



talking cure

PART I
BEING HOME IN TIME
FALL 2009

All drawings, unless otherwise noted, are by Jarrett Earnest

layout by Stephen Raaka

Talking Cure Quarterly: part I: Being Home in Time © Jarrett Earnest 2009

Selections from W. H. Auden's "Reading" are from *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* published by Alfred A. Knopf and Random House inc. as a Vintage Books Edition, in 1968.

The text for Georges Bataille's "The Language of Flowers" is from *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings 1927-1939*, edited and translated by Allan Stoekl. Published by the University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis in 1985 and appear on pages 10 – 14.

Laura Cassidy Roger's *Rendering Life, Refiguring Diversity from the Highlands of New Guinea* is edited from her Master of Arts thesis in Exhibition and Museum Studies at San Francisco Art Institute, conferred May 2009, and the author retains copyright.

Theodore Allen Heinrich's "Hoke and Hype, Chocolate and Gold a case of Egyptomania in Toronto" appears in *artscanada* "Puzzles: Aspects of Criticism" April/May 1980 Number 234/235 published by the Society for Arts Publications and appears courtesy Anne Trueblood Brodzky.



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Talking Cure: Part I: Being Home in Time

Talking Cure is a printed quarterly that hopes to address the concerns of the Bay Area and broader art world in thematic issues which focus on artist projects and experimental criticism. *Theory* will be regarded here like surgery, something used only when absolutely necessary, and then by the most skilled practitioners – believing critical theory to be something that can artfully save a life, or, when improperly carried out or unnecessarily undertaken, cause needless pain.

Talking Cure is in partnership with the new online journal *artpractical.com* and will appear on their website as an archived PDF to be downloaded or printed anywhere by anyone. In their collaboration between online and printed platforms *Talking Cure* and *artpractical.com* are seeking to interrogate the meaning and function of publishing in the present moment. Because paper is no longer the easiest mass conveyor of content it allows us to see it as a physical object (as it has always been but with ever greater clarity.) Publication are entities which make meaning in their materiality, moving throughout the world and into archived history. Although the online interface has the advantages of instantaneous posting and interactivity in a historical sense it proves a questionable resource: writing can be seamlessly altered, or disappear completely from the fragile webbing of the internet. A printed statement makes a definite stand which can be cited by future artists and scholars as the record of a precise moment. In this way *Talking Cure* serves as an anchoring system for *artpractical.com*.

Talking Cure's content will also filter onto *artpractical.com* as “features,” and some of the writing generated online will move into the printed form. In keeping with the historicizing function of *Talking Cure* it will seek out writing that moves beyond the topical service of the “review,” looking for work that it can stand on its own and expands a reader's understanding of art and the world.

The theme of this first issue focuses on artists whose work deals with defining for themselves a space in a particular location, either historically or geographically – *home* in the deepest sense.

In between these texts, while grappling with their interconnections and relationships, you will find an invitation to join and extend their conversation, and may it aid you in your own ongoing efforts to make yourself at home in the world.

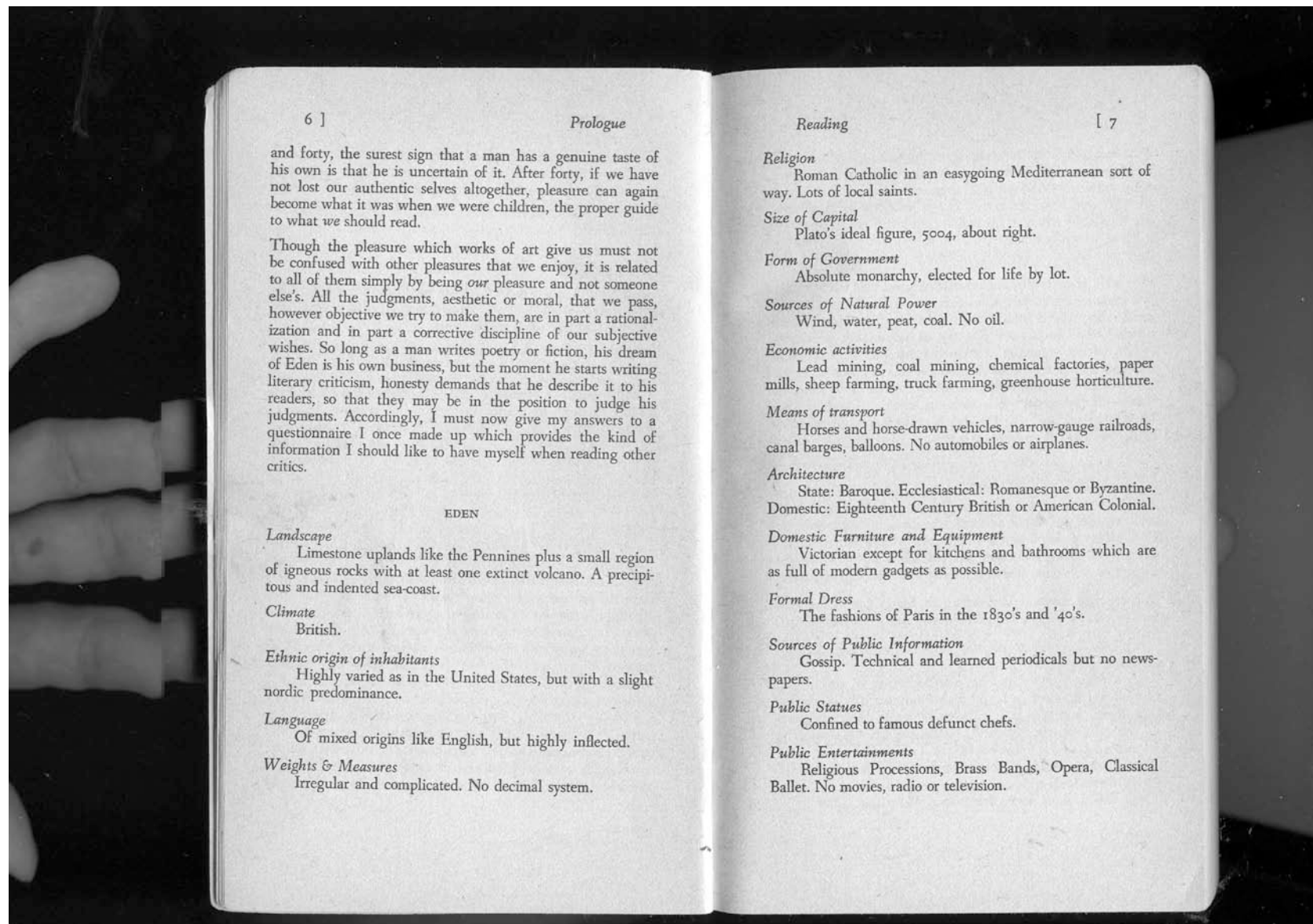
- Jarrett Earnest

Editor, *Talking Cure Quarterly*

THE THEME FOR THE NEXT EDITION OF TALKING CURE, WINTER 2010, IS:

THE QUESTION OF TASTE IN THE 21st CENTURY

FOR SUBMISSIONS, COMMENTS, OR QUESTIONS, PLEASE EMAIL: TALKINGCUREQUARTERLY@GMAIL.COM



Eden in Translation

In an essay on reading Auden created this survey for understanding a critic's personal agenda. For the present issue of *Talking Cure* many of the contributors were asked to answer it as well. Their completed "EDENS" were then given to artists to make visual responses. This, aside from being an inversion of the process of traditional art criticism, allows us to visualize the operation of art writing differently. For instance in her illustration of Amy Berk's Eden, Rye Purvis inserted an image of Sandra Bernhard engaged in a sex act. There is no explicit precedent for this in the text of Amy's response, but in the center of the artistic transcription of her paradise it remains. This type of projection happens endlessly in writing or talking about art – whether it is just what the critic personally brings to the work, or the way in which it is altered by the intertextual/institutional framework in which it is encountered. This fact is the motivation for the subjective preference of this journal, that perhaps by acknowledging the stakes of the writer or artist, aside from being more honest, it might aid in *seeing* a work more clearly and productively.

JARRETT EARNEST

Landscape

Lush open Southern swamp with large ancient tangerine and grapefruit trees, flanked by rock quarrys filled with water and surrounded by high tree covered mountains.

Climate

Unexpected waves of wet and dry grey, violet, white, blue and black - and twice a day at unspecified times gold, red, pale yellow – sublime, except when it isn't (hail).

Ethnic origin of inhabitants

Many eye colors and hair lengths (you can be all the _____ you want to be in a Dolly Parton wig.)

Language

English with outbursts of singing like sheep bells. Ideally language would sound like water.

Weights & Measures

Gravity will dictate, if only the gravity of the given situation.

Religion

General shamanism where all human activities are ritualized especially meals, and everyone loves the sun and moon. Blackberries and honey figure highly as well. And everyone must organize a personal array of sacred texts.

Size of Capital

100,000 – dispersed, but unequally, given preferences.

Form of Government

True Democracy and Quaker process

Sources of Natural Power

The wind (prince of the air)

Economic activities

Gifts

Means of transport

Swimming, rolling, dancing, and mincing about.

Architecture

Swiss Family Robinson houses in fruit trees, meets gothic architecture, meets Buckminster Fuller.

Domestic Furniture and Equipment

Shaker, things made for farmhouses, lots of velvet and numerous divans.

Formal Dress

Neoclassical theatrical garb (Isadora Duncan-like togas and what not) and highly architectural 19th century formal wear.

Sources of Public Information

Dinner parties, notes placed in knolls in tree trunks and written in the margins of library books.

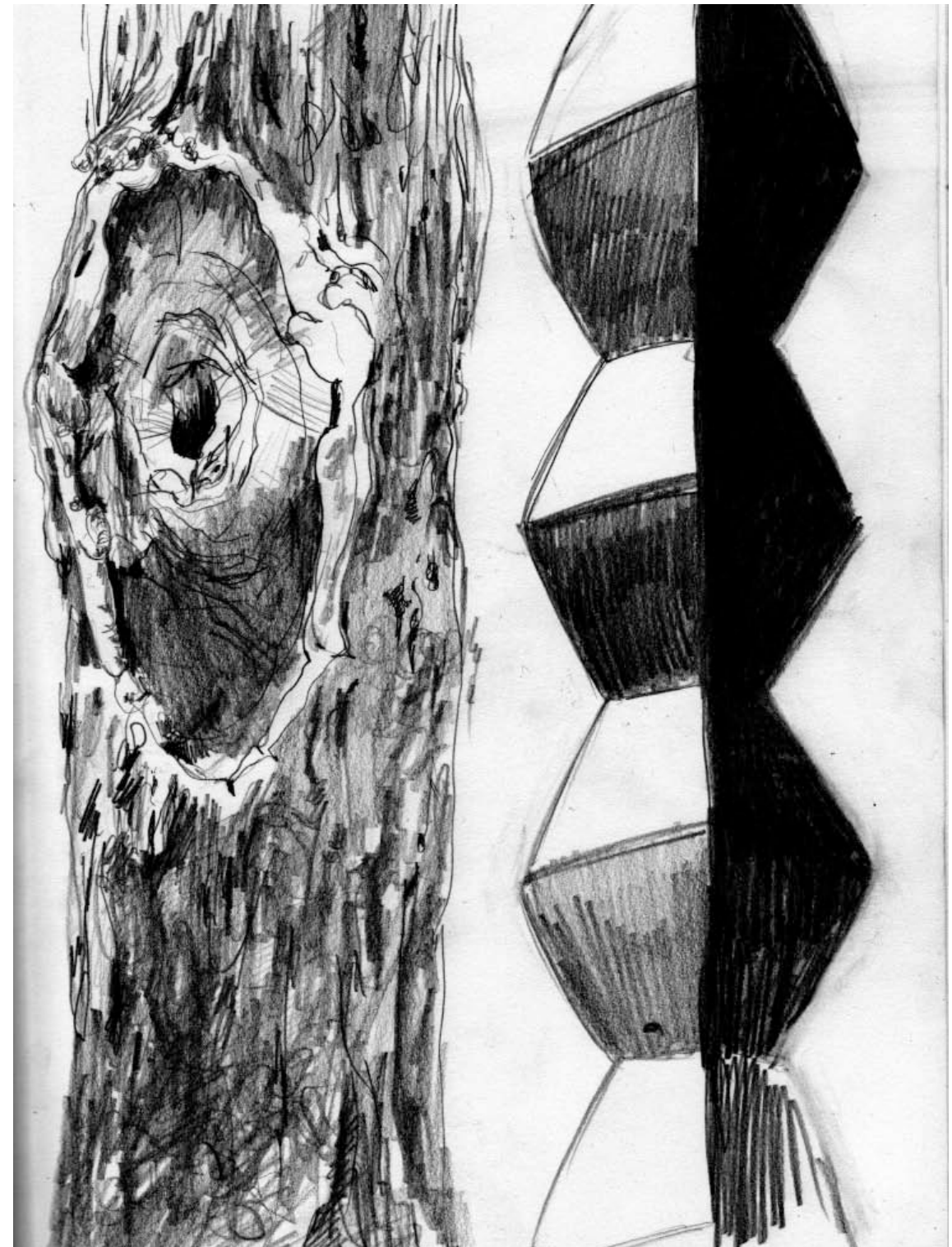
Public Statues

Brancusi's kiss gates, everywhere. Highly allegorical figurative statuary (Bernini) and amorphous rocks – ala Hepworth.

Public Entertainments

Huge community picnics, dances, bacchanals, and black carnivals. Films projected at night on large outdoor screens

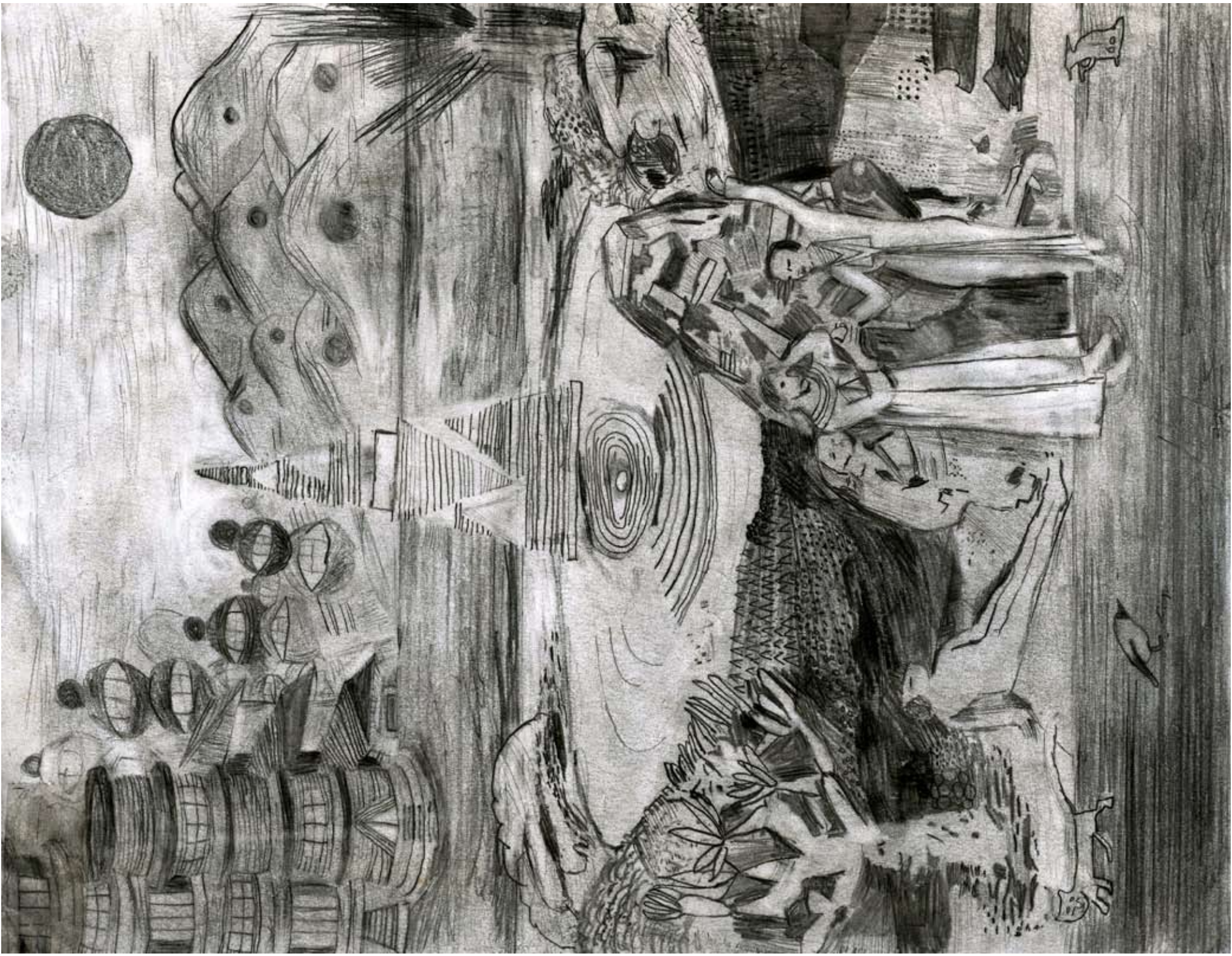
artwork by LEIGHA MASON



Amy Berk (www.twcdc.com/amyberk) uses an arte-povera mixture of minimalism and pop to address issues of feminism, the natural vs. the synthetic, the organic, and the sublime. She was the co-founder/co-director of the innovative Meridian Interns Program and currently teaches in the Center for Contemporary Practice at the San Francisco Art Institute, and in the Studio Arts Certificate Program at the University of California Berkeley/Extension. She co-publishes stretcher.org, (www.stretcher.org) a site for art and culture, and collaborates with Together We Can Defeat Capitalism (www.twcdc.com).

- AMY BERK
 - Landscape*
 - mountains, water (like the bay area!)
 - Climate*
 - mild (like the bay area- notice a trend)
 - Ethnic origin of inhabitants*
 - multiracial
 - Language*
 - polyglot
 - Weights & Measures*
 - berkovets (old russian)
 - Religion*
 - godless
 - Size of Capital*
 - das
 - Form of Government*
 - anarchism
 - Sources of Natural Power*
 - sun/wind
 - Economic activities*
 - bartering
 - Means of transport*
 - walking
 - Architecture*
 - blobitecture
 - Domestic Furniture and Equipment*
 - mid-century modern
 - Formal Dress*
 - yes
 - Sources of Public Information*
 - town cryer
 - Public Statues*
 - minimal
 - Public Entertainments*
 - anything outside
 - artwork by* RYE PURVIS





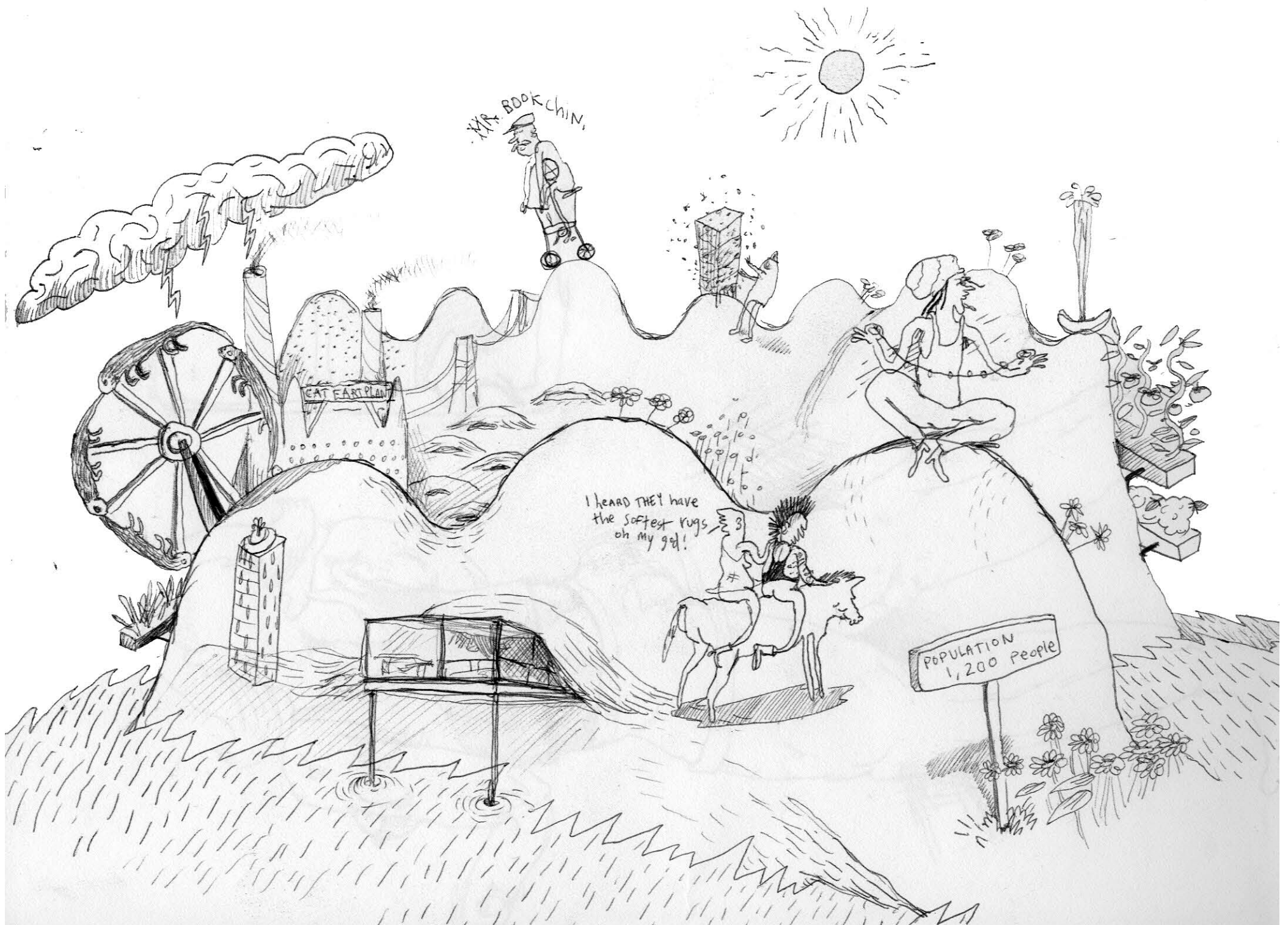
Terri Cohn is a writer, curator, and art historian, and was a contributing editor to Artweek magazine for twenty years. Fascinated by the zeitgeist for decades, she is currently intrigued by contemporary interpretations of traditional genres, the conceptual life of objects, and a return to storytelling.

TERRI COHN

- Landscape* gardens: wild, zen, artistic (since you asked for landscape, which is tamed wilderness)
- Climate* sunny with a chance of showers
- Ethnic origin of inhabitants* global; rainbow palette
- Language* Edenic, with dialects; inhabitants are polyglots
- Weights & Measures* gravity; cyclical time (seasonal, planetary)
- Religion* earth based
- Size of Capital* large, wide boulevards for strolling, filled with interesting people, cafes, bazaars
- Form of Government* animal and human kingdom; inherent respect for agility, cleverness, planning, artistic skill
- Sources of Natural Power* wind, water, sun, fire
- Economic activities* trading; gift economy
- Means of transport* feet; small wheeled conveyances powered by sun and wind and water
- Architecture* berm and Japanese domestic; green
- Domestic Furniture and Equipment* comfort and simplicity; soft cushions and pillows; Equipment: aesthetic and utilitarian – Italian design inspired
- Formal Dress* Women: long gowns with elegant trim (like art deco); rich color palette
- Sources of Public Information* public squares, griots; word and image scrolls
- Public Statues* minimal, that blend with the natural environment
- Public Entertainments* musicians, artist performances, conjurers, shadow puppet theater
- artwork by KIKI HUNT and MAC BALLANTINE*

Lawrence Rinder is the current director of the Berkeley Art Museum, having previously held the position of Dean of the California College of the Arts and been the contemporary art curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Aside from being devilishly charming, he is also a writer of art criticism, poetry, drama and fiction.

LAWRENCE RINDER	
<i>Landscape</i>	hilly, watery, full of flowers
<i>Climate</i>	nice with occasional strong thunderstorms
<i>Ethnic origin of inhabitants</i>	hippies, freaks, and a few genial punk rockers
<i>Language</i>	Egnlish
<i>Weights & Measures</i>	yes
<i>Religion</i>	One Love Jah Jah
<i>Size of Capital</i>	1,200 people on 4 square miles
<i>Form of Government</i>	Bookchinian anarchy
<i>Sources of Natural Power</i>	Otter wheels, Cat farts
<i>Economic activities</i>	jewelry manufacturing, vegetable cultivation, bee keeping
<i>Means of transport</i>	bicycles, donkeys
<i>Architecture</i>	Hobbit meets Philip Johnson's Glass House
<i>Domestic Furniture and Equipment</i>	soft rugs, chairs, tables, lamps
<i>Formal Dress</i>	pre-worn couture
<i>Sources of Public Information</i>	gossip
<i>Public Statues</i>	water features
<i>Public Entertainments</i>	puppet shows, toltng contests, sing-alongs
<i>artwork by</i>	ORION MARTIN





Laura Cassidy Rogers is a writer and critic based in San Francisco. She earned her B.A. from the University of Puget Sound in 2005 and her M.A. with Excellence in Scholarship from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2009. Theoretical models from science and technology studies inform her ongoing engagement with the dynamic living systems and communities that sustain our world.

LAURA CASSIDY ROGERS

(I apologize for not taking the time to indulge in a science fiction of perfect worlds, but I suppose plurality underscores much of my survey answers.)

- Landscape*
implies distancing gaze
- Climate*
conductive to life
- Ethnic origin of inhabitants*
migrations not origins
- Language*
sound, sight, talk, gesture, hear, look, breathe, art
- Weights & Measures*
gravity, balance, multiple scales, representation, life-size
- Religion*
ecology
- Size of Capital*
multiple capitals varying in size
- Form of Government*
ecological
- Sources of Natural Power*
sun, wind, tidal
- Economic activities*
exchange, life cycles
- Means of transport*
preference for public
- Architecture*
varied
- Domestic Furniture and Equipment*
varied
- Formal Dress*
varied
- Sources of Public Information*
multiple and varied
- Public Statues*
ephemeral
- Public Entertainments*
ephemeral
- artwork by ELLIS BELL*

Landscape

Everyone intimately sees sea, sky, desert and volcano, along with their dark mutations in space.

Climate

Temperate and lively, but seasons will change for those who need snow and sweat. Clouds and water for me.

Ethnic origin of inhabitants

In heaven, because ethnic origins had been so complex, their identities are largely archived and storied as fascinating and treasured memories. Now come ancient and new songs, sagas, smells. Herbal and spirit healing are still practiced.

Language

Everything spoken now continues, but Sami, Chicano and Mongolian dialects, code-switching and thousands of other vital forms (once considered obscure) are known, respected, celebrated, and even avidly studied.

Weights & Measures

No need in heaven.

Religion

Spirituality will be private. Institutionalized religions are recalled as poignantly immature constructions that resulted from the longings of orphans.

Size of Capital

Capital is the place where inspiration commands dance, art, writing, music, theater and puppetry, joyous beyond compare.

Form of Government

We're in accord. If anyone falls from grace, let the Mama speak to it.

Sources of Natural Power

Are we still earthbound? If so, we use with forethought. Sun and windmills.

Economic activities

Barter, crafts, do-it-yourself, resuscitating the discarded. The past industries of processed food, malls, identical housing have been replaced by sustainable agriculture, home gardens, hand-built homes from safe materials. We take care of each other. We actually enjoy listening to each other and practicing kindness. Money may well be regarded with hysterical laughter. There's enough because no one lives to steal.

Means of transport

Walking is favored. For those who need more, other realms are reachable; but if the world is no longer corrupted, are other realms more astounding than what's at hand?

Architecture

(Personal note from a brief stint at SUNY Buffalo art department in the 60s: my models of buildings, resembling elephants with courtyards, were indignantly dismissed. Today Frank Gehry, Herzog and de Meuron, and the Chinese do it, and the future will be wilder and more playful than ever.)

Domestic Furniture and Equipment

Spare, beautiful, and individual. For me, 1940's-influenced décor, my Norwegian-American grandmother's 1913 sewing machine, one wall of pictures of my children, a small image of each of my parents when they were young and eager, a simple desk. I already have them. The kind of light coming through a window is crucial.

Formal Dress

Embroidery's rampant, and we spend whole evenings at it. We revel in brilliant colors and textures – a tangerine swath here, a close-fitted vest there. Inspirations might be Japanese court drama, Mongolian ceremonials, Sami reindeer-herding caps.

Sources of Public Information

In my kind of world we dream and therefore we know.

Public Statues

D.H. Lawrence and my onetime kung fu teacher? Actually, do we need statues? We're equal and in love with our mutual possibilities. Trees are better.

Food

Fish, berries, and spicy stews. For dessert, rose geranium leaves.

Public Entertainments

Like gypsies we spend many evenings making music and dancing to it. The whirl of this transcendent circle overcomes obstacles, and we're compelled to laugh with the joy of being alive at all.

artwork by JARRETT EARNEST

Mia Kirsi Stageberg is a Norwegian-American fiction writer who first published with the New Directions annuals of the 1960s and 70s. Based in San Francisco, she has worked as an art writer, editor, oral historian, researcher, nonprofit fundraiser and cloth sculptress



Megan Wilson grew up in Montana. She received her BFA from the University of Oregon in 1992 and an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1997. Her work has been exhibited nationally in San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland, and Los Angeles; and internationally in Tokyo, Japan; Yogyakarta, Indonesia; Paris, France; Jaipur, India, and Manila Philippines. In 2000 she co-founded the on-line publication www.Stretch.org. She is based in San Francisco.

MEGAN WILSON	
<i>Landscape</i>	Montana with an ocean
<i>Climate</i>	77 degrees year round (snow isn't cold)
<i>Ethnic origin of inhabitants</i>	Mix of all existing ethnicities
<i>Language</i>	All languages are spoken and understood ... articulately
<i>Weights & Measures</i>	Universally agreed upon
<i>Religion</i>	None
<i>Size of Capital</i>	There is no capital
<i>Form of Government</i>	There's no need for government
<i>Sources of Natural Power</i>	Power of positive thinking
<i>Economic activities</i>	Barter system
<i>Means of transport</i>	Telepathic transport (if you want to be somewhere – you're there), flying and bicycles (cuz they're fun)
<i>Architecture</i>	Mix of Oscar Niemeyer and Frank Lloyd Wright
<i>Domestic Furniture and Equipment</i>	Well designed
<i>Formal Dress</i>	Not required
<i>Sources of Public Information</i>	Crystal ball
<i>Public Statues</i>	Trees
<i>Public Entertainments</i>	Will be enjoyed by all
<i>artwork by</i>	STEPHEN RAAKA



Additional Contributors

W.H. Auden (1907 – 1973) was a babe, a Brit, and totally brilliant, in that charming aristocratic way that perhaps died with him. A famous poet who also wrote divine criticism; he published over thirty books before he joined the angels in body, where he had so long remained in spirit.

