Canan Tolon’s paintings are wild, kinetic, technically impressive and critically self-aware,” wrote Elwyn Palmerton. “Each appears to be built up off of a staggered grid which is then modified and obscured in incremental stages which approach chaos while retaining a stable underlying structure. This gives them sense of whirling energy that seems, paradoxically, hyper-controlled. They resemble Andy Warhol put through a Constructivist or Futurist blender set to “fragment and churn,” which might suggest, also, something of their attitude towards modernity or postmodernity...Nevertheless, she gives it her own spin, shifting the ratio of irony to sincerity towards the latter while retaining the quality of probing intellect.”

Coal + Ice: Photos made in China at the exact same location 88 years apart show a profound loss of icepack.

Part of a citywide series of climate-related events designed to showcase California’s pushback against Trump, this sprawling exhibition of A-list documentary photographers cast harsh light on the follies of Hydrocarbon Man, linking mining and the consumption of fossil fuels to ecological breakdown, poverty, mass migration and war. If deniers could be compelled to see this exhibition with their eyes pinned open a la Clockwork Orange, maybe we’d be looking at a different future than the one we now face.
**Anglim Gilbert Gallery**

**Linda Connor and Zhan Wang @ Haines**

“In this ode to history, human and geologic,” Max Blue wrote, “Connor displays photos of ancient spiritual sites, petrified bodies from Pompeii, re-photographed century-old glass plate images of the night sky, and photos of geologic sedimentation. Zhang presents stainless steel sculptures cast from rock formations. The inspired pairing stands as a potent reminder of the primordial forces that have shaped both the Earth and human consciousness.”

**Duane Michals @ Crocker**

One of the first to seriously challenge the dominance of the decisive-moment approach to photography, Michals, over five decades, amassed a body of work that continues to resonate. This show, comprised of portraits, shows Michals operating with the alacrity of a street photographer, yet finding (or inventing) approaches that seemed tailor-made to each of his many subjects. Together, their names read like a who’s who of 20th-century American culture. To January 6.

**Frankenstein’s Birthday Party @ Hosfelt**

Given the unsettling character of the art sometimes seen in this space, it made perfect sense to consolidate representative samples on the occasion of Frankenstein’s 200th birthday. “The subject matter,” wrote Justin Manley, “is heavy, and its combination of fantastical grotesques with artifacts of real-life atrocity requires fortitude and a morbid curiosity. Determined visitors are rewarded with a show of first-rate artworks assembled with inspired curatorial vision.” Artists included Alan Rath (whose career retrospective opens February 16 at the ICA); Patricia Piccinini (whose current exhibition runs January 26); and Tim Hawkinson.
**Udo Nöger @ Dolby Chadwick**

Udo Nöger’s paintings should make you shiver. Their interlocking circles and totemic shapes — rendered in a near-monochrome color palette and set atop what appear to be ice flows, frigid waters and overcast skies — issue a distinct chill. They hang in mid-air like fever-dream visions, palpably real, yet remote — like what I imagine the Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton saw when he and his crew were trapped for months in polar ice, seeking an escape route to solid land while battling frostbite and snow blindness. These works are product of an elaborate and original painting process, designed to concretize light and to disguise the means by which it’s captured and shaped.

**Printinstallations @ ICA**

Printmaking rarely aspires to monumentality. Its history is largely one of small, intimate works. *Printinstallations* blew past that convention with works spanning large tracts of wall and floor space, all displaying unique processes. Highlights included Meghann Riepenhoff’s “dynamic cyanotypes” – montages made from light-sensitive paper covered in sand and doused with seawater that credibly evoked the ocean; and a photo-derived woodcut of a freeway overpass by Beth Howe and Clive McCarthy that came close to inducing vertigo through the strategic removal of visual information.

