

# Art show explores ‘Void California’

By Kimberly Chun

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Photo: Courtesy Of Negativland

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Negativland's ink-on-newsprint "Poster Map From A Big 10-8 Place" (1983) was created for the group's sound collage concept LP about growing up in the Contra Costa County suburbs.

When San Francisco underground filmmaker and Other Cinema impresario [Craig Baldwin](#) watches Ant Farm's "Media Burn" (1975) or [Jonathan Reiss and Survival Research Laboratories](#)' "A Bitter Message of Hopeless Grief" (1988), he doesn't simply see a swooping finned "dream car" crashing into a flaming wall of TVs at the Cow Palace, or mechanized animal skeletons enacting dire dances of torment and dread. He sees his generation in these video artworks, which he's currently considering in "Void California: 1975-1989" at [CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts](#).

"These films resonate very deeply for me," says Baldwin, surrounded by the "trillion notes" he relies on while programming, as a matinee plays above him at Artists' Television Access. "I was making film during that period, too. There was fearlessness and ingenuity and of course bitterness and ugliness crawling

through it all — those scars are all over my body, yes.”

S.F. new-wave outfit Tuxedomoon’s “Hugging the Earth” and [Mindy Bagdon](#)’s “Louder, Faster, Shorter,” which documents early San Francisco punk acts like the Dils, the Avengers and Sleepers, will also probably make it onto Baldwin’s video and film program as part of the exhibition of “punk-inflected” zines, photography, collage and sound art.

“A recurring theme of marginalization, of outside status, of poverty and loss,” as Baldwin describes it, marked his California generation’s response to what was viewed as the void between the Vietnam War and [Ronald Reagan](#)’s “Morning in America,” between the violence of the Manson family murders and the Jonestown massacre, and the technological advancements in sound and video recording as well as photocopy machines.

Inspired by the “new-wave cultural research” of V. Vale’s Search and Destroy zine, the seven curators from CCA’s graduate program in curatorial practice researched and gathered publications and works by the likes of [Raymond Pettibon](#), Negativland, [Melody Sumner Carnahan](#), Ruby Ray and Greta Snider for “Void California.” They hoped to sidestep nostalgia, says co-curator [Teresa Goodman](#).

“We didn’t want to romanticize it or make it black-and-white, which is funny because a lot of the works are black-and-white,” she adds wryly.

Oakland artist [Brontez Purnell](#) is a child of the ’90s but can identify with the zine-making urge: He made “these super weird personal little queer zines” as a kid devouring Maximum Rocknroll in Alabama.

“I like to look at zines 15 years later,” says Purnell, who will perform at the opening. “If I look at them five years later, I’m embarrassed. Ten years later, it’s OK. Fifteen years later, the people aren’t mad about what you wrote about them anymore — they’ll just laugh.”

The irony, in a social media landscape awash with online expression, is that the curators have come to treasure the physicality of the oxidizing, yellowing zines and ephemera in their care.

“These objects are so at risk of disappearing because everything can be put online and digitized,” says Goodman. “We’re panicking, and we kind of want to have that tangibility back again. The aura of a tangible zine is something you are drawn to; the thingness of the thing.”

[Kimberly Chun](#) is an East Bay freelance writer.

**Void California: 1975-1989:** Opening reception 6:30-8:30 p.m. Friday, March 11. Gallery hours noon-7 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, noon-5 p.m. Saturday. Through April 9. Free. CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 360 Kansas St., S.F. (415) 355-9673. [www.cca.edu](http://www.cca.edu) or <http://wattis.org>.