KQED Arts

ART NERD HOLIDAY GUIDE 2015

Reflecting on Art: The Eight Best Things I Saw in 2015



By **Sarah Hotchkiss**
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For the Bay Area visual arts community, 2016 can't come fast enough. There's so much to look forward to — and thankfully, that long period of deprivation is almost over. For example, 500 Capp Street, otherwise known as conceptual artist David Ireland's house, reopens to the public on Jan. 16. The San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery celebrates its new, much larger, space with an opening on Jan. 22. The Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive opens in its brand new — and more conveniently located — home on Jan. 31. Jump ahead to March, when the much-anticipated Minnesota Street Project opens its doors. And then something's happening in May, but I can't remember quite what.

In the vacuum created by these temporary (and other, more permanent) closures, certain local institutions, alternative arts spaces, galleries and independent curators stepped up to the proverbial plate. To put it bluntly, 2015 had some remarkable moments. My favorites, in no particular order:



Root Division's new home at 1131 Mission Street. *(Photo: Mido Lee Productions)*

Best Comeback Story: Root Division

In 2014, when Root Division announced they'd be unable to stay in their 17th Street location (their home for the past 10 years), things didn't look good; they were just one of too many arts spaces ousted by costly rent hikes. But thanks to the help of the Nonprofit Displacement Mitigation Fund, a city grant, a benevolent new landlord and the tenacity of the Root Division staff, they now have 13,000 square feet on Mission Street all to themselves. The best part of the move is that it expands Root Division's work on all fronts: they now have subsidized studio space for 25 artists, an expanded roster of class offerings and even more gallery space for their ever-ambitious exhibition program. More on Root Division.



Janet Cardiff, 'The Forty Part Motet' (installation view, Gallery 308, Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture), 2015. *(Photo: JKA Photography)*

Best Exhibition that Made Me Feel Real Feelings: Janet Cardiff's *Forty Part Motet* at Fort Mason Center

Janet Cardiff's sound piece might be the most recommended Bay Area art experience of the year — and not just by me. A spare arrangement of 40 black speakers plays the soaring sounds of English Renaissance composer Thomas Tallis' 1573 choral work *Spem in alium nunquam habui*. I'm now verging on nagging territory, but I'm doubling down: Please, for the sake of your ears, mind and heart, visit this free installation. Don't be discouraged by the "Sold Out" blocks on the calendar: same-day walkup tickets are often available. Read my full review.



Rachel Dawson, interior view of 'Between Here and There,' 2015. *(Photo: Phillip Maisel)*

Best Installation You Didn't See: Rachel Dawson, *Between Here and There* at Alter Space

Chances are you missed the 15-day run of Oakland-based artist Rachel Dawson's subterranean sculptural installation. The project was the culmination of a three-month residency in Alter Space's wooden jail cell (left over from the building's former leatherwear tenant). Inside a mirrored, five-sided structure, phosphorescent porcelain sculptures resembling ghostly ectoplasm covered the walls, ceiling and floor. Their greenish glow was the only illumination, reflected infinitely as a series of hovering, gooey manifestations from the world beyond. I really hope this piece gets a second life so more people can step inside a vertigo-inducing chamber with booties over their shoes. More on *Between Here and There*.



Shana Moulton performing at YBCA's ConVerge. *(Photo: Tommy Lau)*

Best Live Performance: Shana Moulton at YBCA

At April's ConVerge, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts' monthly live event, artist Shana Moulton (and collaborator Nick Hallett) performed in conjunction with the opening of her solo show, *Picture Puzzle Pattern Door*. Dressed as her alter ego "Cynthia," Moulton cannily and wordlessly interacted with projected video and sound in a hilarious sendup of women's wellness products and New Age questing. Wearing a bowl-cut wig and something the internet wants me to call either a "magic bubble shirt" or a "popcorn blouse," Moulton's emotive facial expressions were possibly the greatest part of the entire night. More on *Picture Puzzle Pattern Door*.



