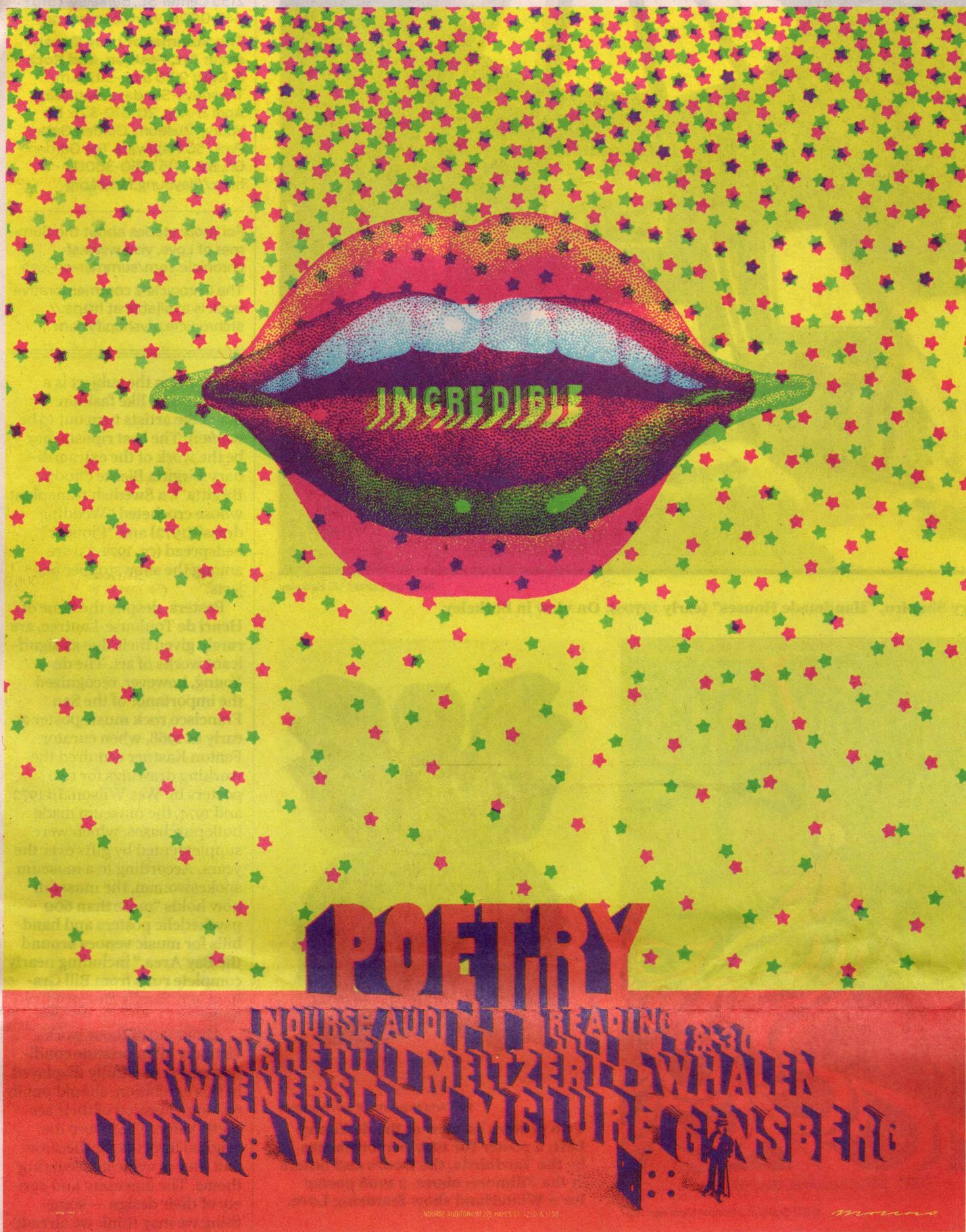




Victor Moscoso / Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Victor Moscoso, "‘Incredible Poetry’, Nourse Auditorium, June 8, 1968." Color offset lithograph poster, at the de Young.

