

Adaline Kent

20th Century San Francisco Artist



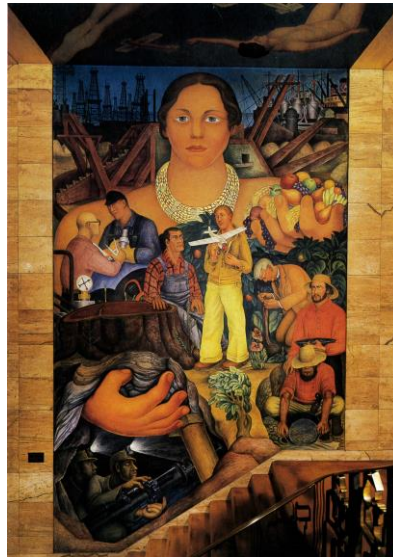
The idea for this essay was prompted by research I did last year for a retrospective exhibition of the artist Adaline Kent that was held at the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno. Since that time my librarian-work situation has changed--I now walk from Aquatic Park along Columbus Avenue, down Montgomery Street to the Crown Point Press Building at Howard and Hawthorne, near the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art—I thought that I knew this area of San Francisco really well—North Beach, Café Trieste, Ed Hardy’s Tattoo Shop, City Lights Books, Bimbo’s 365 Club, Vesuvio’s Bar, and those cool alley ways: Commercial Street, Merchant, Minna, Natoma, even one named to honor Ambrose Bierce. But a close up look while hiking it daily has been revelatory—illuminating new insights into the City’s history. For instance, on New Montgomery

there is a wonderful bar, “The House of Shields,” with a drink listed as “Warren’s Last Breath” commemorating the fact that Warren Harding may have died at this bar when it was a speakeasy in 1923....under suspicious circumstances prior to having his corpse taken across the street to the Palace Hotel.....This is a beautiful city.



I loved how Vince Resh mentioned a Marxist interpretation of history at last month’s Chit Chat gathering and even though I embrace many of the underpinnings of this Lefty view point from my graduate study of American history decades ago, I was much more attached to Charles Beard’s concept of “economic determinism,” and to a lesser extent, Fredrick Jackson Turner’s outmoded, debunked and narrow idea of his “Frontier Thesis.” But I have always also accepted the concept of what I know of as “geographical determinism,” the importance of that “*sense of place*.” That “*sense of place*” is evident in my sashay along the Montgomery Street corridor and is certainly evident in this story of the artist Adaline Kent. Kent’s art was extraordinarily influenced by her surroundings—from Marin County to the Sierra Nevada—and from the lively urban environment of San Francisco’s Montgomery Street in the 1920s and 1930s.

On New Year's Eve, 1932, students from the California School of Fine Arts gathered in front of Timothy Pflueger's new Pacific Stock Exchange Tower building "garbed in smocks and berets" and "assisted in ushering out the old year (1932), and welcoming the new (1933)," as San Francisco Mayor Angelo Rossi "pulled the cord to drop the canvas coverings" to unveil Ralph Stackpole's monumental 100-ton granite pylon sculptures, *Woman and Produce* and *Man and Industry*.¹



The highlight of the *interior* of the new building was Diego Rivera's massive *Allegory of California* fresco, completed the previous year. Pflueger "wanted to create a building ornamented with *pure artwork*" made by "a parade of local artists" that he had hired at Stackpole's suggestion. These included Ruth Cravath, Robert Howard, the three Bruton sisters, Margaret, Esther, and Helen, and Adaline Kent.² Kent's two sculptures, *Night Club* and

¹ Hailey, Gene. *California art research [Monographs]*. 1936. "Ralph Stackpole," vol. 14, p. 46; "Statuary Will Be Unveiled," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12-31-1932; "New Exchange Art Unveiling Fete Tonight: Symbols for Temple of Trade," *San Francisco Examiner*, 12-31-1932; Poletti, Therese, Timothy Pflueger, and Tom Paiva. *Art Deco San Francisco: The Architecture of Timothy Pflueger*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008, p. 102.

² Good, Wendy Van Wyck. *Sisters in Art: The Biography of Margaret, Esther, and Helen Bruton*. 2021. p. 46; Boas, Nancy, and David Park. *David Park: A Painter's Life*. Berkeley [Calif.]: University of California Press, 2012, p. 24.

Saxophone Player, were done in travertine marble, a new medium for her which she described as like “working on a mouthful of bad teeth.”³ Kent “was particularly impressed” when Pflueger paid the artists “not according to reputation, but impartially, by the square foot.”⁴ Kent’s commission for the Pacific Stock Exchange demonstrated her acceptance as one of the dynamic artists bringing new ideas and modernism to San Francisco.



Adaline Kent grew up in the eastern shadow of Mount Tamalpais in Marin County surrounded by a family that was immersed in the politics, environment, and social life of Northern California. Her father William Kent, a progressive politician, is best known for purchasing a wide swath of old growth redwood trees along a gorgeous creek threatened to be dammed and

³ Hailey, Gene. *California art research [Monographs]*. 1936. “Adaline Kent,” vol. 17, p. 98.

⁴ *Ibid.*

logged. Kent, along with his wife, Elizabeth, donated the parcel to the federal government and made sure it would be named after the Kents' friend, John Muir, resulting in the creation of Muir Woods. In 1916 as a congressman from Northern California, Kent wrote the law founding the National Park Service. And yet, the recently updated dedication plaque in Muir Woods supplies contradicting evidence to Kent's progressive and environmental good deeds. Highlighting that "Everything on this original sign is true but incomplete," the new wording —will include text describing William Kent's abhorrent advocacy to restrict Asian property ownership in the U.S.⁵

Adaline Kent's mother, Elizabeth, however, *consistently* walked her talk within early 20th century Progressivism particularly in her adamant support of women's suffrage, winding up in jail on numerous occasions.

Adaline's childhood home, in what is now the posh Kent Woodlands neighborhood, was an entry point to numerous hiking trails stretching across Mt. Tamalpais to Stinson Beach. Undoubtedly, as a child, Adaline felt the shaking along the San Andreas fault during the 1906 earthquake centered just west of her home; experienced the development of Mt. Tam as a destination for San Franciscan excursionists who would climb aboard the "world's crookedest railway" in route to its summit, and was well aware of the 7-mile "Dipsea" running race over the mountain ending at the Pacific Ocean.

As a teenager she must have attended the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco which celebrated San Francisco's renaissance after the destructive 1906 earthquake

⁵ <https://www.nps.gov/articles/williamkent.htm>, retrieved March 8, 2022.

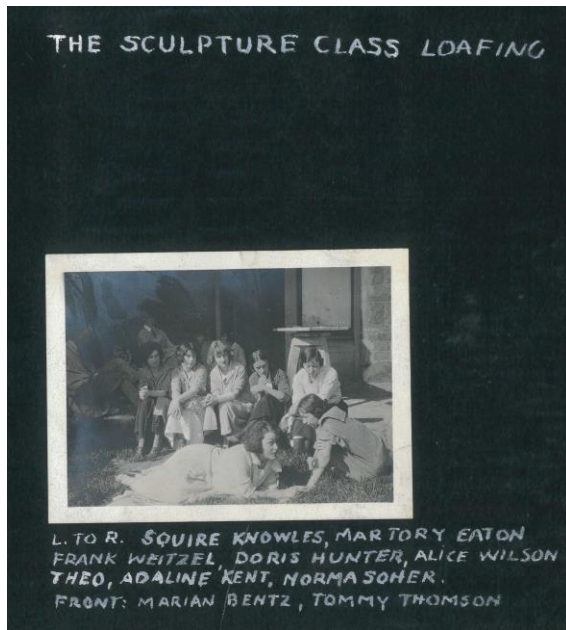
and fire. The PPIE showcased a wide range of exhibitions highlighting modern art developments in New York and Europe. This interest in contemporary art launched San Francisco into an era of “modernism” embraced by a new generation of artists.

Kent’s advantaged upbringing also took her to Washington D.C. as a congressman’s daughter during World War I. Her teenaged independent spirit is illustrated by a photograph she sent of herself to her brother William serving in France that shows her in riding pants, a hat, and holding what appears to be a cigarette. She writes, “This degenerate is Addie—I really had been riding.”



The same letter spoke of their mother’s friends protesting for women’s suffrage outside the White House and Adaline “rejoicing that mother isn’t here to get into trouble and maybe jail.” She continues that “next year if I do get into Vassar I am going to buy a motorcycle with a little backseat and...will spin down to the Bad City for weekends or worse. I can see Dad on his ear at the very sound of a motorcycle but I won’t tell him until it is over.”⁶

⁶ Adaline Kent to William Kent, February 9, 1919, private collection.

