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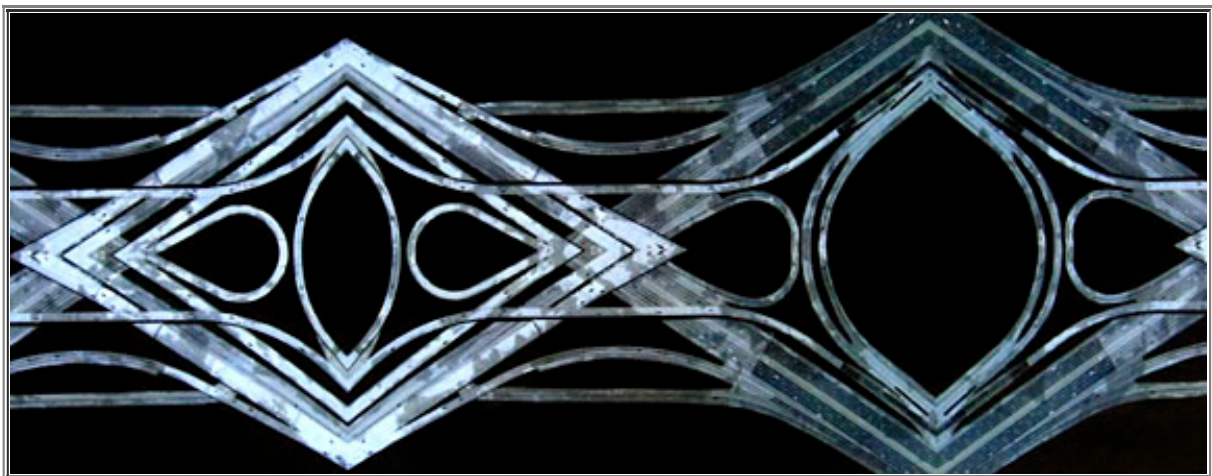
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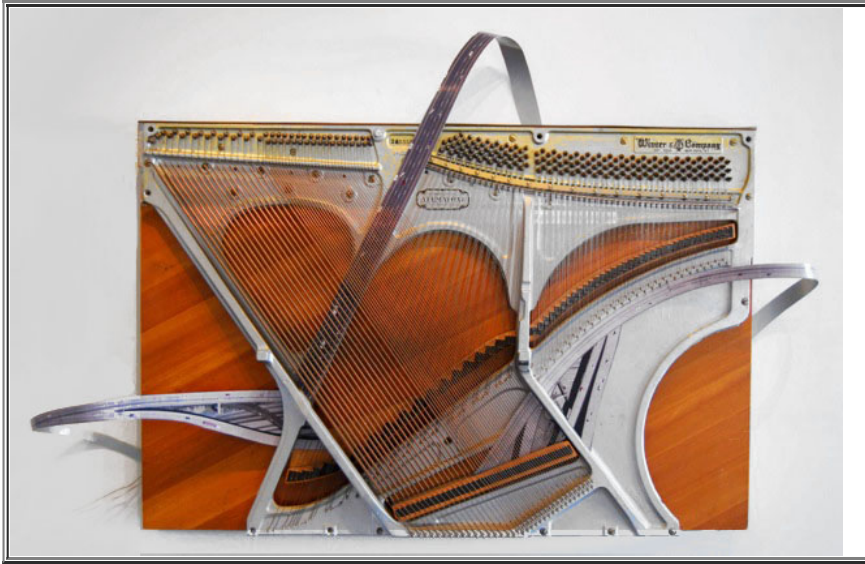
The New Bay Bridge @ Vessel Gallery.

Posted on 18 September 2013.



Christy Kovacs, *Converging Diamonds*, 2013, photo, acrylic and resin 20 x 60"

With no less than half a dozen local exhibits devoted to the new Bay Bridge, it's safe to say that the Bay Area has gone a bit bridge crazy. The Bay Bridge, after all, is one of the most travelled spans in the world, and its arrival — alleged design flaws notwithstanding — has been touted worldwide. Its opening follows the 75th anniversary celebration of the Golden Gate Bridge and Leo Villareal's stunning Bay Lights installation on the western span of the Bay Bridge. The New Bay Bridge, now on view now at Vessel Gallery in Oakland, uses photography and sculpture to frame the bridge in as an emblem of the “technological sublime”. Christy Kovacs, in photo collages, paintings and sculptures, probes its social, ecological and sonic possibilities; John Ruszel, a sculptor, explores it as a feat of engineering. Both celebrate its functional and aesthetic virtues.



