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SURVEYING THE BAY AREA NOW: TWELVE ARTISTS, CRITICS, CURATORS, AND WRITERS

Sitting by the Dock of the Bay: A Discussion on the State of Art by Andrew Berardini

Voices include those of Desirée Holman, Chris Perez, Anthony Meier, Rena Bransten, Larry Rinder, Constance Lewallen, Chris Kubick, Kevin Killian, Chris Perez, Claudia Altman-Siegel, and Steve Seid



I've been to San Francisco more times than any other city I've not actually lived in. Growing up in LA, it's where my acne-scarred, Kerouac reading, Dead Kennedies listening, would-be bohemian friends split to post-high school in order to feel cultured and urbane, something many find difficult in Southern California after childhoods amidst the cinderblock suburbs and the dual pop culture juggernauts of Hollywood and "beautiful downtown Burbank."

Though I've been there more times than I can count over the last fifteen years, I still really don't know the Bay Area. There's a special knowledge gained from standing in one place and watch it shift and change over time. So instead of applying my outsider's take on the Bay Area, I've decided to ask those that live and work there how they feel.

Fall is the beginning of the year for culture, high and low: TV shows premiere, the most literature gets published by publishers after the long drag of "beach reads," the smartest movies (that usually make the least money) are squeezed in here between the Christmas family fare and the Summer blockbuster, and the art world puts out its best wares and ideas. As an opener to the season in San Francisco, instead of our normal reviews, we've asked a number of artists, curators, and gallerists to weigh in on San Francisco this fall as an art town. We asked what they were working on, what they were looking forward to, and most importantly how they felt about the Bay Area as a place for art and artists. Some simply listed the shows that they're looking forward to while others gave poetic, existential contemplations. We don't pretend that this is all inclusive, but it's a good start. This is what a few Bay Area denizens think about art where they live. Many thanks to all who contributed, and if you feel your voice isn't included, please add it in the comments on the bottom.

Andrew Berardini, West Coast Editor, ArtSlant. Andrew is a writer and curator living in Los Angeles

Desirée Holman

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We are making art that can make you experience, change, see, love, feel, think.

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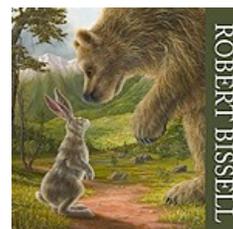
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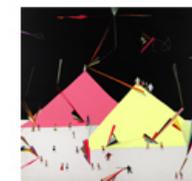
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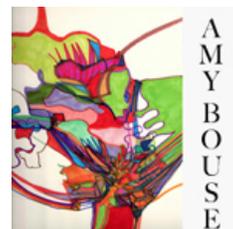
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Go Mary Elizabeth Yarbrough! Go Veronica De Jesus!

Go Stephanie Syjuco! Go Mike Arcega!

Go Jonn Herschend!

We're going on wit our bad selves! We're here to stay.

Desirée Holman is an interdisciplinary artist who lives and works in Oakland, California. She has an upcoming exhibition at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles and is represented in San Francisco by the Silverman Gallery.

Larry Rinder

*The Bay Area art scene continues to be vibrant and surprising. Some of my favorites this fall have been the sculptor Vince Fecteau's installation of works from SFMoMA's permanent collection. Like much of his own work, the show seems to revolve around the themes of transparency and impediment. It's a rascally exhibition, with a number of never-seen-before works, including a really odd pink creature made in Murano glass by Max Ernst. Mitzi Pederson's show at **Ratio 3** has some stunning new floor pieces that bring together her earlier concrete and glitter structures with her more ephemeral xerox paper works. We wish she'd move back here from Berlin! There's an excellent show at **Eleanor Harwood Gallery** of three young CCA grads: Matt Momchilov, Jesse Schlesinger, and Nancy Chan. This show captures a spirit very much in the air here: personal, evanescent, and finely crafted. The cartoony aspect of the old Mission School is gone, replaced by something closer to subjective realism. I'm totally excited to see Todd Bura's show which opens tonight at **Triple Base**. He is such a great artist and it's tragic that he left us for New Jersey. Next week there are several important openings, including the latest installment of Jens Hoffman's serial exhibition on great American novels: *Moby Dick* (at **CCA Wattis**), and here at **BAM/PFA** Fernando Botero's *Abu Ghraib Series* and Ari Marcopoulos' first American mid-career survey. Ari's show is looking spectacular!*