Georges Bataille (1897 – 1962) French poet, philosopher, and surrealist-ethnographer, began as a medieval librarian and died a mystic Saint of eroticism. As founding member of surrealist splinter group the College de Sociologie he sought the sacred in the modern world through the interrelationship between Love, Sex and Death. He also edited the short-lived journal *Documents* (1929-1930) to which the present publication is forever in debt.

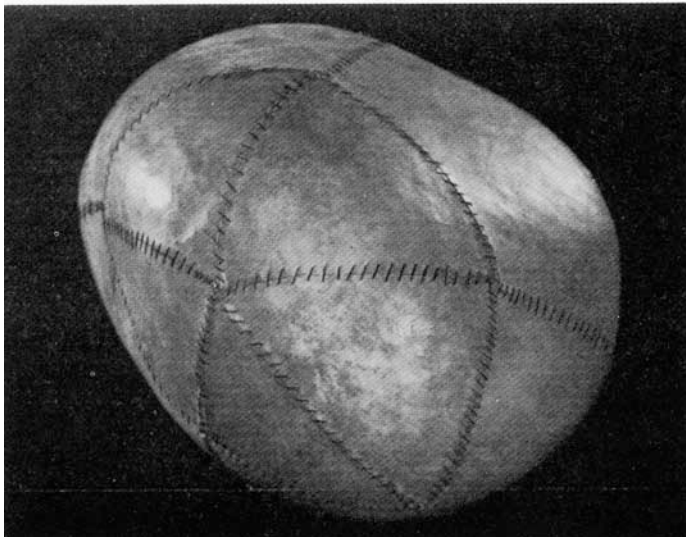
Susan Greene is an artist, educator and clinical psychologist. Her practice straddles a range of cultural arenas, new media, and public art, focusing on borders, migrations, decolonization and memory. Originally from NYC, she has been a resident of the Bay Area 25 years. Greene is visiting faculty at the San Francisco Art Institute, directs the Learning Center at the San Francisco Art Institute and has a private psychotherapy practice in San Francisco.

Theodore Allen Heinrich (1910 – 1981) was an art historian, curator, and educator. After extensive education at UC Berkeley and Cambridge, and serving in the US military, remained in Germany from 1945 to 1950 in connection with the recovery and restitution of looted works of art. He was also involved in assisting German authorities in the rehabilitation and reorganization of war-damaged museums, libraries, archives, monuments as well as organizing art history seminars. From 1953 to 1955, he was Associate Curator of Paintings and Curator-in-charge of drawings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. There, he was involved in various projects to rebuild areas of the galleries, as well as publishing several museum books. From 1955 to 1962, he was Director of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. He then taught as a full professor at York University from 1963 until his death.

Eileen Myles is among the ranks of the officially restless, a poet (Sorry Tree, Not Me...) whose first collection of essays on art, poetry, queerness and culture “The Importance of Being Iceland,” for which she received a Warhol/Creative Capital grant is recently published from Semiotext(e)/MIT. She ran St. Mark’s Poetry Project in the 80s. In 1992 she conducted an openly female write in campaign for President. Since 1996 Myles has toured with Sister Spit. She’s a Professor Emeritus of Writing and Literature at UC San Diego. She lives in New York.

Alison Pebworth’s work excavates symbols, images and narratives from American history and pop culture and reworks them to differently visualize our present. Her ongoing social research project *Road Side Show and Tell* can be viewed in evolving in documentation at www.roadsideshowandtell.com. She lives and works in San Francisco.

Peter Selz was one of the first art historians to examine German Expressionism not as a series of stylistic changes (formalism), but as motivated by the politics of the time. His interest in art as a political phenomenon has never altered. Selz became the curator of department of painting and sculpture exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1958. At the Modern, his exhibitions included the infamous 1960 Jean Tinguely “Homage to New York,” a sculpture that destroyed itself (and started a fire) in the sculpture garden of the Museum. Mr. Selz was the founding director of the Berkeley Art Museum, as well as an art history professor at University of California at Berkeley, and continues to write, curate and love art to this day.



TIM WHITEN *Untitled 9^o*, 1970-71, stone/leather, approx dia 12"
all photos pages 24-28 by Eberhard Otto, courtesey of Anne Broadzky

Kalavinka Dress

Mia Kirsi Stageberg

In the early 1970s I wrote for *artscanada* in Toronto; it offered a uniquely thriving home for insights into art. I reveled in the soulful way of working guided by Anne Brodzky, a consummate gardener of creative connections and shared understanding. *artscanada* had a deep affinity for nature, natural processes, and transformation. Many of the featured artists and those of us who wrote about their work had an interest in shamanism. What was the work of traditional shamans and what did they tap into? What tools had they been taught? What realms did they have to go to, in search of healing? If they had what it took to get there, what did they carry back? Under our curiosity, longing gave inspiration new shapes.

As a part of *artscanada*, I loved the chance to come close to a work of art, respect and befriend it. Often I had generous help from an artist in learning about methods and intent. My resulting piece became a translation of a painting or sculpture’s rhythm and essence. Instead of telling the reader, “Go see these,” I could show what I’d found of value. Art writing, developed in that way, stood as a kind of sign by which to recognize the original’s singular dance. It referred to what had touched the core of me and might draw others to it.

In those times many of us changed names. Instead of causing social embarrassment, it lifted hopes, as certain traditional people take another name when a condition of life demands resources. As a young woman I’d been married, and when I no longer was, I felt unready to take back my father’s surname. I chose a last name that felt right: Kalavinka. It’s a Sanskrit word I ran across in the ancient, voluminous Japanese *Tale of Genji*, for a bird that sings in paradise. To me, Kalavinka meant expressing, true as it could be made in a given time, a grateful sense of life – of the world as imagination means it. I called myself Mia Kalavinka through the early 1970s and even my Canadian bank account was under the name. My articles for *artscanada* were Mia Kalavinka’s.

Three experiences with *artscanada* I particularly cherish – with Tim Whiten, Nancy Graves, and Sarain Stump. All three artists offered me an open portal into their work, and my recollections are visceral. In Tim Whiten’s studio, I spent a couple of long afternoons wandering through his tables full of large stones. He had collected other materials – bones, fur – that strongly suggested the home of a tribal healer, although he didn’t call himself a healer then. I remember the space as dark and dank; I don’t know if it was, but it definitely felt underworldly. Much of Whiten’s work involved wrapping, and the place in which that happened had the taste of uncanniness. He spoke seriously and well about reverent ways of wrapping stone, clearly representing a unique discipline he’d also taught his students as they helped. I think it’s characteristic of a Kalavinka form of exploration that spending time with the wrapped pieces and being allowed to touch them – steeping in the feel of their home – led me to a feeling of being wrapped. Whiten told me that those who worked with him had said this, too.

I’d met Shoshone artist Sarain Stump at an interdenominational meeting of native and Christian spiritual leaders, I believe at York University. The conference had been meant to further intercultural cooperation among religious leaders. As I remember, in beginning negotiations they decided the most productive way to talk would be for participants to sit in a silent circle. Anyone who felt moved to speak told what he had in his heart. I don’t think this traditional council method produced any bullet-point agreements, but it was fascinating to watch. (I helped videotape.) A great deal of honest

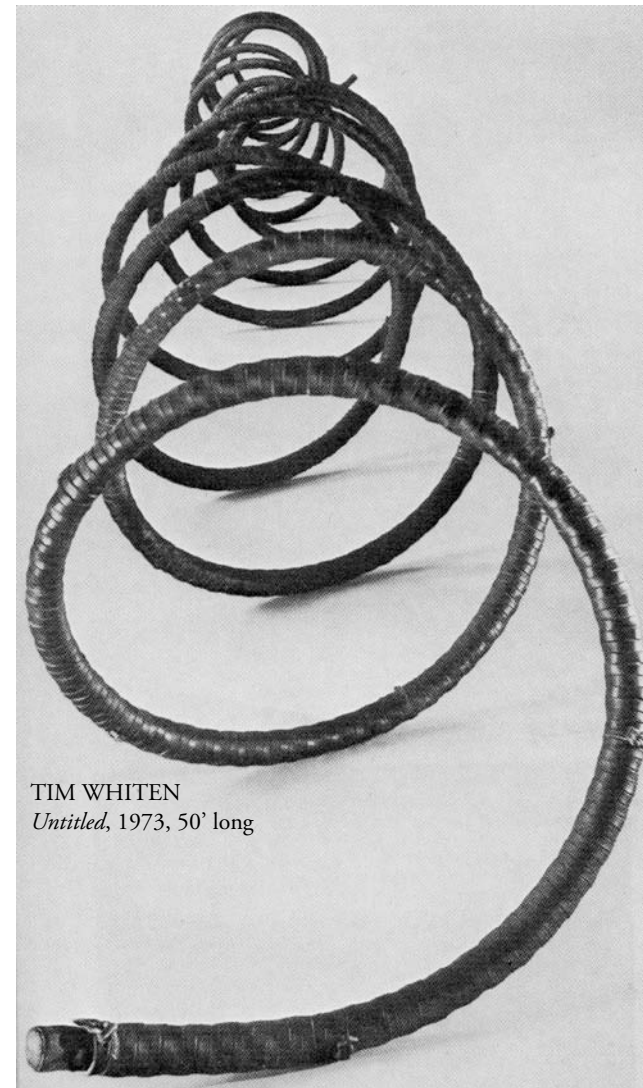
personal expression about the destruction of native spirituality and ways of life took place there. From that gathering, I was invited to others. I remember Sarain playing a wooden flute at pow-wows. He was a young visual artist, poet and educator and, like many native people there, he was generous with me, talking of what he was after in life and work. Anne Brodzky asked me to write for *artscanada* about his art, and I traveled to Saskatchewan to interview him and see the paintings. One of them seemed to carry a wild, skin-shearing howl right out of a shaman's dream.

On interviews with Tim Whiten and Sarain Stump, Chicano poet and social activist Cecilio García-Camarillo participated, and he gave me a sounding board as I wrote the pieces. Cecilio was deeply grounded in Aztec and Native American spirituality and had grown up near the Mexican border around curanderas who practiced with massage and herbs. We were lovers who would eventually live together for ten years and have three children; in my early, Canadian times of a Kalavinka way of working, we were about as connected as a double-handled water jar. Cecilio and I made the Saskatchewan trip together, and in the charged spirit of that time, Sarain and he connected like brothers. All Sarain had been asked to do was show his work, but he shared his commitment to help native youth rediscover their heritage, making art in a local institute. He also gave us gifts worthy of royal spirits: rare recordings of Atahualpa's music and an astounding cassette tape from Peru. Machu Picchu was still fairly inaccessible; there were no tourists to intrude on native festivals then. Sarain's tape held twanging harp music from elders in the Andes, the plangent singing of women, and the record of a ceremony where young children sang to bring up the sun. Sarain said it had been explained to him that if the children did not do this each year, the sun could never return.

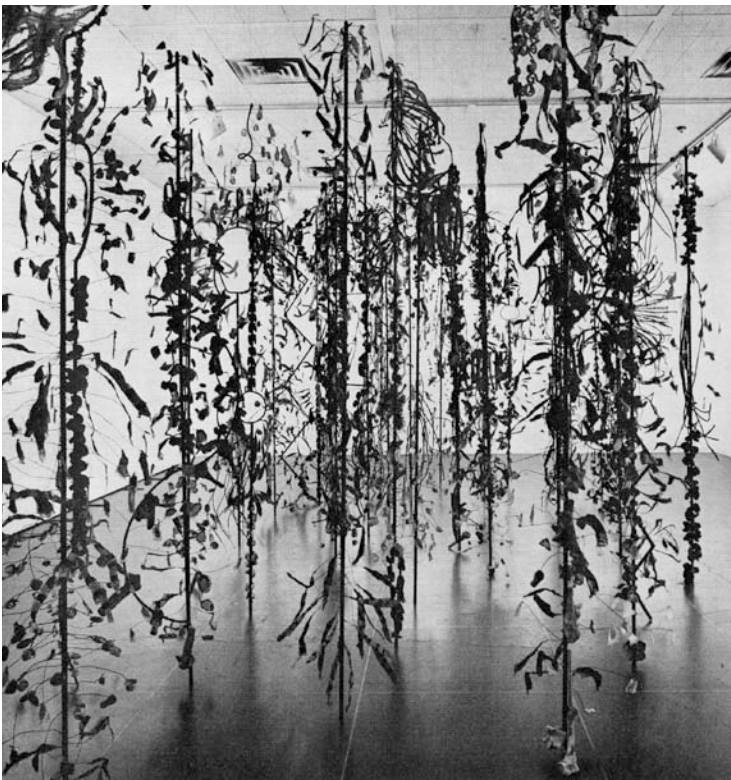
The late Nancy Graves adventured in extreme realms; her early work featured on-site film of camels in the middle eastern desert. Later, through NASA, she had access to satellite maps from distant space that informed her drawings. Her sculpture was brilliantly colored, full of grace and vitality. I visited Graves in New York to write about her work for *artscanada*. I remember her studio as immense, one cavernous corner of its top floor filled with dismantled armatures from her camel sculptures. Her discipline and the force with which she pursued her projects were formidable. For me, Graves was a full-out priestess of imagination. She made the sacrifices that many serious artists of those days executed fearlessly; she'd suffered serious winter pneumonia, living and working vigorously in that studio too huge to heat. Graves was the one artist I've interviewed for print who tried to direct my subject matter. Seeing me taking notes in front of a particular drawing, she asked me to write on another one instead. I asked why. She said that nobody had covered it yet. I was in my late twenties, thoroughly unfamiliar with the business of art criticism. When I protested that what I wrote for *artscanada* couldn't affect her reputation, she told me I had no idea of the power my words might have on a career – that I was a critic whether I meant to be or not. Her worldly history with the politics of positioning shocked me into first awareness of how unusual the *artscanada* way of dealing was. I did the piece the way I wanted, and kept to the journal's policy of showing nothing to artists before it appeared. Graves later wrote me that she loved the piece; I'm still glad and relieved. She had laser-beam focus; it took immense courage for a woman then to follow so isolated and determined a path. Before she sculpted camels she went to the Middle East on a grant and filmed their movements with an anthropologist's care. The results – her hoary, inimitable, lifesized camels covered with camel skin, and how she found and learned and created them – all of that has remained an inspiration.

Besides the Kalavinka endeavors, I had other work happening. I was already a mother. I'd been writing fiction for years. And during the first year I lived in Toronto, I'd become captivated by sound poetry, after seeing footage at the Royal Ontario College of Art of an electrifying group of poets called the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Their syncopated stutterings, wails, intonations and bleeps captivated me, and I couldn't wait to try out the effect with my three young children. They rose to the challenge with boundless inventiveness and uninhibited joy. In a favorite exercise of what we called noise poetry, I'd play a tape of birds from the nearby zoo, riffing from a few peeps into a glorious mind-ripping chorus, while we jumped round the room jamming to their song. On occasion I also played our tapes back to birds. Soon, friends and relatives became part of the noise poetry, and we used words or phrases, growling and squeaking passages from Shakespeare, ancient chant or poetry. Improvisation was key. In a brief interview segment for Canadian radio, I was asked why we did it. I talked a little about free expressiveness and release of energy. The interviewer noted that I'd lived in at least seven cities and several countries. She seemed baffled by my need for these things, in contrast to steadier experience. She asked, "Do you think noise poetry may be a substitute for the rootedness that people have, when they live in a single place?"

Home is a highly personal ideal. The Sami have a word for "the home that lives in the heart." Art happens under arduous conditions and in safe havens; it can come with fierce inward struggle or even seem to strike by itself; however the artist and the piece dialogue, invention triumphs. Art writing the way I learned it is different. Writing like a Kalavinka has let me feel blameless and safe in the act of witnessing beauty, intensity and the healing possibility of images forged in certain kinds of quests. Care for the earth figured in those quests. There was mutual belief that this art, this writing about it, had lifegiving value . . . that we could be players in an enduring circle.



TIM WHITEN
Untitled, 1973, 50' long



(Above and opposite) NANCY GRAVES
Detailed Views from *Variability and Repetition of Variable Forms*, 1971, steel, latex, gauze, oil, marble dust, acrylic, wax

each painting, I recorded impressions of what the images meant to do – the world of assumptions and intent these paintings seemed to live in. Later I typed this up, revised, and imported a few pictures. I brought my piece to the gallery owners and asked if they might have a use for it. Their publicist sent it with a mailing to local reporters, and he kindly suggested I work with his advertising agency. It was tempting, but I knew that constant deadlines and covering art openings on demand wouldn't lead to my right direction. If nourishment and healing aren't part of the undertaking, Kalavinka Dress won't work – it could go up in flames and burn away.

So many years had passed since I wrote for *artscanada* that I didn't know what had happened to the publication or to Anne. One day, looking for her name on the internet, I came up with an entry connected to Meridian Gallery in San Francisco. It seemed unlikely we'd live in the same city, but I called anyway. The words on the other end: "She's at lunch. Oh yes, I was just looking at an old issue of *artscanada*. Call back in half an hour." After our beautiful reconnection – Anne had actually been living in the Bay Area longer than I had, after *artscanada* came to an end – she told me of a Tim Whiten exhibition in planning. Would I like to write about his work again? Of course I would. He now lived between Toronto and Brazil; soon we collaborated by phone, as he educated me on backstories of sculpture and drawings. When I asked about the symbolism of one, he referred me to a Greek myth I didn't know, asked me to find out through my own research, and seemed delighted when I discovered his path by wandering through my own dark. I learned about Whiten's development as a conscious healer through the years; and he told me enough of his history as a son, and his life as an artist, to deepen my reflections on his new work. Parts of what I wrote found their place in the exhibition and on the gallery web site. I sat alone with one of Whiten's glass skulls that deliver memories you've never had. I believed again in the blessings of Kalavinka Dress.

As I write this now, I'm far from any home I've known. My beautiful thirty-one-year-old daughter Cielo became critically ill and I flew to North Carolina. For the next month she struggled on assisted breathing. Finally came an eerie, exultant day when she could stand – and then, trailing machines and an oxygen canister, she insisted on walking the eight-hundred-foot loop around Intensive Care. All the plastic is finally taken out of her throat. Her doctor says she'll recover. How to hold fast in such danger? She does. This kind of road is long; she's taken her stand.

Around thirty years later, after the turn of this century, I thought of how lovely it had been to hold those assumptions. Living in the Southwest, Washington, DC and San Francisco, I had long practiced willingly – needfully – the strenuous solid job and the arduous challenge of fiction. I remembered how hopeful and centered it once felt to be invited to use words, intimately exploring art. What about inviting myself? Maybe I could bring back some Kalavinka spirit, if only to see how it worked now, and whether it led me to art writing or something else. I felt hungry for that kind of unfolding.

I invented a dress about this, the Kalavinka Dress. It took time to collect three materials, in order to make it turquoise blue with shiny green lining and tomato red trim. I had Sami men's dress in mind while I sewed. The dress shaped up somewhat like a straight-wide-sleeved costume of a Siberian shamaness I'd seen in *artscanada* long ago. Around the base of each sleeve there's a soft, large band of the red trim, and a big band of it frames the circular neck, extending down the front to make a road for buttons. The wooden, lightly carved Chinese buttons are dark red, and ropelike loops to secure the opening extend from squares of white ivory. These have a configuration that reminds me of Viking design. All over the bright red, I embroidered with metallic silver thread. Many of the marks I made that way resembled some from deerskin clothes, which I'd seen in an old book on Siberian tribes. I felt comforted by these shapes and I let them wander. It took me through an entire winter; evenings, I often sat with my daughter Karina, who had learned a neighborhood tradition of paño arte/handkerchief art, embroidering roses and borders in the Latino style of drawings and tattoos of our part of the San Francisco Mission. This shared plying of needles and color, and the different images we interpreted, invested my Kalavinka dress with quiet happiness.

The way I wear this Kalavinka dress is alone in my room, invoking images and writing about art. (One of the few times I've worn it publicly, I needed to buy groceries and decided not to change my clothes. Later, a neighbor girl reported to my daughter, "I saw your mom going to the store in her nightie!")

At the same time that Kalavinka Dress is a state of mind, it's a stance. It doesn't require or forbid financial compensation for work, but it provides its own reward. It's about the pursuit of a connection. When my friend Barbara had a gallery showing of large paintings downtown, I went to her opening with a notebook I keep ready to whip out for observations. Moving round the exhibition and visiting

To take a stance can mean so much. I'm remembering what I take on, when I put on Kalavinka Dress. Recollecting tries to collect again. To gather. Not long after Cecilio and I were with Sarain he traveled to Mexico, where he'd longed, he said, to learn about ancient native people. He's reported to have drowned there. Sarain told us he was born in Italy to an Italian mother and a Shoshone father he never met, a serviceman stationed there – that he'd run away to America as a young boy. Biographies say he was born on a Shoshone reserve, but I understood him to have found the self we knew through Shoshone people later. I wonder whether Sarain continued on in Mexico, reinventing himself. When he gave us the sounds of children singing to bring the sun, he cautioned me not to listen often. I'm careful to save it for rare moments. Now, thousands of miles from the recording, I hear those voices in dawn mist wheeling in my mind. The children's open-throated chanting brings my tears.



It invokes inexplicable things. And how we're children before them.

DIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDID
Did I? I did? Did I? I did. Did I? I did. Did I? I did. Did I? I did? I DID?
DIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDIDID

David Ireland would like that. DI liked a lot of things that seemed ordinary or insignificant or just plain silly, or really just plain. That was the beauty of David and his multi-layered aesthetic. He was a lovely man who loved many things often overlooked by others but brought to significance by his able hands and nimble mind.

I was first introduced to DI's work as a college student in Connecticut (our studios were in Neo-Brut concrete buildings that somehow seemed appropriate when viewing DI's work). One of my professors was quite fond of both William T. Wiley and David Ireland--an interesting pair of smarty tricksters with a Northern California sensibility that may have helped pull me to San Francisco from the east coast.

As a graduate student at the San Francisco Art Institute in the early 1990s I took a Performance/Video class (now New Genres) with David. He was fantastic as a professor (probably a moniker he would have laughed at) and so mild mannered and thoughtful--an oasis amid a sea of serious talkers at the Art Institute at that time. You felt you could breathe in his class and get a sense of perspective about art and its relationship to life outside the artworld. He also encouraged experimentation with materials in a real sense.

I remember he loved my use of Wite-Out in a drawing (the first time I had used any so-called non-traditional material) and especially the use of the material as a void or "nothing". He wound up in possession of that work and to this day I continue to work with these types of materials.

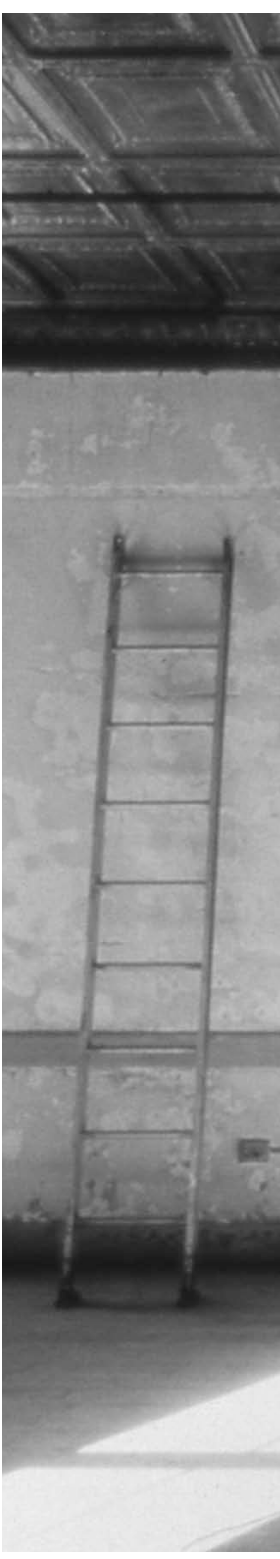
I remember him inviting the whole class to his house on Capp Street and serving pan dulces (Mexican sweet breads) that he bought nearby. It was a real treat to visit and experience his gorgeous stripped-down space where he lived and worked. His attention to detail, beautiful surfaces, and color palette remain embedded in my memory, and his sense of making art an integral part of living was truly revolutionary for me at that time in my life as a young grad student. It was also my first real exposure to the Mission District where I have now lived for over sixteen years and where my son now loves to eat pan dulces. I love to visit the Rodeo Room at the Headlands Center for the Arts which David transformed with a wall treatment similar to 500 Capp to remember that seminal visit. Within that stunning space I can conjure the taste of the pan dulces, the smell of the lacquer, the odor of energy and importance and liveliness that permeated that Capp Street address.

We kept in touch after that class and he was always very supportive of my work (often at times when others weren't). He would attend my exhibitions and leave positive messages in gallery visitor books writing about being a fellow traveler and how much he liked the shows, etc... This generosity was and remains a special part of the Bay Area artists community in which David played a major role as a supporter and resource for a younger generation of Bay Area artists interested in materials and their meanings.

In the last few years David and I managed to connect a few times facilitated by my good friend Barbara Eaton who worked on his major retrospective at the Oakland Museum and was his assistant for a while. I remember these lunches at the Atlas Café in the Mission (near his Capp Street house) and that familiar glint in his eye. He was often in a lot of pain often but he managed to remain a friend, mentor and inspiration to many of us.

Thank you DI for your humor, your generosity, and your spirit. And thank you not only for finding beauty in the unexpected and the overlooked in our crazy world, but for sharing yourself and your beautiful sensibility with us.

-Amy Berk



Terri Cohn

Throughout his career, David Ireland merged his life with his art in remarkable ways. As a sculptor whose vision was nurtured during the 1970s by the process- and concept-based practices of conceptual artists in the San Francisco Bay area, his consistent interest was to restore a voice to objects, materials, and environments that have been neglected or overlooked. One of Ireland's primary ambitions was to create work that is so well integrated into existing spaces as to be fundamentally imperceptible, an approach that was kindled early on by his involvement in Tom Marioni's The Restoration of a Portion of the Back Wall, Ceiling and Floor of the Main Gallery of the Museum of Conceptual Art (1976).

These introductory words, which I wrote as part of an essay about David Ireland's work that was published in *Sculpture* in March, 2005, grew out of a series of conversations we began in 2002. The first interview we did was part of a series I completed with sixteen artists who were central to the genesis of the Conceptual art movement in the San Francisco Bay Area during the early 1970s, among them Tom Marioni, Paul Kos, Linda Montano, Howard Fried, Bonnie Sherk, Jim Melchert, and Lynn Hershman. While these individuals are still actively engaged in their work as artists, a few artists in this group—Terry Fox and David Ireland—have recently passed away, Fox in 2008 and Ireland in May 2009. These interviews are central to a book I am writing about the evolution of Conceptual art as it emerged on the West Coast, with a focus on San Francisco, and the remarkable roles these artists played in experimenting with new approaches to art making. Although there was little support and almost no place to show their work in the Bay Area in the early 1970s, the lack of existing venues for experimental work also meant it was fertile territory for development.

The invitation to contribute my interview with David Ireland to this first issue of *Talking Cure Quarterly* has provided a chance to consider what aspect of David Ireland's life and work would be most meaningful to share with those who are familiar with certain well-known facets of Ireland's life and career-- particularly his house at 500 Capp Street and his process-based approach to working with materials and ideas—as well as with readers who know little about David Ireland and his work. It became clear that the conversations David and I shared about his art and life--especially our discussion about what Conceptual art is--are particularly revealing, as he expressed his concerns about “idea art,” his deep relationship to materials, and the significance of process in linking them. Ireland's concerns about certain ideas central to Conceptual art led him to talk about the importance of tools to his way of thinking about Conceptual art, bringing to mind Sol Lewitt's notion of how “the idea becomes the machine that makes the art.” David also talked in depth about the importance of the community of artists in San Francisco--Paul Kos, Howard Fried, and especially Tom Marioni--who became his friends and influenced his thinking and approach.

This version of my interview with David Ireland is a portion of the longer interview which we edited together, that will be included in my forthcoming book. My one regret is the fact that David didn't live long enough to read these words in print. Fortunately, many other books and conversations with David Ireland were published during his lifetime.

It is with gratitude and respect for the chance to have spent time with this remarkable artist, learning more about his art, life, and thinking, that I dedicate this interview.



Interview with David Ireland

Terri Cohn

original interview October 8, 2002

transcription edit agreed upon w/DI,

4/11/03

This version of the 2003 interview I did with David Ireland was shortened for this publication in Talking Cure Quarterly, September 2009. The 2003 interview, edited with the artist, will be published as part of my Conceptual art book-in-progress. -TC

DI: I wanted to say something here about never trusting my own feelings about the word “conceptual;” Conceptual art.

TC: You have mentioned that before. Why don't you talk about that.

DI: Well, Conceptual Art is idea art, where there's an idea, usually before you set out to make the work, or afterwards like a chance drawing of things like John Cage has done could be thought of as that. It seemed that idea art was just for artists who had an idea, but it has really discredited people by making an assumption that if you are a painter, for example, you couldn't be a Conceptual artist.

So it's a sensitive term, I think, that assumes that no one had an idea besides a Conceptual artist.

I know I've talked about it before, and my feeling hasn't changed too much about that. I like to think of being an artist or being a sculptor, but not specifically a Conceptual artist who has only ideas. It's interesting to look at all of the Conceptual artists that we've known. They have had some brilliant ideas, but we have to allow for artists who would refuse to acknowledge that they're part of Conceptual art.

TC: I agree, there has been a lot of misunderstanding about the term Conceptual art, certainly among young artists today. I read a really good essay that Arthur Danto wrote in his book *The*

Madonna of the Future. He was talking about Robert Morris' sculpture, and exploring the idea of when a pile of dirt is a pile of dirt, and when a pile of dirt is a work of art. It's tricky area of discussion, because when you work as a Conceptual artist-- as artists of the '70s used the term--the idea was actually decided on ahead of time. Since then, Conceptual art has come to be all kinds of stuff. Everybody today is a "Conceptual artist."

DI: That's right. But do the young artists today call themselves Conceptual artists, or just call themselves artists?

TC: I've heard them call themselves various things. Anyway, as I understand it, with Conceptual art, the idea is decided upon ahead of time and then the idea becomes manifest with materials.

DI: Well that's a little iffy too, don't you think? Because theoretically, you would sit down like Sol Lewitt and start looking at possibilities of lines that are contained within a drawing and you would make an observation. I wanted to be an idea artist, of course, but I don't think you go around saying "I want to be this" or "I want to be that"; you do it. You just do it, do what you do because you like it and it feels good to do it. My own thing is, I could see some kind of a credential was necessary: that you develop your credential. Then maybe you look at different artists that you would have

overlooked otherwise, and maybe you had to go back to school to study a little differently, whatever that might mean.

