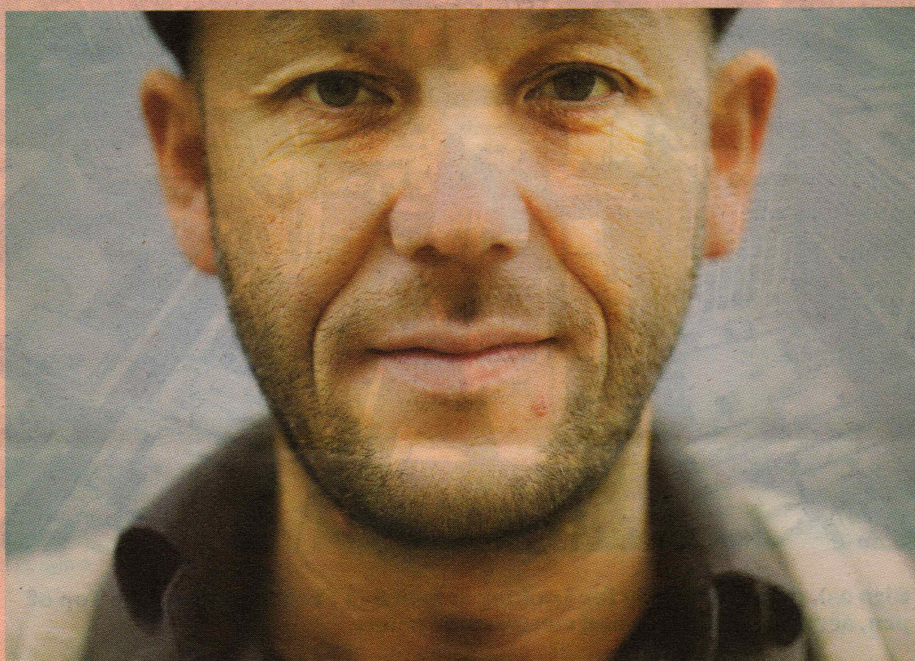


COVER STORY

Six artists answer: What did SECA Award mean to you?

By Charles Desmarais



Mike Kepka / The Chronicle 2014

Kota Ezawa's "X-Ray," below, from "The History of Photography Remix" (2006); computer vector in illuminated light box.

KOTA EZAWA
(SECA AWARD, 2006)

"When I received the award, I was already 37 years old. In comparison, I was one of the more seasoned awardees, with a gallery solo show in New York under my belt and several museum group shows internationally. It was still a big deal. More than the award itself or the prize money, it felt great to be recognized by the premier art institution of the town where I live.

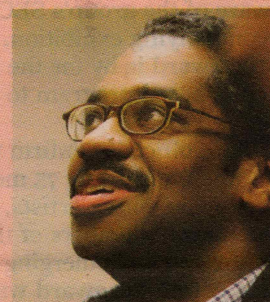
"I'm not sure that the award had any direct impact on my career. A lot of people in the San Francisco art world had already encountered my work four years earlier when I participated in "Bay Area Now 3" at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. The lasting effect of this exhibition was that it established a relationship with the curators and staff at SFMOMA and to the other artists in the show."



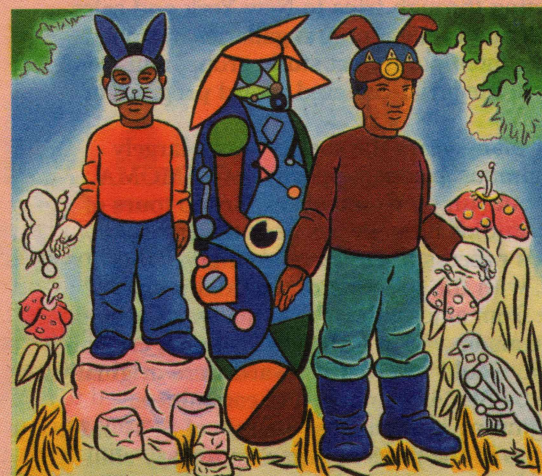
Haines Gallery / © 2006 Kota Ezawa

JOHN BANKSTON
(SECA AWARD, 2002)

"We are very lucky to have institutions in the Bay Area that nurture artists working here. SECA does that. The SECA Award is a fantastic honor. The award opened a door for me to be part of the artist community in San Francisco and part of the rich history of SFMOMA. I feel SFMOMA is interested in my growth as an artist, as well as in strengthening artists working here. I am in a number of museum collections around the country, and SFMOMA certainly stands out in its commitment to artists."



