

2012 in Review: 10 Outstanding Bay Area Art Experiences

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By Christian L. Frock

The strength of the Bay Area arts community lies in its willingness to embrace experimental ideas. No other community in the world has as many alternative spaces and experimental platforms for contemporary art, combined with a healthy number of museums and institutions. Though the list often changes -- sometimes sadly and sometimes for the better -- what doesn't change is the spirit of risk-taking and an incredible ability to realize projects that would be logistically impossible elsewhere. This year had no shortage of great art experiences and next year promises more. Here is a summation, in no particular order, of projects and exhibitions that were compelling and still resonate strongly in memory. Thank you, Bay Area, for so many -- too many to list here -- outstanding art experiences in 2012.



Image from **Barry McGee** exhibition. Photo: Kristin Farr.

Barry McGee at University of California, Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, organized by Director Lawrence Rinder with Assistant Curator Dena Beard

McGee's massive museum-wide takeover of the Berkeley Art Museum was a jaw-dropping display of paintings, drawings, etchings, sculpture, installation, and video. Perhaps most impressively, McGee's work commanded the otherwise unyielding architecture of the museum's brutalist building. During the summer-long open-installation period, McGee and his team worked in-residence and work could be viewed from practically every angle of the building -- even, or rather especially, in the lobby where you didn't have to pay a cent to see everything unfold.



Doug Hall, *Chrysopylae*, 2012; Photo: Jan Stürmann.

International Orange at Fort Point, San Francisco, organized by FOR-SITE Foundation

FOR-SITE Foundation recognized the 75th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge with **International Orange**, fifteen site-specific installations by sixteen internationally recognized artists, including Bill Fontana, Pae White, and Camille Utterback, among others. The works were situated within and around historic Fort Point, a fortress nestled beneath the bridge, built between 1853 and 1861. Seventy-five swags of festive bunting by Allison Smith were draped over the railings surrounding the courtyard, seamlessly fusing art, place and history in one quiet gesture. One encountered the remaining works through exploration, a process that yielded to a sense of the uncanny and the extraordinary.



Manifest Destiny, 2012; C. Mark Reigelman.

Manifest Destiny! by Jenny Chapman and Mark A. Reigelman II, San Francisco, organized offsite by Southern Exposure

In the relatively short recent history of its long service to the Bay Area art community Southern Exposure has become a national thought-leader around innovating new ways to support artists and realize projects in the public realm. **Alternative Exposure**, its pilot re-granting program supported with contributions from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, has supported 105 local indie projects with more than \$351,000 in direct funds; further AltEx has served as a model for three other similar programs around the country, with more to come. *Manifest Destiny!* was the first offsite project of the Graue Award, another successful initiative to support ideas in the public realm. From November 2011 to October 2012 *Manifest Destiny!* confounded viewers while it occupied the public domain in the most unexpected of places, in private air space above the Hotel Des Artes and Le Central restaurant. SoEx expands our sense of what is possible, again and again.

DocumentO at Krowwork, Oakland, organized by director Jasmine Moorhead

In June, Jasmine Moorhead launched an "unofficial satellite of Documenta 13," the international art festival hosted in Kassel, Germany, via an extensive survey of contemporary Oakland artists. Over a too-brief ten-day exhibition period, Moorhead presented works by more than fifty artists that captured the rare spirit of Oakland's creative community -- politically aware, technically savvy, and intellectually rigorous. Ali Dadgar's luminous prints, appropriated media images of fists raised in solidarity during last year's wave of demonstrations, and a ghostly video featuring footage from Oakland's Occupy encampment by Tooth/Moyah Pravda Newsreel encapsulated the undercurrent of DocumentO: Oakland may operate at the periphery, but its artists are speaking to the world.



Taro Hattori, *Penetration*, 2012.

Art & Soul at Oakland City Hall, organized by artist Terry Furry

Artist Terry Furry revamped expectations around contemporary visual art in this year's Art & Soul Festival by organizing a series of installations within Oakland City Hall. Much of the work subversively acknowledged its contentious placement, though this may have been lost on workaday occupants of City Hall itself. Taro Hattori's *Penetration* 2012, a cardboard sculpture representing a deconstructed war machine, spoke to ongoing debates around Oakland's civic leadership and law enforcement. Formally, the work posed a striking contrast with the building's 1911 Beaux Arts architecture. This and other works, by Tracey Snelling among others, generated a new vitality within City Hall's hallowed dome.



