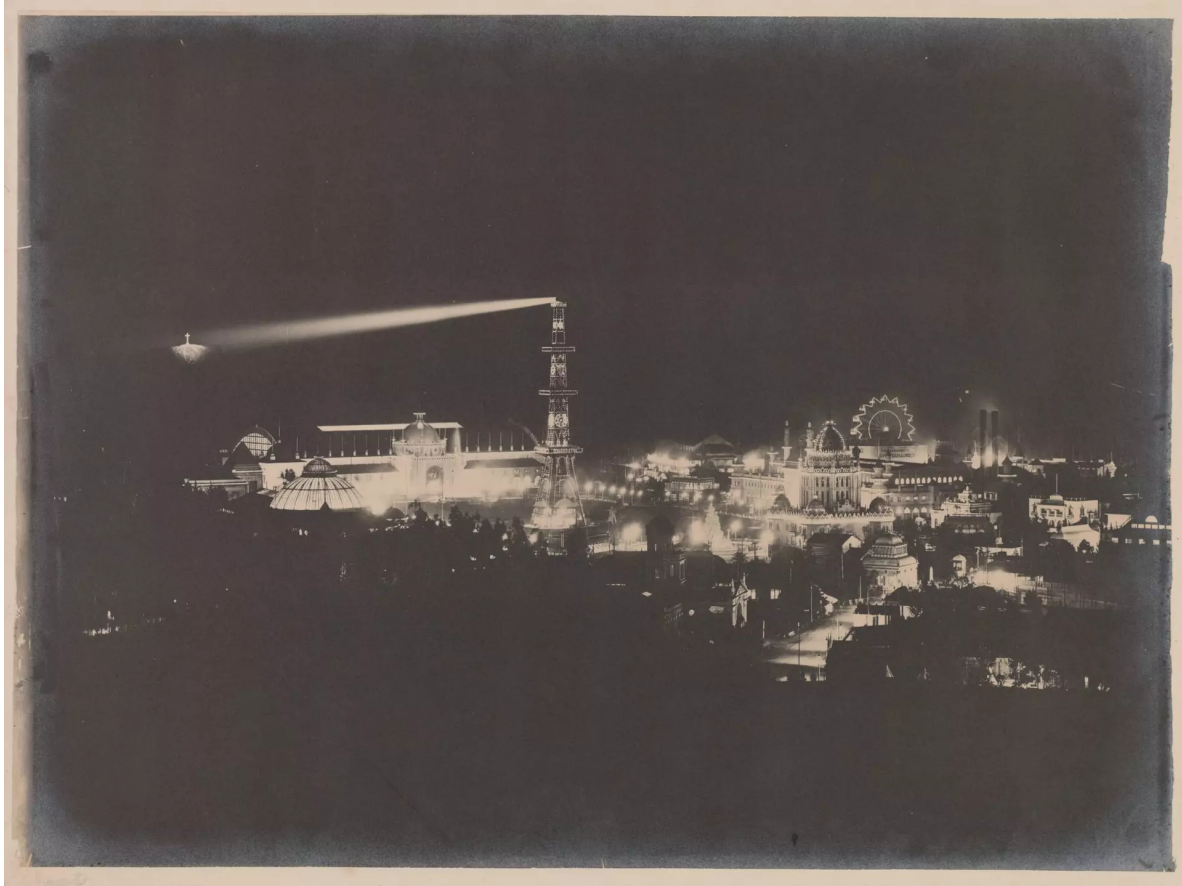


The **San Francisco Standard**

"9 must-see art exhibits around the Bay in October"

By Sam Mondros

October 2, 2025



Isaiah West Taber's "Night View — Golden Gate Park," at the de Young for "Boom and Bust: Photographing Northern California." | Source: Courtesy de Young Museum

Summer is behind us, and while the season brought unwelcome news for some of San Francisco's most beloved galleries — KADIST in the Mission closed in June, and Gallery 16 shut its doors after 32 years — there's a surge of new energy.

With every bust comes a boom. Nexus, the Bay Area's newest art week, spotlighting Black voices and bridging the gap between San Francisco and the East, South, and North Bay, returns for a second year. This time, it's packed with more programming and perfectly timed to coincide with the Museum of the African Diaspora's 20th anniversary and newest exhibitions.

October promises a bounty of creativity, with Nexus serving as the spark for a series of standout shows. Here are nine must-see art exhibitions to mark on your calendar this month.

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'Continuum' and 'Unbound'



Gustavo Nazareno, "The Secret Matrices of Creation." | Source: Everton Ballardin © Courtesy of GUSN Studio and Opera Gallery.

After six and a half months of renovation-related closures, the Museum of the African Diaspora has reopened just in time for Bay Area Black Art Week. The museum is offering twin exhibitions.

"Continuum" celebrates the museum's 20th anniversary, highlighting key moments and artists that shaped the institution. One standout piece is by Ramekon O'Arwisters, a local sculptor who is also hosting an open studio Saturday.

"Unbound" explores the concept of Blackness through the cosmos, featuring multi-generational African diasporic artists exploring identity and spirituality.

Museum of the African Diaspora, 685 Mission St., through February.

