Installation view of "Samara Golden: A Trap in Soft Division" (detail), 2016. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

AROUND SAN FRANCISCO

After being closed for nearly three years of construction, the **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art** reopened to the public this past May with 170,000 square feet of exhibition space—more than double what it had before—and a boatload of marquee art on a 99-year loan from the collection of Gap founders Doris and Donald Fisher. The material in that haul is blue chip—curators will need to find ways to counterbalance its conservatism—but there is no doubting its towering quality.

The museum's opening was one of the main events on the art world's spring calendar, and the usual globe-trotting suspects could be spotted all over town, many admitting that they had not been to the City by the Bay in some time. Galleries and museums, nonprofits and project spaces put on their Sunday best and offered up their choicest wares. The big question on everyone's minds: is San Francisco, flush with tech money, shedding its sleepy reputation and joining the ranks of the world's art capitals?

One clear sign of change is located directly across the street from SFMOMA, a **Gagosian Gallery** (number 16 in the empire), which inaugurated its space with "**Plane.Site**," an exhibition that paired 2-D and 3-D works—one of each—from international brands like Mark Grotjahn, Jasper Johns, Pablo Picasso, Richard Serra, Andy Warhol, Rachel Whiteread, and, for a bit of hometown flair, the late, great, underrated artist and architect David Ireland. A Bruce Nauman mobile of disembodied resin-and-fiberglass heads delivered some welcome complexity to what was otherwise little more than an anodyne display of attractive high-end goods.

In October, S.F. stalwart **John Berggruen Gallery**—in business for nearly half a century—will move to a space next to Gagosian San Francisco. Until then, Berggruen is still operating out of its airy two-floor space nearby, where it presented "The Interactive Character of Color, 1970–2014," a fine display of works in various mediums by **Bridget Riley**. What is there to say about Ri-

Laura Owens, *Untitled* (detail), 2016, acrylic, oil, Flashe, silkscreen inks, charcoal, pastel pencil, graphite, and sand on wallpaper, dimensions variable, installation view. CCA Wattis.

OPPOSITE: COURTESY THE ARTIST; THIS PAGE: JOHNNA ARNOLD/©LAURA OWENS/COURTESY THE ARTIST; GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE, NEW YORK; SADIE COLES HQ, LONDON; AND GALERIE GISELA CAPITAIN, COLOGNE;

ley but that, at 85, she remains woefully underappreciated in the United States? Trademark stripe and ripple paintings hung alongside more intricate compositions involving intercutting patterns as well as the odd misfire (like a weird 2011 number with overlapping circles in various shades of yellow). Riley's canvases set the eyes dancing, but it is her drawings and prints that break hearts—her genius brushes aside typical issues of medium and scale. Riley's works on paper promise an intimate experience and deliver one more grand. They disclose huge secrets tenderly.

Riley has inspired some questionable work by young artists (the derivative, Op-minded paintings of Tauba Auerbach and Hugh Scott-Douglas come to mind), but she feels like a fertile source for **Laura Owens**, whose multivalent paintings are puzzles for the eyes. Owens's solo exhibition at **CCA Wattis**, "Ten Paintings," was the best show in town. She covered the walls with wallpaper that at a distance appeared to be a vastly enlarged view of crumpled white paper. Up close, though, it seemed to be the work of a gargantuan dot-matrix printer run amok—just maybe trying to make a late J.M.W. Turner painting out of cascading black and white squares. Bits of newspapers, strips of telephone books, and hijacked fragments of Owens's MS Paint–style paintings appeared as well, printed or painted directly on the wallpaper. It was difficult to ascertain how, exactly, some images were made.

Digital or real? Mark or print? Owens strives to create environments that render such binaries moot. That's an impressive endeavor, but also a frightening one, mirroring, as it does, the contemporary breakdown between the physical and the virtual. Particularly intriguing here was that her actual painterly moves were more subtle, more restrained than in the past, with only a few of the huge, frosting-like brushes of paint she has bestowed on recent works, like the "12 Paintings" shown at 356 Mission in Los Angeles in 2012. She's honing her art, getting weirder, creating not so much a painting show as a gallery-size collage of information and static—although when the exhibition closes, slicing up the walls will produce ten individual paintings, which will cartwheel off to new, independent lives.

