



MUSEUM OF ART

Life Clusters

Oct. 7 - Nov. 26, 1997

Museum Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 11-4; Tuesday evening 6-8; Saturday 11-2.
Open to tour groups by appointment.

Reception: Thursday, October 23, 6-8, reception with discussion and artist presentation

Life Clusters is an exhibition focusing on artwork in relation to art organizations. The artwork (painting, photography, sculpture and installations) was created by artists connected with the Women's Caucus for Art (WCA) and its South Bay Chapter (SBC-WCA), the organization YLEM which connects art, science, and technology, and the small organization Folsom Street Interchange, located in San Francisco's Mission District.

As life clusters along a river bank, artists cluster to feed body and soul. Forming small, informal alliances or large organizations, they seek ways to show their work, to attend to practicalities of artmaking, but most importantly to make connections and to exchange ideas that affect their growth and their art. These organizations are often based on some commonality, such as same ethnicity, same gender, same art medium, or geographic proximity. *Life Clusters* looks at some of the connections between art, artists, and art organizations, and it brings artists from several art organizations together in a show and a discussion time to see if such introductions to one another might be fruitful.

In developing the show, it became apparent that the artists belonged to additional organizations. Some of these will be cited as well, particularly the small, emerging ones, as they enlarge our understanding of the intellectual, emotional, and support networks and communities artists create in tandem with their art.

Women's Caucus for Art: South Bay Chapter and National

The WCA has been a national support network for women in the arts for twenty-five years. Membership is around 200 for the South Bay Chapter, which develops exhibition opportunities, offers workshops, and produces a newsletter and a journal of art criticism called (*detail*).

Nancy Tector has served as Programs/Exhibits Director of the SBC-WCA this past year. Many of her paintings relate to issues of women and aging. One series contains portraits of older adults with overlaid words used

to “put people into boxes,” starting with the name they were given at birth, followed by their gender, and then various adjectives, “labels put on us.” The works on exhibit form a sort of totem for Tector’s immediate family.

Nina Koepcke exhibits a Russian fairy tale series, which grew from interest in her family’s Latvian and Southern Ukrainian roots. “The characters reflect our human strengths and weaknesses, foibles and yearnings...[they] often seek solace and counsel from the other creatures of the earth, sea, and sky.” Built of ceramic, the pieces refer to Baba Yaga or the underlying rhythms of Great Mother Earth. “Baba Yaga remains the great teacher. She is our storyteller, our listener, and our subject.” Koepcke has been an active SBC-WCA member, working under its umbrella with fellow member, Lois Stewart, in forming LifeLines, a project with artists and poets in connection with the Cancer Support and Education Center of Menlo Park.

Yeung Ha’s monotypes include maps and various collaged elements. The maps refer to her first flight at age thirteen from Korea to San Francisco and to her subsequent life’s journey. The images have much to do with identity and bi-culturalism, “the mashing and clashing of two cultures — East and West.” She incorporates bits of poems, Chinese proverbs, and random words and thoughts. Ha has also been active locally in curating exhibitions of others with work similar to hers, such as *The PRINTed Poem*, and is curating an exhibition of fellow SBC-WCA members.

Artists of the South Bay have also been involved in the national Women’s Caucus for Art. Flo Oy Wong as part of the national board worked to expand the scope and diversify the membership of the Caucus and was instrumental in development of the WCA Women of Color in Art Slide Resource Series. Bay Area women, not necessarily members, are reasonably well represented in these slide packets for educators. We exhibit the work of several: Stephanie Anne Johnson, Bernice Bing, and Elizabeth Gómez.

Stephanie Anne Johnson’s installation *If This Be Death* explores our understanding of death and relationships. Using slide projectors, video monitors, and objects such as butterflies, milagros, and hospital gowns, it was conceived partly in tribute to two of her friends/colleagues in the arts who had died — one from AIDS, the other from breast cancer. The work is a focus of the show because it honors others in the arts and offers a basic reasoning for why we form these alliances (formal and informal) as inspiration, challenge, and affirmation: “I see wisdom and solace from those who have gone before me.” Johnson has a multidisciplinary career in the visual arts and theater, with affiliations with organizations in the theater world (International Associations of Lighting Designers and Theatrical and Stage Employees) and the art world (Affiliate Artist for Headlands Center for the Arts). The work was originally commissioned by the Richmond Art Center; the title was based on a poem by her mother, who was also in theater.

Bernice Bing exhibits one of her characteristically large (6'x8') abstract paintings, *Cosmic Gap #2*. A native San Franciscan of Chinese heritage, she spent the fall and winter of 1984-85 traveling in Korea, Japan, and China, presenting lectures on Abstract Expressionism and studying Chinese calligraphy. The latter has inspired the unification of Eastern and Western ideologies in her recent abstract paintings. Bing was instrumental in the establishment of South of Market (SOMAR) Cultural Center in San Francisco, and served over two decades in the development of community arts programs. Recently she received a national tribute from the WCA, their Visual Arts Honor Award.

Elizabeth Gómez’s paintings focus on women and animals, and often refer to our human natures as both hunter and hunted, and coming to terms with the “natural self.” Sometimes playful, always thoughtful, her works include *Vegetarian Lions* and *Vegetarian Tiger*. A sequential portrait of two sisters is simply called *Hair Growth*. Gómez was part of the group La Unión Esa when a student at the San Francisco Art Institute; that

group had diverse membership and focused on exhibiting their art and on exploring Latino/a issues. She has participated in the (Re)Generation Project through the Galeria de la Raza, a program for emerging Latino/a artists that has involved several other artists in this exhibition. Gómez recently wrote an article entitled “Western Bias for Latin American Fantastic Art” for the SBC-WCA newsletter (*detail*).

