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De Young Open to showcase works of hundreds of artists at critical time for creativity

Tony Bravo | August 1, 2020 Updated: August 3, 2020, 7:33 am



elated.

“I’m thrilled to show at the de Young. I’m bouncing off the walls,” Kwong says. “It’s important people respond to the world with art, especially now that it’s such a critical time for our nation.”

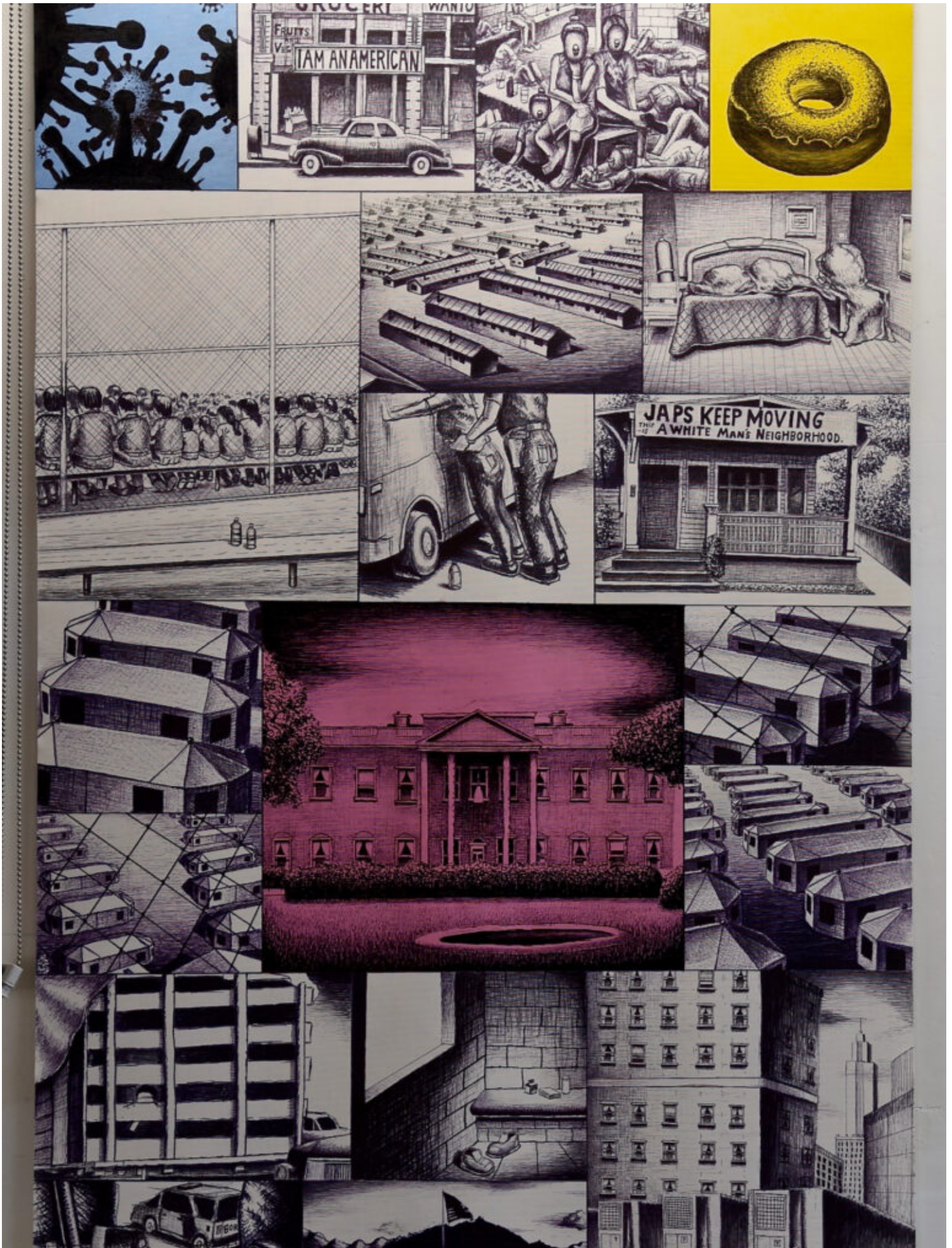
Kwong’s “America, Land of the Free and Home of the Brave” and “This Land Is Your Land, This Land Is My Land” are both emblematic of current events. The first drawing depicts extremely topical subjects – climate change, protests at Standing Rock, the suppression of voting rights – and juxtaposes them against symbols of American culture, like ice cream and hot dogs. The second compares contemporary images of children in cages at the U.S.-Mexico border with depictions of American internment camps that imprisoned Japanese Americans in the 1940s.

