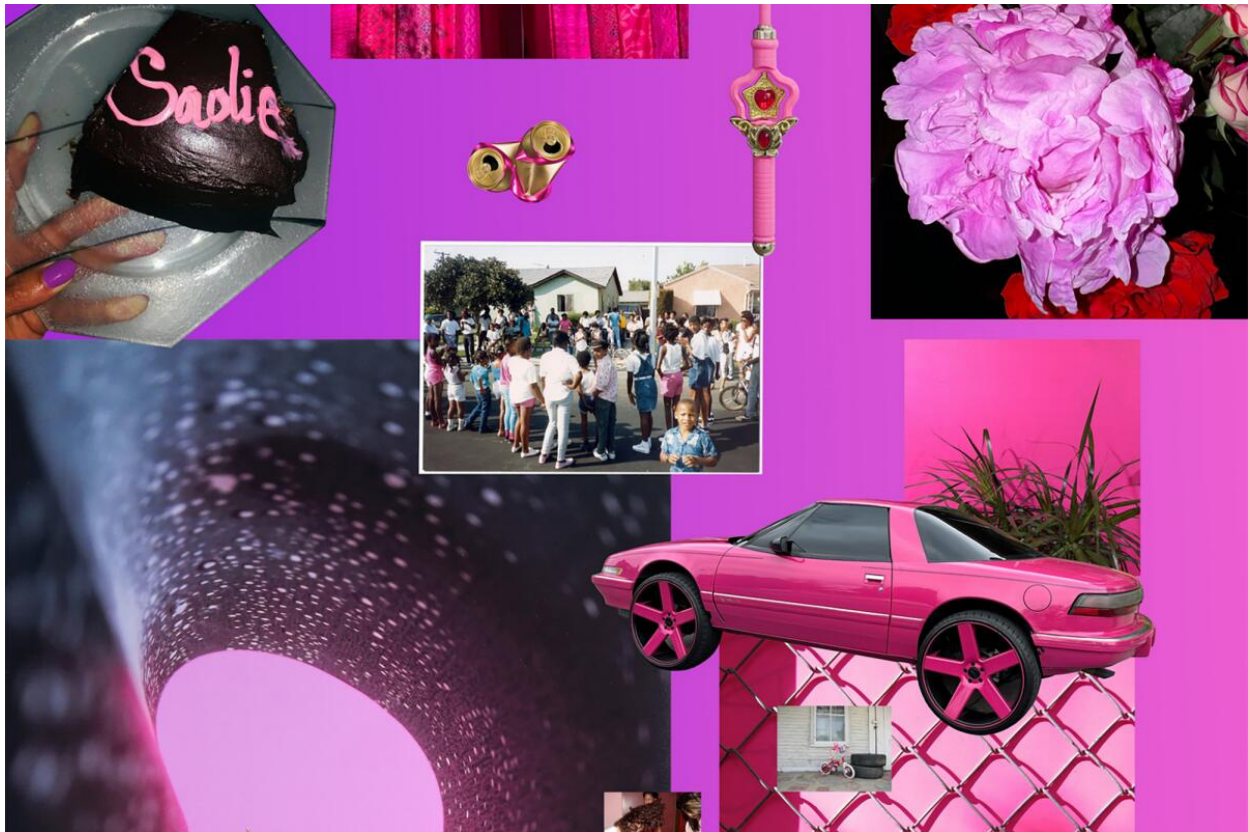
There are always plenty of compelling reasons to visit Los Angeles museums, especially right now. But as the 250th birthday of America looms large in the nation's consciousness, our institutions are replete with works of art exploring and expounding upon, in celebration and critique, what it means and what it feels like to be an American.

These works of art illuminate how race, gender, class and politics frame, reframe, bestow and withhold American-ness and how artists claim it for themselves regardless. Across painting, photography, video, installation, sculpture and more — here are nine impressive and eclectic works you can experience now.

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1. Sadie Barnette: 'How to Fly' at CAAM



(CAAM)

Barnette's site-specific photomural transforms the museum's expansive atrium into a vivid, hot pink and heartfelt visual archive. Family snapshots, important books and California streetscapes dance across a saturated jewel-tone ombré backdrop. Barnette embellishes these personal histories with her signature motifs of glitter, rhinestones, vintage cars and lush plant life, creating an intentional overload of prismatic color and texture. Beneath this joyful aesthetic lies an incisive, unsettling archive of her family's experience with aggressively racist state surveillance and the simultaneous story of reclamation, justice and the continuing struggle she unpacks in her work.

Barnette incorporates references to her father's 1960s FBI surveillance file from his time in the Black Panther Party, alongside recollections of his ownership of a San Francisco gay bar. The federal government weaponized both of these legacies as dangerous "un-American acts," but by monumentalizing these archival fragments amid celebratory scenes of family life, Barnette joyfully challenges systemic historical erasure and expands the definition of what it can mean to be American.

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