



## FOCUS: OAKLAND OAKLAND'S GALLERY SCENE BOASTS A GROWING MURMUR

By Lea Feinstein

When the renowned Brooklyn gallery Pierogi opened its doors in 1994, Williamsburg was a sleepy place. Director Joe Amrhein remembers, "There were a lot of artists moving here, and not a lot of places to hang out. At the time, it seemed slow-paced. "All that's changed, of course, and now Brooklyn is *the* happening place in New York. He reflects on being a Brooklyn gallery. "It means change: bringing a new feel to an old neighborhood, and intertwining the two; that things are dynamic, that things are possible."

Today Oakland is undergoing a similar transformation, in relationship to San Francisco, spearheaded by artists and young entrepreneurs who want to live, work, and hang out in a place where art and music are being made. Coming from around the Bay, they are taking advantage of lower rents, turn-of-the-century buildings and industrial spaces with character, sunny weather, and a down-home boosterism that is contagious.

The Oakland Art Murmur—which started in the early 2000s as an informal group of funky, experimental artist-run spaces like 21 Grand and Esteban Sabar's gallery—has grown up. It now defines a whole neighborhood. The thirty venues that stretch from 27th Street south to Jack London Square are a potpourri of professionally run galleries and mixed-use spaces, cafes, wine bars and artisan studios. The lively First Fridays draw huge crowds of gawkers and participants who look at art, eat from the food trucks, applaud street performers, and dance to the music.

Serious art business is conducted on less rowdy Saturday Strolls (galleries open from 1-5 pm), which also feature educational walks and talks. Cooperation is the name of the game here, as all work together to engage the community. Art loves chaos, and there is plenty of that, but there is also a new face to the Murmur. It has an executive director, a board, and a budget with some city and neighborhood funding. A critical mass has gathered, and that has a lot to do with the current Oakland buzz.

Jonathan Ball, a young lawyer and photographer, with art history and urban planning degrees was looking for a law office with his friend, Frank Petrilli, a lawyer and amateur painter. They stumbled on photographer Todd Hido's former studio, an airy, third-floor corner space flooded with light on 17th Street between Broadway and Telegraph. Opportunists, they seized the moment, looking at each other saying "Why not open a gallery?" They signed the lease, named the space Res Ipsa, after a legal doctrine meaning "the thing itself" and now they stash their law books on shelves that line the gallery walls. ([resipsagallery.com](http://resipsagallery.com))

Enthusiastic Danielle Fox, owner of SLATE contemporary, moved her gallery from the Temescal district in North Oakland (featured recently in the Travel Section of the Sunday *New York Times*). With a PhD in American Art History and eight years of experience working at Sotheby's in London, Fox is now the executive director of the newly re-organized Oakland Art Murmur. Why Oakland? "When we moved back to California from Europe... we loved that Oakland was not pretentious about itself, we loved the burgeoning art scene, and found the creative energy of a community that is generating itself so intentionally rather intoxicating." She is savvy about marketing, and the Murmur's recent spate of press owes a lot to her hard work. Her upcoming group show, "Urban Information," includes the complexly layered photographs of Carol Inez Charney, whose process depends on an elaborate interplay between light, water and illusory depth. Her photographs evoke richly colored paintings. ([slatecontemporary.com](http://slatecontemporary.com))

The 25th Street corridor where SLATE is located is also home to a half dozen galleries which are open for scattered hours during the week, but always on Saturdays. Beginning May 12, PHOTO will exhibit curator René de Guzman's picks from the Bay Area Photographers Collective. Down the hall, Roscoe Ceramic Gallery features Steven Allen's wacky clay works; Manna Gallery displays Mark Lightfoot's shaped and twisted muslin sculptures; and Mercury 20, an artist-run cooperative space shows, among others, the Bay Area veteran conceptual artist Charlie Milgrim. Her sly tongue-in-cheek pieces, wrought in mundane materials, share common philosophical ground with San Francisco's legendary David Ireland. ([photogalleryoakland.com](http://photogalleryoakland.com); [mannagallery.com](http://mannagallery.com); [mercurytwenty.com](http://mercurytwenty.com))