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Drew Villanueva: 'One Thousand Years of Solitude'



"Lake Merritt Apple Maps." | Source: Drew Villanueva

San Francisco painter Drew Villanueva attracted attention in February, when he turned the absurd "Gulf of America" news cycle into a moment of sardonic relief: an acrylic painting of the gulf renamed Lake Merritt and marked as the "center of the universe."

Now, Villanueva is getting his first solo exhibition, and the setting is as odd and interesting as his work: Good Mother Studio on the third floor of Ikea on Market Street. "One Thousand Years of Solitude" features paintings made during a residency in Oicatá, Colombia, as well as other previously unseen works of magical realism that show nostalgia for the dawn of internet culture and Y2K.

Good Mother Studio, 945 Market St., third floor, through Oct. 16

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Jim Melchert: 'Where the Boundaries Are'



"Feathers of Phoenix Blue." | Source: Courtesy di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art

It is sadly poetic that the late ceramicist Jim Melchert's retrospective coincides with the closure of Gallery 16, whose owner, Griff Williams, was friends with the trailblazing artist for more than 30 years and is curating his first major retrospective.

A student of sculptor Peter Voulkos at UC Berkeley, Melchert became an influential artist in his own right in the 1960s. The inaugural visual arts director for the National Endowment for the Arts, Melchert, who died in 2023 at 92, was a champion of free speech.

The show presents more than over 75 artworks, many of which have not been seen by the public since the 1970s, that demonstrate his marriage of conceptual thinking with the down-and-dirty aspects of working with clay. These range from videos of his early experimental performances to the mesmerizing broken-tile pieces that became his late-career signature.

Di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, 1150 25th St., Oct. 18 to Jan. 3

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Mills College Art Museum: '100 Years of Creative Visions'



A work by Ron Nagle. | Source: Courtesy Mills College Art Museum

While Mills College may be no more, its impressive collection of artwork lives on at the Mills College Art Museum, which is celebrating its centennial. On view are works from world-renowned artists like Henri Matisse, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and Diego Rivera, as well as local legends like Ansel Adams, Richard Diebenkorn, and Robert Bechtle. The opening is Thursday from 2 to 5 p.m.

The show is, in part, a tribute to the museum's founder, Albert M. Bender, who collected widely across Bay Area art movements.

Keep an eye out for the logic-defying works of Twin Peaks oddball Ron Nagle — a funk art legend and master ceramicist.

Mills College Art Museum, 5000 MacArthur Blvd., Oakland, through April 26

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'Boom and Bust: Photographing Northern California'

Whether it's in pursuit of gold, water, cannabis, or microchips, ambitious youngsters have been moving to San Francisco to seek their fortune since long before Horace Greeley uttered the phrase, "Go west, young man."

On the heels of "Paul McCartney Photographs 1963-64: Eyes of the Storm," photography curator Sally Martin Katz is back with another ambitious show highlighting the trials and triumphs of a city that can't seem to figure out how to coast.

In "Boom and Bust," historical and contemporary images reveal Northern California's enduring rhythm of growth and decline.

Just don't think too hard about which bubble we're currently in.

De Young Museum, Golden Gate Park, Oct. 18 to June 7

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'Cunning Folk: Witchcraft, Magic, and Occult Knowledge'



Jan van de Velde II, "The Sorceress," 1626. | Source: Courtesy Cantor Arts Center and Robert E. and Mary B. P. Gross Fund

Drawing from Stanford's vast collections, "Cunning Folk" traces the practice and perception of witchcraft from the Middle Ages through the Enlightenment.

Historic illustrated books that document the infamous witch trials, audio installations featuring early "witch ballads," and witchcraft prints from Northern Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer will be featured alongside contemporary works by local artists like Sunny A. Smith, whose ancestors were in attendance at the Salem Witch Trials.

The show makes for a great reason to visit the Cantor just in time for Halloween.

Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University, 328 Lomita Dr, Stanford, Oct. 30 to Feb. 22.

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'Observations of a Still Life'



Annie Duncan, "Two Razors." | Source: Courtesy Bedford Gallery

This show in Walnut Creek gathers 22 artists who, through painting, sculpture, and photography, transform everyday objects into curiosities.

San Francisco painter and ceramicist Annie Duncan stands out for her massive clay sculptures of razors, perfume bottles, and other domestic objects associated with femininity. Using illusionistic glazing techniques, she superimposes reflections and transparency on large-scale vessels, bringing the viewer into the intimacy of a bathroom sink or a bedroom dresser.

Bedford Gallery, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, through Dec. 14

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Her Dark Materials



GaHee Park, "Back to Mountain." | Source: Courtesy Jessica Silverman

Despite the range of media deployed by Ann Agee, Rebecca Manson, Sarah Meyohas, GaHee Park, and Alison Elizabeth Taylor, "Her Dark Materials" brings a surprising sense of calm. Whether it's wood, clay, oil, or pastels, each piece complements the next while maintaining its singularity and demanding presence. Together, the works straddle the tactile and the metaphysical, turning the small monumental and the familiar strange. Manson's carefully constructed works, made up of tiny ceramic pieces, portray the deliberate and meditative act of craft.

Jessica Silverman, 621 Grant Ave., through Oct. 25

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