

I  
LOOK  
FOR  
CLUES  
IN YOUR  
DREAMS



*HMx*

HEATHER MARX ART ADVISORY

## The West as Metaphysical Muse @ Berkeley Art Center

Posted on 12 July 2016.



Installation view, foreground: l to r: "Sun Makes Moon Brown" by Chris Duncan; "Sky Orb and Stones," Amber Jean Young; and pieces from the "Woodrock" series by Victoria Wagner.

by Lawrence Gipe

Organized by independent curator Heather Marx, *I Look for Clues in Your Dreams*, is a compelling and remarkably cohesive exhibition. The artists hang together naturally, like kindred spirits; and the Berkeley Art Center, with its late-60's modernist tree house vibe, functions as the ideal site for a show addressing metaphysical aspects of the western landscape.

The main title proposes an ephemeral premise, but the subtitle, *Six Bay Area Artists Explore the Intrinsic Mysticism of the American West*, aims at a theme that has a long history in the region. In his recent essay about *Enchanted Modernities*:

*Mysticism, Landscape, and the American West*, an exhibition at Utah State University focusing on the many accomplished artists and musicians who moved west in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Paul Eli Ivey notes that as early as 1875:

“Theosophists in New York recognized the potential of the American West as a site for a rebirth and re-enchantment of humanity”. The metaphysical muse promised by the American western landscape and climate attracted bands of earnest and creative people over the last century, many of them artists seeking a profound connection to nature that differed from their dreary East Coast urban existence. Along the way, the term “mysticism” opened up beyond its original definition as a religious vision, to describe most any transcendent adventure, from New Age to psychedelic experiences.

The six artists in *I Look for Clues in Your Dreams* don't explicitly demonstrate how “re-enchantment” arises from the Southwest landscape; but the visual allure of their works as an ensemble might give viewers a mild case of synesthesia (which was a highly sought-after mystical manifestation). Several of the artists combine the retinal excitement generated by lively color combinations, with **Kristin Farr's** psychedelic medallions at the show's entrance leading the charge. Vibrant colors merge onto literal, terrestrial elements in the sculpture of **Leo**

**Bersamina** (who stencils onto stones and driftwood) and **Victoria Wagner** (who paints directly onto redwood burl), but these pieces don't transcend the decorative.

**Jenny Sharaf** re-visits the cusp of the 1970's in her untitled paintings and collage works, which



combine the pioneering pour-painting technique of Lynda Benglis with nostalgic fabrics and soft porn images. The latter makes for humorous dichotomies, as organic gobbs of fluorescent paint

intermingle with old Playboy magazine pages, a battle of over-saturated colors and lurid content. Sharaf groups these works in a salon-style tableau with larger abstract works, creating another dialogue between narrative and non-objectivity. Underneath the colors, she seems more concerned with feminism than with things mystical, and this gives the exhibition a little conceptual heft.

**Amber Jean Young** constructs quilts of fabric printed with photographic

fragments that capture the bright blues and crepuscular oranges of the California landscape; her buoyant wall hangings fit the thematic (*Clues in Your Dreams*) bill perfectly. In *Kaleidoscope Sky*, she assembles a funky pentagon from triangular facets, each printed with details of skies taken at her former rural home. By using quilting, Young invokes a ritualistic and communal craft; and, in the practical sense of making a bed cover, there is an implication of touch, comfort and domesticity. Young makes a gentle commentary: the same fragile sky blankets us all.



**Chris Duncan's** work also emerges from domesticity and a spirit of place. His contribution to the exhibition, *Sun Makes Moon (Brown) 6-month exposure, summer-winter 2015* (2016), was produced on the roof of the artist's family home. Duncan posits the California sun as an "eraser" and the seasons as a durational guide; he stretches a large swath of fabric over a round tabletop, and over time the circular form is bleached-out, leaving a moon-shaped orb glowing in a field of sepia. The project's charming lack of technology summons up the spirit of Rudolf Steiner, who was no slouch in the mystic department (and took great stock in lunar cycles). Duncan's brand of holistic conceptualism is an antidote to our quick-fix culture, and stands out as the compelling nexus of *I Look for Clues in Your Dreams*.

