

ARTSY

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Portrait of Douglas Durkin by Christine Alcino, courtesy of Douglas Durkin Design.

Fog Co-Founder Douglas Durkin on Putting Design First in the Bay Area

BY ARIELA GITTLEN

WHEN THE THIRD ANNUAL FOG Design+Art fair opens next week its organizers expect a slightly different crowd. In addition to the regulars—the artists and industry-types, the dealers and collectors in town for the fair—FOG hopes to entice a broad and local audience, perhaps even the next generation of design aficionados. “On Saturday and Sunday we had a lot of families, which was wonderful because we actually got to see children!” Douglas Durkin reports happily of the visitors last year. Durkin, one of the founders of FOG and chair of the A&D Accessions Committee of SFMOMA, has worked as a designer for over 25 years and heads his own San Francisco-based studio. His approach to the fair dispenses with pretension and emphasizes public engagement. FOG’s relatively small scale, quirky programming, and accessible mix of design and art are intended to draw a fresh audience.

This year the fair will feature just over 40 contemporary art and design exhibitors, including both local West Coast galleries and those from farther afield. 21POP, an installation created by designer Stanlee Gatti, will feature the work of under-the-radar local makers who, Durkin explains, “remind us of the weight of good design made by hand.” Just a few days before FOG’s preview gala, I caught up with Durkin to discuss what makes smaller fairs better, his decision to focus on design, and the eternal allure of California.



Carina Shoshtary
Carnivore I Brooch, 2015
 Sienna Patti Contemporary
 \$1,000 - 2,500



Jacques Avoinet
Set of 4 ceramic coffee tables, ca. 1960
 Magen H Gallery



Michael Geertsen
Turquoise Pot with Smoke, 2013
 Jason Jacques Inc.



Gabriel Orozco
Fly stamp collection, 2010
 Marian Goodman Gallery

Ariela Gittlen: As a relatively new fair, how has FOG distinguished itself since its inception three years ago?

Douglas Durkin: Art fairs, while exciting and inspiring, can also be huge and exhausting experiences. FOG is nicely scaled, with only 43 exhibitors. We want FOG to engage with a wide variety of visitors, from novice to seasoned collector. We also have worked very hard to present not only perspectives from top dealers in design and art, but those of emerging dealers as well.

We also created FOG Forum, a group of Bay Area design and architecture professionals who donate money to an accessions fund for SFMOMA's Architecture and Design department curators to add to the collection from the fair's offerings. So far we've raised close to \$250,000 for this purpose. The beauty of this is it's gotten the local design community really excited about the fair, and more and more professionals are seeking involvement with the A&D department at SFMOMA. With SFMOMA's unveiling of its new building this spring, and the A&D department's expanded exhibition space, the synergy between the museum, FOG, and the local design community continues to strengthen and grow.

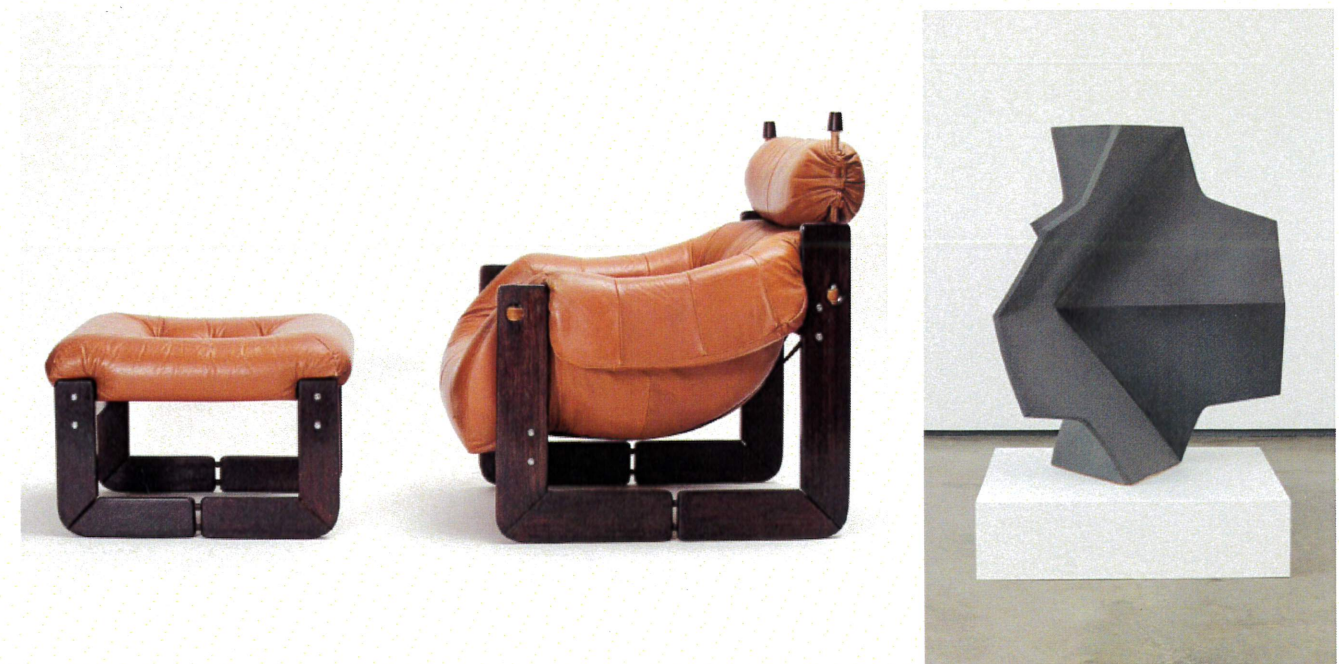
FOG has come a long way in the last three years. As with all new ventures, it's taken us time to build up our dealer list, and develop curiosity and interest

