



# POTRERO HILL

A NEIGHBORHOOD'S  
ARTISTIC LEGACY

# PERSPECTIVES

AN ART EXHIBITION IN COLLABORATION WITH  
THE POTRERO HILL ARCHIVES PROJECT

AUGUST 28 TO  
NOVEMBER 02





# POTRERO HILL PERSPECTIVES: A NEIGHBORHOOD'S ARTISTIC LEGACY

*By Peter Linenthal, director of the Potrero Hill Archives Project*

Potrero Hill has been described as 'the intersection of View, Warmth, Isolation, Economy, and Honesty,'<sup>1</sup> a San Francisco neighborhood where the bay shore rises to meet the sky, gentrified lofts sit next to public housing, and a gritty industrial past became the foundation for our high-tech present. Homes on the hill were built in a sequence of architectural styles, from ornately Victorian to angular post-modern. But for thousands of years, the original inhabitants were Ohlone Indians who thrived on the rich plant and animal life available year-round. Huge shell mounds are evidence of food sources so rich, agriculture was unnecessary. The Ohlone made tule reed boats, coiled baskets woven with patterns of Olivella shell discs, and painted a recently discovered mural combining indigenous and Christian imagery onto the plaster wall behind Mission Dolores' altar.

Potrero Hill's name connects its geography to local history. In the early 1800s, the hill became Mission Dolores' 'Potrero Nuevo,' Spanish for 'new pasture.' The hill's natural boundaries confined the mission's cattle herd inside today's 16th Street, the bay shore, Islais Creek and Potrero Avenues. By the late 19th century, the neighborhood's bay shores became home to San Francisco's first major industrial zone. Workers' homes spread along the shores and over Potrero Hill slopes. The California School of Mechanical Arts, Lick-Wilmerding High School today, opened here in 1895, followed by the Lux School for Industrial Training for Girls in 1912. Both schools emphasized the arts and a hands-on approach to learning. →

Robert Bechtle  
Ruth Cravath  
Marguerite Redman Dorgeloh  
Lionel Edwards  
Charles Griffin Farr  
Bob Hayes  
Henri Marie-Rose  
Theodore Polos  
Charles Surendorf  
Frank Joseph Van Sloun  
Pauline Vinson

**Frank Van Sloun**, whose 1915 sketch of a working-class home is included in this exhibition, painted a mural of the muses which greeted Lux visitors. By the early 20th century, Potrero Hill had become San Francisco's 'quintessential village-on-a-hill.'<sup>2</sup>

Attracted by low rents, sunshine, and wide-open spaces, artists came to this neighborhood on the southern edge of San Francisco and made Potrero Hill their home. Landscape artist **Lionel Louis Edwards** painted



Lionel Edwards, *Potrero Hill*, c. 1920s, Courtesy of the Potrero Hill Archives Project.

the mix of homes and open spaces on Potrero Hill's southern slopes in the early 1920s. In response to the Great Depression of the 1930s, the New Deal's Work Projects Administration (WPA) employed artists in public works, a period artist Charles Griffin Farr described as a "golden age for artists" because of substantial government support for the arts. A WPA printmaking workshop opened at 901 Potrero Avenue, seen in **Marguerite Redman Dorgeloh's** lithograph. Many of the workshop's

printmakers also depicted the surrounding neighborhood, including **Theodore Polos**, who worked in the WPA Easel and Lithography Projects between 1937 and 1943 and taught at California College of Arts and Crafts (now CCA). Printmaker and painter **Charles Surendorf** moved to Potrero Hill in the late 1930s. At that time, the hill was also known as Russian Hill for its immigrant community. Surendorf recorded the steep streets he lived on in striking linoleum cut engravings included in the exhibition. WPA artist **Pauline Vinson** portrayed this Russian community in lovely illustrations for William Saroyan's 1941 *Hilltop Russians in San Francisco*.

