

WONDERLAND

Wonderland Exhibition in the Tenderloin

By Joshua Selman

Why is a large scale contemporary art exhibition taking place in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood, curated by one of today's most respected curators, Lance Fung, titled—of all possible titles—Wonderland? The Tenderloin is a neighborhood that has a reputation as a marginalized community. Yet surprisingly, the title *Wonderland* correctly identifies and responds to a hidden cultural dilemma facing any group of artists approaching this unique and historic, if somewhat neglected, community.

Although the Tenderloin has the second highest density of children per capita of any neighborhood in San Francisco, a thriving immigrant community, many seniors, and includes many other groups that coexist side by side, the neighborhood also suffers from conditions that include high rates of homelessness, joblessness, crime, poverty, drug addiction, and alcoholism. In short, these social problems make it easy to marginalize the local community, turning the Tenderloin into a containment zone. One challenge for *Wonderland* is to be locally inclusive and to avoid the temptation to simply invite marquis artists to draw attention to the exhibition. Rather, *Wonderland's* intention seems to be to sincerely embrace and integrate the local artists with those from outside the community. Initially, there was no support structure to fund such an endeavor; the project began with no monetary support from anyone except the curator and the artists, all of whom worked as volunteers. Eventually, the directors of the North of Market/Tenderloin Benefit District agreed to provide fiscal support and contributed money to pay for a website and some material expenses.

The artists, organizers, and partners of *Wonderland* see signs that change is in the air. They are taking to the streets of the Tenderloin to engage the local community and to make work that is a synthesis of the visions of artist and community. Many of the participating artists see this as an opportunity to engage with larger social concerns and to invent new forms of organization to answer the ongoing needs of creative synthesis. They see it, too, as an answer to the wild growth of the commercial galleries and auction houses. I feel that the exhibition is an attempt to push the boundaries of specific, local culture as far as possible.

Luis Canceel, Director of Cultural Affairs, San Francisco Arts Commission agrees. "From my perspective, the *Wonderland* exhibition is very much a site specific experience that addresses several issues of urban life shared with other cities, but it nevertheless is built around the specific response of artists to the Tenderloin neighborhood and its residents."

Wonderland also speaks to the need to reform dominant culture institutions, such as the MoMA or Lincoln Center, that continue to foster an exclusionary, ivory tower attitude towards culture. *Wonderland* is an attempt to signal the way back to a positive, progressive footing, to organize in a way that goes beyond the survival tactics of the past twenty years.

To that end, *Wonderland* combines volunteerism with multiculturalism, allowing artist organizers to serve local community and, more importantly, to begin a true collaboration between the insider and outsider. The use of volunteerism has allowed the exhibition to remain nimble, rather than getting being bogged down in the attempt to attract funders. John Melvin, Project Director for *Wonderland* has this to say, "As Project Director of an exhibition that has hacked the system, I would not be telling the truth if I didn't agree that it is a complicated and overwhelming experience. Now, with 78 artists, 16 teams, almost 300 artists from the Tenderloin, there is so much to manage that we have added several people to the volunteer-based management team."

One of the unique examples of how *Wonderland* has main-

tained its mission to create public works of art that draw their inspiration from the Tenderloin public, rather than simply being made for that public, is the *Wonderland* Neighborhood Association (WNA) project. The WNA was founded by participating artists from New York City and the Tenderloin around the concept of an art-event as block party. Through necessity, it has grown into one of the primary liaisons between the artists of *Wonderland*, other local arts organizations, residents, and the city itself, putting the organization itself into the hands of the participating artists and the community.

Artists have an unusual potential to increase social imagination. From the Artist In Residence (A.I.R.) impact on urban living, Fluxus of the 1960's, The International Artists Museum and its connection to the Solidarity Movement of 1980's Poland, the Artists' Space movement in the USA from the 1960's to the 1980's, to great social sculptures, such as Documenta and the Skulptur Projekte Münster, the ability of artists to have an impact on and bring innovation to the organization of society itself has been remarkable. *Wonderland* signals a return to this type of artist collaboration and a turning away from an era in which the allure of power, fame, and money all too often cut off all creative options.

Luis Canceel remarks "Lance Fung is part of a minority of contemporary curators who share this vision, and I am gratified to have him bring his keen curatorial eye and dedication to the Tenderloin."

