

David Huffman



David Huffman, *Black Hole*, 2008, Courtesy the artist and Patricia Sweetow Gallery, San Francisco

David Huffman is an Afro-Futurist painter whose practice is inspired by astronomy, comics, Japanese anime, events such as Hurricane Katrina, and 1950s science fiction. Through an invented spacesuit-clad figure called a *traumanaut*, Huffman references the struggles of African Americans to establish their rightful cultural identity in social histories and representations—specifically the traumatic rupture of existence for African American slaves. By using Afro-Futurism as a starting point to build his visual narratives, Huffman draws from the past to reimagine what the future could look like for racial minorities in the United States based on historical moments of oppression. Ultimately, Huffman’s traumanaut reveals the journey of a figure that has endured significant pain, has learned from the past how to heal, and is forging a new identity for the future.

Paul Laffoley



Paul Laffoley, *Xanatopia*, 1995, Courtesy private collection, New York

As a self-taught, visionary artist, Paul Laffoley seeks to deepen the relationship between science and theories of religious and spiritual life. Frequently referencing planes of higher consciousness through diagrams, text, and images, Laffoley takes a multidisciplinary approach to his work, engaging art history, architecture, classical literature, religion, Eastern and Western philosophies, science fiction, and natural and occult sciences. Many of his paintings are in effect mandalas, or ritualistic diagrams of the universe meant to aid in meditation. His fascination with the combination of metaphysical and physical worlds extends to his deep rooted interest in utopic space which, for Laffoley, is “a realization of trans-disciplinary worldview capable of sustaining human existence into a continuous future.”

Basim Magdy



Basim Magdy, *Investigating the Color Spectrum of a Post-Apocalyptic Future Landscape*, 2013, Courtesy Marissa Newman Projects, New York and Art Dubai

Basim Magdy creates art that engenders a sense of the otherworldly, obscuring the usual demarcation between the real and the imaginary. Like science fiction, his dream worlds are grounded in tangible realities so that the absurd seems plausible and scenarios which seem farfetched become imaginable. This speaks to Magdy’s main objective, the conflation of reality and the fanciful to open up a discourse about what is possible through an examination of paradoxical relationships between future and historical eras and cycles of destruction and rebirth. Many of his works—for instance *An Eavesdropper Lurks in the Shadow of Your Every Thought* or *The Only Memory I Have of my Past Life is the Uniformity of the Circumstances*—are humorous or provocative, and serve as invitations to imagine a different reality, a dream world spun from science fiction and human potentialities.

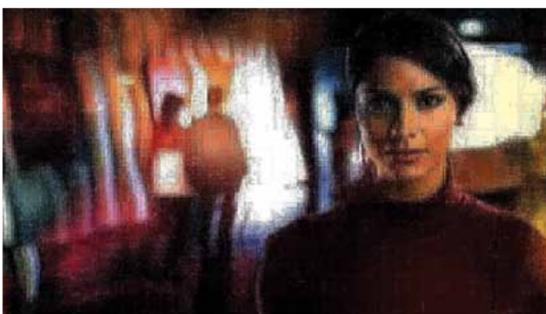
Dan Mills



Dan Mills, *Erasure (Cool)* from the *Quest* series, 2012, Courtesy the artist and Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago

In his cartographic interventions, Dan Mills employs humor, satire, and a critique of national and regional power dynamics through a reworking of images from the past. Specifically, he reconfigures world maps so as to allude to the artifice of all mapping systems, and, simultaneously, to highlight the imperial power and history embedded within them. Mills’s recent projects, *Quest* (2012-ongoing) and *U.S. Future States Atlas* (2003-9), critique geographic boundaries and nationalist ambitions through maps of the U.S. and other parts of the world that emerged from a history of colonization since the American Revolution. He describes the projects as “a grand narrative atlas of global imperialism” and reminds the viewer of the arbitrary nature of national boundaries, considering their frequent origins in military aggression.

