

# Theater that **WOWs**

Without Walls Festival Takes the Stage This October

By Jess Yacovelle

Organized by La Jolla Playhouse, the Without Walls Festival (WOW) is a four day experience filled with eclectic theatre and adventurous art installations perfect for the entire family. Now in its 3rd year, the Without Walls Festival is currently hosted downtown from October 19th-22nd. With artists hailing from as far away as Berlin—and homegrown performers to boot—the aptly named WOW Festival brings art to everyday life.

*FINE Magazine* spoke with Without Walls Festival Director Meiyin Wang about the festival's origin story, the recent relocation downtown and what audiences can expect from the festival's third year.

## What is the Without Walls Festival?

The Without Walls Festival is put together by La Jolla Playhouse and is a festival with site-specific, immersive performances. It takes place in October, and this year, we're bringing the festival downtown. It has been previously [held] on the UC San Diego campus, and this year, we decided to work with partners within the city to bring the festival downtown.



## Why did you make that change?

One of the things [La Jolla Playhouse Artistic Director] Christopher Ashley said is that the artists are craving different environments. One of the things we're looking to do is plug into the energy and diversity of downtown. The works we're presenting feeds off the energy of the downtown and city environment.

We also want to meet audiences where they [are]. It takes a little more effort to come to La Jolla Playhouse and the campus, so people don't always attend. The idea is that [Without Walls] is participatory; [it's meant] for people to experience live and for pedestrians to happen upon a performance or installation.

## How did the Without Walls Festival begin?

It began in 2013 at La Jolla Playhouse. The impetus was how to engage with a different audience—to widen the audience of what La Jolla Playhouse's profile is—literally taking the theater outside of its walls so more audiences can engage with it.

## How did you personally get involved with this festival?

I moved from New York to California a year and a half ago. I was the co-director of the Under the Radar Festival at the Public Theater, and I've been working festivals in theater and performance for a long time in New York. When I moved, Christopher Ashley was interested in seeing what else could be done with the WOW Festival. It was an exciting opportunity because this was the only kind of festival in the country with this kind of profile—site-specific, immersive, participatory theater.

## What can we expect this year?

It's a fun mix of international, national and local works. One of the locations we're working with is the San Diego Public Library. We're doing two pieces: one is Super Night

Shot by Gob Square Arts Collective. The premise is that an hour before the audience arrives, they go out into the streets of San Diego and make a film about a hero's journey... then they screen that film for the audience. It's one of the most joyous, fun things, and it really captures the energy of night-life in a city.

The other piece in the library is called *The Quiet Volume* [by Ant Hampton and Tim Etchells]. It's completely different—it's a piece for two people at a time who sit quietly in the reading room library with headphones, and they follow instructions. Through that, a narrative emerges.

## Is there anything else we should know?

One of the things we're trying to do with this festival is show that it's not the [typical] theater-performance experience. It's about trying to engage with the work in a different way, engage with the audience members in a different way. We can't wait to have [San Diegans] spend the weekend with us. ■

To learn more about the Without Walls Festival, visit [lajollaplayhouse.org/wowfestival2017](http://lajollaplayhouse.org/wowfestival2017). WOW runs from October 19th-22nd.

## Who else will be at the WOW Festival?

Performers and art installations include:

- FAETOPIA: A Faerie Flash Mob, in partnership with the New Children's Museum
- Under Construction: An American Masque, in association with UCSD Department of Theatre & Dance
- WOW Festival Club in the brick room of Bread and Salt
- Trisha Brown Dance Company's In Plain Site and more! View the complete list of performers and artists at the La Jolla Playhouse's website.