MCAM ANNOUNCES 2013 SUMMER EXHIBITION

West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965-1977


In the heady and hallucinogenic days of the 1960s and ’70s, a diverse range of artists and creative individuals based in the American West—from the Pacific coast to the Rocky Mountains and the Southwest—broke the barriers between art and lifestyle and embraced the new, hybrid sensibilities of the countercultural movement. West of Center illuminates the unique works of these individuals through videos, photographs, drawings, ephemera, and other original and re-created objects and environments.

The countercultural movement has typically been associated with psychedelic art, but West of Center presents psychedelia as only one dimension of the larger, artistically oriented, socially
based phenomenon. The wider integration of art practices, political action and collaborative life activities is foundational for so much contemporary art and culture.

*West of Center*, organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver, brings together a range of projects by groups and individuals including the Ant Farm Collective, San Francisco’s extravagant theater groups the Cockettes and the Angels of Light, former Black Panther Emory Douglas, Drop City commune in southern Colorado, modern dancer Anna Halprin, light show producers Single Wing Turquoise Bird, and the Womyn’s Lands of Southern Oregon.

The exhibition will also feature a re-creation of the legendary *Ultimate Painting* (1966), a spinning circular canvas made for Drop City’s Theatre Dome. Lost after its exhibition in Experiments in Art and Technology at the Brooklyn Museum in 1969, this work has been recreated in 2011 by Clark Richert, one of its original makers.

*West of Center* is co-curated by Elissa Auther, Associate Professor of Contemporary Art at the University of Colorado, and Adam Lerner, Director and Chief Animator of the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver.

*West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965-1977* is organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver.

This exhibition is supported, in part, with funds provided by the Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF) and the National Endowment for the Arts.


**PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

(Visit [http://mcam.mills.edu](http://mcam.mills.edu) for full details.)

**Opening Reception**

Wednesday, June 12, 2013
6:00-8:00 pm, Mills College Art Museum
Free shuttle service provided from MacArthur Bart station. Shuttles depart for MCAM on the half hour at 5:30pm, 6:30pm and 7:30pm.

Join MCAM and the exhibiting artists for the opening reception of *West of Center* and *Cockette Chaos! A Total Extravaganza*, a special performance and fashion show produced by Cockettes Fayette Hauser and Rumi Missabu. Refreshments provided.

**West of Center Screening: The Cockettes**

*PALACE* (1971) Directed by Syd Dutton and Scott Runyon, 23 min
*ELEVATOR GIRLS IN BONDAGE* (1972) Directed by Michal Kalmen, 57 min

Wednesday, June 26, 2013
7:00 pm, Danforth Lecture Hall, Mills College

Screening followed by a Q&A with original Cockettes, Fayette Hauser and Rumi Missabu.
West of Center Screening: Drop City
*DROP CITY* (2012) Directed by Joan Grossman, 82 min
Wednesday, July 10, 2013
7:00 pm, Danforth Lecture Hall, Mills College

West of Center Screening: Ant Farm
*Space, Land and Time: Underground Adventures with ANT FARM* (2011) Directed by Elizabeth Federici and Laura Harrison
Wednesday, July 24, 2013
7:00 pm, Danforth Lecture Hall, Mills College

Screening followed by a Q&A with original Ant Farm members, Chip Lord and Curtis Schreier.

West of Center Closing Reception
Wednesday, August 28, 2013
6:00-8:00 pm, Mills College Art Museum

West of Center Screening: Anna Halprin
*BREATH MADE VISIBLE* (2009) Director Ruedi Gerber, 82 min
Friday, August 30, 2013
7:00 pm, Danforth Lecture Hall, Mills College

Followed by a Q&A with Anna Halprin

Body Dances with Anna Halprin
Saturday, August 31, 2013
2:00-4:00 pm, Rothwell Center, Mills College
$10 (Free for Mills College students, faculty and staff)
Register now. 510.340.2164

Anna Halprin’s unique approach to dance highlights the feedback process between feelings, images, and sensations that naturally take place in a movement experience. Instead of teaching a particular dance technique, Halprin teaches and encourages students to find their unique style in movement and dance.

