

CURATOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If the artists, poets, and musicians who lived and worked in the Upper Fillmore during the 1950s and 60s created their own "community within a community", then it makes sense it would take another community to organize an exhibition about that unique place and time.

There are numerous people and organizations who provided valuable guidance and assistance for this project, and space prohibits me from naming everyone worthy of acknowledgement. I would be remiss, however, if I didn't thank Kathryn Reasoner, Executive Director of di Rosa, for inviting me to serve as guest curator of the exhibition, and Leah Levy, Director of The Jay DeFeo Trust, who suggested its theme to me more than seven years ago and played an integral part in its planning. I am also grateful to G. B. Carson, Trustee of the Wally Hedrick Estate, and Adrienne Fish of 871 Fine Arts, for their early support and help in securing important loans. Other individuals who lent their expertise and work from their collections include Robyn Beattie; Dennis Calabi; Jean Conner; Dave Getz; Jeff Gunderson and the San Francisco Art Institute Archives; Dennis Hearne and the Estate of Jerry Burchard; John Held, Jr.; David Jones; Mary Kerr; Michael Kohn Gallery; Sonja Marck; Jim Newman; David Packard and M. Bernadette Castor; Clint Reilly; Michael Rohde; David Simpson; and Gary Spratt. I also wish to thank the staff of di Rosa—past and present—for their help with *Renaissance on Fillmore* and for providing such a special place to exhibit and preserve the art of the San Francisco Bay Area.

Di Rosa wishes to acknowledge Guest Curator Michael Schwager for originating the idea for the show and sharing this history several years ago, and for having the fortitude and passion to bring it to fruition. We are indebted to all the lenders and to di Rosa's Board of Directors, Collectors Council, Onward! Young Collectors and our members for their support of our exhibitions and programs.

Graphic design: Nina Hubbs Zurier

NOTES

¹ <http://nps.gov/archive/else/quotes.htm>

² Paul Dickson, *Timelines: Day by Day, Trend by Trend, from the Dawn of the Atomic Age to the Close of the Cold War* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley 1990), p. 99.

³ Douglas T. Miller, *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (Garden City, New York: 1977)

⁴ Wally Hedrick, SFAA Gallery, California School of Fine Arts (San Francisco: 1956)

⁵ http://foundsf.org/index.php?title=Fillmore:_The_Beats_in_the_Western_Addition

⁶ <http://hyperallergic.com/50672/can-we-still-learn-to-speak-martian/>

⁷ Mary Kerr, *Swinging in the Shadows: San Francisco's Wild History Groove*, DVD, 2011.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jane Green and Leah Levy, *Jay DeFeo and The Rose* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles: 2004), p. 42

¹¹ Rebecca Solnit, *Secret Exhibition: Six California Artists of the Cold War Era* (City Lights Books, San Francisco: 1990), page 73.

¹² <http://beatera.org/sf/sf.html>

¹³ Mary Kerr, *Swinging in the Shadows: San Francisco's Wild History Groove*, DVD, 2011.

¹⁴ John Natsoulas and Tony Novelozo, *Lyrical Vision: The 6 Gallery, 1954–1957* (Natsoulas Novelozo Gallery, Davis: 1990), p. 45

¹⁵ Thomas Albright, *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area: 1945-1980* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1985), pp. 85-86.

¹⁶ Jonah Raskin, *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles: 2004), p. 3.

¹⁷ John Natsoulas, editor, *The Beat Generation Galleries and Beyond* (Natsoulas Press, Davis: 1990), p. 169.

¹⁸ Terry St. John, editor, *The Dilxi Years: 1958-1970* (The Oakland Museum, Oakland: 1984), p. 13.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 26.

