

# East Bay Express

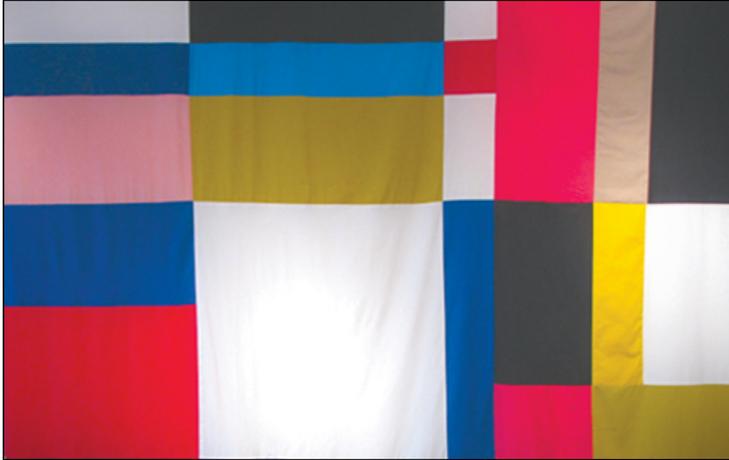
ARTS &amp; CULTURE » VISUAL ART

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## Brave Old World at Chandra Cerrito Contemporary

Three postmodernists remember modernism.

By DeWitt Cheng



It's been axiomatic for a long time that "one must be absolutely modern," although Arthur Rimbaud certainly meant something quite different in 1873 from what we construe nowadays; context can be so troublesome. Even what the supergroup of avant-garde artists associated with the Bauhaus — Kandinsky, Klee, Gropius, Schlemmer, Itten, et al. — envisioned in Germany in the 1920s has been simplified and distorted: Both industrial reformers and utopians, they're now denigrated as elitists serving the power structure. One of the stereotypes of modernism derives from critic Clement Greenberg, who posited that painting must "keep moving" forward into a kind of purist millennium. When his brand of formalism (ably mocked by Tom Wolfe in *The Painted Word* and *From Bauhaus to Our House*) collapsed with the advent of postmodernism a generation ago, art again reopened itself to possibilities outside of 1960s painting's notched canvases, masking tape, and airbrushed mists. PoMo theory even allowed that the history of art was of possible interest. *The Moderns*, curated by **Ben Cooper, Jason Kalogiros, Jonathan Runcio**, and Marko Lucic examines the Bauhaus legacy from a contemporary, non-utopian viewpoint.

Kalogiros makes what look like painted geometric abstractions in primary (red/blue/yellow) and secondary (purple/green/orange) colors, but are, in fact, color-reversed photograms (lenseless contact prints) made from various archived publications illustrating Josef Albers' color theory ("Modernist Equilibrium," "Hommage au Carré"). In other works, he examines the color-saturated eye's tendency to project complementary colors on white paper, and uses a chance (a fan) to "compose" a photo of color monochromes. Runcio explores, instead, architecture and industrial design. He straps together modular sculptures from scavenged metal chair skeletons based on prototypes originally designed by Marcel Breuer (the elegant Wassily chair, beloved by art artists) and Mart Stam, and paints abstractions derived from

architectural/industrial renderings. Lucic, an Austrian, takes a more elegiac, commemorative stance with his wall-size quilt of colored rectangles, an homage to Otti Berger, a Serbian textile designer/teacher killed at Auschwitz; and on his video *The Moderns (Vienna)*, a series of monochrome slides of postwar buildings that fade in and out, accompanied by voiceover-style captions reciting the artist's prose poem. It's a reverie on how the bombings created opportunities for building a new city and a morally cleansed new man: "One has said goodbye to tradition here ... not only was there a new way of building, but of living." *The Moderns* runs through January 22 at **Chandra Cerrito Contemporary** (480 23rd St., Oakland). 415-577-7537 or [ChandraCerrito.com](http://ChandraCerrito.com)

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Through Jan. 22, 2011

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