

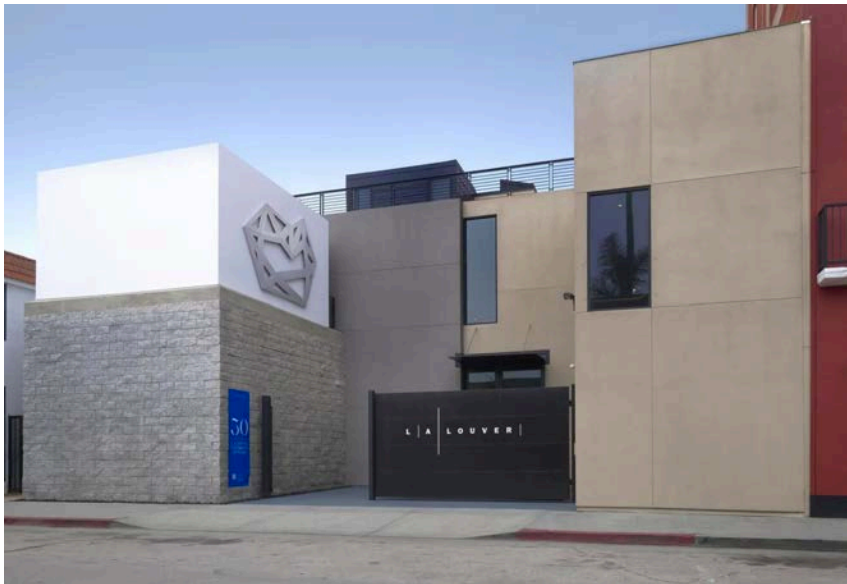
50 Years Of L.A. Louver in Venice, California: A History

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LA Louver on N. Venice Blvd in Venice, CA
PHOTO CREDIT: ROBERT WEDEMEYER, COURTESY OF LA LOUVER

LA Louver, the Venice, California art gallery known for its exhibition of such well-known artists as David Hockney, R. B. Kitaj, and Ed and Nancy Kienholz, as well as contemporary artists such as Alison Saar, Gajin Fujita, and Rebecca Campbell, is celebrating its 50th anniversary.



Gallery founding director Peter Goulds with artist David Hockney, 2015.
PHOTO BY JIM MCHUGH COURTESY OF L.A. LOUVER GALLERY, VENICE, CA.

“It’s been a fabulous incredible journey,” LA Louver’s founder Peter Goulds told me recently.

Long devoted “to showing Los Angeles based artists in an international context,” LA Louver is commemorating this landmark with an exhibition of artists they have shown and who have inspired them (on view until June 13), from Terry Allen to Tom Wudl, as well as Marcel Duchamp, Wallace Berman, George Herms. John Cage, Nick

Cave, Leon Kossoff, and Ed Moses, among many others. It is a museum-worthy retrospective housed in a familiar gallery space with wondrous surprises at every turn. Don't miss it!

Recently, I sat down with LA Louver's triumvirate of Peter Goulds, Kimberly Davis, and Elizabeth East, to hear their personal stories as well as their roles in the gallery's history.

Born in London, in Islington, Goulds, who as a youngster always won his school's Art Prize as well as its Religion Prize, passed his A levels at the precocious age of 15, which would be impressive if you didn't learn that Liz, his wife, had achieved hers at 14. They met at the Walthamstow School of Art, which he attended before leaving London to attend the Coventry Art School, and then the Manchester School of Art, all along developing his interest in information design and audiovisual communication. Goulds's teenage years also included starting a car cleaning business, becoming a card-carrying member of Ronnie Scott's Jazz club, and working at theaters in the West End, building sets, painting scenery, moving scenery and props. All experiences that would prove invaluable in a gallery owner.

In 1971, Goulds, as the recipient of a Leverhulme Fellowship, met Mitsuru Kataoka of UCLA's Dickson Art Center design center at a conference in Vienna; then decided to spend four months traveling around the US, visiting universities teaching Video arts and communication.