Renaissance on Fillmore 1955–65

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

1. PAUL BEATTIE
Guardian Angel, 1960
Ink on paper mounted on board
13 x 10¾ in.
Collection of Paul Beattie Art Estate, Forestville

2. PAUL BEATTIE
George Herms, 1964
Gouache on paper
9½ x 12½ in.
Collection of Paul Beattie Art Estate, Forestville

3. WALLACE BERMAN
Untitled, 1961
Offset poster
187/8 x 135/8 in.
Collection of David Jones

4. JOAN BROWN
New Hampshire, 1960
Oil on canvas
25 x 24 in.
Courtesy of 871 Fine Arts, San Francisco

5. JOAN BROWN
Girl Standing, 1962
Oil on canvas
60 x 48 in.
di Rosa, Napa

6. WILLIAM H. BROWN
Eve, 1963
Oil on canvas
36 x 18¼ in.
Private Collection

7. WILLIAM H. BROWN
Susan Standing with Chair, 1964
Charcoal and graphite on paper
17 x 14 in.
Courtesy of Dajasajo Bolles, LLC

8. JERRY BURCHARD
Joan Brown, c.1958/2012
Digital print
16 x 20 in.
Courtesy of the Estate of Jerry Burchard

9. JERRY BURCHARD
Bruce Conner, c.1958/2012
Digital print
16 x 20 in.
Courtesy of the Estate of Jerry Burchard

10. JERRY BURCHARD
Jay DeFeo (from window), c.1958/2012
Digital print
16 x 20 in.
Courtesy of the Estate of Jerry Burchard

11. JERRY BURCHARD
Jay DeFeo (from staircase), c.1958/2012
Digital print
16 x 20 in.
Courtesy of the Estate of Jerry Burchard

12. JERRY BURCHARD
Jay DeFeo and Wally Hedrick, c.1958/2012
Digital print
16 x 20 in.
Courtesy of the Estate of Jerry Burchard

13. JERRY BURCHARD
Wally Hedrick, c.1958/2012
Digital print
16 x 20 in.
Courtesy of the Estate of Jerry Burchard

14. JERRY BURCHARD
Hayward King, c.1958/2012
Digital print
16 x 20 in.
Courtesy of the Estate of Jerry Burchard

15. JERRY BURCHARD
Deborah Remington, c.1958/2012
Digital print
16 x 20 in.
Courtesy of the Estate of Jerry Burchard

16. JERRY BURCHARD
David Simpson, c.1958/2012
Digital print
16 x 20 in.
Courtesy of the Estate of Jerry Burchard

17. BRUCE CONNER
Venus, July 6, 1958, 1958
Oil on canvas
54 x 42 in.
di Rosa, Napa

18. BRUCE CONNER
Cocoon, 1959
Mixed media assemblage: nylon, gauze, costume jewelry
24 x 4 x 4 in.
di Rosa, Napa

19. BRUCE CONNER
Hunk Ding Dong Ying Yank, 1962
Mixed media assemblage
16 x 22 x 3½ in.
Collection of David R. Packard, M. Bernadette Castor

20. JEAN CONNER
Nixon, 1959
Collage
75/8 x 95/8 in.
Conner Family Trust, courtesy of Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles

21. JEAN CONNER
Was an Angler, and He a Fish Caught, 1960
Collage
127/8 x 87/8 in.
Conner Family Trust, courtesy of Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles

