

Mary Bucci McCoy

Bay Area Vibe

My art viewing is generally focused on staying abreast of what is happening in the art world, looking at work that feeds or is related to my own studio practice, and exploring potential exhibition spaces. When I travel, questions of place overlay this agenda. On a recent trip to the Bay Area, which in the past has been



Wang Du, *Defile*, 2004. On view at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Image courtesy of Galerie Laurent Godin, Paris.

identified with a variety of art movements ranging from the Bay Area figurists to California abstract expressionism to California craft, I was curious to see if I would be able to distill, from the cross-section of exhibition spaces I visited, some kind of contemporary regional essence.

The Oakland Museum of California focuses on the state's history, natural history, and art history. The art is arranged chronologically beginning with the 1800s, giving an overview of California art and movements through artists such as Richard Diebenkorn, Sam Francis, Elmer Bischoff, and Dorothea Lange; craftspeople such as Garry Knox Bennett, Peter Voulkos, and Robert Arneson; and artists from elsewhere who worked in California, such as Eadweard Muybridge and Albert Bierstadt. On this visit a rotating exhibition gallery housed the first show of works on paper by L.A.-based, Cuban-born painter, sculptor, photographer, poet, and writer Enrique Martínez Celaya. The selection of approximately twenty works revealed paper as a material particularly suited to Martínez Celaya's meditations on the fluid and transient nature of time, memory, and the self.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is more nationally and internationally grounded. In recent years its curators have collected aggressively, choosing to devote over half of the exhibition space to the permanent collection of painting and sculpture, architecture, design, media arts, and photography. One of their most recent acquisitions, Danish-born Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson's interactive 15-foot steel piece, *Multiple Grotto*, was prominently displayed and thus received a lot of attention from museum-goers. This was also my first opportunity to see another relatively recent acquisition: Colombian artist Doris Salcedo's powerful *Atrabiliarios (Defiant)*, a room-size installation of wall niches holding the shoes of women claimed by violence in their native Columbia. The front of each niche is covered with a translucent sheet of cow bladder sewn with surgical thread, so that while the shoes are close at hand, our view of them is obscured. On the floor are piles of small, empty boxes also made from cow bladder and surgical thread.

Oakland Museum of California – www.museumca.org
 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art – www.sfmoma.org
 Yerba Buena Center for the Arts – www.ybca.org
 Don Soker Contemporary Art Gallery – www.donsokergallery.com
 Rena Bransten Gallery – www.renabranstengallery.com
 Gregory Lind Gallery – www.gregorylindgallery.com
 Brian Gross Fine Art – www.briangrossfineart.com

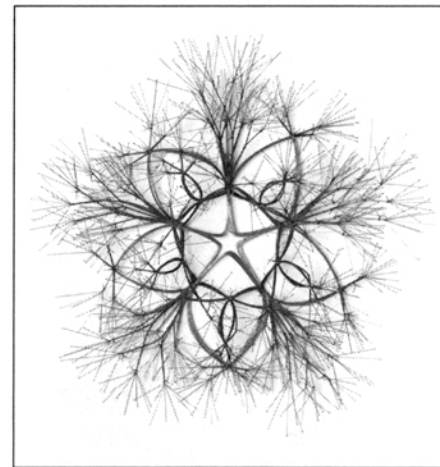
Mary Bucci McCoy is an artist, writer, and designer based in Beverly, MA. She recently exhibited her works on mdf and paper in *Mary Bucci McCoy: Oblique Perspectives* at Montserrat College of Art.

Two solid retrospectives organized in collaboration with the Walker Art Center—*Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980–2005* and *Chuck Close: Self-Portraits 1967–2005*—were juxtaposed with an exhibit of new work by Kenyan-born, New York-based artist Wangechi Mutu, *The Chief's Lair's a Holy Mess*. Mutu's installation of attenuated chairs and wine bottles dripping red wine is set off both by her complex collaged images of women and by red-pigmented gouges in the surface of the gallery walls. Her work is at once raw and refined, and its resonance was unexpected: Mutu's precisely arranged collages related to Close's work, with the whole dissolving into pieces on closer inspection, and red wine dripping from bottles onto the gallery floor through holes in the chair seats shared the visceral quality of Smith's earlier work.