From the moment he arrived in Los Angeles, Goulds began his love affair with the city. "I remember going up Laurel Canyon and I saw those houses on stilts and right then I began my romance [with Los Angeles]." Goulds met many Americans, and "encountered philanthropy at a level I couldn't have imagined [and] as a bedrock of this society." While in LA he went to see UCLA "to see what it was all about."

Goulds returned to the UK to teach at the Leeds Art School, while continuing research on creating audiovisual content at Manchester. After only a few weeks, he received a call from Kataoka, asking Goulds to fill in for him at UCLA while he was away in Japan on sabbatical.

At UCLA, Goulds created a very popular course on structuralism in 20th Century Art for which he projected films, showed slides, and which he taught for three years. In 1975, as his time at UCLA was coming to an end, Goulds, who was now married to Liz, had a decision to make: "We both wanted to stay on because we really got enthralled by this iconoclastic place and met so many artists"



Gallery directors Peter Goulds & Kimberly Davis, pictured at 55 North Venice Boulevard, 1991.

COURTESY OF L.A. LOUVER, VENICE, CA.

Goulds presented two ideas to Liz: The first was to start a textile manufacturing company. Liz was happy being a fabric designer working for Lanz, (famous for their nightwear) but she couldn't stand the manufacturers. The other idea was to start a gallery, something Goulds would have never have thought to do in the United Kingdom.

During their time in California, Goulds had managed to save \$15,000 thanks to grant funds and a quirk of the British Tax Code that didn't tax their earnings abroad. So that was their investment in the gallery.

The history of contemporary art galleries in LA was checkered. The Ferus Gallery opened in 1957, with the involvement of Walter Hopps and Irwin Blum and a coterie of artists. Nick Wilder opened his gallery in 1965. However, in the 1970s both would close. At that time, most contemporary art was shown at universities rather than galleries or museums.

However, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (LAICA), LA's first nonprofit exhibition space founded by Robert L. Smith and his wife Toby Smith, had a wonderful archive where artists could leave slides of their work on file, with details about the artists. Goulds was able to study these to really become familiar with many LA artists. He also contributed a visual essay to their publication, *Journal*, that was a manifesto of sorts, declaring "freedom from all heroes, past, present, and to come."

Goulds was living in Venice and decided to open his gallery there, in part because he couldn't compete with the galleries on decorator's row on La Cienega; and because many artists were living nearby between Ocean Park and Washington Blvd, and between the Ocean and Lincoln Blvd.



Gallery founding director Peter Goulds with his artwork *L.A. Louver*, *Eros it is the mirror*, 1976, 2025.

PHOTO BY SHANNON COTTRELL, COURTESY OF L.A. LOUVER

Marcel Duchamp had created a work called “Fresh Widow” which was a window whose panels of glass were covered with black leather. Goulds had created his own take on it for a film he wanted to make, that was a louvered window whose slats were mirrors. In tribute to Duchamp’s French heritage, Goulds called it “La Louver.” At Liz’s suggestion, this became the name of the gallery (you can see the actual item at the current LA Louver show).

“I thought if you open a halfway decent place, you have something to say, open it where artists live and work, then artists visit other artists, curators visit, collectors visit, critics visit, writers visit. There was a built-in audience. So you just had to gamble that your program was going to encourage others to come by. And it worked.”

From the first day, important curators such as Betty Turnbull and Betty Asher came by, and they brought their fellow curators including a young Stephanie Barron, and the LACMA legend Maurice Tuchman. Local artists often walked in, some hoping to exhibit, some hoping to get work doing construction or installation work.



Lili Lakich, *Mona*, 1981, Photostat on Masonite, plexiglass, glass tubing with argon and neon gasses, crackle tube, transformer, 54½ x 39¼ x 7 in.
PHOTO BY MATT EMONSON, © LILI LAKICH. COURTESY OF L.A. LOUVER, VENICE, CA

At first, Goulds had trouble getting artists to show at LA Louver. He approached Lili Lakich who was doing works with neon (She eventually opened the Museum of Neon). Among the first shows was George Herms, who brought along Wallace Berman. Berman didn't want gallery representation but allowed Goulds to keep a few works in his back office to deal. Tom Wudl, and a Kate Steinitz retrospective followed. Ed Moses would rebuild the gallery and install his work. LA Louver did a couple of shows with Ed Ruscha and published some prints. "He had no means whatsoever in those days," Goulds recalled.

