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## Galleries - Kenneth Baker

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### Write your own headline. The artist wants you to.

Kenneth Baker  
 Saturday, June 9, 2007

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Aimee Chang, curator at the Orange County Museum of Art, assembled the 2007 edition -- the most exciting yet -- of the Oakland Art Gallery's juried annual "Bay Area Currents."



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Her snapshot view of Bay Area art activity, represented by the work of nine artists, will engage equally visitors already hip to contemporary art and those not.

Anyone who missed a chance two years ago to get one of Packard Jennings' giveaway anti-creationist stick-on labels for pasting inside hotel Bibles, has another opportunity here.

But Jennings contributes a new piece also, involving this very newspaper. His "Newspaper Headlines ..." (2007) invites people to download from his Web site a printable newspaper's front page with fake headlines - "White House Reveals Plan for Federal Bankruptcy," etc. -- for pasting over a real daily, and insertion into

the window of one of its street boxes.

Jennings also offers bannered blank front pages for those who wish to fake their own news. He promises to post on his Web site photos submitted by anyone showing that they have carried out the project.

Sure, the Onion got there first, in a sense, but then, its readers don't get to co-produce it. The humor burns more softly in David O. Johnson's neon pieces. His "Gated Community III" (2007) presents a lattice gate of glowing orange neon. Its scale, design and implicitly unhinged tilt all evoke the opposite of the sort of privilege shorthanded in the work's title.

In "Going Green" (2007), Johnson offers a fat cube of concrete bricks whose mortar glows bright green. Viewers not conversant with late 20th century sculpture may catch Johnson's implicit cynicism about the quotient of hypocrisy or denial in popular environmentalism. (Think nuclear waste.) But they will miss his smart, unforced

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references to Sol LeWitt's cinder block structures and an early minimalist classic, Robert Morris' mid-'60s floorbound, hollow ring of gray plywood with light glowing from gaps in its perimeter.

Terry Mason gets credit for the most memorable sculpture, though: a pitted easy chair apparently made of asphalt, titled "E-Z Street" (2006).

Jessalyn Haggengos shows two paintings that make a neat marriage of process and subject. Pouring paint onto panels so that, despite its richness, we cannot keep out of mind its likeness to toxic sludge, she coalesces it into memory images of landscapes she has seen.

Monica Martinez, another artist not known to me before, combines stuffed crows, a running faucet and bucket and a painted, rolling cart into a sculpture that looks utterly fresh, despite being bristling with allusions.

Sylvia in San Francisco: The lesser-known artists in "Bay Area Currents 2007" may take heart that Jill Sylvia, a standout in a 2006 group show at the OAG, now has a solo show at the Eleanor Harwood Gallery in San Francisco.

Sylvia works with ledger paper, including some that her accountant father used and discarded. The flickers of red and blue ink that appear in her work inadvertently bring his hand into it.

She cuts away the tiny rectangles of paper from within the ledger pages' ruled grids, yielding lattices that evoke architectural facades and the constraints of everyday business routine. A confetti of excised paper also results. She carefully collects it for use in collages such as "Untitled (Reconstruction Birds I)" (2007).

The grid comes with a readymade history in modern art, a fact more burdensome than liberating for most contemporary artists.

But Sylvia treats it lightly -- too lightly, in several new pieces -- perhaps because she grew up seeing ledger paper in use all the time.

When she makes a miniature cityscape by folding paper lattice, the result asserts too simply connections among economy, architecture and the work calendar better insinuated in more abstract work.

Similarly, when she arranges the snippets of inked paper into pointillistic images, the inchoate representation completely takes over. I wonder whether these missteps signal an anxiety on Sylvia's part about what comes after she plays out the ledger grid as a readymade form.

-- Bay Area Currents 2007: works in various media by nine contemporary artists. Through June 29. Oakland Art Gallery, 199 Kahn's Alley, Oakland. (510) 637-0395, [www.oaklandartgallery.org](http://www.oaklandartgallery.org).

-- Jill Sylvia: Ledger: collage and paper cuts. Through June 30. Eleanor Harwood Gallery, 1295 Alabama St., San Francisco. (415) 867-7770, [www.eleanorharwood.com](http://www.eleanorharwood.com).

E-mail Kenneth Baker at [kennethbaker@sfgchronicle.com](mailto:kennethbaker@sfgchronicle.com).

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