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10 best art shows at SoCal museums in 2025, a year full of captivating moments

By Christopher Knight | December 8, 2025



Ken Gonzales-Day digitally erased Illinois Black lynching victim Charlie Mitchell from an 1897 postcard to focus instead on the perpetrators. (USC Fisher Museum of Art)

Ken Gonzales-Day: History's "Nevermade." USC Fisher Museum of Art. Through March 14

There was no shortage of engrossing art with which to engage in Southern California museums during the past year, although the considerable majority of it had been made only within the past 50 years or so. Art's global history before the Second World War continues to play a decided second fiddle to contemporary art in special exhibitions.

Art museums across the country continue to struggle in attendance and fundraising after the double-whammy of the lengthy COVID-19 pandemic shut-down followed by culture war attacks from the Trump administration. That may help explain the unusually lengthy, seven- to 14-month duration of half of these shows.

The ways in which identities of race, gender and class are erased in a society dominated by straight white patriarchy animates the first mid-career survey of Los Angeles-based artist Ken Gonzales-Day. The riveting centerpiece is his extensive meditation on the American mass-hysteria embodied by the horrific practice of lynching, in which Gonzales-Day employed digital techniques to erase the brutalized victims (and the ropes) in grisly photographs of the murders. Focus shifts the viewer's gaze toward the perpetrators — an urgent and timely transference, given the shredding of civil society underway today.