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BOOM OR BUST IN THE BAY

Taking the pulse of a changing art scene during San Francisco Art Week

By Bryan Barcena

February 2, 2026 5:06 pm

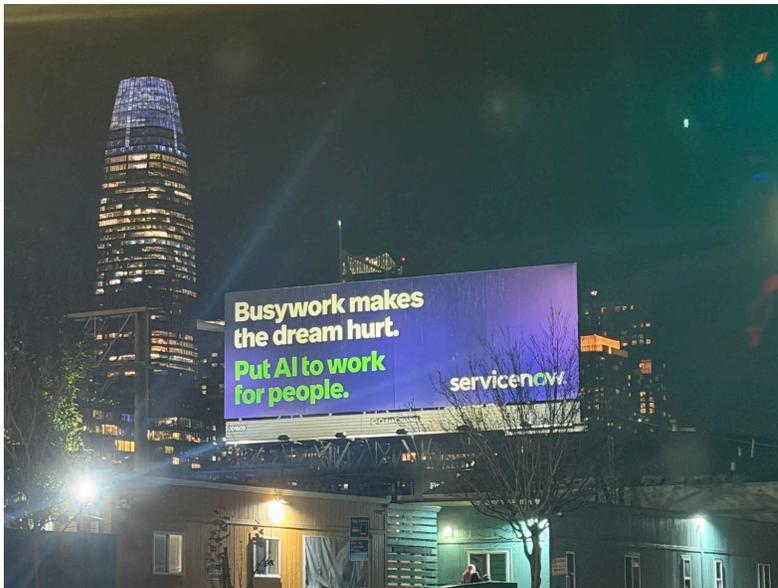


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THE BIG NEWS IN THE BAY AREA is how the rise of AI has reinvigorated the region's tech sector. When I arrived for SF Art Week in late January, cryptic, pastel all-text billboards everywhere spoke in some kind of "for computers, by computers" business language that was mostly indecipherable to me. But while billions of dollars are flooding the large language models of the world, the Bay Area art world isn't quite seeing the trickle-down effect. In the past year Anglim/Trimble, Altman Siegel, Gagosian, and Rena Bransten have shuttered their San Francisco gallery spaces, the di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art is selling its Napa Valley campus, and Kadist has flown the coop. The San Francisco Art Institute went the way of the dodo in 2022, and just seven days before SF Art Week, the California College of the Arts announced that it would be dissolved and its campus purchased by Vanderbilt University.

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That announcement cast a pall over every conversation about the state of the arts that week. It was no surprise that most of the art on display was pragmatic and eager to please: Across many of the city's galleries, the works were colorful, wall-bound, moderately sized, and accordingly priced. There's no shame in that game, though, and I found that there were plenty of gems amid the baubles.



Despite the gloom and doom, the folks at Gallery Wendi Norris suggested to me that it had been a good year for the gallery, and judging by the [Marie Wilson](#) show on display there, it's no wonder why. The paintings and drawings on view are a mash-up of delicious morsels, a grab bag of Surrealist and visionary art: a little of Wifredo Lam's curves, dots, and dashes; overlapping waves of glowing colors that brought to mind Agnes Pelton; the gestural cartoons of Joan Miró; and grids and geometries suggestive of Hilma af Klint.



Marie Wilson, *Pillar of the Central Void*, 1961–62, oil on canvas, 23 × 18". Photo by Scott Saraceno

A native of Northern California, Wilson fell in with the Dynatons in the early 1950s, practitioners of a distinctly Californian vein of Surrealism that shared the European movement's forms and general desire for direct mind-body

connection, yet was informed not by the Freudian unconscious but by a swirl of Native American culture, astrophysics, extraterrestrial life, Zen Buddhism, and sundry other versions of theosophic mindfulness (very California). Founded by Lee Mullican, Gordon Onslow Ford, and Wolfgang Paalen, the movement migrated from Paris to Mexico during World War II and eventually found a home in the burgeoning counterculture of the early-1950s Bay Area. (The group was the subject of a 1951 show at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.) At Wendi Norris, Wilson's works from the latter half of the 1950s, such as *Rites of Passage*, 1957–58, or *View over the Atlantis*, 1958–59, are a joy to perceive—like psychedelic Rorschach tests exploding with biomorphic forms.