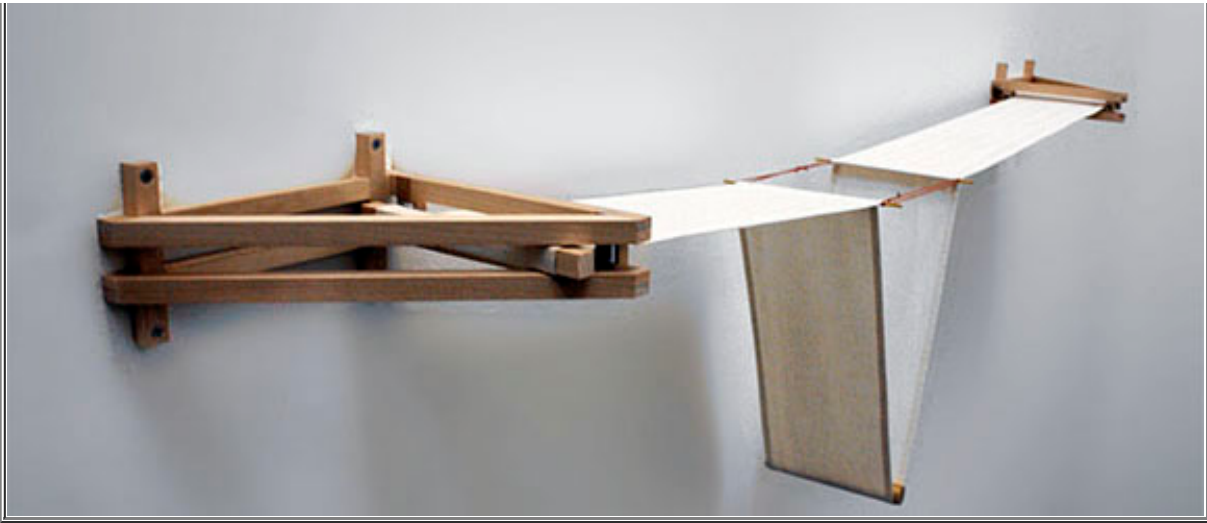
Kovacs: Travel Soundscape, 2013, soundboard, photos, electronics, 40 x 60"

In her collages and paintings Kovacs takes satellite imagery of Bay Area freeways and manipulates it digitally into reflective patterns: thin, looping strands that re-create the “spaghetti” effect seen in aerial photos of freeway systems. She mounts the prints on wood and sets them in glossy resin to create geometric forms that look as much like heraldic symbols as they do highways, echoing the form, content and romantic aspirations of early 20th century painters like Joseph Stella and Charles Sheeler, artists whose depictions of bridges now stand as symbols of the modernist impulse.

She also embeds photos into large-scale paintings in which the photos slice lyrically through black acrylic paint, a visual reference to oil made palpable by thick brushstrokes. Baroque, Lotus and Upward Suspension are elegant examples whose interlocking strands symbolize urbanity and human connectivity. Kovacs' newer three-dimensional works, while lacking the hand-made tactility of her paintings and photo collages, compensate in other ways. Travel Soundscape — a wall-mounted piano sound board that can be hammered with mallets while a soundscape of traffic noise plays on a loop from hidden speakers — is an engaging homage to John Cage and to just about every other composer or performer who's allowed chance, randomness and noise to seep into music.

Ruszel, using base materials like steel, cotton, and unfinished wood, creates geometric puzzles that make equal reference to the industrial architecture of bridges and to traditional crafts like weaving and furniture making. The components are not attached each other or to anything else apart from strings that weave through drilled holes and anchor somewhere else, usually to the wall; thus if any of them were cut, his sculptures would fall apart. This interdependence among the components imparts dynamism to sculptures that would otherwise be inert. Ruszel assembles them in much the same way suspension bridges are constructed: disparate parts are put in place, and as the cables tighten, the structures are pulled into shape.

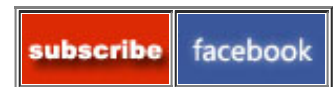




John Ruszel, "Gap", 2013, fir, cotton, birch, brass, steel, 65 x 8 x 16"

In *Enough*, the string is absent; friction and gravity hold the piece together. Though simpler than his earlier works, it seems to be a more successful combination of the artist's interest in creating objects where the function (holding together) determines shape. In this case, a heavy metal weight in a cotton sling hangs over the edge of a slender floating shelf, while two counter weights keep the sling in place. Displaying this system on a shelf gives the piece a domestic intimacy, and frames the components as important but functionless housewares. Ruszel's works are becoming increasingly restrained, and his attention to design and craftsmanship aligns him with other Bay Area artists such as [Ian McDonald](#) and [Dan Grayber](#).

The New Bay Bridge, new works by Christy Kovacs and John Ruszel @ [Vessel Gallery](#) through September 28, 2013
Photos: Russ Jaquith



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