I think I got that idea of a credential from Alan Kaprow. He felt he needed the credentials so he could do what he wanted to do. In other words, he wanted the credential to be more advanced degrees than just an MFA, but he didn't have a degree in art history or art psychology or some other thing. The general academic community accepted him based on what they knew of anything. So when he got his foot in the door because he had these endorsements from the art history department at UC San Diego, he did all his creative happenings. But he needed the support of the academic community before they would get up out of their chair and take note.

...In terms of my work, I wondered, "what can I do with printmaking that will not be looked at as printmaking, but it will be done using printmaking tools? The key word here is tool. That no longer using media, but the tool is what allows us to manifest--to make known--that it's an observation that we want to make. I think Sol Lewitt keeps coming to my mind because he can sit down at a table and work out some wonderful drawings, and they're all based on the different possibilities that are available to him.... The tool is in place of the medium. Some ask, "what medium is used"? I say, "I don't use a medium, I use a tool, and if the work has failed, then I used the wrong tool." The wrong tool is when the artist didn't have a clear vision of what he wanted to say, or what he wanted to be seen by the viewer.

TC: Did you feel that being here in San Francisco during the 70s supported you in your thinking?

DI: I've never asked Howard Fried or Tom (Marioni) or Paul Kos what their position was about this. Tom has got a great selection of tools for the things that he can see to do with an art work. It has helped me consider the possibilities, like with his *Drum Brush Drawings*. It was good to see that there was the possibility to make an artwork like he does, by drumming on a piece of paper. Paul was doing wonderful work, and Howard, of course, but he's part of a younger community. I learned

a lot from those guys, from observing them and seeing how they've handled particular situations. That's part of the fun too. I think among the four or five or six of us, we are kind of a "rat pack!" We overlap maybe, but we don't encroach on somebody else's work. If I notice I am doing that, I know I have to look for new territory.

TC: How does that relate to the question, how do you feel living in San Francisco has supported your vision in what you've tried to do?

DI: We stick close together, those of us who we consider a "family" of artists.

TC: It seems that during the early '70s there was huge potential to do what you wanted because there wasn't much of an art scene here. And, it seems that the climate in San Francisco at that time was ripe for an artist like yourself who was interested in breaking the rules.

DI: I think what brought me back from New York was that I could see that the fun work was being done in San Francisco and not in New York. New York was still working on the market. I was going to gut my house to be a studio, a living studio one floor down and then up. Then I got into the house and saw it not in an architectural way, but in a sculptural way, which really was about sculpture the way I was completing it and cleaning it up and urethaning the walls and doing things. That satisfied me. But I also had to do what every artist at some time has to do, and that is maintain your own life.

TC: Was it the house that led you to start to deconstruct buildings--to take them apart?

DI: Yes, but I have to be completely honest. I thought that here would be an opportunity to do what I've done at the Headlands, but make it more public. I went through the "tool" phase, where I literally had the doors opened for people to come in and look around.

TC: In the house?

DI: In the house, yes. That got kind of scary after a couple of years of having an open door policy. Headlands, in actuality, produced the kind of space that I needed to recreate this kind of thing. It was like a Vermeer painting, something like that. It followed the light that came in to the project. A quality of light, just like we have (in the house) right now.

TC: It's gorgeous.

DI: It changes through the day. The Headlands presented the same opportunity for work like that. So I started to get a reputation for doing distressed work. Something that was distressed would appeal to me. There were several other things like this distressed space. I never used that word before, but it seems like a good term, distressed space. It kind of asks, does one want to be thought of as an archaeologist? There were other artists working that way during the 70s. I wasn't even thinking about them. Artists like Gordon Matta-Clark and Robert Smithson. Smithson died in the early '70s. I liked looking at his work, and Matta-Clark's and Michael Heizer's; there were about a half dozen artists in that group who were working on a big scale, which I liked. But I wasn't looking and seeing what they were doing; I was just doing my thing. In a way it felt like I was part of that group of guys.

TC: Did they serve as like an inspiration in some ways to you?

DI: I would say to myself "I could do something with this space that's not being done by anyone else. No one to this day has said "You must have taken that idea off of somebody else." Somehow, the idea of Conceptual art is freedom. You adhere to it and its principles, which are simple, but you can do anything.

TC: It's an interesting connection, that through process you became involved in the *Dumb Ball* work.

DI: Exactly. That was a pure process piece, and the success of it was inherent to the process. If

you didn't adhere to the process, the end wouldn't work. So I think I still cling to that process notion. Again, I have to repeat that its failure to work is the failure of the artist who brings together necessary ingredients that makes it work, and that makes it work conceptually. That's probably as concise as I can make it....Thinking about this house, there may be a whole bunch of metaphors happening here, and there are some smaller objects which I've kind of quarried, like a mine quarry in the basement where there's lots of dirt. Every once in a while I have something that I want to do with some dirt. So I call the basement the "Gold Mine". Working with the dirt is really very much like alchemy.

TC: Seems there's sort of a holistic relationship of parts.

DI: Yes. Like in this cabinet over here, which was my parents'. I put a painting inside to propose that as soon as it entered that cabinet, it became sculpture. There's got to be some reason for putting the painting in the cabinet, and the cabinet positions were clear. I put the cabinet there to protect the painting, but in that act of doing that, it became sculpture.

TC: It's interesting how it reframes, so to speak, what the painting is... .

DI: This is one way to do it. I've done several cabinets, and they're for protection or for isolation. Isolation is an important issue as well.

TC: How so?

DI: Isolation means we're offering something some protection. My thought about the varnish on the walls was that it was protecting the work...protecting the Vermeer painting by isolating it! The wall is historic, so I'm kind of referring to that.

TC: It also accentuates that play with light by both absorbing and reflecting it. It enhances the quality of the wall and what the light and the wall do, or the light and the painting do.

DI: You'll find, as time goes on, that I'm full of contradictions. That's a privilege I think of as a Conceptual artist. ...More and more I think the search for clarity on my part is not dissimilar from the writer's position: the artist who makes an artwork that's significant and well thought-out, and the writer who wants to write about something using the most complete, concise, significant, important words.



David Ireland, Rodeo Room, 1987,
Headlands Center for the Arts
Photo by Richard Barnes, courtesy
of Headlands Center for the Arts

Home 1996 – 2008 was a site-specific installation/environment that utilized the interior space of my home to explore and challenge notions of comfort and protection, private and public, and the boundaries between art/life/architecture/design. The title is a bit of misnomer because I actually started working on the project in 2004 (the dates reflect the years that I lived at the residence).

In November 2008, I officially opened *Home* to the public for 4 weeks. The installation was open 1:00-5:00pm Wed-Fri each week. The month also included a series of events and digital projections: 1) Eliza Barrios curated a series of video works that were projected nightly onto a window scrim that was best viewed from across the street; 2) I hosted 2 dinner salons that engaged participants in discussions of home, environment, global forces that have reshaped how interior space is viewed, and contemporary trends in exhibiting and experiencing art; and 3) I invited 3 artists - Gordon Winiemko, Lise Swenson, and Maw Shein Win - to each host an evening of work related to the context of the project.

Development of *Home 1996-2008*:

When I first began the *Home project* in 2004 I had just finished a 2-year international exchange project that had exhausted me physically, mentally, emotionally, and creatively. There was also a considerable degree of anxiety in the air because of the Iraq war and the crimes of the Bush administration. I was having a difficult time mustering up the energy to make art or to even leave my apartment if I didn't have to; yet I also knew I couldn't continue to lie on my couch watching bad network TV. I decided I would use my discomfort as an opportunity and make work that spoke to this experience and to my interest in the boundaries between art, life, architecture, and design by turning my apartment into a living artwork that could evolve organically.

I began experimenting with vintage curtains I had bought at a second hand store, cutting out the flower designs of the textiles and pinning them on the bathroom walls. While I wasn't sure what the meaning of this was, I liked it, and more importantly, I was okay with not knowing and allowing my process to be loose and intuitive. This followed with selecting a color palette and painting the walls and the ceilings of the bathroom, kitchen, and hallway. Over time I expanded into almost every room, using a variety of materials and processes to transform the space. As I continued to work, it became clearer to me that I was creating a world that would attempt to redefine my reality. I used the aesthetics of my childhood in an effort to create a warm and safe environment that contrasted how I'd actually experienced my home growing up. I used traditional craft-based materials to adorn the space and approached the process as conceptual fine art, knowing that it would likely be dismissed as simply home décor. I wanted to present the project publicly and create a place for conversations about the meanings and interpretations of "home" and "art."

Additionally, I began to contextualize the project in a larger framework and acknowledge artists who had inspired me: *Home 1996 – 2008* referenced and borrowed ideas from artists such as Dadaist Kurt Schwitters, who erected the Merzbau, a real-life expressionistic interior, in his studio in Hanover, Germany; feminists Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, who spearheaded Womanhouse - a series of fantasy environments exploring the various personal meanings and gender construction of domestic space; and conceptualist David Ireland, whose work "has a visual presence that makes it seem like part of a usual, everyday situation;" architects and designers such as Verner Panton, who created floor-to-ceiling and back-down-the-walls-to-the-floor, psychedelic interiors in the sixties and seventies, César Manrique, who designed Star Trek-like party spaces; and communities of West Africa, where each year after harvest, women gather to restore and paint their mud dwellings which are washed away by rain every year.

Unexpected Events Along the Way:

In December of 2006 my landlord served all the tenants of the building with an eviction notice. It was extremely stressful to anticipate having to move after almost 11 years, as well as having to abandon my installation. Luckily I had two years to leave. One of the questions that I often get from people about the installation is: "What did your landlord think?" While he's known for his harassment tactics and not keeping the habitability of the building up, he actually made a point to tell me "you keep a very nice home." Additionally, all of the changes I made to the apartment for the installation were cosmetic and didn't create any permanent damage. The eviction was an interesting twist to the project, emphasizing the fragility of home and the despair that can be felt when faced with losing it.

In addition to the eviction, I was soon faced with another painful challenge. In March of 2007 my father was diagnosed with stage four-pancreatic cancer, with a less than hopeful prognosis. I was devastated by the news, but did everything I could to be supportive, including several month-long trips to Montana to spend time with him. Ultimately, the cancer progressed and by winter of 2008 he wasn't doing well. However, he did make a point to come to San Francisco for a week in March of 2008 to visit. We had a wonderful time, including a large dinner in the installation for him to meet many of the wonderful people in my life. Sadly, he died two weeks later.

I mention these events in the context of the *Home* project because such life experiences are core to the work, impacting it directly, as well indirectly through the emotional toll they take and the inspiration they provide. At times I was consumed with grief and done with the project; a week later I'd find comfort in the meditation of solely focusing on the installation and see it as a life-affirming extension of these experiences.

Open Home 1996-2008: Theater of the Unexpected

I opened *Home 1996-2008* to the public on November 1, 2008. The first week of open hours drew about 10 people/day. However, that all changed the second week when Jesse Hamlin contacted me to do a feature on the project in the San Francisco Chronicle. After the article came out, I had 50-60 visitors a day from all different backgrounds – people who love crafts, people with disabilities (the article mentioned that I have MS), people in the neighborhood, families, students, artists, interior designers, and people from across the country.

Some of the most memorable visitors included:

From the Interesting:

- An older woman named Linda who said she'd been in many of George and Mike Kuchar's films – naked - since the early seventies. She came twice – one day alone and the next with her friend Granger – staying both times for several hours, reminiscing about the good old days of performance in SF.
- A high school student from San Francisco's School Of The Arts, who came with his dad and was interested in installation work and wanted to interview me. He also later sent me images of his work.
- A group of folks came on their lunch break from a hospital in the neighborhood and one of the women realized when she arrived that the building had once been owned by her aunt, who had sold it to my landlord.

To the wacky:

- A woman who showed up with her large dog and started walking down the hallway to my bedroom – when Eliza told her that I had a cat, she said “that's okay, Fido likes cats.”
- A psychotherapist who showed up to do “crisis intervention” because he'd read about my eviction and was worried it might be needed. He left me his book and still sends me his weekly online newsletter - unsolicited.
- A lawyer showed up curious about the eviction with the landlord – only in SF would there be the ambulance-chaser type lawyer, but looking for evictions instead ...

To the serendipitous:

- A group of 3 veterinarians came from San Jose to see the installation. Earlier that morning I had an anxiety attack about having move my cat to a friends house to stay until I settled in to a new home (which wouldn't be for almost a whole year). They were able to provide me with lots of information

The online response to the Chronicle piece was also over-the-top with more than 150 direct posts to the article, the majority highly negative. Here's a good sampling:

- That apartment is HIDEOUS. Like a "Cost Plus World Imports" threw up on itself -- can she be evicted for having poor taste?
- I went home with a chick like this once after some drinks. After a few minutes of looking around, I said I had to go back to my car because I forgot my protection. I got back to the car, opened the glove compartment, and breathed out in relief. It was there! Clutching my lucky juju charm for dear life, I drove away!
- Here we are presented with Megan Wilson, a Maude Kirk of the next generation. A lady who chose art and leisure activities over earning and saving money. Taxpayers support her by way of SSI/Disability, art grants and Rent Control. BTW a 1 bed Nob Hill apt. was going for about \$600 back in 96 - don't feel sorry for her one bit. Wilson may be going to Idaho or Indonesia for now, but she will return to SF and continue to suckle the enriching nectar of California taxpayer charity for as long as we'll allow it. Hippie "artists" will still flock here to line their pockets with SF handouts and their noses with drugs, as long as SF residents and our representatives vote to continually subsidize it. When you can't find an apartment for under \$2000/month, half-handicapped leeches like Kirk and Hamlin are to blame. Good riddance!
- All you whining art critics should take another Thorazine before your collective berets catch fire on your pointy little heads. You can use your flabby, tatoood legs to push the pedals of your fixies directly into the Bay - that would be an art installation I'd pay to see. Harrumph.
- I think some people have been ingesting a little to much hateraide. Landlord nightmare my *ss...they're going to get so much money for that place. It's right on the top of nob hill. It's probably going to be torn down or at the very least gutted, so she isn't doing any harm. This apartment rules and it does remind me of apt's in the 80's, when SF was still cool...now the city is being overrun by transient yups and fake hipsters, now that's boring. hmm, maybe I've been drinking too much hateraid.

I found this panalog to be one of the most satisfying outcomes of the project because it demonstrated that the work had hit a nerve in people and impacted them enough to respond. I appreciated all of the comments, whether they hated my work, loved it, or were speaking in my defense. Many of the haters I found to be very amusing, especially when someone would create their own story about who I am – based solely on their projection of what having a disability means or what having rent control or being evicted means; like the example above where the poster went off on a tangent about me receiving SSI and not working or saving money (all are completely false). However, I also found myself projecting stories about who the posters were – folks whose only contact with anyone else is through these online formats – people lying on their couches in their cluttered apartments, collecting SSI for having a disability ...

Digital Projections:

When I first started thinking about the public component in 2005, I planned on presenting weekly screenings of movies that somehow related to the project. However, when the time came for planning the actual events, I wanted to incorporate more work by other artists, as well as reach a larger audience. I worked with artist Eliza Barrios to develop an alternative plan. She decided to digitally project videos from inside the apartment onto a scrim on one of the front windows that could be prominently seen from the street. Eliza curated the full month of nightly screenings that included: 1) Works by Carolyn Castaño, Domingo Nuño, Adriana Varella, and Richard 'Axle' Pirkle; 2) Two site-specific slideshow videos created by Eliza for the installation – documentation of the *Home 1996-2008* progression over five years and a piece in support of the Obama campaign that screened on November 3rd and 4th; and 3) Three films that provided a strong visual and visceral impact in that context – *The Color of Pomegranates*, *Yo Soy Cuba!*; and *In The Mood For Love*.

The location of my apartment was directly across the street from Le Beau Nob Hill Market, one of the most frequented and respected family-run businesses in the neighborhood. Le Beau has tables set up in front of the market, providing the perfect venue for viewing the projections. The response was a mix of delight for the unexpected, confusion, appreciation, and concern. The latter was best expressed through a call to the police to report a child being abused.

Adrianna Varella's video featured a 3-year old boy wearing shorts (nothing else) lying inside a cardboard box, moving around and scribbling on the sides of the box. The video was shot tightly as a close-up and viewing it from the street, the boy in the box fit perfectly in the full window. Varella's piece just happened to be scheduled on the night that I was hosting the Dinner Salon *Home and Stuff: Design, Production, Consumption, & Disposal*. My ten guests and I had just sat down to dinner and discussion in the living room when I heard someone coming up the stairs. I opened the door to two cops coming up. They had received a call that there was a boy being abused at the address. They were relieved that all was fine; they were also very curious to hear more about the project. So I offered them a full tour. I was impressed by their interest and appreciation, as well as their distress that my landlord was evicting me and the work would be destroyed.

Dinner Salons:

The two Dinner Salons I hosted were *The Influence and Use of Craft in Contemporary Art* and *Home and Stuff: Design, Production, Consumption, & Disposal*. For each of the salons I invited guests I believed would be interesting contributors to the discussion and asked each of them to invite an additional participant who they believed would also add to the topic/salon. Prior to the dinner, I emailed a few questions/thoughts to each of the participants that we could use as guide points if needed. Participants were also invited to bring documentation to share. The dinners/discussions were recorded and video documented by Eliza Barrios and will be posted on my Website in the future.

***The Influence and Use of Craft in Contemporary Art* guests included:** Michael Arcega, artist, MFA candidate at Stanford University, Amy Berk, artist, writer, faculty at San Francisco Art Institute, Kate Eilertsen, curator, former director of San Francisco Museum of Craft and Folk Art and Interim Director of Visual Arts, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts; Mung Lar Lam, artist, and Jennifer McCabe, Director, San Francisco Museum of Craft and Folk Art.

***Home and Stuff: Design, Production, Consumption, & Disposal* guests include:** Eliza Barrios, Artist; Carolyn Castaño, Artist; Kevin Chen, Artist, Curator, Writer, Program Director of Visual Arts, Literary & Jazz at Intersection for the Arts; Gary Dauphin, Writer, Editor; Glen Helfand, Writer, Curator; Deborah Munk, Director, Artist In Residence Program at the San Francisco Dump; Zachary Royer Scholz, Artist, Writer; Felisa Royer Scholz, MPP candidate, Goldman School of Public Policy, Berkeley; James Sellier, Artist; and Imin Yeh, Artist, MFA candidate, California College of Arts

Curated Events:

One of the intentions of *Home 1996-2008* was to create an environment that would provide an unexpected, alternative space for people to come together and share. As part of this goal I invited three artists – Lise Swenson, Gordon Winiemko, and Maw Shein Win - to each create a site-specific work for the project.

Home 1996-2008 inspired media installation artist and filmmaker Lise Swenson to write, and shoot on site of the installation, a short experimental film, *Mr. Gary on the Feedback Show* about an elderly woman recluse awash in her own reconstruction of a media-saturated world. Lise presented the final work on November 13, 2008 to an audience of 25 friends and supporters in the installation. The effect of viewing *Mr. Gary on the Feedback Show* within the installation was an extraordinary physiological and visceral experience.

Gordon Winiemko used the opportunity to expand on his and Jeff Foye's *Focus Group* project. In summer 2008, Jeff and Gordon were approached by a progressive arts organization to participate in a series about "participation in the political process." Their response was to emulate one of the most ubiquitous forums for participation our society has to offer -- the focus group. They staged performative question and answer sessions first with the staff of the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, then with friends and colleagues of the artist Kim Abeles, and finally with friends and colleagues of their sponsor org. On November 7, 2008 just three days after a victory of progressive, grass roots politics, Jeff and Gordon regaled invited guests with their findings as part of *Home 1996-2008*.

Maw Shein Win hosted *synecdoche at home*, an intimate evening of friends, food, and fun that felt like the epitome of a 1960s San Francisco happening. Guests were adorned with flowers as they entered an altered state of synesthesia. The event included readings by Lael Gold, Carolyn Miller, Jenny Bitner and Maw Shein Win with musical performances by Nathaniel Parsons and Matt Wolka.

Home Investment

I often get asked about the costs and funds to do *Home 1996-2008*. One of the advantages of creating work over a period of years is that it also allows for years to secure funding. The costs were covered by my personal income – in total I spent about \$1,000/year and a \$5,000 grant from the San Francisco Art Commission. In total the installation cost me approximately \$10,000. The greatest resource for the project was my time, which varied based on how much I was working, other exhibition commitments, and personal challenges, such as my dad's illness and death. At times I'd spend 50 or more hours a week, in all I estimate that I spent several thousand hours.

Another question I was asked in relation to the resources I'd invested in the project, was: "How could you invest so much time, energy, and money in this knowing that you would have to leave it at some point?" A good question since it does seem like such a waste. However, there was much I gained from the process (and am still gaining) – including the reminders: nothing is permanent, everything changes, and value is how one decides to interpret it. Admittedly, these are easier said than practiced. The de-install and packing everything up was like a very painful breakup and I cried often during the final two weeks; all the emotions -- disbelief, sadness, anger, feeling numb -- that apply to losing a loved one, were/are there. I'm still struggling with letting go of my home, especially since I don't have a new one, even though it's been almost 8 months, which makes me realize just how important this transition has been for me. Difficult as it is, I'm grateful for the lesson.

The amount of stuff I had to pack up was also overwhelming and almost suffocating to me. Unfortunately too, I didn't have enough time to get rid of more than I did. Instead about two-thirds of my things got packed up and put it into storage. However, as I'm now faced with moving out of storage soon, I wish that I'd been able to cut that down to less than one-third. This phase of the project has actually had the greatest impact on me. I'm now hypersensitive to every little thing in my possession and am constantly evaluating and reevaluating whether I need something or not – almost always, not.

Homeless 2009

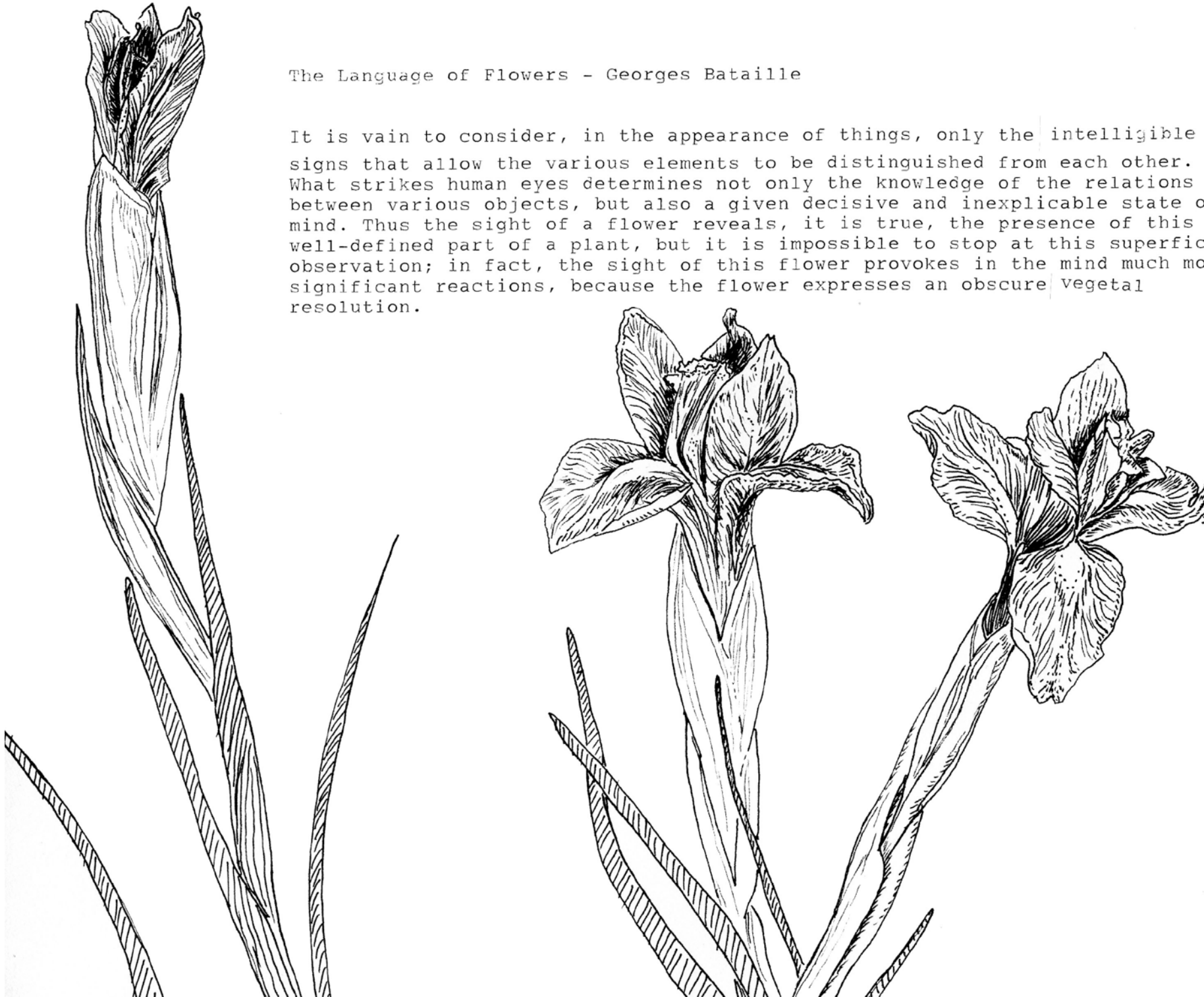
Since I moved out in mid-December, I've been traveling with my girlfriend and living out of several suitcases, including four months in Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines. By the end of our travels in Southeast Asia we realized that even our 2 suitcases were far too much and we could easily have gotten by with one medium-sized pack each.

Through these travels it was also interesting to observe homes in each culture. Not surprising, Americans live far more excessively. However, in every country we visited the great symbol of consumerism -- the mall -- was alive and thriving with the promise that future Southeast Asian homes (and landfills and oceans) will be packed with stuff. Hopefully the silver lining to the current global recession/depression is that it will help to slow this progression.

My current project, *Homeless 2009* explores contemporary Minimalism as I considerably downsize my possessions by selling or donating them. I've also vowed that any new objects will be created with materials I already have.

The Language of Flowers - Georges Bataille

It is vain to consider, in the appearance of things, only the intelligible signs that allow the various elements to be distinguished from each other. What strikes human eyes determines not only the knowledge of the relations between various objects, but also a given decisive and inexplicable state of mind. Thus the sight of a flower reveals, it is true, the presence of this well-defined part of a plant, but it is impossible to stop at this superficial observation; in fact, the sight of this flower provokes in the mind much more significant reactions, because the flower expresses an obscure vegetal resolution.



Introduction

A small black label etched with the words *Diplocaulobium centrale*, *New Guinea* helps people distinguish one orchid plant from numerous others that traveled along various routes from various regions of the world to be reassembled inside the Highland Tropics Gallery at The Conservatory of Flowers.¹ Its pale yellow lip, the portal to thousands of microscopic seeds, inconspicuously unfurls amidst the simulated montane rainforest environment.

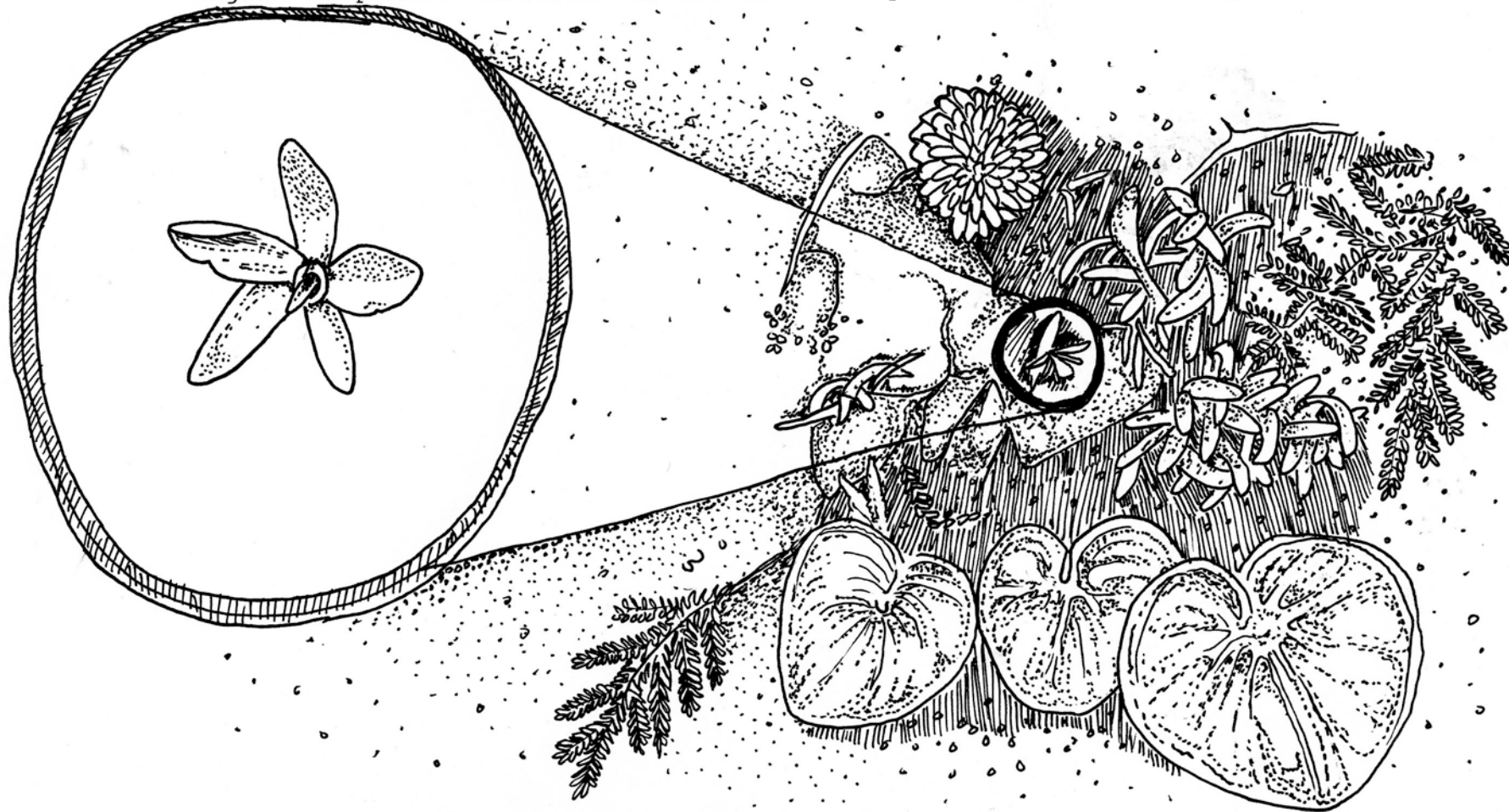
The Conservatory is a renovated Victorian-era greenhouse, or living plant museum, that attracts throngs of tourists to San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. Most people are familiar with commercial orchid plants, which have prominent blooms arching upwards, beckoning passersby to inspect the nuances of their inflorescence. Market-savvy horticulturalists manipulate the texture, symmetry, and exquisite markings of these flowers by hybridizing plants to pique the visual curiosity of prospective buyers with a pageantry of long-lasting color.² The short-lived *D. centrale* flower to the contrary, with its yellow lip and white petals and sepals, is only slightly larger than a human thumbnail and barely visible to the human eye. This wild plant has not adapted to an anthropocentric world, requiring instead that tourists adjust their tropical expectations.