“When the virus happened I thought, ‘Do I add this?’” says the 58-year-old artist, a native of San Francisco’s Chinatown.

Eventually, he did decide to expand “Land of the Free” to include images of refrigeration trucks used for storing dead bodies as a nod to the climbing death rates during the current pandemic. At a time when his own livelihood is being impacted by coronavirus-related shutdowns, he says it felt right to submit work to the museum that reflects “where we are now and who we want to be as a nation.”

Judging by the acceptance of both Kwong works, the museum agrees.







Evri Kwong's "America, Land of the Free and Home of the Brave."

Photo: Image courtesy of Camille Palmer

When the de Young Open submission process was **announced in March** as part of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco's 125th anniversary celebration, museum officials expected a sizable response from Bay Area artists. What they got far exceeded that, reports FAMSF executive director and CEO Thomas Campbell.

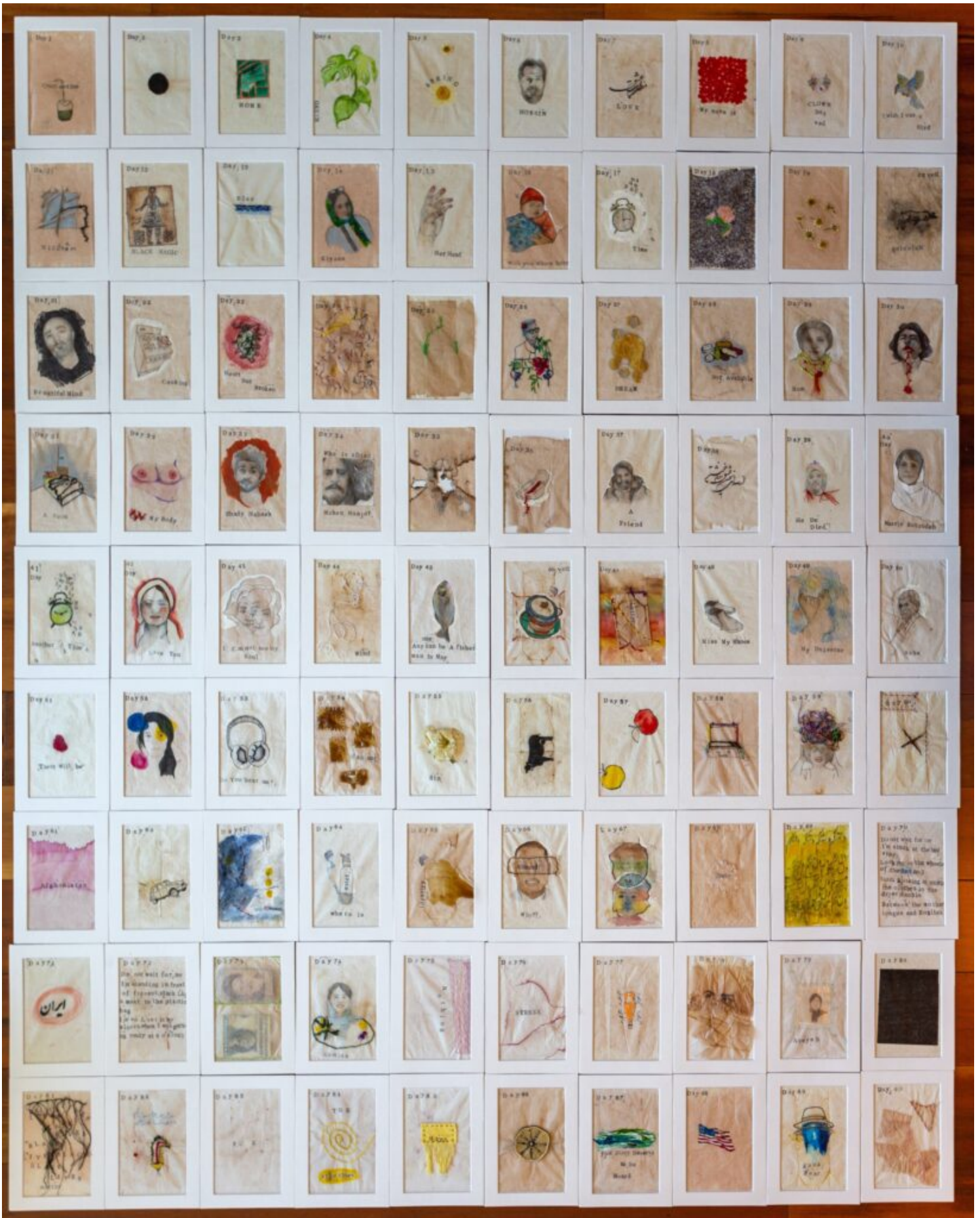
Some 6,190 artists from the nine Bay Area counties applied to be part of the exhibition and sent images of 11,518 artworks spanning painting, drawing, print-making, digital art, photography, sculpture, fiber art and video. After being evaluated by curators and artist judges Hung Liu, Mildred Howard and Enrique Chagoya, 881 works created by 763 artists were selected.

