

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

CHARLES DESMARAIS *Art*

11-foot-high texts for transit center

Artist **Jenny Holzer**, famous for her poetic LED-stream text displays in architectural environments, has been awarded a major commission for a work to be integrated into San Francisco's new Transbay Transit Center. The Board of Directors of the Transbay Joint Powers Authority voted last Thursday, Sept. 8, to award a contract of \$182,000 to Holzer for design and project oversight. Fabrication and installation are estimated at \$740,000.

It was reported in 2011 that the authority had allocated a budget of \$4.75 million for public art in the \$6 billion downtown transportation hub, but it was not until last week that the authority approved the Holzer project.

Four other artists are also slated to make major works: Tim Hawkinson of Los Angeles will build a roughly figurative "guardian" towering 41 feet out of demolition rubble from the old transit center. Bay Area artists Julie Chang and Ned Kahn and New Yorker James Carpenter plan more architecturally integrated works — floors by Chang and Carpenter and a water feature by Kahn in the rooftop park.

Holzer has installed permanent LED works at the Reichstag and the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, the Guggenheim Bilbao in Spain and 7 World Trade Center in New York City. Her San Francisco installation will consist of 11-foot-high texts that will run around a glass enclosure surrounding a central atrium, visible from outside as well as from within the transit center. She plans to both compose her own texts and integrate the words of Bay Area authors.

Spoiler alert: I have been unable to see "The Proposal" at the Walter and McBean Galleries of the San Francisco Art Institute in its completed state, but I have a good sense of the exhibition. I went by as installers were finishing their work before the opening Saturday, Sept. 10. Years ago, as president of the institute, I approved the show and its budget, which included some funds for project development.

I also had read a superb story in the Aug. 1



Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects

Jenny Holzer's LED-stream commission is shown in a rendering of the Transbay Transit Center.



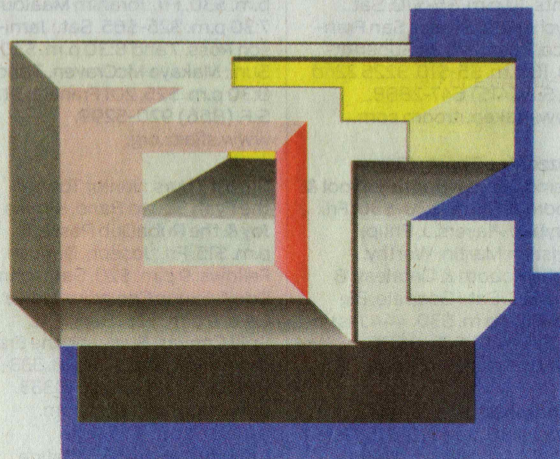
Gallery Wendi Norris

Peter Young's "#54 — 1997," acrylic on canvas, is among his "Ellipse Paintings."

issue of the New Yorker, "The Architect Who Became a Diamond." It tells of the artist **Jill Magid** and her fascinating quest to secure the return to Mexico of the archives of that country's great modernist architect, **Luis Barragán**. "The Proposal" is but one part of that larger effort.

At least, that's one of the things Magid's work is about. It also deals with scholarly obsession, the arrogance of wealth (corporate and individual), copyright law and, it would seem, an insidiously possessive kind of love.

As sometimes happens, though, the exhibi-



Jessica Silverman Gallery

Suzanne Blank Redstone's "Portal 2A" (1967), acrylic on shaped fiberboard, is out of storage.

tion may be better as a book — or, in this case, as a magazine article. I

could not recommend the work more highly, but it's the concept that

is the work of art; the New Yorker story isn't just a teaser — it's a spoiler. See the exhibition, long planned by curator **Hesse McGraw**, first, then read **Alice Gregory's** piece.

The art of finance: The announcement last week that the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco has appointed a new chief financial officer was covered by The Chronicle. It's not the kind of news that would ordinarily excite our attention.

But nearly five years of instability at the museums have occasioned much public speculation over internal politics and financial matters at our largest visual arts institution. That's why I am heartened by the news that a seasoned professional, **Ed Prohaska**, is coming to us after 14 years of service as CFO at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, which is widely considered one of the best-run cultural institutions in California.

As chair of the finance committee for the boards of KQED and the California Association of Museums, he has sat on the governance side of the table — rare experience for a staff member, even at the top level, and much needed in this situation, where the museums board has too often seemed to shirk its oversight duties.

Best of all, the announcement was made not by a trustee or the

president (though I am told that the board was, appropriately, consulted), but by the new director. "Ed ... will be a valued partner, operationally and strategically," **Max Hollein** said in a statement. Which is just as things ought to be: a strong director, taking charge, building his team.

Making the rounds:

Over the course of just two weeks, pretty much every San Francisco gallery is opening an important exhibition. I haven't seen them all, but I did manage to preview a good number. Among the wealth of excitements are three shows remarkable both for their visual intelligence and because they present artists who have demonstrated a lifetime commitment to abstraction.

At Haines Gallery, **David Simpson** is featured in a small retrospective titled "Now & Then." Born in 1928, the Berkeley painter has maintained a vital career since the 1950s. I am most drawn to the earliest work (horizontal strata of solid color and glowing washes, like visual notations on journeys through austere landscapes) and the latest (glimmering surfaces that recall the magical effects of fog and light).

New Yorker **Peter Young**, 76, shows his "Ellipse Paintings" in his first solo show at Gallery Wendi Norris. Young takes the ellipse shape as a starting place and uses it engagingly, whether as a cool gray screen through which we view a field of pinks and greens or as elements of sunny, landscape-like compositions.

And, finally, **Suzanne Blank Redstone**, 71, is at Jessica Silverman Gallery in an exhibition of "1960s Portal Paintings." Silverman asked the artist to bring out works that had been languishing in storage for close to 50 years. They have a great mid-century look to them, with references to de Chirico and Mondrian. (And that's a sentence I would never have guessed I'd write.)

Charles Desmarais is The San Francisco Chronicle's art critic. Email: cdesmarais@sfgchronicle.com Twitter: [@Artguy1](https://twitter.com/Artguy1)