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*“I Look for Clues in Your Dreams: Six Bay Area Artists Explore the Intrinsic Mysticism of the American West,” curated by Heather Marx @ Berkeley Art Center through July 17, 2016.*

Square Cylinder - July 12, 2016

# EAST BAY EXPRESS

OAKLAND, BERKELEY, AND EAST BAY NEWS, EVENTS, RESTAURANTS, MUSIC, & ARTS

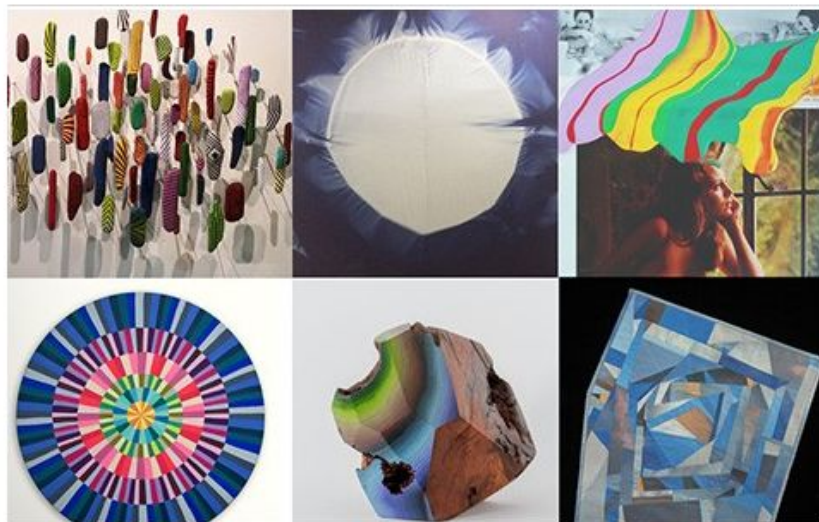
ARTS & CULTURE » CULTURE SPY

MAY 25, 2016

## In 'I Look for Clues in Your Dreams' at Berkeley Art Center, Artists Rethink California Landscapes

The best East Bay landscape show without actual landscapes.

By Sarah Burke [@sarahlubyburke](#)



*I Look for Clues in Your Dreams* is the best landscape show that the East Bay has seen in a while. And that's primarily because there are no depictions of landscapes in it.

Rather, the group show that opened at the Berkeley Art Center (1275 Walnut St.) this past weekend could be considered "post-landscape" — if you're into made-up, hyphenated terms — with work that deconstructs the artistic act of capturing an environment. In that process, the quilt that is California unravels into a conceptual entanglement of Bay-centric, West Coast mythology: psychedelic romanticism, utopian idealism, environmental spiritualism, and lots of vibrant colors.

As curator Heather Marx put it: "By looking for clues in these artists' works, I hope to tell a story about this powerful and complex 'dream' of Northern California and its bewitching hold on our collective imagination."

That story stars a group of Bay Area artists, who were plucked from different pockets of the art world but whose works swap stories around the same proverbial campfire. That's to say, their practices are all fundamentally informed by the light and landscape of California.

Ironically, Marx came up with the concept for the show while in Miami, Florida. The Bay Area independent curator was walking through the Untitled Art Fair at last year's Art Basel when she was stopped in her tracks by the work of Chris Duncan. The piece was a fifteen-foot-tall, deep-maroon textile that had been partially bleached by the sun. To create it, Duncan built a round, table-like structure and wrapped it in cloth, then left it on a roof in Oakland. He began the process on a full moon and "harvested" the work six full moons later. After it was washed, he stretched it out across a wall to reveal what looked like a lunar portrait — a central circle defined

by the absence of color, with soft edges that resemble a cosmic glow. That simple, six-month-long exposure is what caused Marx, who had been meditating on her feelings for California, to stop and say, "Oh my god, that's exactly how I feel."

Like for Marx, place is important for Duncan's work. That's obvious in the site-specific process required to create his sun-bleached pieces. The Oakland artist and musician, who also runs a small press and record label called LAND AND SEA, began sun bleaching in 2012. It was winter time, and he and his wife decided to put pieces from their quilt collection over their many bedroom windows in order to keep out the cold. But when they took the quilts down in the spring, the quilts had been altered by the light, rendering additional shapes into their compositions.

At the time, Duncan was feeling disturbed by the role that ego plays in the art world and was grasping for ways to distance himself from his painting and sculptural practice. The sun bleaches clicked as a poetically symbolic way to relinquish authorship over his painting while retaining the play of light and shadow that he was long interested in. "A painting is a simple gesture repeated over time to the point of transcendence in which it becomes an art object," Duncan said. "In these pieces, that simple gesture is the rising and setting of the sun."