The exhibition had previously been scheduled for next spring, but was moved up when the coronavirus pandemic upended the museum's schedule.

"I thought it was a great way to showcase talent in this area and also offer a sense of hope to the many artists here," Howard says.

Timothy Anglin Burgard, the FAMSF curator-in-charge of American art, says the submissions to the de Young Open showed “the breadth and depth of artistic creation in the Bay Area.” During a period where many galleries and arts venues remain closed, Burgard says it feels like an important moment to give back to artists in the region.

“We wouldn’t exist for 125 years without them and the art created by Bay Area artists,” Burgard says. “This exhibition calls on the past and present by embracing these artists to show their work in the greatest time of need.”



Samira Akbari Hozmahi's "Quarantine Diary on tea bag paper."

| Photo: Image courtesy of the artist

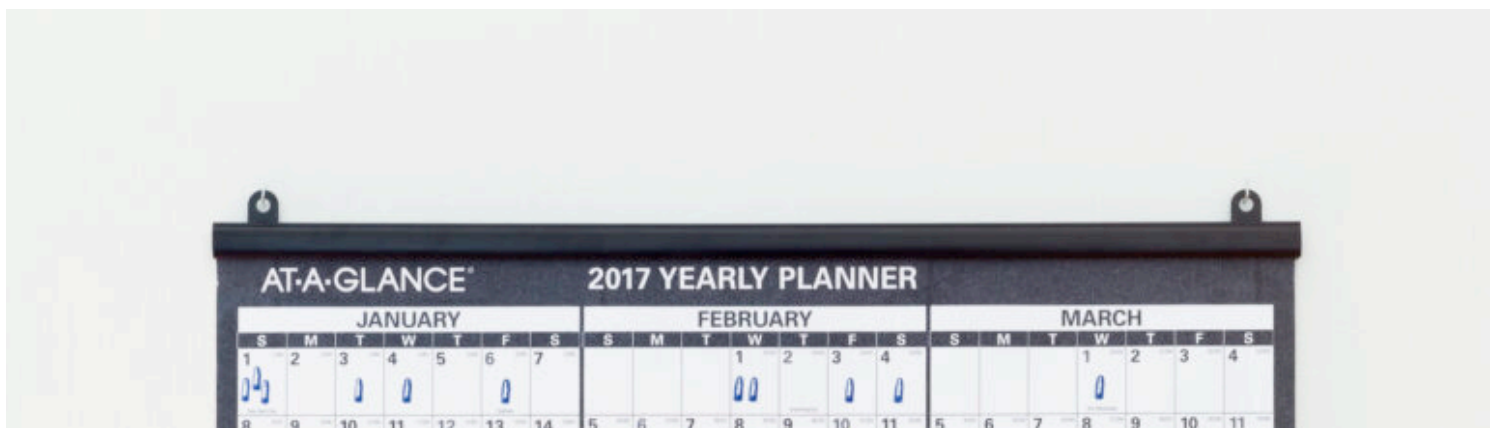
Although the museum is unsure when it will be able to install the show or allow visitors back into galleries because of delays with California's reopening, news of artists' acceptance in the exhibition comes at a time when many are struggling. The work, which will be exhibited online in addition to the de Young's large Herbst galleries on the lower level, will also be available for sale with 100% of proceeds going directly to the artists.