The Otolith Group



The Otolith Group, *Anathema*, 2011, Courtesy the artists and Lux, London (video still)

The Otolith Group, founded in 2002 by Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar, spans filmmaking, events, publications, and exhibitions, all of which are informed by research-based activities. Much of its work speculates on possible futures through investigations between scientific means of production, advancement, and utopia. In that vein, their 2011 video *Anathema* centers on “communicative capitalism”, an exploration of digital advertising and touch screen technology. *Anathema* dissects the visuality of touch technology through a convergence of facts and fictions about the scientific underpinnings of these new digital formats. It presents the viewer with a technological world that is both fascinating and sinister in its capacity to push capital even more deeply into psychological and emotional spaces in its quest to engineer desire in the communication of commodities culture.

Trevor Paglen



Trevor Paglen, *Nine Reconnaissance Satellites over the Sonora Pass*, 2008, Courtesy the artist and Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco

The artist, writer, geographer, and photographer Trevor Paglen has earned international renown for creating work that deliberately blurs the lines between science, contemporary art, journalism, and other seemingly disparate disciplines. A deep fascination with deciphering and unearthing political secrets has motivated him over the past decade to take thousands of photographs of the U.S. government’s most closely guarded secrets—the so-called “black world” of classified military activity. Although his process is reminiscent of investigative photojournalism, it results in compositions that provoke critical reflection on the validity of documentary photography as a means of recording the “truth.” In fact, his works exist not as “truth,” but as a visual metaphor for our existential disorientation at a time when major ideologies are collapsing.

Katie Paterson



Katie Paterson, *Ancient Darkness TV*, 2010, Courtesy the artist (film still)

Working in sculpture, sound, and installation, Berlin-based artist Katie Paterson’s practice examines the cosmos, often bringing the viewer closer to the vast, unthinkable depth of the universe’s scale of space and time. By facilitating an encounter with the sublime limitlessness of the universe, Paterson’s artworks remind us that there is a time, and distance, much greater than that produced and measured by humanity. Her explorations thus alternately ask the viewer to contemplate the enormous gulf separating the current moment from that of the origin of the universe; bridge gaps between humanity and the infinite darkness of the cosmos; underscore the variability and fluctuation of time; and remind us of the mutability of the past, present, and future.

Kamau Amu Patton



Kamau Amu Patton, *Cyber Landscape*, 2013, Courtesy the artist (video still)

Working at the intersection of electronics, objects and kinesthetic body awareness, Kamau Amu Patton focuses on questions of metaphysics, where iconic images are reframed by a subjective futurity. Abstract visual forms and associated, sometimes viewer activated, sound components link the body’s use of material things to the mutability of nature within environments, thereby heightening the viewer’s sense of time/space relationships. For *Cyber Landscape* (2013), Patton filmed piles of e-waste at a Fresno waste facility; the resulting visual patterns of the waste are reminiscent of abstract painting, and the soundtrack dings and crackles as if the now defunct products are screaming out from another world. Displayed on a 1990s-style LAN computer station, it is a reminder of the proliferation of these products, and their resulting environmental, health, and safety issues around the world.

Connie Samaras



Connie Samaras, *Dome and Tunnels* from the *V.A.L.I.S.* series, 2005, Courtesy the artist

Connie Samaras produces photographs and videos with a contemplative quality that hover between the fictive and the documentary, the quotidian and the heroic. She is interested in how structures relate to us in a cultural, environmental, and time-based context, where the future and the past intersect at a particular time and place. Her photographic series such as *V.A.L.I.S.* and *Spaceport America* are embedded with not-so-subtle polemical observations on human progress, the hegemonic tendencies of capitalism, and nationalistic ambitions. As the South Pole Dome, part of *V.A.L.I.S.*, no longer exists today, and as the Spaceport America facility is operational yet not publicly accessible, both works strike a cautious tone in the insistently hopeful vernacular of scientific exploration. They are a kind of futuristic memento mori, reminding us of the impermanence of humankind and its aspirations.

Caulen Smith



Caulen Smith, *The Way Out is the Way Two v.2*, 2012, Courtesy the artist (video still)

Caulen Smith creates work that reflects upon the everyday possibilities of the Black imagination through dynamic film and video installations that incorporate a vast array of sculptural objects and texts. Her work comes out of her roots in structuralist filmmaking as well as her deep interest in Afro-Futurist narratives, focusing most recently on the experimental musician Sun Ra. Incorporating Sun Ra’s music, recordings of Afro-Futurist musicians, and visual imagery representing landmarks of Black creativity, sound and text into her work, Smith creates a constellation of short vignettes centered on the rich legacy of experimental music in Chicago as a major contribution of Radical Black creativity. Simultaneously, she explores how-through improvisation, self-reliance, and her own imagination-comparable artistic transformations might take place today, and, ultimately, persist into the future.