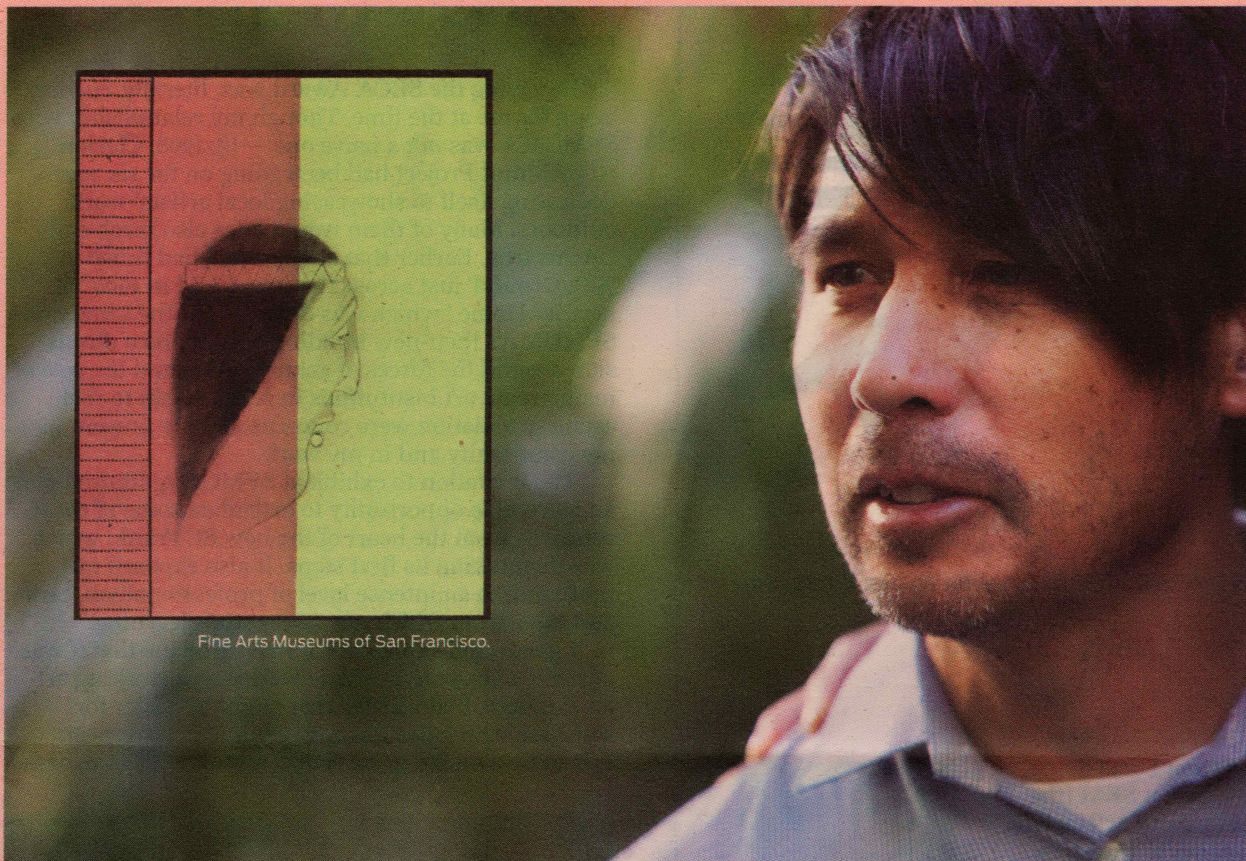
Darryl Bush / The Chronicle



Rena Bransten Gallery / © John Bankston

John Bankston's "All Assembled" (2015), oil on linen.

COVER STORY



Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

Santiago Mejia / Special to The Chronicle 2016

Barry McGee's print, left, from the portfolio "Drypoint on Acid" (2006), published by Edition Jacob Samuel and printed by Jacob Samuel.

BARRY MCGEE

(SECA AWARD, 1996)

"The SECA Award! It was such a long time ago. ... I'm afraid the only documentation I have are dusty slides somewhere. It's a great program, albeit a bit slow to actually encourage contemporary artists to be shown at the SFMOMA. ... Many of the artists picked for SECA started in S.F., (were) never acknowledged, then are discovered in New York only to be given the SECA in hindsight.

"I'm not sure if they still do this, but they used to have recommendation forms for artists you would like to suggest for the SECA. I remember putting (2017 winner) Alicia McCarthy on that form way back in 1998, which tells me something!"

COLTER JACOBSEN

(SECA AWARD, 2010)

"I felt very lucky to receive the award and especially to be grouped with other artists I admired. I was glad that our 2010 SECA show was reserved and quiet. Those were different times! I was very pleased with the curation by Apsara DiQuinzio and Tanya Zimbardo.

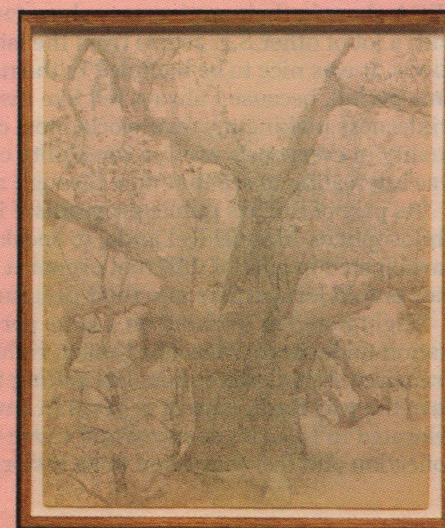
"The lead-up to the award was a bit awkward. The Bay Area is still a relatively small art community where most artists know or know of other artists, so it's strange to be in the running, so to speak, with your peers (and peers that you greatly respect!).