22. JAY DEFEO
Untitled No. 1, c.1956-57
Graphite and colored pencil on paper
6 x 4 in.
The Jay DeFeo Trust

23. JAY DEFEO
Song of Innocence, 1957
Oil on canvas
40 x 40 in.
The Jay DeFeo Trust

24. JAY DEFEO
Untitled, c.1958
Ink on paper
61/16 x 41/32 in.
The Jay DeFeo Trust

25. ROY DEFOREST
Untitled, Group Show-King Ubu Gallery
Offset poster
8½ x 11 in.
Collection of David Jones

26. SONIA GECHTOFF
Untitled, 1959
Oil on canvas
96 x 68½ in.
Collection of Clint Reilly

27. DAVE GETZ
Untitled #4, 1961
Oil on canvas
46 x 35 in.
Lent by the artist

28. WALLY HEDRICK
Fred's TV, 1956
Oil on canvas
127 x 78 in.
Collection of David R. Packard, M. Bernadette Castor

29. WALLY HEDRICK
Love Feel, 1957
Oil on canvas
60 in. diameter
Estate of Wally Hedrick

30. CRAIG KAUFFMAN
Untitled, 1958
Oil on paper, mounted on board
42 x 31 in.
Collection of Jim Newman and Jane Ivory

31. JAMES KELLY
In the Grey, 1956
Oil on canvas
65 x 60¼ in.
Collection of Clint Reilly

32. LES KERR
Untitled, 1961
Oil on canvas
19 x 15 in.
Collection of Mary Kerr

33. LES KERR
Bride, 1964
Oil on canvas
54 x 50 in.
Collection of Mary Kerr

34. HAYWARD KING
Vicky, 1955
Oil on canvas
16 x 24 in.
Collection of Gary Spratt, courtesy of Calabi Gallery, Petaluma

35. HAYWARD KING
Untitled, 1962
Linocut on paper
16¾ x 20¾ in.
di Rosa, Napa

36. MICHAEL MCCLURE
The Beard, 1967
Offset poster
20 x 14¼ in.
Collection of David Jones

37. ED MOSES
Girl in Black Pants, 1960
Oil, ink, mixed media on cardboard
21 x 17 in.
Collection of Mary Kerr

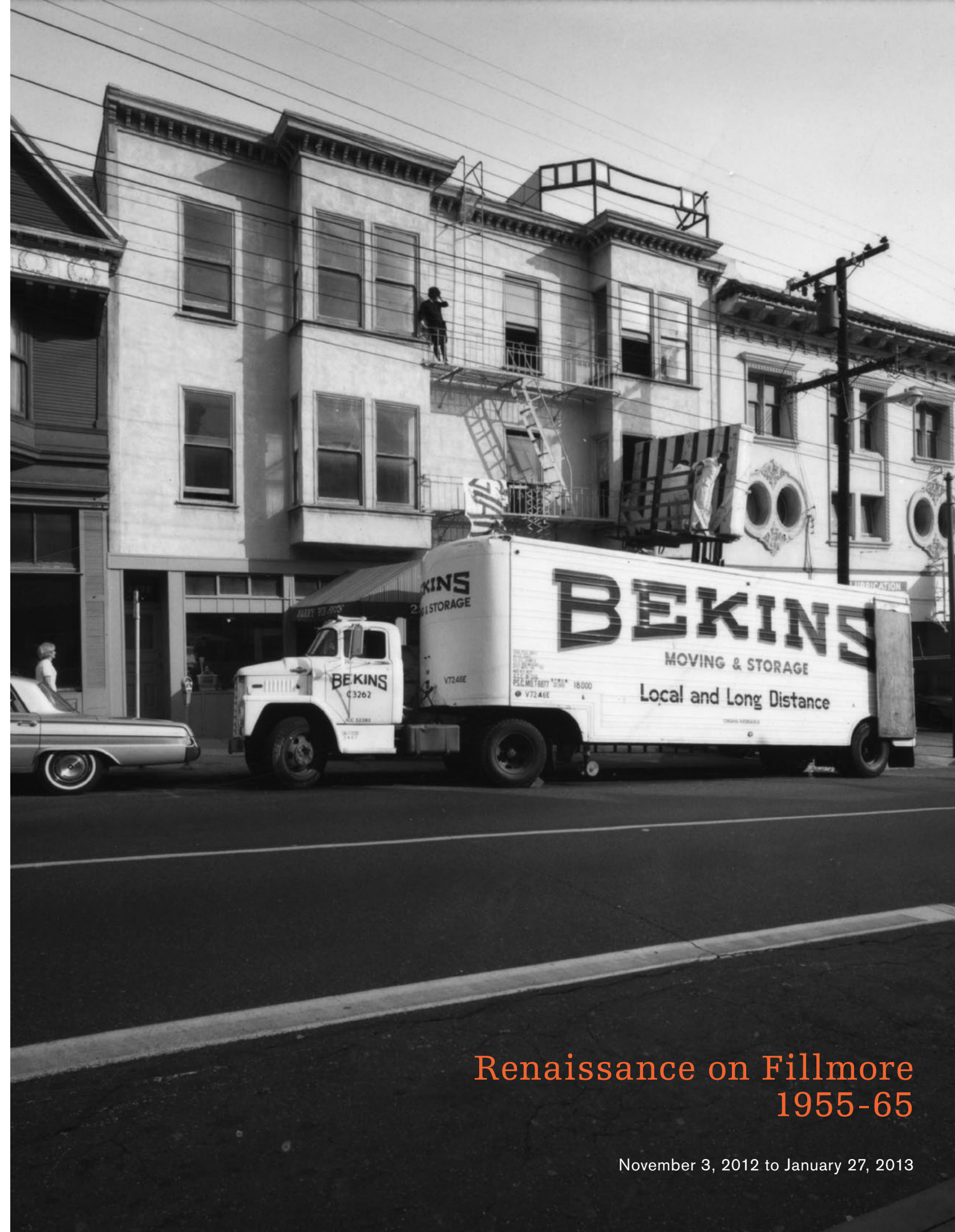
38. DEBORAH REMINGTON
April, 1953
Oil on canvas
38 x 28 in.
Collection of Michael Rohde

