

MORGAN LEHMAN

534 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011



Wild, wonderful ‘Way Bay’ at BAMPFA puts local art in spotlight



The Miles Brothers' "A Trip Down Market Street" was filmed in 1906. (Courtesy Rick Prelinger)

By Leslie Katz on January 28

“Way Bay,” an expansive new exhibition at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive of locally themed works, is fascinating, provocative, historical, eye-opening, even thrilling.

BAMPFA Director Lawrence Rinder, the show’s chief curator, aptly calls it “a love letter to the collection, to the Bay Area, and all of the artists involved.”

Nearly 200 works — paintings, photographs, sculpture, mixed media and film — are appealingly arranged in a loose, almost sentimental format. A line from a poem painted on each wall evokes a feeling that unites the art works on and around it. Most are interpretative and free-form.

For example, on the wall that reads “seconds before sleep seem all tangled up,” a 2017 poem by Steffi Drewes, is the 1963 oil painting “Studio Wall” by Richard Diebenkorn, a picture of the famed figurative artist’s studio on Adeline Street in Berkeley.

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Grouped near it are Henry Alexander's 1886 oil of an interior, "Teete's House," as well as Laurie Reid's colorful 2016 abstract "Up the stairs into the warm night." "The Bed," a funny 1968 short film by James Broughton, in which Bay Area artists including photographer Imogen Cunningham, philosopher Alan Watts and members of Anna Halprin's groundbreaking dance troupe are seen frolicking in a bed in a meadow on Mount Tamalpais, also is in the mix.

The exhibit is filled with fascinating short, mostly silent, films, with an emphasis on experimental works by local artists, according to BAMPFA Film Curator Kathy Geritz.

Ernie Gehr's 1991 "Side/Walk/Shuttle," filmed from a slowly moving glass elevator in the St. Francis hotel in San Francisco, provides a meditative, mesmerizing view from above of surrounding streets and buildings.



Laurie Reid's painting "Up the stairs into the warm night." (Courtesy BAMPFA)

In contrast is the rare 1906 film by the Miles Brothers, "A Trip Down Market Street," offering a historic early 20th century view of the thoroughfare, shot on a camera mounted on a cable car.

A wild 1924 film created by the Oakland Tribune is the depiction of a submission by an Oakland woman who won a newspaper-sponsored contest asking readers to describe their dreams.

While many of the works are by famous artists, Rinder points to lesser known contributors to the exhibition, whose works were purchased to fill in gaps in the collection (Berkeley native Joe Overstreet's colorful untitled watercolor is an interpretation of a 1920 flag designed to

promote pan-Africanism) or were "gems" found deep in storage ("CXXXV," an acrylic on canvas by James McCray, a Modernist who taught at UC Berkeley from 1947-85).

An attempt was made to include contributions from people of color and women: UC Berkeley Professor of Art Katherine Sherwood's 2000 mixed media on canvas "Sallos II" makes a bold statement.

The show also includes plentiful historical pieces, from an anonymous undated Ohlone basket made by the region's first inhabitants, to 19th century oils on wood panel by landscape painter Thomas Hill.

A meaty complement to the almost overwhelming show — it's worthy of multiple visits — is an "interactive postcard project" in which poems by local writers are free to take from trays mounted on a wall; BAMPFA staffer David Wilson said 92,000 pieces of paper passed through the museum's Risograph printer to create the display.

Among the nearly two dozen community programs slated during the exhibit's run through June 3 is a Riso printing session on March 4.

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IF YOU GO

Way Bay

Where: Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2155 Center St., Berkeley

When: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sundays, Wednesdays–Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Fridays–Saturdays; through June 3

Admission: \$11 to \$13; free for ages 18 and under

Contact: (510) 642-0808, bampfa.org