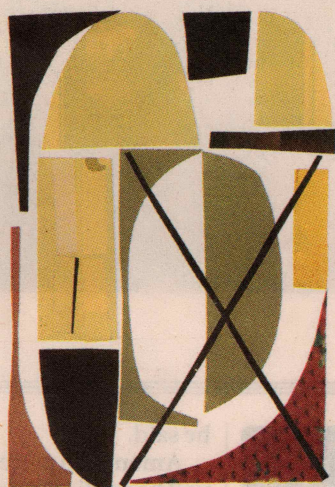




Gallery 16 photos

Rex Ray's "Isidia" (2005) is part of Gallery 16's entrancing display of pieces that deserve to be seen in person.

Exuberant works not to take lightly



Gallery 16

Rex Ray, from "Wall of Sound" (1995-2000), one of 500 sheets.

Transcendent Gallery 16 Rex Ray exhibit is both a respite and a source of energy

By Charles Desmarais

Weary of fighting the rising tide of media? Foundering in the angry sea of politics? Staggering against the constantly pounding surf of the digital?

I know a place where you can go for respite, a place to rest your eyes and brain. Before you dive back in, of course, with new energy for the good fight.

Take a visual vacation to Gallery 16's transcendent exhibition of paintings and collages by the late Rex Ray, "We Are All Made of Light," on view through June 30. It's a trip to an island paradise of the mind, where you will be overcome by blossoms of intertwining forms, surrounded by exuberant dances of color, immersed in cool-

Ray continues on E2

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



Gallery 16 photos

Exuberant color and form as displayed in the Rex Ray installation at Gallery 16, with (at left) "RR 145" (2010) and (right) "Lichina" (2004).

Vibrant exhibition of Rex Ray works

Ray from page E1

jazz melodies of contrapuntal structure.

An introduction to the excellent exhibition catalog by Gallery 16 founder Griff Williams makes it clear that Ray was not a shallow artist. He had a successful career in graphic design creating album covers for David Bowie and posters for 100-plus Bill Graham tours, presenting musicians from the Rolling Stones and Patti Smith to U2 and Radiohead.

More significantly, he participated in AIDS awareness efforts and political activities, and made art celebrating gay culture and identity.

Photographs of some of that work are printed in the catalog, but the show focuses on the extraordinary works that cannot be adequately reproduced in a book (much less a newspaper).

Those works are mere objects, but they are vibrant with life — despite the fact, shared by Williams in his essay, that many were made over five years of illness before the artist's death in 2015. They range from canvases larger than 6 feet square to works on paper smaller than a business letter — 500 of them, amassed into what Ray called his "Wall of

"Rex Ray: We Are All Made of Light": 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesdays-Fridays; 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays. Through June 30. Free. Gallery 16, 501 Third St., S.F. (415) 626-7495. www.gallery16.com

Sound" (1995-2000).

Most of the pieces make use of collage techniques. The larger pictures, like the grand "Nucifer" (2003), generally comprise layers of painted sheets on canvas or wood, cut freehand with a craft knife into elaborate compositions. One can't help thinking of the psychedelic designs a rock poster designer would certainly have known, but each of Ray's images has a freshness of its own.

The small works on paper might be thought of as closer to drawings. They are simpler formally, with a cooler, more rational mood than the elaborate "paintings." All of them date from several years before the earliest painting. While they clearly are not studies for specific later works, we can see ideas being pursued, modified, elaborated, turned inside out. They are mesmerizing.

Charles Desmarais is The San Francisco Chronicle's art critic. Email: cdesmarais@sfbchronicle.com Twitter: @Artguy1



Rex Ray, "Cyphellae" (2006).