Larry Rinder is the director of the **Berkeley Art Museum** and Pacific Film Archive. Before his current appointment he held the position of Dean of Graduate Studies at the California College of the Arts.

Anthony Meier

*The most exciting show this fall is the Bruce Conner show at **Paule Anglim**. One of the world's greatest and most inventive artists. The other happening this year that is continual enjoyment for my family is the new **Academy of Science**. One of the century's greatest pieces of architecture.*

Anthony Meier is the proprietor of **Anthony Meier Fine Arts**, a contemporary art gallery in San Francisco

Constance Lewallan

I've lived in San Francisco since 1980 and have witnessed many changes in the San Francisco art world during that time. Here are the pluses and minuses as I see them.

PLUSES:

SFMOMA, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive, California College of Art



(Wattis Institute) and San Francisco Art Institute (and sometimes the deYoung Museum) present world class exhibitions. At the geographic margins, there are several other exhibition venues: Mills College Art Museum in Oakland, Oakland Museum of California, Nelson Gallery at UC Davis, San Jose Museum, San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, Cantor Center at Stanford, et al.

Small, artist-run galleries have proliferated.

Bay Area artists are invited to show nationally and internationally (this was usually not the case until fairly recently).

Many major collectors are based here.

There are several art schools and universities that draw students and teachers.

MINUSES:

Alternative spaces, once a mainstay of the scene, are struggling; some are closing.

Several years ago there were two daily papers, each with an art critic. Now, there is virtually only one--the San Francisco Chronicle--and one art critic.

Major collectors don't support local artists.

Many educational institutions are working under severe budget restraints.

Insufficient critical dialogue.

There is little support for public art.

I believe strongly that innovative and important art was and is made here and finally people are beginning to know it.

Constance Lewallen is Adjunct Curator at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

Rena Bransten

I am looking forward to the exhibitions commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) that are taking place this season.

Rena Bransten is the proprietor of **Rena Bransten Gallery**, a contemporary art gallery in San Francisco

Chris Kubick

I'm working on a film right now, a film about sound libraries. Or really, one very specific sound library, which is a library of crowd sounds that was begun by a recordist know only as "Douglas" who worked for the silent film star Douglas Fairbanks c. 1930. The library was later acquired and added to by another Douglas, Douglas Fleischut, who founded a fairly obscure company called Language Removal Services and who was my first employer in Hollywood. I'm making the film in a backwards way, in that I've already finished the soundtrack (composed from sounds from the library of crowds), and am now pulling together various disparate image sources (mostly from old silent films) to accompany the inner titles that tell the story of the film, or rather, of the library that is at the heart of the film.

The bay area is an eccentric place, or maybe x-centric would be a better word. Not only in that post-Keasey freak folk kind of burning man way either.

It's a place without a center, or a place whose center is the bottom of the sea. We're not that close to the bubbling NY-London-Berlin-(LA?) cauldron of capital, so we have a lot of freedom to do fuck-all, or do whatever eccentric thing we feel like doing. Which is sometimes fun, sometimes rewarding, sometimes hard. In general, I think good ideas and good art develop quietly over time, and the space and freedom that exists out here are great for people who have independent visions to pursue.

