

9 Bay Area Cabaret presents Christine Ebersole, who performs a show about youth, aging and Hollywood illusions, at the Fairmont's Venetian Room on Jan.15.



10 Fans are invited to join Adam Savage and Jamie Hyneman onstage in this performance of *Mythbusters: Behind the Myths*, playing at the Golden Gate Theater on Jan. 8.



11 MoAD presents *Collected: Stories of Acquisition and Reclamation* through Mar. 4. Left, *"Fore'n' Aft Souvenir Book,"* May 21, 1943; from the Mayme A. Clayton Library and Museum.



13 George Krevsky Gallery offers highlights from its collection in *A Selection of Very Fine Pictures*. Left, Raphael Soyer, *"Dancing Lesson,"* 1969. Through Jan. 28.

January 2012 Volume 21 Number 5

SAN FRANCISCO

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SFMOMA Celebrates 50 Years of SECA Art Awards

by Sura Wood

Fifty years ago, a group of dedicated supporters of what was then known as the San Francisco Museum of Art (now the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, or SFMOMA) established a collectors club, the Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art (SECA). Its purpose was to apprise its members of the newest developments in modern art as well as to educate and connect the community to the museum, and to help bring the work of exciting new talent into the collection. SECA also established an Art Award spotlighting exceptional art made in the Bay Area. CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

John Bankston, *"Bronze Cowboy,"* 2003; oil on linen.

Scion of SF's First Circus Family Tells His Tale

by Jean Schiffman

Lorenzo Pisoni says it right up front in *Humor Abuse*, opening this month at American Conservatory Theater: "[T]his is a play about clowning, and I'm the straight man. I'm not funny..."



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Since its inception, SECA has recognized over 150 emerging local artists, attracting wide critical attention to their work early in their careers. The biennial award comes with a cash prize and a show mounted at SFMOMA with works by fellow award recipients that provides a platform for greater exposure.

The 2010 SECA Art Award exhibition, one of two new shows at SFMOMA celebrating the organization on its 50th anniversary, presents the most recent recipients chosen from a competitive field of more than 250 artists, nominated by academics, critics, curators, SECA members, dealers and former recipients.

The four featured artists are Mauricio Ancalmo, who has devised an ingenious, film-based environment involving used machinery, and a philosophical meditation on romantic relationships; Colter Jacobsen, whose poetic, site-specific collage installation incorporates discarded materials and graphite "memory drawings" that mirror found photographs; Ruth Laskey, a weaver trained in painting and drawing who works with linen textiles to create abstract, geometric tapestries; and Kamu Amu Patton, an interdisciplinary artist who explores the intersection of sound, linear sculpture and textured works on paper. His latest series, now on display, was produced during his residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

The show runs concurrently with *Fifty Years of Bay Area Art: The SECA Awards*, a survey of vibrant Bay Area creativity with nearly 60 works in a variety of media by more than 50 artists. The first major overview of past award winners, it's organized thematically and examines connections among individual artists across generations and genres such as the landscape of the American West. "We begin with works created in response to the urban environment in the Bay Area," explains co-curator Tanya Zimbardo. "Works that hover between abstraction and the representation of elements in nature contribute to a larger core focus on abstract painting and works on paper. Other artists draw upon … references to literature, popular media and childhood objects in constructing portraits or fantasy narratives, [while] in our digital era, certain artists have appropriated imagery circulated online or employed imaging techniques."

While some works in the exhibition have been specially commissioned or produced after artists had won their awards, in other cases visitors get a glimpse of formative artworks that may represent a less familiar area of investigation not readily associated with a particular artist. For example, themes of death, decay and disease were a point of departure for sculptor David Best, who's primarily known for funky, elaborate art cars made over with objects retrieved from junkyards and garbage Dumpsters, and for the monumental wood "temples" he has constructed for the Burning Man festivals. But his 1977 Art Award exhibition, inspired by his close relationship with a couple dying of cancer, highlighted a visceral series of small-scale, porcelain warrior figures, detailed with dead mice and birds. His mixed-media assemblage, *"Untitled (Horse with Saucer),"* ca. 1980, on view here, is yet another component of his multi-faceted body of work.

Born in China, Oakland-based painter Hung Liu (1992) grew up during Mao's Cultural Revolution and draws on her heritage for paintings that evoke cultural memory and combine Chinese and Western motifs. When she visited China in 1990, she made a pivotal discovery: a cache of historical photographs, many of them depicting prostitutes and the harsh lives of anonymous women performing manual labor, which have since formed the basis of her art practice. The drippings and layered washes of linseed oil she applies to her canvases dissolve and transform the photo-based images, intensifying the theatrical elements of the photographs. It's a technique Liu used in *"Loom,"* a 1999 painting of a female weaver included in the exhibition and acquired by the museum.

In drawings and paintings like *"Bronze Cowboy,"* 2003, a whimsical portrait of a nattily attired cowpoke astride a dappled steed, gay African-American artist and 2002 award-winner John Bankston muses on issues of identity, sexual and racial, through fantasies of African-American cowboys, pirates and other imaginary characters. Though he utilizes childhood role playing, excursions into make-believe and the visual aesthetic of coloring books, his thematic content is more complex and sophisticated than his medium suggests. "The idea of 'fantasy' is often thought of as the province of idle escapists," Bankston once said. "But I like to think of fantasy as a way of

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re-imagining our world. It is a means of stepping outside of one's known territory and breaking boundaries."

The SECA exhibitions provide a magical tour of the diverse Bay Area art scene—where it has been and where it may be headed. Enhancing the journey is a comprehensive 50th anniversary book edited by co-curators Zimbardo and Alison Gass; it showcases all past award recipients and features a work from each of their respective award shows.

"(SECA) has helped bridge the activities happening within the museum's walls and the dynamic art community beyond them," writes Gass in the book's introduction. "Fostering emerging artists; organizing exhibitions, studio visits and public conversations; encouragement of collecting and supporting a local museum—are the ingredients that have made SECA a genuinely singular force in Bay Area art."

2010 SECA Art Award Exhibition: Mauricio Ancalmo, Colter Jacobsen, Ruth Laskey, Kamu Amu Patton *and* Fifty Years of Bay Area Art: The SECA Awards. *SFMOMA, 151 3rd St. Through Apr. 3. 357-4000. sfmoma.org.* ★