

Kenneth Baker, San Francisco Chronicle, May 1, 2004

Topographies at SFAI: Anyone intrigued by Hartman's and Maisel's works will find "Topographies" at the San Francisco Art Institute equally involving.

Organized by Karen Moss with the help of a grant from the Fellows of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, "Topographies" arrays new and old works by California artists thinking about place, mapping and orientation in various senses.

The brief sounds serious, but humor pervades the show, beginning with John Baldessari's classic photos that document his constructing the letters C, A, L, I, F, O, R, N, I and A at sites corresponding to their position on a state road map.

Charbel Ackermann contributes drawings, gracelessly reminiscent of Saul Steinberg at points, mocking the notion of an "axis of evil." John Roloff has designed nifty site-specific flags using the standard graphic symbols for features of local geography. Jessica Bronson has gone Jenny Holzer one better with LED "light sticks" that blink out words legible only as one's eyes sweep past them, words such as "develop," "refine," "characterize" and "protect."

Ingrid Calame makes what appear to be abstract paintings. In fact, she develops them by tracing stains found on the streets of Los Angeles, transferring them to canvas and filling them with color. The paintings literally map aspects of the ground. We could trace artistic sources of authority for what Calame does -- one of them, Allan Kaprow, appears in "Topographies" -- but we could never trace the paintings to the origins of their forms.

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