YLEM

YLEM is an international organization of artists, scientists, educators, and others who explore the intersection of the art, science, and technology. Founded and based in the Bay Area, YLEM has a newsletter and Website, and organizes six forums a year at the Exploratorium in San Francisco. Artist Trudy Myrrh Reagan of Palo Alto was the founder.

Barbara Plowman produces photography with a scanning electron microscope: “a rebel in my field of electron microscopy for having gone to art school.” Plowman’s portrayal of the microworld is “both personal and deals with the unknown.” The interior of salted popcorn resembles strange caverns; the seeds on a bagel become a boulder strewn landscape. Plowman captures serenity, mystery, and beauty in the micro-landscapes around us. Plowman enjoys YLEM (“I was isolated for so long”) and is serving YLEM as Secretary of the Board.

Sonya Rapoport’s approach employs psychology, mythology, science, religion, and other disciplines. Her *The Transgenic Bagel*, an interactive computer artwork, is a parody on the recombinant gene splicing theme. It assumes that Noah’s Ark, an early experiment in gene technology, comprised the first gene pool. Each animal residing in this virtual ark had a trait gene in its Noahsomal DNA that could be implanted into a human. Participants play a slot machine to win a character trait excised from one of the animals. The participant acquires this character trait when a genetically engineered plasmid bagel is consumed. Rapoport has been a longtime YLEM member and hosts mailing parties for the newsletter at her Berkeley home.

Kit Monroe Pravda works with fragments of images which she combines and manipulates, often with translucent overlays, by way of Adobe Photoshop. She enjoys wild colors and a sense of movement. The images themselves may be distinctly not high tech — coming from photographs she has taken in nature or at dump sites: abandoned toys, machines, vehicles. Pravda has helped YLEM with exhibitions, served as technical computer consultant, and been an unofficial link to the CADRE Institute at San Jose State University.

Folsom Street Interchange

Folsom Street Interchange is a not-for-profit, neighborhood art space which provides an exhibiting and educational venue for the immediate Mission District neighborhood and for emerging artists of color from the Bay Area. A bridge between cultures, it engages audiences in an exchange of ideas where cultural references are respected and enriched. Storefront window exhibits have explored the experiences of immigrants, Native people, and youth. Programming includes arts education and a literacy program for young Latinas from the local YWCA. Founders and directors are Eugene Rodriguez and Pamela Shields.

Eugene Rodriguez’s *The Good Life* — *Live It* speaks of cultural loss, “what is lost when everything is an advertisement, a billboard.” A small gold-lined bag, as used for fancy chocolates, has an image outside of a farm worker in the strawberry fields; inside is some dirt and a strawberry. The works on exhibit relate to his family, the lives of farmworkers, his relationship with his father. A larger mixed-media work, *Father and Son* — *Uniformity and Conformity* is drawn from his youth: a sequence of boxed-in baby pictures, with a stoop-shouldered, lonely image of his father. Rodriguez: “Pamela and I founded our space [Folsom Street Interchange] because we saw ourselves as social advocates, educators, community activists, and this was not focused on in

graduate school. Our definition of art was more expansive.”

Pamela Shields has gone through the photo archives of the Smithsonian’s Museum of the American Indian and chosen photographs from the Kanai (Blackfoot confederacy, Blood Band); via computer, she has layered them with contemporary images, creating dye sublimation prints or Iris prints. “I am making a connection with contemporary life and the old days. We are still here.” An earlier work, *Footprints*, is a box containing the soles of a pair of mocassins. “One image is my brother on top of a horse — a little Indian boy dressed as a cowboy. The second is my great aunt’s tipi. She is Motoki, a leader in the Sun Dance ceremony.”

To/Gather is a portrait of artist **Al Lujan** with his partner. It is based on a photograph taken last year at Day of the Dead, has the orange glow of marigolds symbolic of this Mexican time of commemoration, and is a “big Valentine.” Another self-portrait is based on his view of himself when he was sixteen — with severed arms, alluding to the family pressure he felt to be practical and not be an artist. Lujan has exhibited at Folsom Street Interchange, created a Day of the Dead altar, and curated readings there. He serves on the advisory board of the Galeria de la Raza’s (Re)Generation Project, which helps emerging artists and opens dialog between older and younger artists.

Olivia Armas: “I see a great need for documenting our past — not only as Chicanos but as world citizens.” The installation *Tapestry de Tonanzin* (section) pertains to the origins of spiritual rituals. A version was shown as part of the window exhibitions at Folsom Street Interchange. “The colorful tradition of offering flowers to the Virgin Mary during May originates from ancient pagan spring festivals in honor of the fertility goddesses... As cultural mestizaje continues to spread, we will find ourselves acknowledging the wholeness of ourselves in traditions with shared cultural origins.” Armas works with the (Re)Generation Project through the Galeria de la Raza and works with other small art organizations in the Mission District.

The exhibition was developed by Jan Rindfleisch with Flo Oy Wong, Nancy Tector, Trudy Myrrh Reagan, and Eugene Rodriguez. During the reception, a period of artist presentation and discussion will look at some of the reasons artists join or do not join in organizations, what sorts of alliances artists seek, what sorts of outreach are sought by the organizations, and whether bringing several local organizations together might be impetus for the artists or the organizations.

Exhibition in conjunction with *Life Clusters: Honoring One Another*, curated by the Euphrat Museum of Art, presented at the Sunnyvale Creative Arts Center Gallery, Sunnyvale, October 24 - December 13, 1997.

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