

# NEW GALLERIES SIGNAL ART RENAISSANCE IN NORTH BEACH

By Art Peterson

The photo of the Transamerica Building as seen from Telegraph Hill that graces the cover of our new format *Semaphore* is the work of photographer Craig Fonarow. He is among the artists who have recently taken gallery space in our neighborhood. Here is a roundup of some of them:

## CRAIG FONAROW PHOTOGRAPHY 527 COLUMBUS AVE.



Craig found a home in San Francisco in 1991 after decades of being on the move, which took him to New York City, San Antonio, Los Angeles and numerous other cities.

While visiting street fairs in San Francisco, he noticed that few of the photographic works on display were of the city.

So he began to make the local scene his subject, selling his work in a kind of garage-sale format in front of his Leavenworth Street residence. Eventually, he began selling his art at street festivals and at outdoor venues such as Justin Herman Plaza.

Giving up the itinerant artist's life for a permanent home on Columbus suits Craig just fine. Even though many of his photos are of local subjects that the discriminating tourist would want to take home, Craig says 50 percent of his trade is with locals.

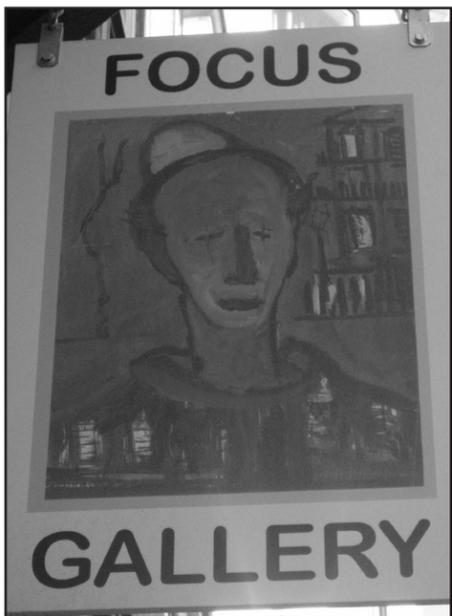
His business is doing well, he says. But don't come looking for him on Tuesday. He is one of the holdouts in the digital revolution, and Tuesday is his day in the darkroom.

## FOCUS GALLERY 1534 GRANT AVE.

Jon Perino, the owner of the Focus Gallery, situated on an artsy block of upper Grant between Aria and Macchiarini Creative Design, seems a perfect fit for our neighborhood. A onetime Caffé Trieste employee and student at the Art Institute, he sees his space as a place where local art and literature meet. So, for instance, recent shows have featured the painting of poets Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Jack Hirshman.

Perino has traveled to many locations to take photographs, most recently in Latin America and Budapest, Hungary. Along the way, he has picked up an eclectic collection of art, some of which one sees on the walls of the gallery. "I like to think what I have represents something of a history of modern art," he says.

He has been the proprietor of Focus Gallery, where he also does framing, for about a year, since moving from Polk Gulch. Business is not bad, he says. "This neighborhood is a little bit like Budapest. The more well-to-do folks, who live up the hill, come down to support us."



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## GALLERY 28 1228 GRANT AVE.

Gallery owner Ethel Jimenez began taking photographs when she was 16, but took a long-term professional detour into a career as an insurance broker. Two years ago, when her business dried up, she decided to take a daring move and acquired a gallery space on Grant. "Right in the depths of the recession; smart business move," she says. But the gallery has survived as a location for Ethel to show her photographs and for local artists to display their work. Upcoming is her second-annual competitive exhibition.

Since coming to the neighborhood, Ethel has very much become involved in community good works. Her gallery has been the site of two fundraisers for North Beach Citizens, one a display of decorated skateboards by local artists and the other, "Vinyl Transformations," in which artists were challenged to transform a vinyl record into a piece of art.



Recently, Ethel was seen at another North Beach Citizens' fundraising event — busing tables at the organization's annual dinner.

## GALLERY 454 454 COLUMBUS AVE.

Anyone who has a doubt that Christopher Jernberg's Gallery 454 is not your generic whatever-the-tourists-want kind of place need only glance in the gallery's window where a life-size military tank fills most of the space. The tank, created from wood products by curator Nick Flatt, was constructed in the gallery in four months and can be purchased for \$100,000. In case the piece does not sell in San Francisco, Flatt, an Academy of Art alum who also creates portraits in the Chuck Close style, will disassemble it and move it to a Los Angeles gallery where perhaps money for cutting-edge art flows more freely.

Gallery owner Jernberg, who teaches at the Academy of Art, says his space is committed to featuring work which is "special, contemporary and provocative." That is not to say he wants to irritate the neighbors. A work that the more squeamish among us might consider pornographic has been moved to a back wall.



## ARATA FINE ARTS GALLERY 450 COLUMBUS AVE.

Next door to Gallery 454 is a space owned by Geri Arata, another Academy of Art student, but one with a very different focus. After Geri graduated in the 1980s with an art degree from San Francisco State, she took up other media, creating everything from ceramics to



jewelry to porcelain dolls. For 10 years she operated the successful Village Crafters in Castro Valley that featured the work of local artists. In the meantime, she returned to painting, but is now focusing on the techniques of the Old Masters. She took intensive workshops in Texas and found instructors at the Academy of Art with skill and respect for academic art.

"I noticed that painters trained in classical techniques don't really have the venue they should have in San Francisco," she says. So when a space opened up on Columbus Avenue at a price she could afford, she decided to change that. She features artists who make use of the techniques of the centuries old Italian greats. Her work reflects not only their techniques, but often their subjects. Where else can one go to find a large painting of Hercules and the Golden Apples treated without irony?

## MODERN EDEN 403 FRANCISCO ST.

This gallery is owned by a young couple, who live a few doors down the street, jeweler Kim Larsen and painter Bradley Platz. Platz's paintings might best be described as "academic surrealism." He's created, for instance, a realistic crucifixion scene, which takes a startling twist that is more appropriately viewed than described.

The gallery's name suggests the combination of old and new art that the couple brings to its curated shows. For instance, the work of Sergio Lopez in the gallery's current exhibit features classic nudes, but embellished with gauzy flowery filigree.

The large, white-walled gallery, with its very high ceilings, is as inviting a venue for art as one will find in the neighborhood. The couple does not rent out the space, but relies on a stable of local artists whose work they want to showcase. In June, they will be celebrating their first anniversary with a show featuring 16 local artists whose pieces they believe deserve to be seen. Visitors to this event's opening may also be entertained by the couple's dog, Dozer, who on the occasion of my visit was living up to his name. ♦

