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San Francisco Chronicle

New Minnesota Street galleries boost SF art scene

By Charles Desmarais | March 17, 2016 | Updated: March 18, 2016 2:28pm

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With the highly anticipated opening of a new gallery complex at 1275 Minnesota St. in the Dogpatch neighborhood of San Francisco — just one element of a more ambitious effort known as the Minnesota Street Project — the battered economy of the Bay Area art scene gets a major boost.

Ten top-quality commercial galleries are opening there this week, ranging from the venerable Rena Bransten Gallery — pushed from its longtime perch on Geary Street by competition from richer technology businesses — to the art photography startup Casemore Kirkeby.

For now, we still have 49 Geary St., which houses broadly influential galleries like Fraenkel (an international player), Altman Siegel and Haines, among others. One expects that downtown will not continue to hold the visual art sway it once had (the



Photo: chris rollett

IMAGE 1 OF 6

In Owen Kydd's "Moth," a digital image of a moth moves above the still image of a man.

recently announced move of John Berggruen Gallery from the neighborhood is just the latest proof of that). At least for the time being, though, there are two great spots where a visit to a single complex can provide a day of worthwhile wandering and discovery.

I've been haunting the Minnesota

Street space since it was a raw

warehouse, shortly after it ended its days as a woodworking shop. I expect that things will change over time (chef Daniel Patterson will **open a restaurant there** this fall), but currently it houses 10 commercial galleries, an art studio-classroom operated by the nearly 50-year-old San Francisco Arts Education Project, and several gallery spaces that are available for short-term projects (the California College of the Arts is now

presenting part of its master's of fine arts thesis exhibition; in April, Christie's will hold an auction preview exhibition).

Before the art was moved in, I was concerned that some of the spaces would be too small to allow for substantial exhibitions. But the rise of the art fair has provided active gallerists everywhere with plenty of experience working in tight quarters, and on this first outing every one of the shows looks professional — no, terrific — and complete unto itself. The common atrium is hung with new works commissioned from Catherine Wagner — photographs of what she calls “ephemeral sculpture” and “archaeology in reverse,” as they document situations she found during the transformation from tired warehouse to gleaming marketplace.

Here are my brief thoughts on the shows in the permanent tenant galleries, with the caveat that some of the exhibitions were still being tweaked when I viewed them last, on the day the dealers all faced the hard stop of a VIP affair.

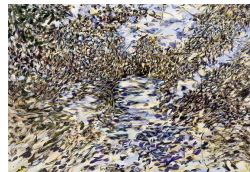
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Anglim Gilbert Gallery: Enrique Chagoya is, by far, the most prominent artist subject to a substantial presentation in any of the current Minnesota Street galleries. A professor of art at Stanford University, Chagoya has exhibited widely, and his work is included in the collections of major museums from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, to New York's Museum of Modern Art, to our own San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

The gallery's exhibition "Mindful Savage's Guide to Reverse Modernism" consists entirely of recent work that critiques — and has a good deal of fun with — the history of art as seen through a Eurocentric lens. It is now well known that the great Modernist

artists often drew upon what they saw as "primitive" models, from Picasso's use of African masks to Frank Lloyd Wright's freely quoted Mayan motifs. Here, a Henry

Moore reclining figure gets the head of a pre-Columbian (also reclining) Chacmool sculpture; an image of Joseph Beuys is reduced to only his famous hat, as a high tide rises to his eyebrows and engulfs symbols of Christianity and popular culture alike.



