

# THE EAST BAY MONTHLY

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## ART

### Slow and go

If the classic landscape tradition in painting and photography sought pristine natural beauty, especially in the American West, an alternative tradition arose in the 1960s, as photographers began to examine banal, industrial civilization. Now, many artists explore the fraught relationship between nature and culture.

In her photography, drawing, and video work over the past five years, Johnna Arnold has focused on Bay Area freeways, exploring the global through the local. Her latest show, *In/Finite Potential*, is a suite of 16 large-format color photos of roadways that are practically invisible, "underappreciated," Arnold says.

She finds the picturesque in I-80, as it winds past a Hercules oil refinery, a Rodeo wall of fake rock, or Oakland's dockyard cranes; in Highway 101, at the Marin City Rainbow Tunnel and at a soundwall doorway in Burlingame; in I-680, as a speeding train dissolves into a shimmering blur; and in I-880, seen through Berkeley's Aquatic Park at dusk, the black trees and their reflections bisected by a line of vehicles,



Freeway art.

presumably stalled by gridlock.

Arnold's deliberate, stable compositions are the result of her careful consideration of these sites, along with the demands of her tripod-mounted 4-by-5-inch view camera, and long exposure times (as phantom vehicles and streaked taillights

attest); her methods and images hark back to photography's first century. Arnold breaks from the classical tradition, however, by inserting herself, in various guises, into the landscapes: as a climbing or sailing participant in an unknown narrative; as a solitary observer; and even as a ghostly shadow cast on concrete walls.

The pleasure of recognizing Arnold's sites is doubled by the anticipation of spotting Arnold reacting to the location; Cindy Sherman's early faux-cinema metamorphoses could also be influences. Also on view: two marker-on-mylar drawings of freeway cloverleaf overpasses and a digital projection (presented within a yurt-like felt structure) of the artist, carefully traversing a small planet, corralled by a ring of traffic.

*In/Finite Potential*, through May 18, Traywick Contemporary, 895 Colusa Ave., Berkeley; (510) 527-1214 or traywick.com.

—DeWitt Cheng

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