



## SF'S GALLERY SCENE: THE EARLY YEARS

Amid the tumult of the '60s and '70s, San Francisco's nascent gallery scene was overflowing with energy, enthusiasm and an anything-goes attitude.

**LEA FEINSTEIN** talks to the original gallery trailblazers, who made the scene what it was.

San Francisco has always drawn adventurers, attracted to its anything-goes aura and its physical beauty. Kenneth Rexroth, San Francisco's poet extraordinaire and rabble-rouser of the '40s and '50s, famously described his adopted home in his autobiography. "San Francisco was not just a wide-open town. It is the only city in the United States which was not settled overland by the westward-spreading puritan tradition, or by the Walter Scott fake-cavalier tradition of the South. It had been settled mostly, in spite of all the romances of the overland migration, by gamblers, prostitutes, rascals, and fortune seekers who came across the Isthmus and around the Horn. They had their faults, but they were not influenced by Cotton Mather."

Energized by this bohemian attitude, and by the unpredictable rhythms of boom and bust, the City by the Bay is constantly reinventing itself. "The only thing permanent is change, so you might as well be part of it," says the Chinese fortune cookie.

That could have been the mantra for art galleries in San Francisco during the 1960s and '70s. The times were raucous—bridging the end of the Beat era, the Kennedy/Johnson years, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights and Gay Rights movements, assassinations, the summer of love, sex, drugs, demonstrations and political crackdowns. It was a time of tremendous ferment in San Francisco. And the world of San Francisco's art dealers was no exception.

In late March and early April, I interviewed several players in the city's art world of the '60s and '70s—some recently retired, others still plying their trade. Lively and sharp, they infused the Bay Area art scene with vitality, insight, tenacity, and imagination, while championing

mainly local artists. Together they helped create a vital art scene in this thriving West Coast city, which, despite its bohemian energy, was still parochial in many ways.

Of this group, not one is a native Californian. Paule Anglim is from Quebec. Ruth Braunstein trained as a modern dancer in her native Minneapolis. Rena Bransten was from New York, schooled at Smith College. Peter Selz, whose grandfather was an art aficionado in Munich, moved here from New York via Chicago and Pomona. Paul Karlstrom was born in Seattle and moved from Michigan to Pennsylvania, before landing in Southern California. Tom Marion hailed from Cincinnati, while Jim Newman came from Omaha, Nebraska, via Stanford and Oberlin College with a brief stint in Los Angeles. Perhaps because they were outsiders with fresh eyes, they were uniquely able to identify, value and tap into what was truly Californian about the art being made here—and to contextualize it in the wider art world.

During the Beat era, at the California School of Fine Arts (which became the San Francisco Art Institute in 1961) Clyfford Still taught painting, and Ad Reinhardt and Mark Rothko had both taught summer classes. A strong local version of Abstract Expressionism was

ABOVE:

JOHN BOLLES GALLERY, INVITATION FOR "THE VISITORS"  
SEP 25 - OCT 20, 1961  
COURTESY CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OPPOSITE:

"COLUMBUS TOWER SAN FRANCISCO APRIL 3, 1960"

**Charles W. Cushman**

CHARLES CUSHMAN COLLECTION: INDIANA UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES (P10965)



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**"He was a crazy artist, an ex-junkie, who had done time in prison, I later found out through Wally Berman. He came up with the name thumbing through a Latin-English dictionary. 'Dilexi' is Latin past participle for 'I loved' (from 'diligere'—to select, to value highly, to love)."**

practiced, and the Bay Area figure painters were at work, as well as all the artists in revolt against both schools. Many avant-garde "underground" San Francisco artists lived and worked in the Fillmore and North Beach. They showed their work in a potpourri of artist-run galleries which were deeply enmeshed in the jazz and performance poetry scene: Lucien Labaudt, Batman, King Ubu, The Place, East and West, and notably The Six (whose six founders included Wally Hedrick and Deborah Remington) where Allen Ginsberg first read "Howl." Exhibitions were mounted at Glide Church and sponsored by the Intersection for Religion and the Arts.

