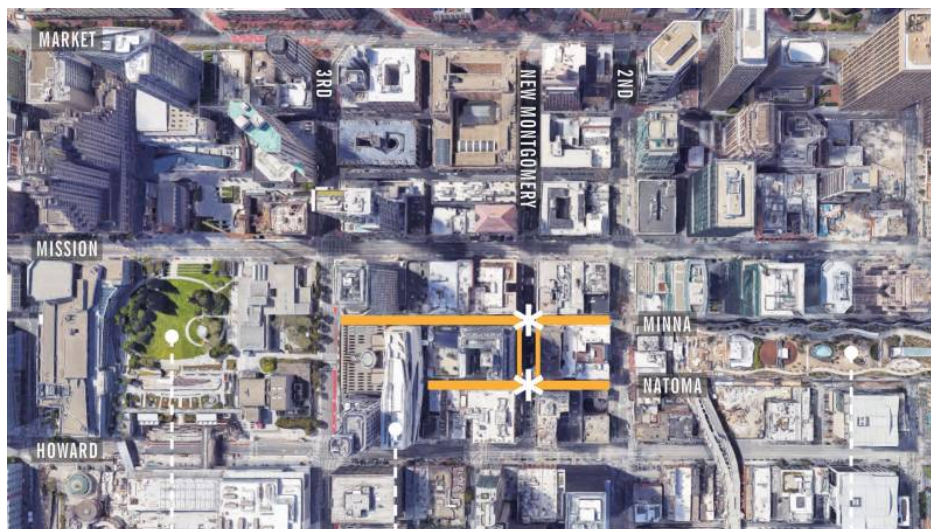


Masako Miki: "San Francisco's Minna and Natoma Streets to Become an Art Corridor"

By Sarah Hotchkiss

October 8, 2021



Minna and Natoma Streets highlighted in orange to show the location of future streetscape improvements in downtown San Francisco. (Courtesy SFDPW)

It's not often that major overhauls to San Francisco's downtown streets also involve the careful selection of artist-designed bike racks. Or colorful asphalt art inlaid into newly paved thoroughfares. But a new streetscape project, a collaboration between city departments, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Yerba Buena Community Benefit District plans to turn about 800 feet of Minna and Natoma Streets into an arts corridor, with help from designs by five local artists.

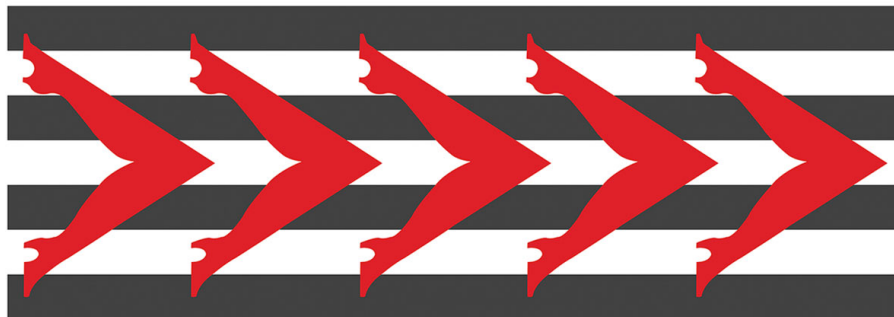
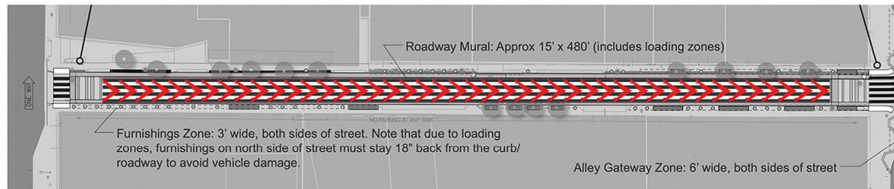
Estimated to be finished by the fall of 2023, the Minna Natoma Art Corridor hopes to transform the narrow streets into a "unique pedestrian destination," as well as an appealing alternative to busier east-west routes like Mission and Howard.



