

# HYPERALLERGIC

Jessica Silverman: "10 Art Shows to See in the Bay Area This Summer"

By Natasha Boas

June 26, 2023



Remedios Varo, "Estudio para Trasmundo" (c. 1955), oil on canvas, 16 1/2 x 21 1/4 inches  
(courtesy Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco)

Art that is generous, critical, and radical — that's what I call the "Bay way." This list of standout shows to see around the San Francisco Bay Area during our foggy summer exemplifies these ideals. It includes a collaboration between three pioneering progressive studios for artists with disabilities in Oakland, a museum-quality solo show spotlighting the 20th-century artist Remedios Varo in San Francisco, a group show curated by Saif Azzuz in Marin County, Sadie Barnette's *Family Business* exhibition in San Jose, and more.

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## Bernice Bing: Open Call



Sujin Lim, "Landscape Painting" (2019), HD single-channel video (© Asian Art Museum)

Described in the film *The Worlds of Bernice Bing* (2013) as "a wild butch, smoking Shermans, drinking brandy, artist, radical thinker, Chinese American, lesbian, Buddhist, activist," [Bernice Lee Bing](#), known as "Bingo" by her friends, was a pioneering queer Asian-American abstract artist in the Bay Area. The first Asian artist to graduate from the now-defunct San Francisco Art Institute, her cohort included the Beat artists of the 1950s and 1960s such as Bruce Conner, Joan Brown, and Manuel Neri. Bing challenged the Eurocentric teachings of art history by creating abstract work that was deeply influenced by Zen Buddhism, Chinese philosophers, and traditional calligraphy.

The exhibition *Into View: Bernice Bing* at the Asian Art Museum ends on June 26, but the museum will continue to celebrate her influence on contemporary art with a juried show of 25 literary and video artworks, entitled *Open Call*. Selected artists responded to the prompt: "In tribute to the Bernice Bing exhibition and the collection at the Asian Art Museum, what is contemporary art through the lens of Asian and Asian American art and cultures?" The open call was co-organized with the Asian American Women Artists Association, among other nonprofits. Bing co-founded the organization in 1989 with noted artists Betty Nobue Kano and Flo Oy Wong and feminist critic Moira Roth to advance the visibility and recognition of Asian-American women in the arts.

Asian Art Museum ([asianart.org](http://asianart.org))  
200 Larkin Street, Civic Center, San Francisco, California  
Through December 11

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## Estefania Puerta: *Tragada*



Estefania Puerta, "Like a thorn piercing through a tough skin that doesn't know if it is open or broken" (2023), 33 x 36 x 8 inches, steel, plaster pulp, acrylic, stained glass, mixed organic media, photographs, and aluminum leaf (photo courtesy the artist and Micki Meng Gallery)

I first discovered Estefania Puerta's work at her Yale MFA show in 2018. Shortly after, she had her first solo show in New York at Situations gallery, where she presented *Womb Wound* (2020). Researching psychoanalysis and so-called "female hysteria," as well as personal histories of immigration and un-documentation in the United States, led Puerta to create dense sculptural bodies and environments made out of mixed materials such as resin, dried flower, beeswax, and steel. Puerta, who was born in 1988 in Manizales, Colombia, self-identifies as an immigrant womxn and splits her time between New York and Vermont, where she teaches art at Middlebury College.

For her show at Micki Meng Gallery in downtown San Francisco, Puerta continues her deep research into what she calls "world-making, shape-shifting, border crossing, the natural, and the alien and language failure." The wall works featured in *Tragada* play with the ideas of slippage and transformation in areas of the body, such as the throat, where speech happens. A work titled "Like a thorn piercing through a tough skin that doesn't know if it is open or broken" (2023) is made from materials: steel, plaster pulp, acrylic, stained glass, mixed organic media, photographs, and aluminum leaf. It reads as a decorative organic ornamental object that is attached to the wall but extends well beyond it.