39. DEBORAH REMINGTON
Mojo, 1961
Oil on canvas
97 x 47 in.
Courtesy of the Gateway Apartments, San Francisco

40. DAVID SIMPSON
Untitled, 1959
oil on canvas
85¼ x 56 in.
Lent by the artist, courtesy of Haines Gallery, San Francisco

The Rose, packed and crated, is lowered by forklift while Jay DeFeo looks on from the fire escape above. Photograph: Moss Photography © 2012 The Jay DeFeo Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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Renaissance on Fillmore
1955-65

November 3, 2012 to January 27, 2013

Renaissance on Fillmore 1955–65

The history of Bay Area art is filled with stories of unique individuals, influential institutions, and the social and political climates of cities like San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland where artists congregated to live and create. This exhibition tells one of those stories: the story of an exceptional group of artists in a particular San Francisco neighborhood during an especially vibrant period. Most of the artists in *Renaissance on Fillmore, 1955-65* were relatively unknown in the mid-1950s—a transitional moment in the art world when abstract painting gave way to assemblage sculpture and both were influenced by poetry and music. Today, these same artists form the foundation of modern art in Northern California and helped shape the future of American art. Their work remains remarkably vital and opens a window on the era during which it was created.

The 1950s were a turbulent time in America and much of the world—a time of both growing prosperity and great social and political conflict. The decade saw the start of the Korean War and the design of the “Peace Symbol”, the construction of the Hydrogen Bomb and the discovery of the Polio vaccine, and the accusations of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the courage of Rosa Parks. The shadow of the atomic bomb still cast a pall over the world’s collective memory. President Eisenhower’s warning, in 1956, that these weapons “can obliterate cities and can be delivered across continents”¹ and Nikita Khrushchev’s threat to the United States the same year that “We will bury you!”², frightened people around the globe. Still, the seductive power of money and commerce was having an equal impact on the culture. At almost the same time Eisenhower and Khrushchev made their ominous remarks, Robert Sarnoff, president of the television network NBC, proposed, “The reason we have such a high standard of living is because advertising has created an American frame of mind that makes people want more things, better things, and newer things.”³

The art world of the 1950s was equally tumultuous. On the East Coast, a group of artists known as the New York School had already rejected the conservative politics and narrative realism of Regionalism and created instead a revolutionary style, dubbed Abstract Expressionism, that reflected the angst of the

postwar period while embracing spontaneity and improvisation. Abstract Expressionism held the interest of many artists on both Coasts throughout the decade and into the 1960s, and the work of San Francisco painters such as Jay DeFeo, Sonia Gechtoff, James Kelly, and Deborah Remington, among others, captured the emotional intensity, utopian vision, and aesthetic energy of the style as well as any artist in New York.