Photo: Anglim Gilbert Gallery, Courtesy The Artist

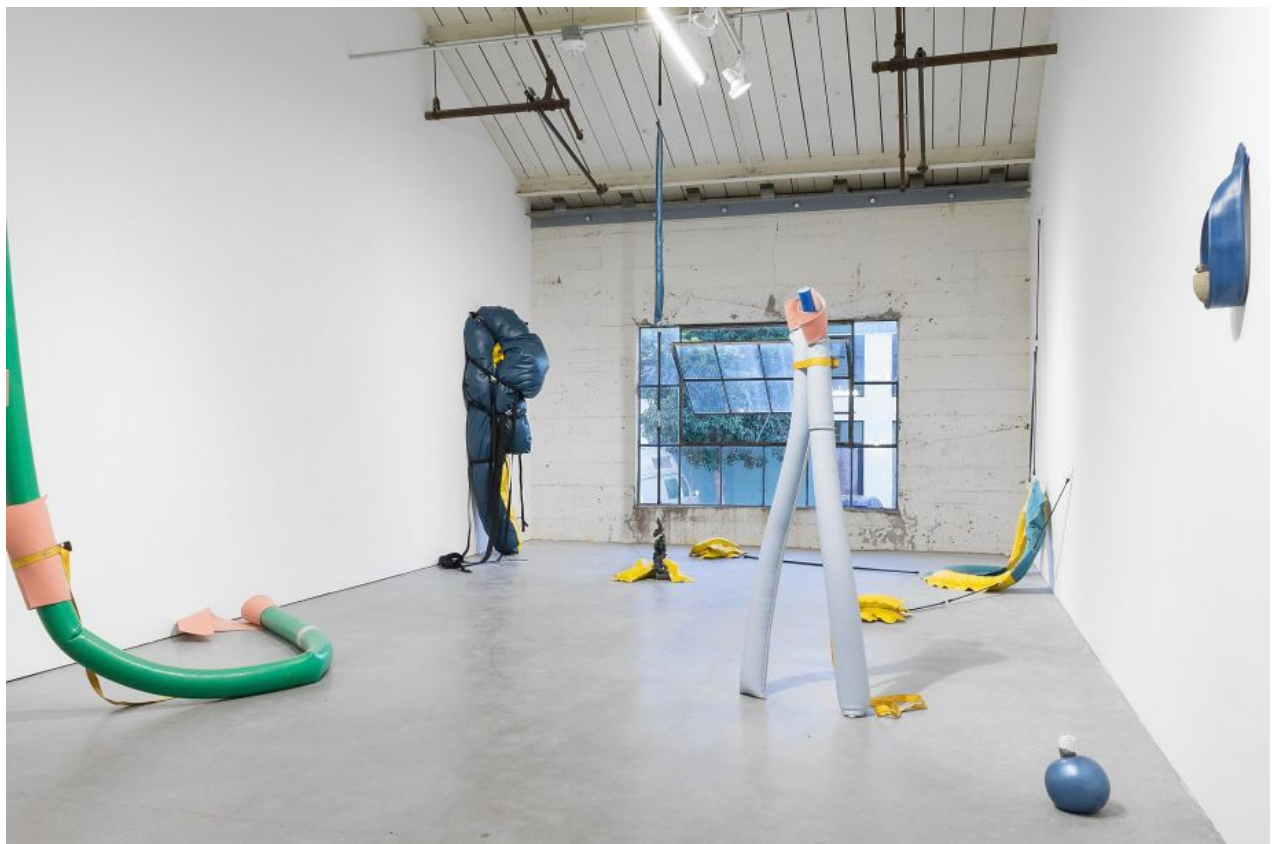


Photo: Chris Grunder, Courtesy The Artist, Bass And Reiner

Bass & Reiner: The freshest works in all of the 10 exhibitions appear — no surprise — in some of the youngest galleries. I'm most taken by the quirky, anthropomorphic

sculpture of May Wilson and Mie Horlyck Mogensen at this, the smallest space in the complex. (See also: the blanketed sound sculptures of Jacqueline Kiyomi Gordon, paired with labor-intensive but conceptually solid weaving by Margo Wolowiec, at Et al. etc.; and Owen Kydd's photo-video-photo confluents at Casemore Kirkeby.)

Hung from the high ceiling, leaning on the walls, balanced precariously on the floor, colorfully animated and vaguely figurative sculptures fashioned from industrial-strength materials (vinyl, rubber, lead) make up an oddly welcoming and lighthearted installation.



