



Arts

If You Build an Events Listing Site in 2020, Will People Come?

by Sarah Hotchkiss

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The San Francisco Chronicle's Datebook is just one of many event listings currently consulted in the Bay Area. (Sarah Hotchkiss/KQED)

Say you have some free time (ha!) and you fancy yourself a consumer of local arts and culture. How do you decide what to do? Text your friends about their plans? Type “what to do this weekend” into a search engine? Flip to the back pages of an alt-weekly? Or in time-honored tradition, do you consult your event listing of choice?

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

When I moved to San Francisco in the summer of 2009, the first list recommended to me (and likely so many others since its 1990 inception) was [The List](#), Steve Koepke's weekly email of punk, funk, thrash, ska and rock concerts in the expanded Bay Area.

In those final days of the aughts, the closest the visual arts scene got to The List was Happenstand, a website created by Lucas Shuman that described itself as "local art event listings better-fied" (among other cheeky phrases). I consulted Happenstand religiously, familiarizing myself with the names of artists and galleries, paying close attention to starred picks. Someone's recommendation—even a faceless, nameless star—was a much-desired guiding hand in the midst of an unfamiliar landscape.

Happenstand Altogether Bay Area arts

Events calendar Browse venues Browse artists Gallery map Events email list Pulse Today's events widget Suggest an event

Google Custom Search Search

Starting soon **Ending soon**

Tuesday, May 1st

Week 16
5/1/2012 - 5/5/2012 at Make Hang Gallery
Make Hang Gallery presents the group sculpture exhibition WEEK 16, a collaboration of artists from Sonoma State University's Fine Art program. ... [Continue](#)

East Bay Open Studios: Preview Exhibition
5/1/2012 - 6/10/2012 at Pro Arts at Oakland Art Gallery

PRO ARTS JUNE 2-3 AND 9-10 A SELF-GUIDED TOUR OF LOCAL ARTIST STUDIOS WWW.PROARTSGALLERY.ORG
PREVIEW EXHIBITION // MAY 1-JUNE 10 PREVIEW PARTY // MAY 4, 5-7PM ARTIST RECEPTION // MAY 4, 7-9PM PREVIEW EXHIBITION // MAY 1-JUNE 10 Plan your ... [Continue](#)

Vessel 8: Charting the Waters
5/1/2012 - 6/30/2012 at Vessel Gallery

A commemorative group show explores the concept of a VESSEL, as a boat, ship, or fleet that navigates and journeys the tides of time. Jon Gariepy, ... [Continue](#)

SFIFF Presents: Golden Slumbers - Davy Chou (Cambodia / France, 2011)
5/1/2012 6:30pm - 8:30pm at PFA Theater

Scott Tsuchitani Illusions of Harmony
4/24/2012 - 5/1/2012
Art Exhibition and Artist Talk Davies Forum University of San Francisco 2133 Fulton Hall Atrium, USF ... [Continue](#)

55th San Francisco International Film Festival
4/19/2012 - 5/3/2012
Held each spring for 15 days, the San Francisco International Film Festival is an extraordinary showcase of cinematic discovery and innovation in one ... [Continue](#)

55th San Francisco Intl Film Festival: KinoTek - Karolina Sobecka
4/20/2012 - 5/3/2012 Human Moves, Animal Visions Friday, April 20-Thursday, May 3 SuperFrog Gallery, 1746 Post Street (near Webster) 2:00-8:00 pm daily Opening Reception: ... [Continue](#)

Friday, May 4th

Art Practical picks

The Center for PostNatural History: An Intimate Science Discussion with Rich Pell
5/18/2012 7:00pm - 9:00pm at Southern Exposure
The Center for PostNatural History is a newly opened Pittsburgh-based organization dedicated to sharing information with the public on organisms that ... [Continue](#)

Group show The Office
3/10/2012 - 6/2/2012 at San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art
Contemporary office culture examined, deconstructed, rearranged, and critiqued. Exhibiting artists: Fritzie Brown, Alex Clausen, Kirk Crippens, ... [Continue](#)

State Of Mind: New California Art circa 1970
2/29/2012 - 6/17/2012 at Berkeley Art Museum
Wednesday-Sunday Only Have you ever heard the sound of ice melting? State of Mind: New California Art circa 1970, part of Pacific Standard Time, ... [Continue](#)

Do Not Destroy: Trees, Art, and Jewish Thought

A screenshot of Happenstand from 2012. (*Courtesy of the Wayback Machine/Internet Archive*)

Every crowd, every individual, has their go-to event listing. For all things stage, there's [Theatre Bay Area](#). The DIY music scene has the delightfully lo-fi [Flyer Mire](#), a date-ordered scroll of show flyers as jpgs. Cultured generalists consult *San Francisco Chronicle*'s [Datebook](#) section. Penny-pinchers turn to [Fun Cheap SF](#). Many of these resources are so much more than lists:

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Sites like [Classical Voice](#) and [Dancers' Group](#) include genre-specific calendars, but also host critical writing, educational resources and audition opportunities.

The idea of entering into this highly segmented fray might discourage some, but local artists [Calen Barca-Hall](#) and [Selby Cole](#) welcome the challenge. In 2019, Barca-Hall launched the website [Art List Bay Area](#) (ALBA), a one-stop resource for visual art event listings, venues, arts organizations, art-friendly vendors, job opportunities and even a forum.