As radical and widely practiced as Abstract Expressionism was, some artists questioned its relevancy in a rapidly changing political and social climate and rejected the self-examination that characterized Ab/Ex painting. As Wally Hedrick suggested in a 1956 exhibition statement, “when painting becomes completely personal, it functions only as a catharsis for the artist.”⁴ In place of introspection and non-objective imagery, artists like Hedrick, Bruce and Jean Conner, and their peers began seeking inspiration from the objects and events outside their studios. They collected detritus from the streets and appropriated everything from magazine illustrations to bits of government films. They created gritty and topical works—paintings, prints, assemblage, performances and movies—that were also intertwined with the burgeoning music and poetry scenes.

Northern California seemed an especially welcoming environment for both Abstract Expressionist painting and this new hybrid of art, music, and literature that was lumped under the rather inelegant rubric “Beat”, a word with multiple associations: the rhythm of Bebop jazz, the cadence of spoken poetry, or the sometimes desperate conditions under which these artists struggled to create their work. During the years following World War II, San Francisco became a haven for artists of all stripes seeking cheap rent, good weather, and a bohemian atmosphere populated by kindred spirits who rejected the era’s conformist values in favor of personal and artistic freedom. The city’s North Beach neighborhood quickly became the center for what has become known as the Beat Generation of artists, writers, and musicians.

For visual artists, the very heart of that center was the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute). The School served as the headquarters for San

Francisco Abstract Expressionism and the home of such influential artist/teachers as Elmer Bischoff, Richard Diebenkorn, David Park, Hassel Smith, Clay Spohn, and Clyfford Still. It also became the breeding ground for generations of art students, many of whom went on to become the region’s most innovative and important artists.

While North Beach flourished as a creative district, replete with galleries, coffee shops, bars, bookshops and studio space, it soon became too crowded and commercial for some artists. The poet Michael McClure, in a conversation with writer Rebecca Solnit, observed “North Beach was like a reservation in which there was a free space for bohemians and oddballs of all stripes to meet in between the Italian and the Chinese districts in what was still a remarkably inexpensive part of town with lots of [residential] hotels. A lot of those very constructive people got out of there in ‘56 or ‘57 when the ‘beatnik’ thing started—because of the tour buses—and the obvious place to go was the Western Addition.”⁵

San Francisco’s Western Addition—a neighborhood bordered roughly by the commercial corridor of Van Ness Avenue, the Haight, and upscale Pacific Heights—also encompasses the Fillmore District, a decidedly downscale area in the 1950s that included the city’s largest concentration of African Americans. It also was considered one of the world’s leading jazz centers, sometimes being compared to Harlem in New York City. The Fillmore, in particular the northern portion referred to as the Upper Fillmore, was an equally important, if less publicized, locus of creative ferment and home to a remarkable and eclectic group of painters and poets. Many of these artists were affiliated, as students or faculty, with the California School of Fine Arts.

Just as the School was at the center of the North Beach art scene, the building at 2322–2330 Fillmore was the nucleus of an artistic renaissance due to its residents and the activities that took place there. The unassuming, white stucco and wood two story structure near the corner of Washington and Fillmore contained four flats. It also had a modest backyard and even a plywood roof deck. The flats were large—seven rooms with 14-foot ceilings—and the rents

small: a now-unbelievable \$65 a month. Even a partial list of the occupants from the mid 1950s through 1965—when the building was sold and many of the artists were evicted—reads like a Who’s Who of Bay Area Beat art and explains the building’s nickname, “Painterland”: artist and filmmaker Paul Beattie and his wife Dee, who were there around 1955 and 1956; newlywed painters Joan and William H. Brown; Bruce and Jean Conner, who shared lodgings with the poet Michael McClure and his wife Joanna briefly in 1957 before moving to their own place a block away on Jackson Street; Jay DeFeo and Wally Hedrick, likely the building’s longest-tenured residents and its creative heart, who lived next door to the Browns and were introduced to the building by Beattie, taking his flat when he left; Craig Kauffman, better known as an L.A. artist but who lived for a time in the flat of Jim Newman, founder of the Dilexi Gallery; husband-and-wife Ab/Ex painters James Kelly and Sonia Gechtoff, who left Fillmore for New York around 1959; the painter and musician Dave Getz, a resident between 1962 and

64; painter Les Kerr, who along with his wife, documentary filmmaker Mary Kerr and their son and daughter, lived there about the same time; and Ed Moses, another artist identified with Southern California, who, with his wife Avilda, took over Newman’s place around 1960.

