

## Bouquets of Art

Kala Institute residents show off their harvest.

By DeWitt Cheng



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Playfulness and irony vie with vague unease — or are we projecting our current anxieties unfairly? — in this second show of Kala Gallery's 2011 Fellowship Residents. Jennie Ottinger's paintings and video are based on Voltaire's *Candide, or Optimism*, an Enlightenment black comedy that seems newly relevant. The travails of its naive hero amid religious intolerance, earthquake, and war, each blessed by his deluded tutor, Pangloss, seem much like our own (blessed by American hyper-optimists). At the end, of course, the characters conclude that even if this is not Pangloss' "best of all possible worlds," that one must still tend one's garden — which is what artists do. Ottinger also animates articulated painted cutout figures from *Candide* for her whimsical film reenactments, with unused eyes and mouths hovering beside the puppets' heads.

Elisheva Biernoff contrasts style and imagery in her colorful screen-printed images. "Brief History," her twelve-picture array (calendar?) of erupting/smoldering volcanoes, suggests travel posters for thrill-seekers; "Long Short Story" pairs bucolic suburban views with overlays of mayhem including tornado, fire, flood, mudslide, earthquake, and even a crashing meteor; and a pair of tiny acrylic paintings on wood mimics old six-cent stamps with their old-school civic idealism. Renée Gertler prints NASA astronomical images on common articles like shopping bags, matchbooks, and a cracker bag, perforating the printed stars so that they cast night-sky patterns of the Milky Way, M81 Globular Cluster, and Barred Spiral, for example, within, like paper planetariums. LaserJet prints depicting similar constructions also play with 2D/3D ambiguity. Zachary Royer Scholz, too, plays with image and substrate; his tabletop "landscape" in "564228511 (crumple, crumple)" is composed of a digital photo of crumpled paper that is itself crumpled again — its physical ridges and valleys differing from the printed ones. In "43-543-523-511 (shelf displacement)," he mounts the photograph of a section of gallery floor on a shelf above the sample area, which is covered with white paper the color of the shelf: trading places, installation-style. Jessica Ingram makes mordant color photographs of the post-recession rural landscape in her series *Work in Progress Takes Time* (with its echoes of the WPA and Ben Franklin): "Welcome to Uto\_ia,"

proclaims a dilapidated real-estate sign, its arrow aptly pointing nowhere; handwritten signs on a cinder-block wall exhort us to join the holy flock; a tree engulfs a civic Welcome sign. If, as Stanislaw Lem once wrote, the universe is a mistake, is this, then, the best of all impossible worlds? *Residency Projects II* runs through October 15 at Kala Gallery (2990 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley). 510-841-7000 or [Kala.org](http://Kala.org)

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