



*Here and Now*

**CHRISTIAN L. FROCK**

INTRODUCTION BY DR. STEPHANIE HANOR



## INTRODUCTION

The Mills College Art Museum strives to be a laboratory for new forms of creative expression and a site for making the lessons of the past relevant to those in the present. *Here and Now* presents an ideal opportunity to accomplish both objectives. By engaging local artists to create temporary site-specific works in historic architectural locations throughout Oakland, the art museum is connecting in a creative and relevant way to our surrounding community, drawing on the rich history of the region and shining new light on historical gems within our midst.

Founded in 1852 as the Young Ladies' Seminary in Benicia, California, Mills College was established two years after California was admitted to statehood and the same year the city of Oakland was established. In 1871 the College moved to its current location, at a time when Oakland was a bustling metropolis of about 10,000 people. Now a historic landmark, Mills Hall was the heart of early campus life, originally housing the entire college, including classrooms, dormitories, dining halls, and faculty housing. Mills College was, and remains, deeply rooted in the local community and *Here and Now* unearths some of the interesting connections from this dynamic period of Oakland's beginnings. For example, David Hewes, a prominent resident at Camron-Stanford House and major patron of the arts, donated the bells for the Julia Morgan designed bell tower on Mills' campus, while the daughters of Governor George Pardee attended Mills College.

Each of the artists' sites is embedded with myriad histories that inform the diverse and fascinating cultural heritage of Oakland. Through Elaine Buckholtz's light installation at Mills Hall, Floor Vahn's soundscapes at the Pardee Home Museum, and Christine Wong Yap's interactive social sculpture at Camron-Stanford House, visitors have the opportunity to experience these sites through contemporary art projects that open a window onto historic worlds which are central to understanding our current lives.

I am grateful to Christian L. Frock for conceiving and curating this insightful project and to each of the artists for their time, commitment, and enthusiasm in engaging these sites and the artistic process. In addition, I would like to thank and acknowledge the trust and help of our partners, Pardee Home Museum and Camron-Stanford House, as well as the administration at Mills College.

**DR. STEPHANIE HANOR**  
Director  
Mills College Art Museum





From the desk of  
**CHRISTIAN L. FROCK**  
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June 2010

Invisible Venue, the curatorial enterprise I founded and have directed since 2005, collaborates with artists to present art in unexpected settings, outside of conventional gallery or institutional spaces. Its objectives are to support artist's ideas and to connect contemporary art with varied audiences and environments. Projects are temporary site-specific public artworks that engage inherent conditions including the built environment, its history and social concerns—variously as sanctioned and guerilla interventions. Each endeavor activates two locations of site-specificity: a physical site of action and a discursive space referred to by art historian Miwon Kwon as “the site of effects/reception.”<sup>1</sup> Here, social engagement is intrinsic to the artwork.

*Here and Now* focuses on three historic buildings erected during the early formation of the city of Oakland and concurrent to the development of the greater San Francisco Bay Area and the state of California. While the discovery of each location is integral to the work, the inadvertent experience of the city in transit between sites also presents a broader context. The relatively unchanged appearance of each site, along with that of many other landmark buildings around the city, benchmarks the cultural values and great prosperity of the era following the Gold Rush. While many enjoyed the opportunities provided by the progress of the day—access to education, professional autonomy, and political freedom—many more were excluded during a period of California history that reflects both socially progressive values and a long history of discrimination. When California entered the Union, in 1849, the framers of the constitution wrote a law that denied voting and other civil rights to all non-white citizens.<sup>2</sup> Each of the sites in *Here and Now* provides portals for engaging with the complicated histories of this region. The resulting works by three Bay Area-based artists, while not overtly political, provide the viewer with space for reflection on the complex legacies relative to the time. Through artistic intervention, these historic locations become contemporary sites of collective memory.

