

Fight and Flight: Crafting a Bay Area Life

“...This may be a city that is built for flight, but not all birds do so voluntarily.”

- Heather Smith, “Dwellers and Drifters in the Shaky City,” in *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*, edited by Rebecca Solnit. University of California Press, 2010.

There are an infinite number of stories in the San Francisco Bay Area, a region of three major cities, nine counties, and seven million residents. Whether natives or transplants, we all have reasons for living here. We cherish long roots in the region, or we have forged ties since arriving here, creating chosen families and settling into cultural communities. We enjoy individual freedom, see opportunity, and make careers here. Though droughts, wildfires, and other climate change disruptions have put us on notice, we appreciate the beauty of Northern California and bask in its Mediterranean-like weather. We take in these pleasures, and simultaneously, face our particular Bay Area dystopia of astronomical living costs, income inequality, and gender, political, and

racist violence. Bay Area artists are among those who struggle to navigate the landscape in crisis.

Fight and Flight: Crafting a Bay Area Life offers a view into our arts ecosystem. Produced by contemporary artists who have called the region home, the works are evidence of what has been done under challenging circumstances. Unsurprisingly, the exhibited projects are diverse and nuanced in regards to styles explored, formats elected, and tones struck. There is no shared lexicon nor visual language that manifestly communicates either fight or flight. In the absence of overt symbols of combat and departure, what is presented are the discoveries of our curatorial research: Bay Area art is what Bay Area artists make.

For a long time, artists have resourcefully crafted a life in the Bay Area. For some of those who decide to move on, the careers and relationships started here are central to their sensibilities as makers. Who is a Bay Area artist? It is the artist who has been nurtured here. Many of this exhibition's participants studied art at Bay Area schools, including California College of the Arts, Mills College, the San Francisco

Art Institute, Stanford University, and the University of California Berkeley. Some have taken on teaching and administration jobs at their alma maters and at other outposts of the Bay Area cultural industry-- museums, galleries, libraries, and archives. Few have one gig; artists labor so that they can make work and live here—a radical act of insistence that it's worth the struggle to stay.

The Bay Area “stays with” the artists who have come of age or made their careers here. In *Infinite City*, Rebecca Solnit writes that “places are leaky containers. They always refer beyond themselves...” In fact, some of the artists in this exhibition have recently taken leave of the Bay Area. Yet they maintain their connection to the region, taking its ideals with them to the next place.

Exhibitions are advocacy, and *Fight and Flight* is no exception. We take a stand for craft, a category frequently marginalized or footnoted in art history. To survive and thrive in the margins is a radical act that occasionally requires the will to fight. By the simple act of replacing “or” with “and,” *Fight and Flight* suggests a broader spectrum of response.

There are many more artists whose stories we know, whose work we wish we had the space to present in this exhibition. We hold space for them here—artists, craftspeople, and makers that have crafted their lives here, and have written their parts of the Bay Area’s history.

Guest Curator, Jacqueline Francis

Co-Curator, Ariel Zaccheo

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