D. centrale redistributes the human gaze towards its quivering leaves, shapely stem, and epiphytic roots that, with the aid of galvanized wire and sphagnum moss, wrap around a manzanita branch protruding from the gallery wall. Manzanita is not its typical highland host plant, though it is a fine local substitute readily available throughout California. Periodically sprayed by ceiling misters, the base of *D. centrale*'s stem—called a pseudobulb—is appropriately swollen with moisture and a latex whitewash on the glass greenhouse exterior neutralizes the light intensity of the temperate San Francisco sun. *D. centrale* appears quite comfortable in these artificial conditions. It is blooming after all.

The population of wild orchids inside the greenhouse is transformed in relation with its surroundings. When initially transported from the rainforest there was a high mortality rate due to shock from uprooting, desiccation, and acclimation. A seed capsule from one of the survivor plants carefully cultivated by a horticulturalist will generate several thousand seedlings, the majority of which would have died otherwise. This new generation will include many weak, non-vigorous, and malformed plants ill-equipped for the montane lifestyle.³ *Diplocaulobium centrale* comfortably blooms in the greenhouse, but would likely die were it reintroduced to the wilderness from which it came. The Highland tropics are neither simulated nor conserved inside the edifice of the Conservatory. The gallery is a juncture of life forms and technologies that constitute a collective that is neither wholly wild nor completely artificial.

Diplocaulobium centrale

What the configuration and color of the corolla reveal, what the dirty traces of pollen or the freshness of the pistil betray doubtless cannot be adequately expressed by language; it is, however, useless to ignore (as is generally done) this inexpressible real presence and to reject as puerile absurdities certain attempts at symbolic interpretation.



Convergence

The Highland Tropics Gallery is a contact zone, or what Donna Haraway describes as an entanglement in which “diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another.”⁴ I have never stepped foot south of the Tropic of Cancer or north of the Tropic of Capricorn. I have never been inside the Tropical Zone of Planet Earth. Though I have visited the Conservatory of Flowers on several occasions and considered the significance of their tropical collections and displays: What is the value of those delicate highland orchids? How does this low-altitude horticultural exhibition deliver a message about conserving high-altitude habitat and to whom? While didactic information is sparse, on each visit the interactive sensory experience of the gallery pervades my human body. I am intrigued to know more.

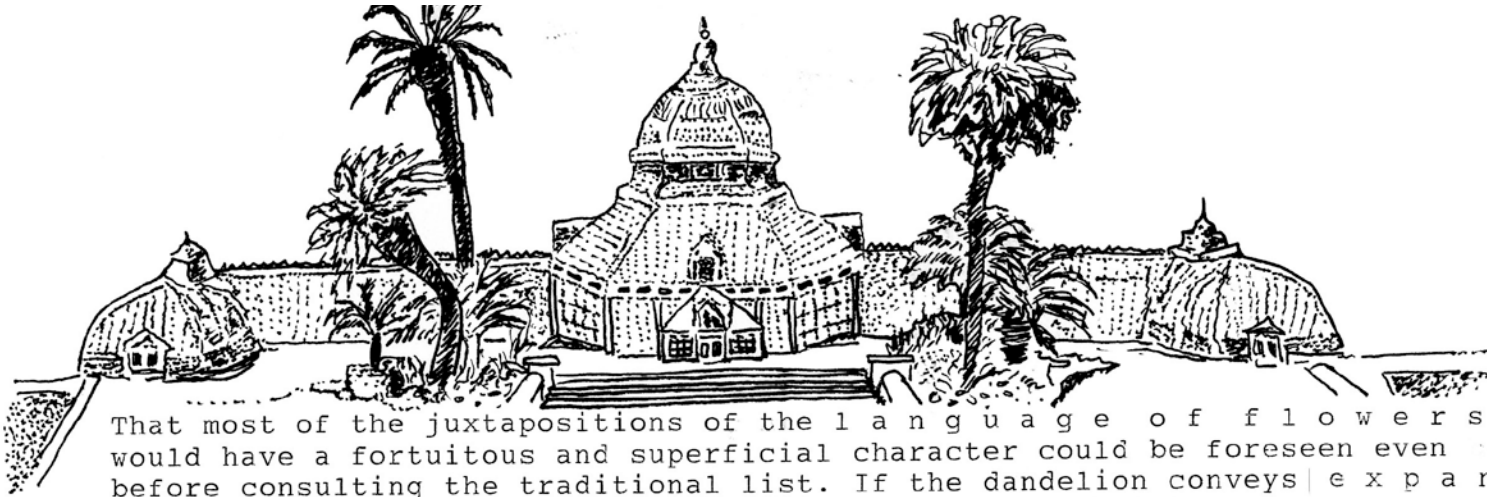
In 1988 Edward O. Wilson edited a book titled *Biodiversity*, which addressed the growing concern about conserving biological organisms. Scientists observed the increasing rate of species extinction and environmental degradation, noting that tropical moist forests are richest in species and most vulnerable.⁵ In Wilson’s concerted effort to describe the contested value and magnitude of species variation on the planet with an incredibly nuanced selection of essays, he sets a surprisingly definitive tone with an opening sentence that reads: “Biological diversity must be treated more seriously as a global resource, to be indexed, used, and above all, preserved.”⁶ Highland orchids are certainly recognized as resources with ethnobotanical, or cultural, value ranging from medicine to metaphor to muse. And because their intricate pollination strategies are easily disturbed, orchids are good indicators of the health of an ecosystem abound with additional resources. But, what aside from a unique genetic legacy and economic productivity do the orchids exhibit?

Over the course of my sustained engagement with the orchids on display at the Conservatory of Flowers, entangled with diverse bodies and meanings, I recognized that underpinning the crisis of biodiversity is what Bruno Latour calls the crisis of modernity.⁷ Many scholars have defined modernity in temporal terms, encompassing a global era or a stage of progressive development in distinct societies. Latour—an anthropologist working in the field of science and technology studies—instead defines modernity as an ideological framework originating in the West, dividing nature and culture.⁸ But he argues that we have never been modern,⁹ that the empirical study *of* objects *in* nature is an illusion, a mental operation that, while a somewhat effective means of analyzing and governing the systems in which live, is actually a myopic misrepresentation of reality and is proving to be unsustainable.

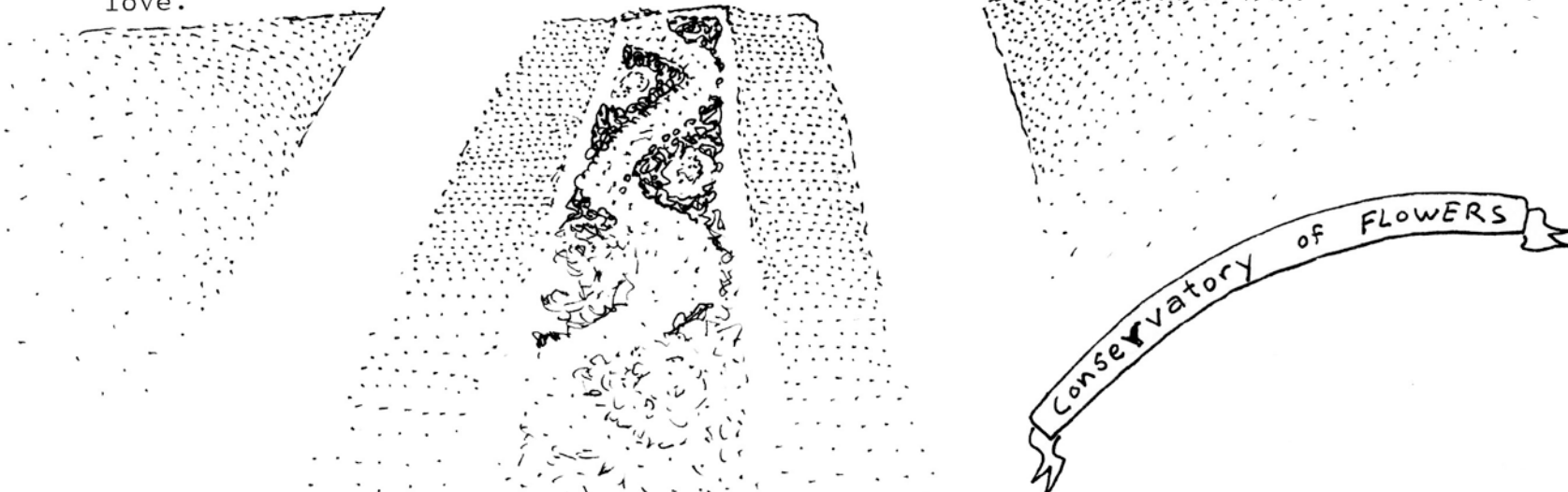
This is to say that there exists no Nature out there to be objectively studied and conserved. These worldmaking processes inevitably churn out tangled “naturecultures” with human *and* non-human actants. Latour’s neologism of natureculture evokes a sense of being and practice that accounts for the simultaneity and togetherness of life in formation. The threat of vanishing biodiversity—discrete organisms, behaviors, genetic information, and knowledge—is in direct tension with the threat of proliferating naturecultures. Because it is impossible to preserve pure forms in nature, Latour anticipates an ontological and epistemological revolution through which moderns come to recognize and sustain, rather than purify and conserve, their proliferating naturecultures: the Conservatory of Flowers as a living museum with a multitude of constituent parts.

Accordingly Latour together with his colleagues Michel Callon, John Law, and others developed a methodology called Actor Network Theory to map the material-semiotic associations that constitute networks of naturecultures. Though this approach has been controversial and nuanced in its application, the basic premise is that ethnographers might “come home from the tropics” to confront the discursive purification of nature and culture in the West, and use this method to drive home the point that we have never been modern.

Latour honors the foot soldiers of anthropology who over the last century have studied the non-Western world divided into many cultures, “dealing calmly and straightforwardly with the seamless fabric of...‘nature-culture’” internal to pre-modern societies. But he aspires to mobilize a new generation of ethnographers who might study networks of things and people that constitute a collective world (with sizeable differences). The kind of practice he supports is founded on the claim that pre- and post-modern societal distinctions are moot, and that it is imperative to understand the collective world as both humans and non-humans actively compose it.



That most of the juxtapositions of the language of flowers would have a fortuitous and superficial character could be foreseen even before consulting the traditional list. If the dandelion conveys expansion, the narcissus egotism, and the wormwood flower bitterness, one can all too easily see why. At stake here is clearly not the divination of the secret meaning of flowers, and one can easily make out the well-known property or the adequate legend. One would look in vain, moreover, for parallels that strikingly convey a hidden understanding of the things here in question. It matters little, in fact, that the columbine is the emblem of sadness, the snapdragon the emblem of desire, the waterlily the emblem of indifference. ... It seems opportune to recognize that such approximations can be renewed at will, and it suffices to assign a primordial importance to much simpler interpretations, such as those that link the rose or the spurge to love. Not that, doubtless, these two flowers alone can designate human love - even if there is a more exact correspondence (as when one has the spurge say: "IT is you who have awakened my love," so troubling when conveyed by such a shady flower), it is to flowers in general, and not to any specific flower, that one is tempted to attribute the strange privilege of revealing the presence of love.



Adaptation

The Conservatory of Flowers is now adapting its interpretative framework for their Highland Tropics Gallery in partnership with the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum and California Academy of Sciences. In 2010 each institution will exhibit their respective collections from the Highlands of New Guinea. A public tour will lead museum visitors laterally, literally, between displays about orchids, art, and birds.

This cross-institutional movement provides a means for contesting the modern notion of diversity as discrete units of analysis by mapping the New Guinea Highlands through material-semiotic associations, which constitute networks of naturecultures rather than an island individually separate and distinct. A prospective visitor starting at the Conservatory of Flowers and moving between each museum gallery, in the ensuing ethnography I attempt to render a highland orchid as a tangled web of relations rather than a delicate “species,” a dynamic living system rather than an individual organism with a permanent origin. This experimental form of writing moves outside the conventional definition of ethnography, which is an oft-authoritative written account of a particular group of people and their culture.¹⁰

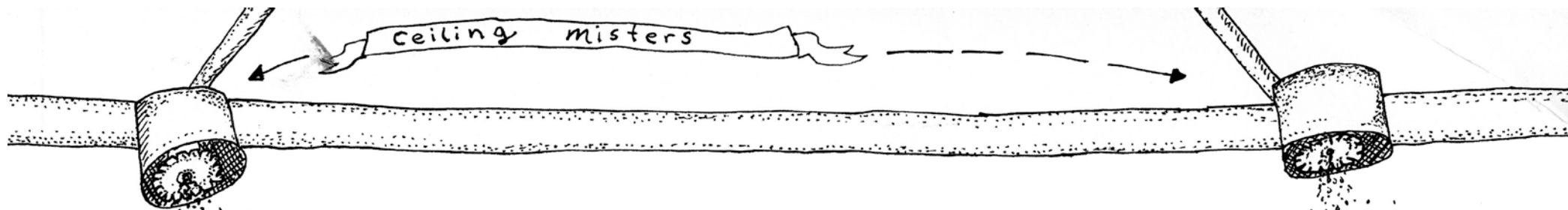
My narrativization is guided by the trope of rhizome, the biological term for underground, horizontally growing plant stems with small nodes from which shoots and blooms emerge. The rhizomes of a sympodial orchid can extend several meters from one season’s growth to the next.¹¹ In the words of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s English translator Brian Massumi, the interdisciplinary rhizome is “a fabric of intensive states between which any number of connecting routes could exist.”¹² Deleuze and Guattari offer this spatial reconfiguration of growth and diversity, emphasizing intense connections between heterogeneous organisms, signs, organizations, and circumstances that are particularly suited for the telling of a series of contingent contact (rather than origin) stories extending from a sympodial orchid into various spatial and temporal locations.

Diplocaulobium centrale is an orchid species that plant taxonomists group with a sub-tribe called *Dendrobiinae*. Imagine the ancestral *Dendrobiinae* emerging nameless millions of years ago. Indo-Pacific continental plate tectonics and other geologic transformations established the critical regional conditions for growth.

Across vast and varied terrains and climates, the *Dendrobiinae* mutated and multiplied. The most prolific populations occurred closest to the equator in tropical climates, especially on the island of New Guinea.¹³ In the massive mountain ranges spanning the island—the highlands—year-round precipitation supported a particularly lush ecosystem. Dense vegetation blanketed its youthful faults, folds, and other limestone distortions.

The orchids that survived in these highlands were highly adaptable. Over time they fashioned themselves according to particular pollinators. For example, botanists surmise that *Dendrobium lawesii* attracts bird pollinators by mimicking nearby rhododendron plants, their hanging clusters of inch-long magenta flowers filled with nectar. Though scentless and without nectar, *D. lawesii* evolved bright tubular floral receptacles becoming visually similar to the rhododendrons, enough to lure the birds for momentary intercourse.

The classical taxonomic representation of diversity assumes the propagation of discrete life forms: the *Plantae* kingdom as isolated from



But this interpretation seems unsurprising: in fact love can be posited from the outset as the natural function of the flower. Thus the symbolic quality would be due, even here, to a distinct property and not to an appearance that mysteriously strikes the human sensibility. Therefore it would only have a purely subjective value. Men have linked the brilliance of flowers to their amorous emotions because, on either side, it is a question of phenomena that precede fertilization. The role given to symbols in psychoanalytic interpretations, moreover, would corroborate an explanation of this type. In fact it is almost always an accidental parallel that accounts for the origin of substitutions in dreams. Among other things, the value given to pointed or hollowed-out objects is fairly well known.

In this way one quickly dismisses the opinion that external forms, whether seductive or horrible, reveal certain crucial resolutions in all phenomena, which human resolutions would only amplify. Thus there would be good reason to renounce immediately the possibility of replacing the word with the appearance as an element of philosophical analysis. It would be easy to show that only the word allows one to consider the characteristics of things that determine a relative situation, in other words the properties that permit an external action. Nevertheless, the appearance would introduce the decisive values of things.....

It appears at first that the symbolic meaning of flowers is not necessarily derived from their function. It is evident, in fact, that if one expresses love with the aid of a flower, it is the corolla, rather than the useful organs, that becomes the sign of desire.



the *Animalia* kingdom for one. Privileging evolutionary relationships between such heterogeneous organisms as the orchid and bird conjures a limitless interwoven life system. Such networks do not exist out there as a finite number of shoots and nodes to be observed, described, and managed by humans. We are embedded in their proliferation and adaptation. Diversity figured in this way begs the question of how, with what, and with whom we sustain the future rather than what we conserve from the past.

While this rhizomatic reformulation of species diversity appears to emerge from and critique systems of Western knowledge—Deleuze and Guatarri were Parisian intellectuals well versed in European traditions—it is prudent to note how marginalized traditions of representation and worldmaking have existed outside of and in relation with European traditions despite colonial efforts to negate them as ‘primitive.’¹⁴ The very concept of rhizome was first published in *Naven*, a mid-1930s ethnographic account by British-American anthropologist Gregory Bateson of the Iatmul tribe who live in northeastern New Guinea.¹⁵ Bateson translated the beliefs of the indigenous people into academic English and takes credit as the originator of the idea. But this concept emerged from interactions *with* the Iatmul. As a multiplex contact story, the dynamics of research along the Sepik River conjures an idea authored by many rather than by one.

Since its inception in 1895 the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum has exhibited selected works of art from Oceania, a region consisting of nearly two thousand island cultures. Ongoing exchanges between Islanders and the Museum—postcolonial knowledge production—energized by the Jolika Collection of New Guinea Art builds an alliance that might flourish and sustain diverse forms of artistic expression. For example, Cathy Kata, a contemporary artist working and living in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, visited the de Young as a Jolika Fellow in the fall of 2007 and delivered a lecture on BilumWear.



But here a specious objection could be raised against interpretation through the objective value of a p p e a r a n c e. In fact the substitution of juxtaposed elements is consistent with all that we spontaneously know about the emotions that motivate us, since the object of human love is never an organ, but the person who has the organ. Thus the attribution of the corolla to love can easily be explained: if the sign of love is displaced from the pistil and stamens to the surrounding petals, it is because the human mind is accustomed to making such a displacement with regard to people. But even though there is an undeniable parallelism in the two substitutions, it would be necessary to attribute to some puerile Providence a singular desire to satisfy people's manias: how in fact can one explain how these garish elements, automatically substituted for the essential organs of the flower, develop in such a brilliant way?

It would obviously be simpler to recognize the aphrodisiac properties of flowers, such as odor and appearance, which have aroused men's and women's amorous feelings over the centuries. Something is explosively propagated, step by step, each one provoking and intensifying the next. Many things can be altered in human societies, but nothing will prevail against the natural truth that a beautiful woman or a red rose signifies love.

An equally inexplicable and equally immutable reaction gives the girl and the rose a very different value: that of ideal beauty. There are, in fact, a multitude of beautiful flowers, since the beauty of flowers is even less rare than the beauty of girls, and characteristic of this organ of the plant. It is surely impossible to use an abstract formula to account for the elements that can give the flower this quality. It is interesting to observe, however, that if one says that flowers are beautiful, it is because they seem to conform to what must be, in other words they represent, as flowers, the human ideal.

At least at first glance, and in general: in fact, most flowers are badly developed and are barely distinguishable from foliage; some of them are even unpleasant, if not hideous.

Bilum Wears are contemporary garments handmade using a traditional single element looping technique, typically used for handbags called *bilums*. Kata embellishes her Bilum Wears with imported colors, though traditionally New Guinea Highlanders relied on the colors of their surrounding environment to embellish their textiles, such as the yellow orchid stems of *Diplocaulobium centrale*. Artists split the dried orchid stems into bright golden ribbons and then carefully coiled the ribbon around two-ply twine while looping complex forms and patterns exemplified by decorative string bags called *noken* in the West Papuan Highlands.

According to cultural anthropologist Mouli MacKenzie, string bags were and continue to be ubiquitous across the island of New Guinea variably used for work, fashion, and ceremony.¹⁶ On a daily basis they accommodate heavy loads of food, valuables, and even babies with their expansive fiber loops. This wearable art form also appears at ceremonies, at times draped around someone's shoulders swaying with their movement and at times resting on one's chest safekeeping a smaller value object.

Scholars interpreting the Jolika Collection offer insights into Highland systems of aesthetic value as they differ from lowland New Guinea and the West. While Lowlanders are recognized for the durability of their woodcarving and Westerners for the primarily visual language of painting, sculpture, and photography, the Highlanders are recognized for their embodied displays of ephemeral microcosms. Ensembles of plant fiber, pigment, bird plumes, marsupial fur, seashells, butterfly pupae, reptile skin, clay, and pigtailed ritually constitute a world of sensual interbeing and agency.¹⁷

A focus on visuality in Western art museums, however, narrows the perceptual visitor experience, permitting people to look closely at textiles but prohibiting touch. The de Young treats its highland string bags as rare fabrics imbued with meaning, protected from loss inside display cases for posterity. Orchids at the Conservatory appear against a tropical rainforest canopy, while string bags at the de Young appear suspended against a neutral backdrop with a bit of dramatic lighting to accentuate their looped construction. The Museum elevates its art collections from the status



Moreover, even the most beautiful flowers are spoiled in their centers by hairy sexual organs. Thus the interior of a rose does not at all correspond to its exterior beauty; if one tears off all of the corolla's petals, all that remains is a rather sordid tuft.

of nature to the status of culture, celebrating the ingenious ways that humans transform natural materials into masterpieces.¹⁸

Though apparently different displays, there are interdependent operations at work in these Golden Gate Park institutions. Neither the de Young nor the Conservatory is a vacuum. Like *Diplocaulobium centrale*, were string bags from the Jolika Collection reintroduced into the Highland ceremonial cycle they will have profoundly changed, as will the indigenous communities from which they came.

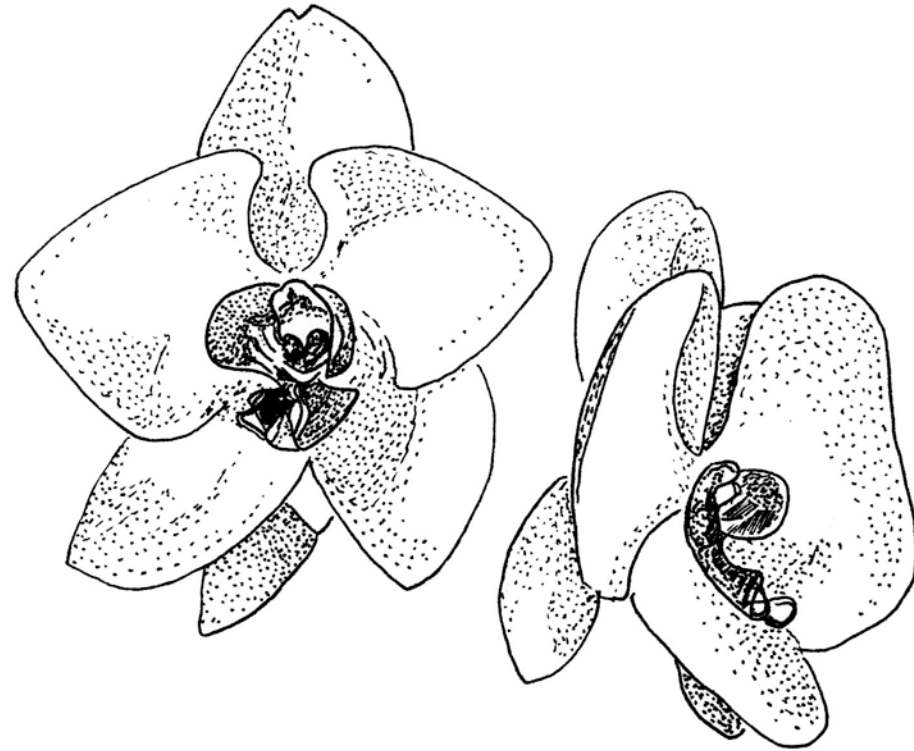
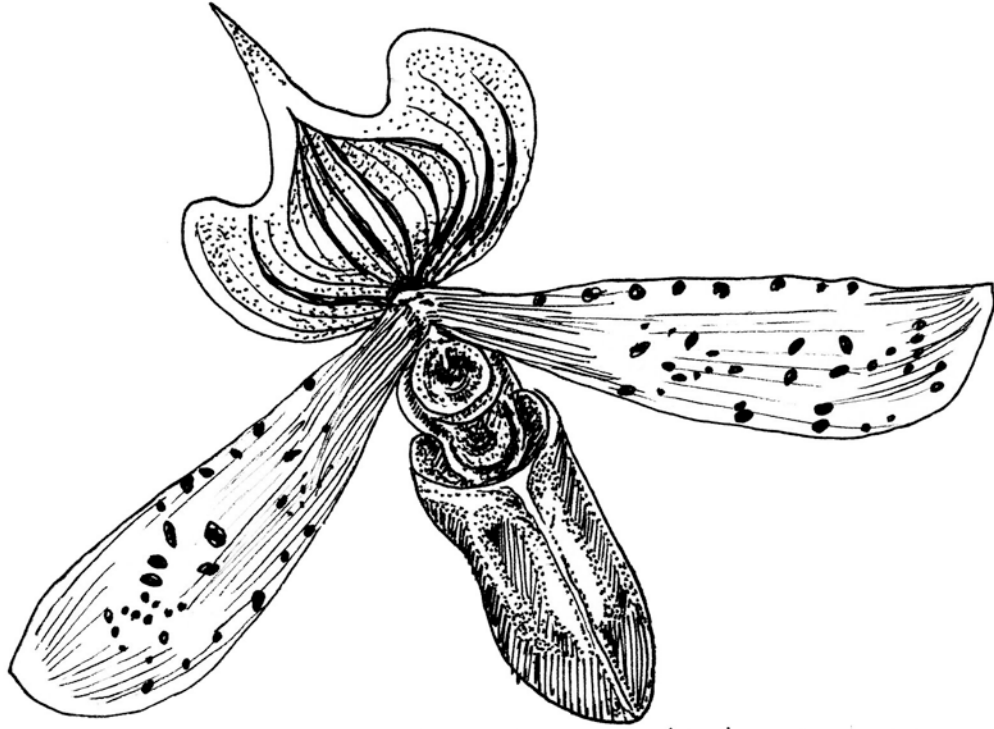
Though the de Young Museum carries few of the vital signs people immediately associate with plant life, it too is living. Not only in the way that it cultivates beauty and diversity by incorporating contemporary art and fostering cross-cultural human relations, but also in the way that living naturecultures run rampant from the ground level through to the ninth floor observation deck and laterally into the park.

For one: the perforated copper skin of the building, newly redesigned and reconstructed by Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron at the turn of the century is more than a façade and will do more than patina. The 420 tons of copper used to construct the new de Young set a precedent for building construction. This skin as the flesh rather than the limit of the new Museum will slowly leach into the ground over time and exemplifies its ever-changing institutional pulse. To perceive the de Young galleries as junctures of meaning, life forms, and technologies, particularly the upcoming installation of ephemeral Highlands art, is to account for decomposition as a necessary part of life cycles, exhibition, and conservation practice. It is to consider how the everyday institutionalization of “permanence” is contingent on artificially extending the ephemeral and stifling particular kinds of exchange. The artificial is not purely a human production, involving instead the collective energies of humidity, temperature, light, and pest controls, curators, conservators, agreements, endowments, and the everyday fluctuations of them all.

Jolika Fellows such as Cathy Kata who are actively contributing to the exhibitions of art from New Guinea in San Francisco signal an important shift in the West’s modern ideology and help modify our expectations of “cohesive” indigeneity as the orchids do for tropicality. As do the bird of paradise specimens at the California Academy of Sciences collected from New Guinea and surrounding Pacific islands.

Lophorina superba, or the Superb Bird of Paradise, appears to be a cohesive body of knowledge stored inside a state-of-the-art pullout drawer in the Ornithology and Mammology Department. A taxidermist has attempted to display the skin of *L. superba* in a lifelike form. Its small chest puffs slightly outwards as if the lungs were full of oxygen and the sheen of its black cape extends from beak to claw in an archival display of his powerful fragility. However, the skin is not at all preserved as it was found in the wild. Forming a trapezoidal shape from *L. superba*’s electric blue breast-shield was an aesthetic choice, after removing all the muscle fibers and bones, made without knowledge of the creature’s courtship dance. At the time, the Western taxidermist could not mimic the bird’s behavior because scientists had not successfully documented the dance.

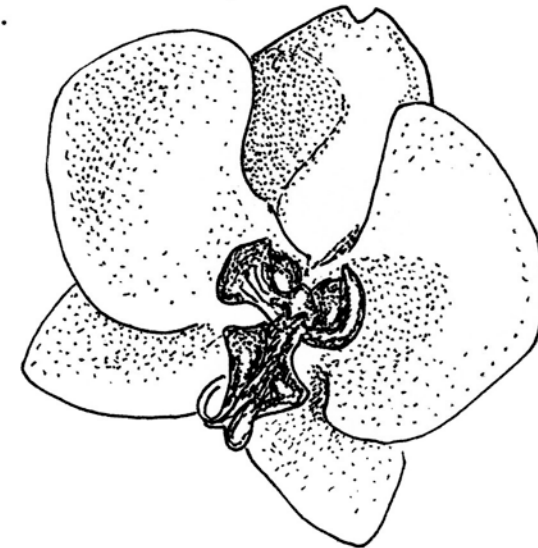
Around the world, an estimated seven million bird of paradise skins are preserved in various lifelike forms with 800,000 at the American Museum of Natural History and over one million at the British Museum of Natural History.¹⁹ The research collections inside these museums revere the diversity of life on Earth by rendering life passive, dissected, and quantified. But their storage facilities, while behind the scenes, are not stagnant archives of natural history. They too are functioning habitats comprised of feathers and formaldehyde. Meticulously designed entries and exits do not isolate pure bodies of knowledge and preserve



Other flowers, it is true, present very well-developed and undeniably elegant stamens, but appealing again to common sense, it becomes clear on close examination that this elegance is

rather s a t a n i c:

thus certain kinds of fat orchids, plants so shady that one is tempted to attribute them to the most troubling human perversions.



essential information about the past for the future. They do, however, constitute an evolutionary record that functions as ‘hard’ scientific data with which to authorize the fleeting present.