Elaine Buckholtz's light and video installation *Out of the Blue (Mills Hall Reconsidered)* animates Mills Hall (c.1871), the original schoolhouse when the college relocated to Oakland. Inspired by an 1873 Eadweard Muybridge photograph, Buckholtz's work revisits the building's exquisite architectural detail through the nighttime lighting of select interiors and its façade. This also forces a closer examination of the environment. Two towering trees



IMAGES: (Cover) Eadweard Muybridge, Detail: *Mills Seminary, Seminary Park, Alameda County, CA* (1873); (Overleaf) Christine Wong Yap, *The Great Balloon Giveaway* (2010), photo: Paul Kuroda; (Interior, right to left) Elaine Buckholtz, *Out of the Blue (Mills Hall Reconsidered)* (2010), photo: Paul Kuroda; Floor Vahn, Installation details, *Sonic Pardee Home (Reconstituting Memories of Pardee Past)* (2010), photo: Christian L.Frock (Listen to audio samples on [www.invisiblevenue.com](http://www.invisiblevenue.com))

in the background are lit from below. Not evident in the Muybridge photograph, they ground the scene in the present and provide an organic measure of history. A Julia Morgan-designed bell tower looms in silhouette nearby and chimes hourly—the same chimes since its commission in 1904. Buckholtz’s installation, easily viewed in transit, invites the public onto campus for a broad consideration of Mills College as representative of a wider history of place.

Floor Vahn’s sound installation *Sonic Pardee (Reconstituting Memories of Pardee Past)* enlivens the Music Room, the Billiards Room, and the Cupola of the Pardee Home Museum. Built in 1868 and occupied by Pardee descendants until 1981, it reflects a uniquely layered private and civic history. Whereas the Pardee women were invested in arts and culture, the Pardee men were deeply involved in politics. Original occupant Enoch Pardee served terms as Oakland mayor, California state assemblyman and state senator; his son George was state governor during the 1906 earthquake. The family interests are represented by extensive collections of artifacts, artworks, musical instruments, and libraries maintained in original placement throughout the house. Each room is a unique cabinet of curiosities: a quilt in the master bedroom includes a scrap of fabric from one of Mary Todd Lincoln’s dresses, which she sold to raise money after Lincoln’s assassination; a book in the library contains a personal dedication to Governor Pardee from Susan B. Anthony. Drawing on a range of sounds that include recordings from the vintage Symphonium and readings of public notices from the *San Francisco Examiner* following the 1906 earthquake, along with samples of ambient sound and Ragtime period music, Vahn’s scores imagine the house filled with the noise of family life.

*The Great Balloon Giveaway*, a one-day event and social sculpture by Christine Wong Yap, involved the installation and distribution of 1,000 multi-colored helium balloons on the grounds of Camron-Stanford House (c. 1876). Twenty-five volunteer youth, Grades K–3, from nearby Chinatown community organization Lincoln Square Recreation Center, sweetly disarmed passersby by offering, “Free balloons!” As an extension of this generosity, the public was also invited into Camron-Stanford House free of charge. One of few residential estates built on Lake Merritt, whose early occupants included historic figures David Hewes and Josiah Stanford, this Italianate Victorian structure also housed the Oakland Public Museum for more than 50 years. The front parlor, sitting room and dining room meticulously emulate original interiors, including a salon that replicates Hewes’ expansive art collection. Original pedagogical displays from the museum are staged in the lower level of the house. Throughout *The Great Balloon Giveaway*, visitors expressed delight at this rare opportunity to see these interiors. Simultaneously

hundreds of balloons could be spotted outside in the area surrounding Lake Merritt, expanding the site of the artwork out into the city.

All of these works demonstrate a commitment to broad public engagement, beginning with their production. As is the nature of a multi-sited project, *Here and Now* posed a wide-reaching collaboration between the artists and the various communities involved in the stewardship of three unrelated landmark buildings, including museum and college administrative staff at Mills College, the Board of Trustees and docents at Pardee Home Museum, the Board of Directors and docents at Camron-Stanford House, as well as a fleet of community volunteers from Lincoln Rec. Each worked together to realize these artworks through the negotiation of permissions and access, logistics, preservationist and safety concerns, human resources, installation and equipment. Whereas *The Great Balloon Giveaway* could be considered the most literal form of social sculpture among the three projects, in essence the community involvement required to see each of these works to fruition could also be interpreted as such. The temporary, conceptual nature of each work—social sculpture and time-based media, including light, video, and sound—depends upon further public engagement through the stories, images and documentation that will continue to circulate after the works are gone.