His contributions to *I Look for Clues in Your Dreams* have the look and scale of the piece that Marx saw at Basel — although each of Duncan's light paintings have their own untended idiosyncrasies. The two textiles, hung on either side of a temporary wall in the center of the gallery, provide a strikingly simple example of a work that captures a California landscape but does not offer a picture of one; work that, rather, was made in collaboration *with* a landscape, and so reflects its character in the way that artwork always echoes something about its author.

The rest of the work follows suit, forming a show that is clearly concept-driven, but also has strong aesthetic coherence.

"Teetering," a painting by avid surfer Leo Bersamina, shows a pool of deep blue, spotted with colorful, fluid, overlapping shapes — like light dappling on water, but seen through an abstracting fog. Bersamina mixed mica into his paint, which adds a glistening effect that evokes a subtle current and prompts viewers to sway back and forth to activate it. He also created an elaborate installation made of painted driftwood, collected after sessions in the water.

Victoria Wagner's contributions include three chunks of redwood, partially cut into crystal-like shapes and partially left rough, with a richly colored bark. On select smoothed surfaces, she painted over natural patterning with rows of colors that blossom into a rainbow gradient. Meanwhile, Oakland's Amber Jean Young offers quilts patterned in similarly crystalline shapes. The fabric she uses are printed with photographs she took of the sky at different times of the day, thus creating a kaleidoscope of clouds and sunsets. Specifically, the skies she uses are ones seen from her former house in Santa Cruz, rendering the quilt not merely a portrait of a place, but also a portrait of a home.

*I Look for Clues in Your Dreams*, which also features work by painters Jenny Sharaf and Kristen Farr, does feel distinctly Californian. But it also feels contemporary — subtly reflecting a

relationship to place that has been radically shaped by the emergence of digital spaces in the last twenty years. These are not the same landscapes that Ansel Adams captured in the Forties and Fifties — environments that are devoid of people and define an idealized sense of "Nature." Rather, today's California landscape is abstract, fluid, fragmented, and engaging. And the works in this show reveal the emotional aspects of that landscape, the memories embedded within it, and the mythic quality that makes it much more than just a place.

East Bay Express - May 25, 2016

# SFGate

## San Francisco Chronicle

### 'I Look for Clues in Your Dreams' a tribute to California

By Kimberly Chun Published 12:03 pm, Wednesday, June 8, 2016

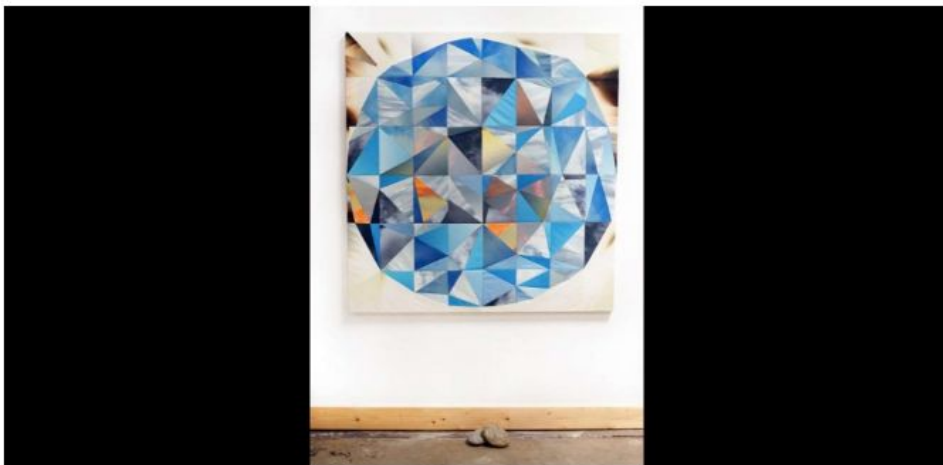


Photo: Courtesy Berkeley Art Center And Heather Marx Art Advisory

“The West is the best,” some might say, but for curator Heather Marx, it’s instead a source of fascination — a magnet for her Midwestern family, which moved to Malibu in the ’60s, fell in love with California and entreated the rest of their clan to move to the West Coast as well.

“Maybe I’ve romanticized it over the years,” Marx confesses. “It’s where the desert meets the ocean. It’s such a strange place.”

