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L.A. artists — scathed by fire —
dominate New York's most talked about
art show

By Grant Klarich Johnson

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- One in six artists at this year's Whitney Biennial have L.A. ties, making the city's contemporary art scene extra visible in the prestigious exhibition.
- Displaced by January's devastating fires, some L.A.-based artists are processing loss and resilience through their work.
- From glass sculptures to abstract collages, the artists grapple with memory, home and survival in the aftermath of displacement.

"We evacuated on January 7th, and never returned," the artist Teresa Baker tells me when we connect to talk about the work she's made for this year's Whitney Biennial, which is among the country's most influential exhibitions of contemporary American art.

Hosted every two years by the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, this year's biennial features 56 artists and collectives, roughly 1 in 6 of whom have lived and worked in Los Angeles in the time since the survey's last iteration. The mass destruction wrought by last January's L.A. fires made that interval far from routine, and like Baker, many participating artists have spent time recovering or rebuilding.

Baker, her husband and their three young children — all under the age of 5 — moved five times in the last year. First to San Diego, then to San Francisco and New York City, and finally twice within Montana, a state Baker has known since childhood.

Baker's Indigenous and German heritage inform her three large abstract collage hangings, created using synthetic turf animated by acrylic paint,

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yarn and a variety of natural materials, including corn husk, willow, buffalo hide and buckskin. They are undeniably painterly. The pieces, says Baker, were made “in a tumultuous time, a time of transition.”



Installation view of Whitney Biennial 2026. From left to right: Teresa Baker, “To the Morning Light,” 2025; Teresa Baker, “The Harvest Melting on Our Tongue,” 2025; Teresa Baker, “Voluminous Day,” 2025.

The glory of the natural world, “the very big, grandiose gestures” of the Montana landscape, has informed Baker’s art since her flight from L.A. After working in her new home studio, Baker says she marvels at the beauty of dusk — the depth of orange and blue — as she drives to pick up her kids from school.

“I think what I’m experiencing right now, and maybe, am especially aware of because of the intensity of the last year, is awe,” she says. “It’s so simple, but I think that’s what this landscape is giving me, constant awe in the midst of a really depressing world, and a tough year for the family.”

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Leaving L.A. was hard, especially the supportive artistic community she cultivated, but “with all of the scientific unknowns post-fire,” Baker explains, “we made the decision to leave for the safety of our young children.” By returning to Montana, Baker has drawn herself into alignment with another L.A. artist, Andrea Fraser. Fraser was born in Montana and says she considers herself a “Western person,” even though she lived in New York for 25 years.