Poet Jack Foley described 2322-2330 Fillmore as “inexpensive so artists could afford it, and when artists moved in and did their art and moved out again, they told other artists about it.” The sheer number—and talent—of the resident artists, poets, and musicians transformed a “tenement building”⁶ into the place in the upper Fillmore to paint, write, play, critique, argue, and party. In a 1998 interview, Hedrick recalled that “the building sort of vibrated with all of these mixed personalities...the poets came over a lot and there was a lot of bongo and chanting and sort of spontaneous musical drumming... there was a party about every weekend.”⁷ Painter Deborah Remington, a friend of Hedrick’s from Pasadena who never lived in the building but visited often, said “It was a wonderful place to socialize...sometimes you

wouldn’t see people except at those parties.”⁸

In addition to those now-legendary parties—one of which included an inebriated Willem de Kooning who, when finally sober, thought he had been in New York because of the remarkable art he saw that evening⁹—the Fillmore building was silent witness to the creation of some of the era’s most interesting and enduring works of art. The most notable example, not included in this exhibition, is Jay DeFeo’s colossal masterpiece, *The Rose* (1958-66). While the story of this icon of Bay Area art is thoroughly documented elsewhere—most significantly in Jane Green and Leah Levy’s book, *Jay DeFeo and The Rose* and Bruce Conner’s haunting film, *The White Rose*—it is worth noting the painting’s connection to the Fillmore building and the profound impact it had on the artists and visitors (including de Kooning) who saw it while in progress there. The massive scale of the work, which the artist saw as “a marriage between painting and sculpture”¹⁰, dominated the front room of DeFeo and Hedrick’s downstairs flat. When *The Rose* finally was



Wally Hedrick, Courtesy of The Estate of Jerry Burchard, c.1957

Jay DeFeo, Courtesy of The Estate of Jerry Burchard, c.1958

ready for public exhibition in Pasadena, the lower section of one of the bay windows in the room where DeFeo worked on the painting for seven years, had to be removed to get it out the building. Evidence of the cut can still be seen on the Fillmore building’s façade.

Obviously, not everyone involved in the Fillmore scene lived at 2322-2330. Several artists whose work is part of this exhibition were included because of their association with those living in the building as well as their affiliation with the galleries operating in the Upper Fillmore in the 1950s and 60s. One of the first was the King Ubu Gallery, located about a half mile north at 3119 Fillmore Street. Founded by artists Harry Jacobus and Jess, along with Jess’ life partner, the poet Robert Duncan, King Ubu operated between 1952 and 53 and served as a sort of multi-media space, hosting art exhibitions, poetry readings, and even presenting plays. Some of the artists who exhibited there were Roy De Forest, Sonia Gechtoff, James Kelly, Hassel Smith, and Julius Wasserstein.

Across the street from King Ubu, at 3108 Fillmore, was East-West Gallery, owned by Ethel Gechtoff, the painter Sonia Gechtoff’s mother. Ethel exhibited the work of Sonia’s friends, along with Conner, De Forest, and Smith, and was seen as something of the “neighborhood mother”. Not far from East-West Gallery, around the corner at 2192 Filbert, was the smaller, but no less energetic Spatsa Gallery, owned by Dimitri Grachis (and named after his father’s island in Greece). It opened in 1958 in Grachis’ small garage, and operated until 1961, featuring the work of Bruce and Jean Conner, Hedrick, and Michael McClure, among others.¹¹