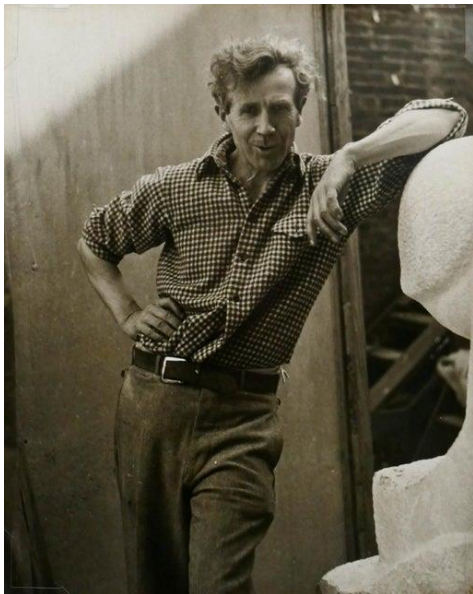


After graduating from Vassar, Kent enrolled at the California School of Fine Arts in September of 1923. The CSFA had its roots in the 1870s and was the oldest and most prestigious of West Coast art schools. When Kent first enrolled, the CSFA was still located at the top of Nob Hill—property that would soon be sold for a new structure on the northeastern slope of Russian Hill. Throughout the fall of 1923 Kent enrolled in “Life” figure drawing classes and by the 1924 Spring Semester, Kent added a sculpture course with Ralph Stackpole. Adaline’s schoolmates were close, as evidenced by pictures that documented “The Sculpture Class Loafing,” and fellow classmates swimming, clowning and making human pyramids at “Adaline Kent’s Picnic, Kentfield, Summer 1924.”⁷

⁷ Trace Sisters Photographic Scrapbook, 1923-1924, San Francisco Art Institute Archives.



During the 1924-1925 academic year Kent traveled to Europe and studied in Paris with French sculptor Antoine Bourdell, who had also been a teacher to Henri Matisse and Alberto Giacometti. Returning to the CSFA in September 1925 Kent continued her classes in “Life” drawing and painting as well as her coursework in sculpture with Stackpole along with newly arrived students, Victor Arnautoff, Yun Gee, and Zygmund Sazevitch. Most of this cohort would continue as lifelong artists and many remained close friends with Kent for the rest of her life.



Ralph Stackpole

Stackpole proved the most influential of Kent's teachers, not only for his technical skills but also because of his stature in the San Francisco art world. He had studied at the CSFA with the prominent California painter Gottardo Piazzoni as well as in New York with Robert Henri and also in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts where he lived in Montparnasse hobnobbing with Henri Matisse and Diego Rivera. Stackpole was one of the key contributors to "The Rise of Modern Art in the Bay Area" in the 1920s. This evolution of the city's art scene was characterized by 2 groups, one who "had retired to the shelter of the Bohemian Club" and the other considered "the innovators, many of them with studios on Montgomery Street."⁸



"The Monkey Block Building at Montgomery and Columbus, where the Trans America Building is today.

The cluster of buildings on Montgomery Street, affectionately known as "The Monkey Block," housed dozens of artists' studios and "was surrounded by a produce market on the east...North Beach on the north, Chinatown on the west; and the elegant skyscrapers and dramatic skyline on the south. It was the city's bohemian heart."⁹ Its epicenter in the 1920s and 1930s was Ralph

⁸ Ryan, Beatrice Judd. 1959. "The Rise of Modern Art in the Bay Area". *California Historical Society Quarterly*. 38, no. 1: 2.

⁹ David Park. *David Park: A Painter's Life*. Berkeley [Calif.]: University of California Press, 2012, p. 23.

Stackpole's stone yard, at 27 Hotaling Place. When Kenneth Rexroth and his artist wife, Andree, witnessed this artists' enclave he reported that Stackpole "knew everybody in town from top to bottom...he had been out in the world...his appetite for people and ideas was extraordinarily alive and alert."¹⁰



Stackpole's stone yard, between Hotaling Place & Montgomery Street

The legions of noted local artists in the Monkey Block included some of the old guard who *had* embraced the new ideas of modernism like Maynard Dixon, Piazzoni, Rinaldo Cuneo, Otis Oldfield, Beniamino Bufano, and Lucien Labaudt along with people like Adaline Kent who was part of the "rebellious young artists" along with Ruth Cravath, Dorr Bothwell, Jacques Schnier, Robert Howard, Sargent Johnson, and Yun Gee "that enlivened conservative art trends and added excitement to both exhibitions and art critics' columns."¹¹ This crucible of "innovators" prompted Beatrice Judd Ryan "in league with Maynard Dixon and Edgar Walter" to open the Galerie Beaux Arts, "the first haven and showcase for modern art in San Francisco."¹² Within a few months of the opening of Ryan's gallery a group of young artists led by Yun Gee launched

¹⁰ Rexroth, Kenneth. *An Autobiographical Novel*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966. p. 365.

¹¹ Hailey, Gene. *California art research [Monographs]*. 1936. "Ruth Cravath," vol. 16 p. 119.

¹² Innes Bromfield, "Beatrice Judd Ryan," in *The Russian Hill Runt*, May 1, 1941.

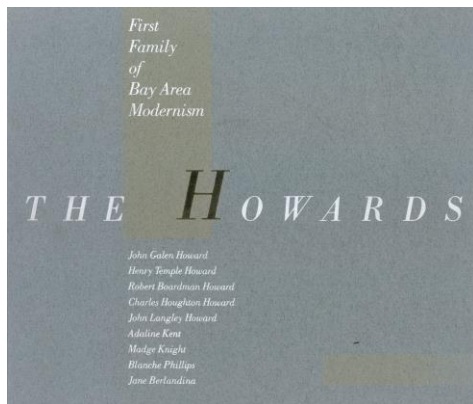
their own cooperative gallery at 718 Montgomery to show their distinctively modern work. Openings at The Modern Gallery would spill out into Stackpole's outdoor stone yard to accommodate dancing and prohibition-era violations. The Modern's first exhibit was a solo show by Yun Gee followed by a group exhibition of other founding co-op members including Kent's friends Dorr Bothwell, Marion Trace, Rosalie Maus, Parker Hall and Ruth Cravath—all of whom had been students with Kent at the CSFA. The Modern kicked off its second season with “a group show of six new members of the Gallery: Matthew Barnes, Adaline Kent, Robert Howard, Marian Simpson, John Stump, and Florence Alston Swift.” According to a review in *The Argus*, “it was the most substantial group show yet seen at 718 Montgomery...the little bronze pieces by Adaline Kent were genuine in attitude and cleverly worked out.”¹³ Of particular note, Adaline Kent and her future husband Robert Howard exhibited together. Both Howard and Kent had studios in the Monkey Block, and were thus well aware of each other's work. Kent would have known of Howard's commissions which had “gathered attention in many venues” and were located in high profile public places, such as his mural maps on Bay Area ferry boats, “celestial constellation” paintings at the Fairmont Hotel, and a “series of murals in the Gothic writing room of Yosemite's Ahwahnee Hotel.”¹⁴ Howard's painting, *Mt. Tamalpais*, would have been of obvious interest to Adaline.

Kent and Howard had plenty in common. Both were from prominent Bay Area families, as Howard's father, John Galen Howard was the architect for the University of California. After serving as a motorcycle courier in Europe during WWI, Howard settled in France. His artist

¹³ *The Argus: A Journal of Art Criticism* (vol. 1, no. 6) September 1927, p. 8, and (vol. 2, no. 1) October 1927, p. 9.

¹⁴ Edwards, Robert W. *Jennie V. Cannon The Untold History of the Carmel and Berkeley Art Colonies*. Oakland, CA: East Bay Heritage Project, 2013. p. 447.

friends in Paris included Alexander Calder and Clay Spohn (both of whom he had known growing up in Berkeley)—it was Spohn who had encouraged Calder to work with wire. Two of Howard’s brothers were also artists, John Langley and Charles, and another brother Henry, was an architect. The family would soon include artists Madge Knight, Jane Berlandina, Blanche Phillips and of course, Adaline Kent—resulting in them eventually being dubbed “the first family of Bay Area modernism.”¹⁵

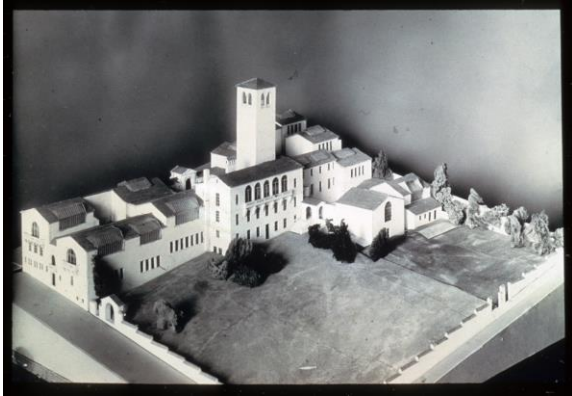


By the time of their participation in the group show at the Modern Gallery, Kent and Howard were significant contributors to an interconnected group of artists that had been part of a wide range of San Francisco’s avant-garde art developments. New art facilities stimulated this advance—the California Legion of Honor opened in 1924 and the California School of Fine Arts celebrated its new building in 1927. Adding to the mix was Jehanne Salinger’s periodical, *The Argus: A Journal of Art Criticism*, “an important vehicle for the dissemination of information coming from Paris and New York” for San Franciscans.¹⁶ Dynamic exhibitions during 1927 also encouraged these modern influences, such as Beatrice Judd Ryan’s exhibition of Diego Rivera

¹⁵ Moss, Stacey. *The Howards: First Family of Bay Area Modernism: The Oakland Museum, May 14 to August 7, 1988*. Oakland, Calif: Oakland Museum, 1988.