When it came to organizing a show in her East Bay community (Marx’s S.F. gallery, Marx & Zavattero, shuttered in 2013 after almost 12 years), she drew from those still-resonant feelings and concepts. “I Look for Clues in Your Dreams,” a group show at Berkeley Art Center, takes its cues from its octagon “tree house” space, as well as landscape- and environment-inspired works by local artists that sidestep traditional landscapes. The exhibit includes pieces by Jenny Sharaf and Kristin Farr.

“Over time, I started thinking, this is a show about place,” Marx says.

An epic sun print by Oakland artist Chris Duncan, “harvested” by exposing fabric to direct sunlight, is at the center of the space. Leo Bersamina’s painted pieces of driftwood, collected from his surfing spots along the coast, draw from the line work and patterns of aboriginal artwork. Kaleidoscopic, gemstone-esque effects are rendered with oil paint on found redwood burls by Victoria Wagner, while Amber Jean Young channels her obsession with sky, light and water into photos printed on fabric that she stitches into quilt-like textile pieces.



The works are “all tied to this notion of California and being anything you want to be,” Marx explains. “These moving, luscious artworks are a reflection of who these artists are and where their values lie.”

— *Kimberly Chun*

SF Gate - June 8, 2016



## I Look for Clues in Your Dreams



BERKELEY ART CENTER

*This is what SF/Arts curator Christian L. Frock had to say about I Look for Clues in Your Dreams :*

"This group exhibition, curated by Heather Marx, features works by Leo Bersamina, Chris Duncan, Kristin Farr, Jenny Sarah, Victoria Wagner and Amber Jean Young. It focuses on the mythological and physical phenomena of Northern California in site-specific installations, sculpture, painting and mixed-media assemblage that reflect on "the area's elemental spirit and force." "

SF/Arts - May, 2016

# BERKELEY TIMES

berkeleyx.org *a paper for the people of Berkeley*



Scott Jaffe

**Grow (Stella-Thiebaud)** – detail, by Leo Bersamina, 2016, 108 x 108 inches, acrylic, wood, and glue

**BAY VIBES** – The current group show at Berkeley Art Center is titled “I LOOK FOR CLUES IN YOUR DREAMS.” It’s all about the aesthetics, the essence of Northern California, and it’s an exhibit that resonates with natives. But how? Find out next Thursday, July 14 at 6 p.m. when Rene de Guzman of OMCA will gauge the wavelengths of curator Heather Marx and artists Leo Bersamina (above), Chris Duncan, Kristin Farr, Jenny Sharaf, Victoria Wagner and Amber Jean Young. Berkeley Art Center is located at 1275 Walnut St. on the edge of Live Oak Park. For more details, turn to page 12.

## Vibrations of Northern California emanate from Berkeley Art Center

Visitors to “I LOOK FOR CLUES IN YOUR DREAMS” who happen to be natives of Northern California may feel a certain tug or sense of attraction as they enter Live Oak Park and approach Berkeley Art Center (BAC). For those who do, this feeling might be explained by a series of brightly painted *Magic Hecksagons* by Richmond artist Kristin Farr adorning the

bridge that lead to the building. And this is just the beginning.

Now at BAC through Sunday, July 17, “DREAMS” is a group show curated by Heather Marx that features 29 artworks, each of which is inspired by some aspect or aesthetic of Northern California. This exhibit is extremely compelling, and the fun is in the discernment of how each art-

work draws you in, how each excites the mind’s eye.

This show was built around the large-scale sun-prints by Chris Duncan – great swaths of fabric exposed to the sun for six months during the winter of 2015; and it includes topographical sculptures and paintings by Victoria Wagner, fantastic explorations in mixed media by Jenny

Sharaf, photographs of NorCal skies sewn into quilts by Amber Jean Young, Farr’s series of *Magic Hecksagons* (see page 12), and wonderfully impressive installations of painted found objects by Leo Bersamina.

While taking in this show, it’s difficult not to be transported back to certain de-

see page 12

# ARTS CALENDAR

## Vibrations of NorCal from front page

caedes by the Bay. Certainly the aesthetics of the 70s, 80s, 90s and 00s are clearly recognizable here.

Take for instance Bersamina's epic wall installation *Grow* (*Stella-Thiebaud*) (see cover), which splendidly combines the soft, organic lines of driftwood (oh, so 70s) with the pulsating graphics of the 90s. While gazing at this all-encompassing creation, one can almost imagine Bersamina, who spent his formative teen years surfing off the coast of Pacifica, bobbing on the Pacific Ocean and looking out for the next wave. "DREAMS" also includes clusters of painted river rocks by Bersamina, and "Teetering," mixed media on panel, which captures a polarized view of the ocean's surface.