When King Ubu closed in 1953, Hedrick, still a student at the California School of Fine Arts, decided to take over the space at 3119 Fillmore and open a cooperative gallery that would fill the void left by King Ubu. As Hedrick later recalled, “we started it (the 6 Gallery) because no place in the city would show our work...and it was...a hell of a lot of fun.”¹² The name of the gallery was decided at the first meeting of the six members, primarily Hedrick’s friends from Pasadena: Hayward King, Deborah Remington, John Allen Ryan, David Simpson, the poet (and CSFA faculty member) Jack Spicer, and Hedrick. Learning

they could rent the space for \$65 a month, Hedrick—who served as the gallery’s director—and the others figured that “if we could just get six people to pay \$10 a month, we could get it.” Following the model of King Ubu, the 6 Gallery held a variety of events: “not only will we show our work, we’ll have poets, we’ll have dancers, we’ll have musicians, we’ll have movies...”¹³

The 6 Gallery presented numerous groundbreaking exhibitions of innovative art during its three years of operation (1954-57), including the work of the six founders along with Paul Beattie, Madeleine Dimond, Peter Forakis, Jess, Fred Martin, Manuel Neri, David Park, and James Weeks. Alfred Frankenstein, the *San Francisco Chronicle’s* erudite art critic, gave the 6 a favorable review shortly after it opened and quoted the gallery’s opening statement, which read in part that it will “make grievous errors in taste and grievous errors in tone but will never be dull.”¹⁴ Neri, who was friends with the Fillmore group (he married Joan Brown after her divorce from William H. Brown), remembers the energy of the gallery: “The immediacy was exciting, even if the work was raw...We were all presenting ideas as fast as we could get them down.”¹⁵

In spite of the gallery’s ambitious exhibitions, it became best known not for art but for another groundbreaking event: the first public reading of Allen Ginsberg’s epic poem *Howl* on the evening of Friday, October 7, 1955. Part of a program called “6 Poets at 6 Gallery”, the evening featured a reading of poetry by six emerging poets who would soon become known well beyond San Francisco: Jack Kerouac, Philip Lamantia, Michael McClure, Gary Snyder, Phil Whalen, and Ginsberg. The event was emceed by poet Kenneth Rexroth, and has been described as “a direct and deliberate response to the culture of the bomb and to American power and wealth.”¹⁶

Two additional galleries in the area played important roles in supporting the Fillmore artists and exposing their work to an increasingly appreciative—and larger—audience. One was the Batman Gallery, launched in 1960 at 2222 Fillmore by William (Billy Batman) Jahrmarkt and his wife Joan, who came to San Francisco from Los Angeles. The walls in the gallery were always black—an

unusual touch even during the freewheeling, nonconformist late fifties and early sixties. The inaugural show was a solo exhibition of Bruce Conner’s assemblages—made of wax, silk stockings, and other discarded and scavenged materials—along with collages and paintings. Conner later remembered it as “one of my best shows.”¹⁷

The other was the Dilexi Gallery, established in 1958 by Jim Newman, a musician and graduate of Oberlin College (by way of Stanford University, where he met the future curator Walter Hopps), and Robert Alexander, a poet and artist, in Alexander’s loft above the Jazz Workshop at 471 Broadway in North Beach. Dilexi—Latin for “to select, to highly value, to love”¹⁸—eventually moved to Union Street, not far from the early Fillmore galleries, before settling at 631 Clay Street in San Francisco’s Financial District. The Dilexi Gallery was one of the more professional and influential galleries of its time and was described by the artist and critic Knute Stiles as being “an active factor in developing the community of galleries which has made the Bay Area a more important part of the modern art world.”¹⁹ Before closing in 1970, Dilexi exhibited the work of many artists from the Bay Area as well as Los Angeles and New York, among them Jeremy Anderson, John Chamberlain, Jay DeFeo, Roy De Forest, Tony DeLap, Craig Kauffman, Les Kerr, Alvin Light, Fred Martin, Deborah Remington, Hassel Smith, and H.C. Westermann.

Looking back on this unique place in the history of San Francisco art, it’s easy to get caught up in nostalgia for a time when the creativity, spontaneity, and freedom with which these artists lived and worked seemed eminently more possible—and affordable. Yet looking at the art they created, now more than 50 years later, it is not nostalgia we’re filled with, but a deep and abiding respect for the beauty and power these works still exude.

Michael Schwager
Guest Curator
October 2012