After returning to find her Oakland childhood home razed, conceivably a Victorian like Pardee Home or Camron-Stanford House, author Gertrude Stein famously wrote, “There is no there there.”<sup>3</sup> No longer physically site-specific, Stein’s memories assumed the site of effects maintained as narrative history through her memoirs. Cultural memory and its most essential forms—the stories and images that recall the light and shadows of our personal and collective past—is what allows us to experience the layered history of any given place. Each of these three contemporary artworks, though temporary interventions, affected a shift in the status quo for these historic sites by creating a different context from which to consider their epoch and by attracting new and different audiences. Inextricably intertwining the long history of the past with the present, even in their absence they continue to reside in the here and now.

#### Notes

1 Kwon, Miwon. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 29.

2 A further initiative attempted to deny entry to all African-Americans. Later much of the physical construction of the West Coast relied upon Chinese manual labor, helping to prompt the California Anti-Coolie Act of 1862 and the Federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

3 Stein, Gertrude. *Everybody’s Biography*. (New York, 1937.)

# HERE AND NOW

A Series of Site-Specific Installations in  
HISTORIC OAKLAND ARCHITECTURE  
Featuring new commissions by  
**Elaine Buckholtz, Floor Vahn, and Christine Wong Yap**  
Select dates throughout June 2010

Curated by Christian L. Frock presents Invisible Venue  
Organized by Mills College Art Museum

## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

### **1. Elaine Buckholtz, *Out of the Blue (Mills Hall Reconsidered)* (2010)**

Mills Hall (c.1871), Mills College, 5000 MacArthur Boulevard, Oakland, CA 94613  
Light and video installation: theatrical lighting equipment, video, dvd players, projectors

Thanks to Jim Graham, Director, Technical Services; Linda Zitzner, Director, Campus Facilities; Hunter Longe, Artist Assistant; John Challenor, Technical Assistant; and the Mills College Administration

### **2. Floor Vahn, *Sonic Pardee Home (Reconstituting Memories of Pardee Past)* (2010)**

Pardee Home Museum (c.1868), West Oakland, 672 11th Street, Oakland, CA 94607  
Sound installation: Original sound scores and vocal performances by Elaine Buckholtz, Tania Ketenjian, and Addie Mae O'Brien recorded on CD, audio players, speakers

Thanks to the Pardee Home Museum Board of Directors, especially Life Trustee Ron Pardee Neilson, Board President Deanna Lyon, Trustee Kay Cheatham, and Docent Darlene Dawson

### **3. Christine Wong Yap, *The Great Balloon Giveaway* (2010)**

Camron-Stanford House (c.1876), Lake Merritt, 1418 Lakeside Drive, Oakland, CA 94612  
Installation and social sculpture: 1,000 helium filled balloons, string, community members

Thanks to the Camron-Stanford House Board of Directors, especially Elaine Oldham and Nestor Bradley; the Children and Families of the City of Oakland's Lincoln Recreation Center, with organizational assistance from Gilbert Gong and Tina Huang; Kimi Taira; FLINC; and Trader Joe's, Lakeshore

## MILLS COLLEGE ART MUSEUM STAFF

Dr. Stephanie Hanor, Director; Stacie Daniels, Manager of Collections and Exhibitions; Lori Chinn, Program Manager; Summer 2010 Work-Study Students: Amanda Bailey, Nic Buron, and Abby Lebbert

## COLOPHON

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Documentation, including audio clips, video and images, is available on [www.invisiblevenue.com](http://www.invisiblevenue.com)