

Off-Site

'Unfurled'

We have two American flags always: one for the rich and one for the poor. When the rich fly it it means that things are under control; when the poor fly it it means danger, revolution, anarchy.

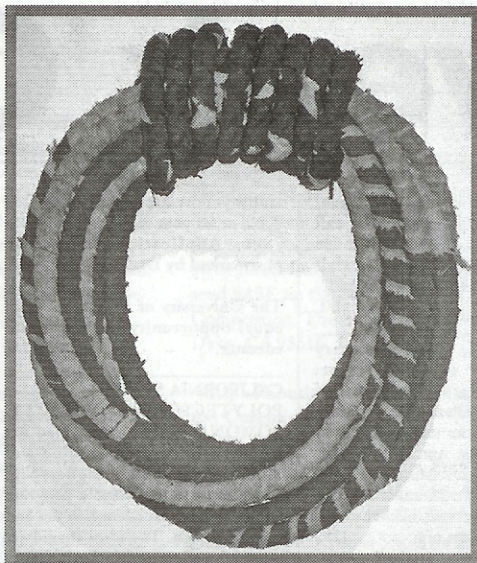
—Henry Miller, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*

Sadly enough, Henry Miller's statement, written almost sixty years ago, is remarkably apropos given the current sociopolitical circumstances in this country. In response to the political and cultural dominance that our country's flag currently represents, the San Francisco gallery Pond recently invited a dozen artists to present critical responses and alternatives to it for the exhibition *Unfurled*. The selected artists offer an amalgam of symbolic beliefs and concerns in their flags, which range from those with broad, public meaning

to others that suggest more intimate, private significance.

In the context of a flag's symbolic or signaling purposes, some of the works in *Unfurled* communicate more clearly than others. Among the most declarative is David Rudolph's *Filtration Flag*, an American flag design made of white filter cloth. The darkening of the flag through the course of being displayed outdoors makes it effectively emblematic of the air contamination to which the current administration has contributed by weakened pollution controls. Shannon Spanhake also offers incisive commentary on the changes in freedom and rights

Below: Rigo, *Barely There*, flag; right: Randall Sinner, *Untitled*, flags, at Pond Gallery and various locations in San Francisco



represented by the flag. *Transformation* features microbial "stars" which are visually referential of those on the American flag, but here are made of unicellular organisms growing in Petri dishes. The piece alludes to the wars fought in the name of flags and what they represent, but also implies the biological agents that have been used in the name of American freedom.

Though equally pointed,

Rigo's *Barely There* provides a bit of comic relief. With its simulation of the California flag with only the stitched outline of the last remaining grizzly bear as a ghost image, the piece makes a statement about the state of our State. However, it is the bear's positive image, which I later noticed mounted on the wall near the floor, heading toward the door, that made its point most effectively through humor. I suspect many of us identify with that bear, wishing we could walk out of the nightmare currently taking place in the lands over which our flags fly. Or, if one replaces the "poor" in Miller's statement with "artists," perhaps such works suggest that insurgency is brewing.

—Terri Cohn

Unfurled closed in September outside of Pond Gallery and at various locations in San Francisco. Other artists in the exhibition included Deric Carner, Cheryl Coon, Veronica de Jesus, Veronica Duarte, Jessica Hobbs & Sonya Blesofsky, Tim Martinez, Kevin Radley, Randall Sinner, Jackie Sumell and Twin Heart Collective (Joshua Short & Mabel Negrete).

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