



Best Of: Renny Pritikin

By Renny Pritikin

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Illegitimate Business, 2012: Installation view, Will Brown, San Francisco. Courtesy of Will Brown

Best Imaginary *National Enquirer* Headline: “Will Brown Born in Same Mission District Storefront in Which His Ancestor Died”

When Triple Base closed a year ago, after its director Dina Pugh moved to New York, it marked the end of a feisty and often interesting experiment in straddling the line between a commercial and a not-for-profit gallery. Stepping into the breach this past year has been an even more interesting space in the same storefront on 24th Street, with the name of Will Brown, run by Dave Kazprzak, Lindsey White, and Jordan Stein. Apparently there are many Will Browns who inspired the name, but no Will Brown in particular did. This augured well for the gallery’s unusual curatorial approach, which disregards propriety and seeks to go beyond sequential exhibitions of yet more objects.

Three Best Burgeoning Programs

1. The Kadist Foundation’s Wednesday-night series

This series came into its own this past year under the visionary leadership of Joseph del Pesco. Artists and writers step up to the roles of public intellectuals during these informal evenings, which are always preceded by a hosted bar and are routinely packed beyond capacity. It has become the first ongoing venue in recent memory in which a sense of community is manifested in the San Francisco art scene. It is also one where programs are often interdisciplinary and the stakes are elevated to serious inquiry but where academic show-offs are discouraged. This past year I recall: seeing Connie Lewallen and Alan Ruppertsberg relive the experience of Ruppertsberg’s legendary 1970s *Al’s Cafe* for a roomful of twentysomethings; being moved by Colter Jacobsen’s wistful, fragile singing voice following a conversation between Larry Rinder and Matthew Stadler; and hearing Nato Thompson speak off the top of his head

for an hour about the Occupy movement, a talk simultaneously full of righteous anger, hope, humor, and a slightly scary surety of the true believer.

2. For-Site Foundation

Cheryl Haines founded this program a decade ago in order to bring national and international artists to Northern California to create projects on her land in the Sierra foothills. However, none of For-Site's earlier projects have matched the impact of her recent outdoor exhibitions on the western edge of San Francisco. *International Orange*, a project at Fort Point organized by the foundation to celebrate the Golden Gate Bridge's seventy-fifth anniversary, was the best one yet. Fifteen artists were commissioned to make temporary installations inside Fort Point, under the bridge's south end. Highlights included the enormous and exquisite video of merchant ships on the Bay, *Chrysopylae* (2012) by Doug Hall—which combined the politics of Allan Sekula with a visual ambition made possible by state-of-the-art digital video—and its antithesis, the lovely, ephemeral, and technology-free camera obscura, *Vertigo* (2012) by Abelardo Morell, which pictured ghostly sailboats floating by, upside down and silent. Also of note: Stephanie Syjuco's gift shop full of objects not for sale, the latest iteration of her ongoing examination of the machinations of art and commerce; and Pae White's attempt, in *muhf-uhl* (2012), to capture the essence of fog in a large-scale tapestry.



Abelardo Morell. *Vertigo*, 2012; site-specific double camera obscura using Fort Point windows to reflect an inverted image of the Golden Gate Bridge into the interior space of the East Bastion of the Fort. Courtesy of the Artist and the FOR-SITE Foundation. Photo: Jan Stürmann.

3. Rick Prelinger's *Lost Landscapes of San Francisco*

This is a series of annual screenings of found and collected home movies, industrial films, Hollywood outtakes, educational films, and the like from the past one hundred years. In the past year, the series has matured from a persistent rumor to a steady and beloved community celebration. In its recent location at the large and eccentric auditorium at the Internet Archive in the Richmond district, attendees can pay with five dollars or five books to see vintage images of San Francisco neighborhoods in the twentieth century and are encouraged to shout names of locations they recognize. Like Pop-Up Magazine and other irregularly recurring local events, the series embodies a politically informed, inclusive approach to public gatherings that is the opposite of a spectacle.

Six Best Exhibitions

1. *State of Mind*, curated by Lewallen and Karen Moss, adjunct curator at Orange County Museum of Art, at the University of California Berkeley Art Museum, was a primer on curatorial discipline. It was objective, encyclopedic, and genuinely helpful to anyone interested in early conceptual practice in California.
2. *Illegitimate Business*, at Will Brown, which I reviewed in this publication.
3. Jim Campbell's lobby installation at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), *Exploded Views* (2011), curated by the always-interesting Rudolf Frieling. For decades, Campbell has been exploring the limits of visual perception by assembling images with minimal information. *Exploded Views* takes this inquiry into three dimensions, making 3-D movie effects look like kids' stuff. It is located, however, in the most problematic site in recent memory for a masterwork. If this installation were in the upstairs media gallery, it would have visitor lines out the door, like something by Christian Marclay, but in the lobby it looks like a Christmas display that most of the visitors miss or ignore. It's time for SFMOMA to get over its Turbine Hall envy.
4. *Modern Cartoonist: The Art of Daniel Clowes*, at the Oakland Museum, was organized by its guest curator, Susan Miller, and the museum's senior curator of art, René de Guzman, with exhibition design by Nicholas de Monchaux. This relatively small show was a knockout, with de Monchaux's truly surprising installation that deconstructed the book as a public reading experience. Clowes is simply a local treasure; his auditorium conversation with Chris Ware was charming and generous, and he chalked one up for us East Bay types when he admitted that he loves Oakland and never feels at ease in San Francisco. The catalogue, designed by the amazing Alvin Buenaventura, is a work of art.
5. *Southern Machine Exposure Project*, already hailed here, was a collaboration between Southern Exposure (SoEx) in San Francisco and Machine Project in Los Angeles. This was a notable breakthrough in SoEx's ongoing attempt to reinvigorate the field of alternative art spaces, in this case through the cross-fertilization of ideas in works by the two cities' leading young artists and through the movement of several works out of the gallery space and into the community.
6. The De Young's *Masters of Venice: Renaissance Painters of Passion and Power*, from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, was a hoot. (Thanks to the advice of Bill Berkson, I don't always miss the Old Masters shows in town.) There were some incredibly moving early-sixteenth-century paintings: Titian's could've-been-made-today *Elector Johann Friedrich of Sazony* (c. 1550–51) and two Giorgione's—*Boy with an Arrow* (1505), with its heartbreaking vulnerability, and the wonderfully strange *Three Philosophers* (1508–09). Plus, a few clunky over-the-top, rosy-cheeked Rhine-maiden pictures reminded us of how great the Titians and Giorgiones are.

The Two Most-Talked-About Art-World Topics

These did not have much local connection. One was Christian Marclay's *The Clock*, which the Los Angeles County Museum of Art has shown several times (they own one of the few editions) and which might someday come to San Francisco if the valiant efforts of one of our museums pays off and we're lucky.

The other was the best tempest in a teapot of the year: the ongoing war at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. It's relevant here because the issue—the direction of art museums vis-à-vis popular culture and audience—resonates with every institution presenting art today. Most opinions that I've come across side with Paul Schimmel over Jeffrey Deitch. I'm not comfortable with the configuration of scholar versus barbarian, as it has largely been laid out. In addition to the East Coast versus West Coast culture clash that never gets mentioned, I think that to ignore popular culture in a city that is built on it is the worst kind of denial. The local angle, of course, includes the legacy of John Buchanan at the De Young and its current Jean Paul Gaultier show, among others who have a penchant for dragging popular visual culture into the museum world, like this writer.