Dissident Futures

Feb 2, 2014

Oct 18, 2013

Dissident Futures is curated by Betti-Sue Hertz, Director of Visual Arts at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. The texts for this brochure are excerpts from longer entries by Betti-Sue Hertz, Susie Kantor, Ceci Moss, Stephanie Tran, Nicole Wallace, and Sybil Wendler, to be published in the forthcoming exhibition catalogue (due February, 2014).

About Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

Founded in 1993 out of an expressed need for an accessible, high profile arts center devoted to contemporary art of all genres, YBCA presents contemporary art from the Bay Area and around the world that reflects the profound issues and ideas of our time, expands the boundaries of artistic practice, and celebrates the diversity of human experience and expression. YBCA is an integrated site for creative endeavor; a unique fusion of art, innovation, and ideas in a social environment. It serves as a curated platform for the dynamic convergence of artists, inventors, thinkers, producers, and the community, working together to sustain multiple levels of participation, propel short-and long-term social change, and ensure contemporary arts and living arts are vital to our society. YBCA’s artistic offerings include a year-round exhibition program, two annual performance series, a celebrated year-round art film program, a community rentals program making YBCA performance spaces available to Bay Area performing arts organizations at affordable rates, and award-winning community engagement programming. Distinguished by its widespread support of local, national, and international artists in the performing, visual, and media arts, YBCA is also recognized for its innovative approach to audience-centered programs and for its partnerships with other arts and community organizations. Through its programming, YBCA invites exploration and risk-taking, quiet reflection, and active engagement.

Dissident Futures is an investigation into possible alternative futures, particularly those that question or overturn conventional notions of innovation in biological, social, environmental, and technological structures. Either through active engagement with future studies or through intuitive investigation, these artists and designers envision a future that expands beyond conventional expectations. They incorporate into their work knowledge from other fields of inquiry: the occult, science fiction, and outer space; Afro-Futurism; architecture and the environment; technology; human emotions and language; mapping and atemporality; and post-apocalyptic scenarios. Filtering, managing, and inventing meanings from this vast archive, they navigate new configurations of what is imaginable, what might be possible, and what is probably impossible for the future.

Loosely structured around three thematic strands—the utopian, the speculative, and the pragmatic—the exhibition furthers our understanding of how artists are addressing potentiality and the unknown, from the most desired future to the most feared. **Utopian** approaches postulate scenarios in which the best possible outcomes are achieved for the greatest numbers of people. Artists continue to work through this legacy, but perhaps with much more caution and skepticism than the artistic visionaries who pursued these ideals in decades past. **Speculative thinking** consistently pushes beyond the known, even beyond existing systems of logic, to locate potentialities that may seem impossible, unreal, or fantastical at the moment, but could become possible at a later date. The speculative is often spectacular, and occasionally surreal, as it walks a line between a desire for an ideal world and humanity's known shortcomings. Through diagnosis and prognosis, **pragmatists** lay the groundwork for what the future will look like in the real world. Their tools include predictions involving demographic changes, climate change, pollution, mounting health concerns, lack of clean water, and economic disparities as well as new directions in personal desires, social interactions, and entertainment. By its very nature, pragmatism works within a scope of probability and therefore tends to have more product- and project-oriented outcomes than speculative or utopian futures.

Dissident Futures does not assume that these three categories are mutually exclusive. Rather, they are understood to be relational, providing a dialogic structure through which audiences can appreciate the works on view. Nor does the exhibition set out to propose solutions or set a direction for a certain industry, for culture, or even for art itself. Instead, it aspires to be exploratory and thought provoking on a far-reaching and fascinating topic.

An international roster of artists working in video and film, photography, painting, installation, sculpture, and performance probe these timely topics, often resulting in works with chilling subtexts. These range from Basim Magdy's sequenced slide projection featuring spectral images of the volcanic region of Spain's Lanzarote island—a possible future memory—to David Huffman's paintings of wandering traumanauts, Melanie Gilligan's experimental multi-episode science fiction drama in which personal needs are inextricably linked to exchange value, Lynn Hershman Leeson's prototype of a genetics lab, and Trevor Paglen's photographs that deliberately blur the lines between science, contemporary art, and journalism to construct unfamiliar, yet meticulously researched, ways to see and interpret the world around us.