Wonderland is a signal to the Tenderloin community and to the established art world to return to supporting difficult and challenging art and to enlarge art audiences and art concerns by engaging wider publics through their collaboration. Ahead of the curve, *Wonderland* calls out warmly to multicultural reality.

I asked Elaine Zamora, District Manager, North of Market/Tenderloin Community Benefit District about her involvement. She said, "My initial reaction was art was being 'brought to the neighborhood' by outsiders who were going to dump art on the neighborhood. When I heard Lance's presentation I was relieved to hear that he wanted true community engagement and input from the neighborhood and neighborhood artists ... realizing *Wonderland's* commitment to neighborhood engagement and relevancy, as well as the willingness to do the work on a voluntary basis, and the consequential positive impact for the neighborhood and the CBD's work in the neighborhood, it became a clear and easy determination that this was a project we wanted to help develop and bring to the community."

As artists, we know that we have yet to earn public recognition of our significance. The general public is often still distrustful of artists; however the organizational structure of *Wonderland* includes a transparent sharing of power and information with the Tenderloin community and is determined to put the priorities of the individuals within that community first. This will hopefully create a growing and evolving web of trust between the artists and the Tenderloin community.

I spoke about this with Lance Fung, the curator of *Wonderland*, and he said "I believe there are many themes when it comes to *Wonderland*, but one of the most important ones is community. As you know, I often deal with different aspects of community in my curatorial endeavors. *Wonderland* has taken me the deepest I have ever gone in outreach to true involvement and creation from the local community. The Tenderloin has been a complex place to work in, as the community involves many micro communities; so listening and learning from each group has been key. Staying objective is also important, as many of the micro communities have opposing points of view."

Wonderland is happening at a time of great economic uncertainty, and this has had a large impact on corporate and government support for the arts. For this reason, *Wonderland* has chosen a new path of reliance based on volunteerism and

relevance to the Tenderloin community. It is not institutional support that makes art; it is the artist. *Wonderland* is committed to nurturing young artists and to engaging works that champion culturally diverse people who have been discounted in their neighborhoods. *Wonderland* is an experiment that asks the public to revalidate the relationship between creativity and social change.

Lance Fung recently curated the only international biennial in the United States, which is hosted by Site Santa Fe, and was also the visionary curator of The Snow Show. His experience with institutions and with stretching the institutional fabric for the sake of artistic vision is well established. Fung's commitment to making *Wonderland* a reality, without the usual institutional supports, speaks to his awareness that it's not enough to simply survive as a curator. Over the past twenty years, while the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was backing away from its once-strong commitment to challenging work, Fung crossed sides from commercial art dealing to the non-profit world of art. It is interesting that, in a year in which we are all celebrating recent symbolic gains at the NEA, Fung has proceeded, with *Wonderland*, to create an exhibition that is almost fully disengaged from support funding in an effort to rekindle a call to social change.

"In *Lucky Number Seven*, the Site Santa Fe's 7th International Biennial, I wanted to bridge the triculture of Santa Fe through the biennial. Despite what I was told, the three cultures live in very separate circles so I attempted to engage them through various social economic issues. When I began working in the Tenderloin I had no idea how truly important it would be just to be present there. Issues of gentrification and exploitation came up and it was not until I had become so involved with the community that I began to get a sense of what the Tenderloin is really about. Typically, I am somewhat in control of my projects, but in this case the local community is, and I am here to guide and learn simultaneously" comments Fung.

The organizers hope that one of the benefits from *Wonderland* will be to develop a mechanism for the Tenderloin community to maintain close ties between artists and the neighborhood. When I asked the curator what it was like to finally curate an exhibition in the city he was born he said, "Surprisingly, I am more of an outsider here than anywhere else on the globe. As we know, there are certain universal codes within the art world such as education, career history, attire, etc., but upon entering the Tenderloin none of that mattered. The only thing that mattered was could *Wonderland* really effect the lives of the people in the neighborhood? That is a tall order for an art exhibition! Soon after we began to work, everyone forgot I was an outsider and simply wanted to make the best effort we possibly could. Initially, I felt it was a neighborhood with so many different issues that it would inspire artists. Little did I know that the people of the Tenderloin themselves would have more effect on the artists and me than the political and topical issues of the neighborhood."