Chris Kubick is a Bay Area artist who often collaborates with Anne Walsh in a collective that goes by the name ARCHIVE

Kevin Killian

It is still the loveliest city in America, and its poetry (and its art writing, to which the poetry's inextricably bound, like Gemini) continues to blossom and freshen. But on the other hand San Francisco's always been a city easy to say goodbye to, and the current economic crisis only heightens the underlying despair. I feel sorry for the collectors, tapping neat chalk ticks against their old masterpieces, for the gallerists, coasting the months till recovery, for the curators, ideas pounding off a newly lowered cost ceiling, for the young artists who can't afford to buy materials, who face massive student loans. To counter the general stasis everyone I know seems to be making some movement, even if it is to reiterate the old globalist's cheerful saw about bad times being good for art.

Kevin Killian born 1952, is a poet, novelist, critic and playwright, living in San Francisco.

Chris Perez

I wish I had something poetic and clever and insightful to say, but I'm dry like the LA river.

I think SF is a great city in which to live and work. Of course the economic downfall has affected SF, but I feel that the institutions and collectors here are still very supportive, visiting the gallery, and buying work. Things do happen here but on a much smaller scale and at a slower pace. The city is receptive to new art. Not only do good artists live here, a good number of artists also visit the city. There are always lectures, residencies, etc. Our viewfinder is wide, and while we do look to New York, London, Berlin, and Reykjavik, SF is always on the horizon.

*I am looking forward to seeing Sean Talley at **Jancar Jones** and Hiroshi Sugimoto at **Fraenkel Gallery**. And of course Ari Marcopoulos' mid-career survey opening next week at the Berkeley Museum of Art! I feel very good about the season. It seems as if galleries are mounting solid shows that are worth seeing and spending time with.*

Chris Perez is the proprietor of **Ratio 3**, a contemporary art gallery in San Francisco.

Claudia Altman-Siegel

I just opened my gallery in January of 2009. Since I am fairly new to San Francisco, I'm still learning the nuances of the scene here. The Bay Area's art scene is small but dedicated and we are picking up momentum.

I've begun with tremendous enthusiasm and energy, and feel like the reception to the gallery has been overall very positive. I hope more people will learn about the gallery, an expanding audience as time goes by. This season we are starting to participate in art fairs for the first time. We will be going to Frieze in London in October, and to NADA in Miami in December. I am looking forward to taking the gallery to the international scene and seeing how our reception will be there. Of course I spent years participating in fairs at my old job at Luhring Augustine, but this will be different, marked by an excitement to reintroduce myself with the new gallery.

We have several great shows planned for this season. The first is a special exhibition with the estate of Charley Harper which opens on Thursday, 24th. Then the first US solo show of the Japanese artist, Shinpei Kusanagi. Then in January the first west coast show of Shannon Ebner.

Claudia Altman-Siegel is the proprietor of **Altman Siegel Gallery** in San Francisco.

Steve Seid

It's hard to feel anything about art in the Bay Area, because to feel anything is to feel everything. The works are so expansive, the intentions so wide-ranging, the skill-sets so

disparate, the materials so promiscuous, the ambitions so fickle, the gestures so hearty, the continuance so miraculous, that to feel anything is to favor one feeling over another, differentiating one from the next, indifference from engagement, neutrality from estimation, apathy from passion. And there lies the problem: art in the Bay Area does not stalk a single response, but a multitude. It desires all manner of provocation. At least that's what I feel.

Steve Seid is the Video Curator of the [Pacific Film Archive](#)

Posted by [Andrew Berardini](#) on 9/21

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Marx & Zavattero

Great comments, all. Our hard work continues but we feel confident the art world has begun to take notice of our rich, diverse, and talented scene. Keep on supporting your local artists by visiting the galleries -- this fall and winter Marx & Zavattero is mounting great new solo shows by San Francisco grads who still live and work in the Bay Area. On view through October 17: David Hevel (CCA MFA); October 24 - December 5, 2009: Michael Arcega (SFAI BFA, Stanford MFA); December 12, 2009 - January 30, 2010: Taravat Talepasand (SFAI MFA)

Comment by: marxzav on Tuesday 09/22/09 at 12:36 PM

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