The scene changed in 1958 when Jim Newman opened the Dilexi Gallery. Newman, a trained saxophonist and jazz lover, came to San Francisco for the music and the art, after a stay in Los Angeles. He, Walter Hopps and Craig Kauffman, together with Ben and Betty Bartosh, had launched a small short-lived gallery, Syndell

Studio, in Brentwood. After it closed, Hopps and artist Ed Kienholz started the Ferus Gallery while Newman decamped for points north.

"In 1956, I moved to SF, where there was an active art and music scene in North Beach. It was mostly a black neighborhood with lots of clubs and musicians. Brubeck played at the Blackhawk. Bob Alexander, a painter, sent by Hopps, knocked on my door in 1958. He was a crazy artist, an ex-junkie, who had done time in prison, I later found out through Wally Berman. He came up with the name thumbing through a Latin-English dictionary. 'Dilexi' is Latin past participle for 'I loved' (from 'diligere'—to select, to value highly, to love). It was on the second floor over the Jazz Workshop Club on Broadway. We stayed open late, thought people could get a drink, listen to music downstairs and then come up. It didn't quite work out that way... Alexander was into printing and did the announcements. The partnership didn't last, and he moved to LA."

Starting on Broadway, Dilexi operated in three sequential locations during the years 1958 to 1970. Distinguished by the fearlessness and quality of the work exhibited, as well as by its appearance—custom architecture, white walls, carpets, and modern furniture—it was a professional standard-setter of its time. Recalled Jay DeFeo, in 1984: "I remember my attitude toward it in those years was that, you know, I had shown without any second thoughts. First of all there was The Place in North Beach and any little galleries that would have me, I was perfectly willing to hang it up. But when Jim's gallery came along it did have class, and all of a sudden I was wondering if I was ready for my first grown-up show."

From Broadway, Newman moved his gallery to 1858 Union St, then later to 631 Clay. His taste was bold and discriminating, and he ran his gallery like a business, free-wheeling enough to let the artists install their own shows and create posters and ads for each one. "Ron Nagle put an ad on a bus, which had a phone number connected to the gallery. When you called the number, the answering machine just said 'Get on down to 631 Clay.' I wasn't cautious about my choices," Newman recalls. "Even people off the street. There was an artist, Richard 'Eye.' He did some pin-on buttons that were installed all over the walls. They were very cheap, but no one bought them. Bob Anderson... the artists knew him, he did banging paper bags... Anna Halprin did an improvisational performance in the gallery on Union St. in the '60s, around the structures that Charles Ross, a gallery artist, built for her. On Broadway, there were poetry readings, later Elias Romero did light projections. Current events in the '60s didn't shape what was shown in the gallery, but they affected me very much. I was busy demonstrating and organizing."