In his 1946 sketches, **Louis Siegriest**, member of the Society of Six and the 'grand old man of California art,'<sup>3</sup> depicts neighborhood views that remained largely rural, but housing expansion and freeway construction soon transformed Potrero Hill into a fully formed residential neighborhood. **Minor White's** photos of Potrero Hill record post-war San Francisco and ask us "to maybe not romanticize the new city or sentimentalize the old city."<sup>4</sup> White and Dorothea Lange, who also photographed the hill, taught at the California School of Fine Arts,



Charles Surendorf, *House in San Francisco*, 1939. Woodblock print, 13 x 16 inches, framed. Courtesy of the Potrero Hill Archives Project.



Minor White, *Jack-Hammer Man Jack McGarvey*, 1949. Courtesy of the California Historical Society.



Imogen Cunningham, *Ruth Cravath, Sculptor*, 1955  
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which became the San Francisco Art Institute. **Charles Griffin Farr** came to San Francisco in 1948, and his Monday morning life drawing group in his large studio on De Haro Street brought Potrero Hill artists, including exhibition artists Ruth Cravath and Henri Marie-Rose, together for over thirty years. Farr started the oldest art show in San Francisco, benefitting

the hill's Potrero Branch library in 1955. In 1959, poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti explained why he chose to live on Potrero Hill: "I always envied those poets who sit in the full lotus on mountaintops, calling each other on golden telephones, and Potrero Hill, where phones were recently installed, is the closest thing to it." Sculptor **Ruth Cravath** lived and worked on the



Robert Bechtle, *Potrero Stroller - Crossing Arkansas Street*, 1989. Watercolor on paper. 23 × 30 inches. Courtesy of CCA/C Art Collection at California College of the Arts Libraries.

hill at that time because it offered ample room to work outdoors with her chosen materials of marble and stone.<sup>5</sup> In 1960, the Rudolph Schaeffer School of Design moved to Potrero Hill. Schaeffer also taught at CCA and was strongly influenced by Japanese aesthetics and philosophy. His school helped establish San Francisco's reputation as a center of international design.

More recently, images of Potrero Hill have reached a wide audience through the work of renowned artist/teachers Wayne Thiebaud and **Robert Bechtle**. These two artists' works feature unique perspectives on the hill's vertiginous streets, juxtapositions, and surprising views. Bechtle was married to art historian and educator Whitney Chadwick, whose work on

contemporary art, Surrealism, gender and sexuality includes *Women, Art and Society* (1990), which is on display in the exhibition's Writers' Corner. Artist **Henri Marie-Rose**, a longtime Potrero Hill resident, resisted the label "artist" as a child in Martinique, insisting simply, "I like to make things." Marie-Rose



Henri Marie-Rose, *Photo of artist sitting on Arkansas Street in Potrero Hill with his sculpture*, c. 1965. Courtesy of Pierre Joseph Marie-Rose and family.

hosted a KQED series on *Techniques in Sculpture* and received public art commissions in San Francisco. Beginning in the early 1970s, photographer **Bob Hayes** worked as a photography teacher for thirty years at the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House, a building that was designed by the esteemed architect Julia Morgan and opened in 1922 to serve the hill's Russian Molokan community. Serving as an unofficial neighborhood documentarian, he photographed performances, portraits, community projects, celebrations, and political events at the Nabe, the "Heart of Potrero Hill." Wherever Hayes went, kids called out, "Take my picture!" His images bring the diverse Potrero Hill community vividly to life.

California College of the Arts' expansion in 2024 is the most recent addition to an increasingly healthy Potrero Hill arts ecosystem. While early live-work lofts built in the late 1980s were intended to support artists but proved too expensive, the Goodman 2 Arts Complex now offers 30 live-work studios at market and below-market rates and has received accolades for its mixed-use design. The Noonan Building in Pier 70 also houses 27 artist studios.



Bob Hayes, *Untitled*, 1970-1984. Photocollage detail. Courtesy of the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House.