Photo: Owen Kydd, Casemore Kirkeby

Casemore Kirkeby: Canadian-born Owen Kydd, based in Los Angeles, has made a splash on the photography scene in recent years with barely cinematic videos — he calls them “durational photographs” — that read, at first, as still pictures. This new work incorporates large-scale photographs in black and white or limited-palette color. They purport to tell human stories but stop short of any comprehensible narrative, which would be frustrating if they weren’t so attractive.

One 6-foot-high still photo of a man in a gray hoodie and blue pants is pasted flat to the wall, giving a suggestion that we are seeing through, rather than at, the picture plane. Breaking that illusion, a box with a digital moving image of a moth in grays and blues is mounted atop the still picture. The push-pull relationships of insect and sweatshirt, black box and shadows, motion and stillness, flatness and volume are hypnotic.

Eleanor Harwood Gallery: Kirk Maxson’s exhibition “Gardens of Paradise” is the end point of a time-consuming process, and deeply heartfelt. Maxson appropriates photographs related to America’s two great military failures, the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, cutting them into multiple fragments in the shapes of leaves. These are laboriously pinned to the walls of the gallery in loose compositions that just barely allow us to reconstruct pieces of the original images in our minds.

The interplay between the tough photographic source and the prettiness of the leafy constellations is engaging, but for me, in the end, heavy-handed, and the wire-formed “phantom limbs” distributed around the room put me in mind of retail display technique.

Et al. etc.: If you have never walked through a dry cleaning store in Chinatown and down the back stairs to the basement, you have never visited the tiny art gallery with the outsize reputation, Et al. This, the new outpost, looks to be three times the size of the original, allowing the co-owners to try an unconventional system of inviting a guest gallery to share the space each exhibition period. Currently that temporary partner is Toronto’s Cooper Cole Gallery, which has mounted a lively installation by artists Bjorn Copeland and Georgia Dickie.

Et al. etc. is presenting Jacqueline Kiyomi Gordon and Margo Wolowiec, two artists who force the stereotype of textiles as women's work into a dead-end alley and pretty much beat it to death. Gordon drapes woozily colored sound blankets, ordinarily used to muffle industrial noise, over loudspeakers. I'm dying to share the results, but the work was not ready just hours before the opening — trust me, though, it's at least worth investigation. Wolowiec makes engaging weavings that have the presence of work by the great Modernist textile artist Anni Albers; painstakingly hand woven, with all the homely slubs and nubs that come with that process, they are designed based on photographs subjected to algorithmic distortion.



Photo: Courtesy Ever Gold Projects

Serge Attukwei Clottey, "American Lottery" (2015) at Ever Gold Projects

Ever Gold Projects: Colorful "paintings" composed of scraps of plastic water tanks and wired together into abstract designs have a powerful impact in this gallery's close

quarters. They are by Ghanaian artist Serge Attukwei Clottey and, along with small, masklike sculptures of the same material tacked to wooden scraps, they constitute his first West Coast show.

It's impossible to view these works without thinking of the larger, brighter and better-known assemblages of Nigerian artist El Anatsui, but Clottey has specific stories to tell, referencing slavery and opportunity. The show is titled "Kufuor Gallons," a reference to those water cans, so named to commemorate a devastating drought during the administration (2001-09) of John Kufuor. The Kufuor gallon can symbolizes the vast and polluting presence of plastic throughout the country, as well as the continuing challenge of obtaining clean water there.

Jack Fischer Gallery: The Spanish artist Javier Arce draws with felt-tip markers on Tyvek, a synthetic material that looks like paper but holds up to lots of abuse. And Arce puts his drawings to the test, bunching them up into balls and shipping them in plastic garbage bags from exhibition to exhibition (the shipping bags, lying on the gallery floor, are part of the current show).