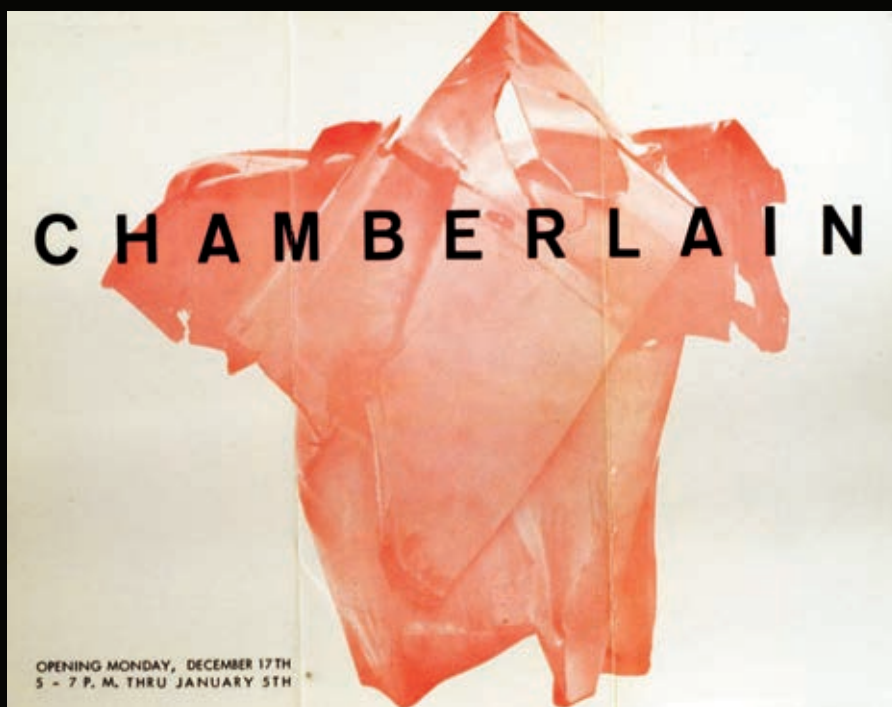
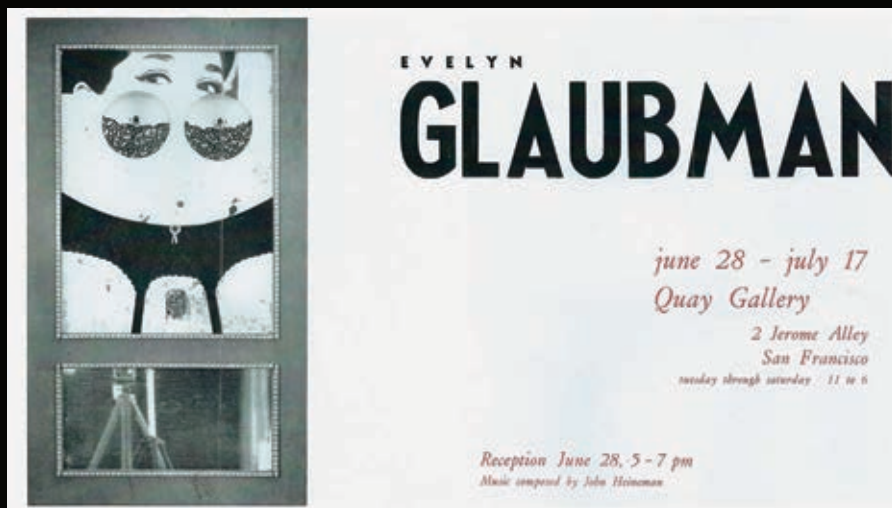
During its run, Dilexi showed a range of artists—Bay Area, LA, and a few from New York—introducing Jeremy Anderson, John Chamberlain, Jay DeFeo, Roy De Forest, Tony DeLap, Alfred Jensen, Craig Kauffman, Leslie Kerr, Alvin Light, Phil Makanna, Fred Martin, Deborah Remington, Hassel Smith, H.C. Westermann, Franklin Williams, and others to a wider public. Newman maintained his contacts with Ferus Gallery and showed Walter De Maria, Ed Kienholz, Ed Moses and Craig Kauffman. In addition to the artists and their friends, collectors, museum people, and other dealers also attended shows, and bought. "John Humphrey from the SF Museum of Art (now SFMOMA) bought work from us, as did Ninfa Valvo, curator of contemporary art at the de Young. She had a good eye and was very nice. Paul Mills at the Oakland Museum bought from Dilexi—Diebenkorn, Brooks, Zogbaum." Word spread that there was a first rate gallery in San Francisco. *Artforum*, begun in the city in 1962, often mentioned Dilexi shows. New York collectors came, and Newman was invited to show his artists abroad.