¹⁶ Lynne Baer Smith, “The Relationship Between Paris, New York and San Francisco,” *From Exposition to Exposition: Progressive and Conservative Northern California Painting, 1915-1939*. Sacramento, Calif: Crocker Art Museum, 1981. p. 18.

drawings and Galka Scheyer's exhibition of the *Blue Four* artists, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Alexej von Jawlensky, and Lyonel Feininger. The *Blue Four* artists were described in the press as "virulent abstractionists" whose "notorious and unutterable ultra-modern art has at last assailed the walls of...the California School of Fine Art...and may be enjoyed by the shock-proof from 9-4 daily."¹⁷



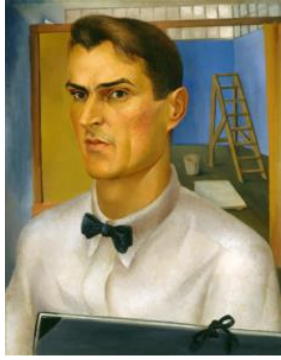
California School of Fine Arts, Arthur Brown model Russian Hill

The opening of the new CSFA on Russian Hill encouraged Adaline Kent to "pay the sculpture fee" for a summer 1927 class and once again one of her classmates was Victor Arnautoff.

Arnautoff, born in eastern Ukraine during the Russian Empire, had been an officer in WWI, then traveled across Siberia to China on the heels of the Russian Civil War, then to San Francisco for art school, to Mexico to work with Diego Rivera, back to California where he taught at the CSFA and Stanford, and then returned to Soviet Ukraine in 1963. "His 360-degree trip around the globe was accompanied by a 180-degree turn in his political views."¹⁸

¹⁷ Gene Haily, "Ultra-Modern Invades Fine Arts School," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 27, 1927.

¹⁸ Cherny, Robert W. *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art*. 2017. p. 1.



Victor Arnautoff, self-portrait

Kent exhibited constantly, expanding her range with fascinating work illustrative of modern tendencies. A piece from 1928 included the practical, surreal, and dada-esque reflecting the “intimate relation with our everyday life...a piece of sculpture meant to be used as an automobile radiator cap.”¹⁹

The “close-knit” group of local artists quickly embraced new arrivals as demonstrated by Adaline Kent’s friendship with the 19-year-old David Park, who would go on to pioneer Bay Area Figurative painting by mid-century. Park worked as one of Ralph Stackpole’s assistants on Stackpole’s granite sculptures for Pflueger’s Pacific Stock Exchange Building. Much of the artwork for the Stock Exchange building project was accomplished in Monkey Block studios, uniting these artists in a common project and bringing Adaline Kent and Robert Howard even closer together. Howard’s involvement included not only his sculpture but also a personal project to film the artistic activities. Ongoing activities in the Montgomery Street studios included organizing drawing groups one of which included Adaline, David Park, “...Robert Howard,

¹⁹ “In San Francisco Galleries,” *The Argus: A Journal of Art Criticism* (vol. 3, no. 3) June 1928, p. 6.

Robert's brother, John Langley Howard, and the sculptor Jacques Schnier" who "met and drew from a model once or twice a week."²⁰

Northern California was a destination for international artists as verified by a summer 1930 postcard mailed by Henri Matisse to San Francisco artist Lucien Labaudt informing him that his trip from Tahiti back to France was taking him through the Panama Canal and regrettably he would not be able to make another 3-day visit to California.²¹ Labaudt had been Matisse's host earlier that spring at a banquet at sculptor Ralph Stackpole's Montgomery Street Studio "attended by leaders of the local art colony" which featured "deadly cocktails" and "five gallons of red wine." Artist Esther Bruton "observed that Matisse did not drink alcohol and was a vegetarian and would not eat the chicken dinner brought in from a nearby restaurant."²² According to artist Dorr Bothwell, "Matisse sat at the head of a U-shaped table. French speakers were seated on one side of the table...and non-French speaking guests (including the young tennis celebrity and art student Helen Wills Moody) on the other."²³ One of the French speakers was Adaline Kent who must have discussed with Matisse how they had both studied with French sculptor, Antoine Bourdell.

Matisse was not the only artist of world renown that Adaline Kent interacted with in 1930. In correspondence with her fiancé, Bob Howard, she wrote of driving from Mexico City to Cuernavaca and seeing Diego "Rivera working in Cortez's palace. He was very genial only I was

²⁰ Boas, *David Park*, p. 23.

²¹ Henri Matisse postcard to Lucien Labaudt [summer 1930] Lucien Labaudt Papers, *Archives of American Art*. [see Paul Karlstrom, "West Coast," *Archives of American Art Journal*, vol. 24, no. 4 (1984) p. 39.

²² "Ralph Stackpole," CAR, p. 39; Good, Wendy Van Wyck. *Sisters in Art*, p. 55.

²³ Boas, *David Park*, p. 26.

so taken aback by his speaking French to me...with my mind searching for Spanish that I was struck dumb.” So, Victor Arnautoff, Rivera’s assistant at the time, “came along and translated from Russian.” Rivera invited Kent and Arnautoff to his house for the following Sunday prompting Kent to write to her fiancé, “I’ll have to drink a wee drop of French beforehand.” Addie certainly missed her fiancé, writing, “It isn’t right that I should have you in my heart and Mexico spread out at my feet.”²⁴ Upon her return the couple was married at Kent’s Marin County home in August of 1930.



Adaline Kent and Robert Howard, Kentfield, California

Soon they would move to an “attractive house on the bay slopes of Russian Hill,” at Francisco and Leavenworth, a half-block from the CSFA. Both kept their studios in “the old warehouse district at Jackson and Montgomery, within a block of each other” and when “they were both working it was their relaxation to picnic at noon on Telegraph Hill a few steep blocks above.”²⁵ From their home “they were able to walk, ride bicycles or take the buses around the city quite easily,” and the ferry to Marin was only 3 blocks away.²⁶ Kent was “a diminutive person, wiry

²⁴ Adaline Kent to Robert Howard, July 5, 1930.

²⁵ Howard’s studio was at 402 Jackson Street. “Robert Howard,” CAR, 1937, vol. 17, p. 32.

²⁶ Apsara DiQuinzio interview with Galen Howard Hilgard, date???

and athletic,”—a life-long bike rider, Sierra backpacker, and skier, who “practiced gymnastics on exercise rings installed in the ceiling of her studio.”²⁷ Athleticism was intrinsic to her art. She wrote, “To me, skiers, dancers, trapeze artists provide pleasure comparable to that of sculpture—an idea of form in space, space in form, movement controlled in space, free yet disciplined in composition.”²⁸ In 1931 their first daughter Ellen was born, and in 1933 daughter Galen was born.

By the Fall of 1930 Rivera had arrived in San Francisco to contribute his monumental fresco to Pflueger’s Stock Exchange building as well as to execute another massive mural at the CSFA. In the Spring of 1931 Rivera was one of the jurors, along with his friend Ralph Stackpole, for the San Francisco Art Association’s 53rd Annual Exhibition where the two top sculpture winners were African-American sculptor, Sargent Johnson, and Adaline Kent who “captured the certificate of honorable mention with her *Nude* sculpture in ebony.”²⁹



²⁷ Boas, David Park, p. 22.

²⁸ Kent, Adaline Dutton. *Autobiography from the Notebooks and Sculpture of Adaline Kent*. 1958. p. 20.

²⁹ Nadia Lavrova, “Art Association’s Annual Opens Today,” *San Francisco Examiner*, April 26, 1931.

In the late Spring, 1931 Arnautoff returned from Mexico and rented a large studio near the Monkey Block, where he demonstrated his newly acquired skills by painting a mural that “occupied a space eight by twenty feet...a magnificent experiment in group portraiture, containing the likenesses of 24 prominent local artists, painted larger than life.” Arnautoff reported that he “wanted to paint a fresco to decorate my studio, and I wanted to see the faces of my friends around me.”³⁰ The scene included Adaline Kent and many of their mutual friends from student days at the CSFA such as Maxine Albro, Parker Hall, Ruth Cravath, and Sygmund Sazevich as well as Arnautoff himself. The mural initiated Arnautoff’s mural commission career, the first of which was received from Kent for her Montgomery Street studio titled, *Adam and Eve*.³¹ Kent also purchased a painting by Arnautoff and facilitated the sale of his art to others including her sister-in-law, Alice.