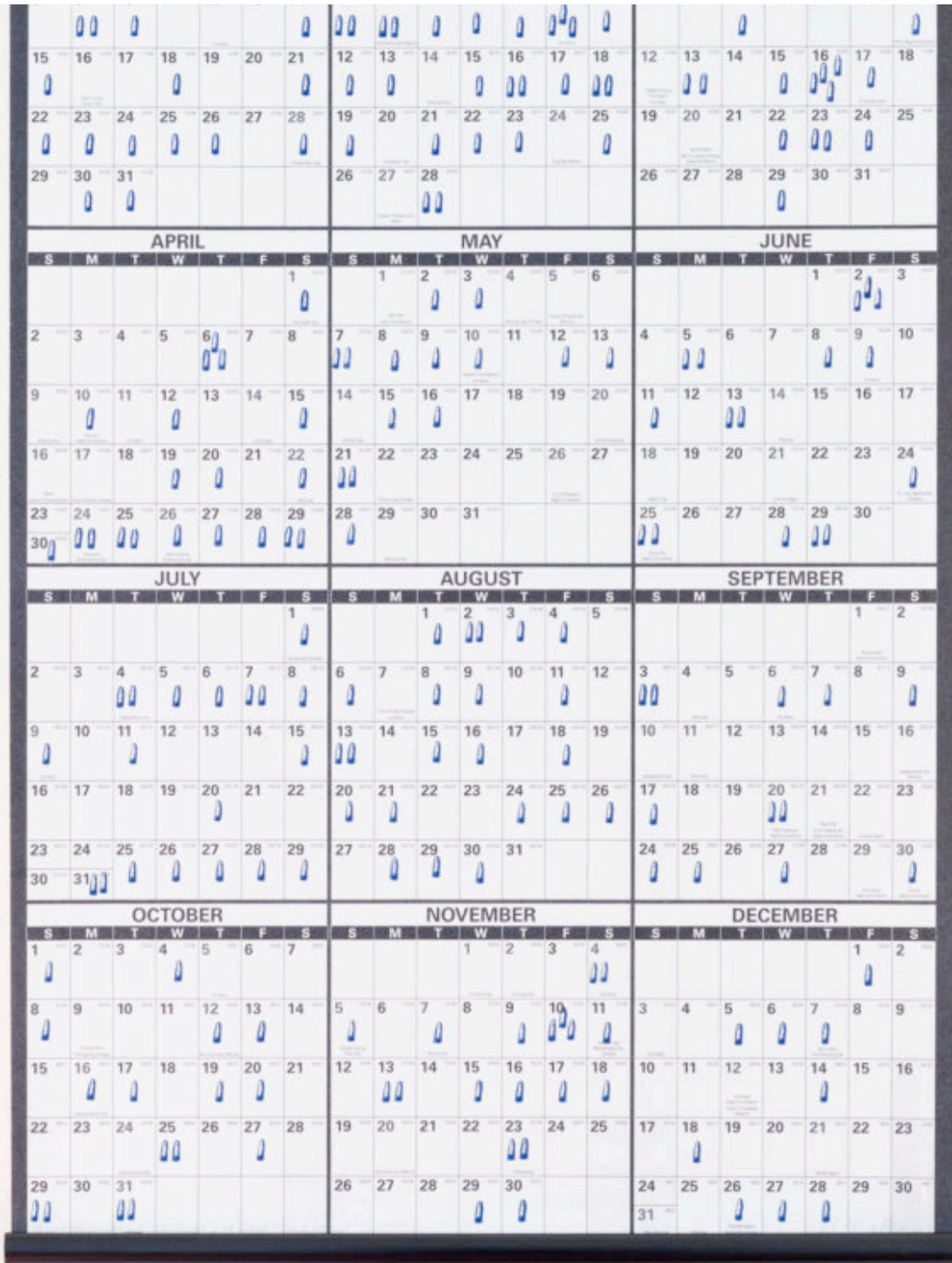
Even before the coronavirus, many artists in the Bay Area were struggling with the region's high cost of living and shrinking gallery scene. Income from the exhibition "makes the difference between paying rent and putting food on table," for some artists, Burgard says.