The San Francisco Bay Area is at the center of many innovations in a variety of fields that actively engage questions about the future. It drives projects in research labs, think tanks, academic departments, and scientific centers, not to mention biotech companies, social media corporations, and entrepreneurial start-ups. At organizations devoted to the environment, climate change, species diversity, education, gender fluidity, and housing equity, people are deciding how they can positively impact the future. It is also integral to the choices many of us make every day regarding where to invest our thoughts, resources, and energies. In addition to the pragmatic approach to real world endeavors there is also a long tradition in experimentations in lifestyle choices, new age spirituality, and a thriving fascination with speculative fictions. Unsurprisingly, about half of the participating artists in *Dissident Futures* have lived in the Bay Area at some point in their lives—further proof that this region's focus on the future has also had a profound impact on the visual arts.

Betti-Sue Hertz,
Director of Visual Arts

Neil Beloufa



Neil Beloufa, *Kempinski*, 2007, Courtesy François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, Galerie Salice Hertling, Paris, and Galleria Zero, Milan (video still)

Neil Beloufa creates videos that reside in a nebulous place between fact and fiction; he has called his particular brand of filmmaking “ethnological sci-fi documentary.” Relishing the contradictions inherent in such a description, the artist investigates real and imagined worlds, and how things may change depending on context and one’s relationship to it. In *Kempinski* (2007), Beloufa does this by blurring the lines between film genres through a simple deceit: he asked his subjects, locals outside Mali’s capital city of Bamako, to describe the future in the present tense. Neither utopian nor dystopian, their imagined tomorrow is an animistic world, where desires become reality just by thinking them and the distinctions between humans and inanimate objects are no longer clearly defined—nor do they need to be.

Heman Chong & Anthony Marcellini



Heman Chong and Anthony Marcellini, *Twenty Plots for Things to Come*, 2013, Courtesy the artists (video still)

Heman Chong and Anthony Marcellini have collaborated on numerous projects since 2005, developing their working strategy over a long period of sustained conversation on the ideas and methodologies of artistic practice. Their projects explore systems for autonomy, risk, generosity and compromise within artistic production and their deep interest in literary forms means that they often blur the boundaries between the written word and visual art. *Twenty Plots for Things to Come* (2013), their most recent collaboration, takes quotidian objects and systems and reimagines them as something recognizable yet changed—providing a method both for evaluating the world today and for imagining where the future may take us. The results of their efforts capture the unease many feel about the future, expressed by how we envision it in the here and now.

Peter Coffin



Peter Coffin, *Untitled (Flying Fruit)*, 2012, Courtesy the artist (video still)

Although known as a conceptual artist, Peter Coffin prefers to refer to his practice as “idea art.” This distinction points to Coffin’s assertion that the artist’s role is to catalyze an art experience, not produce an authoritative view. It also reveals the driving motivation behind his practice: an investigation into the way people perceive and interpret the world around them. His *Untitled (Flying Fruits)* (2013), a two minute video of fruits flying through a void, expands the way we relate to objects and ideas in reality, while *Untitled (Sun)* (2012)—a customized geochron clock shown as a map with all political boundaries removed—becomes a map from the point of view of the sun. Both works provide a method for imagining something beyond our everyday experiences, jump starting what Coffin calls an act of creative self extension.

Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen



Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen, *75 Watt*, 2013, Courtesy the artists (video still)

Revital Cohen and Tuur van Balen’s collaborative, experimental, design practice produces objects, photographs, performances, and videos that explore the political, ethical, and aesthetic implications of technology. Through their work, Cohen and van Balen attempt to reexamine the relationships between human and animal, body and machine, machine and technology. In *75 Watt* (2013), the artists collaborated with workers in a factory in Zhongshan, China, where the workers’ end product is a choreographed dance generated by an object’s assembly. By shifting the purpose of the worker’s actions from the efficient production of objects to the performance of choreographed acts, *75 Watt* reinterprets mechanical movement as one of the most human forms of motion: dance. As such, *75 Watt* stands as a symbolic commemoration of the end of one era and the looming of an inevitable, yet still unknown, future.