Goulds figured that he would give it two years, after which if there were no sales, he wasn't sure how they'd survive. "But I had a hunch," Goulds said, "And luckily, we made sales in the first year, actually \$29,000. Next year we made \$80,000; and the third year over \$200,000. And it sort of went on like that."

At Art Basel in 1977, he met Paul Cornwall Jones whose Petersburg Press was creating fine art prints with artists such as a young David Hockney. A few years later, Jones needed \$250,000 to undertake a large new project, and Goulds borrowed the money to participate, having slowly built up his own credit rating by taking and repaying small loans. Goulds was involved in the exhibition of Jasper Johns illustrations for Samuel Beckett's *Foirades / Fizzles*. And that led to an edition where he got to meet David Hockney.



Installation of David Hockney: Looking at Landscape / Being in Landscape at L.A. Louver, 1998. Pictured at right: David Hockney, A Bigger Grand Canyon, 1998, Oil on sixty canvases, 81½ x 293 in., National Gallery of Australia, Purchased with the assistance of Kerry Stokes, Carol and Tony Berg and the O'Reilly family 1999.

© DAVID HOCKNEY. COURTESY OF L.A. LOUVER, VENICE, CA.

In London, R. B. Kitaj had mounted *The Human Clay*, his exhibition making the case for a “School of London” figurative painting. Inspired by this, Goulds decided to assemble an exhibition, *This Knot of Life*, that would feature ten British painters. He went to Hockney who agreed to participate who introduced him to Kitaj , and eventually the exhibition included work from Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach, Leon Kossoff, Francis Bacon, Michael Andrews, and Howard Hodgkin. This cemented the direction of the gallery having an international viewpoint. And, over the years, LA Louver has mounted many beautiful shows of Hockney’s ongoing experimentation and exploration of various landscapes, perspectives, media, and his studio.



Gallery director Kimberly Davis with a sculpture by Deborah Butterfield, 2020.

PHOTO BY JACOB SOUSA. COURTESY OF L.A. LOUVER, VENICE, CA.

The story now turns over to Kimberly Davis, who was born in California, grew up in Detroit, and attended a year at Wayne State before transferring to Pratt in Brooklyn. “I always wanted to be in New York,” she told me recently. Initially attracted to the fashion world, after working in all aspects of the industry, including making hand-painted silk fabrics, she decided, “This is no world for me. I just hated it.”

She had a lot of friends who were artists, so she decided to go to Hunter College to get a Master's in Art History. However, she was stymied by the German language requirement. "So I started working in the art world." Her first job was with Alanna Heiss at the Clocktower, whom she helped with the opening of PS One in 1976, after which Davis got an internship at the Guggenheim Museum. However, none of those jobs paid enough to live on. Davis babysat in exchange for an apartment and worked as a bartender and a waitress two nights a week.

Finally Davis got a paying job with Judith Selkowitz who did corporate art consulting for clients such as IBM, Xerox, and Prudential.

"It taught me a lot about how to hang art, because we would go into a building on the weekend in Westchester and we would have 300 works we would have to hang," Davis said, adding, "That was very useful, but it was boring."

A friend told her about a job in California working for British art dealer Bernard Jacobson. She moved to LA with \$5000 and a lot of inventory, of works by Howard Hodgkins and David Hockney, and prints from Brooke Alexander and Bob Feldman from Parasol Press. "Start selling the inventory," Davis was told, "Then you can pay yourself. It was really hard."

Davis had met Graham in New York, and he followed her out to LA, where they married. To expand her circle of friends, acquaintances, and buyers, she started to host dinner parties at her apartment. Often, she called a person she didn't know but invited them saying someone else would be there and then called that person saying the first couple was coming. That first year, Davis made dinner for 300 people, and she adds, laughing, "no one ever invited me back to their homes." But it was at one such dinner that she met Peter and Liz.

