

A symposium on public art

The idea of a socially engaged art is as old as ancient ritual and as new as **Nicolas Bourriaud's** keenly influential book "Relational Aesthetics" (published in 1998, but released in English in 2002). The Bay Area has a history of political activism and a desultory art market that all but discourages the manufacture of collectible objects. It follows, then, that it has become a center for work that is variously called "social (or public) practice," "relational art" or other terms that suggest collaboration, participation and audience involvement.

Indeed, while such approaches to art making are popular in virtually all academic environments, Oakland's California College of the Arts claims the distinction of having created the first master of fine arts degree in social practice, in 2005.

The more politically activist brand of socially engaged art seems to newly be a particular direction of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, where a recent exhibition, "Take This Hammer: Art + Media Activism From the Bay Area," surveyed the field.

The increasingly visible Kenneth Rainin Foundation, which is fast becoming one of San Francisco's most insightful and dedicated cultural funders, is presenting a free symposium on the topic. Exploring Public Art Practices takes place from 1 to 6 p.m. Sept. 10 at the Oakland Museum of California. It is open to the public, with "strongly encouraged" advance registration available at <http://krfoundation.org/exploring-public-art-practices>.

The keynote talk is by Ghana ThinkTank, which asks "Third World" people to help solve "First World"-created problems. Many of the Bay Area's top names in the field are also involved, including **Michael Arcega**, **Kota Ezawa**, **Ana Teresa Fernandez**, **Mildred Howard**, **Chris Sollars** and **Jennifer K. Wofford**.

Exhibitions between covers: Don't let anyone tell you that art book publishing is fading. (Whether it's a business in which to make money is a topic on which I have no opinion.) The array of intellectually engaging, visually surprising and beautifully produced books I receive weekly is proof of the industry's vitality. Some of them document exhibitions around the U.S. and the world that I wish I could have seen; others are what I think of as fantasy exhibitions that exist only between covers.

From San Francisco's Last Gasp Books comes **Alan Kaufman's** "The Outlaw Bible of American Art," a 668-page compendium of the weird and the transgressive. There seems to be no framework other than what appeals to the author's tweaked view of art and the

world, which brings together such disparate makers as **Forrest Bess**, **William S. Burroughs**, **Sue Coe**,

Charles Gatewood and **Annie Sprinkle**. And that, I'm sure, is the point: For the most part, these are artists who reject frameworks — or, at least, suspend ordinary rules — going for our emotions first and structure only later.

One of those "Why didn't I think of that?" moments hit me when I opened the package containing "Radical Seafaring," the catalog for a Parrish Art Museum exhibition published with DelMonico Books (an imprint of the German publisher Prestel).

The Parrish is in Water Mill, N.Y., where sailing is much on the minds of many of its Long Island patrons. Curator **Andrea Grover** put more than 10 years of thought and work into the show, inspired, she writes, by her father's journey across the Atlantic Ocean in an outboard motorboat in 1985.

Excellent reproductions and short, engaging texts describe 25 artist projects that embrace the sea. They include **Bas Jan Ader's** famous "In Search of the Miraculous" (1975), a long-



Kenneth Rainin Foundation

"Ghana ThinkTank in Corona," a custom-built trailer that seeks out "First World" issues and sends them to "Third World" think tanks, returns to New York City with proposed solutions.



Stanley/Barker

One of Stephen Shore's 1993 photographs from the new book "Luzzara," a tribute to Paul Strand's work 40 years earlier.

distance sailing expedition that led to the artist's death; artist-designed vessels like **Duke Riley's** 2007 wooden submarine — a replica of a crude but effective Revolutionary War

craft; and an armada of rafts, floated from Slovenia to the 2009 Venice Biennale, by a group under the leadership of street artist **Swoon** (Caledonia Curry).

The limited-edition "Luzzara," by photographer **Stephen Shore**, consists of 39 lusciously reproduced images he made in 1993. It was put out by the small London publisher Stanley/Barker. Luzzara is a village in Northern Italy photographed by the great **Paul Strand** in 1953, precisely 40 years before Shore's visit; that work was published in 1955 as "Un Paese: Portrait of an Italian Village."

Shore came to prominence in the early 1970s, largely on the basis of audacious color photographs of unpeopled streets. For his touching tribute to Strand, he returned to black and white and created this languid portrait of a place with one foot in our time, and the other in the past.

Last chance: Abstract paintings by Los Angeles artist **Ed Moses** are on view only through Aug. 27 at Brian Gross Fine Art ... also through Aug. 27, and right next door at Catharine Clark Gallery, is a show I was much taken with (and reviewed in June) of new work by **Stephanie Syjuco** that peels back layers of so-called neutrality in search of the authentic.

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