**David Shrobe @ Jenkins Johnson**

His pictures posit a kind of Dada-informed Antebellum Postmodernism, one in which black men and women, swathed in mismatched, makeshift garments, appear as tangible apparitions, sending out veiled messages about their psychological makeup and their place in a hierarchy not of their own making. In this fictional universe, art-historical arrows point backward to Picasso’s borrowings from tribal art and forward to contemporary artists like Titus Kaphar and Michelene Thomas.
No design team has had a greater impact on the American psyche than Charles and Ray Eames. You may not know them, but you surely know their work, in particular, those molded fiberglass chairs that became instant icons when they were introduced in the mid-1940s. What also you may not know, but what the exhibition makes clear, is the stunning range of the couple’s inventions. Their output included cutting-edge graphic design, experimental films, propaganda efforts on behalf of the U.S. State Department, and, most of all, model houses that stand as the epitome of Modernist design, if not the embodiment of mid-century America’s materialist aspirations. Robert Atkins’ review puts it all in context.

Unbrided optimism. That is what we saw looking at the early years of the 20th century through the eyes of the Precisionists, a group of between-the-wars artists who took as their subject industry and its supposed splendors: skyscrapers, automobiles, suspension bridges, factories and the like. This tour de force of an exhibition, organized Emma Acker and reviewed by Mark Van Proyen, brought into sharp focus the distinct parallels between the naive hopes of the Machine Age and the wide-eyed outlook that accompanied the growth of the Internet – before it became the handmaiden of Big Data.

These intertwined exhibitions explored modernity with fat dollops of humor – slapstick Jewish humor. Goldberg’s legendary cartoons poke fun at the absurdities of American life, particularly those arising out of newfangled gadgets that were supposed improve life, but didn’t; while Contraption, a companion exhibition curated by Renny Pritikin, featured works by contemporary tinkerers (Bernie Lubell, Sheri Simmons), alongside those of painters, photographers, sculptors and conceptualists, all whom challenged notions of progress.
Anglim Gilbert Gallery

**Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World @ SFMOMA**

China’s quick leap from agrarian poverty to industrial superpower upended the post-Cold War world order, bringing with it unprecedented levels of social, political, economic and environmental upheaval. Operating inside this environment, artists exposed the emerging fissures, placing China and the art made therein at the center of the world’s contradictions. It’s difficult and sometimes painful show, but essential viewing for anyone seeking insight into the People’s Republic.

**Monica Lundy @ Nancy Toomey**

The old adage about ignorance of history condemning us to repeat it appears to be a driving force behind the work of LA artist Monica Lundy. She’s devoted the past nine years to examining the fates of incarcerated women, turning archival photos into portraits on paper that attempt to reclaim lives marred or destroyed by injustice. _Deviance: Women in the Asylum During the Fascist Regime_, was based on a trove of photos culled from the archives of the Sant’Antonio Abate asylum, a psychiatric hospital to which women were involuntarily committed during 20 years of fascist rule (1920 to 1943). The paintings add a fresh chapter to the artist’s ongoing examination of the dark corners of women’s history.

**Kara Maria @ Catharine Clark**

These action-filled Pop Surrealist-leaning paintings explode like fireworks. Loud, garish and hyperbolic in the extreme, they show endangered creatures perched or roaming unmolested amidst scenes of catastrophic disarray, lost in a cacophonous universe in which everything we take for granted has become dangerously unmoored. The mayhem appears to leave these creatures unperturbed, indicating that they are unaware of their fate. To look is to be both a witness and an accomplice.

**Way Bay @ BAMPFA**

How to present 200 years’ worth of Bay Area art from the museum extensive holdings? Building on the expansive multi-disciplinary approach taken in museum's 2016 re-opening exhibition, _Architecture of Life_, curator Lawrence Rinder mined the museum’s
mixed works from all eras (and all media) together in ways that defied chronology and
category but made intuitive, poetic sense. The show included paintings and sculptures by
outsiders and insiders; works of craft and design; objects long held (but rarely displayed);
and works of recent vintage. The impact? “Like kids after a Saturday triple feature,” wrote
Maria Porges, “we stumble out into the sunlight, dazed and enchanted by everything we’ve
been shown.”

