

Sometimes we wish for more, sometimes less

Faint cultural shock waves still emanate from Marcel Duchamp's promotion to art status of a few mass-produced objects nearly a century ago.

One such tremor registers, detrimentally, in the art of Los Angeles native Edgar Arceneaux, the latest in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's "New Work" series.

Kenneth Baker
Galleries

Duchamp's artmaking-by-fiat engendered a lot of magical thinking about the efficacy of

intention in artworks. Perhaps throwing our credence behind someone's questionable claim to have made art bolsters our own misplaced faith in wishes. Perhaps it gives us the feeling of participating in a consensus, a feeling less and less available in politically hollow contemporary life. In any case, Arceneaux's work, like much recent conceptual and political art, banks on our overestimation of creative intent.

Arceneaux has organized his ensemble of works around references to the sun.

One portion evokes the sun as the primordial projector lamp. Here the beams from a slide projector and a 16 mm film projector crisscross near one side of the room.

The slides in "Blocking Out the Sun" (2004) show Arceneaux holding his thumb up to the sun's disk. Light floods some of the images, completely washing out the artist and his surroundings. In others, he appears with arm and hand extended, thumb poking up, as if trying to create a private solar eclipse. Arceneaux apparently refers to an old astronomer's habit of masking the sun to determine the clarity of the surrounding atmosphere. But viewers who linger with the piece may think of the traditional drawing trick of sighting a subject past an upright thumb to gauge proportions.

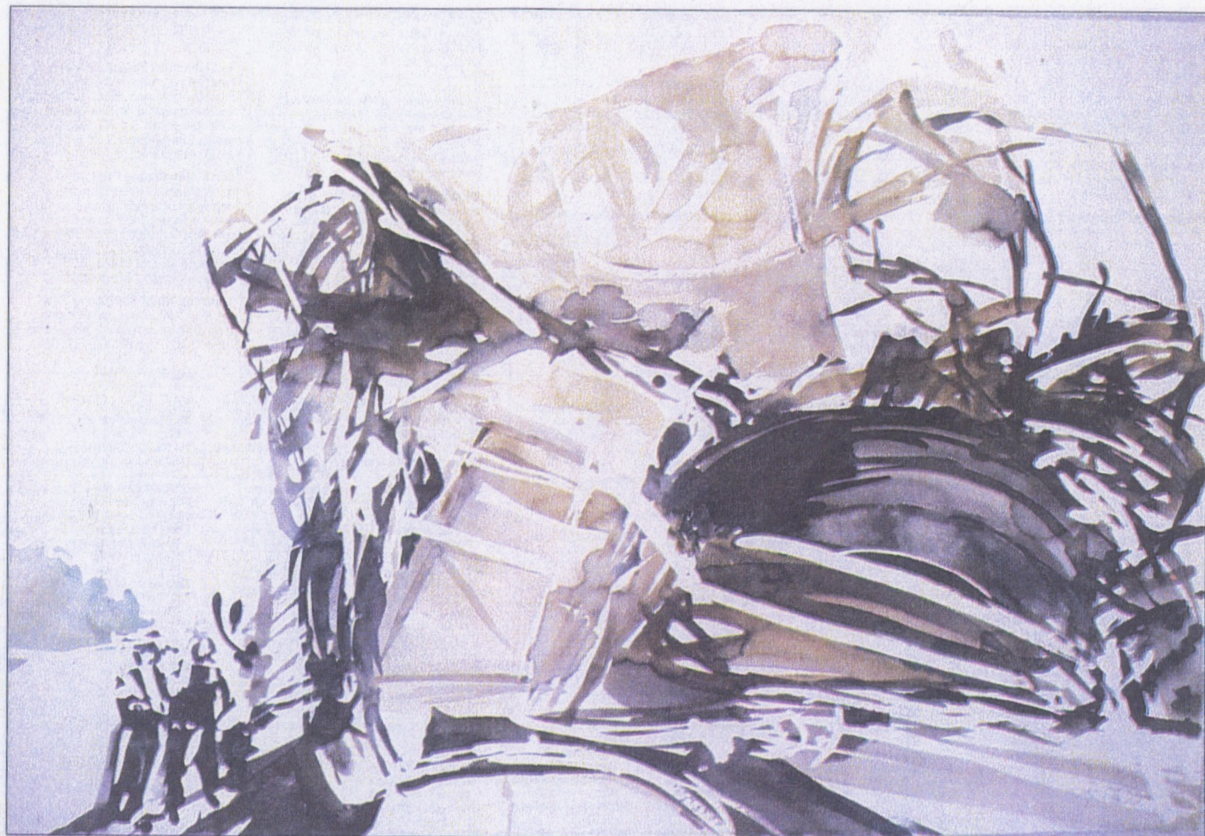
Meanwhile, the movie projector throws a silent film on a loosely stacked section of concrete block wall.

