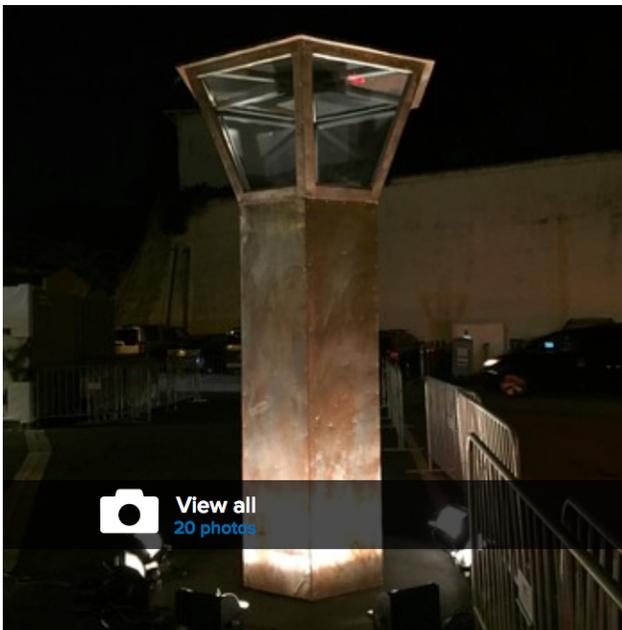




Review of Art Market San Francisco 2015 (part 1)

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Greg Flood



This year's Art Market San Francisco fair arrived with a great opening night party at Fort Mason Center. This is the annual convention of the Bay Area art world, where old friends catch up, rivalries and even hostilities are sometimes renewed, and a general accounting of what has been happening in the art world around the bay is taken. While this is all well and good, the quality of the galleries attracted to showing at this fair does nothing to represent the overall strengths of the gallery scene in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Most of the top tier galleries in SF decided not to show this year, with some choosing instead to do another fair

happening this same weekend, and others just skipping it all together. The major loss this year is Gallery Paule Anglim from its anchor spot at the entrance to the fair. However, there are strengths to the fair, with Brian Gross Fine Art, Rena Bransten Gallery, Catharine Clark Gallery, Gregory Lind Gallery, Jack Fischer Gallery, the former Patricia Sweetow Gallery (now called 'Spun Smoke' and located in Oakland), Chandra Cerrito Contemporary, Meyerovich Gallery and a few others representing the stronger programs in the region. Notable out of town presences include Walter Maciel Gallery from Los Angeles, and Nancy Hoffman Gallery from New York.

What all of this really shows is the state of the market for buying art in San Francisco. Galleries with strong programs know that they are not likely to see the returns they get from other fairs at this one. What this means for the potential crowd of newly rich techies that might show up at the fair is they would likely go somewhere else to have the art fair experience – Miami, New York, or Los Angeles – rather than to stop by the one in their own back yard. How to counter this is a question many people are working to find an answer to.

All that being said there were a number of great galleries and artists represented at the fair with strong examples of their work on view. Arriving at the fair, we are greeted by the sight of a surveillance tower created by the artist Stephen Whisler. Whistler's provocative works about the future role of drones in the domestic US surveillance state and our current use of them in our foreign policy have made an impact in the conversation about this technology through their provocative stances. This tower is the latest work in his investigation of this aspect of contemporary society.

Entering the Festival Pavilion we are greeted by some of the powerhouse galleries from the bay area. The first I visited was Rena Bransten Gallery, where I found high caliber works by Vik Muniz, Doug Hall, Nam June Paik, Edward Burtynsky, and Sam Perry. Muniz's composed photographs have made a broader impact since the documentary about his work in Brazil called 'Waste Land' was nominated for an academy award in 2010. Doug Hall has had a distinguished career in photography, video, performance and installation for over 30 years. Currently there is a special exhibition of Hall's work at the San Francisco Art Institute that should not be missed. Nam June Paik is a legendary pioneer of video art and his piece on view 'The Late Show, c.1987' is a classic. Burtynsky's photograph of canola fields in the Yunnan Province of China displays a sense of wonder at the uniformity of color in landscapes created by industrial agriculture, and also a subtle critique of those practices. Sam Perry's sculptures of twisting and undulating wood are both exquisite studies in form and movement.