Victor Arnautoff’s mural of his artist friends, showing Adaline Kent in the middle with white shirt.

³⁰ *San Francisco Examiner*, February 15, 1932, quoted in “Victor Mikhail Arnautoff,” *California Art Research*, vol. 20, p. 112.

³¹ Cherney, p. 79-80.

Kent's cohort of modernists continued their barrage of exhibitions, one under the guise of their "membership" in "The Society of Progressive Artists" held at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor from January to February of 1933. The set of 25 artists comprised Kent and Robert Howard, Marion Simpson, Margaret Peterson and Worth Ryder from UC Berkeley, and Stackpole, Bufano, Ray Boynton, and Helen Forbes, all Montgomery Street tenants.³²

The Great Depression triggered the need for widespread work relief programs, with one of the most noted being the New Deal commissions for artwork through the Public Works of Art Project. The PWAP's pilot project was the art work at Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill. The structure was completed in 1933, designed by architects Henry Howard, (Adaline Kent's brother-in-law), and Arthur Brown (who had also designed the CSFA, San Francisco's City Hall, and Temple Emanuel). Above the building's entrance, Robert Howard "cast a high relief plaque four feet in diameter of the phoenix bird with outspread wings."³³ The twenty-six artists for the Coit Tower project were directed by Victor Arnautoff who painted *City Life*.

³² "January Brings in Six New Exhibits at Palace," *San Francisco Examiner*, Jan. 1, 1933.

³³ Zakheim, Masha. *Coit Tower, San Francisco: Its History and Art*. 2009. p. 11.



“City Life” mural by Victor Arnautoff at Coit Tower

Kent’s brother-in-law, John Langley Howard painted one of the most controversial of the murals *California Industrial Scenes*, an image of social and racial equality with a group of integrated workers at a May Day parade. Jane Berlandina, one of Kent’s closest friends and Henry Howard’s wife, used egg tempera to paint her *Home Life* mural, resulting in a more dreamlike image than those of other muralists. Kent helped with Berlandina’s mural and Robert Howard would visit for lunch and see his friends. Berlandina had studied in Nice and Paris, briefly with Henri Matisse. She was also an art historian who taught at the CSFA from 1936 through 1940. This was a close-knit group of artists---as evidenced in a photograph showing artist and activist Maxine Albro reading a manifesto demonstrating their concern over the destruction of their friend Diego Rivera’s murals at the Rockefeller Center in New York.



At the inaugural exhibition in early 1935 at the San Francisco Museum of Art (now the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) designed by Arthur Brown at Van Ness and McCallister, Kent displayed four sculptures along with a legion of local artists eager to initiate the new contemporary art space in the city.

At the same time, in the spring of 1935 Kent along with Robert, Charles, and John Langley Howard and Berlandina held a joint exhibition at the Paul Elder Gallery in San Francisco and that summer one of the first sculpture shows at the SFMA consisted of work by Stackpole, Kent and Ruth Cravath. The 1930s were filled with exhibits at gallery spaces and public museums that showed Kent and her band of artist friends. Kent's stature as a revered artist resulted in her landing on the "Jury of Selection" for the 1936 SFAA Annual where *Young Woman*, a stone sculpture by Helen Philips was awarded the "Museum Purchase Prize," while another prize went

to David Park for his painting, *String Quartet*.³⁴ Phillips and Kent would become close friends. According to *Time* magazine, the “blue-eyed, honey haired” Phillips had “served apprenticeship in the stone yards...under the sympathetic eye of sculptor Ralph Stackpole” whose “vigorous, massive modernism...she found much to her liking.”³⁵ Phillips proved worthy of the sculpture award and soon received the prestigious Phelen Travelling Fellowship for CSFA students which took her to Europe in 1937. Phillips reported from Munich that she had seen “the *Degenerate* art exhibition” and that “the manner of which it was presented and its objectives were appalling.”³⁶ Phillips would remain in France and soon crossed paths with the eminent surrealist artist, Stanley Hayter who she married in 1940.



Helen Phillips with husband Stanley Hayter.

Throughout the late 1930s Kent and Howard traveled to the Sierra in both summer and in winter. By 1939 they had become particularly taken with wintertime visits to Donner Pass with their friend, ski legend Hannes Schroll, the founder of Sugar Bowl ski resort. Kent and Howard became stockholders (along with Walt Disney) in the new startup winter resort. At Sugar Bowl,

³⁴ Annual exhibition of the San Francisco Art Association. *Fifty-Sixth Annual Exhibition of the San Francisco Art Association*. [San Francisco, Calif.]: [The Museum], 1936.

³⁵ “Montalvo’s Maeceanas,” *Time Magazine*, June 15, 1936.

³⁶ Helen Phillips to Arthur Brown, Sept. 4, 1937. SFAI Archives, Phelen Travelling Fellowship Papers.

Kent's brother-in-law, Henry Howard designed the first chairlift built in California while architect friend William Wurster planned the lodge with its signature sloping roof.



Sugar Bowl ski lodge designed by William Wurster

At nearly the same time, artist and mosaicist extraordinaire, Jeanne Reynal, who would become one of Kent's closest friends, "set-up her home and studio in the remote village of Soda Springs" just 2 miles from Sugar Bowl.³⁷ Kent found inspiration in the Sierra and it is no wonder that she

³⁷ Fort, Ilene Susan, Teresa Arcq, Terri Geis, and Dawn Ades. *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States: [Exhibition Held at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Jan. 29-May 6, 2012; Musée National Des Beaux-Arts Du Québec, June 7-Sept. 3, 2012; Museo De Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Sept. 27, 2012-Jan. 13, 2013].* 2012. p. 235.

would recognize a kindred spirit in Reynal who also understood the captivating call of the mountains in her Soda Springs studio.



Jeanne Reynal, mosaicist extraordinaire

The Golden Gate International Exhibition on Treasure Island of 1939-1940 offered another exceptional opportunity for Bay Area artists to come together and demonstrate their artistic talents. Helen Philips said that “San Francisco was ahead of its time then, with fantastic support for the arts” and at the GGIE there was “a distinct style, very progressive.”³⁸ Again, it was architect Timothy Pflueger who advocated for artists’ engagement with the GGIE. The “Court of Pacifica” with its “Pacific Unity” sculptures served as the centerpiece for the 1939 version of the GGIE with Stackpole’s *Pacifica* statue, towering 80 feet overlooking “a bold relief mural, *The Peacemakers*” by the three Bruton sisters. The sculptures surrounding the fountain at the “Court of Pacifica” were done by Kent, Helen Phillips, Jacques Schnier, Sargent Johnson, Cecilia Graham, and Ruth Cravath.³⁹

³⁸ Helen Phillips interview quoted in Anne Schnobelen, “Preserving the Lost Art of Treasure Island,” *The Sophisticate*, (Summer/Fall, 1989) p. 8.

³⁹ Mcelroy, Paul C. *California: A Guide to the Golden State*. New York: Hastings House, 1939. p. 683.



GGIE, Treasure Island, with Stackpole's *Pacifica*, and Kent's *Court of Pacifica* sculptures

The GGIE continued for an added year in 1940 because of Pflueger's advocacy—a chance to make up lost revenue as well as offer up a new menu of art which included the return of Diego Rivera to San Francisco to meet up with friends as well as paint his mural destined for City College of San Francisco titled *Pan American Unity*. Rivera was a part of Pflueger's "Art in Action" component of the GGIE where artists were under surveillance by an intrigued public as they crafted art projects destined for San Francisco locales.

While the GGIE served as an all-encompassing entertainment venue, it was the San Francisco Museum of Art that provided space in which the public could be exposed to the sea change taking place in the art world. The Museum's director, Grace McCann Morley, "stayed close to the growing edge of creative art" by mixing a great assortment of local artists with solo shows of Gauguin, Cezanne, Matisse, and Gorky as well as exhibits that traveled from New York's MOMA like *Cubism and Abstract Art* and *Fantastic Art: Dada, Surrealism*. Morley embraced fine art photographers such as Ansel Adams and Edward Weston, initiated a film program, and kept the museum open until 10pm incorporating music—Jazz—and putting on up to 100 shows a year. Picasso's *Guernica* was displayed publicly for the very first time at SFMA in August and

September 1939, exactly at the start of WWII in Europe. The following summer, the New York MOMA's *Picasso Retrospective* arrived and again included *Guernica*. San Franciscans staged a sit-down strike on the last day of the show, July 22, 1940 refusing to leave the galleries at the 10pm closing.