The homemade documentary shows Arceneaux and a friend outdoors tracing a 1976 abstract wall drawing by Sol LeWitt and transferring it in white chalk onto a black wall.

Arceneaux later rebuilt the wall of uncemented concrete blocks in the gallery to produce, on its reverse side, "Broken Sol" (2004), where "Sol," the sun and LeWitt are equivalent.

On the far side of the concrete wall you see the copied wall drawing fractured and chaotically reassembled. Yet, as visitors to SFMOMA's 2000 LeWitt retrospective will recall, he has conceived wall pieces that, when executed, look very much like "Broken Sol." Arceneaux's work looks like an ironic homage whose hero has already outflanked its irony.

Bay Folk
is on vacation



Oakland Art Gallery

"Truck" (2005), a watercolor by Pamela Wilson, is part of a small exhibition on cross-fertilization of contemporary painting and photography at the Oakland Art Gallery.

The humor that simmers in "Broken Sol" plays little part in the rest of Arceneaux's show.

He has a big drawing of sunspots that references Galileo and his discovery that the sun revolves on its own axis and a couple of pieces devoted to the oracular jazz musician Sun Ra, who took his name from the ancient Egyptian sun god.

These associations bounce around in Arceneaux's show through word and image play, but he organizes them so loosely and whimsically that their coherence depends on our confidence in him, a confidence he has done too little to earn.

'Photoo' in Oakland: No exhibition as small as "Photoo: The Subversion and Subvention of Photography" at the Oakland Art Gallery could do justice to the cross-fertilization of contemporary painting and photography. But "Photoo" contains enough intriguing things to make one wish for an extensive survey.

The show's co-organizers, Pamela Wilson and Nina Zurier, have included their own work, but no one who looks carefully will take exception.

Wilson borrows images from news photographs and transcribes them in deft but unfussy watercolor.

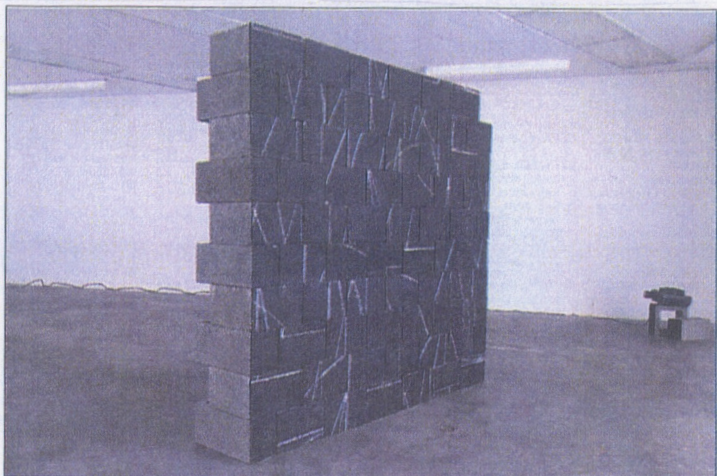
Some, such as "Najaf," have ob-

New Work: Edgar Arceneaux: Drawings and installations in mixed media. Through Nov. 27. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 151 Third St., San Francisco. (415) 357-4000. www.sfmoma.org.
Photoo: The Subversion and Subvention of Photography: Photographic works and paintings by six contemporary artists. Through Sept. 24. Oakland Art Gallery, 199 Kahn's Alley, Oakland. (510) 637-0395. www.oaklandartgallery.org.

vious topical reference. Others, such as "Truck" and "Mistake," might refer to violent mishaps more generally. In every case, Wilson's pictures gain power from their subjects' distance from the largely quiescent watercolor tradition.

Zurier takes deliberately "incorrect" photographs — wildly maladjusted in framing, exposure and color balance. She mounts them on unframed aluminum panels. The resulting objects look like neither photographs nor paintings, but planes of powdery color whose faintly modulated surfaces give the eye just enough traction to detain the mind.

Roy Tomlinson's paintings happen to offer a startling contrast



Edgar Arceneaux and Susanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles Projects

"Broken Sol" (2004): Paint and chalk on concrete blocks by Edgar Arceneaux at SFMOMA.

to Arceneaux's work at the level where intention makes itself felt.

Tomlinson uses photographs as maps for painting. His not-quite-legible pictures have titles such as "Ground Fire #2," "Clearing" and "Home." But he works with a touch, a withholding of follow-through, that inch by inch con-

veys his intent not to arrive at an image. The resulting pictures evoke photography's infection of our memories as a bleak malaise.

Francesca Pastine's work looks like something left over from a different show, but it makes a striking impression, especially her "Football Cutouts" (2005).

In each of these she has printed a sports page photo on Japanese inkjet paper, and with scissors or mat knife cut it into a frilly stencil, the incisions intervening comically or critically in the image.

E-mail Kenneth Baker at kennethbaker@schronicle.com.