within the art world and increase attendance. This year we filled the dealer roster months ago and we anticipate strong attendance throughout the run of the fair. Our programming has gotten tighter, with many more groups approaching us with proposals. The initial years of convincing dealers to come were nerve wracking! It's so satisfying that FOG now speaks for itself.

Another unique aspect of our association is that we are all volunteers. Our motives are not so much driven by the bottom line as they are by the desire to create a unique experience for San Francisco. The FOG Steering Committee was created by Stanlee Gatti, and is comprised of myself, Stanlee, Katie Schwab Paige, Allison Speer, Cathy Topham, and Roth Martin. There is no one committee chair per se, which is unusual, though I think it works because we're all good friends, with particular talents and points of view. Stanlee as creator of 21POP, myself as a designer, Katie and Cathy as collectors, Ali as a huge talent in PR, and Roth, formerly of Hedge Gallery in San Francisco, as a dealer.

AG: How has your work as an interior designer shaped your approach as a member of the FOG Steering Committee?

DD: I have spent years regularly attending art and design fairs around the world as part of what I do. I work with a lot of collectors, and so it's important to be aware of what's going on in the art and design world. As such I brought a broad and current perspective to the steering committee of what was out there in terms of design dealers that might fit well with our goals. As we approached



Percival Lafer
Lounge Chair and Ottoman, 1970
 Patrick Parrish Gallery
 \$4,800

John Mason
Folded Cross Dark Grey, 2014
 David Kordansky Gallery

dealers, we went to the best and tried to not have too much overlap. Because of this there is great diversity in perspective being presented.

The fair set out to be about design first and foremost, though as it has grown, the mix between design and art dealers has shifted to about 50/50. The challenge going forward will be to balance a growing interest from the dealer community with our limitations of space. We don't want to make the fair too large since we feel it will work against the visitor experience we've created.

AG: FOG puts an emphasis on design, situating it prominently rather than affording it secondary status. Has there been an active effort on your part to foreground design?

DD: Our entire committee agreed that design was to be in the foreground of this fair. The art world can be an intimidating experience for many, while design is something that people can touch more readily. And as a designer, my own definition of art is quite broad. Being with a beautiful painting, sculpture, or photograph can be as satisfying as experiencing a beautifully sculpted chair, an elegant ceramic thrown by a master potter, or a historic piece of post-war French design. FOG will always strive to cast a wide net through the worlds of modern and contemporary art and design, as this dialogue seems to have a general and relevant appeal. We hope this approach infuses some of the joy back into the experience of looking at art and design, stimulating engagement with the material and the dealers.



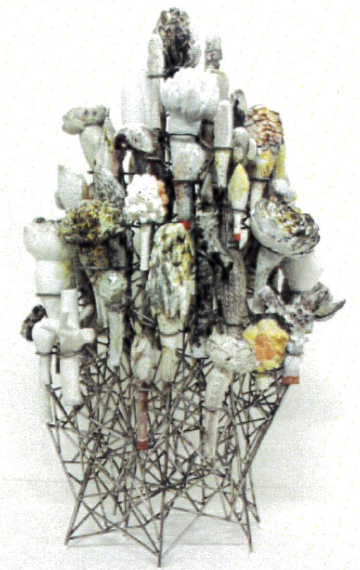
Maison Leleu
Pair of Bookcases, 1963
Maison Gerard



David Bielander
Cardboard bracelets, 2015
Ornamentum



Iris Eichenberg
Real, 2015
Ornamentum



David Hicks
Structured Composition (whites and kaolin), 2015
Edward Cella Art and Architecture
\$9,500

AG: There's been a big boom in the West Coast design scene in recent years. What draws so many artists and designers to the region?

DD: I think it's the ultimate promise of California, that element of the possible. I moved here from New York in 1989; drawn to California's scale, to its nature. It seemed like a place to make it and live well at the same time. I think that mystique still persists.

AG: On the other hand, as rents in San Francisco skyrocket, the city itself has become increasingly inhospitable to working artists and makers. How can the art and design communities stay vibrant and innovative in the face of gentrification?

DD: When I was 26, my first apartment in San Francisco cost about \$700 a month. That same amount of space is probably going for \$5,000 today. The prevailing culture here in the Bay Area is highly rewarding of technology jobs, while many other qualities that make a place interesting—such as a thriving community of artists and makers—are being challenged in profound ways. Like most San Franciscans these days, I am troubled by what's going on, though lacking in clear ideas towards a solution. That said, I'm not going to miss the panel discussion at FOG on January 16th called "The Changing Face of San Francisco's Art Scene." I'm sure there will be a lively debate and sharing of ideas addressing this particular question.

—Ariela Gittlen