Picasso's *Guernica* at the San Francisco Museum of Art

Kent and her local artist friends were soon joined by a new set of artists from Europe, ex-pats who returned to the U.S. to escape the war. Brother-in-law, Charles Howard and his artist wife, Madge Knight, who had spent most of the 1930s in England returned to San Francisco along with Stanley Hayter and his new wife, Helen Philips. The *San Francisco Examiner* reported, "Expatriates of Paris Flee War to U.S." exclaiming that "...with the darkness over Europe...San Francisco may well inherit the ancient mantle of Paris...as the world's new center of arts and letters."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ "Refugee From the Left Bank: Expatriates of Paris Flee War to U.S.," *San Francisco Examiner*, June 22, 1940.



It appears that all of these arriving artists were either relatives or close friends of Adaline Kent and Robert Howard. Charles Howard, Madge Knight, Stanley Hayter, and Helen Phillips figured prominently in bridging European and Northern California art. Within months, both Hayter and Howard were showing work at Morley's San Francisco Museum of Art, with Hayter also teaching "his new and slightly revolutionary techniques" to students at the CSFA.⁴¹ Howard and Knight quickly settled into a place on Water Street across the alley from Adaline Kent and Robert's new studios on Francisco Street. While Hayter was teaching at the CSFA during the summer of 1940, Kent attended Mills College for a Summer Session that was loaded with a "high-powered faculty" visiting from Chicago's School of Design including Moholy-Nagy,

⁴¹ Ibid.

painter/photographer Gyorgy Kepes, and an array of noted weavers, designers, furniture makers, teaching courses “based on the Bauhaus.”⁴²

The presence of ex-pat artists and the war in Europe both had an immediate impact on local artists. Charles Howard’s *First War Winter* won the San Francisco Museum of Art’s Purchase Prize in the 1940 SFAA Annual exhibition.



Charles Howard, *First War Winter*

Charles Howard “galvanized the Bay Area art scene...prompting a renaissance for modernist abstraction.”⁴³ He encouraged Clay Spohn’s surrealist sensibilities, resulting in Spohn’s set of watercolors, *Fantastic War Machines* that would appear at the SFMA in 1942. Kent and Howard were also influenced by this change in aesthetics and current events with works titled *Combat*

⁴² Peter Selz, “The Impact from Abroad: Foreign Guests and Visitors,” in Paul Karlstrom, *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900-1950*.p. 112.

⁴³ DiQuenzio, Apsara, *Charles Howard: Margin of Chaos* p. 25

and *Victory* exhibited in 1941. Morley also encouraged SFMA programing designed to distract audiences from the upheaval of war supporting her new curator Douglas MacAgy's vision for a circus-themed exhibition, *Sawdust and Spangles* complete with posters, sideshows, and Robert Howard's "mobiles of acrobats" under the "Big Top," pitched in the museum's rotunda. Artists included David Park, Charles Howard, Madge Knight, Clay Spohn, and of course, with her interest in trapeze and gymnastics, Adaline Kent, who entered two pieces, *Juggler* and *Tightrope Walker*. MacAgy and his wife, Jermayne, who was a curator at the city's Legion of Honor Museum, became close friends with this group of artists, an assembly that would lend much to the vitality of the culture of the city.



San Francisco Museum of Art, *Sawdust and Spangles* exhibition

Kent escaped war weariness by visiting the mountains. She wrote that she was “an addict of the High Sierras.”⁴⁴ These trips also benefited her lungs and soothed her asthma reporting from

⁴⁴ Autobiographical Notes [c. 1943] with Kent Family Papers.

Sugar Bowl that the “fine clear air is working its usual magic on me—I feel so well...I think this whole nasty business” of the asthma “is a bad dream.”⁴⁵ Kent admitted, “I knit instead of smoke,” which probably made her “feel better than she had “for many months and freer from those darn medications.”⁴⁶ During a particularly long stay in November and December of 1942 she wrote to Robert, encouraging him to take a break from his wartime camouflage factory job, “save up some gasoline and bring the children up for the weekend,” writing “don’t get too used to it without me—it won’t be long, the way the red corpuscles are mowing down those sissy white ones in this clean air.”⁴⁷ Kent wrote to Howard about a quick trip from Sugar Bowl at Donner Pass to Reno, mentioning that “there will be time to lose a few dimes and see High Life over one bonded Bourbon.”⁴⁸ Three days later she reported “meeting at the Riverside for gambling and my one small highball. I lost five dollars in an hour and a half...then back to the crazy place after dinner...a bunch of small ranch houses, shacks, etc. shared by divorcees, newlywed heiresses and cowboys...” Kent rushed back from Reno, racing a blizzard at Donner Pass as well as “burning branches that swirled around in the air...it was the night part of Virginia City burned.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Adaline Kent to Mary Bradbury Howard, December 4, 1942.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Adaline Kent to Robert Howard, November 9, 1942.

⁴⁸ Adaline Kent to Robert Howard, November 14, 1942.

⁴⁹ Adaline Kent to Robert Howard, November [17], 1942.



Kent sought refuge in the Sierra for her health, to hike, to camp, and to ski. The outdoors, coupled with her athleticism, all proved fundamental to her work. Grace McCann Morley would write that Kent took advantage of the “twentieth century artist’s freedom to find substance and the reason for creative expression everywhere.”⁵⁰ Kent agreed with Reynal who had written her that she was “working unbothered by the ‘contest for money, reputation, and false friends.’”⁵¹ Reynal “associated with the Surrealists,” was friends with Andre Breton, had purchased a 1941 Jackson Pollock painting from Peggy Guggenheim, and collaborated with Isamu Noguchi, while her “closest artist friend was Arshile Gorky and his wife Agnes.”⁵² Kent was also friends with Noguchi. He wrote to her in the summer of 1944 mentioning that his “fits of gloom are my particular curse” encouraging Addie and himself that “with suffering and tragedy that besets the

⁵⁰ “Adaline Kent,” Rehistoricizing Abstract Expressionism webpage. <https://rehistoricizing.org/adaline-kent/> accessed March 13, 2022.

⁵¹ Adaline Kent to Galen Howard, February 10, [1953]

⁵² Berit Potter, “Eric Firestone Gallery: Jeanne Reynal,” ericfirestonegallery.com accessed February 12, 2022.

work one needs to be double dedicated” and to “believe in our own work to the fullest.”⁵³ Kent took comfort in her artist friends that explored similar convictions writing that “there is no such thrill as finding yourself accepted in a gathering of ideas, either as host or onlooker.”⁵⁴