In his archeological survey of natural history as a mode of representation that develops between the classical and modern epistemes, Foucault discusses the sterility of things without words:

The whole of animal semantics has disappeared, like a dead and useless limb. The words that had been interwoven in the very being of the beast have been unraveled and removed: and the living being, in its anatomy, its form, its habits, its birth and death, appears as though stripped naked.²⁰

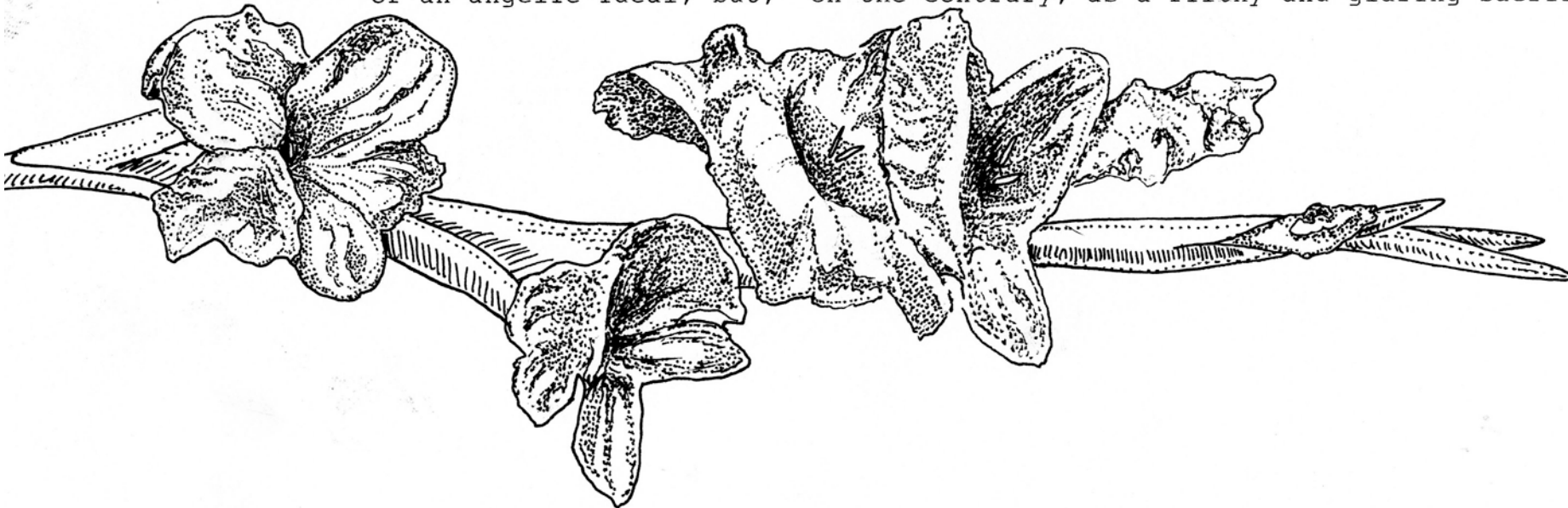
Knowledge about living beings produced in this way assumes the autonomy of nature and consistency of natural objects. Collected and transported from around the world, crossing time and space, research specimens maintain the integrity of their origins.

When it opened in 1853 the Academy of Science performed the role of a natural history museum, celebrating the observing gaze, though Italian architect Renzo Piano recently redesigned and reconstructed the building in line with the science institution’s new approach to educating and exciting the public about the natural world. The new site-specific museum opened in September 2008 with worldwide sustainable appeal, attempting to reconcile its historic collecting and display practices—ordering the universe into discrete taxa—with its environmental agenda—caring for and taking part in living systems of varying scale that constitute the universe. Its two-acre living roof undulates like the coastal hills of the San Francisco peninsula and, its perimeter covered with photovoltaic cells, will generate five percent of the energy necessitated by the building. The Academy emphasizes its energy footprint and field research alongside its conventional dioramas and research collections. For example, curatorial selection for the four-story Living Rainforest accounted for the adaptive qualities of plants, or their ability to survive within the conditions of the exhibit.

The horticulturalists at the Conservatory of Flowers will also consider the light levels when installing new orchids in their Highland Tropics Gallery, which is also energy efficient, though by default perhaps, due to the climatic similarities between temperate coastal fog and cool highland mist. The Conservatory modestly regulates the temperature and moisture of its Highland gallery with latex whitewash and ceiling misters, whereas

But even more than by the filth of its organs the flower is betrayed by the fragility of its corolla: ~~THUS, FAR FROM~~ ANSWERING THE DEMANDS OF HUMAN IDEAS, IT IS THE SIGN OF THEIR FAILURE. In fact after a very short period of glory the marvelous corolla rots indecently in ~~th~~ the sun, thus becoming, for the plant, a garish withering. Risen from the ~~sten~~ stench of the manure pile - even though it seemed for a moment to have escaped it in a flight of angelic and lyrical purity - the flower seems to relapse ~~abr~~ abruptly into its original squalor: the most ideal is rapidly reduced to a ~~wis~~ wisp of aerial manure. For flowers do not age honestly like leaves, which lose nothing of their beauty, even after they have died; flowers wither like old ~~an~~ and ~~overly~~ made-up dowagers, and they die ridiculously on stems that seemed to carry them on clouds.

It is impossible to exaggerate the tragicomic oppositions indicated in the ~~cou~~ course of this death-drama, endlessly played out between earth and sky, and it is evident that one can only paraphrase this laughable duel by introducing, ~~no~~ not as a sentence, but more precisely as an ink stain, this nauseating ~~banalit~~ banality: l o v e s m e l l s l i k e d e a t h . It seems, in fact, that desire has nothing to do with ideal beauty, or, more precisely, that it only arises in order to stain and wither the beauty that for many sad and ~~vell-ord~~ well-ordered personalities is only a limit, a c a t e g o r i c a l i m p e r a t i v e . The most admired flower for that reason would not be ~~repr~~ represented, following the verbiage of the old poets, as the faded expression of an angelic ideal, but, on the contrary, as a filthy and glaring sacrilege.



the Academy must diligently maintain its Living Rainforest at 82-85 degrees Fahrenheit and 75% humidity. Is the Academy more sustainable with regard to its curatorial selection, or its creative technologies that consume more energy in order to assist plants less equipped for San Francisco's climate? Is the Rainforest a celebration of a threatened ecosystem, or human innovations that maintain the contrast of the ordinary and extraordinary?

Perception

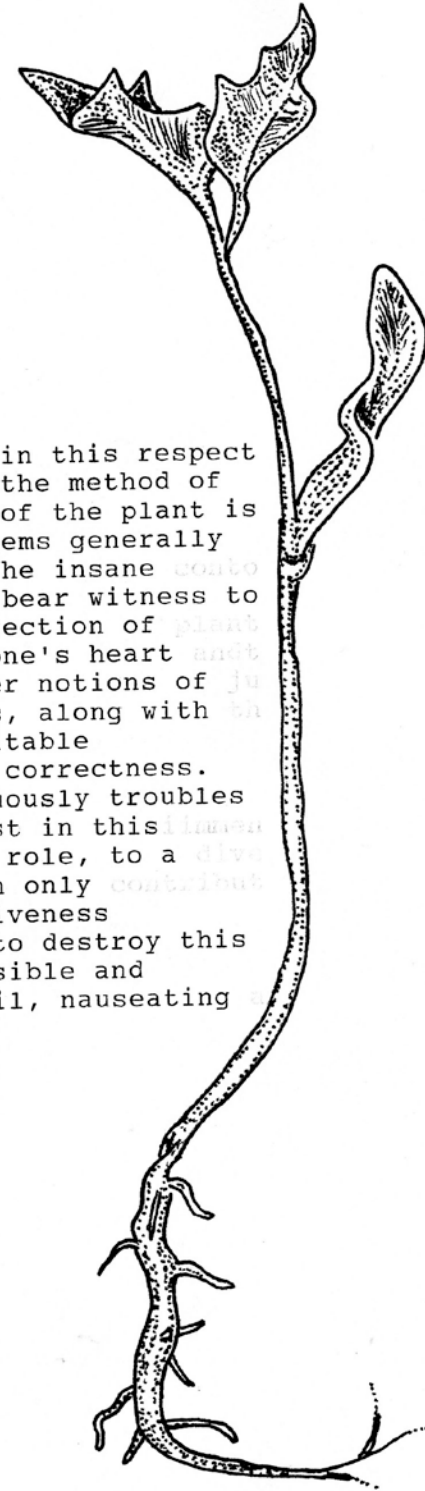
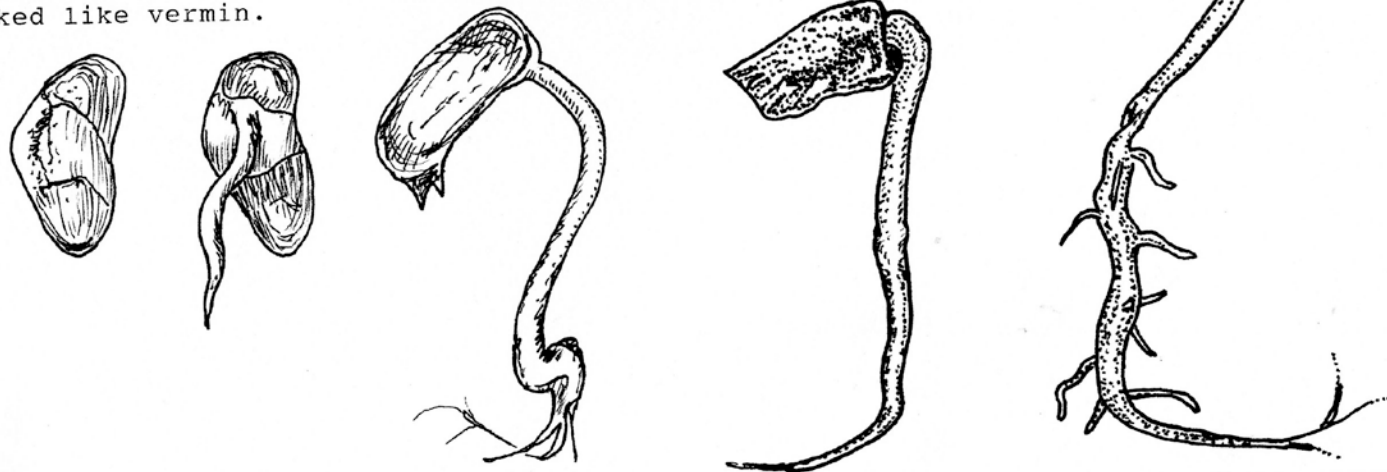
Difference and classificatory schemata pervaded the consciousness of modern collectors. Natural historians as well as merchants amassed orchids, butterflies, dragonflies, and bird of paradise skins as exotic tokens from distant tropical islands that contrasted with the urbanity of Europe and the United States. Specimens as well as illustrations and travel writing were pivotal in fueling the demand for and shaping the relationship to birds of paradise in Europe and the United States. Edmé-Louis Daubenton first illustrated *Lophorina superba* in 1774, Philibert Guéneau de Montbeillard described him in 1775, and Louis Jean Pierre Vieillot named him the sole species in his genus in 1816. Though this suite of French naturalists never actually observed a live Superb Bird of Paradise in the highlands for it was not until 1870 that a collecting expedition led by Carl Benjamin Hermann von Rosenberg finally encountered *L. superba* living in the Arfak Mountains as they were exploring the northwestern region of New Guinea.²¹

Hand-colored folios, oil paintings, and lithographic prints were the primary means of representing birds of paradise until the early 1870s when photography raised public consciousness about their courtship songs and dances.²² Benefiting from the great technological innovations of the twentieth century, a natural historian filmmaker from Britain named Sir David Attenborough was able to climb through the rainforest canopy of the New Guinea Highlands and document a variety of courtship behavior using high definition moving images.²³

In Attenborough's suspenseful narrations the circulation of intensities between male and female birds of paradise is paramount. Viewers see how, fluttering



There is good reason to insist upon the exception represented, in this respect by the flower on the plant. In fact, if one continues to apply the method of interpretation introduced here, on the whole the external part of the plant is endowed with an unambiguous meaning. The appearance of leafy stems generally gives the impression of strength and dignity. Without a doubt the insane contortions of tendrils and the unusual lacerations of foliage bear witness to the fact that all is not uniformly correct in the impeccable erection of plants. But nothing contributes more strongly to the peace in one's heart and to the lifting of one's spirits, as well as to one's loftier notions of justice and rectitude, than the spectacle of fields and forests, along with the tiniest parts of the plant, which sometimes manifest a veritable architectural order, contributing to the general impression of correctness. No crack, it seems - one could stupidly say no quack - conspicuously troubles the decisive harmony of vegetal nature. Flowers themselves, lost in this immense movement from earth to sky, are reduced to an episodic role, to a diversion, moreover, that is apparently misunderstood: they can only contribute, by breaking the monotony, to the inevitable seductiveness produced by the general thrust from low to high. And in order to destroy this favorable impression, nothing less is necessary than the impossible and fantastic vision of roots swarming under the surface of the soil, nauseating and naked like vermin.



between tree branches to attract a prospective mating partner, *Lophorina superba* developed over several generations his electric blue breast-shield and lustrous black cape. When a female bird approaches, this adaptation enables him to expand his top feathers into a dark ellipse, framing the beaming shield that he exposes as he twitters and dances side to side. Attenborough reinforces the birds as taxonomized beings recognized by humans for their distinctive plumage and bird-to-bird mating patterns.²⁴ Meanwhile he dismisses patterns of transmissions between the birds and other organisms, technologies, support systems, and himself.

Donna Haraway concisely and eloquently describes how seeing is not a one-sided operation or a faculty unique to human kind. She details how people and animals look back reciprocally, highlighting companion species like dogs and cats with whom we exchange glances on a daily basis. How does the contemporary collector of moving images and the historical collector of skins actually engage in a complex horizontal system of worldmaking in addition to feeding the hierarchical grid of modernity? Things together are productive, active, and alive. Production equipment though hidden from the viewer is in the field juxtaposed with Attenborough and the Superb Bird of Paradise. Perception is the ability to become aware of something through the senses, and it is not limited to vision. Haraway reminds us through her witty rescriptions of the varying scales of contact from genomes to canines to computers that there is something profoundly impacting about being in close proximity to the flesh of a bird, whether traipsing through the Arfak Mountains of New Guinea or visiting Golden Gate Park.

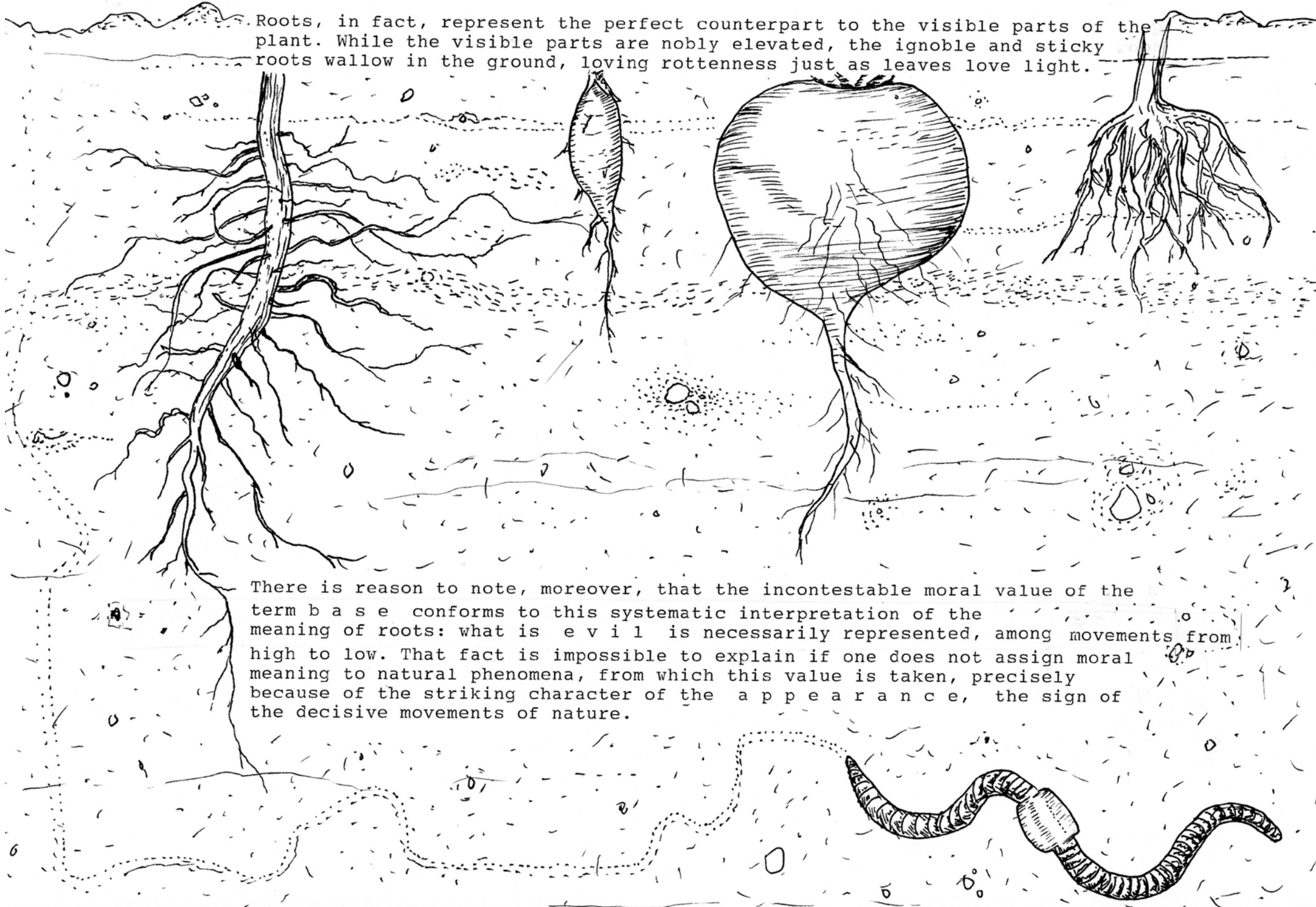
Ethnomusicologist Steven Feld studied perception and sensuality in a Southern Highlands region south of the Huli where the Kaluli people have lived for many years. His particular ethnographic interests are at the intersection of sound and sense of place. While Feld is careful not to essentialize the West in polar opposition to the non-West, placing emphasis on the interplay of the human sensorium in varying contexts, he is intrigued by the refinement of hearing as well as smell in the multisensory Kaluli experience of the tropical rainforest.

[T]he dense sensuality of evening darkness, with voices overlapping the misting light rains and insects and frogs of the nearby bush, is sensually continuous with smoky aromas that fires or resin torches release into the longhouse and diffuse out into the ever-moist night air. Evoking the diffuseness of this motional sensorium, the processes of sound and smell are incorporated into the same Bosavi verb, *dabuma*, or absorption by ear and nose.²⁵

And rather than discrete sounds, Feld says the Kaluli inhabit an interlocking soundscape that enables them to deduce their whereabouts from atmospheric information like humidity, mud, and running water. Orienting oneself in the context of a dense rainforest in this way offers an innovative way to navigate the collections and displays of diversity from the Highlands of New Guinea in Golden Gate Park.

Overwhelmingly people from the West have conceived, collected, and measured diversity as qualitative and quantitative difference, rendering species and cultures static. Identifying and counting the variety of life forms in the world such as tropical orchids and birds has generated

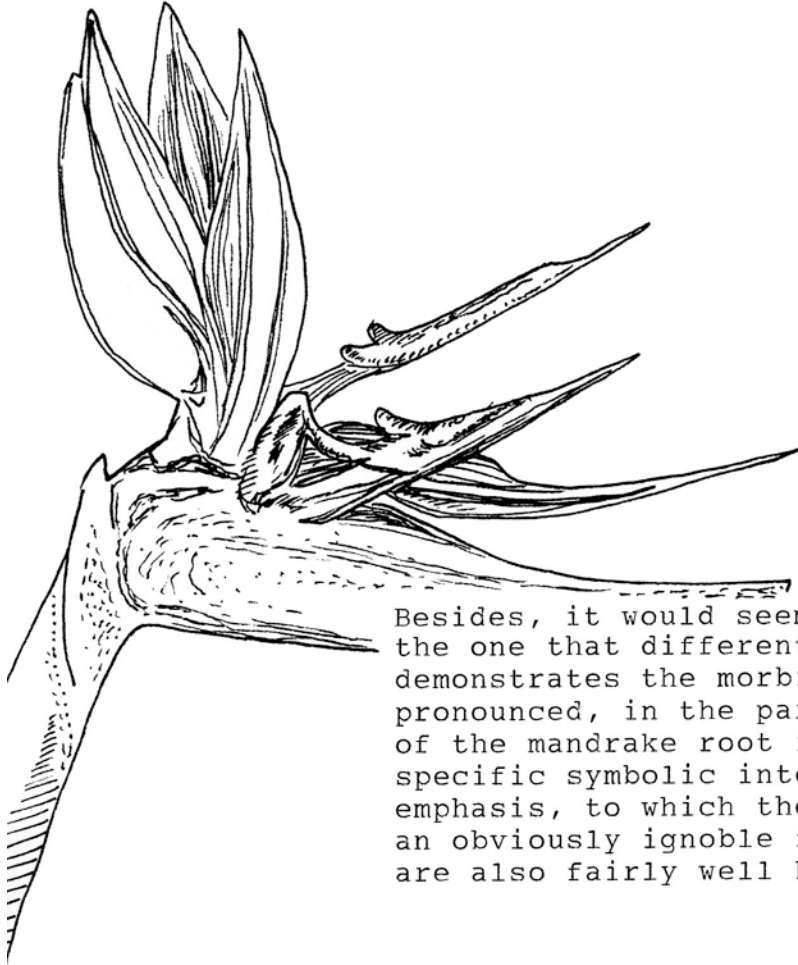
Roots, in fact, represent the perfect counterpart to the visible parts of the plant. While the visible parts are nobly elevated, the ignoble and sticky roots wallow in the ground, loving rottenness just as leaves love light.



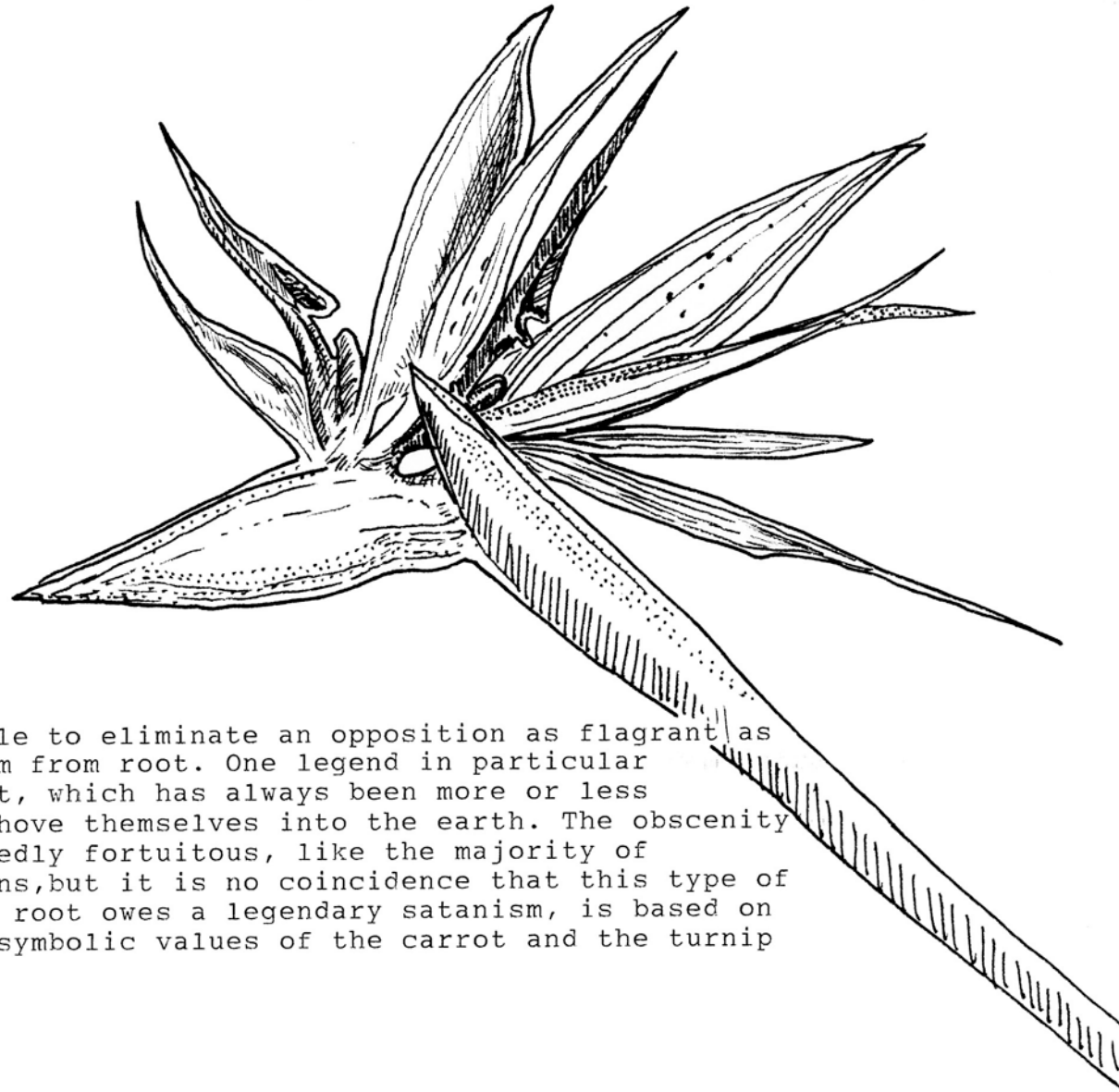
There is reason to note, moreover, that the incontestable moral value of the term *b a s e* conforms to this systematic interpretation of the meaning of roots: what is *e v i l* is necessarily represented, among movements from high to low. That fact is impossible to explain if one does not assign moral meaning to natural phenomena, from which this value is taken, precisely because of the striking character of the *a p p e a r a n c e*, the sign of the decisive movements of nature.

fascinating scientific studies and statistics. But as Harold Koopowitz says, “We are abysmally ignorant of the ecology of tropical orchids. Nearly all attention has been focused on their taxonomy, the distribution of orchid plants or how they are pollinated. We know very little about how they ‘fit’ into their environment, the way in which these plants manage themselves or their needs in the wild.”²⁶ Or in the words of Haraway, “Typological thinking reigns almost unchecked in this universe, and nuanced views of developmental biology, behavioral ecology, and genes as nodes in dynamic and multivectorial fields of vital interactions are only some of the crash victims of high-octane medical genetic fuels and gene-jockey racing careers.”²⁷

For decades a 15-inch-large creature from the New Guinea Highlands with an ebony body accented by brilliant patches of orange around his eyes and on his wings convinced taxonomists that he was from the birds of paradise family. He was named *Macgregoria pulchra*. The morphological character of *M. pulchra*'s nasal region, beak, and feet exhibited a close affinity with other birds of paradise and became scientific evidence for common and convenient ancestry.²⁸ However in 2000 a few curious ornithologists, equipped with new biochemical tools and methods, argued otherwise.²⁹ They claim that *M. pulchra* is the largest honeyeater on Earth, a magnificent bird amidst its modest brethren, whereas previously it appeared as a dull example of the most flamboyant of all bird families.



Besides, it would seem impossible to eliminate an opposition as flagrant as the one that differentiates stem from root. One legend in particular demonstrates the morbid interest, which has always been more or less pronounced, in the parts that shove themselves into the earth. The obscenity of the mandrake root is undoubtedly fortuitous, like the majority of specific symbolic interpretations, but it is no coincidence that this type of emphasis, to which the mandrake root owes a legendary satanism, is based on an obviously ignoble form. The symbolic values of the carrot and the turnip are also fairly well known.



It was more difficult to show that the same opposition appeared in an isolated part of the plant, the flower, where it takes on an exceptionally dramatic meaning.

Participation

Highland ranges of golden yellow: the plumes of a Twelve-wired Bird of Paradise and the fruits on which they feed are colored like the dried stems of *Diplocaulobium centrale* interwoven as a *noken* in West Papua.³⁰ In the course of their lifetime birds interact with countless flowering plants, which interact in turn with countless varieties of fungi, which interact with insects, raindrops, and light rays traveling through the vast networks of interbeing on the island of New Guinea and beyond. This rhizomatic approach to species takes seriously the impossibility of naming all the world's dynamic life forms: flora, fauna, microbes, monoliths, and *Homo sapiens* too.

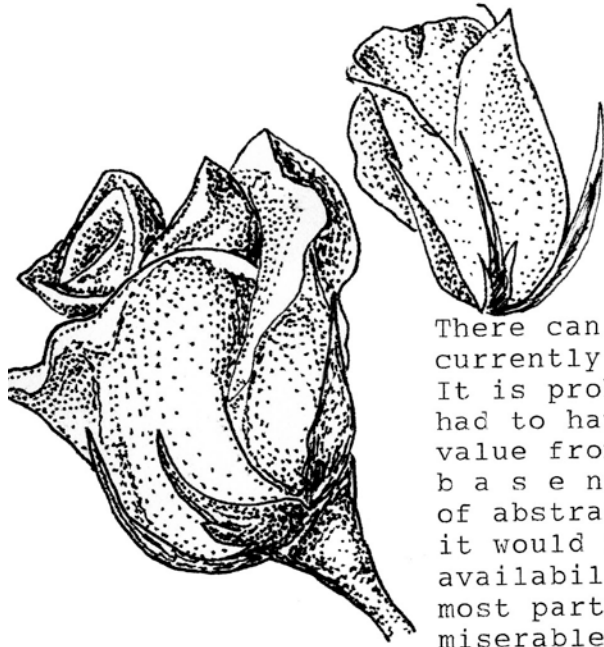
Anticipating the upcoming tour involving the Conservatory of Flowers, M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, and California Academy of Sciences I have attempted to refigure the highland orchid *Diplocaulobium centrale* through lateral webs of movement, a gesture of diversity as dynamic process. In doing so, what seemed a double crisis—loss of species and proliferating naturecultures—became a generative opportunity.

While discursive production—written, spoken, and visual language— is important to me as a storyteller, I am not concerned with a true representation of diversity or rendering of life. I am, however, concerned with the physicality of language and how representations of the world reverberate in the world. If descriptions of tropical taxa have elicited species, site, and culturally specific conservation management policies, descriptions of natureculture networks as sociotechnological imbroglios might refigure conservation as participatory.