In a back gallery, Owens showed her grandmother's humble little needlepoints of flowers and landscapes, suggesting that all those dots in the front room were—again, just maybe—a stitching pattern for a sprawling tapestry that she was only beginning to fill in. A few strips of faux-fading paper embedded in the wallpaper had telephone numbers (all area code 415, San Francisco's) and an invitation to text questions. I gave it a whirl and recorded voices responded from behind the walls: "The thing is, I just don't feel like telling you the answer," one said. "Sometimes," another replied. No easy answers. Owens knows we would have it no other way.

Samara Golden's show at the **Yerba**

Red Horse, *Drawing of Dead Cavalry Horses*, from "Red Horse Pictographic Account of the Battle of the Little Bighorn," 1881, graphite, colored pencil, and ink, 24" x 36¼". Cantor Arts Center.

Buena Center for the Arts, "A Trap in Soft Division," also harbored mysteries. The gallery it was housed in appeared, at first glance, to be empty. On the floor, in the center of the room, though, mirrored tiles reflected the gallery's grid of 18 recessed skylights above, each containing a model of a room with a window and a sofa. All the rooms had the same basic layout but with variations—different objects strewn about or subtly different decorations—suggesting that we were spying on an apartment over time, or even seeing it in different universes. A Yayoi Kusama "Infinity Room" redirected from hypnotizing abstraction toward the messy stuff of the world, it was a show about time and the way things change, about how little decisions can have larger consequences. It was deeply moving.

For raw charisma, though, it is difficult to beat the works of **Isaac Julien**, who had his debut show with **Jessica Silverman Gallery**, "Vintage," with photographs connected to three of his films. Two beautiful young black men in tuxedos dance through smoke in a huge black-and-white C-print, from *Looking for Langston* (1989); a man, reaching upward, is seen from behind in dramatic silhouette, in an image from the S-M–imbued *Trussed* (1996); and in photogravures related to *The Long Road to Mazatlán* (1999–2000), smiling cowboys gazeout, a little dazed, at the viewer. Julien's work succeeds by crafting and reinforcing circles of seduction—drawing you first to the actor, then to the scene, then to the story, with technical prowess.

AT THE NORTHWEST EDGE of the city, the **Legion of Honor** had a blockbuster **Pierre Bonnard** show, "Painting Arcadia," which I could have happily spent a day in, and across the Bay Bridge was the wide-ranging "**Architecture of Life**" at the **Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive** (recently expanded and remodeled by Diller Scofidio + Renfro with mixed success). Organized by BAMPFA's director, Lawrence Rinder, it combined renowned treasures like Ruth Asawa's hanging wire sculptures and a Caillebotte bridge scene with obscure jewels like musicologist Harry Smith's string figures and Lee Bontecou's swirling sci-fi drawings.

THIS PAGE: NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, NAA MS 2367A, 08569900; OPPOSITE: COURTESY QUEER THOUGHTS

Mindy Rose Schwartz, *Before* (detail), 2008, mixed media, 30" x 18" x 6'. Queer Thoughts at Et al. etc.

Down south, on the peninsula, the **Cantor Arts Center** at Stanford University showed "**Richard Diebenkorn**: The Sketchbooks Revealed," featuring selections from 29 notebooks recently given to the institution by the estate of the Bay Area painter's widow, Phyllis Diebenkorn. They would be a pleasure at any time, but they were doubly so since Diebenkorn and his gang of mid-century Bay Area denizens are not prominently featured at SFMOMA.

