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Best of 2017

Posted on 13 January 2018.



Linda Fleming, *First Light*, 2017, powder coated steel, 72 × 96 × 65

[Linda Fleming @ Brian Gross](#)

Drawing in space may be a tired metaphor for sculpture, but that, quite literally, is what Linda Fleming does for a living. She creates spiky see-through structures assembled from powder-coated sections of laser-cut steel. The chest-high shapes, held together by big chrome bolts, are packed with sinuous, labyrinthine forms, each of which displaces a mirror image of itself in negative space. The seamless merger of the two prompts gut-level questions about the nature of matter and space, interior and exterior and the universality of forms.

[Deborah Oropallo @ Catharine Clark](#)

Since taking up digital painting in the late 1990s, Oropallo has developed an arsenal of visceral imagery that grabs viewers and leaves them questioning whether her intent to terrorize,



Deborah Oropallo, 45, 2016,
photomontage, paint, paper and
canvas 70 x 60"

enlighten, empower or all three. Where fairy tales once served the equivalent function, Oropallo's art, which draws on modern and ancient fables, warns of dangers lurking in the darker recesses of the Internet. More recently, with the right-wing takeover of American government, her work has turned pointedly political, all the while retaining the tantalizing visual provocations and post-feminist themes that have elevated her to her present position. All were thrillingly encapsulated a show that featured the artist's first foray into video — a piece that deepened artist's longstanding exploration of gender roles.

[Andrew Schoultz @ Hosfelt](#)

"With seemingly unstoppable verve," writes Glen Helfand, Schoultz "makes large-scale wall



Andrew Schoultz, *Beast in Space (Floating)*, 2017, acrylic on paper, 30 x 22"

works, paintings, and architectural installations that burst with vibrant color and concentric shapes that sometimes generate dizzying moiré patterns. In his paintings there are ferocious four-legged red beasts; flocks of birds that appear to be dive bombing; coils of fluffy clouds that suggest missile contrails; various vortexes; stylized Greek urns; brick walls; sinking ships and Trojan horses. All of which is to say, this energetically apocalyptic body of work is ripe for the times. **On view through Jan. 20.**

[Jewish Folktales Retold: Artist as Maggid @ CJM](#)

Making Jewish history and religious belief relevant to contemporary audiences is CJM's core mission. In these regards, this exhibition (as well as Archie Rand's *The 613*) scored bullseye hits. Maria Porges wrote: "All the pieces in this masterfully conceived and executed show remind us of why folk tales are not only enjoyable and enchanting, but a crucial part of how we know who we are. Though the stories the artists drew upon may come to us from long ago and far away, much about them remains relevant for us, particularly in psychically trying times like these."



From Jewish Folktales Retold: Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor, "blame:thirst" and "lullaby:lament"

[Robert Rauschenberg @ SFMOMA](#)

Mark Van Proyen traces the long shadow cast by this quintessential mid-century modernist:



Robert Rauschenberg,
Retroactive I, 1964

from his early Kurt Schwitters-influenced collages to his collaborations with John Cage and Merce Cunningham to his innovative printmaking involving media images and large-scale combines. Rauschenberg's work, writes the author, "may well represent the very first instance of an aesthetic recognition of the media-scape replacing the landscape, and insofar as we can draw a sharp art historical distinction between the display etiquettes of the gallery and those of the projection screen...we can certainly see that Rauschenberg was the first American artist to find unique artistic opportunities in the interstitial spaces between those realms." **On view through March 25.**

[Richard Diebenkorn 'Beginnings' @ Crocker](#)

Due to scheduling snafus we weren't able to review this show, but we wished we could have. Comprised of works drawn from the artist's early years, 1942-55, this exhibition, judiciously selected and meticulously researched by Chief Curator, Scott A. Shields, filled a longstanding gap, giving Bay Area audiences a look at parts of the artist's career not covered by the spate of Diebenkorn exhibits of



Richard Diebenkorn, *Untitled*, c. 1944–1945. Ink on paper

the past few years, including those we *did* cover at [SFMOMA](#), the [de Young](#) and the [Cantor Arts Center](#). The overwhelming impression given is that of a young genius — evident in the WWII-era drawings the artist made while teaching at California School of Fine Arts (now SFAI), in his experiments with Cubism and Surrealism, and finally with Abstract Expressionist works that, by the early 1950s, had brought him fame.



Cornelia Schulz, D1, 2017, oil
on canvas on wood, 12 x 9.5"

[Cornelia Schulz @ Patricia Sweetow](#)

“If anyone understands the hugely plastic and seductive physicality of paint, it is Cornelia Schulz,” wrote Julia Couzens. “Troweled slugs of cadmium yellow, puckered splotches of minty green, and regressive planks of flat black collide, slip, slide, splat, and skid into the chunky-luscious concoctions that constitute Schulz’s new paintings. Where Ellsworth Kelly opens up his shaped canvases like vast unfolding fans, Schulz cobbles together tiny odd-sized canvases into cranky grids where reasoned geometry pushes against seduction’s looping pull.”