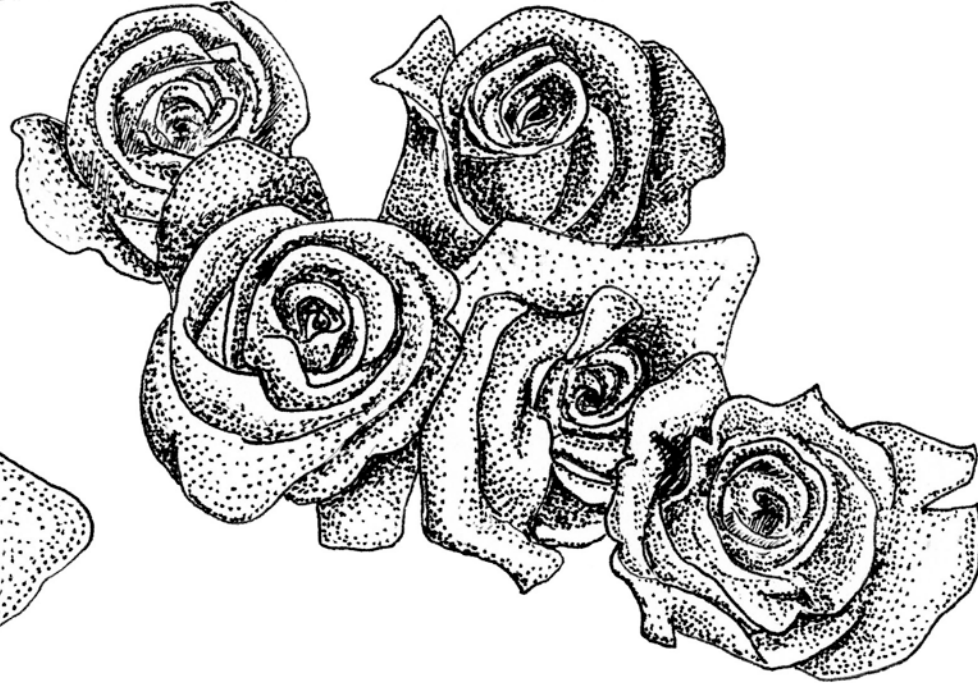
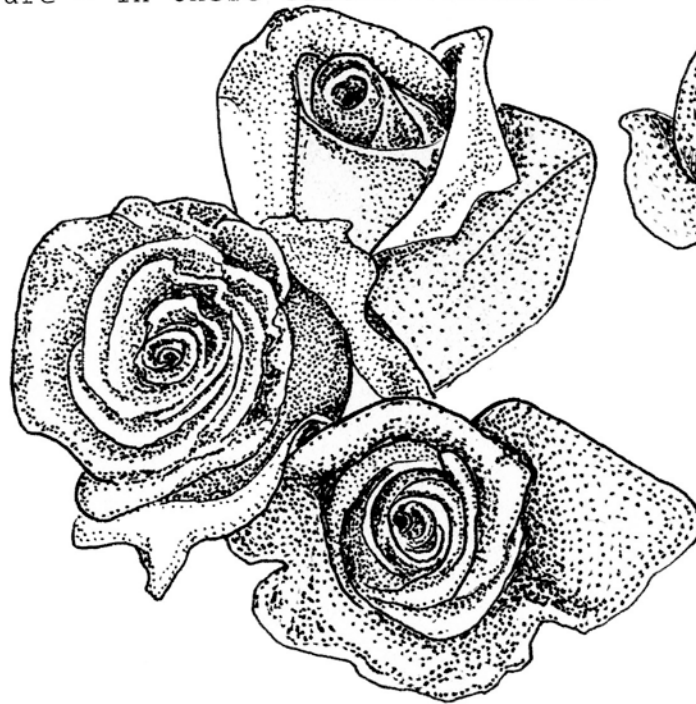
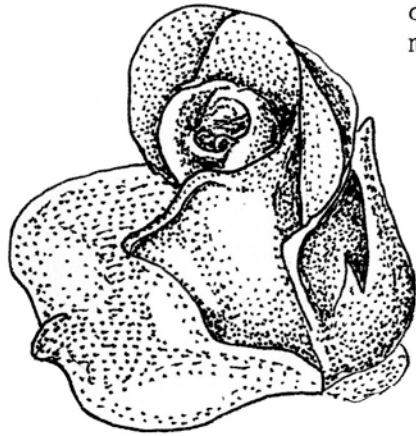
Participation is not conservation in conventional terms. It is not voluntary. While the island of New Guinea seems distant, San Francisco is fully implicated in the process of conservation: seeing, absorbing, and being juxtaposed with a multitude of life forms from the island on display in Golden Gate Park. Recognizing this contact as participation, on a local and global scale, reminds us how absolutely interconnected and implicated we are in the constant collective making of the world.

It is challenging for museums to represent the material-semiotics of collections and display, though they are well suited to trace the interactivity of exhibition spaces as exploratory models of worldmaking: renderings of life. How might museum databases evolve from object profiles to render the activity of computer users and gallery visitors, growing our ability to perceive microcosms, rhizomes, or networks? The discourse of database aestheticians is compelling.³¹ Emergent technologies such as Web 2.0 have developed and animated communities of practice in unprecedented ways. We need to innovate. The division of “nature” and “culture” has become manifest in the world as unsustainable boundaries in the politics of land use and resources wherein governmental, non-profit, and even for-profit organizations such as eco-tourism agencies are struggling to protect the Earth's last “wild” places.³²

Although the Conservatory of Flowers and Academy of Sciences interpret the natural world and the de Young Museum interprets the world of art and culture, ultimately all three identify as cultural institutions located *ex-situ*. Their collections are geared towards preventing loss, anticipating the deterioration of wild places *in-situ*. But we are always responding to life *in-situ* as opposed to objectively measuring and representing it *ex-situ*. Today diversity has greater currency as lateralized webs of interaction than as discrete taxon. Diversity figured in this way begs the question of how, with what, and with whom we sustain the future rather than what we conserve from the past.



There can be no doubt: the substitution of natural forms for the abstractions currently used by philosophers will seem not only strange but absurd. It is probably fairly unimportant that philosophers themselves have often had to have recourse, though with repugnance, to terms that derive their value from the production of these forms in nature, as when they speak of *b a s e n e s s*. No blindness interferes with defending the prerogatives of abstraction. This substitution, moreover, threatens to carry one too far: it would result, in the first place, in a feeling of freedom, the free availability of oneself in every sense, which is absolutely unbearable for the most part, and the troubling contempt for all that is still - thanks to miserable evasions - elevated, noble, sacred . . . Don't all these beautiful things run the risk of being reduced to a strange *mis en scene*, destined to make sacrilege more impure? And the disconcerting gesture of the Marquis de Sade, locked up with madmen, who had the most beautiful roses brought to him only to pluck off their petals and toss them into a ditch filled with liquid manure - in these circumstances, doesn't it have an overwhelming impact?



(Endnotes)

1 The Conservatory of Flowers has not acquired or installed *Diplocaulobium centrale* in the Highland Tropics Gallery, though it is one example of the ethnobotanical orchid plants from Highlands New Guinea that they are considering.

2 “While there are tens of thousands of orchid species in the wild, man has produced an even larger number of orchid hybrids...The first artificial orchid hybrids were made well over a century ago, in 1863, and these gradually replaced the wild species in most hobbyist collections...Nearly all flower hybridizers, no matter what the group of flowers they work with...all seem to have produced similar, though artificial sets of criteria, about what makes a superior flower. In each case there is a definite preference towards full, rounded, flowers with broad overlapping petals. In most cases the trend is towards creating ever-larger blossoms with petals or tepals that look as if they have been ironed flat. Clearer and brighter flowers with more intense tones and contrasts are also favored...These are clearly artificial criteria because flat, round flowers are not suited to insect eyes and, in the wild, few of these ‘ideal’ orchids would ever get pollinated.” See Harold Koopowitz, *Orchids and their Conservation* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 2001), 52.

3 Ibid., 93 and 136.

4 Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3 and 205-246.

5 Although tropical rainforest habitats, “cover only 7% of the Earth’s land surface, they contain more than half the species in the entire world biota.” And they “are being destroyed so rapidly that they will mostly disappear within the next century, taking with them hundreds of thousands of species into extinction.” He continues in detail, “Approximately 40% of the land that can support tropical closed forest now lacks it, primarily because of

human action...the tropical world is clearly headed toward an extreme reduction and fragmentation of tropical forests, which will be accompanied by a massive extinction of species” (E.O. Wilson and Frances M. Peter, eds., *Biodiversity*, Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press: 1988, 8-11).

6 Ibid., 3.

7 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 49-51.

8 Ibid., 10-11.

9 To purify nature from culture requires a lot of work and, as Latour claims, has never been fully successful. See *We Have Never Been Modern*, 100-103 and 7. Slippage between the study of plants and animals and the co-presence of humans is prevalent from the seventeenth century onward. James Clifford discusses how the connotation of culture as aesthetic form and cohesive whole has prevailed in the West, and suggests that the concept emerged or was clipped from horticulture’s “tendency to natural growth.” Growth became associated with creativity and refinement, figuring classed individual plants and people into hierarchical elevations. See *The Predicament of Culture*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 233-234.

10 For a review of ethnographic authority see Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 21-54. In this context of networked naturecultures, the tools of ethnography allow me to reflexively navigate the collections in Golden Gate Park whereas ethnobotany has a pretense to objectivity and asymmetry (Latour, *Science in Action*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987: 215-257).

11 Koopowitz, *Orchids and their Conservation*, 18-19.

12 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xiv.

13 Taxonomists aspire to describe all the *Dendrobiinae* species that exist in the world today: though still uncertain the estimate is 1,700 different species. The highest concentration (33%) of *Dendrobiinae* is on the island of New Guinea. See Bill Lavarack, Wayne Harris, and Geoff Stocker, eds., *Dendrobium and its Relatives* (Portland: Timber Press, 2000), 14 and 31-32.

14 Edward Said in Dean Scully, ed., *Decolonizing Conservation* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007), 28.

15 Gregory Bateson, *Naven* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1936), 249.

16 Maureen A. MacKenzie, *Androgynous Objects* (Philadelphia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991).

17 Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, “Body Decoration,” *Gender, Song, and Sensibility: Folktales and Folksongs in the Highlands of New Guinea* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 147-164.

18 Outside of the de Young Museum, the largest collections of New Guinea art are held by museums of natural history. The de Young once housed natural history collections. It was 1928 when, “many of those 1890s stuffed birds, as well as other material in the natural history section, were deemed unfit for exhibition by the museum taxidermist, who was authorized to destroy them, thus adding momentum to the museum’s inexorable movement toward specializing in art” (Pamela Forbes et al., *100 Years in Golden Gate Park*, ed. Pamela Forbes, Sacramento: Cal Central Press and The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1995: 9).

19 C. B. Frith and B.M. Beehler, *The Birds of Paradise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 39.

20 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House Inc., 1970), 129.

21 Pamela Swadling, *Plumes from Paradise* (Coorparoo DC, Queensland, Australia: Papua New Guinea National Museum in association with Robert Brown & Associates, 1996), 75.

22 Frith and Beehler, *The Birds of Paradise*, 29-34; Chris Ballard, Anton Ploeg, and Steven Vink, eds., *Race to the Snow* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2002), 7.

23 *Attenborough in Paradise*, videocassette, written and presented David Attenborough (New York: BBC Video, 2007).

24 L. Christidis and R. Schodde, “Sexual selection for novel partners, a mechanism for accelerated morphological evolution in the birds-of-paradise (Paradisaeidae),” *Bull. Brit. Ornithol. Club* 113 (1993): 169-172.

25 Steven Feld, “Waterfalls of Song,” *Senses of Place*, eds. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 99.

26 Koopowitz, *Orchids and their Conservation*, 21.

27 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 143.

28 Frith and Beehler admit that “the cnemophilines may, in fact, not be birds of paradise” but “it is certainly convenient to treat these three species” as such in *The Birds of Paradise*, 174.

29 Don Roberson, “Cnemophilines, *Cnemophilidae*,” Creagrus @ Monterey Bay (<http://montereybay.com/creagrus/cnemophilines.html>).

30 Frith and Beehler, *The Birds of Paradise*, 24.

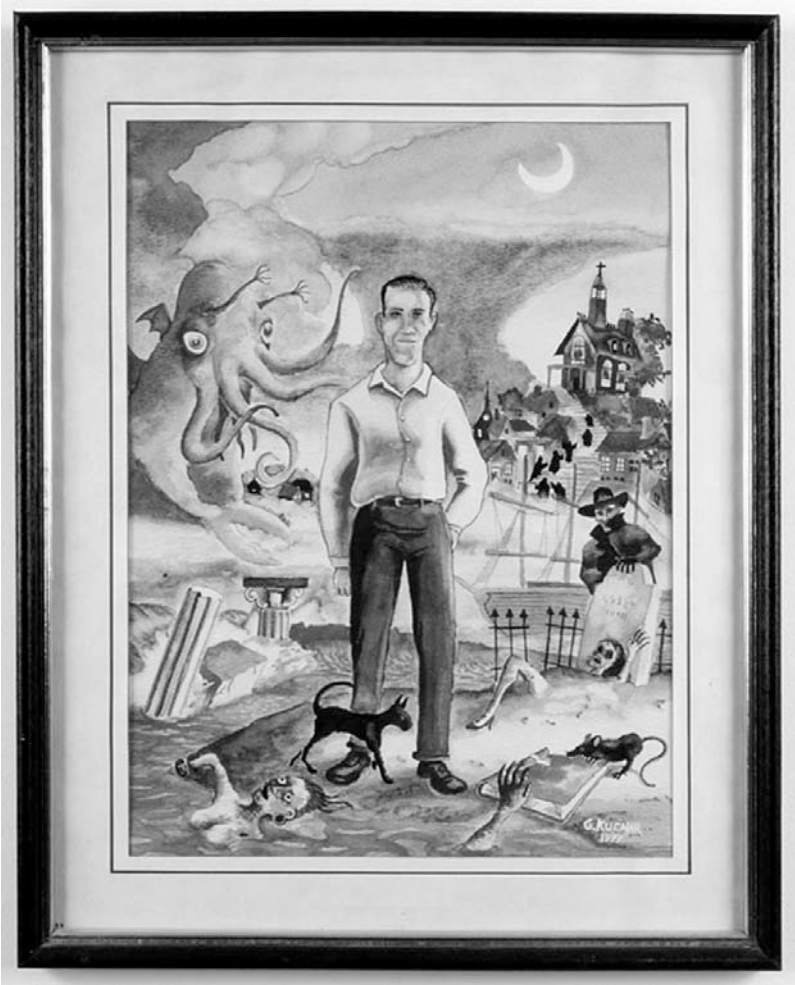
31 Victoria Vesna, ed. *Database aesthetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

32 Mittermeier et al., *Wilderness: Earth’s*

[2nd floor projects] is an artist-run space located in San Francisco that began in April 2007. Programming includes invitations to commission writers nationally to produce editions—essays, personal narrative, interviews, poetry, or mixed genre in the form of broad sheets or chapbooks. The intention is to encourage engagement with the artists’ work from the writers point of departure, distal, rather than from a traditional essay model, such as in the exhibition catalogue. From early on my interests have aired on the side of trespassing disciplines—visual, theoretical, and narrative crossings with intention to address an interstitial space of engagement. This fall 2nd floor projects is invited to participate in The NY Art Book Fair, October 2-4, 2009. The following essay by Eileen Myles was on the occasion of the exhibition “GEORGE AND MIKE KUCCHAR paintingsdrawingspaintings” on view at [2nd floor projects] San Francisco, 19 January to 24 February, 2008.

—Margaret Tedesco

(projects2ndfloor.blogspot.com)



Brothers ‘n Sons and Female Heroes

by Eileen Myles

George got into doing that, through their friendship. His paintings are filled with heroines. I like women he explains. They already paint themselves and women are attracted to emotional situations. How do you like feminism I ask. It forced people to take sides. He likes it better now. Not so much anger. It was rough, especially at school. Then he tells me about Joyce Wieland, a Canadian filmmaker who recently died whose work he thinks I’d like. I thank him, and I will check her out. One painting which stands out for me is a luminous back—of a young man I assumed. Maybe seen through a greasy lens, or by a hungry paparazzi. I was in a motel in the panhandle says George and this former student comes into the room took off all his clothes and lies down on the bed. Yeah that painting is special. I’m glad you like it. I was already in an altered state, he admits. Was the student Curt McDowell, I suggest, being smart. No but Curt *was* in the room at the time. Most of George’s paintings are from memory, but I forgot to ask if this one was. Neither Kuchar brother has shown or sold his work much. Bruce Hainley got George to put a couple in a show at Casey Kaplan’s in New York and they were snapped up quickly. None of this work has been produced in the last couple of years. If you sell all these you’ll just make more I cheered. That’s not how it works he informs. I paint because I like to paint. And I *don’t* like to paint my apartment. These cover the walls, they cover a lot he laughs. So the paintings are even painting of yet another sort. Then he makes a beautiful distinction. For film I get very involved in creating the lighting. Painting is about going where the weather is, astonishing places like Oklahoma in the spring, and painting in the light.

I remember once reading an interview with Francis Bacon in which the interviewer sets us up for the conversation by telling us that Bacon had that quality of all great artists in which he knew when to pull back and when to go forward. Like stop and start were great seismic moments that affected the destiny of the work. It maybe suggested that great art was the result of great will—subtly calibrated to respond to the push and pull of the self, the animal driving the creativity bus. The Kuchar brothers, especially outside their own proscribed area of expertise, are presenting us with a small but glowing body of work: drawings and paintings, in oil, watercolor, and tempera and all made from an entirely other kind of spirit—I think—George says he makes paintings ambiguously, I make em cause I like painting, he paints them when he’s sitting in a motel room in Oklahoma—enjoying the weather and also waiting for it to change. There’s no grandiosity whatsoever in his talk about this work yet the further he went in describing his process the richer the work became. And I was already a convert. He and his brother Mike went to art high school in the Bronx where they grew up. The push was towards illustration, getting a job. I don’t think it had that result at all for George. He said he learned about oil paintings from the Walter Foster books you’d find in Woolworth’s as a kid. He liked that old guys did this kind of work. He was already making films that were screening at the Underground in New York with Warhol and all those other guys, and painting was just something extra he did. I forgot to ask him if these paintings have titles but the big orange oil painting of a man and a woman looks like they are watching television and George confirms, indeed they are, they were *always* watching television. The painting was a gift to Larry and his mother and when he showed it to them they just changed the subject. Years later Larry wanted the painting, after his mother had died but George by then had gotten attached to the painting hanging over his bed. It was safe! For George giving or even selling a painting to a person is inextricably linked to whether that person is going to give the painting a good home. If someone pays a lot for a painting his assumption is the painting might also be okay. The subjects of some of his paintings often come from special sources. One of my favorites is a woman with a beach ball having a tug of war with a purple creature with very well formed thighs. It’s the New Jersey Devil George tells me. The creature haunted the New Jersey pine barrens of the 60s and also would occasionally leave a hoof mark on a roof. George researches his paintings. Looks for stories he wants to do. I enthused to him that his paintings look like movies. They’re very similar, he replied. I pick characters, and I’m used to working in a box. I was looking at him in a beige room with a window and a dog (the famous Bocko.) They were on a train. But otherwise the box being the frame of the canvas or paper, the screen or even a comic strip. Art Spiegelman was a neighbor in San Francisco in the 80s and that’s how



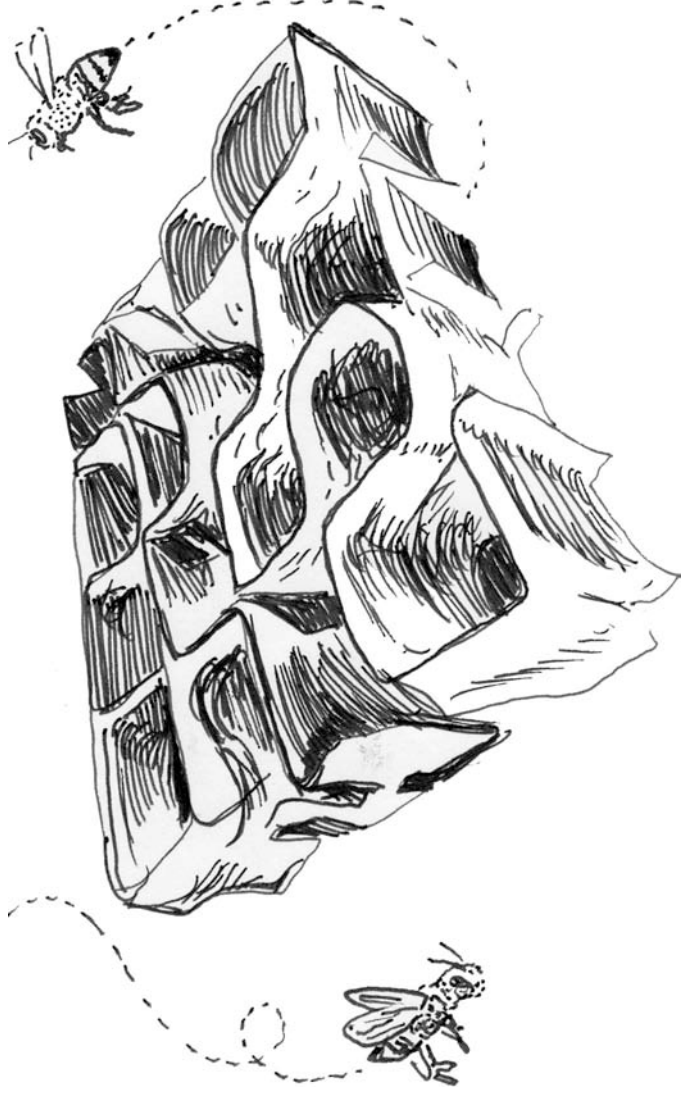
Mike Kuchar
Gay Heart Throbs No. 3
1981
Acrylic on poster board
28 x 20 inches

George Kuchar (opposite)
H.P. Lovecraft
1977
Ink on paper
15 x 12 inches (framed)

Mike Kuchar's body of work is largely commissioned. **Unlike the world of Francis Bacon's bull. His will.** Mike's work, in fact, is as postmodern as it gets. A roommate had a friend who needed art for some gay publications. Mike did a few for them, got paid, and the word got around that he was good. Gay Heartthrobs, included here, is one of them. It's amazing that these are extensions of stories long gone, that Mike's drawings have outlived those forgettable tales. And carry them too. I ask him about these big hunky men with peaceful eyes and elongated tits. One stands like a surfer on a dinosaur's back. The dinosaur, of course, is hot too. I find myself thinking of Nicole Eisenman's masculine women and Mike Kuchar's guys pushing through fountains of testosterone seem like feminine men, all their bold poses seemingly for show. Seen to be scene I thought. Classical Hodgepodge is what he calls his arrangements, men holding up clumps of the earth like Atlas, or underwater, swiftly ducking a shark. One man is holding back a red sail in a sexy (and absent) wind. They're juicy cartoons Mike brags. I like flowery stuff, a lot of curves. I don't care for too much macho. I like cuddly; sweetness. Mike has shown even less work than George. I mean in galleries, not in magazines. Maybe only one gallery show, but significantly another show was held in a sex club. Beneath the drawings were pillows and couches. If you like what you saw you could just get down and illustrate the stories yourself. Which seems the highest kind of praise for art and the truest way to install it. Not "in" a meditative stillness, but encouraging active praise so that any modeling on the wall by Mike could get improved on today. He calls his work pulp. Like flesh, or trees? *I embellished* the stories he states firmly. Every time you draw you get better, from each job my work became more refined. I was working to a deadline. I would take care of *it* and they, his pinups, his action characters, they just went out into the world.

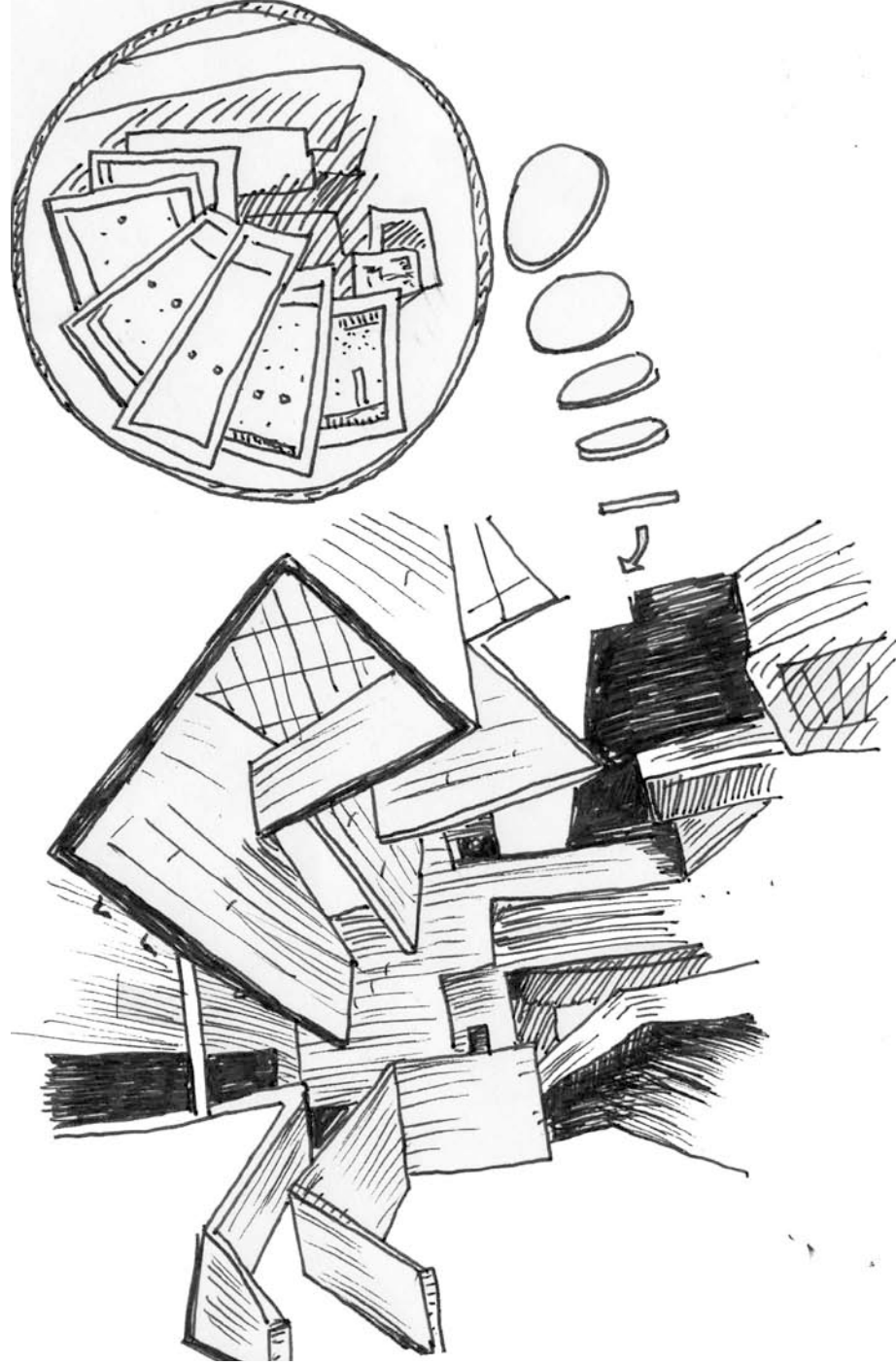
There and Back Again

Interviews with Peter Selz and Lawrence Rinder



on the Past and Future

of the Berkeley Art Museum



Laurence Rinder Interview August 2009

JE: What's happening with the building?

LR: Well I'm liberating it. The building has been constrained by the presence of a number of temporary exhibition walls in what we call "Gallery B" – the vast atrium space at the center of the building - and these walls have blocked the architecture from expressing itself fully. One cannot see through the building to the glass, or to the garden as was intended by the architect, and the main central space has been divided. So we're getting rid of the walls, taking them out, and we have commissioned Thom Faulders, who is a Berkeley architect and designer, to design a sort of sculptural interactive seating element that will occupy the center of Gallery B, and serve as a space for conviviality, rest, observation, and what not.

JE: So it's going to be a hang out space?

LR: Well, it will be a hang out space, at times; it will be a space for contemplation. We will have wireless internet so that during the day students, or anyone for that matter can do their email or research.

We will be open Friday evenings starting October 6th we will open till 9pm and Gallery B will be the focal point for performative live things that will happen – so concerts. The first one will be Terry Riley on November 6th, programmed by Berkeley's own exquisite Sarah Cahill, who will be programming a series of concerts beginning November 6th and running through June on the first Friday of every month, with the exception of January. Terry Riley November 6th, Ellen Fullman the first Friday in December and so on. Then the other Fridays will be programmed by other local programmers: Franklin Melendez and Anne Colvin will each have a Friday and PFA will do the forth Friday. On those nights the PFA screenings will be in Gallery B. People will sit on this Thom Faulders thing, so that in the evenings it will become a type of amphitheatre. Sarah Cahill is doing music, Franklin Melendez is doing an evening of noise/music but he is also doing a fashion show of East Bay designers, a "zine" festival -- all sorts of things. One of the strategies of this is to bring together the cultural things that are already happening out there, particularly in the East Bay, and give them a space to do their thing for a more expansive public. So that's Gallery B, and I believe it will be a dramatic transformation of the museum – visually, programmatically, and dynamically. I think it will change the tone of the place considerably. In a way it will take it back to its roots, when the building was first made, in those first years, there was a lot of performance going on – Anna Halprin, Steve Reich – so what goes around comes around. By the way the Terry Riley concert will begin probably around nine o'clock and run possibly to midnight, and possibly beyond. The audience members are encouraged to bring their sleeping bags because they may be allowed to sleep there. If they do we will have coffee in the morning.

So that's Gallery B – fabulous.

So then we have Omer Fast, who is a great, great artist who will be showing in our Matrix program.

Peter Selz Interview August 2009

JE: To begin can we talk about the founding of the Berkeley Art Museum and your involvement with that.

PS: Berkeley decided to start a museum and Clark Kerr who was at time the president said that he would get people from Harvard and Yale to teach in the sciences here and they liked Berkeley but when they were asked to stay and join the faculty they would ask "where is your concert hall, where is your art museum?" So they decided to build the concert hall, which became Zellerbach and an art museum. They were very smart and brought a man named Milliken who for many years was the director of the Cleveland museum and made it into a major museum. They brought him here to get an idea of the kind of museum they should have, he wrote a prospectus and the first person they asked to be the director of the museum was me. I had a very good friend Walter Horn, a medievalist and a brilliant man, and we have been friends for many years. He suggested me and rather persuaded me. I spent about a year before I decided to take it. I was very happy with a great job as the chief curator of painting and sculpture at MOMA. Some of the reasons that persuaded me to come here: in the seven or eight years I had been at MOMA, I had done most of the things I really wanted to do.