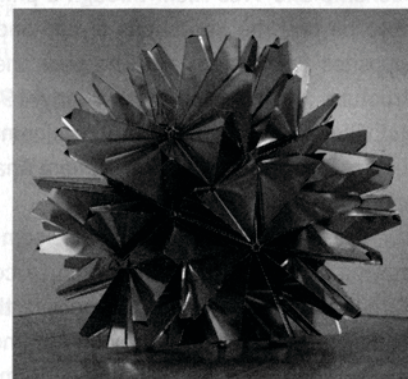
The Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, one of the most established alternative spaces in the city, presents visual arts within a larger cultural continuum that includes performing arts, film, and video programming, with a focus on challenging work by young and/or emerging artists. An exhibit in the *Risk and Response* series, which looks at issues of art and healing through the work of international artists, consisted of two installations by British artist Cornelia Parker: *Mass (Colder Darker Matter)* (1997), made from charred wood retrieved from a white Baptist church in Texas destroyed by lightning, and the brand-new *Anti-Mass*, made from the charred remains of a Southern black Baptist church in Kentucky destroyed by arson. Taken together, the two pieces examine the nature of violence in light of the law of conservation of matter. As part of the *Future Shock* series, *Recent Work by Wang Du* was the first solo exhibit in the United States for the Paris-based, Chinese-born artist. His large-scale, in-your-face installation examines issues of consumption, waste, and mass media.

With more than twenty galleries in two buildings, Geary Street has one of the major concentrations of galleries in the city. (But as I was visiting on the Tuesday before a "First Thursday" opening night, a number of galleries were closed for installation.) Gallery group shows can be a reason to skip a visit to a familiar hometown venue, but in another city they can be a welcome way to get an instant read on a gallery: the Don Soker Contemporary Art Gallery, for instance, specializing in reductive work by Northern California, Japanese, and European artists, presented a particularly strong, unified showing. There were also some memorable solo exhibits. *Ruth Asawa: Knit Together* showed both delicate, lyrical wire sculptures and works on paper by the nationally known San Francisco artist at Rena Bransten Gallery; also at Rena Bransten, the throbbing colors and morphing forms of New York artist Paul Henry Ramirez's exhibit *Frothy. Flirty. Feely.*, containing paintings and signature paint pours, were a direct contrast to Asawa's understated work. San Francisco artist Chris Corales showed compelling small-scale found material collages at Gregory Lind Gallery. And rich, obsessively patterned ink drawings by San Francisco-born, D.C.-based Andrea Way at Brian Gross Fine Art were mesmerizing. San Francisco

(continued on page 55)



Ruth Asawa, *Untitled (Wall Mounted, Tied Wire, Open-Center, Five-Branched Form Based on Nature)*, stainless steel wire tipped with resin, 33 x 33 x 13", mid 1960s. Courtesy the artist and Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco.



Olafur Eliasson, *Multiple Grotto*, 2004. Collection SFMOMA, Accessions Committee Fund purchase. ©Olafur Eliasson.

Report from San Francisco (continued from page 7)

book artist Emily McVarish's exhibit at 871 Fine Arts was an engrossing showing of the intimate, refined pages of her letterpress book, *Flicker*, spread across one long gallery wall, and her *Be Still* series of letterpress prints on the other. McVarish takes San Francisco and the ephemerality of life as her subject matter, and it is perhaps in her elegant work—out of everything in the cosmopolitan, vibrantly eclectic mix of work by regional, national, and international artists that I saw—that I surprisingly found the most grounded and evocative portrayal of San Francisco's emotional core. ■