CCA established its large campus in 1996 inside a former Greyhound Bus maintenance garage, further enhancing the neighborhood's artistic community. Other notable additions include San Francisco Center for the Book (1996), the Museum of Craft and Design (2013), the Letterpress

Archive (2015), the Minnesota Street Project complex (2016), and the Institute of Contemporary Art (2022). These recent developments build upon the strong artistic legacy of the neighborhood and foretell a future full of possibilities for the arts on Potrero Hill.

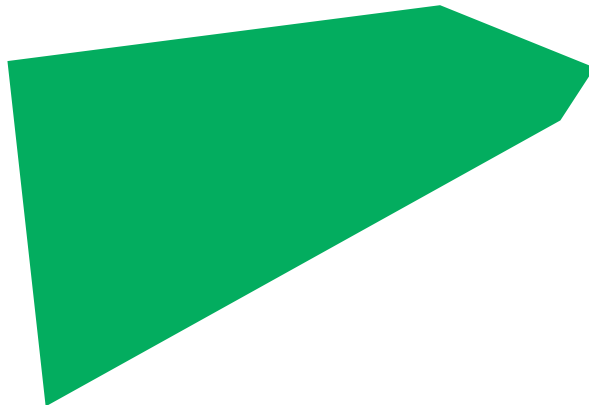
- (1) A.J. Blumenthal, *San Francisco News-Call Bulletin*, 1949
- (2) Kevin Starr, "San Francisco's Potrero Hill," 2005
- (3) Nancy Boas, "Society of Six's Louis Siegriest Leaves Colorful Legacy," *SF Examiner*, 1989
- (4) Erin Garcia, "Minor White's San Francisco: Evocative Pictures of a Vanishing City," *California Sun*, 2022
- (5) "The Artists Are Moving to Potrero Hill," *San Francisco Examiner*, 1959



This exhibition was organized by Peter Linenthal (director, Potrero Hill Archives Project) and Jaime Austin (director of exhibitions and public programming, CCA), in collaboration with CCA student Anny Long. The exhibition is supported by CCA and San Francisco Grants for the Arts.

Additional exhibition support was provided by Bryndis Hafthorsdottir (Gallery Manager, CCA Exhibitions) and Manuel Angeja (Installation Manager, CCA Exhibitions). The exhibition's graphic identity was designed by Aashna Keswani (Graphic Designer, CCA Exhibitions).

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## Potrero Hill Perspectives Community Panel

September 25, 2024 / 6-7:30pm

CCA Campus Gallery

This gathering offers the rare chance to ask questions about the exhibition artists and see their work. What has changed in the neighborhood and what is unchanged? What makes Potrero Hill special? Moderated by Peter Linenthal, director of the Potrero Hill Archives Project.

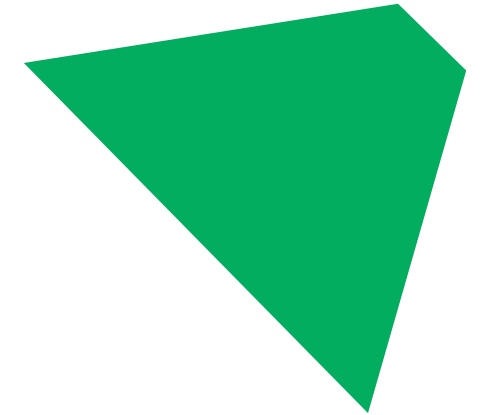
FEATURING :

**Edward Hatter**,  
friend of Bob Hayes and Executive  
Director of the Potrero Hill  
Neighborhood House

**Pierre-Joseph Marie-Rose**,  
son of Henri Marie-Rose

**Carol Sundell**,  
neighbor and close friend of Ruth  
Cravath

**Cindy Surendorf**,  
daughter of Charles Surendorf



## 25th Annual Potrero Hill History Night

November 2, 2024 / 5:30-9pm

Saint Teresa's Church  
1490 19th Street, San Francisco  
94107

5:30-7pm Community Pizza Dinner  
(enter of Connecticut)  
7-9:30pm Free Program inside the  
church

