

# EAST BAY TIMES

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## **‘Altered States’ exhibit in Walnut Creek showcases nature’s wonder**

Bedford Gallery presents Bay Area artists’ work through March 24



Heather Marx, the curator of the new "Altered States" art exhibit at the Bedford Gallery in Walnut Creek's Leshner Center for the Arts, appears at the exhibit's recent opening reception with featured artist Victoria Wagner and fellow Bedford curator Carrie Lederer. On display through March 24, the exhibit of nine Bay Area artists' work offers visitors a rare, essential opportunity to pause, contemplate and sync with the natural world.



Sonja Hinrichsen's 2017 snow drawing of Truckee, "Sierra Nevada," is one of the works in the new "Altered States" art exhibit at the Bedford Gallery in Walnut Creek's Leshner Center for the Arts on display through March 24.

By **LOU FANCHER** | Correspondent

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"Altered States," a new art exhibit at downtown Walnut Creek's Bedford Gallery, offers visitors a rare, essential opportunity to pause, contemplate and sync with the natural world. The work of nine Bay Area artists joined in this harmonious, richly textured show acutely choreographed by curator Heather Marx sings — especially in the face of this high-speed, Internet-of-everything era — a countervailing message in praise of time-consuming processes and the relinquishment of control.

The multigenerational artists participating include Kim Abeles, Mari Andrews, Chris Duncan, Tanja Geis, Sonja Hinrichsen, Jay McCafferty, Klea McKenna, Sam Perry and Victoria Wagner. "Altered States" is on display through March 24.

"I wanted to show a trend within the last five years in the Bay Area that was in opposition to very contemporary, hyper-technologically-based, digitally-produced artwork. This is a disparate group working independently, but many of them work with traditions that date back to environmental art movements of the 1970s and beyond," says Marx.

The connective thread running through the exhibit attaches itself to natural elements used not always as primary materials — although that occurs often — but as inspiration. Responding to landscape without being traditional landscape art per se, the works require careful examination and thoughtful consideration.

In Perry's reclaimed wood sculptures, naturally fallen or diseased trees are transformed with a chainsaw. The extraordinary puzzle-like pieces reveal the wood's chronology, injury and rejuvenation in fine art.

Andrews, a methodical collector of acorns, lichen, flower petals, seed pods and other abandoned materials in area parks and hills, fashions abstract designs that peel away, providing a sense that nature continues to do its thing in its own real time, especially in one large seed pod installation found on the ceiling of the Bedford's curvaceous gallery space.

"It's magical," says Marx. "This is a show that evokes a mood."

The show's multiple layers and deliberate arrangements, says Marx, cause the art works to "interact with each other extensively," a relational feature increased by the gallery's open sight lines. The result is enhanced tonal and media contrast that maintains an overall effect on the works as a dynamic organism. It's a celebration and harnessing of land, sea, air, planets and plants that avoids tethering nature's range and applauds the high-spiritedness of its free forms.

Vivid colors are limited — found mostly in the geometry of Wagner's brightly painted wood pieces — leaving "Altered States'" soothing color field of rusts, grays, blacks, whites and beiges. Excitement as a result rises from a realization of the significance of time in each work. There is reverence expressed in McKenna's photo paper rubbings of cross-sections of trees; in total darkness the paper surface is embossed by hand into the rings of the trees and then exposed to light and developed. Similarly, Duncan allows the sun to bleach and determine the eventual appearance of fabrics exposed to its rays for six months or longer.

