

McMahon, Katherine, "L.A. Habitat: Mary Weatherford," *ArtNews.com*, April 1, 2016

ARTNEWS

L.A. HABITAT: MARY WEATHERFORD

BY Katherine McMahon
April 1, 2016



Mary Weatherford in her Cypress Park studio on December 8, 2015.

This week's studio: Mary Weatherford; Cypress Park, Los Angeles.

"Los Angeles is on fire," Mary Weatherford said, lounging in the outdoor space behind her Cypress Park studio. The Ojai-born, Los Angeles-raised artist called New York home from 1984 to 1999, but ultimately returned to the West Coast. "This is the place to be to make art right now. There's so much going on all the time—I have an incredible fear of missing out."

Weatherford's studio, a space she's inhabited for two years, is situated in an unassuming building along the heavily trafficked San Fernando Road. She explained that the corridor on which her studio is located is becoming increasingly desirable as more and more condos go up and businesses go in. "Hopefully I won't get priced out. My previous studio wasn't nearly as big as this. It was handed down from artist to artist and had been occupied by Laura Owens, Matt Connors, Alex Slade, and Rebecca Morris, to name a few. So much great art was made in that studio," she said, recalling that her landlord at the time purposefully kept the rent low because he liked having artists as tenants.

Weatherford currently serves on the board of the arts nonprofit Laxart, and described L.A. as a mecca for alternative spaces. "The hallmark of a great arts scene and a healthy city is artist-run spaces, and this place is flourishing. There's a lot of opportunity," she said, mentioning 356 Mission, Joan, and BBQ L.A.

In addition to smaller, artist-run endeavors, Weatherford feels that museums on the West Coast are more accessible than ever. "Everyone's vision is influenced by one's experiences," she said, recalling visits to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art as an example of a formative childhood experience. "I remember going to that museum and stopping by the cafeteria to order coconut cream pie. There was a big painting on the wall of the cafeteria there. I think it fostered my love of cafeteria paintings." Her 2014 mural *From the mountain to the sea* is part of Claremont College's collection, on view in the dining room of the Marian Miner Cook Athenaeum.

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Weatherford has exhibited since the late '80s and continues a prolific studio practice. "I go through different phases of making work that looks seemingly anomalous to the work that came before," she said, clarifying, "The themes and ideas that run through the last 40 years of the work are consistent, but the physical manifestation of the themes is very different." The works in her breakthrough series, "The Bakersfield Project," in which she debuted her trademark paintings affixed with neon lights in 2012, are named after streets in the California city. A sense of place seems to pervade Weatherford's work, recently with neon paintings that illustrate Los Angeles and New York but previously with literal depictions of seashells and starfish, which she would source from the California seaside. "I don't keep a journal," she said. "I can't write about myself and my life, but I've always thought that my paintings are, in effect, my journal. I can look at a painting and remember what was going on at that time."

In 2018 the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston will present a survey of Weatherford's work, curated by Bill Arning. Below, a look around her Los Angeles studio.