To accommodate the large number of works, the museum plans to hang the show in a salon or academy style, where numerous pieces are grouped together in the nine galleries to best use wall space. The grouped works will then be separated into different thematic sections. The first gallery will feature works inspired by recent events surrounding Black Lives Matter; the second will explore art that addresses the impact of the coronavirus. Other delineating themes include nature, abstraction, figures and portraits, as well as works inspired by surrealism.

The exhibition's overall theme, "On the Edge," comes from a phrase in a traditional Ohlone song: "I am dancing. On the edge of the world I am dancing." The theme had already been chosen before the pandemic and the year's social activism, but evolved to focus around the Bay Area's geographic location on the Pacific Rim and the region's historical reputation for cutting-edge creativity.

"Never was a theme or idea more relevant or true," Burgard says.





Cheryl Derricotte’s “2017 Year-at-a-Glance: 214 Dead Black Men.”
 Photo: Image courtesy of the artist. Photography by Kija Lucas

San Francisco artist Cheryl Derricotte’s piece “2017 Year-at-a-Glance: 214 Dead Black Men” will be in the gallery exploring Black Lives Matter. The work takes a personal calendar and

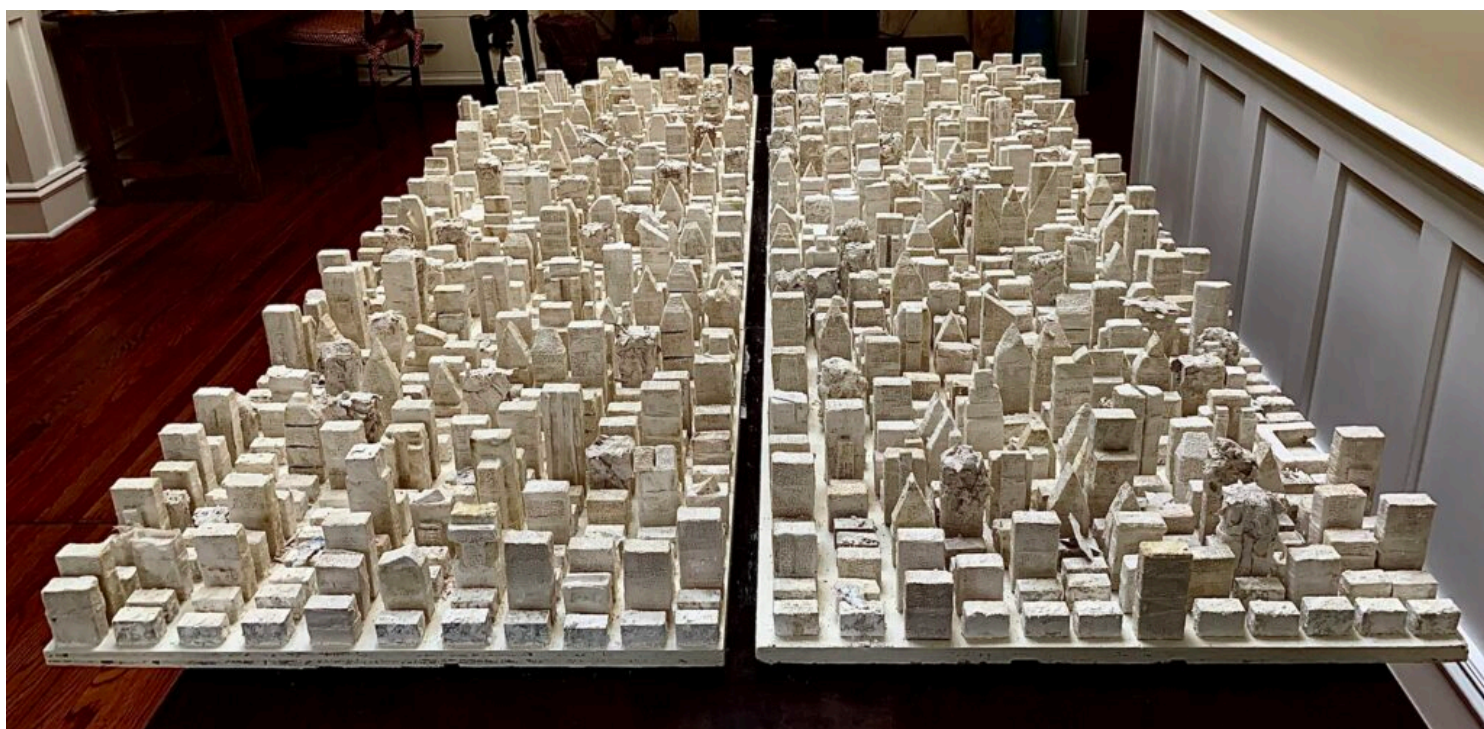
marks with bullet symbols the days where Black men were slain. Derricotte says that although she has exhibited her work at other museums, the de Young is among the most prestigious showing opportunities she's had in her career.