Interestingly, curator Heather Marx told *Berkeley Times* how her aesthetic sense of Northern California literally shifted after moving from San Francisco to Danville. Quite suddenly, she found herself embracing an "indoor-outdoor lifestyle" and wondering about the source of its special-ness.

On Thursday, July 14 at 6 p.m., Marx and Rene de Guzman of OMCA will discuss the nature of "DREAMS" with the artists featured in this exhibit. The event is free, and all are welcome to attend. Berkeley Art Center is located at 1275 Walnut St. on the edge of Live Oak Park. For more details, go to [berkeleyartcenter.org](http://berkeleyartcenter.org).

*The Magic Hexesagons of Kristin Farr, 2016 (clockwise from top left): 3D Vision (17.5 in. diameter); Waves (23.5 in. diameter); Spring Plaid (23.5 in. diameter); Ocean (17.5 in. diameter); 3D Rainbow (23.5 in. diameter); and Fall Plaid (17.5 in. diameter).*



*Images courtesy of the artist*

Berkeley Times - July 7, 2016

# Gia On The Move

## Curating Culture

From May 21-July 17 **Berkeley Art Center Agility Projects** will present ***I Look for Clues in Your Dreams***, a group exhibition curated by Heather Marx, featuring Bay Area artists: **Leo Bersamina, Chris Duncan, Kristin Farr, Jenny Sharaf, Victoria Wagner and Amber Jean Young.**

**Opening Receptions: Saturday, May 21st 6-8pm and will include a special performance by Victoria Wagner and 15 of her CCA students, invoking the overall spirit of the show.**

Through site-specific installations, sculpture, painting and mixed-media assemblages, the artists examine the elemental spirit of the American West.



*I look for Clues in Your Dreams* includes works that are informed by a spirituality that is influenced by the mythology of the American West and, specifically, Northern California. These six artists, who Marx also views as seekers and explorers, represent a continuation of the area's rich visual and social history, including elements of psychedelia, community and a reverence for the local landscape. Following the lead of the utopian idealism and the beauty and freedom of the 1960s and 70s, each exhibiting artist reshapes and re-vitalizes the world around them in the pursuit of visual magic.

Curator Heather Marx explains her desire to create an exhibition with the rich history of Northern California in mind:

*By looking for clues in these artists' works, I hope to tell a story about this powerful and complex 'dream' of Northern California and its bewitching hold on our collective imagination.*



Chris Duncan, Kristin Farrand Jenny Sharaf, will each create site-specific installations, embodying exhibition themes.

Duncan will install a large fabric window in the high-ceilinged cupola of the gallery, incorporating symbols that speak of a utopian state, referencing mother earth and the cycles of the seasons.

Farr's work will be featured outside the gallery walls, displaying a series of hexagonal paintings and a mural on the face of the building. Harnessing the colors and patterns associated with psychedelia, Farr's work

is playful and exuberant.

Sharaf's installation will occupy a corner of the gallery, incorporating vintage Playboy magazine pages (mapped with the artist's signature swirling of bright acrylic paint) into a large-scale and boldly-colored floor-to-ceiling design. Here, she explores California myth making and its relationship to femininity.

Artists Leo Bersamina, Victoria Wagner and Amber Jean Young will address the Northern California landscape.

Bersamina sources materials from beaches in Marin County to weave the abstracted driftwood sculptures that will be included in *I look for Clues in Your Dreams*. This particular series will incorporate an array of painted marks and hand etchings on the wood, creating a psychedelic, spirited quality while casting a dense spider web of shadows across the gallery walls and floor.

Wagner will exhibit a group of 3 Woodrocks—harvested from fallen trees in Northern California forests—which explore transitions of abstracted sound and light inspired by the sun, music and vibrational pull of the forest.

Young’s work will present a series of large-scale quilts, paired with natural elements resting below the wall pieces. The artist includes rocks and sticks with her reconstructed quilts—which she stitches together using photographs she takes of the landscape—to create a connection or clue between the initial inspiration she felt in nature and its final shape in the form of the artwork.



Victoria Wagner, Woodrock (too heavy), approx. 13” diameter, oil on Coast Live Oak, 2016.

Gia On the Move - March 4th, 2016