

Check Out the World's Best Collection of Cat Art

By Olivia B. Waxman

Top artists contribute to Cat Art Show in Los Angeles



Marc Dennis, A Great Big Giant World, oil on linen

An upcoming exhibit of cat-inspired art in Los Angeles is the latest opportunity for people who generally browse online cat photos and videos by themselves to appreciate them with other fans IRL (in real life). [“Cat Art Show”](#) — a free event that runs from Jan. 25 to Feb. 2 at the gallery [101/exhibit](#) on Santa Monica Boulevard — is expected to feature a little

over 100 works for sale by 78 artists and donate some of the proceeds to the [Stray Cat Alliance of Los Angeles](#).

Black cats seem to be a general theme, and attendees who believe black cats bring bad luck will be unable to avoid them, between [Emily the Strange](#) creator Rob Reger's "40 Cats in 4 Directions" — a square painting of black cats that spins around, yet shows the cats upright from any angle — and "Black Cat" by Mattia Biagi, a stuffed black cat on a Roomba that will be circulating the gallery.

"Black cats have been unfairly vilified," says Shepard Fairey, creator of the iconic [Hope poster](#) that became a symbol of Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, who consequently depicted a black cat as a member of the Black Panther Party in his contribution "Radical Cat," which he shared exclusively with TIME. The background is a collage of newspaper clips about the movement at the time and photos of civil rights leaders Malcom X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Angela Davis. The feline sports the party's signature turtleneck and black leather jacket with a sticker of a raised paw, a spoof on the Black Power symbol of a raised fist. Fairey says the outfit is also a play on the slang use of cats as "cool dudes, and the Black Panthers' getups made sense with that." So just as superstitious people believe black cats are a threat, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover [stated](#) the Black Panther Party was the "greatest threat to internal security of the country." Likewise, cats are largely independent, and for those who find that quality about them unsettling, Fairey says his painting portrays how "aspects of independence can be celebrated by some and be seen as terrifying to others."

Other submissions based on cultural figures include a photograph by Steve Schapiro, who documented the Godfather trilogy [behind the scenes](#) and contributed an image of Marlon Brando as the "Godfather" Vito Corleone holding a gray cat, an outtake from the opening scene in which the mobster pets the animal while explaining the [concept of friendship](#) to the undertaker Bonasera. And "A Great Big Giant World" by Marc Dennis is a

painting that shows Snopp Dogg (now “Snoop Lion”) in a velvet jacket, gazing at a framed portrait of a kitten — a comment on the Internet’s fascination with felines. The blue and white background is inspired by the symbols for Snoop’s former gang Crips, a curious juxtaposition between his rough past and the soft, innocent-looking creature, Cat Art Show’s curator and arts journalist Susan Michals tells TIME.

Several pieces are interactive. Misako Inaoka’s sculpture “Double” is a two-headed cat flanked by a couple of motion-sensored “bird-mice” that turn their heads and chirp when people walk by. Ryan Metke submitted a QR code, so when visitors hold their smartphones up to it, they will see a painting of a cat. Just as cats go viral on the Internet because fans share videos and photos of them with others, cat art exhibits that have occurred in the past year and a half are similarly interactive. In May 2013, artists from Huntsville, Alabama, organized [The Grumpy Cat Art Project](#), a showcase and online auction of pieces inspired by the [famously frowning feline](#). The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis started the Internet Cat Video Festival in 2012, a now annual event in which cat lovers gather in costume and watch YouTube clips projected on a big screen. The event has traveled to [Chicago](#) and [Brooklyn](#), and even the Cat Art Show will feature a mashup of cat videos contributed by the Minnesota museum.

As Cat Art Show curator Susan Michals explained the larger purpose of her exhibit in a phone interview, with a Maine Coon cat named “Miss Kitty Pretty Girl” apparently sitting on her lap, “I want to be able to expose more people to art, and if a cat is the way to get them to look at different forms of art, then that’s how I have to do it.”