

San Francisco Has Replaced L.A. as the West Coast Capital of the Art World

By Michael Wilson

January 26, 2018

Dealer Jessica Silverman is among those making the case for a West Coast shakeup.



Judith Linhares, *Heading Out*, 2000, at Anglim Gilbert's booth at Untitled. Courtesy of Anglim Gilbert

As a West Coast art-world destination, San Francisco has long played second fiddle to Los Angeles. Pretty but pricey, the Paris of the West remains a tough place for artists to live and work. But the relentless growth of the tech industry and a timely reboot of some local institutions have the city on an upward trajectory. And if art fairs serve as barometers of cultural-economic health, recent editions of the interdisciplinary FOG Design+Art fair and Untitled, Art (known to most as plain Untitled) demand to be factored in to the equation.

The latter event in particular feels significant; founded in 2012 when it set up shop in Miami Beach, this month's annual edition was its second in SF. Gathering 51 exhibitors under the watchful eye of stone angels in the extraordinary Palace of Fine Arts, Untitled juxtaposed New York mainstays like Andrew Kreps and David Zwirner (the latter showing new paintings and drawings by Oscar Murillo), with such West Coast counterparts as Anglim Gilbert and Southern Exposure. Also featured prominently were some lesser-known international spaces (Norway caught the spotlight this time) and an excellent grouping of not-for-profits. Key among the last was the 500 Capp Street Foundation, which looks after the former home of an oft-overlooked local hero of Conceptualism, the late David Ireland.



Carlie Wilmans, Executive Director of the 500 Capp Street Foundation, lights David Ireland's chandelier during a tour of the house. Photo: Michael Wilson



View of *Mechanisms*, 2017, CCA Wattis Institute. Photo: Johnna Arnold, courtesy of CCA Wattis Institute

Though not an exhibitor at Untitled this year, Jessica Silverman, a dealer who's operated galleries in SF for the past decade, cites it as an important factor in the city's expanding art-world potential. Having started out in a 300-square-foot space ("it was becoming to be the case that my art fair booths were larger than my gallery space," she told GARAGE), Silverman later graduated to larger premises. Then in 2013, she teamed up with designer Yves Behar to establish Fused. "Yves needed a kind of foil, a public space," she

explained, “and asked me if I’d be interested in curating. But he’s always in dialogue with me about the people that I invite, so it’s not like I just show up and decide unilaterally what’s happening.”

Quizzed about the structure of the Fused program, Silverman emphasized its utility as a testing ground: “I can invite an artist who I’m really interested in, but who I’m not yet sure about as a long-term possibility. It can also just be an artist who I’m really keen on—we did an exciting show here with LA artist Erica Mahinay, for example. Sometimes the shows also veer into design.” The space’s location also contributes to this broad-based flexibility; Silverman pointed out a few significant institutions not far away, including Minnesota Street Project, an “economically sustainable” Dogpatch warehouse stuffed with a mix of galleries and studios, and the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, which grew out of the California College of the Arts and claims the pin-sharp Anthony Huberman as its director.



View of *OPEN HOUSE*, Jessica Silverman Gallery. Photo: Courtesy of Jessica Silverman Gallery



View of *John Houck*, fused. Photo: Courtesy of Jessica Silverman Gallery



Dealer Jessica Silverman. Photo: Courtesy of Jessica Silverman Gallery

At her own Ellis Street space, Silverman was hosting an exchange show with Toby Webster's Modern Institute from Glasgow, having previously worked on a similar project with Mexico City's Kurimanzutto. "I've been choosing collaborators based on, when I walk around an art fair, what feels distinctive, she explained. "Plus, San Francisco felt unimportant when I first opened—though it's obviously changed over the years—so I have a sensitivity to people being in cities where it can be quite hard to do the kind of business you need to do in order to survive."

Exactly how had San Francisco changed since Silverman had set up shop, I wondered. "My need to leave here to do art fairs has lessened with the growth of the city, which has a lot to do with the tech community. The wealth here is enormous, the history of philanthropy is tremendous, and there's a younger generation that's taking on that legacy too. There's also the reopening of SF MoMA, the growth of the de Young under Max Hollein and Claudia Schmuckli, and the success of the FOG and Untitled." The dealer was particularly struck by the latter event's opening the previous night: "San Francisco has better art fairs now than Los Angeles, which is impressive given that we're so small."

Silverman's acknowledgment felt particularly telling given LA's continuing dominance in terms of critical attention. "I love LA," she insisted, "but I don't do a lot of business there. I have four artists who live there and only one of them also shows with an LA gallery. I think that means..." She stumbled, laughing. "I haven't decided what it means! But I feel good about it. It's very hard for artists to afford to live in San Francisco, so in that way LA becomes the place to go. People are moving from San Francisco to New York! The idea that New York is easier to live in than San Francisco is crazy to me. But San Francisco right now is keeping me quite busy."

The next installment of Untitled, San Francisco, will take place in January 2019. OPEN HOUSE, *Jessica Silverman Gallery's show in association with the Modern Institute, continues through March 3.* John Houck is on view at fused through February 23.