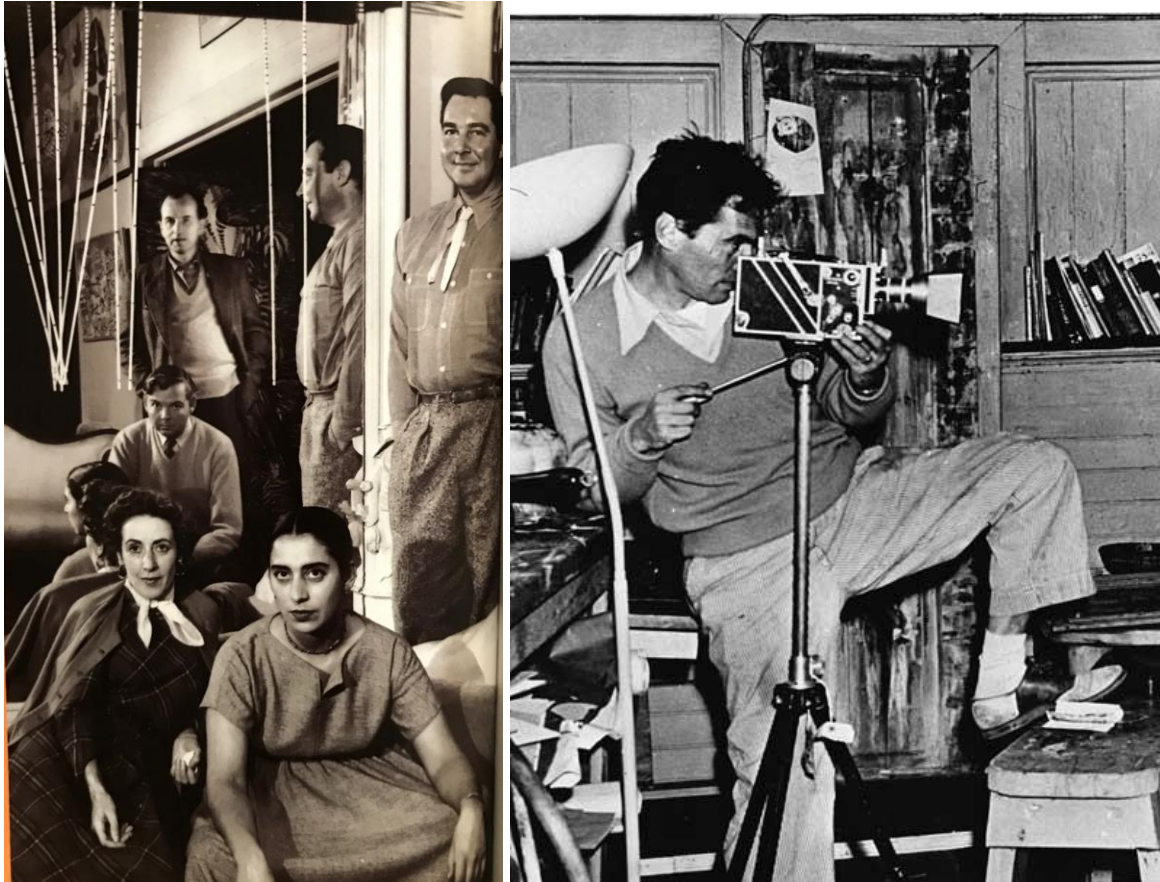
Jewelry made by Adaline Kent, c. 1945

In the summer of 1945 Kent enrolled in Franz Bergmann’s jewelry class at the CSFA. MacAgy had just taken over the job as Director at the school with a faculty in the late 1940s that included David Park, Robert Howard, Charles Howard, Clay Spohn, Jean Varda, Walter Landor, Richard Diebenkorn, Ansel Adams, Claire Falkenstein, and Dorr Bothwell. The CSFA would become a hub of art activity for Kent with her husband teaching, her home across the street, and her studio three blocks away. By 1947 she was on its Board of Directors. Kent and Howard hosted parties featuring the school’s Studio 13 Jazz Band at their studio, housed the CSFA’s visiting artists and

⁵³ Isamu Noguchi to Adaline Kent, [summer] 1944. Kent Family Papers.

⁵⁴ Kent, *Autobiography*. p. 42.

even provided showers, meals, and art conversations for David Park who would go directly from his “graveyard shift” job at the General Cable Corporation to teach his painting class and then return for dinner.⁵⁵



Onslow-Ford, Lee Mullican, Luchita Hurtado, Wolfgang Paalen.....and Frank Stauffacher

Soon after Charles Howard and Madge Knight returned to England in the summer of 1946, a new influx of surrealist artists made their presence known in the Bay Area. Gordon Onslow-Ford, Lee Mullican, Wolfgang Paalen, and Luchita Hurtado would soon be in Mill Valley close to surrealist Jean Varda’s “Vallejo” ferry boat at Sausalito’s Gate 5 houseboat community, while filmmakers James Broughton, Sidney Peterson, and Frank Stauffacher launched “Art In

⁵⁵ Boas, *David Park*. p. 85.

Cinema,” program sponsored by the CSFA and SFMA. “Art In Cinema” showed “a series of avant-garde films in modern art forms—surrealist, non-objective, abstract, fantastic.” The November 1947 program screened films by Viking Eggeling, Joris Iven, and Kenneth Anger’s *Escape Episode* along with Robert Howard’s *Meta*, a “slow motion filming of the action of color dropped into a pan of water.”⁵⁶



Jean Varda’s *Vallejo* ferryboat, Gate 5, Sausalito

Kent spent nearly three weeks in New York in March 1947, ostensibly to drop off two sculptures, *Compass* and *Witch*, at the Betty Parson’s Gallery. Initially she “wanted no interruptions between me and NY,” so had not told many people of her visit, and yet her brother-in-law Henry Howard and his wife, her good friend, Jane Berlandina had found out of her arrival and “well, I’m going to have dinner with them tomorrow...but in the meantime so many adventures.”⁵⁷ Kent reported on an art opening at 24 55th Street and to her “joy and astonishment the first thing I saw was a mosaic J.R. [Jeanne Reynal], then a bronze [Helen] Phillips, a plaster [David] Hare, a slate Noguchi, paintings of Gorky, Matta, Lam...Pretty soon the artists began to

⁵⁶ *Art In Cinema*, Fall Program Flyer. SFAI Archives; and Edwards, *Jennie V. Cannon* . p. 449.

⁵⁷ Adaline Kent to Robert Howard, March 3, 1947.

come in—our friends.” Also at the opening was Sidney Janis, a mutual friend of the MacAgys.⁵⁸ Kent noted that “Nobody there seemed to speak English and the costumes ranged from migrants, through Cossacks and magicians to nudity covered with a pink open coat. Gallerie Hugo it was.”⁵⁹ This Hugo Gallery exhibit titled *Blood Flames* was pivotal in the installation world, based not only on the array of artists involved, but because of its unconventional installation designed by Frederick Kiesler.



Kent was thrilled to drop off her sculptures at Betty Parson’s, explaining “and there they stay in a gallery in New York. She has a show of Rothko now, very impressive, one of the best shows, perhaps the most appealing one-man show I’ve seen here.”⁶⁰ Kent visited New York’s MOMA and “saw d’Harnoncourt and he was most pleasant, sent you regards.”⁶¹ Kent and Betty Parsons then took a taxi to the Whitney Museum’s opening of their 1947 Annual where she “met more old friends” and afterwards “we went to a party at [Whitney Director] Juliana Force’s, upstairs, good drinks, much ‘rich junk’ and people.”⁶² Kent rounded out her time in New York with visits

⁵⁸ Janis’ son, Conrad Janis played trombone in the CSFA Studio 13 Jass Band with MacAgy, David Park, Elmer Bischoff, and others.

⁵⁹ Kent to Howard, March 3, 1947.

⁶⁰ Adaline Kent to Howard, March 11, 1947.

⁶¹ Ibid. Rene d’Harnoncourt was Director of the NYMOMA from 1949-1967.

⁶² Ibid.

to the Hayters and a dinner with “the Rothkos”⁶³ and a final night gathering with friends and “a conglomerate mass such as only Minnie [refers to herself] could be involved in...with too many martinis...and what a hangover.”⁶⁴ Reflecting on her trip on the train home, Addie wrote that she had “been wanting to be on the train being carried toward you and my precious ones. New York can go on and on and I’ll have no urge to go back like this. I know it is good for a person for freshening an acquaintance with yourself—finding where you really stand as an individual. But it’s not much fun. I can tell you now. Just a treatment.”⁶⁵

Betty Parsons exhibited Kent’s sculpture and Jeanne Reynal (who had moved to New York in 1946) wrote to Kent, “your work at Betty Parson’s looks very well.” Four months later, Reynal reported to Kent that “your sculpture looked VERY well indeed at the Whitney which is on the whole a large and disparate show with good work standing out very clearly” as she highlighted other “notable sculpture by Helen Phillips, Noguchi, and Bob Howard.”⁶⁶ Howard’s sculpture was consistently exhibited at the Whitney between 1948 and 1956.

In the Spring of 1948 MacAgy and Kent telegrammed Stanley Hayter and Helen Phillips details about their \$1,000 summer teaching appointments at the CSFA “plus the Howard house with backyard offered to you rent free with love...suitable climate and wine included. Also, private studios for each of you at School.”⁶⁷ Hayter taught “Lithography and Etching,” and a “Painting”

⁶³ During both of Rothko’s summer teaching stints at the CSFA in 1947 and 1949, the Rothkos stayed at the Kent home across from the school.

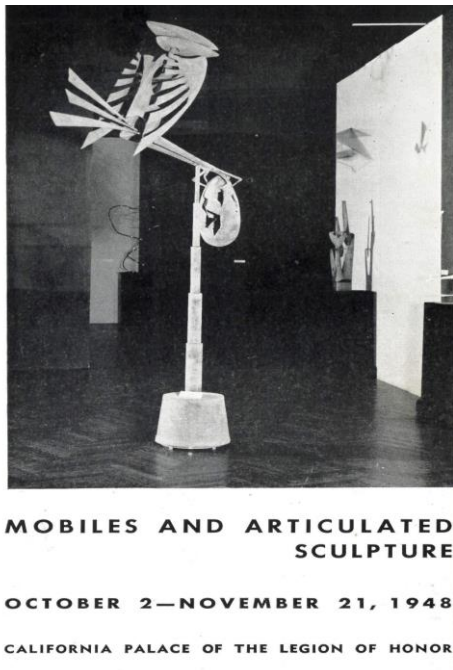
⁶⁴ Adaline Kent to Robert Howard, March 24, 1947.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Jeanne Reynal to Adaline Kent, November 6, 1947; Reynal to Kent, March 10, 1948. Kent Family Papers.

⁶⁷ Adaline Kent and Douglas MacAgy telegram to Stanley Hayter, February 27, 1948. SFAI Archives.

class. Kent, along with her friends Jo Landor (wife of the designer Walter Landor), Lee Mullican, and “Mrs. Onslow-Ford” enrolled in Hayter’s lecture course on “Contemporary Art.”



