

## STYLE

# Thiebaud, Monet, YBCA: San Francisco sees a superbloom of art happenings



**Catherine Bigelow** | April 11, 2019 | Updated: April 11, 2019 12:39 p.m.



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CCA People's Party co-chairs Cathy Podell and designer Stanlee Gatti. March 25, 2019.

Photo: Catherine Bigelow / Special to The Chronicle

Our atmospheric winter has given way to a fecund spring of excellent art happenings, from a California College of the Arts tribute for artist **Wayne Thiebaud** to a fantastical YBCA fundraising reboot, This Is Not a Gala.

But first, a few not-to-miss exhibitions: **Claude Monet's** breathtaking, [later-year lilies](#) are in bold bloom over at the de Young (through May 27). And **Peter Paul Rubens'** Baroque drama is served up in oversize, chiaroscuro splendor in "[Early Rubens](#)," which just opened at the Legion of Honor.

On May 19, the [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art](#) SFMOMA presents "[Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again](#)." Starring more than 300 works by the crown prince of Pop Art, it's also the first retrospective since since the artist's 1987 death.

Also on view through April 28 is "Wayne Thiebaud: Artist's Choice," the 98-year-old's first solo show there in 30 years, which features Thiebauds that SFMOMA owns.

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Jose Gomez and his son, CCA architecture graduate student Luis Arturo Gomez, at the People's Party. March 25, 2019.

Photo: Catherine Bigelow / Special to The Chronicle



Artist Wayne Thiebaud (left) and CCA President Stephen Beal.

Photo: Catherine Bigelow / Special to The Chronicle

**Piece of cake:** As the California College of the Arts' People's Party demonstrated, Wayne Thiebaud — a towering Bay Area Figurative-Abstract Expressionist — continues to inspire in his 10th decade.



The decor for the party was a cinch for event co-chair-designer **Stanlee Gatti**, who adorned tables with technicolor drip paint cans and brushes. Mix-master **Greg Lindgren**, head of Rye on the Road, shook “Wayne’s World” martinis. And caterer **Paula LeDuc** dished up clever, Thiebaud-esque lemon meringue pie desserts.

This warmhearted fundraiser, led by Gatti and co-chair **Cathy Podell**, inspired guests to give a whopping \$1.2 million in support of CCA student scholarships — a cause near and dear to Thiebaud, who still teaches a few students and serves as professor emeritus at the UC Davis art department, which is vaunted, in part, thanks to Thiebaud’s tenure.

In a video interview with KQED radio host **Michael Krasny** that screened at the event, Thiebaud likened painting to a craft.

“Painting is also an activity that you pursue like a scientist — trying to find something fresh or new or as different as you can,” he explained. “You’ve got to approach it like it’s Lazarus and you’re the one who brings it to life.”

CCA is also in the midst of folding its Oakland campus into an expanded S.F. campus that will provide affordable housing for 1,000 students. **Luis Arturo Gomez**, a CCA architecture honors student now supported by a CCA scholarship, recalled the arduous work required of him as an immigrant.

“My parents always said, ‘Every sacrifice has its reward.’ I am a Mexican dreamer,” he declared, after thanking his parents, “and I promise you, I won’t disappoint.”

Thiebaud was surrounded by a bastion of admirers, but we finally got the chance to ask him about his current artistic explorations — and his tennis game.

“I’m too old to be a golf pro,” he said.

“Being honored by CCA touches my heart deeply,” he continued, then joked again: “As CCA searched for someone to attract people to this event, I did wonder how they settled on a 98-year-old art professor. I’m always working, sometimes desperate in the studio. But always with hope.”



A performer at YBCA’s This is Not a Gala. March 30, 2019.

Photo: Catherine Bigelow / Special to The Chronicle



**Culture cabaret:** It definitely was not your typical fundraising fare at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts' 25th anniversary celebration, This Is Not a Gala. Some 330 guests were greeted by drag artists, aerialists and an array of performing arts from jazz and hip-hop to Bollywood-inspired bhangra.

Dreamed up by **Jonathan Moscone**, YBCA chief producer (with assists from emcee **Marc Bamuthi Joseph** and event chairs **Amy Eliot** and **Meg Spriggs**), this colorful kaleidoscope of cultures raised funds for center programs, public-school arts teaching residencies and community partnerships.

Even Mayor **London Breed** swung by, presenting YBCA CEO **Deborah Cullinan** with a proclamation declaring March 30 as Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Day.

YBCA's **Charles Ward**, artist **Lava Thomas** and choreographer **Margaret Jenkins** delivered a round of heartfelt tributes to the honorary chairs, gallerist **Rena Bransten** and arts philanthropist **Ned Topham**, both founding YBCA trustees.

"As president, Ned led the charge saying, 'The center will be an inclusive and pluralistic place where artists and audiences can engage in empowering dialogue,'" recalled Jenkins. "Artists create community through making and sharing work. Centers like YBCA make that possible. And support from champions like Ned and his family are critical for artists to realize that work and connect with the larger community."

Harking back to YBCA's 1993 opening, Cullinan ticked off a few events from that year: The World Trade Center was bombed for the first time. President Clinton issued his "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" directive. **Jonathan Demme's** film "Philadelphia" changed the public conversation around HIV.

"It's here, at YBCA, that new, young and emerging artists are mentored, encouraged and come into their own," Cullinan enthused. "It's here where we encounter artists who move us to think, to feel, to question, to imagine. And most importantly, to take action. This is the undeniable power of the arts."

*Catherine Bigelow is The San Francisco Chronicle's society correspondent. Email: [missbigelow@sfgate.com](mailto:missbigelow@sfgate.com) Instagram: @missbigelow*



**Catherine Bigelow**

Catherine Bigelow is a freelance reporter-columnist-blogger who specializes in coverage about boldfaced names and A-List affairs. A fourth-generation Northern Californian, Miss Bigelow first divined her love of San Francisco by reading the dispatches of such classic Chronicle columnists as Pat Steger, Stanton Delaplane, Charles McCabe and Herb Caen. She began her newspaper career at The San Francisco Chronicle in 1995 as an editorial assistant to the features department's editor and columnists. She became a features reporter in 1999 and was assigned the society column in 2004.

Catherine left The Chronicle in 2007 but continues to write features for the paper and a twice-weekly society column.