Feed your head, heart

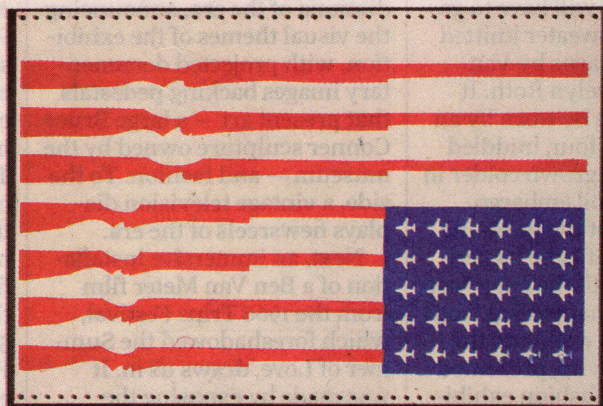
Berkeley exhibit is scholarly;
the de Young takes you there

By Charles Desmarais

Two major museum exhibitions currently on view in the Bay Area could not be more different in their approach to aspects of the same subject: One exhibition tells, the other shows.

"Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia," at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive through May 21, is an exhaustive, international survey of art and design ideas

Hippie continues on E2



Lincoln Cushing / Docs Populi Archive

Untitled (c. 1970), at "Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia" in Berkeley.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

2 '60s-era exhibits to feed your head

Hippie from page E1

wrought by the alternative cultural movements of the 1960s. It is serious and analytical to a fault: No viewer could possibly read all the text-heavy objects on view, supplemented by labels with more words of explanation, in a single visit.

"The Summer of Love Experience: Art, Fashion, and Rock & Roll" takes a more experiential approach. Opening Saturday, April 8, and running through Aug. 20, the de Young Museum exhibition confines itself to cultural expression in '60s San Francisco. It, too, is a huge show, but its emphasis on the visual leaves one feeling filled with ideas and images, rather than drained of energy.

If the 50th anniversary of the Summer of Love has not yet fully caught your attention, just wait. San Francisco, overwhelmed physically and psychically in 1967 by an influx of new people and ideas, will be awash this season in evocations of that memory. An excellent website with historical and event information, www.summeroflove.org, is maintained by the California Historical Society, which will present its own exhibition on the theme beginning May 12.

While both art museum exhibitions come with sumptuous catalogs, Berkeley's "Hippie Modernism" is clearly the more ambitious effort of scholarship. Organized by Andrew Blauvelt, senior curator of architecture and design at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, with the assistance of BAMPFA, it sets itself the enormous challenge of surveying what it defines as a more or less monolithic, worldwide counterculture.

At the philosophical core of that phenomenon, the argument goes, lies an apparent conflict between back-to-the-land emotional urges and an intellectual embrace of the brave new world of science and technology. Between the hippie celebration of "the premodern and the preindustrial: an affinity for nineteenth-century pioneer dress and its agrarian life" and the modernist's "fascination with new media, materials, and technologies — taped music, synthesized sound, feedback and distortion, light effects, slide projectors, portable video cameras, television, plastics, reflective Mylar, and computers."

A team of 18 scholars wrote for the handsome, extensively footnoted book accompanying the exhibition. It's an instant classic that will take its place on the shelves of every significant library of art and architecture — reason enough to have undertaken the massive research that undergirds it. But as an exhibition, the project is no greater than the sum of its documentation.

The show is too broad in scope, too unfocused in presentation, too hard to figure out (I spent hours over two visits). If you're old enough, do you remember the "Whole Earth Catalog" — a pivotal object of the era — with its wide-ranging, detailed display of items of value and curiosity, all jumbled together, all printed in black and white? Picture that as a three-dimensional installation and you have a good idea of the show.

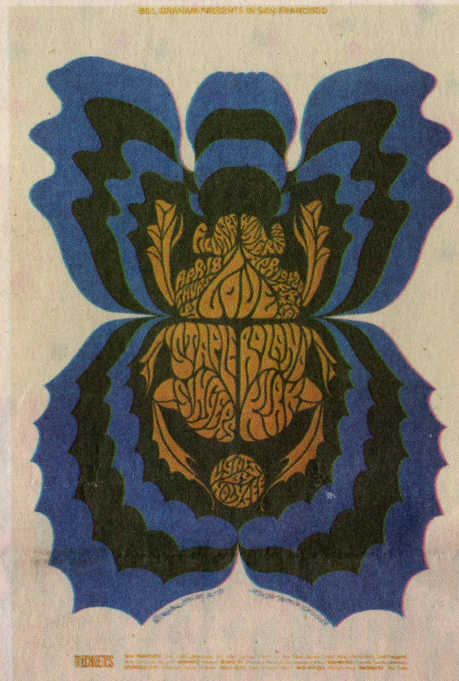


Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley

Barry Shapiro, "Handmade Houses" (early 1970s). On view in Berkeley.