That is, he *hopes* it will be a one-stop resource for all of the above. "It needs to be fed by an audience," says Barca-Hall, who works full time as the head of installation and exhibition design at the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts. Currently, events on the site are mostly brought in from a shared Google calendar managed by a consortium of Bay Area arts organizations (started by San Francisco gallery Altman Siegel). Only a few additional galleries and spaces seem to have taken up the cause of creating profiles and submitting their own events to ALBA's site. As of yet, the forum is mainly Barca-Hall talking to himself.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Art List Bay Area (ALBA) website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Listings, Forum, Job Listings, Calendars, and Other. Below the navigation is the ALBA logo, which consists of a black rectangle with the letters 'ALBA' in white. To the left of the logo is a vertical decorative element with a repeating pattern of small black shapes. The main content area has a white background. On the left side, there are several sections with blue headers: 'VENDOR LIST', 'ARTS ORGANIZATIONS', 'JOB LIST', and 'EXHIBITION SPACES'. Each section contains a brief description of what it lists. In the center, there is a search bar with a blue 'SEARCH' button. To the right, there is a large 'UPCOMING EVENTS' section with a list of events, each with a date and a link. Below this is a section titled 'FOR A CURATED LIST OF EVENTS:' with a link to 'The Just A List.com'. At the bottom, there is a footer note: 'THESE LISTS ARE BUILT BY THE ARTS COMMUNITY.'

A screenshot of Art List Bay Area in January 2020.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

The impetus for starting ALBA came from a meetup of Bay Area hiring managers organized by Justin Limoges and Crow Cianciola at the Contemporary Jewish Museum. At the gathering, representatives from different institutions discussed hiring practices, issues of diversity and inclusion, and shared recommendations about materials, fabricators and vendors.

Barca-Hall noticed a lack of shared resources beyond this in-person confab. “People email me one-to-two times a week with questions about vendors,” he says. “I would prefer to point them to the site, link them to a page.” Vetted recommendations about, say, custom welding services can save artists and art handlers valuable time and money. As Barca-Hall points out, “Google results are so different than what art practices need.”

Where ALBA’s scope is broad, Cole’s website [Just a List](#) takes a far less expansive approach. The self-described “highly partial and haphazardly curated list of art-related happenings in the Bay Area” is just one page of text and links. She focuses on free, non-ticketed events, views one-night basement shows as equally worthy of mention as three-month-long major museum exhibitions, and personally attends many of the things she recommends.

“Going to an art show is more interesting than anything else you might be doing,” says Cole, who grew up in the Bay Area, but lived in Los Angeles for six years before returning to the Bay Area in 2012. She started Just a List in 2018.

When Cole first moved back, she says she was “lonely, lost and isolated.” Going to art events was her way of reintroducing herself to the Bay Area—this time as an artist. Echoing Cole’s own attempts to break into the local, often insular, scene, Just a List strives to appeal to the nontraditional art viewer. Cole’s watchword is “accessible.”

JUST A LIST

THE Just A List

A Highly Partial and Haphazardly Curated List of Art-related Happenings in the Bay Area.

It's just a list.

But it's *THE* Just-A-List.

If you have an event for us to list please send an email to thejustalist@gmail.com

Upload your art events to artlistbayarea.com

January Shows

MONDAY, JANUARY 27

[Dancing with Robots: Expressivity in Natural and Art. Systems](#) at BAMPFA, 6:30pm

TUESDAY, JANUARY 28

Presentation: SOFT POWER at [San Francisco Public Library Excelsior Branch](#), 7pm

Shannon Finnegan: Accessibility Dreams at [CCA](#), 6-7:15pm

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29

Presentation: SOFT POWER at [San Francisco Public Library Bernal Heights Branch](#), 7pm

The Art Report: Benjamin Tear at [Gallery 211](#), Minnesota Street Project, 5-8pm

[Soul of a Nation Art Talk with the de Young Museum](#) at San Francisco Public Library Ortega Branch, 7pm

Open Stage at [CounterPulse](#), 6-7:30pm

[Gordon Hall](#) at CCA, 6-7:30pm

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30

CURATOR & ARTIST TALK | Don't Shoot: An Opus of the Opulence of Blackness at [MoAD](#), 6-8pm

JAMIL HELLU: TOGETHER at SF Camerawork, 6-9pm

Reading: Anne Walsh at BAMPFA, 5pm

Kathleen King: [Aided, Inspired, Multiplied](#) at ProArts, 12-6pm

A screenshot of Just a List in January 2020.

Aiding ALBA and Just a List in their quest to become even more useful to the local art community is a [2019 Alternative Exposure grant](#) they'll split between the two projects. The \$3,800 award will go towards growing the sites' audience and paying people to guest-curate Just a List for three two-month periods. Barca-Hall is planning to deliver pitches for ALBA to CCA undergraduates, and is creating tutorials to usher people through the process of generating their own content on the site.

But for now, the concern for Barca-Hall and Cole is: If you build it, will people actually come? Anecdotally, there's certainly a desire for vetted resources and reliably organized event listings. How many people do you know who maintain their Facebook accounts "only for the events" and then can't even bring themselves to log onto the site? And for those putting on events, there's definitely incentive to centralize, so the job of submitting information to various systems, forms and calendar editors doesn't become a full-time one.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Back in 2008, when Lucas Shuman first created Happenstand, he says “an arts calendar seemed like a fun and simple project.” He singlehandedly ran that project, building a mobile site, RSS feeds, a custom management tool, an email newsletter, and curating and formatting all of the listings, including those submitted by others.

“I think that’s what kept the quality high, but also led to exhaustion,” he reflects. “It’s unsustainable.” Shuman passed the keys to the site on to online arts publication *Art Practical*, which hosted a simplified version of the listings before they eventually disappeared altogether. ALBA and Just a List face a similar hurdle. As one-person operations, even working in tandem, the risk of exhaustion is real. In the initial blog post on ALBA, Barca-Hall wrote, “We have no money, very little computer skills, and no free time, but we still think this is a good idea!”

He concludes hopefully, “The more that our community uses this site, the more powerful and useful it will be.”