

CHARLES DESMARAIS *Art*

A quasi-museum on Minnesota St.

What would you call a venue that presents, all at the same time, some 15 substantial art exhibitions, as well as education and social events? It is difficult to think of the Minnesota Street Project in San Francisco as anything but a hyper-challenging, always entertaining museum.

It's not a museum, but here is a list of just some of the current offerings: an up-to-the-minute program of filmic contemplations on race by one of today's most sought-after American artists (Carrie Mae Weems); an invigorating pairing of enigmatic artists from the mid-20th century (Francis Picabia) and today (Sigmar Polke); witty, laboriously hand-carved wooden replicas of cheap plastic seating by a young South African (Cameron Platter); little-seen commercial work by an artist best known for his ruminations on photographic truth (Larry Sultan); a reinterpretation of a well-known installation-cum-performance from the 1980s (originally by Sultan and Mike Mandel); a show of serious political works by distinguished artists, pitched as an interactive project to young audiences ("Rise Up! Art as Action"). Add to these, nine additional one-person shows, all at a high standard of artistic quality.

Minnesota Street Project is a complex housing art galleries, most of which offer objects for sale. That commercial aspect of exhibition planning must be kept in mind — organizers hope that we will buy — but it's also what supports another appealing feature of the place: Virtually all events are free.

The round of exhibitions currently on view will provide as satisfying an afternoon of art viewing as you will experience anywhere. The full roster of

galleries and programs is available at <http://minnesota-streetproject.com>.

When MSP opened last year, it was not entirely clear that its founders, Deborah and Andy Rappaport, could accomplish all they had in store for it. Indeed, a restaurant originally scheduled to open last summer was actively under construction last week, and elements of a promised "comprehensive, concierge-based art-collection management service" do not appear to be yet in place.

But the number of galleries has grown as two major dealers moved into an annex space (at 1150 25th St.) down the street from the first gallery building (1275 Minnesota St.). A third, reportedly nonprofit, exhibition program will join them later this year, bringing the total exhibition space to more than 30,000 square feet (up from 22,421 one year ago).

As if the vibrant programs of the resident galleries were not more than enough, visiting galleries from around the U.S. have presented pop-up exhibitions regularly. Moreover, the complex itself sponsors lectures, events and installations. Less public, but much valued, is a subsidized studio program that currently serves 37 artists selected from among the best in the Bay Area.

A match made in L.A.: Another commercial art enterprise celebrating a year of operation in San Francisco is the international powerhouse Gagosian. Given the scale of the gallery's efforts — and spaces — throughout the world, the program here is probably destined always to be treated as something of a provincial cousin. But it's the thought that counts.

The current exhibition, "Notepads, Holograms and Books,"



Michael Werner Gallery

Francis Picabia, Untitled (1933), on view at Adrian Rosenfeld, in the Minnesota Street Project.

presents works by two Los Angeles artists, Ed Ruscha and Jonas Wood. Ruscha, by far the better known of the pair (his latest outing here was a major show at the de Young Museum last summer), proves that he can still surprise by showing things that I, for one, had never seen. Among these are old books, the covers and fore-edges of which are painted with the short words or phrases for which he is known ("Baby Jet," "Oh No," "Starbrats"). A small selection of holograms on familiar filmic themes is surprisingly appealing, and not gratuitously flashy.

Which brings me to the Jonas Wood works, which are pleasant enough when seen as sketches on paper smaller than 10 by 7 inches, but become bombastic advertising placards for the gallery when they are canvases nearly 8 feet high.

We have yet to see an exhibition of the ambition of the offerings in New York — and I am not talking about size, but depth of thought. Gagosian is located at 657 Howard St.; the exhibition runs through June 17.

Fairly complete: I hope someone is tracking the results of all the art fairs in the Bay Area this year, as it is hard to see how they can all make financial sense. Nevertheless, such events are an efficient way to see a lot of art in a short amount of time.

Some people (I am among them) find the gallery setting a more comfortable art viewing experience. The best galleries provide a place halfway between museum and home — between the strictly formal and the domestic. But people actively looking to buy sometimes prefer to shop in a market environment. The art

fair is the big box store of art, the bazaar where everyone knows that commerce is the central function. The two latest such events in our area take place this weekend.

The Art Market San Francisco roster does not have all the big-name galleries one sees at the annual January fairs, but it does include a number of highly credible dealers with small or out-of-the-way shops. Art Market should be thought of as an introduction to a wide range of possibilities, some of them excellent. It takes place April 27-30 at Fort Mason Center; info at <http://artmarketsf.com>.

Startup Art Fair San Francisco, to be held April 28-30 at Hotel Del Sol (3100 Webster St, S.F. <http://sf.startupartfair.com>), takes a novel, if controversial, approach. Artists, most of them without gallery representation, rent space from the organizers and sell directly to fair attendees. It's a great way to meet the makers of the works one might be considering — rarely an option at a traditional fair. The downside, like at the many outdoor festivals across the region, is that vetting is minimal. You're on your own, without the guidance of a knowledgeable dealer.

Individual tickets for a single day start at \$15 for Startup, \$25 for Art Market.

Last chance: The tiny, almost-on-the-beach Great Highway Gallery (3649 Lawton St., S.F.) presents "The Horizon Line," inventive and engaging ceramic works and drawings by Georgia Hodges on the theme of water and sea life. And "Jonh Herschend: Your Lost Shoe" at Gallery 16 (501 Third St., S.F.) is a thorny story told in overly ambitious video and deceptively casual-looking paintings of great strength. Both shows close Saturday, April 29; both are worth a special trip.

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