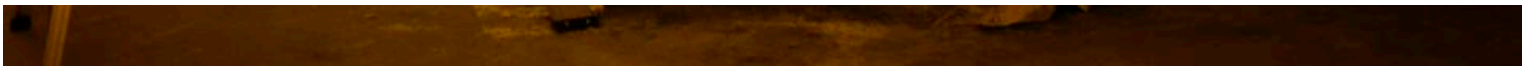




The Betty Roberts Room—

Inside the Pacific Design Center, at the Annie Wharton Los Angeles gallery, a room is deconstructed, broken, dimmed, shuttered, its white walls left only to be imagined. An art report from Los Angeles by Katya Tylevich



The Betty Roberts Room opened 20 March at [Annie Wharton Los Angeles](#), one of several galleries inside the Cesar Pelli-stamped [Pacific Design Center](#) in West Hollywood — specifically, inside the "Blue Whale," as it is known colloquially, that blue-glazed centre of commerce beached on the famed and flossy Melrose Avenue. Inside, art openings often coincide with gourmet food and wine events, to set the scene. It's more Munich than Berlin, in other words, a clean-cut interior with an information desk, well-oiled security, and cascading escalators. A scan of these surroundings proves important to understanding (or at least trying to) some of the many suggestions buried into *Betty Roberts*, a collaboration between artists Dennis Hoekstra and [Noah Olmsted](#). Foreshadowing: When I talk

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to Olmsted at the exhibition opening, it takes all of ten minutes for him to tell me, "I have a lot of architectural baggage."

Prior to the opening, *The Betty Roberts Room* is billed as featuring a number of intriguing though cryptic elements. Among them: A vibrating Mylar wall reflecting high-pressure sodium light across the gallery space; stacked-object sculptures, paintings, and prints all realized in grey-scale surface; paintings reminiscent of famed faux-painter [Pierre Finkelstein](#), a 1986 graduate of the Van Der Kellen Painting Institute in Brussels; and a guided imagery soundtrack by [Belleruth Naparstek](#), "noted psychotherapist, author and producer of the [Health Journeys](#) line of guided imagery audio programs."

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↑ *The Betty Roberts Room*, installation view at Annie Wharton Los Angeles

On the night of the opening, adjacent galleries look like well-curated aquariums — their open doors and glass walls reveal white walls, art and art-goers. Annie Wharton's gallery reveals nothing. The doors are plastered, the entrance dark. I see people hesitant to enter — "is there work being done in there?" That's a good way of putting it.



The Betty Roberts Room, installation view at
Annie Wharton Los Angeles

For the unsuspecting, the signal being sent reads, "do not enter." How odd, a renovation of some sort being done at night. Did something go wrong in there? Did something malfunction? Interesting that the surroundings of this low-lit would-be mess deter some, while emboldening others. Because, of course, there is a certain bravado involved with striding into an entrance that looks more like an exit. To walk in is to announce: "I get it," or "I am not intimidated." Again, the immediate design around *The Betty Roberts Room* is whole, even *wholesome* (though, of course, art being displayed in other galleries doesn't necessarily fit such an adjective). *The Betty Roberts Room*, on the

"To think of The Betty Roberts Room as intentionally broken might be to give in to rationalization where there is no grounds for it — it's falling for a trick of the mind, a trick of the camera, or, worse yet, a

other hand, is deconstructed, broken, dimmed, shuttered, its white walls can only be imagined. A ladder. Empty beer cans on the floor (nice touch!). Construction tools and materials, slabs on the walls. From the artists, I learn that this show uses waste materials generated by the Pacific Design Center — specifically, materials from the building's loading dock. Here, this strikes me as a subversive act rather than a "sustainable" one. Like wearing a wig made of one's just-trimmed split-ends, or putting in dentures made of one's cavity-riddled pulled teeth. Rather than demonstrating a functional salvation of "waste," *The Betty Roberts Room* performs a demarcation of that title altogether — What waste? This isn't waste, this is *the point*.