"COOL PAIR #1," 2011, CHARLIE MILGRIM  
DRAWING ON ROOFING TAR PAPER,  
PHOTO: CHARLIE MILGRIM, COURTESY MERCURY 20 GALLERY



Lonnie Lee, owner of Vessel Gallery, is a key player in the Oakland Art Murmur. Energetic and committed, she is one of the few full-time gallerists in the neighborhood. She moved to her current site on 25th Street from a much smaller showcase in Berkeley and brought her clients with her. Lee says she fell in love with her two-story space, a former stable and auto glass business, and she has done an inspired job of bringing it to life. She pairs rotating shows of local and international artists with a rich mix of programming: monthly gallery talks, video interviews with artists, and music performances of all stripes. For the May show, which explores seafaring metaphors of "vessel," Jon Garipey presents cracked and ruptured ships of fired clay, while sculptor John Ruszel translates the tensions of wind on mast into a complex web of planes and lines. ([vessel-gallery.com](http://vessel-gallery.com))

Chandra Cerrito Contemporary specializes in finely crafted two and three-dimensional work that is clean and minimalist. Ben Cooper, her easy-going British assistant director, is friendly and knowledgeable. The current show, up through May 19th, features works by Brian Caraway and David Allan Peters, who both have Bay Area connections. Caraway's paintings are lush color fields with contrasting vinyl stripes, while Peters layers coat upon coat of vibrant acrylic onto wood panels and then carves down into their surfaces, creating multi-layered "core samples" in the strata. ([chandracerritcontemporary.com](http://chandracerritcontemporary.com))

Sharing square footage and a side entrance with Chandra Cerrito Contemporary is Krowswork, a photo and video gallery. The owner, Jasmine Moorhead, works part-time at a high-end gallery in Union Square, SF and opens her space after work and on weekends. She and her partner live "over the shop;" her rent for apartment and gallery space is much less than what she would pay in San Francisco. Eight years ago she moved from New York, and confessed, "I wouldn't dream of having a bricks and mortar space in New York." Here she has an opportunity to make a mark on the local scene, and as a native Mississippian, she felt right at home in Oakland's mix. ([krowswork.com](http://krowswork.com))

Another significant Oakland gallery known for their adventurous work is Johansson Projects; their April show featured a local painter, Robert Minervini, and New York-based Tadashi Moriyama, whose exquisitely detailed works and wild imagination seem like an updated version of Durer's most apocalyptic visions. ([Johanssonprojects.com](http://Johanssonprojects.com))

In Oakland 2012, as in Brooklyn 1994, artists and their supporters are helping to create a sense of change and possibility in an old neighborhood. The Murmur has an informative website ([oaklandartmurmur.org](http://oaklandartmurmur.org)) and walking maps of member spaces are available in many venues. During the weekend of the San Francisco Art Fairs, on Saturday, May 19 from 7-10 pm, 16 galleries and friends of the Oakland Art Murmur present "Murmurama," a special night of art and festivities. Check the website for details.

An ongoing service, the "B," a FREE Broadway Shuttle bus operates Monday-Thursday, 7 am - 7 pm; Fridays 7 am - 1 am; and Saturdays 6 pm - 1 am. (for shuttle and downtown info go to [MeetDowntownOak.com](http://MeetDowntownOak.com)). The neighborhood is walking distance from the 19th St. BART station. Paid parking lots and street parking are available nearby.

FlourishOakland, an evening of fine food, wine, art and music to raise funds for the Oakland Art Murmur Gallery Organization takes place on Saturday, May 6 from 6-9pm. (info and tickets: [flourishoakland.org](http://flourishoakland.org)).

"SPACEFOLD," 2012  
**Brian Caraway**  
 ACRYLIC ON PANEL, 40" x 40"  
 PHOTO: COURTESY CHANDRA CERRITO GALLERY

"UNTITLED," 2012  
**Morgania Moore**  
 PLASTER PAINTING, WATERCOLOR, OIL, WAX  
 PHOTO: COURTESY VESSEL GALLERY

"NYC6," 2012, **Carol Inez Charney**  
 DIGITAL CHROMOGENIC PRINT MOUNTED ON ALUMINUM WITH PLEX FACE  
 PHOTO: COURTESY SLATE CONTEMPORARY

