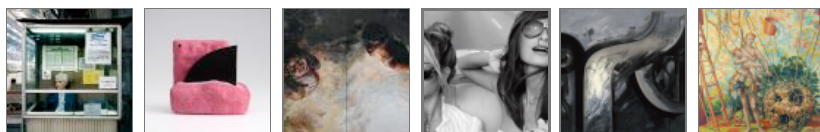


7x7SF

Art to Watch: September Gallery Guide



"Gisele and Rachel going for a spin on the Malecon" by Michael Dweck, 2009. Courtesy of Modernism, Inc.



While San Francisco's contemporary art scene is downright quaint compared to the likes of, say, Manhattan's, this weekend's sea of downtown gallery openings was testimony to how vibrant and overwhelming the art world can be, even in a dusty frontier town like ours.

Now the wine and cheese (or, if you're Catharine Clark Gallery, tacos) are back in the fridge, but the art will remain quietly on display for at least a month longer. After wading through a lot of it, we've come up with a perfectly manageable selection of what is truly worth seeing this September.

"Hamilltoe – new sculptures & drawings" and "Train Stations & Night" at Rena Bransten Gallery

Ron Nagle lines the walls of one room with shapeless yet strangely evocative little sculptures – what looks like artifacts from an imaginatively colored, surrealist other world. Make sure to check out his preliminary sketches, simply drawn on lined paper. They raise the somewhat disturbing question – what would your doodles look like, if they were to take physical form?

German artist Matthias Hoch depicts the hard lines and angular fixtures of public spaces – train stations, phone booths, etc. – at that time of day when their yellow artificial lighting begins to cast its glow. Think of his approach next time you're on BART.

"Hamilltoe" and "Train Stations & Night" run through Sat. 10/15 at Rena Bransten Gallery, 77 Geary St., 415-982-3292, renabranstengallery.com

"Gale Antokal - Some Drawings" and "Some Painting, Sculpture and Drawings" at Patricia Sweetow Gallery

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In one room hang remarkably sad, quiet sketches by Gale Antokal – hazy silhouettes and fading figures, whispered onto canvases through impossibly delicate chalk work. Compare this iciness to the gallery's other room, a boisterous collection of eight distinctive visual and sculptural voices. Artists David Huffman and Jamie Vasta blast their already strikingly colored canvases with glitter. Why? Vasta had an explanation for me: the stuff turns her dark portrayal of sirens (seductive bird-women who lure sailors to their deaths, if you're not up on your Greek mythology) from static to cinematic, drawing the viewer's bedazzled eye places it might not otherwise have gone. Girlish, yet predatory.

"Gale Antokal – Some Drawings" and "Some Painting, Sculpture and Drawings" run through Sat. 10/15 at Patricia Sweetow Gallery, 77 Geary St., 415-788-5126, patriciasweetowgallery.com

"Habana Libre" at Modernism, Inc.

Easily one of the more provocative exhibitions of the mix, Michael Dweck's "Habana Libre," a photography exhibition accompanying a book by the same title, drops a compelling opening hook:

"Cuba has a secret; one that has never been photographed, never reported in Western media, and never acknowledged openly within Cuba itself."

Until this exhibition, that is. Cuba's secret is a glamorous, even privileged slice of its supposedly classless society – an exclusive world of fashionable socialites, successful artists and cultural dynamism. Certainly not the image of dilapidated façades and '50s clunkers that usually comes to mind. Make no mistake: if Dweck's accompanying book unearths a social phenomenon, this exhibition is overwhelmingly interested in unearthing something else – the female form.

"Habana Libre" runs through Sat. 10/29 at Modernism Inc., 685 Market St., Suite 290, 415-541-0461, modernisminc.com

"DeFeo" at Hosfelt Gallery

"DeFeo" marks the first West Coast exhibition of this once overlooked, now massively acclaimed San Francisco native in fifteen years – a rare opportunity, not to be missed. The gallery has rounded up a sizable array of Jay DeFeo's work from the time between the completion of her legendary one-ton painting "The Rose" and her death in 1989. Rendered almost entirely in black and white, DeFeo's high-velocity spirals, abstracted geometric forms and stunning light-dark contrasts from this period leave color seeming utterly superfluous. As with many of the 20th century greats, her obsessive meditations upon light and form take on an unmistakably spiritual quality.

"DEFEO" runs through Sat. 10/22 at Hosfelt Gallery, 430 Clementina St., 415-495-5454, hosfeltgallery.com

"Boy, O Boy II" at Catharine Clark Gallery

Julie Heffernan, the artist featured in this solo show, has a style truly all her own. In a refreshing break from the minimal, the obscure and the abstract that tend to reign in contemporary art, her massive, sprawling canvases are colorful cornucopias of narrative, symbolism, humor and wit – all within reach, executed gorgeously in a classical style. The logic in these mad, Where's Waldo-esque jungles of imagery is, to say the least, not exactly self-evident. However, Heffernan's canvases provide more than enough material for the viewer to extract rich, touching, and hilarious narratives of his or her own.

"Boy, O Boy II" runs through Sat. 10/29 at Catharine Clark Gallery, 150 Minna St., Ground Floor, 415-399-1439, cclarkgallery.com

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