

VISUAL ART

WEDNESDAY, JULY 18, 2012

Jeremy Fish provided visual love letter to San Francisco



BY SARAH BURKE | STAFF

I found the heart of San Francisco. In fact, I went inside it. I took the 71 bus line down Haight Street and got off at Fillmore Street then walked to 218. After going through the glass door, there it was. Black and gray and twice my height, it had arteries like roots and ventricles like sewer pipes with a familiar bunny popping out the end of one. In the center was an arched entryway, inviting San Francisco citizens inside, but only those who were willing to fall in love — those like Jeremy Fish.

As part of his exhibit “Where Hearts Get Left,” iconic San Francisco-based artist **Jeremy Fish** transforms the art gallery Fifty24SF into a visual love letter to his favorite city: the one by the bay. The show, presented by Upper Playground, consists of 50 small black-and-white drawings, six paintings, six screen prints, four sculptures and a mural installation that gives one the experience of walking into a huge, anatomical heart.

Although Fish was born in upstate New York, he’s lived in San Francisco for almost 20 years and knows it just as well as anyone who was breastfed there. With a start in designing skateboard graphics, Fish has since become known for his clean, recognizable illustrations that synthesize the San Francisco aesthetic into loveable, whimsical illustrations.

At the exhibit opening, where Fish sat in an alcove and intricately signed limited edition books for an endless line of adorers, he told me that he did the show because he credits a lot of his success to his coming of age in San Francisco.

“When I first moved here I wasn’t really that good at what I’m doing now,” he said.

It was the relationships that he formed with fellow artists in San Francisco and others at the skateboard company where he worked that helped him find his direction. Moving there at 19, San Francisco shaped the adult he became, and ultimately, the artist that he is today.

“I think part of the reason that I do these kinds of shows, where I really want to like give something back, is ‘cause I feel like I wouldn’t have had this career if I had stayed in New York, where I’m from,” he said. “I feel very grateful to this city for what I have, and my life, and I didn’t expect any of it when I moved here.”

Fish's drawings articulate his appreciation for San Francisco with charm, wit and relatability. Each had an instantly recognizable Jeremy Fish aesthetic, cumulating into an epic ode to the beloved idiosyncrasies of San Francisco. One features the notorious Bush Man of Fisherman's Wharf hiding behind branches, another features a "super burrito" wearing a cape surrounded by the signs of all the best Mexican joints in the Mission and another is a caricature of San Francisco's cityscape wearing Wilson's famous beard. Chinatown, Lower Haight, North Beach and Fillmore each warrant their own lines in the poem, pastiches of each neighborhood's quirky characteristics emblazoned with beautifully-scripted banners. Meanwhile, reoccurring elements, such as the cityscape, skulls, anatomical hearts, bears and other animals, make the collection perfectly cohesive.

Fish combines familiar and fanciful elements in each depiction such that every drawing constitutes a visual poem in itself as well. For instance, in one drawing the city's most iconic buildings emerge from a winged anatomical heart with streets running through the ventricles and the fog forming a cloudy halo above it. The bottom of the heart is encased in the hull of a ship with waves beneath it. Every piece of imagery is molded together into a finished design that's satisfyingly symmetrical. Most are even framed with drawn, Sailor Jerry-style leaves and San Francisco and California logos in the upper corners.

To someone who has never been to San Francisco, the pieces in the exhibit would be a mere display of impressive illustration skills, but the icons and legends that Fish employs make the collection sentimental and personal for any native. Viewing the exhibit is like joining in on a massive inside joke with everyone else in the city or singing along to a song that everyone knows — and when you leave, be prepared to leave your heart behind.

Source: <http://www.dailycal.org/2012/07/18/jeremy-fish-provides-visual-love-letter-to-san-francisco/>