And then, presenting the sort of work that gets short shrift almost everywhere, there was the Cantor's "**Red Horse**: Drawings of the Battle of the Little Bighorn"—a dozen works, on loan from the Smithsonian, that the Minneconjou Lakota Sioux artist Red Horse made in 1881, five years after Custer's defeat. It was a rare privilege: the drawings had not been displayed in 40 years. Red Horse depicts the violence with graphite, colored pencil, and ink, drawing with simple lines and gently shading patches. The Native Americans are portrayed in detail, adorned in ornamented garments and headdresses. The U.S. soldiers are distinguished only by their facial hair, all nearly identical. Blood is everywhere—spilling out of the neck of a horse and the heads of men who have been scalped. "No prisoners were taken," Red Horse is said to have remarked, while explaining the rows of dead army men. "All were killed; none left alive even for a few minutes." Words fail.

A few minutes away, in Palo Alto, **Pace** has opened its newest space with a small sampler of **James Turrell** works—one color-shifting wall piece and some of his holograms, which always feel a touch goofy and flat. A long line of people waited along velvet ropes at the opening, a sign of the Bay Area's fervent interest in contemporary art.

BACK IN THE CITY, in the fast-rising Dogpatch neighborhood sits another sign of increasing engagement (and one of the most-talked-about ventures in town): a chicly refurbished warehouse called the **Minnesota Street Project**, a for-profit enterprise started by area collectors Deborah and Andy Rappaport aimed at uniting many of the city's dealers in a single location. With poured cement floors, sleek staircases, and room for ten galleries, it has the vibe of a high-end mall—wan, and, depending on your temperament, maybe even a little depressing. The quality of exhibitions varied.

The most hotly anticipated outing at Minnesota Street was the temporary joint venture by New Yorkers **Anton Kern** and **Andrew Kreps**, which turned out to be a lackluster affair, the two sharing two rooms to present a few works by their gallery artists. Kern had a bronze sculpture by Mark Grotjahn and a large painting by Chris Martin, both strong and funky, and Kreps had an intricate Pae White mobile and a painting by Andrea

Isaac Julien, *Pas de Deux*, 1989/2016, Kodak Premier print, Diasec mounted on aluminum, 70¾" x 102¼". Jessica Silverman Gallery.

Bowers, but the displays felt random. As at Gagosian, it looked like an art fair booth, albeit at a lower price point.

Et al., one of a handful of auspicious young outfits in town, won the Minnesota competition—Best in Mall?—with an untitled exhibition organized by the Chicago-turned-New York wunderkinds **Queer Thoughts**. The artists: Mindy Rose Schwartz, Stefanos Mandrake, Lulou Margarine, all bracingly cool figures. Margarine spilled a large quantity of cinnamon across the floor and hung cartoon flowers on the walls, pushing scatter and Pop art to deadpan extremes. Ditto for Mandrake, whose contributions included a rock of craggy black "unknown material" on the floor and a plastic deck chair on the wall. Schwartz showed a rococo sculpture–meets–cosmetics desk–meets–reliquary that featured swirly brass flowers, a drawing of a decapitated man bleeding into a river, and two ghoulish plaster heads. Florine Stettheimer would have loved it. It was an exhilarating display—the artists were given plenty of space to flex their muscles.

Another delightful surprise was **VI Dancer**, a project space operating in the sunroom of a third-floor apartment on a dead-end street South of Market. "Memo Ruth," a sui generis solo show by New York artist **Lali Foster**, was on view, with paper leaves tossed around the floor, a clipboard on the wall holding a drawing of a makeshift trap, and an address book, open to the letter M. On the page was an immaculate drawing of a tough-looking Jennifer Melfi, the psychiatrist character from *The Sopranos*. On that series, Melfi was the victim of a sexual assault, the first one to be fully and forthrightly depicted on television.

As the sun set, the mood in that little room was haunted and thrillingly enigmatic. You could say something similar about San Francisco, where real-estate prices are soaring (making New York City's seem reasonable by comparison), where institutions like SFMOMA and CCA are swinging for the fences, and where big-money dealers are beginning to dip their toes in.

To become a thriving art metropolis, the city could use more big guns of the Gagosian and Berggruen variety. But it also needs more of those scrappy, nimble, risk-taking venues like VI Dancer and Et al. Things are happening, but depending on the support that local collectors and museums provide, you sense it could all go either way. ANDREW RUSSETH