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A Zoox driverless car stationed at the entrance to FOG Design+Art



A view down the hallway of FOG Design+Art during the opening night gala

The main event of SF Art Week, FOG Design+Art, opened on Wednesday evening, a gala affair at which visitors were greeted by a driverless ZOOX car occupying pride of place on the red carpet (the egg-shaped car is *really* cute). Reviewing the successes or failures of an art fair has always seemed an odd proposition to me, a redundant and ultimately ineffective application of the critical apparatus. What I will say is that the organizational principle of FOG, which is to present both art and design under one roof, presented a welcome respite from the all-art model and provides the chance to consider avant-garde furniture and lighting design in relation to the bigger-ticket items.

The next day, the new Atrium Art Fair opened at the Minnesota Street Project—a complex of three warehouses that provides affordable spaces for galleries, artist studios, and nonprofit spaces in the Dogpatch—and *Artforum* contributor Andrew Berardini and I arrived early to see what the galleries that reside there year-round had on offer. We were greeted by a charm offensive of quirky practices.



Ian Everard, *WORKS IN PROGRESS*, 2025, found book and watercolor, 8 × 10".

At Jack Fischer Gallery, Ian Everard had meticulously replicated found books in watercolor, presenting the duplicate directly alongside the original, both framed in a black shadowbox. The titles Everard chose to depict elevated the gesture beyond mechanical reproduction, with titles that slyly echoed the replicative gesture (*Make Your Own Sails*), the purpose of art writ large (*No and Yes: on the genesis of human communication*), and the artist's own subjectivity (*Sanity in Art*). In some cases, there were subtle but noticeable omissions of subtitles, author names, and colors that again complicated the act of mimicry, as when *A Dipper full of Stars* became just *of Stars*—what I hope is an oblique reference to the meme about Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). I genuinely thought about taking one home, given the almost affordable price tag, but I'm happy to report that all the ones I would have wanted had been sold.



Lee Materazzi, *Tangle*, 2025, ink-jet print, 33 × 23 1/2".

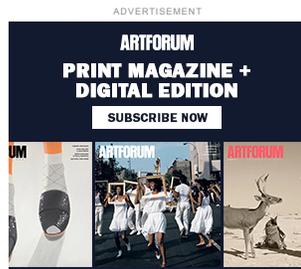
Across the way, at Eleanor Harwood Gallery, Lee Materazzi's crisp photographs depict bizarre tableaux in which the artist's body and its surroundings are covered completely by segments of colored or metallic paper, tape, and stickers. In *Bust*, 2025, two exposed nipples peek out from a field of green and white marble patterning, while in *Baby Blue*, 2025, her torso appears bent over a chair while a soda cup sits on the small of her back, all of which have been obscured by what appear to be blue Post-its. The most compelling photos, however, were devoid of the human form: *Tangle*, 2025, depicting a folding chair clad in green marble paper, interrupted by the shock of a neon-orange extension cord that drapes over its edge and into a tangled pile on the floor—it too partially papered in the marble motif—gleefully sublimates its discrete elements into a pleasantly indecipherable all-over composition.



Sally Scopa, *Wilkinson Park*, 2025, acrylic on antique stereocard, 3 × 7".

Finally, a show of small paintings over stereocard (nineteenth-century paper slides of paired photographs that appear to form a 3D image when viewed through a stereoscope) by Sally Scopa at Bass & Reiner presented to us like small jewels—busy pointillist dreamscapes in pink, yellow, and blue that totally obscured the underlying pair of photographs. It seemed no coincidence that many of the compositions mimicked the multicolor petri dish of dots that form Ishihara color blindness tests, drawing connections to the imperfect mechanics of human vision. Andrew and I both also thought about taking one of these home, but I am happy to report that all of them were sold.

Maybe things weren't so bad up here after all?



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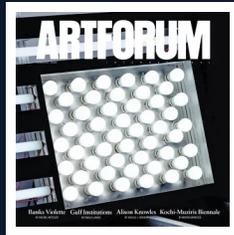
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