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Micki Meng Gallery ([mickimeng.com](http://mickimeng.com))

716 Sacramento Street, Chinatown, San Francisco, California

Through July 28

**Remedios Varo: Encuentros**



Remedios Varo, "Encuentro" (1959), oil on canvas (courtesy Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco)

One of Mexico's most beloved artists, Remedios Varo is known for her seminal Modernist works informed by Surrealist tropes such as magic, alchemy, astrology, and spirituality. Born in Spain in 1908, Varo participated in the first International Surrealist exhibition in Paris in 1938 where she met Max Ernst, André Breton, Dora Maar, and others of the Surrealist movement. In 1941, along with the poet Benjamin Péret, Varo boarded the Serpa Pinto ship in Marseilles to flee Nazi-dominated Europe. Ending up in Mexico City in the Colonia Roma district among other artist refugees, she formed a strong lifelong bond with artists Leonora Carrington and Kati Horna, whose daily lives and studio lives were interrelated with hers.

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In this exhibition, the second solo gallery show of Varo's work since she died in 1963, twelve works on view include "Estudio para Trasmundo" (c. 1955), which depicts a crewless ship sailing in murky grey waters. The ship, like many of Varo's whimsical machines and impossible vessels, is propelled by a large pinwheel sail powering wheels attached to either side of the ship's hull. This fantastical transportation illustrates the afterworld as the migration through different imagined and real realms, which also references her extensive transnational travel as an émigré. Varo's painterly technique, honed over many years, combines meticulously rendered primary subjects with loosely painted atmospheric backgrounds in *grattage*, a technique favored by Surrealists which involves scratching fresh paint with a sharp blade.

Gallery Wendi Norris ([gallerywendinorris.com](http://gallerywendinorris.com))

436 Jackson Street, North Beach, San Francisco, California

Through July 15

**Isaac Julien: *Once Again ... (Statues Never Die)***



Isaac Julien, "lolaus / In the Life (Once Again ... Statues Never Die)" (2022)  
(photo courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco)

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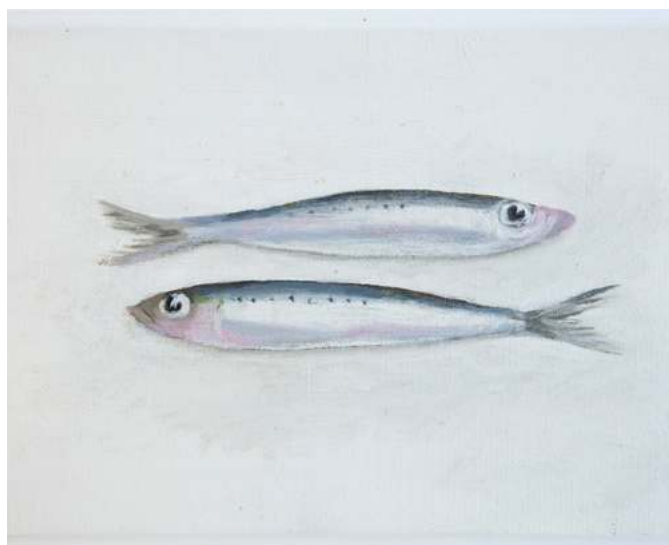
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Haptic, sensual, and scaled up, Isaac Julien's new series of photographs in this exhibition are desire-inspiring. They're based on a video installation by Julien that follows the story of patronage of Black art by Albert C. Barnes, the American millionaire and founder of the Barnes Foundation, where the film debuted last summer. In this gallery exhibition, however, unexpectedly and intentionally, the referenced film is not shown; although the soundtrack written and composed by Alice Smith haunts the space. The majestic photographs stand alone in the gallery space as their own monuments to the film — further problematizing the ideas of reperformance and reappearance.

The atmospheric tableaux made for this exhibition celebrate the 1930s Harlem Renaissance and are inspired by the historical relationship and love story between Alain LeRoy Locke, philosopher and cultural critic who is known as the "Father of the Harlem Renaissance," and Richmond Barthé, a sculptor known for his portrayal of Black subjects. Images of Locke and Barthé (played by actors André Holland and Alex Part) suggest a form of political resistance through the possibility of desire between two Black men. Thinking about the exhibition title, *Once Again ... (Statues Never Die)*, we can at least hope that monuments may be re-imagined towards the narration of a better future.