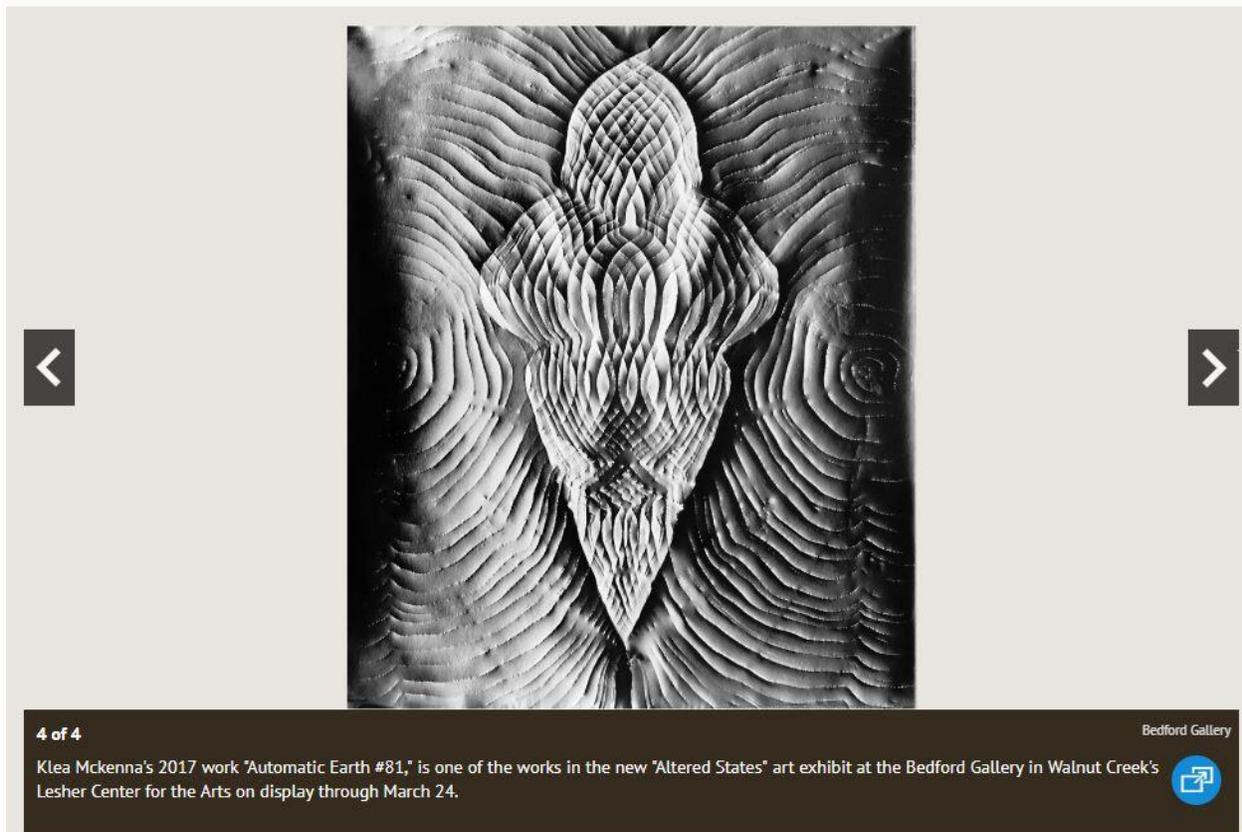
"Everything has an element of chance to it. That's what they're embracing: that nature is unpredictable," says Marx. "They're acknowledging the giving up of control that we're all subject to."

Which is not to say the artists have no interest in making deliberate statements about the environment and human interaction with the natural world. Abeles' ghostly, haunting, stenciled images on fabric are created using particulate matter — smog in the lung-choking atmosphere found on the rooftop of her Los Angeles studio. Geis fancifully but provocatively animates the at-risk-of-extinction Olympia oyster, casting it in a series of drawings as if it were to repopulate in the San Francisco Bay.

“They’re not being overtly political, but in how I view the work, they certainly have environmental mindsets,” Marx says. “They’re creating work that’s a reaction against all of the political, in-your-face trends we see so often. It’s spiritual, which is bold and unexpected in these days. By not making it so blatantly political and obvious, it’s a case for looking at the world differently, for slowing down a little.”

Asked if she envisions expanding the work into other formats, Marx considers film a possible medium.

“I see things as sequences. I could see taking this outdoors, adding a sonic aspect because there’s a vibration to some of the work.” If there is a “vibe” to “Altered States,” it’s a slowly evolving one with a looping soundtrack and a visual exploratorium offering infinite possibilities and following eternal timelines.



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## If you go

**Where:** The Bedford Gallery, inside the Leshner Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive in Walnut Creek, four blocks south of the Walnut Creek BART stop

**Contact info:** 925-295-1417, [www.bedfordgallery.org](http://www.bedfordgallery.org), [galleryinfo@bedfordgallery.org](mailto:galleryinfo@bedfordgallery.org)

**Admission:** General, \$5; ages 13 to 17, \$3; ages 12 and younger, free; Bedford Gallery members, free; first Tuesdays, free to all

**Hours:** 12 to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday, closed Monday

**Tours:** Call 925-295-1416 or email [gallerytours@bedfordgallery.org](mailto:gallerytours@bedfordgallery.org) to book tours of the exhibit.