While Douglas MacAgy promoted a free creative arts environment with a dynamic faculty at the CSFA, Jermayne MacAgy encouraged the avant-garde with her work at the Legion of Honor. For her show *Mobiles and Articulated Sculpture* she included Kent’s string and papier mache sculpture *Truth to Tell* along with kinetic work by Alexander Calder; Clay Spohn’s *Unnamed Object*; Robert Howard’s *Scavenger*, *Phoenix*, and *Semaphor*; David Hare’s *The Magician Game*; Marcel Duchamp’s *6 Roto-Reliefs*; and Claire Falkenstein’s works *Water Reflector* and *Rotating Articulation*.⁶⁸ Kent wrote to her daughter about the opening, that “Gerry MacA [Jermayne MacAgy] organized a show of mobiles and...I have that black papier mache rolly thing, Clay Spohn has 2 crazy twisted things hanging in the air, 3 Calder’s,...and about 10 other strange and lovely things lit up with spotlights, casting shadows. The Bird (Scavenger Bob calls

⁶⁸ California Palace of the Legion of Honor. *Bulletin of the California Palace of the Legion of Honor Museum, San Francisco*. Vol. 6 no. 7, October 2-November 7, 1948. San Francisco: The Museum, 1948

him) towers over the show. People are going to go crazy one way or the other about it.”⁶⁹

Jermayne MacAgy was particularly pleased with Kent’s work describing how the “witty...sculpture...moves by a punch from the hand and goes into the same kind of action as a toy which, no matter how hard rocked, defies any attempt to knock it over.”⁷⁰ The *New York Times* reported on the show specifically mentioning how Kent and Howard “are conducting successful experiments in abstract form, tensions and balances.”⁷¹ The kinetic and visual movements of the exhibition prompted a film made by Falkenstein who screened it for friends a couple of years later in Paris. Dorr Bothwell reported on the film, “I loved your mobile tho not too happy about the movie of it...Claire seems to be booming along...she also plans to do a movie on Chartres cathedral, Love Dorr.”⁷²

In the late 1940s a new artist community developed along the Marin waterfront across the Golden Gate Bridge in Sausalito, stretching from the downtown to the old WWII shipyards to the north. Kent had always maintained her ties to her home county, designing sets for local theater. In 1949 both Kent and Howard were part of an inaugural show at the “Contemporary Gallery” in Sausalito that included paintings by other CSFA artists like Richard Diebenkorn, Frank Lobdell, George Stillman and others.⁷³

Daughter Ellen’s 1949 graduation from the Cambridge School of Weston in Massachusetts coincided with Kent’s solo opening at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York. After visiting

⁶⁹ Adaline Kent to Ellen Howard, October 4, 1948.

⁷⁰ California Palace of the Legion of Honor. *Bulletin*. 1948.

⁷¹ Aline B. Louchheim, “San Francisco: Division and Vitality,” *New York Times*, October 24, 1948.

⁷² Dorr Bothwell to Adaline Kent, December 17, 1950.

⁷³ “New Sausalito Art Gallery to Open Next Sunday,” *San Rafael Independent Journal*, April 18, 1949, p. 2.

Ellen, Kent wrote that it “is exciting seeing shows, people, streets, etc. (Betty Parsons has been reassuring so I feel better).” She had dinner with the Hayters and visited “Rothko’s School,” but the highlight seemed to have been visiting Jeanne Reynal’s “treasure house” where she viewed many of Reynal’s mosaics “then old fashioned, minerals, objects, and exotic people—dinner—Luchita Paalen, Noguchi...and a lion hunter and some other celebrities...very dreamish.”⁷⁴ For Ellen’s graduation, Kent sent a note “Happy G. Day,” with an illustration of a palm and a *reading*: “You Will Take a Journey, You Have Friends (Fair Weather and Foul Weather), You Will Receive a Package (from the Emporium).”⁷⁵ Clement Greenberg wrote that “Sculpture’s new vitality is again demonstrated by the first show at Betty Parsons of work by Adaline Kent, an artist hitherto unknown to me. That she is [an artist] and more than a promising one.” A month later in the *Partisan Review* Greenberg wrote positively of the “nine or ten young sculptor-constructors who...contribute something ambitious, serious and original...they all show freshness, inventiveness, and positive taste...” Included along with Kent were David Smith, Theodore Roszak, David Hare and Noguchi.⁷⁶

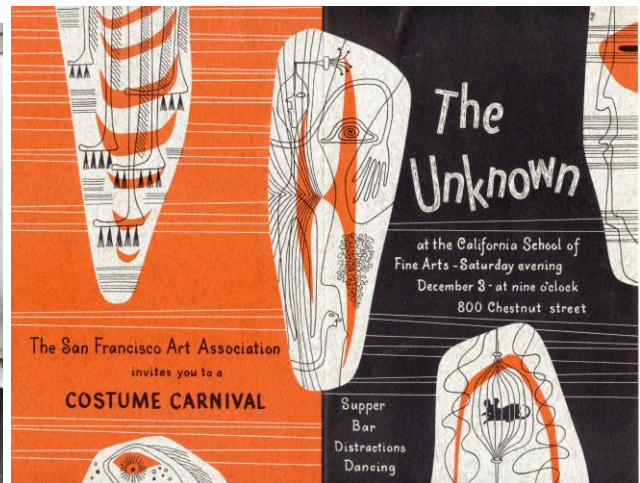
The decade of the 1940s ended with a revival of the artist-generated galas that had been annual events sponsored by the CSFA in the 1930s and known as Parallias after the ancient Roman festivals of the same name. These themed costume parties featuring elaborate pageants vanished after the 1939 edition, “Fantasia Pacifica.” The 1949 version drew its inspiration from a theme concocted by Clay Spohn and Mark Rothko, “The Unknown.” The flier for the “Costume

⁷⁴ Adaline Kent to Ellen Howard, May 1949; Adaline Kent to Robert Howard, May 3, 1949.

⁷⁵ Adaline Kent to Ellen Howard, June 1949.

⁷⁶ Clement Greenberg, “Review of Exhibitions of Adaline Kent and William Congdon,” *The Nation*, May 28, 1949; Clement Greenberg, “The New Sculpture,” *Partisan Review*, June 1949, both in Greenberg, Clement, and John O’Brian. *The Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol. 2*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. p. 311, 312, 319.

Carnival” listed “Supper, Bar, and Distractions, Dancing.” Spohn’s “Museum of Little Known and Unknown Objects” consisted of enigmatic fugitive material that were assembled with the assistance of Kent and Richard Diebenkorn. Costumed revelers entered through a previously unused door to the school and were ushered through the dark to a “house of cards” ball room that had been decorated by Howard and David Park. Jeanne Varda was disguised as King Neptune, Howard portrayed a “keyhole,” and “Addie Kent wore a black leotard with a tail and covered in moss and leaves.” “Two Bands thumped out hot jazz....and nobody went to the hospital or jail.”⁷⁷



“The Museum of Little Known and Unknown Objects,” at “The Unknown” themed gala, 1949

In February, 1950 curator Jermayne MacAgy asked 17 artists to “create drawings...with the only stipulation” being “the drawing could not measure less than six feet in its greater dimension” giving a nod to artists proclivity for “large scale presentations.” Kent’s work, “*Rites of Spring*” measured 2 feet 11 ¾ inches by 6 feet 8 inches.” The exhibition, simply titled *Large Scale Drawings by Modern Artists* also included Richard Diebenkorn, Elmer Bischoff, Robert Howard,

⁷⁷ San Francisco *Examiner*, December 4, 1949; San Rafael *Independent Journal*, December 6, 1949; San Francisco *News* [n.d. in clipping file, SFAI Archives: Parties, 1949]

David Park, Clay Spohn, and Claire Falkenstein's *Motion-Image* of ink and paint on a 1 foot 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ inch by 23 feet 3 inch "scroll on drafting linen."⁷⁸

In the summer of 1950, Kent and Howard were invited to exhibit at the obscure, "MetArt Gallery," a student-run space that had been masterminded by Clyfford Still. The exhibition, of course, featured "Paintings by Clyfford Still" but also made room for a number of CSFA affiliated artists, Diebenkorn, James Budd Dixon, George Stillman, Frank Lobdell, and others.⁷⁹

Kent's circle of artist friends are highlighted in a 1952 letter to Galen in which she describes going with Howard to Varda's Vallejo ferryboat at Gate 5 in Sausalito where he "put on a little show just for us—a shadow picture of various junk spotlighted by different filters from behind a sheet hanging from the ceiling. It was unbelievably beautiful, transient and changeable....and then to Mill Valley for supper with the Onslow-Fords, Lee Mullican and Luchita Paalen—we heard Alan Watts (friend of theirs) speak on Zen Buddhism on the FM radio and had a gourmet evening in all ways. A day to remember." She continues that at Gate 5 "yesterday was Harry Partch's day. He has those fabulous instruments...and he did play them, solo...there were crowds of colorful people including all the Gate 5 artists, huddling and gabbing and drinking wine between the demonstrations."⁸⁰ Kent was particularly close with Jacqueline Onslow-Ford as revealed in a very kind condolence note from her to Kent when Kent's mother died in 1952. Counted among the close friends of Onslow-Ford were not only Kent, Robert Howard, Stanley Hayter, Helen Phillips, and Charles Howard, but also Morris Graves, Kenneth Rexroth, Philip

⁷⁸ California Palace of the Legion of Honor. *Large Scale Drawings by Modern Artists*. San Francisco: California Palace of the Legion of Honor, 1950.