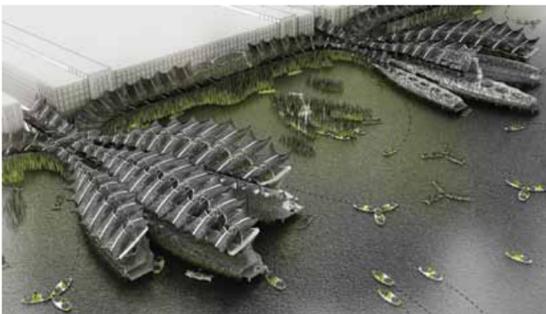
Brody Condon



Brody Condon, *Future Gestalt*, 2012, Courtesy Kadist Foundation (video still)

Brody Condon—inspired by the popular fantasy role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons and the Live Action Role Playing Game (or LARP) subculture, wherein participants take up an adopted identity within a fictionalized game played out in a real environment—explores the limits of fantasy in a world dominated by spectacle in his performance-oriented art practice. Keenly interested in the psychological impact of these games, Condon investigates how members navigate their sense of self through the lens of their characters. As common in his practice, his 2011 video and performance piece *Future Gestalt* reveals the deeply psychological realm of fantasy, where LARPing becomes a tool to investigate the construction of selfhood, and the many pressures which inform it.

Future Cities Lab



Future Cities Lab, *HYDRAMAX*, 2012, Courtesy the artists

Founded in 2004 by Jason Kelly Johnson and Nataly Gattegno, Future Cities Lab combines architecture, design, research, and technology to explore future manifestations of the San Francisco Bay Area and the world beyond. Seeking inspiration in organic, biological forms, they combine technological innovations with a design sensibility rooted in the realities of today’s world to produce sympathetic visions of the future. Through their interactive models—such as *HYDRAMAX* (2012), which reimagines the San Francisco waterfront as a system of aquatic parks, community gardens, and aquaponic farms, and *Hydraspan* (2013), which reimagines the now defunct eastern span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge as a habitable space—the collaborative research office prototypes possibilities for the future in a utopian, yet functional, manner.

Melanie Gilligan



Melanie Gilligan, *Unrest*, 2010, Commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, Walter Philips Gallery, The Banff Centre, Banff and Presentation House, North Vancouver (video still)

Melanie Gilligan is best known for her video work that examines current political and economic crises through dystopic visions of the future. She often structures her videos as television miniseries and distributes them via the Internet, intentionally breaking down the barriers between art, television, film, and web-based media to propose a new genre as a vision of the future. Her 2010 work *Popular Unrest* is a five-episode drama that explores the effects of the financial crisis of 2008, envisioning a future world where an unseen force called the World Spirit monitors and tracks all human transactions, from emotions to job performance. Through Gilligan’s conception of a future world, she forces viewers to consider the nature of free will and how much control we have in, and over, our lives, both now and in the not-so-distant future.

Lynn Hershman Leeson



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Infinity Engine*, 2013–2014, Courtesy the artist (detail)

Lynn Hershman Leeson has long mined new frontiers in future-facing technology and scientific research as a source for creating innovative artwork that displays a fascination with the malleability of the body and identity from both psychological and technological perspectives. Working in installation, digital media, feature film and documentary, she wrestles with emerging ideas in areas of communication technology and biological technology on the one hand, and the psychological status of identity including cyborgs and avatars, feminism and speculative fictions on the other, all in an effort to illuminate the relationship between the physical and psychic self. Her current project, *Infinity Engine* (2013–2014)—a two-room prototype of a genetics laboratory—enacts narratives of a not-too-distant future by exposing what the artist has called “possibilities for evolution—now that DNA can be programmed.”

Shane Hope



Shane Hope, *Public Panopticon Powder*, 2013, Courtesy the artist and Winkelman Gallery, New York

Shane Hope investigates possible impacts of nanotechnology, a field that studies the manipulation of matter on a molecular scale, by envisioning a future in which things will be atomically manufactured, or “nanofactured.” Hope uses currently available means to construct his intricately layered prints and paintings, but his intent is to provide a glimpse of what might become possible when matter becomes more widely hackable. As precise as his work may seem, Hope insists that the future he gestures toward cannot be predicted. Rather, his visual representations are pure postulation from the position of a human artist working prior to the ascendance of a superintelligence brought on by unimaginable technological feats, otherwise known as “the singularity.” In Hope’s imagined worlds, everything becomes hackable, and anything can cycle from an atom to an entire entity and back again.