Davis opened a Bernard Jacobson Gallery in a space in the parking lot of Ma Maison that had been Patrick Terrail's mother's boutique. She put together shows from Jacobson's inventory as well as some of the British artists he represented. However, she discovered that it was less expensive to have the artists come to LA for three months and create new work than to ship it from England.

The gallery was barely surviving and Davis, who was paying all the gallery's bills, was owed a lot of money. She decided that what she needed was a job. "I left with some inventory that I could own myself and ultimately did okay with it."

Davis had been to LA Louver to see *This Knot of Life*, which exhibited artists she knew from working with Jacobson, such as Hockney, Kossoff, and Hodgkin. Peter and Liz had come to her house for dinner, and she had worked with Peter on a Howard Hodgkin exhibit, so Davis joining LA Louver made sense, and allowed Goulds to travel to art fairs while Davis managed the gallery and its sales.

The next piece in the puzzle was Chris Pate, a young artist who, while continuing to work in his own studio, helped prepare the exhibitions. Today, he manages and is in charge of the collections.

Over the years, beyond the story of artists and exhibitions, Goulds threaded his way through labyrinthian real estate arrangements up and down his block of N. Venice Blvd, moving to a space next to his original location that resulted in the gallery building LA Louver has occupied since 1987; as well as the parking structure across the street which makes visiting the gallery simple. At one point, there was a New York branch of the gallery that created its own problems and which Goulds eventually decided to close, Doing so was costly which, luckily, they could weather. At the same time, there were vexing situations of employees who went off to start their

own gallery trying to take artists and collectors with them, and one trusted employee's financial skullduggery.

Fred Fisher was the architect for the new gallery building on N. Venice Blvd. Goulds had a rather precise vision for the height of the rooms and how art might be moved in and around the building. For example, Goulds went to visit Riko Mizuno in her gallery. The whole time they talked, Mizuno was crocheting; after which, she stood up and put on the pants she'd just made. But what was more striking was that Ed Moses had taken the roof off her studio to build a sky room. The story Goulds was told was that Ed's friend had helped him make the perfect hard edge to frame the space. That friend: James Turrell. So, when Goulds built his new space for LA Louver, inspired by Mizuno and Turrell, he built his own sky room, which he says is "The most popular, really successful room there."



Gallery director Elizabeth East with artist Matt Wedel with his sculpture Fruit Landscape (2017) at the Korean International Ceramics Biennale, Gwangju, South Korea, 2024.
COURTESY OF L.A. LOUVER, VENICE, CA.

In 1998, Elizabeth East joined LA Louver. East, who is also British, received her first degree in business. “I thought I would spend my life in advertising,” she said. After being an account executive at an ad agency in London, she joined an art consultancy that was looking for a marketing executive. She worked there until her personal life took her to Washington D.C., where she worked at the Hollis Taggart Gallery for eight years. However, the gallery was focused on historic American painting, such as the Hudson Valley School. East decided that her passion was for contemporary art, and to get a job in that marketplace, she needed a Masters. As far as East was concerned, at that time, “the place where artists get educated was Goldsmiths in London.”

After her year’s course, East came to Los Angeles, and seeing shows of Joe Goode and Leslie Wayne, she understood that LA was a developing home for contemporary art and artists. She wrote to several galleries inquiring about employment opportunities. She received a call to visit LA Louver. Davis gave her a tour of the gallery, “I couldn't believe it, because when I came up the stairs, I saw a Hockney, which I'd seen six months before in an exhibition in Manchester, England. “ As she proceeded through the gallery she saw work by British artist John Virtue, and then a Leon Kossoff, which

is when she knew LA Louver was the place for her. East had timed doing her degree at Goldsmiths to being able to see the Kossoff exhibition at the Tate.

