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## SAN FRANCISCO DAYS by Abraham Orden

To an easterner like me, the signs of autumn in San Francisco are few and far between -- the homeopathic scent of decayed oak leaves on certain rainy street corners, say, or the decreasing span of the day as the sun dips ever more sharply over the Pacific rim. I happened to watch the sunset last week from the towering observation deck of Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron's splendid new de Young Museum. It sits in Golden Gate Park like a contemporary castle keep, a sprawling palace of art clad in stippled bronze, fit for a king's collection -- and built at a king's ransom, some \$135 million.

A great, powerful building, just the thing to reinvent the museum experience. Too bad the de Young has such a pokey collection. It was better served by its old quarters, some say, a musty space in which the art seemed spirited. Now that same art -- works by Wayne Thiebaud, and a big Ed Ruscha -- serves its grand new building like hired help. All its energy is spent guiding guests through the masterpiece space.

The de Young is, as ever, an essentially harmless place, but it's all institution, a condition the new building has made materially apparent.

This is simply to say that, despite the de Young's new digs, the constellation of important contemporary art institutions in San Francisco hasn't changed. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts are the ones you watch.

### **Out at the galleries**

What about the galleries? Ratio3 has New York sculptor Robert Lazzarini's new "Sewer Cover" project on view. Two anamorphically distorted New York City sewer covers, about 200 lbs. each, are suspended from the walls of the gallery. Their billowing shapes belie their own weightiness, but they would be sure to put a hole in the floor if they dropped, I'm told. These works from the urban landscape seem especially suited to this town, earthquake-prone as it is.

Anthony Meier Fine Arts is showing new work by Sarah Cain, the young artist who took one of this year's SF MOMA's SECA awards. Her works on paper, abstractions that combine soft gesture and accident with severe hard-edge shapes, are made in humble materials, incidental and brightly colored. Particularly beautiful is a work installed in Meier's eccentrically stylish fireplace, an iconic abstract emblem surrounded by a flickering mass of blue spray-paint, reminiscent of the work of the German abstractionist Katherina Grosse, but bite-sized.

**Sarah Cain**  
*Hello Darkness My Old Friend*  
2006  
Anthony Meier Gallery