[Klimt & Rodin @ Legion of Honor](#)

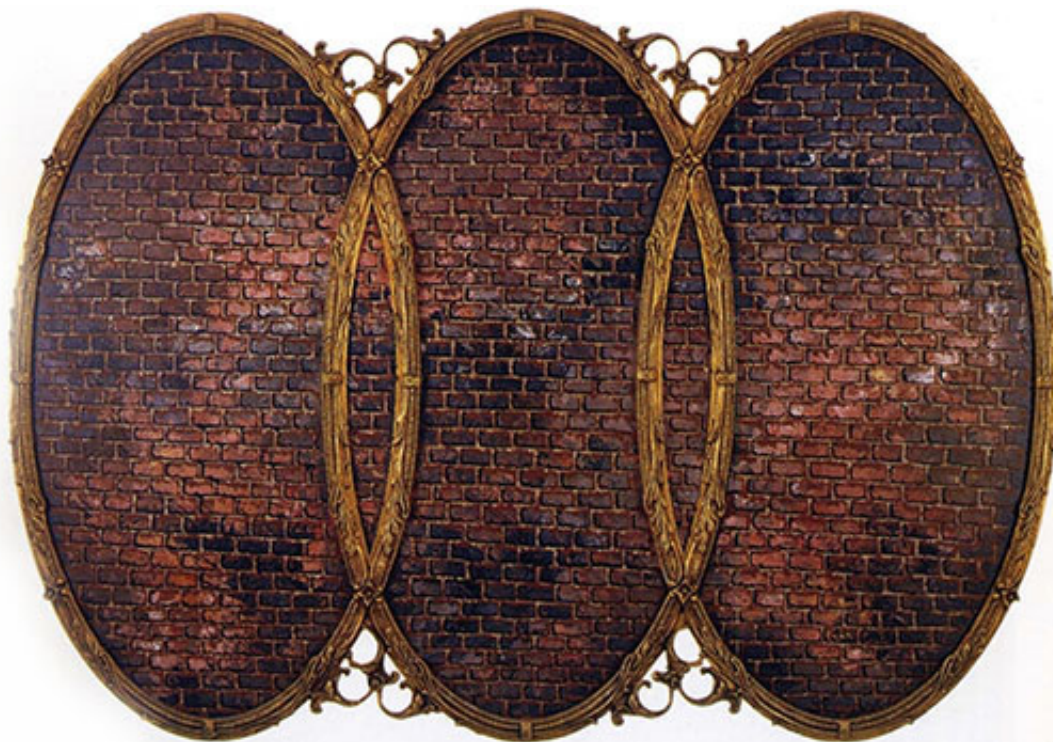


Gustav Klimt, "Portrait of Ria Munk III," 1917

Granted, this pairing is somewhat strained due to the fact that there aren't enough Klimt works available to fully explore commonalities and differences. Still, the appearance of 30 Klimt works on the West Coast, many of which have never been seen in this country, represents a rare opportunity – rarer still when you consider the paucity of works Klimt created during his lifetime. **On view through Jan. 28.**

[Martin Wong @ BAMPFA](#)

"Martin Wong's paintings depicting tenements, people of color, prison cells, gated storefronts, constellations labeled in gold, firemen (the fetishized objects of his affection) and dialects ranging from American Sign Language to visual poetry, make for a pungent and unique portrait of a culturally seminal place and time: the East Village of the 1980s," wrote Robert Atkins, who, as critic for the *Village Voice* during that period, witnessed it firsthand.



Martin Wong, Rapture, 1988, Acrylic on canvas, 45 x 64 x 2"

[Ragnar Kjartansson's 'The Visitors' @ SFMOMA](#)

Part of a larger exhibit called *Soundings*, this eight-screen music video of a live performance, filmed in an upstate New York mansion, rivals, for visceral beauty and audio clarity, the multi-screen presentations of William Kentridge that SFMOMA showed in 2009. This "experiment in virtual reality," wrote Justin Manley, "demonstrates a thrilling depth of immersion, a triumph of technological illusionism."

[Nina Katchadourian @ Cantor Arts Center](#)

Katchadourian finds humor and bemusement wherever she looks: airplanes, libraries, city streets, family archives and in the annals of food packaging. At every turn she transforms the ordinary into the fantastic. Katchadourian's lip-synched classic rock tunes, made while dressed in mock-Flemish attire in airplane bathrooms, were a clear LOL highlight.



Nina Katchadourian Lavatory Self-Portrait in the Flemish Style #3 and #12, 2010-ongoing.
From “Seat Assignment”

[Julia Couzens @ Sac State and JayJay](#)

Two concurrent solo exhibitions offered a look at the methods and conceptual concerns that have undergirded the artist's production over the past 15 years. At Sac State Couzens took deathbed utterances and subjected them to a variety of aesthetic treatments; at JayJay she installed wall-mounted “bundles” made of fabric scraps that read as autobiographical fetish objects.



