



Left: Steven Claydon, installation view of “Total Social Objects,” 2013. Below left: Alan Rath, *Forever*, 2012. Pheasant feathers, aluminum, polyethylene, fiberglass, custom electronics, and motors, 90 x 60 x 12 in. Below: Alan Rath, *Fa Fa Fa*, 2013. Ostrich feathers, fiberglass, polypropylene, aluminum, custom electronics, motors, and speaker, 73 x 80 x 54 in.

structure. The object seems somehow eroded, as if rescued and partially restored. Its front is painted bright safety-yellow, while the back—neatly divided from the front by a bubbled seam—has a golden shine. The word “London” is stamped low on the metallic, back side. Though the sculpture is probably a portrait, it has been salvaged from the past and brought into a present where meaning is diminished and forgotten.

Claydon’s work reflects a societal anxiety about objects—what they mean to and say about the viewer, what uses they serve above and beyond function. This gives his sculpture a humorous, and melancholy, quality. The mystery lies in the polymorphous semantics; neither the artist nor the viewer has the ability to nail down a meaning. Claydon makes it a matter of assigning a name.

—Kathleen Whitney

SAN FRANCISCO

**Alan Rath
Hosfelt Gallery**

Electronic arts pioneer Alan Rath has been making robotic sculptures that challenge the boundaries of biomorphic projection since the 1980s. Each sculpture in his recent exhibition, “Irrational Exuberance,” has a personality of its own. This individuality is made evident through specific patterns of whimsical and often quirky

movements. Fabricated from aluminum, fiberglass, and feathers, his creations give the appearance of independent action, though they depend on small industrial motors programmed with open-ended algorithms. Rath, an MIT engineering graduate, definitely has the skills to infuse these complex computerized sculptures with an enchanting animation that hovers on the edge between industrialized machinery and sentient being.

The nine fluffy white ostrich feathers of *Fa Fa Fa* emulate the petals of an exotic tropical flower. Their soft undulations, which imply boas and opulent femininity, vacillate between seduction and evasion. As in all of Rath’s sculptures, the action is trig-



gered by viewer proximity; the work comes to life when someone draws near and falls silent as they walk away. Affixed to the end of a base that resembles a music stand, the feathers open and close, revealing, but more often concealing, a black speaker from which a hard aluminum bulb protrudes.

Forever vibrates in a quite different manner, evoking a nervous energy with sexual implications. Two partial, feathered arcs are attached to the wall to create an elongated form, part insect, part vagina dentata. Moving like elegant lashes or moth antennae, the pheasant feathers occasionally reach out to caress the air or embrace a passerby. When the movement shifts and begins to

take on an unnerving orgasmic quality, the attention (which is flattering at first) becomes embarrassing and annoying. At the exhibition opening, discussion focused on whether or not the work chose its collaborators. Did it react to something specific in various people, something that determined its response? Did it prefer some viewers over others? Was it you, in particular, that it wanted to touch? The complexity of the variations left room to imagine a narrative of interaction.

Absolutely floated overhead with a slow, dreamy motion as if suspended in water. Supported on a single metal rod, the configuration of feathers spread out like a grand,



pulsating umbrella covering the space, leaning a bit to one side with precarious delicacy. The motors emitted a soft, barely audible sound, the force behind the movement. This friendly, albeit large beast was still intimidating, standing 15 feet tall.

Rath creates a dizzying range of personalities through slight yet profound alternations in movement and stance, while keeping the aesthetics of the engineered mechanics deliberately raw and simple. Black wires, exposed hardware, metal stands, speakers, and fragile-looking connections all come to life with a few wiggles and beeps. The works whimsically illustrate the predisposition of the human brain to search for signs of life in the most inanimate of objects.

—Donna Schumacher

BOSTON

“OccupyING the Present” HarborArts Outdoor Gallery

HarborArts Outdoor Gallery not only features a permanent collection of large-scale sculpture, it also hosts temporary exhibitions at the Boston Harbor Shipyard and Marina. Located in East Boston, directly across the harbor from the Institute of Contemporary Art, the 14-acre shipyard offers

its grounds, walls, and roofs to artists with the imagination to re-envision the industrial environment as a home for sculpture.

“OccupyING the Present,” a show of 15 site-responsive installations curated by Elizabeth Michelman, filled the bustling shipyard with carefully orchestrated works that inhabited and complemented the built environment. Many of the sculptures evolved over the duration of their installation, slowly transformed by the harsh harbor weather. Nature was a welcome collaborator, and the theme of our relationship to the natural world echoed throughout the show.

The peak of Peter Lipsitt’s massive, dense pyramid on stilts, *Hell and High Water*, mirrored the tall masts of surrounding boats and the spires of skyscrapers across the harbor. The pyramid, coated with black roofing membrane and textured with organic patterns like cracks in a desert landscape, formed a sepulchral reminder of the irreversibility of death—the death of things that we take for granted in our environment.

A large transparent water cooler bottle, inscribed with the words, “Tell me,” pointed across a narrow inlet to a series of parallel colored

lines that stretched along decaying piers. The lines signaled continuously rising sea levels. Using art as an active conveyer of environmental concerns, Susan Israel, who created *Rising Tides*, invited viewers to place their own “messages in a bottle,” as comments on the changes wrought by global warming.

Catherine Evans frequently uses sea anemones, which can regrow after sustaining damage, as a symbol of regeneration. She situated *Sea Anemone/Boston* at the end of the main pier. Colorful fuchsia, turquoise, and pink plastic fibers nestled into the cores of weathered pilings. Other cores in the same cluster were filled with discarded bottles, starkly illustrating the choices that we make.

Some artists developed a conversation around the waterfront itself. In *Natural Repetition: Boston Harbor Rockweed*, Wendy Wolf made use of several buildings. She collected rockweed growing around the shipyard and used it to generate patterns for the wheat-pasted paper forms that floated over the brick façades. As her “rockweed” began to curl and peel, it seemed to return to its aquatic origins. Nearby, the rhythms of a shipyard symphony—tugs, engines, fog horns, waves, and clanking cables—

reverberated from a narrow, dark space between two structures. *Sounding*, a concealed digital recording by Liz Nofziger, intensified the sounds and spaces of the harbor, exposing a beauty that we often fail to recognize.

John Powell’s *Collected Reflection* came alive in unexpected ways when its painted and mirrored Plexiglas surface reflected the viewer’s body. In an instant of surprise, the distinction between self and environment broke down as we saw ourselves amid the boats, buildings, and harbor. In Nora Valdez’s *Still Waiting/Todavía Esperando*, a diminutive carved limestone figure curled into itself, seemingly imprisoned in a geologically ancient state of perpetual waiting. The question it posed, “What are we waiting for?” could apply to many of the issues raised by “OccupyING the Present,” which challenged us to consider our role in this present moment.

—B. Amore

Below left: Catherine Evans, *Sea Anemone/Boston*, 2013. Repurposed plastic fiber, dimensions variable. **Below:** Nora Valdez, *Still Waiting/Todavía Esperando*, 2009. Indiana limestone, 17 x 13 x 12 in. **Both from** “OccupyING.”



LEFT: JOHN EVANS / RIGHT: COURTESY THE ARTIST