Ramekon O’Arwisters @ Patricia Sweetow
During an artist’s residency at Recology (the SF city dump), O’Arwisters looked at
how crocheting could transform broken ceramics into something new. His experiments
produced a suite of fantastically strange and deeply beautiful objects. Presented on
pedestals of unfinished wood, the sculptures incorporate ceramic shards into fabric-based
forms crocheted in a wild variety of colors and textures, proving yet again, how one person’s
trash can, in the right hands, become another’s treasure.

Al Farrow @ Museum of Craft and Design
“It’s not possible to walk into Al Farrow’s Divine Ammunition without feeling both awe and
soul-deep dismay,” wrote Julia Couzens. “The hatred that religions can breed is the blood-
soaked ground upon which Farrow constructs models of mosques, synagogues, cathedrals,
and reliquaries using munitions—a perversely incongruous counterpoint to the gospel of
peace, love and tolerance we hear coming from pulpits.” The highlight and centerpiece of
the exhibition is Farrow’s re-creation of the White House: “Like a massive architectonic
skull, it issues a bone-chilling, silent scream: the sound of democracy disintegrating.”

Ned Kahn @ Bedford
Seed Vortex is so massive that it confounds our sense of scale. Its slowly rotating steel disc,
covered with 100 pounds of shifting, siding mustard seeds, dominates this mini-
retrospective of Kahn’s work,” wrote Maria Porges. “The shushing whisper of the seeds
and their constantly shifting patterns is enchanting enough to justify a visit,
but six other smaller sculptures ringing the Bedford’s idiosyncratic circular
gallery build on the experience and further Kahn’s intention to get viewers to
think about the forces of nature by inviting hands-on contact — a departure
from the usual don’t-touch situation in public spaces.”
Phillip Maisel @ Gregory Lind

This is one body of work that absolutely cannot be understood in reproduction. It demands a face-to-face experience. “Though one can say this is required for all art, wrote Maria Porges, “in this case, this assertion is more than a fatuous truism. Maisel assembles photographic images into still lifes in shallow space, onto which additional collaged elements are added — creating diabolical shifts from three to two. The result is a trompe-l’oeil subtlety that toggles between flatness and space, between concrete objects and images of those objects.

Lava Thomas @ Rena Bransten

“The subtle and not-so-subtle transformations in Thomas’ drawings,” wrote Mark Van Proyen, “achieve the powerful effect of reaffirming and elevating the personhood and dignity of their subjects,” those being 12 African-American women arrested in the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott, and whose mug shots served as the source material for the series. “As a general rule, police photographs deny and subtly abolish the dignity of their subjects by fixing them to a graphic surface like so many specimens of real or alleged wrongdoing, as if to say, “don’t be like this person.” Thomas reverses this effect by showing how the dignity of a person can rise above the indignity of official accusation, in effect putting the law on a kind of esthetic trial.”

Tim Hawkinson @ Pace Palo Alto

Hawkinson’s art, writes Mark Van Proyen, “seems freakishly homespun, but at the same time very concerned with the question of what it means to make art in a post-genome world in which each of us have become minor monsters of Frankensteinian provenance.” Here as before, Hawkinson uses povera materials to bring “a science fiction sensibility to the interstitial space between sculpture and installation,” the result being an even more pronounced blurring of the line separating realism from Surrealism.
Dinh Q. Lê @ San Jose Museum of Art
“On the morning of the tenth day at sea, I awoke to the sound of that old man asking for help to push the young man’s dead body into the water.” Those words, spoken by a former Vietnamese boat person, are scrawled across the back of a snapshot — one of hundreds in Dinh Q. Lê’s installation Crossing the Further Shore, the emotional magnet and centerpiece of his exhibition True Journey is Return. Battered and yellowed and loosely stitched together into boxy enclosures, “they show, writes Patricia Albers, “what art can do and politics can’t.” To April 17.

David M. Roth, Squarecylinder’s editor and publisher, compiled this year-end roundup from reviews written by: Mark Van Proyen, Maria Porges, Robert Atkins, Patricia Albers, Max Blue, Justin Manley, Julia Couzens, Elwyn Palmerton and...himself. Thanks to all those above and to the many donors and advertisers who, in the past year, helped make Squarecylinder possible. If you like what you read there's a way to support it: