

Generational Bridging: How a CCA student connected Potrero Hill through art.



Anny Long at the CCA Campus Gallery | Photograph courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

By
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"The project simply took on a life of its own as [Anny Long] contemplated the best way to inventively detail the vivacious culture, community and artistic history of one of the most spirited neighborhoods in San Francisco."



My initial shift at the Campus Gallery on 1480 17th street was an eccentric introduction to the vibrant community that surrounds CCA. I was staffed on opening night of *Potrero Hill Perspectives: A Neighborhood's Artistic Legacy*, a remarkably curated tribute to several generations of artists that dwelled, survived and occasionally thrived right here within the steep slopes of the Hill.

The translucent double doors to the gallery opened at 5pm and the vacant space promptly morphed into a gorgeous melting pot of people hailing from all corners of the community. Students, faculty, children, CCA alumni, residents of Potrero Hill and many more steadily packed the room throughout the night from wall to window. Upon walking in and greeting faces both familiar and unknown, spectators were swiftly drawn to the lofty white walls where dazzling portraits, photos and sculptures from artists such as Robert Bechtle, Rudolph Schaeffer, Theodore Polos, Frank Van Sloun, Henri-Marie Rose, Ruth Cravath, and Charles Griffin Farr echoed their stories across the room.

Many of these tales were made possible throughout the last century in this peculiar section of the city due to low rent costs and wide-open spaces that became available throughout the Hill because of gentrification. Getting priced out of North Beach by the hundreds, artists who for many years had lived in northern parts of the city, reluctantly evacuated those sections for the sake of



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cost-efficiency in communities further south, making the Potrero Hill neighborhood their home out of necessity. Observing people from both the CCA community and residents of the Hill gather in unison to celebrate the legacies of these brilliant artists, who throughout their careers had defined the meaning of immersing themselves in a community with endless tales to relay, made me realize that through art, they were bridging the gap between old and new.

The exhibition was filled with wondrous drawings, paintings, photos and murals, ranging from the early roaring 20s through the late 1980s, by some of San Francisco's most influential artists that lived and worked in Potrero Hill. Listening to students, faculty and friends converse about the remarkable collection of pieces that inventively depicted the neighborhood's breathtaking views from various sections throughout the Hill, distinctive architecture, and vivacious residents was an exceptional experience that was difficult to properly appreciate in the moment.

I thought about the work that needed to be conducted in order to curate *Potrero Hill Perspectives*, how difficult it must've been to gather historical works across several decades from a community that has yet to cease its evolution. Prior to my first shift, I learned that the exhibition was organized by Peter Linenthal, director of the Potrero Hill Archives Project, and Jaime Austin, Director of Exhibitions and Public Programming here at CCA, with additional help from Manuel Angeja, Installation Manager, and Bryndis Hafthorsdottir, Gallery Manager.

Peter and Jaime briefly spoke about their involvement in the exhibition, detailing their experiences and tribulations to those in attendance. Their collaboration seemingly created a vital moment for the community, urging minds, bodies and souls to gather in a place where history can be studied, and thoughts can be shared. I admired Peter's heartfelt passion for his community, the love he expressed for the Hill and how this exhibition had finally come to fruition after so many years of speaking it into existence. Hearing about Bryndis, Manuel, and Jaime's utter joy in assisting with bringing the exhibition to life was special. The beauty of the exhibit increased the more people spoke about the passion that was poured into it. However, the part that inspired me most was learning that the exhibition, as the community had come to know it, could not have been possible without the collaboration of a certain CCA student.

Following sentimental and celebratory words from Peter and Jaime, the opening night crowd then had the luxury of hearing humble words from the person that inspired me most, Ms. Anny (Yuyang) Long. Peter warmly welcomed Anny up to the front, handing her a microphone so that she can share a few words herself. Prior to listening to her brief speech where she thanked Peter and Jaime for the opportunity to collaborate, and paid homage to the entire Potrero Hill community for their willingness to have their lives and stories be placed on display in front of a large audience, she was standing in the back of the room, quietly observing the crowd.



Photograph by Nicholas Lea Bruno.

I had no idea who she was. She didn't have a CCA student ID and seemed a bit less social, in a kindly introverted way. Upon learning that the exhibition was made possible through her hard work, I additionally learned about the origins of *Potrero Hill Perspectives* being born from a class project assigned to her here at CCA. She spoke softly and humbly as she quickly summarized her experience in front of a fascinated crowd.



Photograph by Nicholas Lea Bruno.

She briefly detailed the origins of the project and spoke about how creating a hybrid photo book unintentionally became the stepping stone for the exhibit. The book, which was also on display as part of the gallery, is filled with narrative text accompanied by brilliant pictures that organically detail the historical archives, natural landscapes and earnest portraits from artists and artworks that dwelled within the Hill. I physically held and read it, and a heightened sense of fulfillment flowed through my body. The project deeply resonated because, like myself, she was a student simply trying to conduct impactful work in her community. In turn, this unlatched a multitude of possibilities that, for many young artists and scholars, can often feel out of reach.

The mere notion of a class project turning into a marvelously crafted exhibition was influential. I had the luxury of expressing my admiration for her work right before Anny departed the event. Gracious and humble, she shyly thanked me for the praise, but expressed that

she was slightly unsatisfied with the final version of the book, and that she was currently working on a more polished one. She then shook a few more hands, voiced a few “thank you’s,” and subtly shuffled out the door. *I had to find out more.* How did she get started? Who did she reach out to? What challenges did she face along the way? How long did the entire process take from start to finish? What advice did she have for fellow students who are equally fervent about connecting community members and preserving histories? I voiced some of these questions to Bryndis Hafthorsdottir, who rightfully suggested that I reach out to the main source.