Julia Couzens, Croquette, 2017, mixed textiles, wire, threads, 9 x 11 x 7 inches

[Gay Outlaw @ Anglim Gilbert](#)

“Over the last 25 years,” wrote Maria Porges, “Gay Outlaw ‘s elegant, inscrutable objects and



Gay Oulaw, Untitled (Orange Flow with Waders), 2016

images have continually subverted definitions, expectations and rules. An unrelenting inventiveness, often employed in tandem with a seemingly inexhaustible appetite for technical exploration, has led the artist to make some of the most unforgettably idiosyncratic work the Bay Area has ever seen.”

[Detritus @ San Jose ICA](#)

“Making art is not an easy, clean, or orderly process,” wrote Barbara Morris. “Rather, it often creates random piles of crap, foul



Paint-splattered
studio aprons
from

Carrie Lederer & Lauren Bartone

odors, loud and unpleasant sounds and sodden messes. If the studio is, in this metaphor, a crime scene, then these forensic curators have selected and isolated bits of evidence that hold the DNA of larger and more complex bodies — of work, that is — buried in the teeming storage racks and dark recesses of the artists' habitats,” culled here from an A-list of Bay Area artists.

[Sophie Calle @ Fort Mason](#)



Sophie Calle, video still from
Take Care of Yourself

A break-up letter received by France's best-known conceptual artist formed the basis of *Take Care of Yourself*, an exploration of love-gone-bad in which Calle enlisted input from some 107 women in different fields. Their letters, photos, diagrams, video clips filled a huge room, salon-style, making for an exhibition of extraordinary emotional poignancy and rhetorical force, publicly flaying an ex-lover while inadvertently exposing the artist's own shortcomings.

[Christian Maychack @ Gregory Lind](#)



Christian Maychack,
Compound Flat # 59,

Christian Maychack's sculpture insistently references painting. He invokes its conventions and material hierarchies and then violates them, exercising an intuitive, process-based approach. For this series — a blend of precision joinery and detritus aesthetics rendered in Play-Doh hues and textures — he jammed pigment-infused epoxy clay into wood enclosures, interleaving amorphous shapes with hard-edged geometric forms to suggest windows invaded by mutant growths.

[Andrew Hayes @ Seager Gray](#)

“This North Carolina artist,” wrote Barbara Morris, “has always emphasized a formalist impulse to create autonomous, abstract



Andrew Hayes, Crossing

objects coupled with an undercurrent of allusion to the long, rich and intimate world of the book, the cold geometry of steel wedded to the warmth and nuance of well-thumbed tomes. In earlier exhibitions, Hayes

worked exclusively with books, specifically with pages taken *from* them as a foil to his welded steel housings. Here, in an assortment of wall, pedestal and freestanding works, he broke new ground by injecting into these minimalist geometric shapes hints of trompe l'oeil.”

[Lynn Aldrich and Sabina Ott @ Bedford](#)

These two artists, wrote Maria Porges, “are uncommonly adept at making the sculptural equivalent of silk purses out of sow’s ears. There is really no other way to describe the spectacularly eccentric yet magnetically attractive works that punctuate the Bedford’s space, many hanging from the ceiling. The first impression is of a riot of colors and textures: lots of neon orange, for instance, and plastic in



Lynn Aldrich, *Starting Over Neo-Atlantis*, 2008, Sponges, scrubbers, scouring pads, mop heads, brushes, plastic gloves, plungers, plumbing parts, wood, 4.5 x 8 x 5.5 ft

every possible garish hue; a forest of shiny galvanized metal, improbable squiggles of foam insulation, and many variations of fake fur and animal skin. Whether it’s insulation foam, plastic plants and burlap (Ott) or metal gutters, plastic cleaning tools and waxed paper (Aldrich), their materials are neither precious nor, by most common definitions of the word, beautiful.

#

David M. Roth, Squarecylinder's editor and publisher, compiled this year-end roundup from reviews written by Maria Porges, Robert Atkins, Mark Van Proyen, Barbara Morris, Julia Couzens, Justin Manley and...himself. Thanks to all those above and to the many donors and advertisers who, in the past year, helped make Squarecylinder possible. If you like what you read there's a way to support it:



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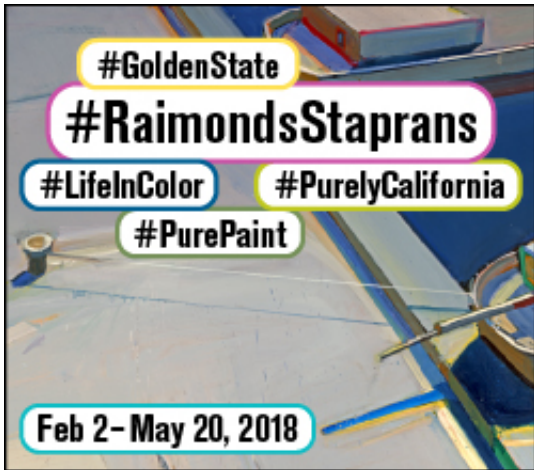
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