We can all now watch and see what effect *Wonderland* has on the Tenderloin and San Francisco. Certainly, the organizers will, because they hope to learn from the experience and achieve even greater things with The Return of *Wonderland*, planned for 2010, should actual funding come their way. And I certainly hope it does.

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Constellation, 303 Golden Gate

Brian Bixby, Sydney Cooper

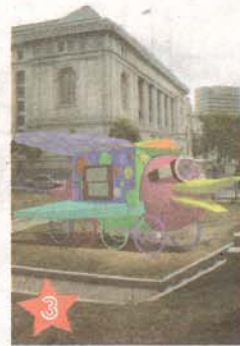
Constellation is a community wide self-portrait project. The goal of this project is the representation of identity generated by individuals in a community (in this case an area known as the Tenderloin) rather than for a community by outsiders. These self-portraits are created through one on one interaction, interviews and writing and finally time spent alone in reflection. Cops, the trans-gendered, prostitutes, drug dealers, east Indians, Vietnamese, these are all reductive labels we use to categorize and define people - not the way we see or would label ourselves when asked. What we learn from portraiture is that our view of any person including ourselves is often subjective and contingent. Who we are and how we perceive ourselves involves selection, interpretation and chance. We are presenting one way a community might define itself in much greater and rich detail. Part of the process of creating the portraits will be to create local "experts" in facilitating these portraits, in this way the project will become the property of the community, a creation of the Tenderloin.



Down The Rabbit Hole, (YWAM building) - 357 Ellis Street
M-F 11-3pm, call 415.885.6543 for an appointment; Sat, 11-3 pm, drop by

Jonathan Fung, Monika Jones, Mark Lee, Erik Otto, Brandon Robinson
Today the sex trade is thriving, both globally and here in the US. In fact, San Francisco is host to 48 percent of all trafficked women entering California and the Tenderloin District is contributing to this growing issue according to Donna Hughes, a national expert on sex trafficking at the University of Rhode Island.

Down the Rabbit Hole is an art installation elaborated by artists Jonathan Fung, Monika Lea Jones, Mark Lee, Erik Otto, and Brandon Robinson. The art installation will be located at 357 Ellis Street in the heart of the Tenderloin District of San Francisco. It will graphically depict a realistic environment of a working / living space of a young girl that is a hostage of sex slavery. Guests will leave Down the Rabbit Hole uneasy but hopefully moved to seek awareness about the human trafficking issue that looms over San Francisco and throughout the Bay Area. Each guest will take a blindfold as they exit with printed websites of agencies who fight against this horrific travesty to inspire guests to help stop human trafficking.



Home Away From Home, McCallister @ Larkin and throughout the Tenderloin

CENTS - Barry Beach, Colby Claycomb, John K. Melvin, Kit Rosenberg, Izumi Yokoyama

As Wonderland was beginning to take shape, we started working with neighborhood youth groups. In conjunction with these organizations, we held a series of workshops wherein they asked the young participants to represent for them "a house that moves". We eventually used those paintings and drawings as a means to establish an ongoing dialogue with the greater community about the more abstract notions of home, place, and where one fits within

the two.
After the workshops, we created a fantastical "mobile meeting place" whose design is a combination of some of the paintings and drawings that were produced by the children. It will be shown in two parts. One large "house", potentially inhabitable, is permanently on the corner of McCallister and Larkin. Another, smaller house was also created, scaled so that we can cart it around the neighborhood in order to engage more directly with the community. This mobile sculpture will be taken out to various points in the Tenderloin at select times in October and November. We will distribute postcards with images of the children's creations in the hopes that their impressions of home will extend beyond the borders of their neighborhood. The mobile meeting point will also work to bring together a number of people that differ in age and ethnicity, and that might not have had the opportunity to meet otherwise.



JAW: Wonderland Remix, Installation: Evergold Gallery.
Performance: Beoddeker Park

JAW — Mathias Josefson, Thomas Watkiss, Per Ahlund

For Wonderland, we are choosing unadvertised locations of the Tenderloin to gather daily transactions through recording small conversations and the different sounds of languages to be remixed for a new perspective to the visitor of the exhibition. We set out to demonstrate a select thread of commonality, cultural semantics and innuendos that may exist within approaches to small enterprise. In a way, we are displaying the nature of small business of the Tenderloin as key to understanding the greater formation of American culture for an international audience.