The artist takes his imagery from photographs with unapparent political connections: Black Panther Huey Newton displaying his Bob Dylan album; the East Bay (here mistitled "Oakland") Dragons Motorcycle Club, a significant group of African American rebels, posing casually in front of Helen's Bar-B-Que; a portrait of Cathay Williams, an African American woman who posed as a man to fight as a soldier in the Civil War.

Nancy Toomey Fine Art: Of all the galleries opening at Minnesota Street, this is the only one to put its faith entirely in the abstract. "Gathering Light: Part One" presents the work of six artists, all but one from Los Angeles — a fact that matters because all the works draw upon the tradition of the Light and Space impulse that took hold in L.A. in the 1960s and '70s. Based on the effects of light on highly worked surfaces and high-tech materials, those earlier works — and their offspring today — were less art objects than instruments for the experience of an art beyond object.

The one old-school Light and Space artist in the current show, Larry Bell, is the least intriguing, as these works on paper just don't have the magic of his famous glass boxes that unpredictably reflected and refracted light and color. Lisa Bartleson's panels balance between there and not-there in the manner of Robert Irwin's great disks (though the gallery may have to further tweak the lighting to get that effect just right). The one San Franciscan, Gregg Renfrow, shows a work that makes us forget its acrylic support to concentrate on pure, poured color.



Photo: Courtesy The Artist, Rena Bransten Gallery

Dawoud Bey, "The Birmingham Project: Braxton McKinney and Lavon Thomas" (2012).

Rena Bransten Gallery: Who doesn't love Rena Bransten, both for her frank but warm personal qualities and for helping to sustain Bay Area art and artists since she founded her gallery in 1974? It must be said, though, that the display, while a well-presented survey of many of the artists the gallery has represented over the years, takes on far too broad a subject to really qualify as a thematic exhibition. "These

American Lives,” the exhibition, touches upon political issues, from racial inequity to immigration to surveillance to violence against women, without the depth that many of the artists have brought to their larger bodies of work.

A one-person introduction to the odd and colorful ceramics and screen-painted “tablecloths” of Jeffry Mitchell is more cohesive and less ambitious. Social criticism is the through line of the larger show (Lava Thomas shows a tough memorial to the nine people killed in last year’s Charleston church shooting, incongruously composed of black tambourines, across the room from Dawoud Bey’s photographic commemoration of the 1963 church bombing in Birmingham, Ala.). Mitchell revels, with little irony, in childlike themes.



Photo: Courtesy The Artist, Themes + Projects

Arno Elias' "Simba 3" (2015).

Themes + Projects: The former Modernbook Gallery presents painted photographs of wild animals and exotic settings by the French artist Arno Elias. The monochromatic photos are (rather gratuitously, I think) touched up and splashed with paint, and embellished — the gallery's word — with diamond dust, and gold and silver leaf.

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

Minnesota Street Project comprises 10 independent galleries, as well as the San Francisco Arts Education Project and, beginning this summer, a restaurant. Galleries will generally be open 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays; call or consult the gallery websites directly for details. Minnesota Street Project, 1275 Minnesota St., S.F. (415) 243-0825. www.minnesotastreetproject.com

Casemore Kirkeby (415) 290-9833. www.casemorekirkeby.com

Ever Gold Projects (415) 254-1573. www.sfaq.us/ever-gold-projects

Et al. etc. (415) 269-4873. www.etaletc.com

Themes + Projects (415) 732-0300. www.themesandprojects.com

Nancy Toomey Fine Art (415) 307-9038. www.nancytoomeyfineart.com

Bass & Reiner (206) 265-2928. www.bassandreiner.com

Jack Fischer Gallery (415) 522-1178. www.jackfischergallery.com

Anglim Gilbert Gallery (415) 433-2710. www.anglimgilbertgallery.com

Eleanor Harwood Gallery (415) 282-4248. www.eleanorharwood.com

Rena Bransten Gallery (415) 982-3292. www.renabranstengallery.com



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