© Bill Graham / Bonnie MacLean 1967



Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Two posters on view at the de Young: Left, a poster for 1967 performances by the Yardbirds, the Doors and others at the Fillmore; above, a 1968 poster for a Winterland show featuring Love.

There are some great photos and posters, but relatively few other works of art, unless we count descriptions of significant actions and provocations. And, of course, there are a few revelations. The one that bowled me over (no photos allowed, so you will have to go and see) is the sweater knitted from recycled yarns by Vancouver artist Evelyn Roth. It was designed to be worn by an entire family of four, huddled against a world grown colder in the 1973 OPEC oil embargo.

Meanwhile, at the de Young, "The Summer of Love Experience" pulses with the energy of a youth-fueled happening from the moment we walk into the first gallery. Having presented a long series of fashion exhibitions over the years, the museum knows how to wow us with an installation. The new in-house exhibition designer, Tomomi Itakura, working with

extraordinary content ferreted out by curators Jill D'Alessandro (a costume expert) and Colleen Terry (graphic arts), provides surprises at every turn.

At the entry, a supergraphic frame surrounds a kind of diorama of the era, announcing the visual themes of the exhibition, with projected documentary images backing pedestals that present art — a large Bruce Conner sculpture owned by the museum — and fashion. To the side, a vintage television displays newsreels of the era.

Next, an immersive installation of a Ben Van Meter film from the 1966 Trips Festival, which foreshadowed the Summer of Love, draws us in. It was made by exposing the same roll of film on each of the three days of the festival, and the resulting multiple exposure images surrounding us suggest the feeling of the moment.

"Weird and confusing," Van Meter says in a short catalog essay, is the effect he was going for.

If the Summer of Love launched a phenomenon that was international, it was centered in San Francisco and celebrated in Golden Gate Park. The de Young Museum stands pretty much at ground zero, and that adds to the excitement of the show. When we hear the recorded voice of Timothy Leary exhorting a crowd to "Turn on, tune in and drop out" in a gallery rimmed by a 360-degree mural shot from atop Hippie Hill, it's clear that we are no more than about 500 yards from the site of the Human Be-In and other key events of 1967.

Some might quibble over whether this is an exhibition of great art or merely artifacts of history. It is, ridiculously, the kind of question that often

Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia: 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Wednesdays-Thursdays; 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays. Through May 21. \$10-\$12, free 18 and under. UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2155 Center St., Berkeley. (510) 642-0808. www.bampfa.org

The Summer of Love Experience: Art, Fashion, and Rock & Roll: 9:30 a.m.-5:15 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays. Saturday, April 8-Aug. 20. \$10-\$25. De Young Museum, Golden Gate Park, 50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Dr., S.F. (415) 750-3600. <http://deyoung.famsf.org>

For more stories about the Summer of Love, visit www.sfchronicle.com/summer-of-love

The Chronicle's commemorative book is available at <https://sfchronicle.myshopify.com>

arises when the subject is a popular one, like fashion. Or when the artists turn out to be women. The best riposte may be the work of the extraordinary Birgitta Bjerke ("100% Birgitta"), a Swedish transplant whose crocheted "Wedding dress" (1972) and "Pioneer" bedspread (ca. 1972-73) are among the showstopper objects.

Posters, despite the fame of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, are rarely given their due as significant works of art. The de Young, however, recognized the importance of the San Francisco rock music poster as early as 1968, when curator Fenton Kastner acquired the working drawings for two posters by Wes Wilson. In 1972 and 1974, the museum made bulk purchases, which were supplemented by gifts over the years. According to a museum spokeswoman, the museum now holds "more than 600 psychedelic posters and handbills for music venues around the Bay Area," including nearly complete runs from Bill Graham and Family Dog productions.

About 130 of those works, virtually all in pristine condition and respectfully displayed in this exhibition, should put to rest any question of their aesthetic value. They were the original impetus for the show, and they provide its recurring theme. The ingenuity and variety of their design — something we may think we already know — will astound anew.

About midway through each of the exhibitions is a room devoted to a staple of the day, the rock concert light show (actually, a video simulation in both cases of what would have been live manipulation of light and color). At Berkeley, the room is off in a side gallery, with digital projections cast in screen-size rectangles on the walls. Like much of the BAMPFA show, it is a valuable report on a cultural moment.

The de Young light show gallery, unavoidable in the pathway of the exhibition, fills the walls edge-to-edge with color and movement. It's a work of art to dance through, a recognition of the Summer of Love as a time with us still.

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