

Up in the Air Bernie Lubell

June 13 – 27, 2015

Gallery Hours
Tuesday – Saturday
12:00 – 6:00pm

Collaborate with Bernie Lubell as he sets out to build an airship in the gallery at Southern Exposure. In two workshops and ongoing studio hours, visitors and Bernie will work together to create an air powered flying machine inspired by Frederick Marriott's 1869 airship *Avitor*, expanding on Bernie's ongoing research into breath and the force of air.

Hiller Aviation Museum Research Field Trip Sunday, June 7

2:00 – 4:00pm

Meet at Hiller Aviation Museum

601 Skyway Rd, San Carlos

Admission \$14

RSVP to programs@soex.org

Join Bernie Lubell on a visit to the Hiller Aviation Museum to visit and discuss the full size replica of Frederick Marriott's 1869 airship *Avitor*.

Heart/Walk/Whistle Workshop

Saturday, June 13

1:00 – 5:00pm

Attendance is limited

RSVP to programs@soex.org

\$5 Materials fee

When so much in San Francisco feels up in the air, join Bernie Lubell to explore the sense of being airborne. Each participant in this workshop will design and build a machine inspired by a trio of words culled from Bernie's research into the feeling of weightlessly waiting to see which way the wind may blow.

Drop in Airship Construction

June 16 – 19 and 23 – 26

12:00 – 6:00pm

Experimental Elevations Workshop

Saturday, June 20

1:00 – 5:00pm

Attendance is limited

RSVP to programs@soex.org

\$5 Materials fee

Hand-construct mechanisms to generate hydrogen and hot air, which will be used to fill balloons and send them aloft.

Closing Party

Friday, June 26

6:00 – 8:00pm

Join in a celebration of Bernie Lubell's work and everything that was created together over the past two weeks.

Where Are You When You Are "Up in the Air?"

Bernie Lubell's project *Up in the Air* considers the metaphoric, historic and conceptual aspects of flight. In our everyday earthbound state, we assign names to places, architecture and roads. We chart them on maps where longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates produce a network of relationships between things and places. But where are the signposts in the expanse of the sky? While the sky is charted for aeronautics and astronomy, to the layperson, vertical space remains a bit mysterious. Where are you when you are up in the air?

Lubell's intricate wood contraptions have always had a playful absurdity. Belying their appearance, Lubell develops his work through a serendipitous process: he begins with a general idea and builds his elaborate structures piece by piece. One pulley leads to another in a meandering sequence; the absurd and useful play in tandem. Lubell's making itself becomes a journey, a process of discovery by doing.

In considering the process of getting from place to place, one might imagine that Lubell would turn to the French scientist and photographer Etienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904). Lubell has used Marey as the source of insight for previous works. Marey researched the flight of seagulls and pigeons through elaborate chronophotographs, plaster models and zoetropes. By studying the flapping motion of birds' wings, Marey sought to unlock the mysteries of flight. Some early inventors created imaginative, but unsuccessful, wood and steel approximations of flapping wings. As wonderful as it is to imagine, Lubell has not chosen to build a seemingly untenable large wooden mechanical bird.

Rather than turning to Marey, Lubell takes inspiration from Frederick Marriott (1805–1884). Working at the San Mateo County Avitor Works in the 1800s, Marriott built his thirty-seven foot steam-powered dirigible, the Avitor Hermes, Jr. The airship had an unlikely and ungainly appearance, being a combination of a plump bird and a fish. Marriott flew his airship several times, in one case flying just one mile at 5 mph and in another struggling against the wind. With its inability to steer and honking girth, Marriott's dirigible was only moderately successful.

Beyond Lubell's immediate fascination with mechanical intricacies, he takes great care in considering his participants and their bodies. As participants ride bikes, walk on treadmills, or simply sit, their bodies become symbolic and mechanical agents within a network of larger actions. For *Up in the Air*, Lubell considers the participants through his workshops, as they think through the relationships between body and actions, build their own mechanisms, and assist Lubell in constructing his dirigible. Lubell's work consistently prompts participants to engage in a process of thinking through doing.

As an artist, rather than an engineer, Lubell is less concerned with the "successfulness" of his contraptions. In using outmoded and inefficient processes, Lubell's mechanisms produce rather un-useful results. In *Up in the Air*, Lubell embraces the vulnerability and seeming impossibility of manufacturing an air-borne mechanism by hand. As the history of flight demonstrates many unsuccessful, but laudable attempts, Lubell harnesses the anxiety, disorientation, and process of exploration and invention.

–Genevieve Quick

Notes

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ART WORKS.

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design by Collective Material / Megan Lynch