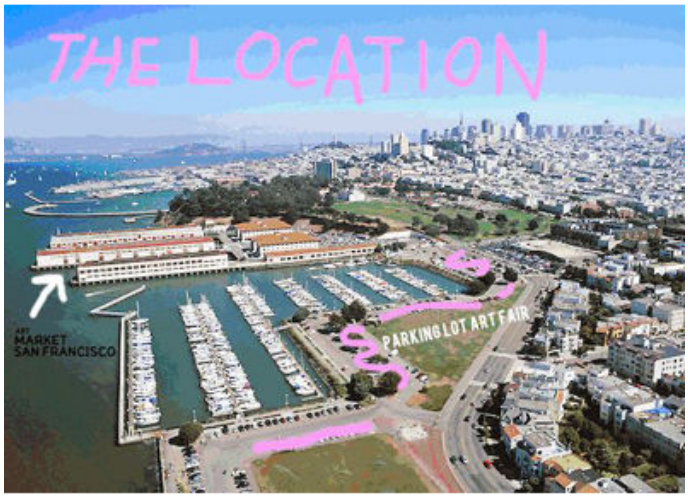
View from Sacramento Street of CAPITAL. *(Courtesy: CAPITAL)*

Best New Gallery: CAPITAL
It seems like ages since CAPITAL opened with their first show. But no, it was less than a year ago. Eight exhibitions, one art fair and two editioned objects later, the year ahead looks equally bright. Visiting shows at CAPITAL is often more like hanging out on the sidewalk of Sacramento Street with co-directors Jonathan Runcio and Bob Linder. The space itself is so small, I have to focus intensely on the art just to prevent myself from wreaking havoc with my long arms. But focusing intensely on art is never, ever a bad thing. More on CAPITAL.



The artist and volunteers laying out 'Sky Bridge,' 2015. *(Photo: Lydia Han/CCC)*

Best Public Art Installation: *Sky Bridge* at the Chinese Culture Center
For the month of August, Chinatown's Portsmouth Square pedestrian bridge transformed into a gleaming causeway between the increasingly outward-facing CCC and the neighborhood's most active public space. Austin-based artist Beili Liu adhered 50,000 brick-sized pieces of mirrored Mylar to the bridge with the help of a small army of volunteers. The result was dazzling. Just a few weeks ago, the CCC announced its next project on the bridge: a mini-park with landscape design by Jennifer Ng and Chris Hardy, and *Sunrise*, a tile installation by local artist Mik Gaspay. Read my full review of *Sky Bridge*.



Announcing the location of the Parking Lot Art Fair. *(Courtesy: Parking Lot Art Fair)*

Best Unsanctioned Art Event: Parking Lot Art Fair, outside Fort Mason Center

Timed to coincide with artMRKT and the stARTup Art Fair, the Parking Lot Art Fair clung to conventional capitalization, but little else. Early on the morning of May 2, artists, art spaces and MFA students commandeered the prime parking spaces outside Fort Mason Center with vehicles tricked-out as galleries, blankets displaying wares, or an entire boat-turned-installation, complete with live fish. I'm not one to talk about energy, but the energy was great. Organizers Jenny Sharaf and Emily Reynolds pulled together an event that was equal parts rogue happening, zany flea market and a big middle finger to the neighboring art fairs, with their entrance fees and hefty booth costs. More on the Parking Lot Art Fair.



Coco Fusco, still from 'The Empty Plaza/La Plaza Vaca,' 2012. *(Courtesy: Alexander Gray Associates)*

Best Video I'm Glad I Watched All the Way Through: Coco Fusco, *The Empty Plaza/La Plaza Vaca*

Tucked into a screening space in the back corner of *Public Works: Artists' Interventions 1970s-Now* at the Mills College Art Museum, I almost didn't have the patience for *The Empty Plaza/La Plaza Vaca*. The video is a 12-minute rumination on Havana's Plaza de la Revolución, a site of legendary gatherings in Cuban history. Today the treeless expanse is an obligatory stop for tourists, while locals hurry through it if they must be there at all. Narration by Cuban journalist Yoani Sanchez overlays long, still shots of the darkening plaza interspersed with historical footage. This piece reminded me of the power of text combined with image, and of the equal importance of what is *not* said and *not* shown. More on *Public Works*.