OPPOSITE:  
"BROADWAY, SF"  
PHOTO: NICK DeWOLF

RIGHT TOP TO BOTTOM:  
QUAY GALLERY  
INVITATION FOR EVELYN GLAUBMAN

DILEXI GALLERY  
INVITATION FOR JOHN CHAMBERLAIN

DILEXI GALLERY  
INVITATION FOR WILFRED ZOGBAUM  
PHOTOS: COURTESY CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

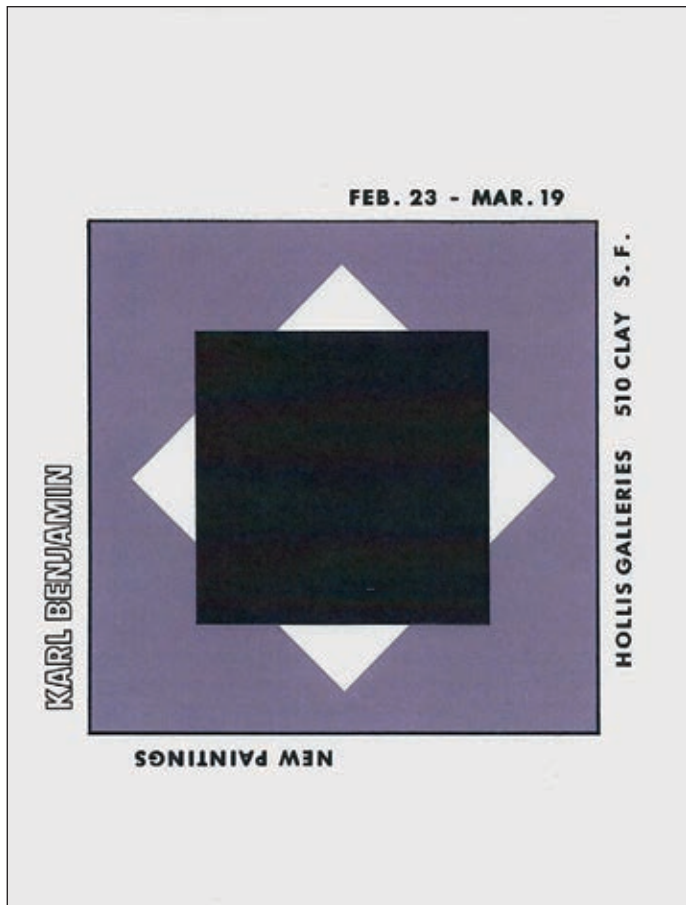
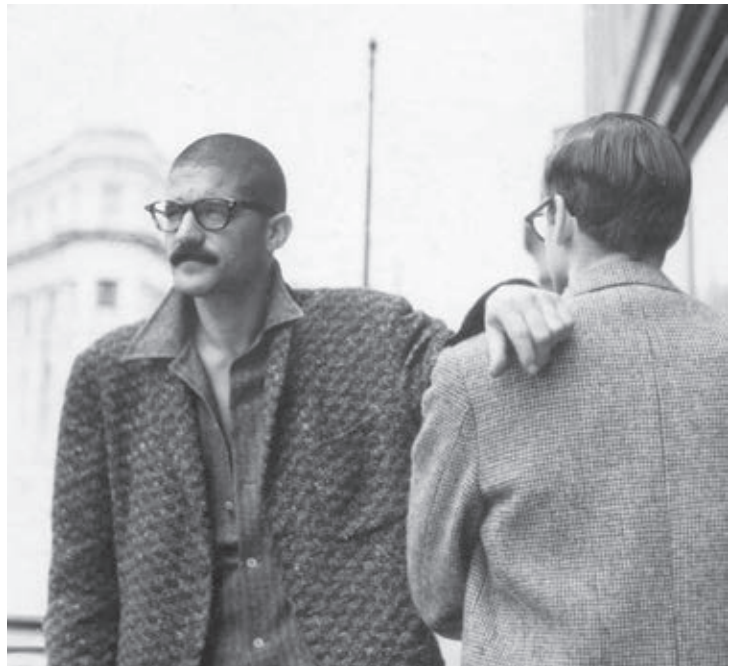