Jessica Silverman ([jessicasilvermangallery.com](http://jessicasilvermangallery.com))  
621 Grant Avenue, Chinatown, San Francisco, California  
Through July 22

### **Martha Shaw & Alicia McCarthy**



Left: Alicia McCarthy, "Untitled" (2023), colored pencil and spray paint on wood panel 24 x 24 inches; right: Martha Shaw, "Sardines" (2023), oil on canvas panel, 6 x 8 inches (photo courtesy Part 2 Gallery)

Oakland-based artist Alicia McCarthy paired up with the Marin-County-based Shaw family matriarch, Martha Shaw, for a group presentation of paintings at Part 2 Gallery in Oakland. McCarthy, who had an important graffiti practice in the late 20th century and hails from San

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Francisco Art Institute, has created a body of work that is capacious and very Bay way. Quietly prolific, McCarthy refers to herself as a "painter of lines" and is a Bay area arts activist and a central figure of the 1990s Mission School. Her generosity and commitment to other artists are felt in her practice through her intentionality with placing friends in her solo shows.

Having studied at UC Berkeley graduate art school with her mentor, the notable Funk ceramicist Richard Shaw, McCarthy quickly became an honorary member of his family, forming connections with artist Martha Shaw, his collaborator and wife, and their two children, musician and painter Virgil Shaw and photographer Alice Shaw. McCarthy invited Martha Shaw to participate in this summer's two-person show and explains: "There is this beautiful and haunting quality about Martha's work that stays with me as well as her dark sense of humor. It's also the attention she holds to objects most folks never hold a gaze to, like a stick of butter." Shaw's still lifes and landscapes create a harmonious dialogue with McCarthy's work. In "Ranunculi" (2023), a small oil on canvas panel, Shaw assembles a bouquet of colored flowers with a soft brush and elegant touch – not unlike the poetry of a classic McCarthy double rainbow helix.

Part 2 Gallery ([part2gallery.com](http://part2gallery.com))  
1523b Webster Street, Oakland, California  
Through July 29

### *What's that about*



Installation View, "trickster returns", Saif Azzuz and Lulu Thrower  
(image courtesy Saif Azzuz, Lulu Thrower, and Anthony Meier)

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Bay Area-based Libyan-Yurok artist Saif Azzuz makes his curatorial debut with the show *What's that about* at Anthony Meier's new gallery in Mill Valley, the rarefied town in Marin County at the base of Mount Tamalpais, 10 miles north of the Golden Gate Bridge. The exhibition plays with the ontological status of the image and begs the question that everyone asks artists: "What is your art about?" The answer, Azzuz suggests, is to look at the works he selected for the exhibition to push back on the hierarchies that conventional art histories impose. The show feels like an ongoing conversation among friends.

The Bay Area is known for its deep-rooted subcultures of art movements such as Dynaton, the [Rat Bastard Society](#), and the Mission School. There is something implicitly Bay-way about Azzuz's selection of works from friends — all of whom have lived and worked in the Bay — such as Teresa Baker, Libby Black, Clifford Hengst, Eamon Ore-Giron, the duo Tyler Cross and Kyle Lypka, among others — the exhibition additionally includes work by historical figures who share in certain conceptual and material resonances, including Melvin Edwards and Rosie Lee Tompkins. Is Azzuz defining a new group of artists who share formal and social concerns?

In the gallery's exhibition window vitrine, facing the street and the neighboring community, Azzuz and Lulu Thrower created a narrative diorama entitled *trickster returns* (2023), which includes a repurposed family canoe and a new painting by Azzuz, "Coyote Tales" (2023), based on a traditional Karuk tale.

Anthony Meier ([anthonymeier.com](http://anthonymeier.com))  
21 Throckmorton Avenue, Mill Valley, California  
Through August 1

***Frank Bowling: The New York Years 1966–1975***

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Frank Bowling, "Palimpsest I - Mothers House DarkRedGreen" (1966) (© FrankBowling, DACS, London & ARS, New York, 2022; photo © Charlie Littlewood; image courtesy the artist)

Seeing a Frank Bowling painting from the late 1960s is a time-bending revelation. Bowling developed major bodies of work in New York including his oceanic "Map" paintings, with hazy stencils of continents and silkscreened family photos that read as contemporary and timely and not tethered to a mid-20th century New York Abstract Expressionist (AbEx) aesthetic doctrine. The artist uses color-soaked compositions of primary pop colors and features interpretive abstracted landscapes of London, New York, and Guyana. Bowling also draws upon his transnational journey; born in Bartica, British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1934, Bowling arrived in London in 1953 and was recognized as a driving force in the London art scene by the early 1960s.