Walking down the central corridor, I found the booth for Brian Gross Fine Art. This year's showing includes an A+ -grade painting by Roy De Forest (reviews [HERE](#) and [HERE](#)) displaying all of the wit, humor, and mastery of color balance that this artist is legendary for. In front of it is a large sculpture by Robert Hudson, showing all of the mastery of welding techniques and a combination of form, color, and movement that has left other sculptors full of envy for many years. Another stellar work on view is a five part work by Peter Alexander, well known for his pioneering work in the Light and Space art movement of the 1960s-1970s. This recently made piece is a revisiting of techniques he used in resin sculptures during that period, with newer technologies allowing him to achieve his subtle but powerful results in ways that were not possible before. On the other side of the booth is a large Robert Arneson bronze head on a pedestal. Arneson never failed to bring his pointed humor into his work and this piece is no exception. Next to it is a brand new work by Dana Hart-Stone. Hart-Stone appropriates vintage photographic images to create patterns mimicking textiles of subtle color harmony and warmth. A new addition to the stable at Brian Gross Fine Art is the artist Leo Valledor. Valledor is one of the founding members of the hard-edged painting movement in the 1960s. He also is one of the first artists to use specially shaped canvases, which broke the hold of traditional rectangular and square formats in painting. He has been long overlooked compared to others from this time period and is due for a retrospective.

Heading back up to the front, I came across the booth for Catharine Clark Gallery. This year's booth displayed works by fewer artists, but with more examples from each artist. This year's stand out artist is Wanxin Zhang, who is a recent addition to the gallery (review [here](#)). His large scale ceramic sculptures are hybrid forms that combine the artistic legacy of California ceramics with the cross cultural influences of the West and that of his native China. In their synthesis, we find ourselves challenging our assumptions of both cultures. On the walls behind these works are new digitally made paintings by Deborah Oropallo. These works explore what digital technologies can achieve artistically, while also challenging our notions of identity in their overlaying of male and female forms. Singing out from side by side video screens is a piece by

Nina Katchadourian (review here). This humorous work is the latest in her series entitled 'Seat Assignment', where she uses the materials available to her in an airplane to make up a costume, which she then wears while lip synching to a song of her choosing. One other artist on view in the booth is Timothy Cummings, with several works by him. The one that caught my eye the most was a small self-portrait hidden in the back of the booth. This arresting image reminds me a great deal of a photograph of David Wojnarowicz by Peter Hujar that reveals the vulnerability of its subject under the scrutiny of our gaze.

Heading down the right hand hallway, I discovered Walter Maciel Gallery's booth full of great works. There was a large painting by artist Hung Liu, who is one of the most important Chinese-American artists working in the United States today. Across from it is an excellent corner composition by Freddy Chandra, who never fails to lure us in with his use of delicately pigmented resin. Beside this work is a new piece by Nike Schroeder. Schroeder uses hanging threads of various colors to create dynamic experiences of color and optical movement as one walks by. Resting on low pedestals this year are a few small works by Robb Putnam, including a couple of bunnies and a skunk.

Next, I came upon Patricia Sweetow's booth. Sweetow closed her 77 Geary location at the end of last year and with it Patricia Sweetow Gallery. Her new venture is located in the arts district of north Oakland and called 'Spun Smoke'. In it she has diversified from her previous gallery to include ceramics and design, while still working with a number of the artists she represented in the gallery. In her booth I found vibrant new works by both Jamie Vasta and Markus Linnenbrink. But the real surprise was a set of new small sculptures by Cornelia Schulz. Schulz has been a painter for the entirety of her career, and in a way these are still paintings, while also being sculptures. Made of carved and accumulated layers of oil paint, these works are the embodiment of her most recent paintings now come off the wall. When I ran into Ms. Schulz at the fair, I discovered that some of her inspiration for their underlying forms came from looking at the work of the well-known ceramicist Ron Nagle.