"I hope it's a partnership that continues and grows going forward," says Derricotte, 55.

The de Young Open will be the first time Samira Akbari Hozmahi presents her work in a museum. The 37-year-old Academy of Art graduate's piece "Quarantine Diary on tea bag paper" uses 90 individual tea bags compiled as a single work to depict events she experienced during the first three months of sheltering in place. She completed drawing on her 90th tea bag shortly before the final day to submit her entry.

"Number 61. And then the world changed," by Dr. Robert Foster, is a sculptural work in the form of a wood-and-plaster model of a city that appears to be either newly under construction or recently ruined. Foster, 57, chief of plastic surgery and director of the breast reconstruction service at the Carol Franc Buck Breast Care Center at UCSF, says his sculpture was completed while he was recovering from his own brain surgery over the spring.

"I had three weeks to do the project," Foster says. "It was great for me; it got my mind off recovery."



Dr. Robert Foster's "Number 61. And then the world changed."

Photo: Image courtesy of the artist

As museums continue to be disrupted by the changing realities of pandemic life, Campbell and Burgard acknowledge that looking locally and relying less on traveling exhibitions of internationally famous artists may be a key part of how FAMSF will move forward.

"Museums have been dependent on the blockbuster exhibition schedule," Burgard says. "Here we are relinquishing that role for a more populist model that engages community."

"There's not expected to be a big tourist audience in San Francisco for two to three years," Campbell adds. "In light of COVID, it's more necessary that we reach out to people in the Bay Area and build on those relationships."

Chagoya says the Bay Area is overdue for an open submission exhibition and he hopes it can become a new tradition well beyond the de Young Museum.

"It doesn't have to be every year, it could be every three years," Chagoya says, "and it could happen in a warehouse, like at art fairs.

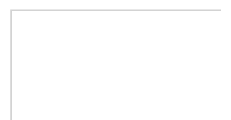
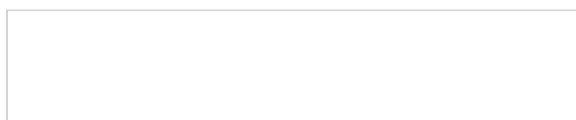
"Shows like this keep the arts exciting and moving. Local museums should think of doing something beyond the walls and typical mainstream exhibitions trying to compete with New York. We have a lot of interesting artists emerging from Bay Area all the time. The freedoms artists experience here are unlike any other place."



Tony Bravo

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