"I was happy, of course, to be exposed to a larger audience. I met a lot of people, some of whom were collectors who have supported my work over the years. To witness so many people enjoying my work was very different than, say, having a small show at a neighborhood bookstore. Both have their place and power, of course.

"What the award meant to me then, at a young age, was that it made museums less intimidating.

"I really like what the poet Ocean Vuong says about awards: "Get on, then get off at your stop and find your people. Don't live on the bus, and most importantly, don't get trapped on it."

Colter Jacobsen, "The Beekeeper, the Astronaut, the Pomo Dancer, the Mother and Child, the Reacher for the Light, Tom, Arabic Architecture, the UFO, Mushroom Family, Eyebrows, Face Skull, Mask" (2016), right, graphite on found paper.



Colter Jacobsen

Continues on page Q18

COVER STORY



Liz Hafalia / The Chronicle 2009

Artist Leslie Shows with pieces of her installation at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in 2009.

LESLIE SHOWS

(SECA AWARD, 2006)

"It was great to be recognized for what I was doing, after starting out in S.F. as an undergrad at SFAI [the San Francisco Art Institute], learning about artists like Jess, Bruce Conner and Jay DeFeo, going to shows at SFMOMA, and then later showing my work there. It was such a dream. Career moves were not my main motivator, and I didn't know about SECA before I was nominated for it in 2006, but once that process started, it made a lot of other opportunities possible. I really loved working with Janet Bishop, she is so supportive of artists.

"Later SFMOMA put the piece they bought from the SECA show in their anniversary show (2009), in a room with a lot of other S.F. artists from the late '90s and early 2000s. It was nice to be included in the narrative of that time period, because I always felt like I was out in the wilderness making my own world most of the time, but I saw a shared rough quality in everyone's work, a sensibility of using whatever was around, and it was interesting to see that time through an institutional lens.

"As part of SECA's public programs, I invited one of my favorite writers and philosophers, Manuel DeLanda, to speak there, which was really thrilling. I participated in a lot of different events at SFMOMA, and it's great how much they enfold local artists into their programming. I feel really proud to be part it.

"Right now I'm working on a large permanent artwork for the new subway station underneath Moscone Center, right near SFMOMA. It's through the San Francisco Arts Commission, but getting the SECA Award 100 percent helped pave the way for it. I spent 19 years in San Francisco, and maybe because I've relocated to L.A., it's so important to me that I have work in the museum's collection and feel connected to its history and to the city."



Leslie Shows, "Face B2" (2012), mixed media.

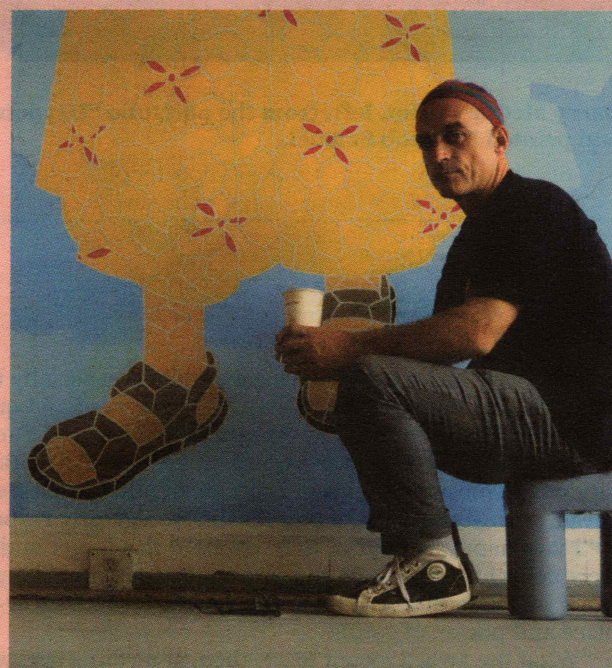
RIGO 23 (FORMERLY RIGO 98)

(SECA AWARD, 1998)

"Receiving the SECA Award was, literally, encouraging for me at the time. Though my relationship with SFMOMA was not a naive one — by 1998, Clarion Alley Mural Project had been going on for six years, dedicating itself to showcasing local artists' work outdoors. Many of them would later also receive SECA Awards. Earlier that same year, I had finished 'Sky/Ground' just across the street, and in 1994 'InnerCity Home,' which was dedicated at the same time SFMOMA's then-new building opened. So a discussion around the forces of gentrification and the role of mainstream art institutions in relationship to real estate speculation were concerns already present in my community and in my work.

"The invitation to exhibit at SFMOMA allowed me an incredible opportunity to articulate some of these concerns from the heart of the new St. Frank, which was then taking its first steps. It also exposed me, firsthand, to an intense level of professionalism, care and rigor from which one never stops learning.

"I guess, reflecting now, it reassured me that it was possible to exist in multiple worlds as a working artist. Granted, historically, that might be easier for someone who looks like me — but I've never been driven by a desire to surround myself with sameness."



Jessica Olthof / The Chronicle 2013

Rigo 23 works on a mural in his studio in San Francisco in 2013.