JE: What were those?

PS: Well first thing was *The New Images of Man*. I got that job and they asked me to suggest three exhibitions I would do. One was *New Images of Man*. I was very much into the roots of modern art and modern architecture, having done the German Expressionism book, so the second show I suggested was an Art Nouveau show. At that point Art Nouveau was totally on the periphery, nobody liked Art Nouveau. I thought this would be a wonderful thing to do. It was also the first time that all the different departments of the museum worked together. I was in painting and sculpture, I had someone else from the print department -- architecture and design were central. We all worked together to do the first Art Nouveau exhibitions of hundreds to follow. That was great show. The third one I suggested, we didn't have a name for it, was assemblages. I saw these wonderful assemblages being done in Europe and America, which I called "collage and the object," and for which we eventually coined the word "assemblage." So I had done all these things. That was one reason, and there were all the other shows I did after that: the first American Futurists show, solo shows of Nolde, Beckmann, Dubuffet, Giacometti, and Rodin. There had never been a Rodin show, he was extremely famous but no one had ever done a solo show. So I had done all these things. Then the idea of going back to teaching appealed to me very much, because I enjoyed teaching when I did it before. And the idea of starting a museum of not only Modern Art but a more encyclopedic museum attracted me very much. But mostly this was the 1950s, and the political situation in New York was pretty boring. But then I picked up the New York Times and there was all this stuff about the free speech movement and civil rights on the Berkeley campus. I was involved in civil rights in New York earlier, but in Berkeley it was really happening. All these things, in addition to a personal situation – I was getting a divorce at the time – attracted me very much and I took the job. One show I really wanted to do when I was still at MOMA, I was at that time doing the research, and I brought it all with me. So the first major international show I did here

JE: Is there a relationship between the Matrix programming and the new Gallery B programming?

LR: There is no relationship.

Liz Thomas is of course our Matrix curator and she is continuing in the Matrix legacy of brining in interesting and important emerging artists, so Omer Fast is certainly an interesting emerging artist who's work has to do with filmic capacity, fiction and truth telling in film and video. He constructs narratives and there is interplay between fiction and documentary. He is doing a new piece for us. In the upper gallery's we will have Fernando Botero's Abu Ghraib series, 56 paintings that he has given to the museum – a timely interesting body of work. Botero is coming for a week in September. I will be interviewing him at the museum. Then we have Ari Marcopoulos -- lives in Sonoma, a world-renowned photographer but not very well known in the Bay Area. First American mid-career show. It will be work from about 1980 to the present. He is an interesting photographer and a great photographer. He started out in New York in the late seventies, early eighties, worked for Warhol -- printed Warhol's photographs -- worked for Irving Penn, so he had an interesting foundation with these seminal figures, but then went on out on his own and developed a very distinctive language, and beyond that an approach to photography that was almost anthropological where he is just completely giving himself to the communities that he was interested in, whether it was skateboarders, snowboards, or his family, becoming totally immersed in that life. So this show will have about ninety photographs and videos. We just put the catalog to bed, it was a great catalog, he designed it, and it is done in the style of artist book. Ari has done a lot of artist's books and zines so we said -- you design it. Stephanie Cannizzio, the curator of the show wrote a wonderful essay. So that is the fall. And of course the PFA goes on doing their wonderful things.

JE: A two pronged question: this issue of *Talking Cure* is really about place, and I wonder about on your thoughts on what it means to be in the Bay Area or the East Bay in relationship to the "Art World". Then the second part: what is the role of a museum, which happens to be part of a university.

LR: The East Bay is the art world. Really. Period.

JE: what do you mean by that?

LR: I mean there are great artists there and our museum is there, and I am going to start living there. Thom Faulders is there.

JE: Ellen Fullman is there.

LR: Sarah Cahill is there. What else is there?

Well I can't speak to the past, but in the present the East Bay is as much the center of the art world as any place on earth, and that may just be the way things are just now, that that may be true.

JE: And for you does that have to do with the ubiquity of Internet communication, the trans-national art world, etc?

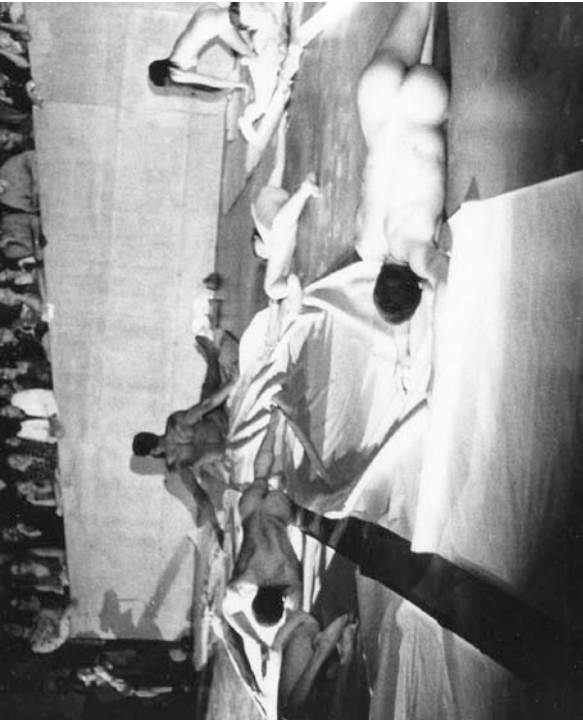
was the Kinetic Sculpture show. And there were 60,000 people in this temporary building. They loved to see this art move. And there I had Tinguely - I had done the Tinguely earlier at MOMA. I brought Tinguely together with people like George Rickey, Len Lye from New Zealand, Takis from Greece, a bunch of people from Germany. It was a marvelous and exciting exhibition in Berkeley, and it was so successful that I decided to go a group show of new things happening in the world. So a year after the kinetic sculpture show I did the Funk Show, which was in many ways the opposite, which has become much more talked about than the kinetic show at this point. The kinetic show I thought was really important and the funk show I did for fun, and it turned out to be a lot of fun.

JE: When I was talking to Larry Rinder a lot of what was being discussed was the building of the new building. You oversaw the building of the current building, could you talk about that.

PS: Well I came out here to be an advisor to the jury. It was an AIA project, which is the way it should be, so only AIA architects could vote. I think there were over 160 proposals that they looked at and they narrowed it down to six or seven. Many major architects in this country submitted proposals. I liked the Ciampi the best and was very excited when they decided to go with it. I loved the building from the very beginning. We had a big show called "art of excellence" that was the first show of work out of the university community. It took about two or three years to learn how to use this crazy building. The new design by Ito looks awfully good, but I like the one that is there now. And I understand that if there was a very bad earthquake the present building would be destroyed, but perhaps if it were bad enough the new building would be destroyed too.

JE: What was the talk about Noguchi with regards to the Ciampi building?

PS: Well there was supposed to be a sculpture garden. Ciampi and I used to have meetings once a week. And one week Ciampi, like most architects who don't know much about the other arts, said to me "I saw something about a sculpture garden in Jerusalem designed by a man named Noguchi and it looks good, what do you think about him?" so I said "I think that would be wonderful." And we got in touch with Noguchi who had built things all over the world now but had never been commissioned to build anything in his native California, so he really was very happy about this. I picked him up at the airport and he carried a maquette for this new sculpture garden. He left it in Ciampi's office. I looked at it and looked at it and I said "this is wonderful,



with this sculpture garden the whole world will be interested in this museum.” At this point something went off in Ciampi’s head that the tail will wag the dog and overshadow his building. So the next time I saw him he said he checked it out and it was beyond the budget and he couldn’t do it. So I said “what are you going to do for a sculpture garden?” and he said he was going to design it himself. So a couple of weeks later he unveiled his design and I told him that if he built that sculpture garden Noguchi might well sue him for plagiarism and I will have to be Noguchi’s witness, because it looked just like it. So he put it away and as you see to day, there is not a sculpture garden. But what Noguchi had done in this small space – he was a master – every foot of that space was carefully considered. But win a few and lose a few.

LR: My feeling is right now that I find it so much more satisfying to be engaged with what is happening in my metropolis, broadly speaking, then chasing some sort of notion of an abstract present or value of “nowness” that is somewhere in the world, be it Malaysia, London, Chelsea. Who the hell cares? I don’t know – its in Berkeley as far as I’m concerned. I mean I do travel and certainly there are interesting things happening, everywhere, not just in the art world.

JE: As a university art museum, how is that a different space for what is shown and how you approach things differently than other museums, like the Whitney?

LR: It is not just that it is a university museum; one has to really add other facets to understand what makes us who we are. It’s a university art museum in Berkeley California with very different conditions because there are all sorts of other University art museums that have very different characters than ours. I think many university art museums tend to be more focused on a mission as a study collection so there is that sort of primary focus. We certainly serve the teaching needs of the University community – 30,000 works of art and film that are actively used by the art history and film studies programs. The more profound core of our mission has to do with exploring the essence of art and provoking engagement with the idea of art and the exploration of its boundaries, based on a fundamental love for it, which pervades everything we do. There is a sort of irreverence, which brings me back to the fact that we are a University art museum in Berkeley California at UC Berkeley, which comes with a certain willingness, always with certain seriousness and respect for our subject, but willing to go down the path not taken.



JE: They are beginning these performance programs with a Terry Riley concert, didn’t he play at the opening of the building.

PS: No it was Steve Reich, and he played all night. Huge

JE: One of the things that came up when talking to Larry Rinder is that they were trying to re-integrate performance and music in the space of the museum, which you had at the very beginning.

PS: Well you know about the dancers we had before we opened? Anna Halprin said she would like to bring her dancers to define the museum space before we hung any pictures, which I thought was a very good idea. About a week before someone said to me “you know I heard they will be dancing naked in the museum, you better do something about it or you are going to get into trouble before you even open the museum.” I said “if I would censor them I would be in more trouble with myself” so they did the performance of these beautiful young bodies going up and down the ramps and it was very beautiful. So actually we had performance in there before any paintings. And the acoustics were very bad, but we had jazz and all kinds of things. One thing that really lasted was the Pacific Film Archive.

JE: How did the PFA come about?

PS:I wanted to do it.

JE: And you were doing films at MOMA before that?

PS: So MOMA was the only museum in the country to have a big film program, we were the second. I wanted to do the same thing here. In the downstairs part in the original plan there were art studios. I said we didn’t need them there, that we had the art department. I kept running again and again against people in the administration who would say, “What do movies have to do with an art museum?” Especially because we didn’t charge. When I was at the museum we didn’t charge anything either for the museum or the film archive, and the film archive was fairly expensive, so we ran into budget problems even then. But I insisted we do it and we had very good directors running it, and it got better and better as time went one. There was some question about naming it because we didn’t know what to call it: “film program,” or like MOMA “film library” or “Cinematheque.” We brought Henri Langlois who ran the cinematheque in Pairs and he gave us all kinds of advice about how to organize it and program it. That has been the most successful thing.

And that has happened consistently throughout the history of the museum. We are traditionally untraditional. I think the museum has historically in its 40-year history exploited that effect primarily by identifying with contemporary art and contemporary culture. There is a niche for us, for bringing that same attitude as a lens for us to see historical material as well. Which is something the deYoung is not going to do, nor are many other institutions. There are some who do it simply because their niche is so narrow, like the Frick or the Morgan Library, that just have such narrow window that whatever they do has an eccentricity to it because their mission is so specific. So that is what I would like to be – a cross between the Morgan Library and the Frick.

JE: More on who you would like to be, what did you see as your goal as curator, and how did that change when you became the director of the museum?

LR: Well, my role as curator was defined in the context of the institution, the curator has to support the mission of the institution – the role was very different at the Berkeley Museum, at what is now the Wattis, and the Whitney -- three very different institutions. As a curator generically speaking it is about bringing the best art within ones purview to your audience and to present it in a way that serves the art. That allows the art to be itself as well as it can. That might mean simply putting it on the wall. That might mean writing something about it, or standing next to it talking about it. I mean there are all sorts of ways. As a director my responsibilities are considerably broader than that. I have to raise money, a lot of money, to build the new building. I supervise various people who are responsible for various areas of the institution – so there is a management component, managing people, which is not really a nice word “management.” Really “encouragement” is what it should be called. Helping them to clarify their own goals and align their own work with the mission of the institution, supporting them, inspiring them. I mean all these things are what I do, which have nothing to do with art per se. But I carve out some things for myself, like the Galaxy show, or doing this project with Thom Faulders, which is an art project. I am working directly with Tom on that project, which is in a sense curatorial. Also, being able to have the breadth to delegate and give space to other people to curate is very important. I can't and shouldn't be making all the curatorial decisions, so I'm bringing in these guest programmers to activate the space that Thom has made and giving them considerable autonomy. They get a budget and are told “this is the space you have to work with” and there it is. I certainly loved it as a young curator, when I was given almost total autonomy; it was a lot of fun.

JE: We haven't talked at all about the new building.

So right now November is the liberation of the current Berkeley Art Museum building, but what is its ultimate destination.

LR: Well the ultimate destination is the Toyo Ito designed building in downtown Berkeley, at Oxford and Center street, on the same block as the Downtown Berkeley BART station, at the western entrance to the university of California Berkeley. The first American building designed by Toyo Ito, the wonderful Japanese architect. It will be an extraordinary building unlike anything anyone has ever seen. Structurally speaking it is a completely new concept for building. It is made of ribbons of steel that are continuous vertically and horizontally. It is a little bit hard to describe. Imagine a torqued honeycomb, that is sort of what it is like - an interesting balance between order and

crowds came because there were headlines in the Chronicle and Examiner. So we had this big opening and I think the museum was open until midnight. In the auditorium where we were screening the PFA programs there was a performance that was run by Bill Wiley. I was one of the performers and everyone was very happy to see the museum director there in the performance. It was a Western; I said something like “Give me some art!” or something like that. We had a lot of fun in that museum.

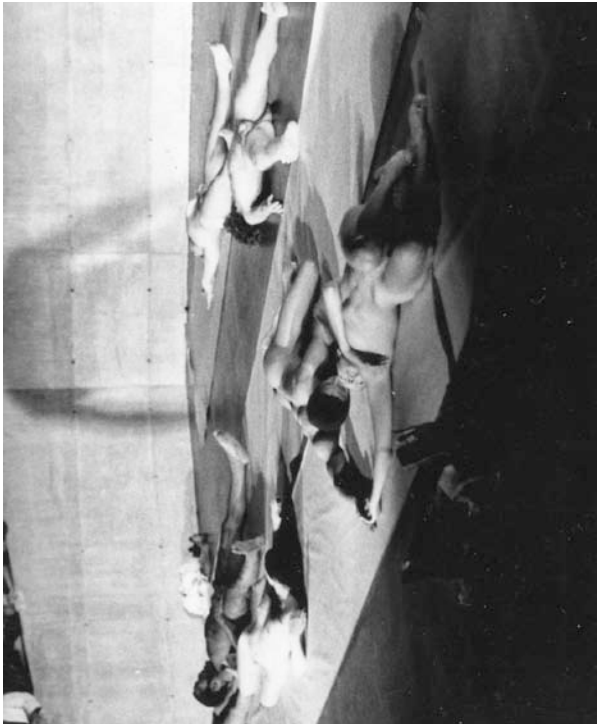
You see before we had the museum building in the Powerhouse Gallery. That is where we had the Funk show, the Kinetic show, and we had a de Kooning show. You see the de Kooning retrospective was in Los Angeles from MOMA and by the time it opened it was three years on and the last three years of his work were not included in that show, so we had a marvelous show of just those last three years. That was the idea of Matrix, specific things from specific artists. Then we got the Magritte show, the great great Magritte show from MOMA. I was there when we decided to do it and brought it to Berkeley.

JE: How do you feel about the “Galaxy” show that is up at the Berkeley Art Museum now?

PS: AH! Well what Larry has done is not at all what I would have done. I would take the things I liked the best and put them in chronological order, which is a little boring. What he did was delightful, full of surprises. I mean I object basically to hanging an Ad Reinhardt next to an Andy Warhol, but then again why not. Ad Reinhardt would have torn his hair out, but I think it was so full of interesting juxtapositions. I liked it very much.

JE: Your career sort of grew up with Modern art. What do you feel your role is as a curator or historian?

PS: I was always interested in things that I thought were excellent but that other people didn't really pay attention to. When I wrote my dissertation on German Expressionism, in about 1950, nobody paid any attention to German Expressionism. Not only in America, but also in Germany they didn't. In West Germany they were too much against figurative art so they pushed German abstract painters that painted in the style of what was going on in Paris and New York, they weren't very good, like in Paris they were very good. In East Germany they were pushing Socialist Realism. So then I went on from there looking at things that other people weren't. My Fulbright in Paris was looking at post-war French art, it was 1949-50, it wasn't long afterward, and was



organic deformation.

JE: But how is it going to be to show art?

LR: Oh, Wonderful! It will be like a dream, like being in a dream. It is hard to imagine because none of us have been in such a space before, but I think it will be wonderful. We are hoping to break ground next spring and open in late 2013 or early 2014. So best case scenario we will stay in the current building all the way through, and we have four years left. I'm not just going to sit in this building and wait, I don't have the time. The building we have now can be a great building, if you work with it, accept it for what it is, and in a way live up to it. That is why I want to take down those temporary walls, and enjoy the space while we have it. Another thing is that there are certain characteristics of the Ito building - for instance almost the entire first floor will be public galleries, space that you don't have to pay admission and anyone can walk through. It will be an unusual kind of museum space because we will be programming it, but it can't be programmed with the kind of art one typically finds in museum because of the issues of conservation and security, so there will be a lot of commissioned work, a lot of projections. So in a way what we are doing with the Thom Faulders' project in Gallery B will be a test run for certain conditions we expect to have in the Ito building. The Faulders' thing is a two-year project, we want to see how it works first and then we can play with it and see what happens.

JE: So the other part of who you are, that is less talked about, is you're a fiction writer! Tell me about it.

LR: Let's see, when did I start writing fiction? I started writing fiction seriously when I moved back to California from New York, which was now five years ago. So when I left New York and moved out here I started work on a novel about the Art World in New York and I finished that in about two years. It was the first novel that I finished. I published a short story here and there and continue to. The rights to my novel were just optioned to a wonderful filmmaker in Memphis, who has already done a great feature film that I saw at the Gay and Lesbian film festival last year in L.A. It was fantastic. So I am just thrilled that he is doing the film and am very excited.

JE: Why do you write?

LR: Well, I love writing. It is almost the thing that comes most natural to me, certainly of any creative thing. It comes out of the place of the productive imagination, something that is more than just floating clouds. I don't have a skill at any of the visual arts - I can't carry a tune, I can't dance, nothing. But I can write a story, thank god! Thank god I can do something, because I think it is important for me to do something where I can have empathy with artists. It would be ridiculous for me to be involved as a curator or museum director for that matter without having a sense of what it feels like to build something from your imagination. The struggle of that, just what that's like. So I do it in a way as an exercise to keep that empathy going, but also because I wouldn't know what else to do. You can only water your garden so much and then it becomes too much.

all new, which is why I looked at people like Dubuffet. The book that Cambridge University Press published of my essays was called *Beyond the Mainstream*, and I think my whole career really, including the things I am doing right now, are looking at art that I think is excellent, whether it was German Expressionism then or Morris Graves now, that deserves to be seen and is on the periphery.

Now this doesn't mean that at times I wasn't prompted to write about or do exhibitions of artists who were recognized, like for instance the Mark Rothko exhibition I organized, or the Sam Francis book I did, but most of the time I thought about doing things other people didn't want.

JE: How did moving from MOMA to Berkeley change that? It seems like one of the most wonderful things you did was help contextualize what was happening in California within the larger art world.

PS: I enjoyed doing that...

One of the Major shows I did was in the large space downstairs of what they call the "Gallery B," which I hear is going to be converted into a living room. When I saw this I thought, "We have these huge spaces we can show these huge paintings by Ferdinand Hodler." That was a really important show to do, introducing this great symbolist painter of the turn of the century to America. It was a beautiful show. It went to the Guggenheim, where it didn't look quite as good but they installed it very well and it ended up at Harvard. It was expensive but we managed to get the Swiss government to pay which nice.

We were doing a double European sculpture show and two weeks after it opened, it was the time of the Cambodian invasion, some students came who wanted to make posters in protest against the Vietnam war and that they would like to do it in the museum. They thought, "How are we going to convince Selz to let us use that space," so they made a petition. When they presented it to me I said "I think that is a great idea!" and we moved all these sculptures into the back and turned it over to the students to make posters. I was always involved with political things at the same time.

JE: What is your favorite thing about being a curator or historian?



JE: is “Larry Rinder the writer” your true self more than “Larry Rinder the museum director”?

LR: I really am a museum director.

JE: for real.

LR: for real! I really am. But I really like writing fiction.

JE: What’s your favorite part?

LR: The moments where the things that have blocked up the flow are released and the solution becomes clear -- what the thing is, and it reveals itself as if it was always there. That’s such an incredibly satisfying feeling.

JE: and what’s your favorite thing about being a curator?

LR: It’s the exactly the same feeling.

JE: the process?

LR: The process per se is not satisfying, because there are all sorts of things about the curating and writing process that are dispiriting and tiring tedious and bring up feelings of self-loathing and insecurity. That is not fun. But in both processes of writing and curating there are moments where there is clarity and wonder and discovery and freshness and I don’t know where else one gets those particular feelings.

JE: To wrap this up nicely: What is the best thing about the future of art, and what is the worst?

LR: Well the best thing about the future of art is that there will be artists, and more than that I cannot say. Because only the artists are going to take us there, not museum directors. I have always thought that curators and directors prognosticate at their peril. AVOID IT, don’t do it. You have to be right there behind the artists. Which is hard, because they are moving forward, or wherever, and it is very dangerous to become fixed in ones assumptions about what things are. You have to be open enough to let yourself move and change with artists, and not so full of yourself that you think you can imagine where they are going to go.

JE: So the worst thing about the future of art, or the present moment?

LR: Well you know sometimes, I mean this is really just more

PS: Well my favorite thing about being a curator is finding new things to show, and I love installing shows. At my first show I did at MOMA, I had never installed a show before, and the idea of the Museum of Modern Art was that instead of having professional designers install the show, the curator who knows the work best installs the show. So I had to do that.

For being an art historian, basically, relating art to its historic, social, and political context. I did that at a time in my art historical writing when most of my colleagues were strictly involved in formalist art history.

JE: In a simple question towards closing: what do you think is the best and worst thing about contemporary art and its future.

PS: I don’t know what is best and worst; I think contemporary art has basically become totally global. I think that the Funk show, for example, was a regional thing and can’t really exist anymore, and don’t exist any more. At all the art fairs it all looks the same, no matter where it is being done. So I don’t know if it is the best or the worst but it is certainly what is going on. Basically I think a lot of what is going on is not very interesting. From way back when I first saw video art I felt that it’s mostly done by people who couldn’t make it as filmmakers. That is still true with some exceptions. The same is true about performance art -- people who couldn’t make it on a regular stage. On the other hand the Happenings were much more interesting then what later on became performance art. So what is going on in general? I don’t feel a great deal that is exciting, although I am still involved in doing shows. I think it is very rare that you find a major artist.

JE: What do you mean by major artist?

PS: Like when I was young there was de Kooning and Dubuffet and Giacometti and Pollock -- these are major artists. I am very happy that SFMOMA has done two shows in the last three years of what I think are major artists: Kentrige and Kiefer -- those are major artists. There are really very few. And then you see them spend over a million dollars on crap like Mathew Barney. That doesn’t even appeal to the public. At least the Tut show brings in people -- those two exhibitions are on the same level of quality and interest.

JE: Why do you think there are so many fewer major artists?

PS: Maybe I should ask you that question because I don’t know. I think it has probably become so totally commercialized that it has become very difficult for an artist to create art in the commercialization that is going on. To swim in this kind of an art world is extremely difficult. When Albers was teaching at Yale he was teaching this rigid geometric style and people could go there and either do it, or revolt against it. There was a leading style -- there is not such thing now. Everything is possible and let me put it this way, if you talk about quality these days you are put down for being “an elitist.” Art is very hierarchical. Art is an elitist profession; otherwise you would be a house painter. But if you go away from being a house painter and become a fine art painter, that is an elitist step. Rothko felt very much that he was a member of the elite, and I think this is one of the problems now. It has become much too democratic. So these guys don’t know what to do. I see these MFA shows and they are all very clever. They work with computers and say, “look what I can do with my

about me and my insecurities than anything real in the world, but I feel like some day we will wake up and people will just decide to just watch TV, and that's it. That will be the end of culture. But hopefully that won't happen.

JE: is that what drives you to do the community outreach where "the center of this museum is something fun you can do, its not just this art on the wall, we have parties and movies!" is that where that comes from?

My biggest problems with museums is that they are trying to compete with entertainment, so you get these hideous blockbuster things that don't mean anything...

LR: The strange thing is that the "art thing" is this amorphous thing, it's like the lights that used to dance around the masts of ships, St. Elmo's fire, you can't pin it down. So to say that a blockbuster show is a bad moment for art is a red herring. It was never art to begin with, so it's not a bad moment for art because by definition art never has a bad moment. So wherever it is its art and its really about making oneself flexible enough to see where it is and not lose too much sleep about where it isn't, because who cares. So being the director of an institution that has the mission to forward art and celebrate it, I do have a responsibility to nurture an environment where art can happen, whether it is on the wall, sound waves in the air, or some dynamic between people.

computer," and they show you things that are quite amazing, but the computer has done it. This doesn't mean that you can't make good art with a computer but it hasn't happened yet. I think people like Kiefer and Kentrige are breaking out of this, but there are not many people like that.

JE: You have worked with so many of the great artists of the twentieth century, who has remained for you the most important.

PS: Max Beckman.

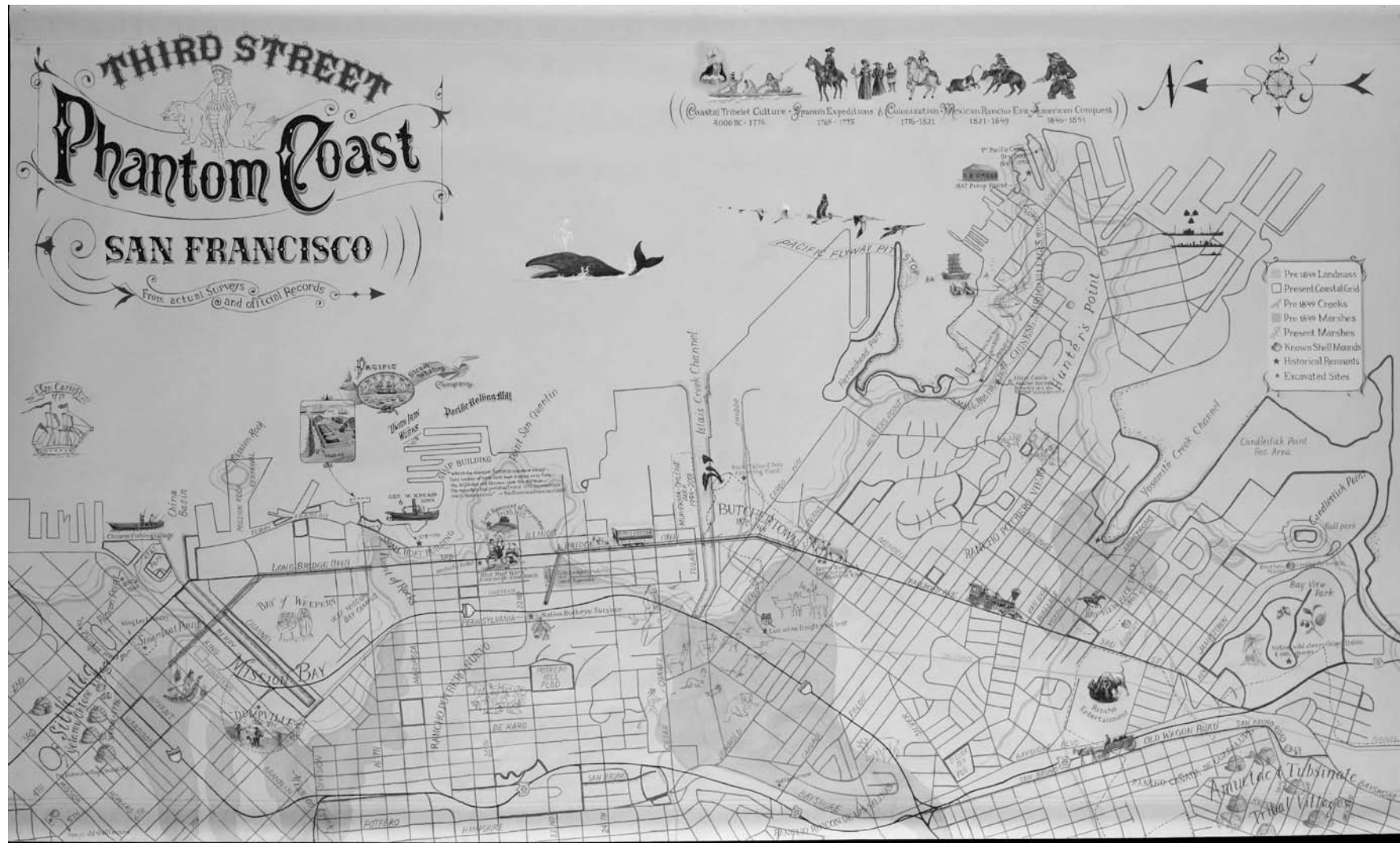
JE: How has Beckman changed for you having lived with his work for so long?

PS: Well for so many years Abstract Expressionism was king and it wasn't so easy to look at somebody like Beckman. How he has changed for me? He has just become richer and richer. Every two years another book is published on different aspects of his work - it is just so enigmatic. I read these things and think "he has seen things in that triptych that never occurred to me." Always new things, different things, in the detail of this or that triptych. The richness of his imagination, the fact that you never quiet know in some of them what this or that figure means. And the quality of the painting - the sense of color too. I mean right after World War One he made a painting, *The Night* that has all the cruelty of the war. It ranks with *Guernica* and it was made fifteen years before.

The other one is Rothko, because I see more and more in him all the time.

