

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Women with big impact in public art

By Kimberly Chun  
December 2, 2015

Small gestures made on a public scale are capable of making the biggest impact, according to the curators of “Public Works: Artists’ Interventions 1970-Now” on view at Mills College Art Museum. New Orleans artist Candy Chang’s continuing “I Wish This Was” project, for instance, appropriates the “Hello I Am” slap stickers of the graffiti world and invites viewers to scribble in their thoughts, hopes and fantasies concerning closed storefronts and shuttered real estate.

“They originally came out (after Hurricane) Katrina,” says co-curator Tanya Zimbardo of the piece. “Even though we’re in a different city and different location, the issue of rent increases and displaced businesses continue — larger issues that a work like this is able to resonate with.”

Chang is just one of about two dozen contemporary female artists like subversive giants such as Karen Finley and Guerrilla Girls recognized in this exploration of art-making in public spaces, which runs through Dec. 13. Other powerful works include “Photo Requests From Solitary” by Chicago artist Laurie Jo Reynolds and Tamms Year Ten, which grants photographic requests from prisoners in solitary confinement, and “Tatlin’s Whisper #6” by New York City artist Tania Bruguera, which provided a platform for free speech in Havana.

Oakland’s Favianna Rodriguez and L.A.’s Suzanne Lacy look directly at ongoing hot-button topics with a local perspective in the newspaper ad intervention “Migration is \_\_\_\_\_” and the youth-and-police-focused “The Oakland Projects,” respectively.

Meanwhile, San Francisco artist Stephanie Syjuco and New York-S.F. artist Bonnie Ora Sherk investigate the changing nature of public space itself in the Bay Area.

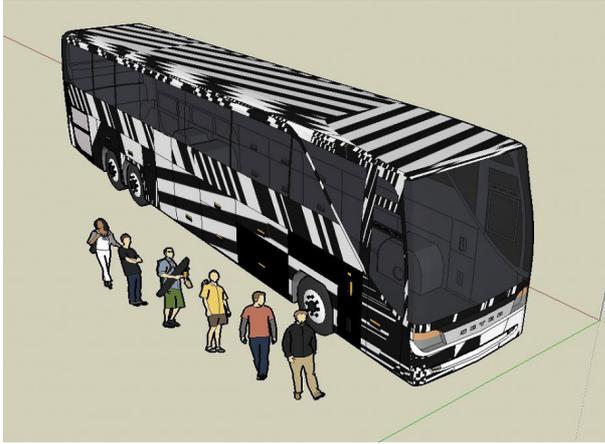
Syjuco’s wry “Ultimate Vision (Dazzle Camouflage)” and “Bedazzle a Tech Bus” comment on the collision of private transit and public streets, and Sherk’s formidable “Sitting Still Series” bears witness to the artist’s performances at the then-Army Street freeway interchange and the S.F. Zoo, among other locales.

Of Sherk’s work, co-curator Christian L. Frock says many of her images have never been shown before or shown as a slideshow.

“We were determined to daylight that project in a new way,” she says.



Karen Finley’s 1998 recorded phone message project “1-900-ALL-KAREN.” Photo: Karen Finley, Fales Library, NYU



Detail from Stephanie Syjuco's 2013 proposal for Google worker transit, "Ultimate Vision (Dazzle Camouflage)." Photo: Stephanie Syjuco, Catharine Clark Gallery

In the end, Frock acknowledges that the number of public art pieces by female artists that have been staged or centered in the Bay Area is striking. She attributes that rich history to "a combination of the fact that there are so many top-notch art schools here, and for a long time the Bay Area was a very affordable place for artists, and the social politics of the Bay Area lent themselves to a consideration of public space. There have always been many possibilities in that regard.

"I think that's shrinking now, and that's something we want to hold a mirror up to," Frock adds.

*Kimberly Chun is an East Bay freelance writer.*

**Public Works: Artists' Interventions 1970-Now:** 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday and 11 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Wednesday. Through Dec. 13. Free. Mills College Art Museum, 5000 MacArthur Blvd., Oakland. (510) 430-2164. [mcam.mills.edu](http://mcam.mills.edu). (Related Southern Exposure off-site commission, Constance Hockaday's "You Make a Better Wall Than a Window — The Tour," is 4:45-7 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 6, at San Francisco Bay Ferry Terminal, 99 Embarcadero, S.F.)