ABOUT THE MILLS COLLEGE ART MUSEUM

Founded in 1925, The Mills College Art Museum is a forum for exploring art and ideas and a laboratory for contemporary art practices. Through innovative exhibitions, programs, and collections, the museum engages and inspires the intellectual and creative life of the Mills community as well as the diverse audiences of the Bay Area and beyond. The Mills College Art Museum is located at 5000 MacArthur Boulevard, Oakland, CA 94613. Museum hours are Tuesday-Sunday, 11:00–4:00 pm and Wednesday, 11:00–7:30 pm. Admission is free for all exhibitions and programs unless noted. For more information, visit mcam.mills.edu

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Sacramento on a warm June afternoon embodies the city's position as a capital of California ethos. It may not be an art center, but it's a place where idiosyncratic, perhaps crackpot ideas take shape and blossom on sun-heated expanses of fertile flat land, (i.e. affordable studios). There's space enough for thinking to grow, and for dreams to be realized outside the spotlight. I was there sifting through a range of national submissions for the August juried show at Axis Gallery, an artist co-op that affirms some ideas about community spirit. Some of the most impressive art I saw came from distant states — Iowa! Hawaii! — making me consider that there are options for creative freedom outside of increasingly expensive urban environments like San Francisco.

More frequently, artists in SF are bemoaning the construction crane shifts that are reshaping creative, countercultural enclaves into gleaming, LEED-certified (http://www.usgbc.org/leed) condo towers and gastropubs. This urban evolution is complex, driven by public policy, which doesn't often prioritize the history and future of creative culture.
That afternoon in Sacramento, I visited the Crocker Art Museum, a metaphorically apt but experientially awkward conglomeration of historic Victorian and corporate-contemporary architecture, where the current exhibition concerns a generation of San Francisco bohemians. An Opening of the Field: Jess, Robert Duncan, and Their Circle is an abundant collection of works by a community of Northern California artists, poets, and filmmakers. Jess, who made remarkable paintings and dense, playful collages, and Duncan, a revered poet and public intellectual, exchanged marriage vows back in 1951, a radical, if not legally binding act. The show conveys a sense of maverick art culture during the second half of the twentieth century, conjuring the romance of notorious confabs, legendary galleries, queer culture, and characters who loomed large in the aesthetic universe of Jess and Duncan.

I adore Jess' intricate collages and gloppy Translation works, dimensional, detailed dollops of what resemble topographical paint-by-numbers painting dimensionalized with thick shiny layers of oil paint, though the real surprises are his early paintings merging abstract expressionistic and Bay Area figurative impulses.

Duncan's visual art isn't as strong as his poetry, yet it's wonderful to see his projects in this arena, as are the works of lesser-known artists. I was taken with James Broughton's 1953 film The Pleasure Garden displayed on a modest flat screen, which conveyed the sense of play he had with his cast of creative friends who danced and posed on the grounds of a dilapidated mansion. Much of the show's appeal is
in its evocation of California history, of a San Francisco teeming with artistic vitality.


Later that day I encountered more evidence of historical regional experimentation at the opening of a show at the Mills College Art Museum. *West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiments in America, 1965-1977*, is an exhibition of maverick communities who merged aesthetic practice with political aims to remake the notion of American lifestyle. It is focused on groups of people working on the West Coast, many out of the Bay Area, and while a next generation of artists, also covers a time frame when Jess and Duncan were still vital forces. This show has a rollicking feel, featuring: a giant, inflatable plastic sculpture with a zippered side that allows viewers to enter by the Ant Farm collaborative; documentation of Anna Halperin’s dance actions; Black Panther posters; and a gallery devoted to the drag stylings of The Cockettes and the Angels of Light, members of which performed, somewhat feebly, before dusk on the museum’s outdoor patio. While the show is more like a visit to a state expo than an art/culture essay, it makes a fitting companion to the Crocker show, recalling and resurrecting as it does cultural production that has reached a historically ripe age. These shows exist, perhaps, because we hunger to be reminded of previous models.

It’s useful to consider questions these shows raise as part of an evolving regional art history. Is the creative spirit of Burning Man parallel to the cavorting characters in Broughton’s film? Do the tech and food scenes hold similar cultural resonance? Will the expanding SFMOMA make the city a more hospitable place for working artists or one more out of reach? Time will tell, as these exhibitions attest. They are heartening, entertaining projects, just the kind of thing that continues to fuel my California dreams.