Restless to reach a larger audience and bored with the details of gallery life, Newman closed Dilexi in 1970 and went on to collaborate with KOED on a series of artist-originated TV shows, "The Dilexi Series," featuring Andy Warhol, Frank Zappa, and Yvonne Rainer among others. Meanwhile, a nucleus of art galleries grew up, first around North Beach, then in the mid-'60s, towards Union Square and the financial district. In addition to Dilexi, there was Hansen Fuller Gallery (later Hansen Fuller Goldeen), Ruth Braunstein's Quay Gallery, then Carlson Gallery and Wenger Gallery on Montgomery; Joe Chowning on Pacific. Charles Campbell's frame shop, later Campbell Thiebaud Gallery on Clay Street. Other venues, such as Arleigh Gallery, Berkeley Gallery, John Bolles Gallery, and Hollis Galleries showed artists such as Franklin Williams, photoreal-ist painter Robert Bechtle, future *Artforum* editor John Coplans, and LA hard edge painter Karl Benjamin, respectively.

Ruth Braunstein remembers, "In the early '60s, I had a gallery—Quay Gallery—in Tiburon, next to Rodney Strong's wine tasting on Main Street. (We were modern dancers together in DC, and I knew he was coming out here to start a winery.) It was a former furniture store—the rent was \$35/month, and I sold my first piece for \$150. I was there for about five years. I showed 40-50 artists, and I also really got into clay. I paid 60/40 to the artist. All work was on consignment, and the gallery workers and I were paid in trade (with artwork, no money). I just responded to it, what people were doing with clay."

"I couldn't get the critics, like Al Frankenstein, to review my shows out there in Tiburon, and the customers were mostly businessmen waiting for the ferry, so I moved to North Beach (2 Jerome Alley off Pacific St.), around the corner from City Lights, and Café Divino (now Caffè Trieste) —not far from Jim (Dilexi Gallery). When I moved to North Beach, I threw everyone out, except a few: Earl Pierce, a painter, Peter Voulkos, and Richard Shaw. I turned down William Wiley at the Tiburon gallery, and he said it's a good thing I did. 'That was terrible work.'"



ABOVE:  
DILEXI GALLERY FOUNDERS **Bob Alexander** AND **Jim Newman**  
PHOTOS: GUI MAYO (FORMERLY DE ANGULO)

LEFT:  
HOLLIS GALLERIES, INVITATION FOR **KARL BENJAMIN**  
PHOTO: COURTESY CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OPPOSITE TOP:  
**Judy Newman** AT DILEXI GALLERY IN FRONT OF  
"THE EYES," 1958, **Jay DeFeo**  
GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 42" X 83¾"  
PHOTO: GUI MAYO (FORMERLY DE ANGULO)

OPPOSITE BELOW:  
DILEXI GALLERY, INVITATION FOR **CHARLES ROSS** AND **NORMAN KANTOR**  
PHOTO: COURTESY CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**"It was much more intimate then," Bransten recalls. "We went to each other's shows. There was Berggruen on Grant, Dan Weinberg Gallery on Bush, Simon Lewinsky across from Berggruen, Steve and Connie Wirtz across the street."**

Braunstein was an energetic visionary, working hard to get her artists seen on both coasts. "I always showed women artists as well as men. I was a dancer and there were always good women around in that world. In the gallery I showed Nell Sinton, Ruth Armer, Karen Bresci. From SFAI, I showed Richard Shaw, Bruce Conner, Franklin Williams from CCAC, Tony Costanza. In 1968 I went to New York showing Voulkos. Rose Shimkin from *Ceramics* magazine came to see it. Peter Selz helped with some connections. Then in 1975, I had a co-op gallery with Phyllis Kind from Chicago and Ed Thorpe from Santa Barbara. We were trying to get East Coast people to look at West Coast art. Allan Stone and Staempfli came from New York and Frumkin came from Chicago. They showed people like Arneson there."