Public Programs

Beyond Mars, Earth
Lecture by Adam Steltzner
Tue, Oct 15, 2013, 7:30 PM
SF Jazz Center, Miner Auditorium
201 Franklin Street
Tickets: \$15

In partnership with YBCA, Long Now Foundation will present a lecture by NASA’s Adam Steltzner, who engineered Curiosity’s landing on Mars, as part of their Seminars about Long-Term Thinking series.

Lecture by Paul Laffoley

Thu, Oct 17, 2013, 7:30 PM
San Francisco Art Institute,
Lecture Hall
800 Chestnut Street
FREE and open to the public

In conjunction with the *Dissident Futures* exhibition, SFAI will present a lecture by *Dissident Futures* artist Paul Laffoley as part of the Visiting Artist and Scholars series.

Opening Night Party

Fri, Oct 18, 2013, 8–10 PM
Downstairs Galleries, YBCA
\$12 in Advance / \$15 at the Door / YBCA Members and YBCA:You FREE

Celebrate the opening of *Dissident Futures* with an evening of live music, DJs, and performance, featuring DJs Nihar, Tristes Tropiques, Jason P and Smac from San Francisco’s premier monthly dance event, Haqeteria; *Dissident Futures* exhibiting artist Kamau Amu Patton in collaboration with Los Angeles-based artist Suzy Poling; and the funky, dark electro project kit n c.l.a.w.s. (Kit Clayton and Brian D. Hock).

Artists in Conversation

Sat, Oct 19, 2013, 2–4 PM
Large Conference Room, YBCA
FREE with gallery admission

Join us for an informative conversation with *Dissident Futures* artists Revital Cohen, Shane Hope, David Huffman, Jason Kelly Johnson of Future Cities Lab, Basim Magdy, Dan Mills, Kamau Amu Patton, and Connie Samaras.

Dissident Futures is made possible through the generous support of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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YBCA’s programs are made possible in part by Adobe, Koret Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.



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Lecture by Kazys Varnelis

Mon, Oct 21, 2013, 7 PM
California College of the Arts
(SF Campus), Timkin Lecture Hall
1111 Eight Street
FREE and open to the public

In conjunction with the *Dissident Futures* exhibition, CCA will present a lecture by Kazys Varnelis as part of their Architecture Lecture Series. Varnelis is Director of the Network Architecture Lab at the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture Planning, and Preservation, and a *Dissident Futures* catalog essayist.

Dissident Futures Art & Ideas Day Festival

Sat, Nov 23, 2013, 12–9 PM
Downstairs galleries, YBCA
FREE and open to the public

YBCA will present a one day interactive festival that will bring our communities together to explore and investigate possible futures envisioned by artists, urban planners, environmentalists, scientists, robotic experts, designers, programmers, and food activists through dynamic workshops, lectures, performances, interactive media, music and more. Partner organizations include: Institute for the Future, Code for America, GAFFTA, Long Now Foundation, Young Gifted and Black, Future Cities Lab, Fantastic Futures Project, YBCA’s Young Artists at Work, and a host of individual presenters.

Gallery Performance:

Myra Melford & Ian Winters

Sat, Jan 25, 2014, 4–6 PM
Downstairs Galleries, YBCA
FREE and open to the public

In conjunction with *Dissident Futures*, musician Myra Melford and video artist Ian Winters collaborate on an improvised performance within the galleries, using prepared and amplified piano with live video projection in an effort to re-imagine the piano as a 21st century instrument; followed by a Q & A with the artists.

Community Engagement and Youth Education Programs are made possible in part by: Adobe Foundation, Walter & Elise Haas Fund, Institute of Museum and Library Services, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, GGS Foundation, The Kimball Foundation, The Bernard Osher Foundation, The Sato Foundation, U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo Foundation, and Members of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

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Free First Tuesdays
Underwritten by Directors Forum Members

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