An image from Jesse Schlesinger's SFAC proposal for Natoma street furniture. (Courtesy SFAC).

The five artists selected by a San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC)-organized committee will design large-scale street murals (to be made with colored thermoplastic) and street furniture (benches, chairs, bollards and bike racks). Oakland painter Muzae Sesay's proposal for the two stretches of Natoma Street resembles a stack of cozy homes with arched front doors. Sculptor and woodworker Jesse Schlesinger is in charge of Natoma's street furniture; his designs use natural elements like salvaged old-growth redwood to connect the green space atop the Transbay Transit Center with Yerba Buena Gardens.

On the longer stretch of Minna Street, two artists will take over the asphalt art. Barbara Stauffacher Solomon, known for her supergraphics, has proposed a pattern of red-booted legs angled to cleverly denote the traffic direction and pay homage to one oft-repeated story of how the street got its name (hint: sex workers). The neighborhood's history and current population (the project is located squarely in SOMA Pilipinas, San Francisco's Filipino Heritage District) also informs Mel Vera Cruz's proposals, which feature designs inspired by Filipino banig mats and hablon (hand-woven fabric in colorful plaids). Masako Miki's sketches for Minna's street furniture draw from Filipino myths, creating simplified, three-dimensional forms based on boulders, the sea, sun, moon and stars.



An image from Barbara Stauffacher Solomon's proposal for Minna Street's asphalt art. (Courtesy SFAC).

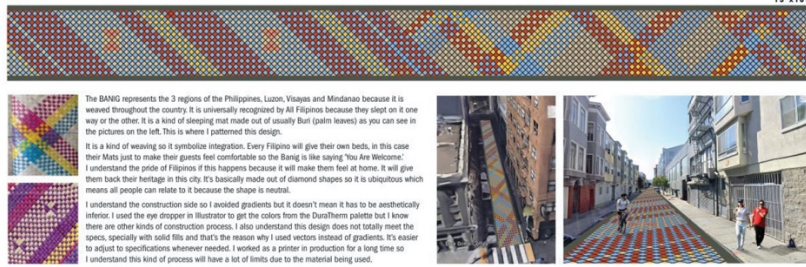
Jill Manton, the SFAC's director of special initiatives and the Public Art Trust, says the fact that Public Works thought to integrate artworks into infrastructure improvements is by itself an achievement. While many downtown construction projects trigger the city's 2%-for-art requirement, streetscape upgrades are exempt from that rule.

And yet the Minna Natoma Art Corridor Project has encompassed both functional and aesthetic considerations from its very start, evocative of the city departments involved: the SFAC, Planning Department, Public Works and Municipal Transportation Agency. "I loved that our colleagues [in other departments] are now sort of art advocates," Manton says. "[They] are now recognizing the benefit and value of having artists' involvement."

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

1 BANIG



The BANIG represents the 3 regions of the Philippines, Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao because it is weaved throughout the country. It is universally recognized by All Filipinos because they slept on it one way or the other. It is a kind of sleeping mat made out of usually Buri (palm leaves) as you can see in the pictures on the left. This is where I patterned this design.

It is a kind of weaving so it symbolize integration. Every Filipino will give their own beds, in this case their Mats just to make their guests feel comfortable so the Bang is like saying "You Are Welcome." I understand the pride of Filipinos if this happens because it will make them feel at home. It will give them back their heritage in this city. It's basically made out of diamond shapes so it is ubiquitous which means all people can relate to it because the shape is neutral.