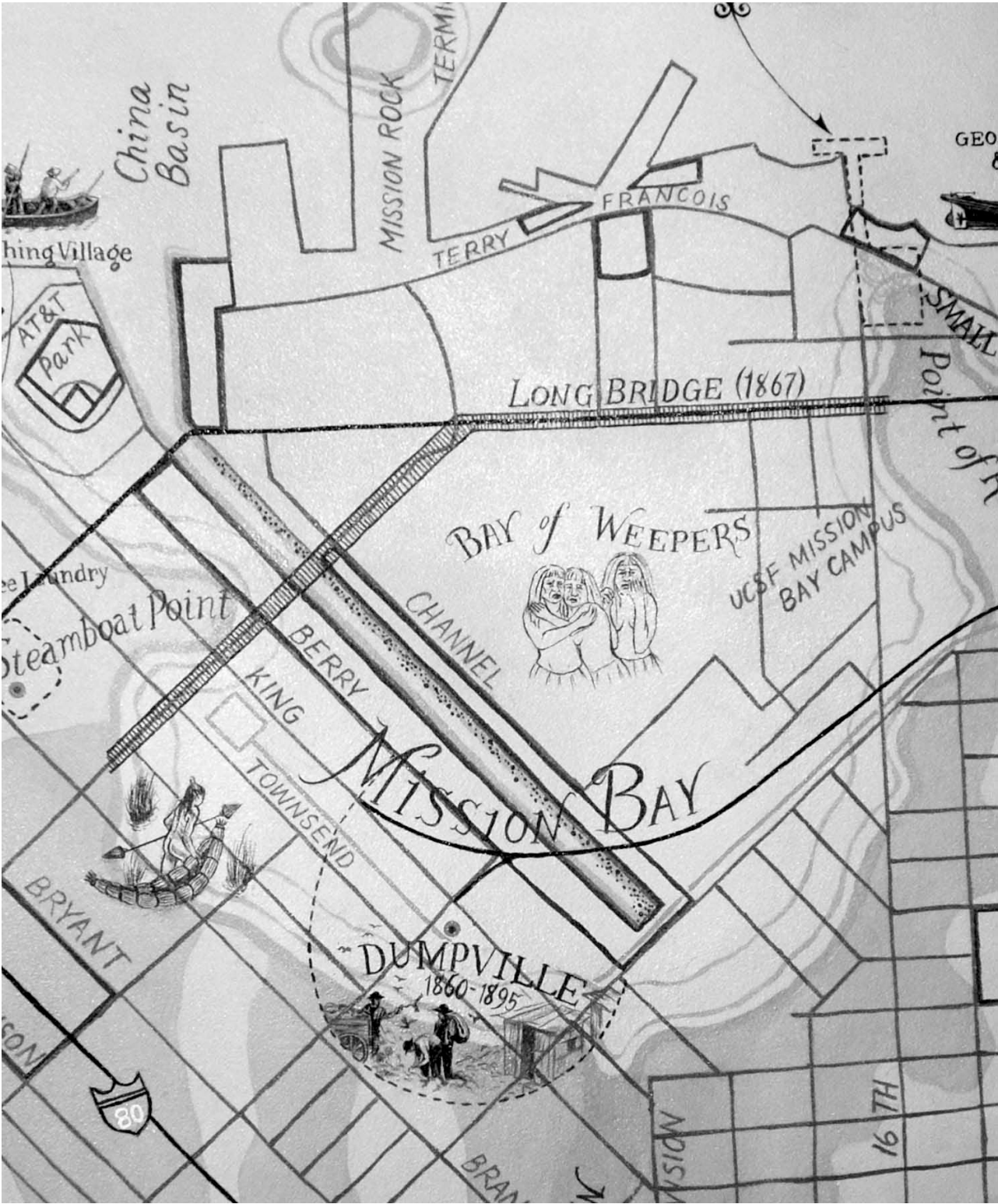


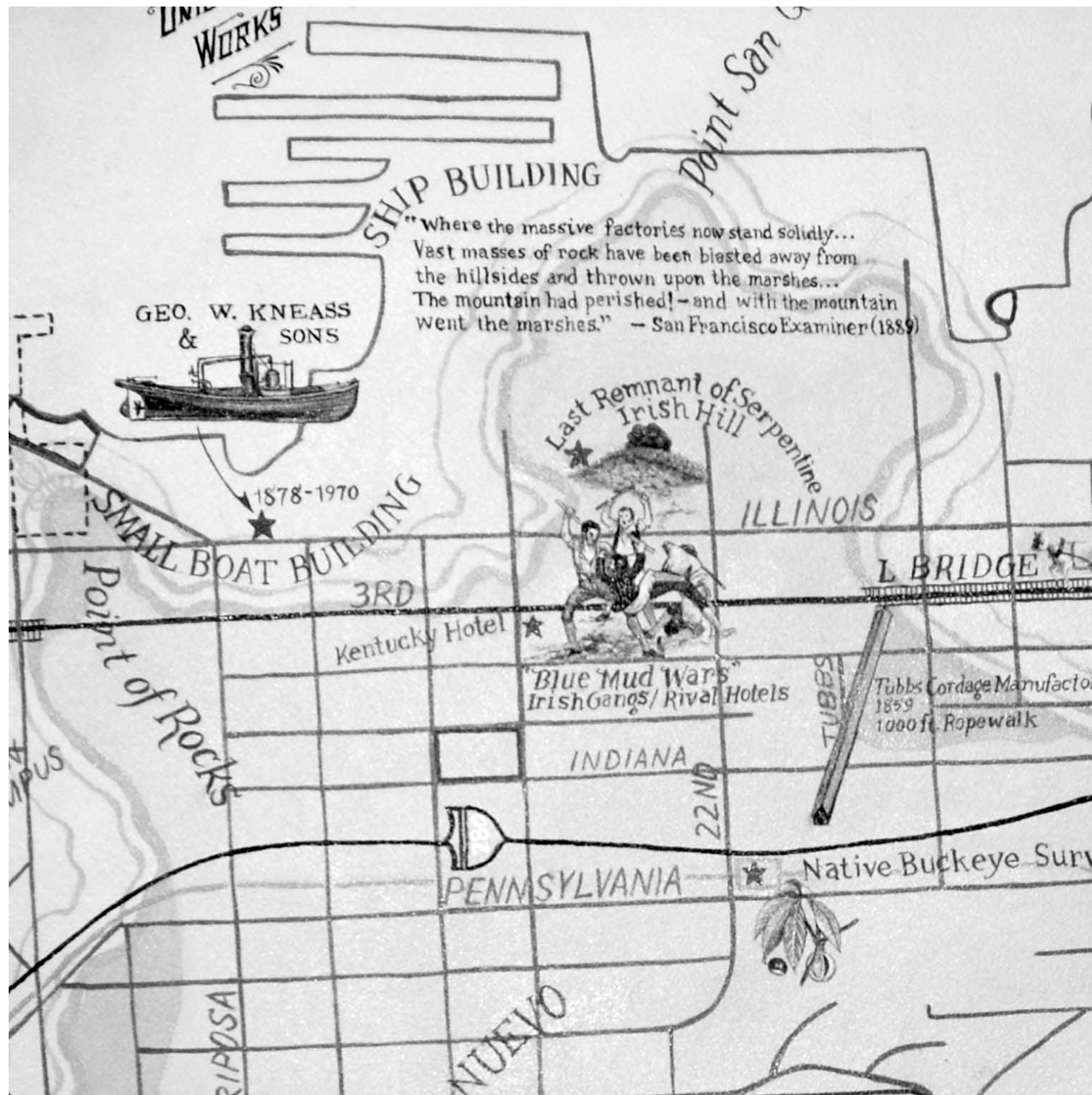
all photos pages 67-73 and covers
Anna Halprin Dancers
Parades and Changes, 1970, performed at the Berkeley Art Museum,
photo courtesy of the Chester Kessler Estate and Peter Selz



I made the map thinking I would like to have it printed into a usable map—as a way of orienting your present location back in time.

Knowing the exact locations of some of the vague histories we've all heard a little about, allows (me) to look a little deeper into my surroundings and discover subtle remnants that still exist from these histories—a sinkhole on an abandoned lot that is reverting back to marshland, a lone railroad sign in the sidewalk of neighborhood street now paved over--phantom histories reveal themselves in subtle ways--I like living with the opportunity for new discoveries that alter my familiar understanding of a place. Although I referenced actual survey maps and documents to create as accurate a map as I could, it is not a practical map, but rather meant to facilitate a fresh outlook of SF's eastern shoreline. I did not orient the map with the north at the top as is usual, but as I imagined an earlier orientation to the bay--with the East at the top where the sun rises







Most often one thinks of an exhibition or artwork in relation to its specific historical or geographic location. However, sometimes, as in the case of King Tut's two world tours, they move seemingly dislocated from these concerns. This essay was written in 1980 about Tutankhamun's first trip through North America and appeared in artscanada magazine. The current exhibition "Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharos" began its nine month stay in June 2009 at the deYoung museum in San Francisco, fresh from a re-appearance at the Art Gallery of Ontario, as it did thirty years before. The criticism of the exhibition - its institutional function and marketing - are all the more relevant three decades on, and appear here unaltered, save a few passages which directly cite the AGO facilities. It takes no imagination to read the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco as its subject and in this way opens up for deeper consideration our current institutional conditions.

Hoke and Hype, Chocolate and Gold

Theodore Allen Heinrich

The vagrant moon of an obscure moment in long-ago Egyptian history, having shone on Ontario for the past year, set peacefully and punctually somewhere the far side of the Mississauga at the moment a new decade was born. For the last two months of 1979 it had hung like a fixed comet over Toronto, while almost precisely three-quarters of a million people, roughly one out of every three local citizens filed with respectful interest through a simulated catacomb of a golden tomb – treasures set out for their edification in the temporarily carpeted and evacuated pictures galleries on the main floor of the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Most of them had bought tickets five or six months earlier for a precise hour on a fixed day. The majority lavished an average of a single minute of contemplation on each of the 55 objects selected for North American exhibition from the 2,500 found in the burial place of a boy-king who had left so little mark on the history that even his name was forgotten until their sensational rediscovery in 1922. Many of the visitors were wired for the ambulatory sound of a well-written tape that slowed them down for those objects accorded special commentaries. All could read the identifying labels in French and English handsomely lettered on the sloping sides of the discreet blue-light boxes suspended high above each case. All had been exposed to excellent explanatory material arranged to keep them happy while waiting in the ingenious maze contrived as a holding pen for the next batch of a thousand or so to be admitted to the sanctuary.

A great many more people, obviously setting foot for the first and perhaps the last time inside the AGO, were drawn simply and innocently by the blanket of



inescapable all-media promotion that had suddenly made this experience seem one of the unmissable events of the year, not to be missed even by a surprising number of wee infants in back-carriers. Each and every one emerged from the exhibition proper to enter another minutely planned maze of worldly enticements more or less related to what they had just seen except that some were edible and all were imitation. This part of the enterprise – for we had better be frank to admit that every bit of the undertaking fully earned that brisk label – turned the devotional portion of the visit into the bazaar atmosphere of the charter-plane pilgrimages to the more commercialized holy shrines of the world – Lourdes, Srirangam, Bethlehem, Nara.

This was repeating, very efficiently, a pattern established over the past 20 years with roughly the same selection of well-traveled funerary offerings, themselves mostly gold. They have proven an apparently inexhaustible goldmine as ambassadors of goodwill, builders of interest and earners of hard currency for modern Egypt. They are an increasingly effective stimulant to war-wrecked tourist industry as well as to all agencies serving that traffic and to an international ragtag of souvenir makers and purveyors. There is an old but persistent rumor that one day some of the profits might be used to improve the ramshackle old museum in Cairo that is home to those far older, artistically far more important Egyptian antiquities.

The mass hypnotic effect of all this seems to have persuaded some who ought to know better that we are legitimate heir to a meritorious tradition. Egyptomania truly is a hoary affliction, especially apt in the past to attack the victors in territorial aggression against the Land of the Nile. Cyrus and his descendants left evidence of it in Pasargadae and at Naksh-i-Rustam. It rampaged in the Rome of the Caesars and another outburst left visible traces of that of the baroque Popes. In the age of Napoleon and Nelson it swept the Tagus

to the Neva, inspiring a style in furniture and decoration that left its mark on virtually every place on the Continent, establishing standards of design and craftsmanship perhaps never since equaled. A milder case associated with Napoleon III and the opening of the Suez Canal gave us an ever-satisfying legacy in *Aida*. It broke out once again in late 1922 with a different but extremely persistent strain, this time triggered not only by military conquest but the climax of a very long, patient campaign in that respectable branch of grave-robbing treasure hunt called archaeology.

There is little fresh that can be said after so much exposure about the objects of the exhibition themselves, some beautiful, some touching, but in the aggregate what one might have expected to find on display in the fourteenth-century b.c. equivalent of the Nile Tiffany's. No one would suggest that the output of the Faberge workshops constitutes the high watermark of European art for the 20 years preceding the catastrophe of 1914, let alone for the whole of it from early Greek times onward. Something very like such a misjudgment is what the general public has been conned into believing about the artifacts from Tutankhamen's tomb with respect to the whole sweep of Egyptian art.

To judge by the countless tons of junk souvenirs unloaded on an innocent public in every centre in Europe and North America where the Tutankhamen exhibitions have been staged, there can be no single greater or more specific cause for the corruption of whatever traces of public taste still survived. This appetite doesn't even represent anything like the old admiration for Egyptian culture and history, but is a media-created fad rising at times to hysteria and fed on a special set of ingredients. No other group of artifacts on earth enjoys as attention-getters the magic combination we find here: gold, the perpetual mystery of death and the carefully nurtured legend of an ancient curse.

It is a temptation to explain the corruption not only of public taste but even the standards of the institutions that should be its guardians as the true victims of the curse. I do not at all mean to denigrate a very real and impressive achievement on the part of the AGO, its administrative staff and volunteer workers. Their present mood of self-congratulation is understandable and deserved. What follows applies in greater or lesser degree to every centre and museum where this saturnalia of the second-rate has descended.

There is a great deal that ought to have been said on this subject for years past. Now, in the calm afterglow of the Toronto event, is the time to reflect deeply on whether this is a useful pattern for the future -- just a glorious case of wild-oat sowing that can be regarded as necessary but dispensable stage in the process of institutional and community growing up. Granted the unique ingredients, most would agree that this was an all-but-impressive act to follow, but expectations have been created that tempt the effort. It is as well to recognize that these will put heavy, even intolerable strains on the integrity as well as the capabilities of the "eligible" museums.

For many years a vocal faction within the museum movement and among its critics have been advocating something called the democratization of our public institutions. It seems to me that the obvious benefits of such a process, most of them long since achieved, are now menaced by overkill. The typical dialectical strategy of creating mythological polarities established the premise that the old-style museum catering to a privileged and educated minority was a temple. The false syllogism then develops to claim that religion is an evil reflection of a shackle to serve the interests of that antidemocratic minority, therefore the temple must go or become as "classless" as the hockey rink (where, regardless of graded location, at least everyone knows the names of the players and the rules of the game).

The AGO has been caught in this fantasy for some time now and some very disquieting evidences of its progress became too conspicuous during the Tutankhamen exhibition to ignore. There is not space here to comment in more than the briefest terms, and I only speak out of the concern of a very old friend.

It was wrong even in its greatly expanded facilities to promote an attendance requiring the herding of visitors as though they were well-behaved cattle and that made impossible the unhurried contemplation and privacy that are essential for the experience of serious works of art. Museums are not theatre. It is poor policy to encourage crowds that cannot be absorbed in the available space without disrupting all other regular activities of an institution. It was somewhat doubtful to push new memberships as bait for preferential ticketing, memberships that must be serviced in order to retain them, but which make most of the regular benefits as uncomfortable as the regulated mob scenes in this exhibition.

It was positively censurable of the AGO to let the money changers into their ex-temple: The foyers were turned into souks and cash registers were everywhere. (Mr. Wedgewood, around in the time of Napoleon and Nelson, was one of the most decorous exhibitors here.) It might at least have controlled the greater excesses of its own hardworking fund-raising volunteers: we didn't need chocolate mummies or T-shirts bearing unbelievably vulgar promotional slogans. Some of the souvenirs were tasteful enough, but there was little reflection of the superb quality of craftsmanship of the originals the buyers had just viewed, perhaps too hastily to have become able to discern the difference. Someone in authority might have objected to using golden reproductions of the goddess Selket and Tutankhamen the Divine Harpooner as stands for draping imitation beads. Howard Carter himself had written, when first glimpsing Selket, that he felt "it was all but sacrilege to look at her." Unfortunately there is no law against aesthetic libel. And it seems to me a

very questionable precedent to enter into what amounts to rental agreements for obtaining crowd-attracting spectacles. This kind of quid pro quo is a sharp change from the traditional reciprocal exchanges previously governing intermuseum loans and enormously increase the chances through politically motivated decisions for undue risk to or loss of irreplaceable and fragile treasures.

All these disturbing details represent a course -- whether it be taken by the AGO in what is not actually an either/or town or by museums elsewhere -- that promises a film palace out of the thirties in place of a cathedral. It is possible that both are out of date, but I would bet any day on Chartres as against Roxys at The Last Judgment.

The AGO, itself worried about follow-ups, has already announced a show which dangles the magic bait of Van Gogh's name. My new nightmare is that in the name of art half the good ladies of the Members Committee will seize the opportunity to hustle the streets with tickets, attired in ribald T-shirts, while the other half peddles marzipan ears in the lobby.*

*(*It is interesting to note that one of the DeYoung's next large exhibition is in fact Post-Impressionists, with Van Gogh as poster child.)*



Up Against the Wall
Susan Greene

“The globe shrinks for those who own it; for the displaced or the dispossessed, the migrant or the refugee, no distance is more awesome than the few feet across borders or frontiers.” --Homi Bhabha

For close to a year, Maisa, Assia, Ishak, Nidal, and Shaad Aamer have looked out their front door and instead of seeing their garden, animal shed and beyond to their village, they are confronted by an enormous, gray, concrete wall. In the village of Mas’ha, West Bank, Palestine, the children of Hani Aamer live surrounded on all four sides by the Apartheid Wall or Separation Fence, depending on one’s perspective. Although the wall running through Mas’ha is actually a fence topped with barbed wire, in November 2003, the Israeli army erected a concrete section, twenty-four feet high and one hundred twenty feet long, directly in front of the Aamer home. This was the Israeli response when the family refused to accept a blank check to move from their land. An Israeli settlement comes right up to the back of the property, a mere twenty feet away.

The Aamer home sits between the two main gates into the village. Family members are forced to let themselves and others in and out through a locked gate, which sends an alarm to the Israeli army every time it is opened. For nearly a year, the Aamers did not have their own key to the gate, nor were they allowed visitors. The family was threatened with home demolition if they violated the order. After their situation was publicized on Israeli television, the army commander agreed to let the Aamers have a key to the gate and, with prior Israeli army approval, periodic visits from family members.

I met the Aamer family on July 18, 2004. Sponsored by the International Women's Peace Service (IWPS) my partner Eric Drooker and I arrived in Mas'ha as volunteers for Break the Silence Mural Project. We were very curious to meet this family and planned to ask if they would be interested in painting a mural on the wall that cut through their land. To this first meeting, we brought art supplies and conducted a drawing project with about fifteen neighborhood youngsters while their parents looked on. We asked the children to draw pictures of their hopes for the future and then asked the parents what they thought about a mural. "Yes!" was the instant response of Munira, the mother of the family, and Hani, the father, also immediately agreed. They told their excited children that we would soon return to paint with them.

A few days later, Eric and I—joined by IWPS and members of two Israeli organizations, Anarchists Against the Wall and Black Laundry—met at the gates to the Aamer house and stopped at the red sign that threatened: "Warning: Mortal Danger for Damaging the Fence." Israeli soldiers and settlement police arrived quickly and questioned us all. "Are you going to paint on the wall?" "No, we are doing an art project with the children, but, you know how children are..." The soldiers collected all our passports, said they must obtain permission for our visit, and noted that because our group included Jewish Israeli citizens, they had a particular obligation to protect our safety. They retreated to their jeeps, and when they were a safe distance away, we discussed the irony that at this exact spot just months earlier, Israeli soldiers had shot an unarmed Jewish Israeli protester with live ammunition. Twenty agonizing minutes later, the soldiers returned the passports, and the Aamer family was allowed to open the gate.

The children run up to us, shaking our hands and saying hello. They asked in English: "How are you?" and "What's your name?" Tea was served, and Eric and I started mixing bright colors. Without any prompting, and despite the army Jeep sitting outside the fence twenty yards away, the children joyfully and vigorously started painting on the wall--fish, a large bird with a snake in its mouth, hills, flowers, several bright yellow suns, trees, faces, and many, many houses. Eric painted a phoenix in flight. More than twenty children painted with us. Then their parents and neighbors joined in. Eric and I somewhat nervously watched the Israeli army as they watched us the whole time. At one point, a Jewish Israeli settler stood outside the gate conversing with the soldiers and watching, then finally left. We worried that at any moment they would stop us. We were putting a lot of paint on the wall. At about 2 p.m., Hani Aamer came back from his fields with his cart and donkey. To get into the enclosure, he had to open the larger gate, to which he had no key. We watched as the soldiers opened the gate for Hani to enter his property. Hani's kids ran up and jumped on the cart for a ride. Soon after, the Israeli soldiers came in and told us they wanted us to leave immediately.

We packed up our paint and went inside the house for one more cup of tea.

Now, when they looked out the front door, the Aamer family would see a yellow and orange phoenix rising up from an almost psychedelic green valley dotted with red flowers, brilliant suns, large animals and houses. Of course, the wall was still there. The IDF and settlement were still there. But the view from the front door of the Aamer family home had begun to change, recording the family's engagement in a collaborative public act of creative resistance and solidarity.

A week after the painting party, I returned to the Aamer family to interview them. I had a research grant from the Palestinian American Research Center to analyze what public art projects such as this one mean to all the participants. Would it be possible to determine the effects of the project? What did solidarity mean in this context? The mission of Break the Silence Mural Project includes using culture to bring back stories of Palestine to an American audience. What did the project say about the Aamers' life? What did it mean to the family to work with Jewish Americans and Jewish Israelis? What did it mean for me, a Jewish American, to collaborate on public art projects with Palestinians?

Munira Aamer said, "The wall continues to be a wall, but the mural has made it easier for us to look at it. The mural creates some pleasure and relief for me and my children. The mural changed the view--now I am looking at something alive, and before I saw it as the end of the world, a disaster. Now when I look at it, I see birds, suns, and flowers. This view is beautiful and good. Before it was only scary. My children are very happy and proud of their painting in the mural. My kids see life when they see the mural. The mural was like opening a window for the world. One day the wall will be demolished. I wish I could open this cage and fly with my children, like the free bird in the mural."

Hani Aamer said: “When the Israeli government started building the wall, many people from all over the world came to support our resistance to it. The government arrested or took all of the supporters and deported them. The Israelis told me that the people who came to help me were no longer here. They said: “You are now alone. Who is going to help you?” But the solidarity people, including Israeli solidarity people, came back to help us again. It lifted my spirits when the solidarity people came back to paint on the wall. My kids started to play outside again. For a year, they were so sad they would not play outside. When you come to paint with the children, it makes them feel like they can live.”

Munira Aamer continued, “The children remember who painted with them on the wall, and they remember the experience of painting with their friends. When we look at the wall, we remember who painted each section and how it felt to paint together.”

The family asked when we would return to finish the mural. The painting had only gone up to where a six-foot ladder allowed. Two-thirds of the wall was still unpainted concrete, in stark contrast to the colors of the mural at the bottom.

“People who come by want to know why the painters didn’t finish. They say the mural should cover the whole wall,” Munira said. “The people who came and worked with us value the ideas of the mural—that is good and we hope that they will cover more of the wall.”

And so the next summer, 2005, we returned to the Aamer home to finish the mural. Together with the family and their friends, a group of young Palestinian women activists called Flowers Against the Occupation, members of the IWPS, and Anarchists Against the Wall, we prepared to paint the sky. The first day, the painting continued until about 2 p.m., when the Israeli soldiers intervened. They invaded the yard barking orders and asserting their power with sub-machine guns. We tried to argue with them, as did some neighbors of the Aamer family, to no avail. There was a palpable sense of, anger, frustration, and resignation among the Palestinians. A neighbor, standing on the porch in close proximity to several Israeli soldiers, angrily threw down her cup of tea. Several of the men present whisked her away, then negotiated frantically with the Israeli soldiers, who decided to let it go.

It was unclear whether we would be permitted access the following day, but a different crew of soldiers was at the gate and they were polite, stopped us for a while, then permitted us to enter. They seemed unaware of the previous day’s events. Children poured into the area joyously, many more than the day before, as word had spread that the American painters were back. We continued to paint the sky while drinking many rounds of tea.

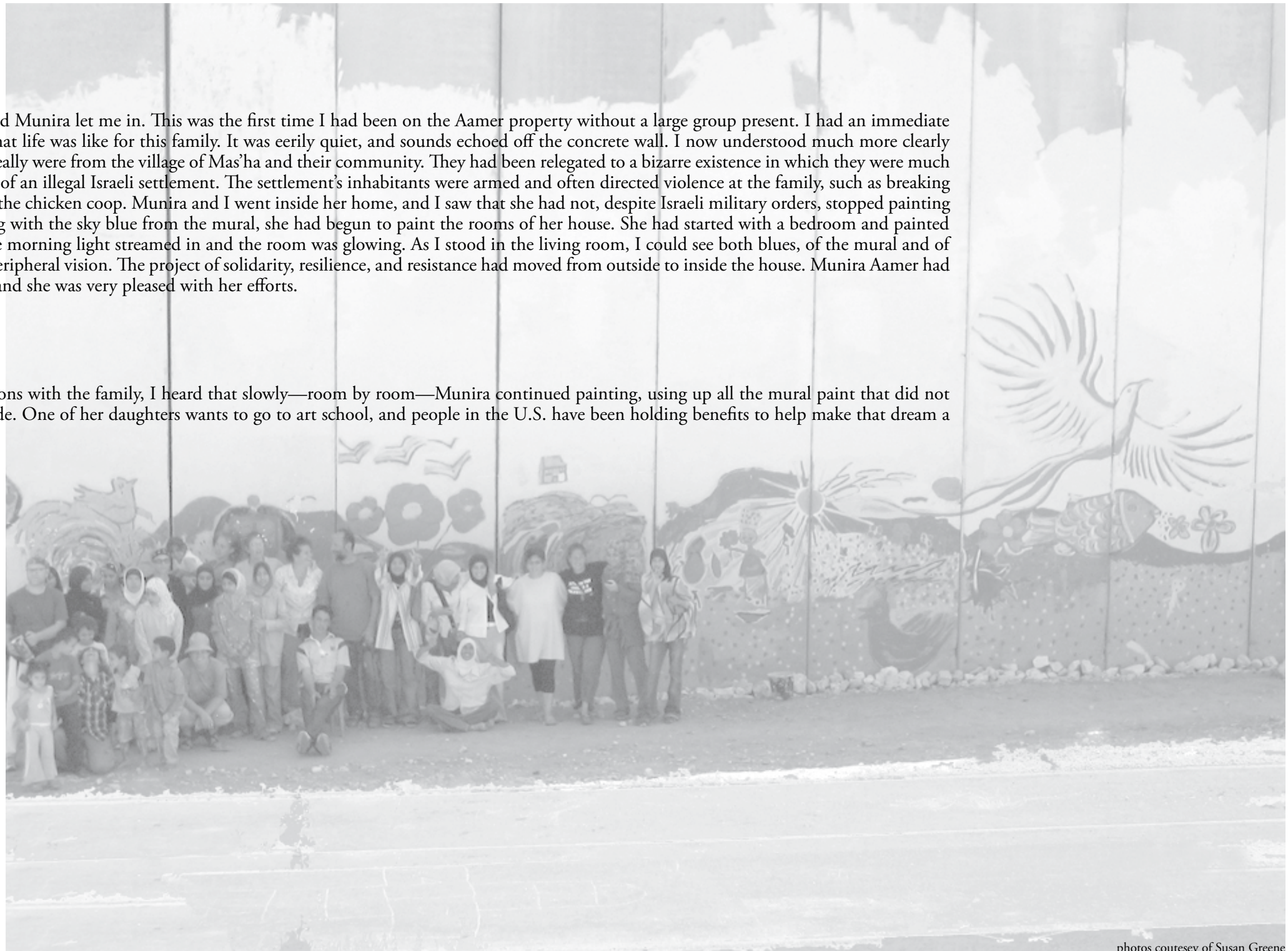
At around 2 p.m., Hani Aamer phoned to say the painting had to stop immediately. We had no idea why, but knew that if Hani said we had to go, it must be serious. Later, we learned that because of the “disengagement” of settlers from Gaza taking place at that moment, the Israeli army perceived the mural painting as a provocation to the nearby Jewish settlement. The IDF had threatened Hani with taking back the family’s key to the gate if we did not leave immediately.

Hani Aamer later explained his dilemma. “The soldier is telling me that the visitors should leave. They are my visitors who come to support me and stand in solidarity with us and I cannot tell them to leave. They come from England and the United States. They are guests in my house. I cannot throw them out.” Yet Hani Aamer had to do just that. This act of the Israeli army commander forcing Hani to ask his visitors to leave, instead of ordering us to do so himself, was an infliction of additional pain. For Hani, treating guests in a rude or inhospitable way was completely unacceptable and humiliating, especially guests who had come from so far.

We packed up our materials, leaving the leftover paint and brushes behind for the Aamer family. After a final defiant cup of tea, we left the premises. We had planned a mural opening the following day, but since the mural was not completed, we held a press conference instead. Very few reporters showed up, in part because everyone was focused on the forced removal of the settlers from Gaza. We took advantage of the time and opportunity to interview Hani. Someone suddenly appeared and urged me to follow quickly.

I ran back to the gate, and Munira let me in. This was the first time I had been on the Aamer property without a large group present. I had an immediate and shocking sense of what life was like for this family. It was eerily quiet, and sounds echoed off the concrete wall. I now understood much more clearly how cut off the Aamers really were from the village of Mas'ha and their community. They had been relegated to a bizarre existence in which they were much closer to and in full view of an illegal Israeli settlement. The settlement's inhabitants were armed and often directed violence at the family, such as breaking windows and destroying the chicken coop. Munira and I went inside her home, and I saw that she had not, despite Israeli military orders, stopped painting the day before. Beginning with the sky blue from the mural, she had begun to paint the rooms of her home. She had started with a bedroom and painted the ceiling and walls. The morning light streamed in and the room was glowing. As I stood in the living room, I could see both blues, of the mural and of the bedroom, from my peripheral vision. The project of solidarity, resilience, and resistance had moved from outside to inside the house. Munira Aamer had refused to stop painting and she was very pleased with her efforts.

In subsequent conversations with the family, I heard that slowly—room by room—Munira continued painting, using up all the mural paint that did not make it to the wall outside. One of her daughters wants to go to art school, and people in the U.S. have been holding benefits to help make that dream a reality.



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Anna Halprin said she would like to bring her dancers to define the museum space before we hung any pictures, which I thought was a very good idea. About a week before someone said to me "you know I heard they will be dancing naked in the museum, you better do something about it or you are going to get into trouble before you even open the museum." I said "if I would censor them I would be in more trouble with myself" so they did the performance of these beautiful young bodies going up and down the ramps and it was very beautiful. So actually we had performance in there before any paintings.

-Peter Selz