There will be two parts of our contribution to the exhibition. The installation at Evergold Gallery will allow visitors to listen to the sound work we have created and allow for the listener to express their thoughts in words on the gallery wall. We will demonstrate the work with a live mix of the piece, similar to what one could hear in the installation. In this, we want to captivate the audience and allow a second level of interest to the piece in hopes to understand the diversity of the Tenderloin as beautiful and profound.



Night at the Black Hawk, SF Recovery Theatre,
CBD Community Center, 134 Golden Gate Avenue

Edgar L. Gillies, Geoffrey Grier, Nicole Harley, Anthony Haynes, Charles Houston, Vernon D. Medearis, Eric Ward, Stefan Williams

The San Francisco Recovery Theater will reconnect the vital historic artistic links within the Tenderloin community by reviving the history of the Black Hawk Jazz Club once housed in the epicenter of San Francisco's nightlife. As part of the Wonderland opening ceremony, the SF Recovery Theater will revisit the location of the original Black Hawk Jazz Club (Turk & Hyde) and pay homage with a short performance then continue the tour stopping at various Wonderland installations. Community members, musicians, artists and patrons that actually frequented the Black Hawk will be invited to either perform or describe their memory of this club as SF Recovery Theater plays out their part by hosting weekly productions through the end of October at the CBD Community Center 134 Golden Gate Avenue. Please check the Wonderland website for details.



Offstage, 3 sculptures near the intersection of Market Street, Golden Gate Avenue, and Taylor Street

Melkerka Helgadottir, Christopher Piallat, Brandon Truscott

San Francisco's Tenderloin district has always been a neighborhood marked by various contrasts and complexities. The Tenderloin is San Francisco's theater district and its streets are an extension of a very real human drama taking place just outside of these glossy stages every day. The various expressions and interactions that exist on the streets of this neighborhood are an extremely raw and poignant display that represents a truly human struggle. Our group is interested in showing

the similarities and contrasts between this real and illusionary drama at the root of this struggle.
People often wrap their bodies and their belongings in various ways to shield themselves from this nature. People are pushed to extreme psychological ends. Our observations revealed an enigmatic display that often occurs upon these conditions. People often dance, sing, or individually revel with poignant outbursts meant for an unknown audience. The three sculptural figures we have created move within their individual glossy pods to represent the haunting "performance" that is at the heart of our conceptual foundation. The figures will be positioned in various locations in and around the Warfield Theater. The Offstage locations reflect a street like proscenium meant for all audiences, local or otherwise. Our aim is to highlight the Tenderloin's unique tapestry of social complexities and drama, blurring the lines between theater and street, performance and life, perceptions and reality.



Fear Head, Golden Gate Street between Mason and Jones Streets
Roman Cesario, Mitsu Overstreet

In San Francisco there is a giant three headed monster watching the people of its neighborhood walk by its enormous heads. It sees its residents and visitors with six enormous eyes walk by with the looks on their faces and the experiences that happen day by day. This monster has a fever of fear. Why is it in a state of fear? Well you see this enormous head is fed everyday and its food is saturated in this horrible emotion. The homeless feed it everyday every time a police officer is on the same block. The Police feed it everyday whenever they get a call about violence. The onlookers feed it as they watch the police and the ambulances whine through the streets. The immigrants feed it everyday as they try to assimilate themselves into San Francisco and the United States. The Prostitutes feed it every time they meet a new John. The drug addicts feed it when they don't get in contact with their dealers. The drug dealers feed it when they go to meet their clients. The Tourists feed it when they walk a bit too far from the plaza. This head eats and eats and has become to be in a permanent state of fear. Every time it eats it gets bigger snorting lines of the poverty stricken and getting drunk on the urine of the schizophrenics as bedbugs infest its skin. It can taste the worlds fear pouring down its streets craving the unhealthy and unemployed.

These enormous faces and heads are a mural and it lives in the Tenderloin.