trick of the artists. But failure to do so leaves one in a limbo of uncertainty and aggravation"



↑ *The Betty Roberts Room*, installation view at Annie Wharton Los Angeles

Of the two rooms designated for *Betty Roberts*, the back one includes something of a human flytrap. That much-anticipated Mylar sheet bounces in a corner, moved by the air of a stationary fan. Specs of light reflect off of the Mylar as if off of water, as if off a mirror or a building. A recognized film technique, which proves just as successful in the context of this show: just look at all of these people pulling a Narcissus, gathering around the promise of reflection, or perhaps enlightenment. Many viewers take flash photographs. They look like art-journal paparazzi. And suddenly my mind moves from architecture to Hollywood, which is where we happen to be (that's right). Olmsted, who has a background in architecture, may talk to

me of architectural baggage, and he's correct to, but here we are in Los Angeles, where all the other kind of baggage goes without saying. The fictionalized, implicative title of this project, and this "room," starts to feel all the more fitting.



↑ *The Betty Roberts Room*, installation view at Annie Wharton Los Angeles

So are we on set, then, in *The Betty Roberts Room*? Is this the way the stage is intended to look — complete only when it perfectly apes a state of incompleteness? Or are we instead behind the scenes? Are these the ruins of something that once aped totality? Are we at the beginning of a project, or its end? And about this "Guided Imagery" soundtrack, distorted as it is... In its original state, this music is intended for the relaxation or healing of the mind. Manipulated, surrounded by images of fracture, the music makes the thought of convalescence seem ironic, farcical, if not tragic. To think of *The Betty Roberts Room* as intentionally broken might be to give in to rationalization where there is no grounds for it — it's falling for a trick of the mind, a trick of the camera, or, worse yet, a trick of the artists. But failure to do so leaves one in a limbo of uncertainty and aggravation. If only the Belleruth Naparstek music were undistorted, maybe then the mind (and eyes) could settle down for just a moment.



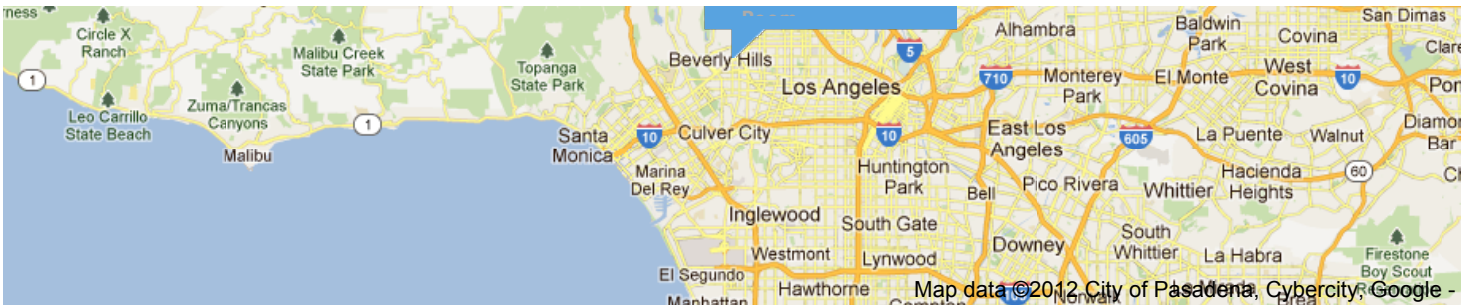
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Through 4 May 2012

The Betty Roberts Room

Annie Wharton Los Angeles

8687 Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles



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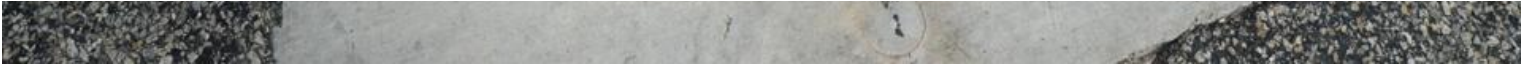
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