Bowling spent just under a decade in New York from 1966 to 1975 and the exhibition at SFMOMA highlights this period in his life, presenting large-scale paintings that combine British landscape traditions and Ab/Ex gestures. During this formative time in New York, the artist participated in critical debates around abstract painting and the role of Black cultural identity with his contemporaries, including the artists Jack Whitten, Mel Edwards, Al Loving, and Daniel Johnson. In

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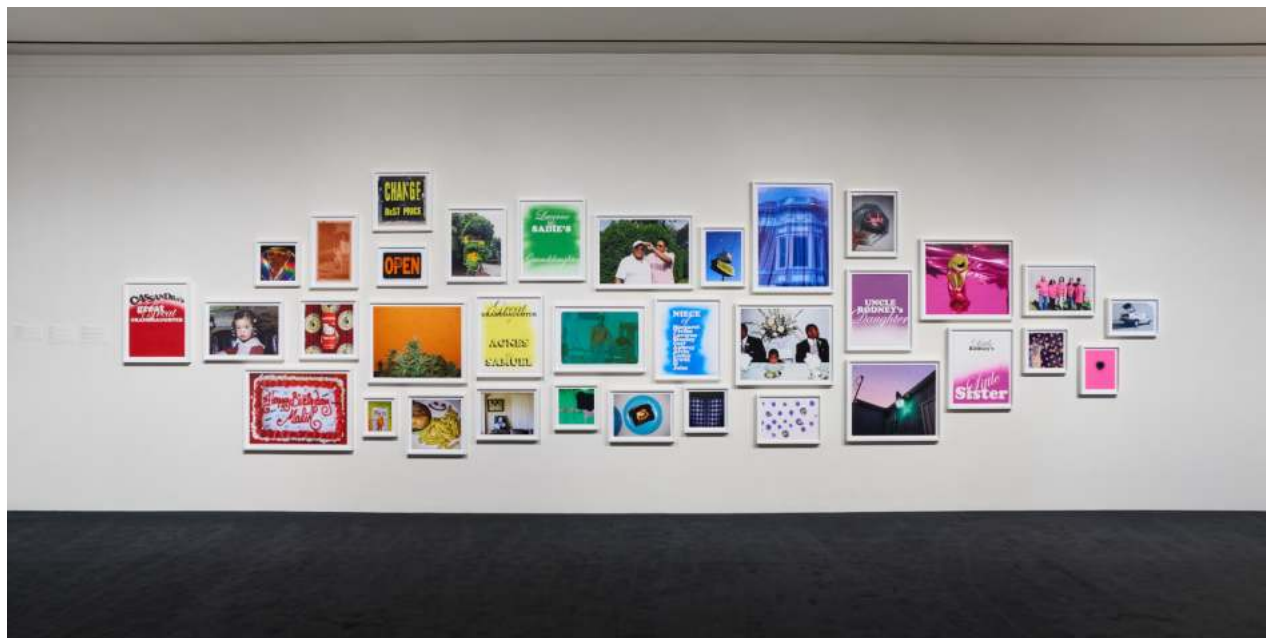
1969, Bowling curated the ground-breaking exhibition 5+1 at Stony Brook University in New York, showcasing the work of five African-American abstract artists, including himself. Bowling continues to, in his own words, "update painting traditions" from his London studio.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art ([sfmoma.org](http://sfmoma.org))

151 3rd Street, SoMa, San Francisco, California

Through September 10

### Sadie Barnette: *Family Business*



Installation view of *Sadie Barnette: Family Business* at San Jose Museum of Art, 2023 (photo by Glen Cheriton, Impart Photography; courtesy the artist and the San Jose Museum of Art)

Oakland-based artist Sadie Barnette's installation *Family Business* at the San Jose Museum of Art operates as a kind of "liberation living room": a private space within a public institution that speaks to Black life in the US. Barnette works through family stories and archives, conveying the political through the personal.

Take a peek at the living room through a dramatic pink glitter rose-tinted window covered with security bars at the entrance to the gallery. Peruse the wall of festooned and bejeweled family photographs and hang out on the silver glitter vinyl-covered sofa and armchair. Watch a video montage of family home movies depicting dancing and celebrations entitled "Almond Street" (2023) with an interpretive drum solo soundtrack.