⁷⁹ *Metart* flyer, June 17-July 4, 1950, SFAI Archives.

⁸⁰ Adaline Kent to Galen Howard, February 23, 1952.

Lamantia, Sidney Peterson, James Broughton, Frank Stauffacher, Alan Watts, and Harry Partch, plus the Dynaton surrealist artists, Paalen, Luchita Hurtado, and Lee Mullican—a rich blend of artists, poets, philosophers, filmmakers and bon vivants.⁸¹

Kent's and Howard's love of the Sierra is apparent in Kent's camping journals with descriptions of places like Desolation Lakes, about which she writes, "many lakes—Bob caught fish. I read and gazed. Thunder, lightning and hail and Bob caught more fish."⁸² On a 1953/1954 trip to Rome, Greece, Egypt and France with 22-year-old daughter Ellen, they traveled by bus, boat, and bicycles "lovely Bianchis complete with bells, lights, locks" and immersed themselves in Greek, Roman, and Egyptian antiquities under the guidance of and with "extraordinary hospitality" from "friends of friends" like Jean Varda and Dr. Leo Eloesser.⁸³ In Paris they met up with the Hayters as well as Charles Howard and Madge Knight. Kent and Charles Howard roamed the corridors of the Louvre. They also visited Claire Falkenstein's studio, "bursting with new works, sculpture, lithographs, construction...we take her to lunch...and hear much gossip news of Paris art world."⁸⁴ Returning to New York City Kent and Howard visited Reynal where they had "a session around the kitchen table" after seeing Reynal's and her husband's work, the African-American painter, Thomas Sills.⁸⁵

Upon their return from Europe Kent and Howard opened their studios and "invited 1000's of people, mostly artists and doctors" at which Howard showed his recent travel movies: "We are

⁸¹ Susan Anderson, "A Journey Into the Sun: California Artists and Surrealism," in Paul Karlstrom, *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900-1950*.p. 203, 209.

⁸² Adaline Kent, "Facts 1950 Trip." Kent Family Papers.

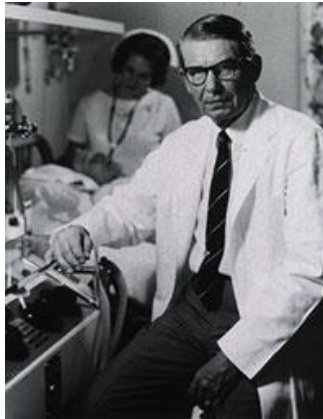
⁸³ Dr. Leo Eloesser was a noted San Francisco thoracic surgeon who had treated Frieda Kahlo.

⁸⁴ Adaline Kent, *Egypt-Paris Journal*, March 5, 1954.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* March 7, 1954.

going to give the people beer, wine, etc. in paper cups after they've used up the glasses—and simple snacks—and then maybe some jazz on the phonograph.”⁸⁶

Kent's correspondence included commentary on contemporary political events criticizing Eisenhower's inept response to Joe McCarthy during the Army-McCarthy hearings, calling Ike “a stupid weak parent saying naughty naughty to a big bully—I hope you are registered to vote?”⁸⁷



Stanford Hospital at Clay & Webster in SF....and Kent's doctor, Frank Gerbode

After another severe bout with asthma in 1955, Kent found herself in Stanford Hospital, at the time located at Clay and Webster Streets in San Francisco's Pacific Heights, where she received “cortisone...it is indeed a miracle drug for beside smoothing out all the asthma, it has made my hand feel so much better I forgot there was anything wrong.”⁸⁸ That spring Kent and Howard went to Jean “Varda's party for his new Greek bride—they are barbecuing a whole animal out among the driftwood and cultch at the entrance to the gang plank. I hear the bride is very young

⁸⁶ Adaline Kent to Galen Howard, May 2, 1954.

⁸⁷ Adaline Kent to Ellen Howard, May 17, 1954.

⁸⁸ Adaline Kent to Galen Howard, February 12, 1955.

and speaks only Greek, she probably won't think anything is odd, not even the hordes of loving friends Varda has..."⁸⁹ Kent's close connections with Onslow-Ford, Ruth Asawa and Noguchi motivated her to take "a class in calligraphy taught by a non-English-speaking Zen Japanese. This Zen Buddhism is attractive—a way that might conceivably lead toward peace....I also got a little book light enough for the ruck sack and profound enough for weeks! It fits in with other ideas that seem important to art."⁹⁰ Evidence of this thinking is reflected in her letter to daughter Galen that "Noguchi came to lunch last week—giving off idea sparks."⁹¹ Kent used a sports metaphor for calligraphy noting how "the pen is one of my favorite tools—when it gets to the point of 'freedom with discipline in lettering.' It is something like fencing."⁹²



Adaline Kent, standing next to Ruth Asawa with calligraphy teacher, Hodo Tobase

Kent and Howard kept in close touch with the most current of San Francisco art happenings, most notably in the mid-1950s with their connections with the legendary "6 Gallery" organized by CSFA artists Wally Hedrick, Deborah Remington, Hayward King, David Simpson, John Allen Ryan and the poet Jack Spicer. In October 1955, Allen Ginsberg first read *Howl* at "The 6"

⁸⁹ Adaline Kent to Galen Howard, "Easter Sunday" [1955]. Varda married the artist Chryssa in 1955.

⁹⁰ Adaline Kent to Galen Howard, July 19, 1955.

⁹¹ Adaline Kent to Galen, November 3, 1955.

⁹² Ibid.

which was located at 3119 Fillmore. In November, Robert Howard was included in The 6 Gallery's second annual group show along with Hedrick, Jay DeFeo, Roy DeForest, Fred Martin, Bill Morehouse, and James Weeks.⁹³ Kent's close connection with The 6 Gallery co-founder, Hayward King is obvious from a letter to daughter Ellen who was in Paris in 1955. Kent reminded Ellen to send her "best to Hayward" who was on a Fulbright grant studying at the Sorbonne at the time.⁹⁴

The *New York Times* wrote a very favorable review of "the more than forty works" that Kent showed at the Betty Parsons Gallery in April 1956: "Adaline Kent, in her modestly scaled sculptures brings both humor and poetry to the medium."⁹⁵

Throughout the next year Kent continued to exhibit, take classes in calligraphy, mingle with artist friends, explore nature, and make art. After her death in a car accident in West Marin on March 24, 1957 Robert Howard received condolence letters and messages from Beatrice Judd Ryan, Clay Spohn, Harry Partch, Gordon Onslow-Fort, Jeanne Reynal and many more. Ansel Adams wrote, "...so many years of friendship—just knowing you both were here and there and always in our hearts....one can not forget, and one is always grateful for it."⁹⁶ An *Adaline Kent Memorial Exhibition* was held at the San Francisco Museum of Art in March and April of 1957 which then traveled to the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York during September and October.

⁹³ Natsoulas/Novelozo Gallery. *Lyrical Vision: The 6 Gallery, 1954-1957: Exhibition January 12, 1990-February 28, 1990*. Davis, Calif: Natsoulas Novelozo Gallery, 1989. p. 87.

⁹⁴ Adaline Kent to Ellen Howard, November 14, 1955.

⁹⁵ *New York Times*, April 13, 1956.

⁹⁶ Ansel Adams to Robert Howard, March 25, 1957

Jermayne MacAgy along with Alice Kent and Robert Howard published *Autobiography: From the Notebooks and Sculpture of Adaline Kent* in 1958.



It must have been difficult for Adaline Kent's close friend Ellen Bransten to write about her in the past tense for the May 1, 1957 San Francisco Art Association *Newsletter*, "you were a wiry young girl on a flying trapeze who, when tired of sculpture would swing on the rings overhead in your studio and barely miss the latest piece of sculpture beneath your feet." Bransten composed this as a piece of correspondence, writing "Dear Addie, We are writing you an informal letter as evidence of how much we miss you. We cannot write you an ordinary farewell because you were an extraordinary person who will live as vital in memory as in actuality. You will be with us as long as artists exist in this community; as long as laughter, conviction and a faith to fight for is vital to our way of life."⁹⁷

⁹⁷ San Francisco Art Association *Newsletter*, May 1, 1957.