East, who had no direct connection to LA artists, collectors, and institutions, spent a year as Goulds's assistant, learning the practical aspects of the gallery. "The business background of Elizabeth comes out quietly, in various ways," Goulds told me. "And it's a decisive part of what we do."



Gallery managing director Lisa Jann, 2025. Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHANNON COTTRELL. COURTESY OF L.A. LOUVER

When Elizabeth decided to find her replacement as Goulds' assistant, she produced two candidates, the first a wonderful person who would take care of Peter, and the other, who was a dynamo that if Peter could keep up with, would be an incredible addition to the gallery. Goulds chose the latter, Lisa Jann, who has been with the gallery for 20 years and is now its managing director.

Over the course of its 50 year history, LA Louver has presented many memorable exhibitions and each of the trio has their favorites. For each, the gallery is a stage set,

its proportions rationalized by Goulds. to offer up a variety of exhibition spaces that optimize seeing what's on display.

Among the early shows that Davis recalls as “one of the most powerful we’ve done,” was a 1996 installation by Doris Salcedo, *Atrabiliarios*, her first on the West Coast, described in the LA Louver press release as “shoes have been collected in a line along the wall and have been covered with a translucent layer of cow’s bladder which has been sewn onto the wall.” At first, they endeavored to sell the pairs of shoes individually. Then they realized, that “If they could find one buyer for the whole thing, that's the way to do it.” Davis found a home for the work at a museum. Which Goulds cited as “a great piece of art dealing.”



Davis also treasures her relationship with artists over the years such as with Deborah Butterfield and Allison Saar. Davis has worked with Saar for close to 20 years, which, she says, “has allowed me to not only expand what she's doing, but curate a show that traveled to 12 museums and played a role in finding all those venues... I've worked with Jordan Schnitzer extensively and putting together a book that he published.” Davis adds that “it's been a very rewarding relationship with her and her family, and all of that has been really great.”

East, whose own curatorial debut, the 2023 summer “Flower Show” exhibition is among my personal favorites, listed a few of hers that included: “Rebecca Campbell “Poltergeist” in 2009; Alice Neel in 2010; Frederick Hammersley in 2017; David Hockney always...And the energy of our Rogue Wave exhibitions.” In 2001, Goulds and Pate began a program, Rogue Wave, to have solo and group exhibitions of Southern California’s diverse, emerging and mid-career artists.

LA Louver has always marched to the beat of its own drummer. “If you chase fashion,” Goulds said, “You're finished.” He added that, “For a long time through the nineties, we were probably better known in Europe than we were known here.”



Gajin Fujita, Angel's Eye View, 2024, Spray paint, 23.75K gold leaf, 12K white gold leaf and paint markers on five wood panels, 72 x 110 in., Private collection.

PHOTO BY MATT EMONSON. © GAJIN FUJITA. COURTESY OF L.A. LOUVER, VENICE, CA.

There is a magic to LA Louver that is the reason artists such as David Hockney, Alison Saar, Gajin Fujita, and the estates of Ed and Nancy Kienholz and R. B. Kitaj, continue to call the gallery home. To an outsider, such as myself, each of the three has their persona: Peter radiates bonhomie, Kimberly seems formidable, and Elizabeth appears serious and studious. In truth, they are all that as well as its opposite: Peter knows exactly what he is doing, Kimberly is warm and nurturing to artists and friends, and Elizabeth has a great sense of humor and, from her perch on the main floor knows every person who comes to the gallery.

“We do not operate on a commission structure,” East told me. “So we don't have a kind of classic sales competitive environment, which some galleries do have. And also, we have engagement directly with artists as well as clients... And I personally love that.”

“One of the things that ties us all together is that we share an aesthetic of liking the same artists,” Davis said, “which is amazing, actually.”

“I've never allowed myself the luxury, honestly, of self-praise or congratulatory moments,” Goulds told me, “[But] I have to say now, as I look back, first of all, that the decision to stay in Los Angeles was the very best thing I ever decided... We have been a part of this community through the largest period of its cultural growth... To watch all that, and to somehow, [in] some small measure to have contributed to that, gives me great joy.”

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