*Family Business* is simultaneously taking place at the Institute of Arts and Sciences at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Barnette created monumental and detailed graphite drawings

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at the university referencing the 500-page dossier the FBI amassed on her father, Rodney Barnette, who founded the Compton chapter of the Black Panther Party in 1968.

Institute of the Arts and Sciences, UC Santa Cruz ([ucsc.edu](http://ucsc.edu))  
100 Panetta Avenue, Santa Cruz, California  
Through September 3

San Jose Museum of Art ([sjmusart.org](http://sjmusart.org))  
110 South Market Street, San Jose, California  
Through October 15

***Kehinde Wiley: An Archaeology of Silence***



Installation view of *Kehinde Wiley: An Archeology of Silence* at the de Young Museum, San Francisco, 2023  
(photo by Sam Tyler Cooper; courtesy the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco)

*Kehinde Wiley: An Archaeology of Silence* debuted at the Venice Biennale last year and consists of 25 works, all made by the artist during the COVID-19 pandemic at his studios in Dakar, Senegal, and Lagos, Nigeria. Wiley, an alumnus of the San Francisco Art Institute, borrows from Michel Foucault, explaining the author's concept of an "archaeology of silence" by giving voice to neglected and silenced words and things. "I was looking to create a show that spoke to the vulnerability of Black bodies," Wiley said at an opening reception. "During COVID, it became immediately evident to me

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that there was something that needed to be unearthed: an archaeology of those presences that are no longer with us.”

Horizontal Black figures dominate this exhibition. Billboard-sized paintings of beings struck down, wounded, or dead suggest martyrs and the legacies of colonialism and systemic racism. Large-scale or small-scale sculptural figures (never life-size) are prone in the grass or a tomb while others appear doubled over in anguish, drawing a violent and visceral connection to the larger systemic racism and the individual. An awe-inspiring central bronze equestrian monument, which stands on a plinth at nearly 20 feet tall and weighs several tons, is isolated in a dramatically lit burgundy room. A shirtless young Black man with cornrows is slumped over a horse’s back like a fallen warrior, while his legs, adorned with Nikes, dangle below. Although the de Young Museum has thoughtfully established a “respite room” for viewers triggered by visions of Black trauma, this gallery seems to offer viewers a chance to naturally pause, contemplate, and mourn in the darkness.

The de Young Museum ([famsf.org](http://famsf.org))

Golden Gate Park, 50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Drive, San Francisco, California

Through October 15

### *Into the Brightness: Artists from Creativity Explored, Creative Growth & NIAD*



Monica Valentina, an artist from Creative Growth in Oakland, California, poses with her work featured in *Into the Brightness*. (photo by Leopoldo Macaya, courtesy Oakland Museum of California)

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The Bay Area has historically led conversations around artists with developmental disabilities. Countering the label of "outsider art" to describe the work of artists who have no contact with the commercial art world and who are physically and/or mentally isolated, *Into the Brightness* convenes three Bay Area independent art centers that have expanded representation for the past 50 years. Creativity Explored in San Francisco, Creative Growth in Oakland, and Nurturing Independence Through Artistic Development (NIAD) Art Center in Richmond were founded by Florence Ludins-Katz and Elias Katz, two pioneers of the arts and disabilities movement.

In 1969, California Legislature passed the Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act, which gave people with developmental disabilities the right to seek sufficient support services necessary to lead independent lives. The Katzes' art centers helped develop an "insider" methodology to support artists with disabilities, creating group studio environments with artist mentors while engaging with commercial gallery systems, collectors, and museum acquisitions.

Bringing together 300 artists and 600 works from these three profound venues, *Into the Brightness* is a celebration of creativity. Beginning with "Welcome" (2023), a video showing artists happily greeting the audience, what follows are large gallery spaces filled with vivid joyful artworks, ephemera, and videos. Included are Monica Valentine's intricately sequined sculptures, Samedi Djeinguero's sculpture "Thank you for helping me" (2021) from his residency at Recology in San Francisco, Jonathan Velasquez's large-scale cardboard musical instruments, Jason Powell-Smith's text-based works, narrative works by Rosena Finister with her signature speech bubbles, a fiber sculpture by Joseph Omolayole, and two collaborative murals — one organized by the Creativity Explored studio, the other by NIAD Art Center.

Oakland Museum of Art ([museumca.org](https://www.museumca.org))  
1000 Oak Street, Oakland, California  
Through January 21, 2024

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