After several email exchanges, Anny and I found time to connect via zoom. Fall semester was in full throttle and both of our schedules had blazed erratic paths of their own. She was kind enough to block off an hour of her time on a charmingly sunny Friday afternoon, the kind of day that urges you to get outside and ignore all current responsibilities. I started the conversation with an inquiry about the initial stages of conceptualizing *Potrero Hill Perspectives*. I was pleased to learn that Anny had targeted a practical approach, backed by curiosity.



Photograph by Nicholas Lea Bruno.

“How do I make a simple class project more interesting?” She had zero plans of creating a hybrid photo book. The project simply took on a life of its own as she contemplated the best way to inventively detail the vivacious culture, community and artistic history of one of the most spirited neighborhoods in San Francisco. Initially, having been a resident of the Dogpatch neighborhood during the

COVID-19 pandemic, she wanted to create a project centered around the transformation of her community. She began to ask peers and community members for guidance toward people she could speak with regarding this unnamed historical project about the neighborhood.

She kept hearing the same two names over and over again from various residents throughout the Hill, and few CCA community members. One of the frequently mentioned names, Steve Moss, has been head publisher of the *Potrero View* newspaper for decades. She briefly met with Steve, whom she described as warm, welcoming, and filled with endless information about Potrero Hill, and many other sections of San Francisco. Moss then directed her to the other name that was enthusiastically suggested — Peter Linenthal.



Photograph by Nicholas Lea Bruno.

Anny met with Peter the day after meeting Steve, which is something I took sharp note of as I wrote down initial thoughts while I listened to her story through the speakers of my computer. The tenacity in which Anny approached this project with, should be met with deep reverence. A majority of the logistics for this project took place outside of the classroom, on her own time, amid rigorous work for other classes and much more outside of school. When thinking about what it takes to pursue a task as lofty as bridging gaps between communities, whether knowingly or unknowingly, most of your “free time” is likely to be spent on the pursuit. This is a price that Anny was willing to pay.

“Elegant, kind, and old fashioned,” is how she described Peter. “He lives right on the Hill, walking distance from me.” The first day they met, she was only expecting about 10 minutes of his time, give or take. Those ten minutes turned into weekly coffee chats over a long period of time, just under one year. During her conversations with Peter, she detailed how he would pull out loads of archives, artwork, books, newspaper clippings, posters and blueprints from various compartments throughout his home. For many of those conversations, she’d come prepared with a set list of questions, only to go off script each and every time. She learned that Peter would conduct history nights for over three decades, and even invited her to them.

This is when she began to encounter a large number of people from Potrero Hill, who were delighted to speak with her. In some cases, ecstatic even. Many of the community members she spoke to were long time residents of the Hill, unaffiliated with the realm of art. “They were normal, hard-working people who were just trying to make a living. Just trying to survive.” She recorded the conversations while jotting down notes in a looseleaf pad. Notes began to pile up, and before she knew it, something that resembled a book was being formed. “How do I make a class project more interesting?” This is the question she asked before making the decision to turn these conversations and notes into a book. A serious book.

“The more stories I collected, the more I realized that this could be a serious piece. I don’t know who would read it, but I want to do it for future generations to know about its history. The entire community was beyond welcoming, and more than willing to share the history of their neighborhood. They’re definitely proud to be from here.”

While conducting these conversations, interviews and notes, Anny also brought along her beloved camera with her practically everywhere she went. As photos began to take up space on her memory drives, the idea of combining her own organic images with historical portrayals she gained access to by way of various members from the community into a fully polished project was born. Not too long after conducting her final rounds of interviews amongst community members from Potrero Hill is when she was introduced to Jaime, ultimately pitching the idea of a book to her. In collaboration with Peter and with the help of some grant funding, the three of them not only brought a gorgeous historical narrative book into fruition, but

simultaneously created an artistic exhibit that enthrallingly bridged the gap between communities of old and new.

“The entire process took two years from start to finish.” One of the first questions that came to mind when formulating a conversation with Anny was her creative timeline. Intensely focused on the logistical aspects including editorial and publishing details, she made sure to emphasize that the true joy in working on *Potrero Hill Perspectives* was the process of getting to know the community. She expressed mountainous gratitude toward the people. All of the business owners, educators, artists and historians of The Hill who take pride in living and working there. “They opened up their homes and lives to me, when they didn’t have to,” she said.

Pertaining to the making of the book, as well as curating an exhibition, she relayed, “You have to have the tenacity and perseverance to turn a school project into an official one. It was definitely a journey that needed a lot of patience,” she detailed. “If you really care for a project, there’s nothing stopping you from achieving what you want to achieve.”

After congratulating her for the numberless time before wrapping up our conversation, I felt compelled to ask her if she had anything else in store for the near future? “I’m pretty sure I’m gonna be making another book. Probably not this year, but soon.” After attaining a glimpse into Anny’s work, tenacity and creative process, there’s a few things I can almost certainly expect from her ensuing projects. They’re going to be magnificently crafted, there’s going to be immaculate detail embedded within every ounce of her idea, and somehow, she’ll find the most innovative way to bridge gaps between vivacious communities that have so much to offer the world. And she’ll do it with class, authenticity, and grace.

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VOLUME 09

VOLUME 09