Rena Bransten worked with Ruth Braunstein for years before opening her own space. "I was in Ruth Braunstein's gallery in North Beach, and she said she was looking for a partner. 'What about Mary Kiesling?' I said 'What about me?' So we worked together. I knew Jim Newman from Dilexi and I knew about (ceramic sculptor) Ron Nagle because of Jim. Diana Fuller took over an existing space, Art Unlimited, in 1960. She then brought in Wanda Hansen who left in 1977, followed by Dorothy Goldeen, and then her final partner Brian Gross, in 1986. Fuller Gross closed in 1990 and then Brian went out on his own. Around 1974 we moved together to 550 Sutter, the old Elizabeth Arden salon building. I started my own gallery. I was down the hall from Ruth on the 2nd floor. She had the front half and I had the back half. Our storage room was the old steam room for the spa!"

"It was much more intimate then," Bransten recalls. "We went to each other's shows. There was Berggruen on Grant, Dan Weinberg Gallery on Bush, Simon Lewinsky across from Berggruen, Steve and Connie Wirtz across the street."

In the late 1960s, Peter Selz, who had been curator of contemporary art at MOMA in New York, came to head the new Berkeley Art Museum. He went to all the gallery shows, visited the local art schools and artists' studios, and partied hard with the artists. He authored numerous books, and countless articles and catalog essays which documented and publicized the art he found. In 1967, he mounted a broad-ranging show he entitled "Funk Art" at Berkeley. He calls this "the last important regional movement in American Art." Showcasing the irreverently humorous works of painters and sculptors like Robert Arneson, Wallace Berman, Bruce Conner, Roy De Forest, Viola Frey, Wally Hedrick, Jess, Richard Shaw and William T. Wiley, the show garnered enormous attention from the art world in the magazines and on the East Coast.

Selz was also mentor to art historian Paul Karlstrom, who in 1973 opened a branch of the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art at the de Young Museum. "Jim Newman (at Dilexi Gallery) and Bill Woolfenden... gave me a structure at the time. Not the museums.



<p>CHARLES ROSS, mixed steel &amp; iron, 1962</p>	<p>sculpture <b>CHARLES ROSS</b></p> <p>December 4th thru 23rd Preview, Monday, December 4th, 5-8 p.m. <small>(Gallery closed December 24th - January 1st)</small></p>
<p>drawings <b>NORMAN KANTER</b></p> <p><b>DILEXI</b> ● <b>gallery</b> 1808 Union Street San Francisco WA 94115 2-1804</p>	<p>norman kanter, 1967</p>





**Deeply knowledgeable about the roots of modern art, Paule Anglim had close personal ties with the art world in New York and Europe, and flew there frequently. On a 1976 visit to Picabia's 90-year old widow Gabrielle, they spoke of Samuel Beckett in the French Resistance, the first Armory Show with Marcel Duchamp, and meeting the Stieglitz circle.**

There was not a lot of major collecting," Karlstrom recalls. "The donor money went to the opera and the symphony. Aside from George Neubert, the Director of the Oakland Museum, there was not so much support for the art world, especially for contemporary art." He adds, "The dealers and their personalities played a big part in the development of the art scene at that time. They had the commitment, were devoted to their artists. They really cared; they took it personally."