Local Wonder, CBD Gallery, 134 A Golden Gate Avenue

Ken Bensley, Charles Blackwell, Brittny, Rick Darnell, Jaine Dickens, Jeff Marshall, Txatxo Perez, Rex Reso, Jeff Roysdan, Niki Savage, Stix, Wilton Woods, Steven Zettler, and more!

Local Wonder is an exhibition created by artists who live and work in the Tenderloin. We hope to challenge the stereotypes and mischaracterizations about the Tenderloin. As the exhibition's title implies, Local Wonder focuses on the intensely positive and wonderful ideas that spring from the diversity of the cultures, people and lifestyles of the Tenderloin.

Local Wonder is working collaboratively with NOM, TL, CBD and Wonderland who have made it possible for scores of San Francisco artists, international artists and Tenderloin artists to exhibit their artwork together. This is no small thing.



Reflect/xions, Warfield Building (982 Market St.), Public Barber Salon (571 Geary St.), Ever Gold Gallery (441 O'Farrell St.)
Christin Kurt Ebert, Alex Brauchack, Owen Takabayashi, Andrew McClintock

Reflect/xions is a collaborative installation project that has identified three prominent street-level locations in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood whose surfaces are transformed into public, large-scale mirrors by recasting them with reflective silver mylar film. The project explores the possibilities of a physical mirror's reflective surface to function as a stimulus for self-reflexive thinking. The reflections of the persons in their environment passing by or interacting with the mirrors create momentary images of public space. Thus the recognition of the reflected self in the mirror provokes the realization or contemplation of one's existence and participation in that space. The effect of "mirrorizing" a surface is a quite common design practice that is used by various bars, restaurants, massage parlors, and other small businesses in the neighborhood to expand but also to conceal the actual space of these places.



Stake, Throughout the Tenderloin
Lars Chellberg, Thomas Kosbau, Layman Lee

As a team coming from New York, we felt it would be best to engage in a dialogue with a cross section of Tenderloin residents to get a sense of the people who choose or were placed to live in and frequent the neighborhood. It was striking how little the activity on the streets reflected the wide ranging diversity of the residents. One of the perplexing elements is that a neighborhood like this could be at the center of such an expensive and affluent city. Puzzled by the contrast of this neighborhood to the rest of San Francisco, we posed the question of its existence to the people we met at the Tenderloin. The answers were varied, some surprising, some not. The stories we discovered through this process will be communicated in a variety of ways as Stake.

Throughout world history, gold has been the common international standard of value. The pieces of the Tenderloin identified by Stake will be unified with gold paint; their story, significance and location will be recorded on a plan of the neighborhood. Stake will serve as a walk-able mental map, stitching the stories, boundaries, and faces of the Tenderloin together.



Tender Transmissions, Luggage Store Annex/ Tenderloin National Forest, 509 Ellis Street
93.7FM and 415.375.8282
Alex Beckman, Kaif Ghaznavi, Malak Halmi, Lynne McCabe, Lauren Marsden, Mike Moorillo, Rana Mukherjee, George Pfau, Kris Timken

Tender Transmissions is a temporary Tenderloin specific radio program (available locally on 93.7 FM), a series of phone messages (at (415) 375-8282) and an audio installation at The Tenderloin National Forest. We were interested in the intimate and invisible characteristics of sound and its potential resonance at the threshold of the public and the private. We approached the neighborhood by engaging with intimacy, desire and tenderness in a variety of artist projects, by listening to individual voices, the sounds of the neighborhood and the desires and stories of various residents, workers and students. In recognition and celebration of the diverse culture of the Tenderloin, the projects involve a wide range of participants including groups of students from the Glide Foundation, De Marillac Academy and the Vietnamese Youth Development Center.

The transmissions include conversations about love, songs and poetry chosen and sung or recited by participants, soundscapes made from ambient neighborhood recordings, a screenplay derived from conversations with erotic dancers, ambient audio recorded during guided blindfolded walks, conversations between visiting Japanese college students and youth and a composition which reflects on the cinematic history of the neighborhood. It also includes interviews with curator Lance Fung and other key members of the organization which focus on issues of movement, migration, nomadism and the visible in relation to current residents, participating artists and potential visitors.