Artwork by Eric Drooker; courtesy of the artist and YBCA.

Occupy Bay Area at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, organized by YBCA Director of Visual Arts Betti-Sue Hertz

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts stood out among institutions this year when they presented Occupy Bay Area, an exhibition of "visual culture" from Occupy encampments around the Bay Area. Though it made perfect sense among artists and other cultural producers on the ground -- a tremendous number of posters, videos, photographs and other artworks were generated in response to the Occupy movement around the world -- it was considered a bold move among some who questioned whether the exhibition created a kind of "instant history." Nimble responsiveness to the zeitgeist is not often seen among larger institutions and most museums kept mum about Occupy. YBCA took a risk and it was refreshing to see.



Family photo discovered in the debris left over from the 3.11 East Japan tsunami; courtesy Lost and Found.

(re)collection, a collaboration with Lost & Found, at Intersection for the Arts, San Francisco, organized by Program Director Kevin B. Chen

Intersection for the Arts, under the longtime curatorial vision of Kevin B. Chen, is consistently the most socio-politically aware arts organization in the Bay Area. The shows are timely and respond to the issues of the world at large, beyond the concerns of the art world. Case in point, **(re)collection** presented a series of new commissions made in response to selections from the Lost & Found project, a traveling archive of destroyed photographs swept away by the East Japan tsunami. Previously, **Motion Graphics** presented a new take on "street art;" Ana Teresa Fernandez's video "Borrando la Frontera" depicts the artist spray painting white the oceanic border fence between Mexico and the U. S., effectively erasing it from view. The exhibitions are timely, address salient concerns, and in the process support art making -- artists are paid for their work, a progressive gesture that speaks volumes about Intersection's values.

Will Brown, San Francisco, an experimental exhibition space and collaborative project organized by Lindsey White, Jordan Stein, and David Kazprzak

Will Brown's first exhibition **Illegitimate Business** set the stage for the kind of ideas that would be parsed out in this new experimental space, offering a kind of playful and yet intellectually rigorous critique of art world concerns. **Illegitimate Business** presented a number of works and ephemera by internationally prominent artists that had been "obtained without any monetary transaction, and often illicitly." Other shows included materials from an under-the-radar program of "exhibitions" staged in the office of SFMOMA's director in the 1970s and an in-gallery miniature golf course based on seminal earthworks of the '60s and '70s. Indeed the programming has appeared to be directed towards those with an advanced knowledge of contemporary art and the inner workings of the art world -- but so what? The art community is a community too, perhaps more expansive and tightly knit than most would realize. Will Brown stands out among the alternative landscape, in the best possible sense.



Installation shot, **Lin Yilin: Golden Journey**.

Lin Yilin: Golden Journey, Walter and McBean Galleries at San Francisco Art Institute, organized by former Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs Hou Hanru

Lin Yilin came to San Francisco from China at the invitation of SFAI to make new work and what did he do? He hit the streets. Literally. **Lin Yilin: Golden Journey** presented video documentation from Yilin's performances, wherein he rolled along the ground on some of the city's most famous streets, offering new views from which to consider the familiar. The video installations in the gallery were larger than life and offered an immersive experience of the work. Coming out of the gallery into the sun was a bit uncanny -- the astonishing panoramic city vistas afforded by SFAI are like no other, in life and in art.

FAX at San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery, San Francisco, co-organized by the Drawing Center and Independent Curators International, both in New York, with guest curator João Ribas with local programming curated by SFAC Galleries director Meg Shiffler and manager Aimee Le Duc.

FAX at San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery was part of a larger system of exhibitions organized all over the world, based on use of the (nearly obsolete) fax machine as a drawing tool. Several binders of faxes from previous shows were presented alongside new commissions by more than twenty local artists including Kota Ezawa, Pablo Guardiola, and Taraneh Hemami, among others. A series of public events created an interesting dialogue around art's relationship to technology. Perhaps most interestingly, the premise was built on the simplest of ephemeral gestures and still had the capacity to travel widely and engage many, many people -- when this is possible, art is at its best.