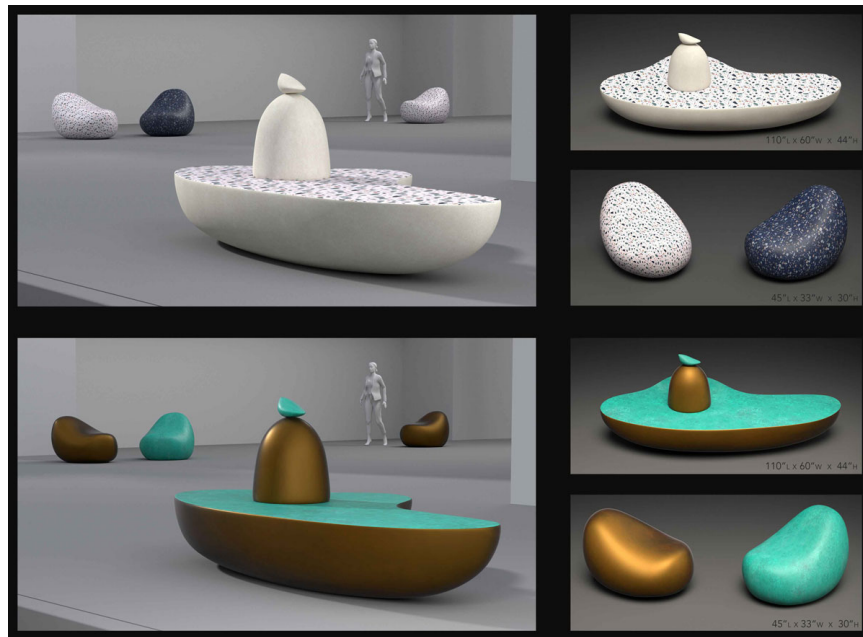
I understand the construction side so I avoided gradients but it doesn't mean it has to be aesthetically inferior. I used the eye dropper in Illustrator to get the colors from the Banig's pattern but I know there are other kinds of construction process. I also understand this design does not totally meet the specs, specially with solid fills and that's the reason why I used vectors instead of gradients. It's easier to adjust to specifications whenever needed. I worked as a printer in production for a long time so I understand this kind of process will have a lot of limits due to the material being used.

Part of Mel Vera Cruz's proposal for asphalt art on Minna Street. (Courtesy SFAC).

While the actual fabrication of the asphalt art and street furniture will be carried out by general contractors and other professionals, the artists will be part of every step leading up to final installation, approving mock-ups, materials, colors and placement on the street. Each artist will receive \$30,000–\$35,000 for their designs.

Further phases of the art corridor may include stand-alone artistic interventions (like murals, window installations or light projections) that could be commissioned on both public and private property, depending on fundraising. Manton is excited for the current streetscape improvements to inspire future projects. "We hope that this created sort of a nexus in these two very long blocks," she says. "I think there's great potential there for other activations."

Previous projects like Sites Unseen have used private funding to install public art in the same vicinity. Hank Willis Thomas' neon piece *Love Over Rules* lights up over Annie Alley, Barry McGee's paintings adorn the Moscone Center Garage, and Leah Rosenberg's colorful niche seating already lines a section of Natoma Street near the corner of New Montgomery. (Manton says as far as she knows, Rosenberg's piece will remain in place when this project is complete.)



Images from Masako Miki's proposal for Minna street furniture. (Courtesy SFAC).

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

But missing from those previous efforts to enliven public space was the added transformative power of—wait for it—infrastructure. The Minna Natoma Art Corridor aims to create a more pedestrian-friendly route through SoMa with widened sidewalks, new pedestrian “bulbouts,” raised crosswalks, and new mid-block traffic signals and crossings on 2nd Street and New Montgomery. Furthermore, the Yerba Buena Community Benefit District has volunteered to maintain the artworks after their installation.

While the Minna Natoma Art Corridor will definitely yield a more attractive—and safer—route between the Transbay Transit Center and the hub of cultural institutions surrounding Yerba Buena Gardens, Manton has even loftier goals for the site and its integrated artworks: “I think hopefully it might become a destination instead of just a pass-through area.”

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508