The Queen Amje Studio Project, 125 Hyde Street

Tender at a Distance - Doug Hall, Carole Hay, Amie Krubally, John Roloff

Event Schedule: October 17, studio open house, 2-5; October 25, November 1, November 5, Batik workshops; November 15, 2-5, Closing event for workshop participants and guests

Amie Krubally is a world renowned Batik artist from The Gambia, West Africa who has been residing in a Tenderloin SRO for the past

several years. Due to personal circumstances, she has been unable to continue the innovative work she began in Africa several decades ago. In the course of doing research for Wonderland we were introduced to Ms. Krubally by Stephen Woo, a community organizer employed by The Tenderloin Neighborhood District Corporation. At the time we were more aware of what we did not want to do than what we did want to do - conscious of the many ideological, political, and aesthetic pitfalls that awaited artists who naively blundered into this complex section of San Francisco.

It was after this first meeting while walking through the Tenderloin on our way back to our cars, we turned to one another and simultaneously announced that we had found our project: a studio for Queen so she could work again and, perhaps, offer workshops for residents of the Tenderloin. Amie Krubally has gained worldwide recognition for her innovation and artistry. The Gambian government granted her the title, "Queen of Batik", in recognition of her wide-reaching influence in the art of Batik.



WNA Block Party, Boeddeker Park

Christopher Burch, Jessica Higgins, Erika Kner, Joshua Selman
Schedule of events: October 17, Boeddeker Park, 11 am - 5 pm

The Wonderland Neighborhood Association (WNA) is an informal, self-organizing arts collective originating with the Wonderland Exhibition. WNA was founded by Jessica Higgins, Erika Kner and Joshua Selman and developed and augmented by Christopher Burch. The sole purpose of the WNA is to organize bi-annual arts events in the Tenderloin with the goal of promoting resident and guest artists for the benefit of the Tenderloin residents. It is our goal to pass along WNA to a local arts organization for ongoing management of an artists collective in the Tenderloin committed to using art for positive impact on quality of life throughout the

neighborhood. The inaugural event is the WNA Block Party which is an event score written by it's founders and inspired by Dick Higgins, George Brecht and Charlotte Moorman.



Special event: Personal Geographies, Throughout the Tenderloin
Regina Miranda, Patricia Niedermeier

Based on the true stories of homeless women, collected via interviews in the Tenderloin, Personal Geographies is a collaborative performance created by choreographer Regina Miranda and performer Patricia Niedermeier. The interactive choreography, which evolves along the streets of the neighborhood, explores the causes that send women onto the streets, or into behaviors that are out of the norm, provoking a reflection on the myriad of emotional losses and survival struggles of women who suddenly see themselves without a home, and invisible to the world around them.

Revealing the human face of a population that is both extremely familiar and painfully foreign, Personal Geographies retraces homeless women's walking paths, and uses the meeting between performer and audience as a trigger to redesign the streets of the Tenderloin as urban spaces for the expansion, contact, sharing and crossing of subjectivities. Through interaction, the borders between art and "real life", private and public, inside and outside, artists and audience, is blurred, and in the nomadic bodies of performance, that include the audience, the paradigm of us - the included versus them - the outsiders, the excluded, is questioned and reduced.



Special event: PaintOut, 272 McAllister Street

Lauren Addario, Kara Pojewski, Leif Percifield

PaintOut is a collaborative work that allows the participant to create a virtual graffiti drawing on any reflective surface. PaintOut facilitates the creation of temporary street art and graffiti, and because of this, it allows the normally marginalized street artist

to participate in the current contemporary art dialogue. The system functions using an infrared camera that tracks LED emitters built into modified spray paint cans. The video projected on the wall allows us to see the results of the infrared tracking program, which creates the simulation of spray paint.

The whole point of graffiti is the act of creating it without permission. It is surreptitious; created by individuals who typically have no formal art training and who are operating within a set of unwritten rules. If an outsider artist is invited to participate in the contemporary cultural dialogue, they are now paving the way for gentrification of the art form. What does it mean to legitimize this art form? What does it mean to invite the outsider in?

WONDERLAND

74 artists - 16 projects

October 17th - November 15th

free to the public www.wonderlandshow.org

Saturday, October 17: free opening, noon at Boeddeker Park, 240 Eddy St.
Sunday, October 18: free symposium, 2-4 at the Warfield Theater, 982 Market St.

WONDERLAND



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free to the public • www.wonderlandshow.org

