



According to a lawsuit filed last week, a former lead artist on the cartoon "SpongeBob Squarepants" hired accomplices to attack his art dealer and take over her gallery in order to gain control of the sale of his work— claims the artist denies.

The Rembrandt sketch stolen from the Ritz-Carlton has been found and returned.

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by Laura Cassidy

Image: MAU. *Tempest: Without a Body*, April 7-9, 2011. Courtesy of MAU and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco. Photo: Lemi Ponifasio/MAU.

Best International Artist Debut: Lemi Ponifasio, *Tempest: Without a Body*, performed by MAU, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, April 7–9, 2011

Tempest: Without a Body is a stirring performance by Samoan choreographer Lemi Ponifasio based on the works of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin and Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Beyond the angel wings worn by Ponifasio's principal dancer—an explicit interpretation of the windswept "angel of history" that Benjamin illustrates with Swiss artist Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* (1920)—*Tempest* is decidedly abstract in its philosophical engagements.¹ With a loose narrative structure and implicit reference to the erosion of individual freedoms following America's catastrophe on September 11, Ponifasio optimizes the medium of theater as a collaborative and immersive form of visual art. Rather than literally describe inclement weather, he evokes an emotional upheaval and oppressive political regime.

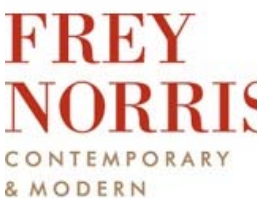
At times, Ponifasio's dance company, MAU (a Samoan word meaning "vision" and "revolution"), moved across Yerba Buena Center for the Arts' stage with crisp ceremonial synchronization; at other times, it did so in an agonizingly slow manner that suggested gradual metamorphosis. The

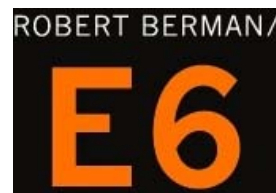
Driving from Park Presidio Boulevard onto the Golden Gate Bridge, for example, passersby can peer out their car windows and glimpse the camouflaged aphoristic word sculptures that Philippe Becker Design filled with nesting material for the American robin in the work *Winged Wisdom* (2010). Phrases like "nest from the inside out" are appropriately sized poetic fragments that prompt a reconsideration of the surrounding built environment. While many other habitats in this show fail to function as homes or resources for animals, instead playing on formal and conceptual figure-ground relationships operating within an object-based proprietary economy, the larger conversations about place and prototypes for sustainable living merit its selection for Best Environmental Arts Initiative.

Best New Media Arts Initiative: Gray Area Foundation for the Arts, San Francisco

The Gray Area Foundation for the Arts (GAFFTA) is a vital experimental hub of new media art in the Bay Area. It is both a physical cornerstone of San Francisco's NEA-funded ARTery Project, aimed at revitalizing the Central Market and Tenderloin area of downtown San Francisco, and a virtual node in a multilayered network of education, research, and public exhibitions and events. Its April 2011 move from its inaugural white-walled, street-level exhibition space on Taylor Street to the ground floor, or basement, of the Warfield Building has reinforced GAFFTA's desire to be grounded in a practice of community building and to avoid stereotypical gallery rhetoric.

The historic atmosphere of the Warfield's basement, once the haunt of rock musicians and Prohibition-era bootleggers, lends a certain authenticity to new media art. Such was my experience when viewing a recent robotic installation by artists Barney Haynes, Jennifer Parker, and Kevin Murphy entitled *BubbleTRANSIT: an erosive drawing mechanism* (2011), for which the artists hacked a Kinect motion-sensing device intended for the Xbox 360 game console and reprogrammed it to capture the movements of curious gallery visitors. Stepping into the frame of action, participants witnessed their movements translated into real-time abstract drawings composed in water by a Terminator-like mechanical arm. The drawings were subsequently projected onto a nearby paint-chipped wall, hovering like apparitions in cement.





Rachel Sussman. *welwitschia mirabilis*, #0707-22411 (2,000 years old; Namib Naukluft Desert, Namibia); archival fine art print, 44 x 54 in. Courtesy of Rachel Sussman and The Long Now Foundation.

Best Interdisciplinary Lecture Series: Seminars About Long-Term Thinking, hosted by Stewart Brand, The Long Now Foundation, Fort Mason Center

The Long Now Foundation's Seminars About Long-Term Thinking (SALT), held monthly at Fort Mason Center, supply an accumulating archive of interdisciplinary knowledge. The series contains some of the most diverse and compelling ideas about long-term thinking presented in a way that is always accessible and stimulating.

Visual artists whose work resonates with The Long Now's methodical approach are periodically invited to present. Rachel Sussman's November 2010 seminar, "The World's Oldest Living Organisms," featured a collection of large-scale photographic portraits of rare organisms, mostly plants, around the world that have survived for millennia. Along with endearing accounts of her journeys to find these organisms, Sussman suggested a new subfield of biology dubbed Biological Longevity, by which scientists would study the ability of these organisms to survive over time in changing environments. Stewart Brand, who hosts SALT, joked that one if not several scientists in the crowd might be receptive to her proposition, demonstrating the reciprocity and beauty of interdisciplinary assemblies.

NOTES:

1. Benjamin writes: "blowing from Paradise; it [the storm] has got caught in his [the angel of history's] wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them..." Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History / Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940).

2. *Presidio Habitats* exhibition catalogue (2010).

stagecraft of MAU's light designer, Helen Todd, further dramatized their swift and arduous struggle to endure the titular tempest. She skillfully delineated and oft contracted what would otherwise be open space. The visually arresting image of a dancer slinking like a cat along the edge of an illuminated section of the stage—an illusory cage—demonstrates why Ponifasio and MAU are deserving of this award.

Best Environmental Arts Initiative: Presidio Habitats, FOR-SITE Foundation, May 16, 2010–August 2011

After the commotion surrounding the late Donald Fisher's nearly two-year campaign to bring a contemporary art museum to San Francisco's Presidio, I am impressed by the FOR-SITE Foundation's facilitation of a large-scale environmental arts initiative addressing site specificity in this beloved public Bay Area landscape that is "layered with natural and social history."² Beyond the politics of place though, *Presidio Habitats* also brings a refreshingly post-humanist perspective to Bay Area visual culture, distinguishing itself by addressing resident animals as "clients" whose needs are on par with humans'.



Philippe Becker Design. *Winged Wisdom*, 2010; steel armature, mesh netting, sterile straw, 64 letters; 36 x 30 x 8 in. Courtesy of the FOR-SITE Foundation. Photo: Monique Deschaines.