Deeply knowledgeable about the roots of modern art, Paule Anglim had close personal ties with the art world in New York and Europe, and flew there frequently. On a 1976 visit to Picabia's 90-year old widow Gabrielle, they spoke of Samuel Beckett in the French Resistance, the first Armory Show with Marcel Duchamp, and meeting the Stieglitz circle. She opened Paule Anglim Associates at 710 Montgomery in the mid '70s, and later moved the gallery to 14 Geary, where it remains one of the city's most prestigious exhibition spaces. "I opened a gallery because I wanted to work directly with the artists," Anglim recalls. "In the early years I showed Milton Avery, Alice Neel and Hassel Smith. Then Calder, Henry Moore, and Isamu Noguchi. In 1977, we had the DYNATON show with Wolfgang Paalen, Lee Mullican and Gordon Onslow Ford."

Her gallery openings in the '70s, like others, reflected the cross-over spirit of the times: "I was showing Joan Mitchell, and Robert Duncan came and read poetry in the gallery, along with Michael Palmer. Duncan was the partner of Jess, whose work I also showed. I knew Duncan first. He invited me to lunch, then I met Jess and we really got along. Then when I had a show of Jay DeFeo, Michael McClure read his poetry there. I have always been dedicated to showing San Francisco artists."

A stalwart champion of Bay Area artists, Anglim picked up many of Newman's artists when Dilexi closed. She developed a keen interest in the conceptual art scene and



TOP:  
ARLEIGH GALLERY, INVITATION FOR 1965 GRADUATE STUDENT GROUP SHOW  
COURTESY CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MIDDLE:  
ANNOUNCEMENT FOR RENA BRANSTEN GALLERY RELOCATION  
COURTESY RENA BRANSTEN GALLERY

BOTTOM:  
BERKELEY GALLERY, INVITATION FOR ROBERT BECHTLE, 1967 (DETAIL VIEW)  
COURTESY CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

RIGHT:  
PAULE ANGLIM AND TOM MARIONI AT ORIGINAL LOCATION OF GALLERY PAULE ANGLIM AT 710 MONTGOMERY.  
PHOTO: COURTESY TOM MARIONI AND GALLERY PAULE ANGLIM



showcased the works of artists who were no longer drawing, painting, and sculpting. The works of Terry Fox, David Ireland, Paul Kos, Tony Labat, John Roloff, and Al Wong explored video, film, performance and technology, their chosen materials including furniture, hardware, and found materials. In 1977, Tom Marioni, who had started his own Museum of Conceptual Art, did a remix of Yves Klein's *Le Vide* (The Void), painting the windows of Anglim's Montgomery Street space a brilliant blue.

Marioni recalls: "In the '70s, it was a recession. There was no money, and a lot of alternative art spaces sprung up. It was a big time for performance art. Reese Palley, a guy from New Jersey, started a gallery in SF, which ran for a few years showing mostly conceptual art. I showed there, and Nauman and Oppenheim. Now it's the Mercer Hotel. I started the MOCA, Museum of Conceptual Art, where a lot of big names got their start. People didn't come, even the artists of the previous generation. It's like they were afraid of it, challenged by it, didn't know what it was going to be when they got there. Peter Selz was one of the first and few who came to MOCA... It was on the wrong side of the railroad tracks, South of Market... But the funny thing is, it was like next door to where the museum is now."

Reviews and journalism played an important part in the burgeoning art scene. Alfred Frankenstein had come to the *SF Chronicle* to be the music critic, yet wrote insightfully about the art. So did Albert Elsen, Stanford professor and Rodin scholar. Thomas Albright was perhaps the most impassioned and complete cultural critic, who lived hard, wrote brilliantly and in great depth about the whole complicated scene. His definitive work, "Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-1980: An Illustrated History," stands as his epitaph.

In the late '60s, Cecile McCann started *Artweek*. Rena Bransten says, "Everyone read *Artweek*. We depended on it. When it was going out of business, we tried to buy it, but didn't succeed. With more and more galleries, there were fewer reviews."

Yet even as conceptual art proliferated, the city's commercial art world grew as well, and by the 1970s, the San Francisco gallery scene had come into its own. "There was a whole potpourri of people who came to galleries," says Bransten, of the scene in its heyday. "It was the thing to do."

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