

The Bay Area Figurative Movement

September 19

The California School of Fine Arts

“Never before and never since have I known an organized group of people to be so free-wheeling and yet purposeful; so warm, open and encouraging and yet demanding.” - Elmer Bischoff

In the late 40s, and 1950s much of San Francisco's artistic life revolved around the California School of Fine Arts. It was where many of the painters associated with the Bay Area Figurative Movement taught or studied. A school open to progressive ideas, where many creative friendships began. We begin our studies of the Bay Area Figurative Movement by exploring the magical school that connected so many of the colorful characters in our story.

September 26

David Park

In 1949, shocking the San Francisco art world, David Park drove his abstract artwork to the Berkeley dump. This was the moment he made an artistic change that would combine abstraction with something warmer and livelier. We will fully devote our second session to Park, the de facto leader of the Bay Area Figurative Movement.

October 3

Elmer Bischoff

This week we will examine a key figure in figurative art of the Bay Area. It was Elmer Bischoff who first joined David Park in his search for a new vocabulary in art. We will also talk about the notable influence

The Beat Generation and Jazz in the 1950's had on our figurative artists.

October 10

Richard Diebenkorn and Wayne Thiebaud

“I’m really a traditional painter, not avant-garde at all. I wanted to follow a tradition and extend it.” - Richard Diebenkorn

“I don’t like the term ‘artist.’ It’s a term I’m uncomfortable with, but I love the idea of being a cartoonist, a draftsman, a designer, a painter...”
-Wayne Thiebaud

Richard Diebenkorn and Wayne Thiebaud’s iconic works from the early 1960s defined a California vernacular —Diebenkorn with suburban views of figures at windows and Thiebaud with arrays of desserts. Maybe you prefer their landscapes or even the rare portraits, but there will be something in the light and the chosen subjects in their work that universally appeals. We will talk about these two greats and their deep and long-lasting friendship.

October 17

Joan Brown and Manuel Neri

“Art is a by-product of a person and of one’s life, of one’s ideas, of one’s feelings, of one’s follies and foolishness, of all these things.”
-Joan Brown

“The figure is very important to me, not just because it is traditional. I’ve always been very intrigued with the spirit that the figure conveys.”
-Manuel Neri

Both Joan Brown and Manuel Neri are outliers in our Bay Area Figurative survey. Brown, being the stand-out woman of the group and Neri the only sculptor. They were married briefly in the early 60s and shared a son, who was a frequent subject of Brown's paintings. Each artist has their own process and art story that will fascinate.

October 24

The Bay Area Figurative Legacy

The talismanic presence of Park, Bischoff, and Diebenkorn at the California School of Fine Arts had a profound effect on the San Francisco art world. The bridge generation primarily constituted a group of artistic peers who built upon their example. These artists included Paul Wonner, Theophilus Brown, and Nathan Oliveira. They certainly furthered the figurative style with a stronger interest in psychological, sensual, and surrealist imagery. After that, the artists of the Bay Area Figurative Movement were increasingly influenced by pop culture and new-age ideas rather than defining their work solely in opposition to Abstract Expressionism.

Suggested Reading

- *Bay Area Figurative Art 1950-1965*, Caroline Jones
- *David Park, A Painter's Life*, Nancy Boas
- *David Park: Nothing Held Back*, Helen Park Bigelow
- *Elmer Bischoff: The Ethics of Paint*, Susan Landauer
- *The Art of Richard Diebenkorn*, Jane Livingston
- *The Art of Joan Brown*, Karen Tsujimoto
- *Wayne Thiebaud*, Kenneth Baker
- *Nathan Oliveira*, Peter Selz
- *Manuel Neri: The Human Figure in Plaster and on Paper*, Jock Reynolds

Websites

- **California School of Fine Arts closing**

[How veterans and avant-garde art saved the California School of Fine Arts](#)

and

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/24/arts/design/san-francisco-art-institute-coronavirus.html>

- **Diego Rivera Mural**

[San Francisco's Top Art School Says Future Hinges on a Diego](#)

[Rivera Mural - The New York Times](#)

and

[The San Francisco Art Institute: Its History and Future | Essay | Gagosian Quarterly](#)

- **David Park**

["My God, What Happened to David?" - Fine Art Connoisseur](#)

- **Elmer Bischoff**

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/elmer-bischoff-ive-taught_b_7874754

- **Richard Diebenkorn**

[Richard Diebenkorn Foundation](#)

- **Wayne Thiebaud**

[Wayne Thiebaud Is Not a Pop Artist | Arts & Culture | Smithsonian Magazine](#)

- **Joan Brown**

[Joan Brown - Artforum International](#)

- **Beat Generation**

[What is the Beat Generation?](#)

Video

- Bay Area Figurative Artists

[Nancy Boas on Bay Area Figurative Artists | New York Studio School](#)

[Portrait of a Friendship: Richard Diebenkorn, David Park, and Bay Area Figurative Art](#)

- David Park

[David Park: A Personal Point of View](#)

- Richard Diebenkorn

[From the archives: Artist Richard Diebenkorn](#)

- Joan Brown

[The Art of Joan Brown](#)

- Manuel Neri

[Manuel Neri's Chromatic Chaos](#)

- Nathan Oliveira

[Nathan Oliveira: Painting is beautiful and essential · SFMOMA](#)



Drucie Saal Belman is a Guide at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and a Professor at the Fromm Institute. She has worked at Pace Gallery in both New York and Palo Alto, the Catharine Clark Gallery in San Francisco and is a member of the Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art at SFMOMA. Drucie has worked as an art consultant with the Loft Gallery in Paris and Hong Kong. She has given private talks on a range of contemporary artists from Gerhard Richter to Mark Bradford, Joan Mitchell and Team Lab. Drucie graduated

Wellesley College with a major in Art History, going on to study Computer Design at the School of Visual Arts in New York.