

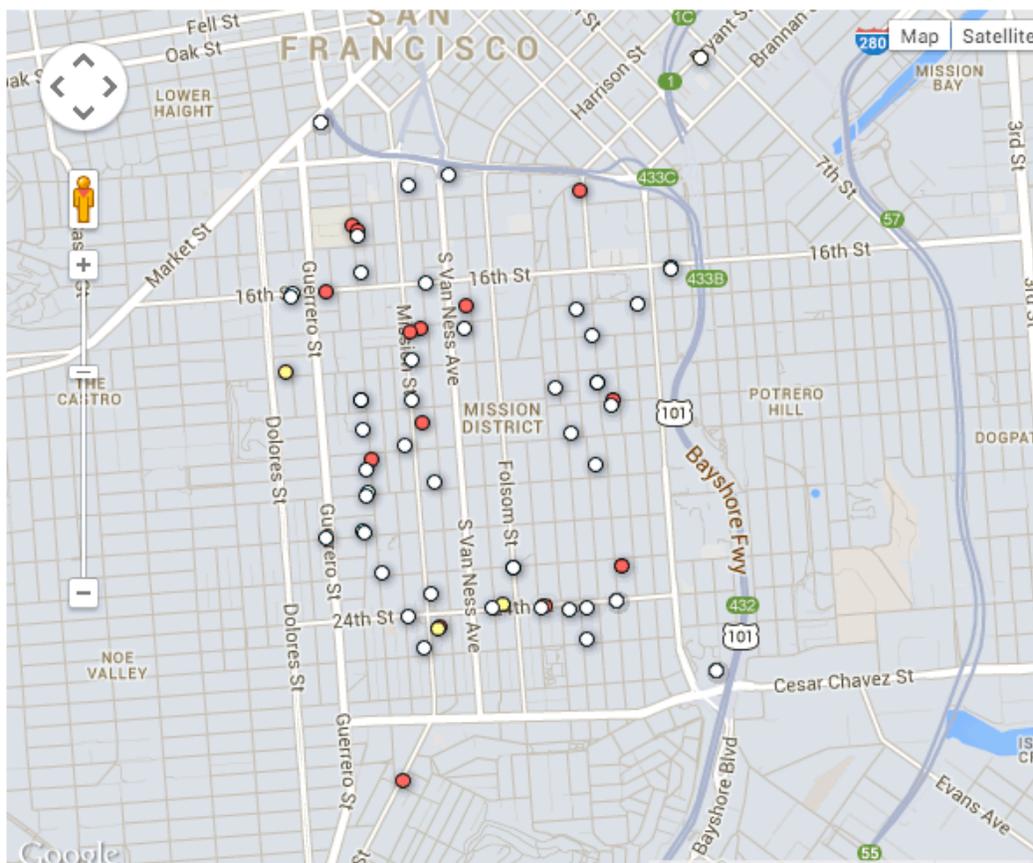


MISSION LOCAL.

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Mission Galleries Closing Amid Boom

by Emily Gibson
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A map of the Mission's galleries and art spaces. Red indicates a gallery that has closed, yellow indicates a space that has relocated and the remaining open galleries are marked with a white icon. Click on an icon for additional gallery information.

Sarah Hotchkiss and Kellie Flint knew that Southern Exposure's gallery guide was out of date, but it wasn't until they sat down to review the list of art spaces recently that they realized how much had changed.

It took just minutes for the 2010 Mission Arts Trail Guide to become covered in ink as they crossed out gallery after gallery, marked others "moved" or "replaced," and labeled some with simply a question mark.

S O U T H E R N E X P O S U R E

At least 14 galleries and art spaces have closed in the Mission in the last few years, and at least three have relocated as rents have become increasingly high.

“There is always good and bad,” said artist Jeremy Sutton, who has a studio on Bryant Street. For him, the influx of the wealthier tech crowd has translated into increased income. “Now professional artists are earning a living. It is good when the economy picks up and people have the money to spend on art.”

Sutton has been riding out the boom successfully, but his art is also relevant to the Mission’s new residents: he uses apps to generate works on an iPad. Sutton’s digital paintings have been so successful that they have earned him a spot at the de Young Museum’s Friday Nights, where he will be showcasing the process in November.

He says the 40 or so other artists in his building at 1890 Bryant Street, where Sutton has worked since 2006, are doing similarly well.

Other spaces have proven more vulnerable. Guerrero Gallery’s widely mourned announcement that it would be closing this month was surprising because it was exactly the sort of spot you would expect to benefit from the Facebook IPO. Young and well-dressed Missionites crowded into its final exhibition and interest in Ben Venom’s quilted heavy metal T-shirts ran high.

And yet, it wasn’t enough. The gallery cited changes in the city’s landscape as the reason for their need to move on. It wasn’t the first to leave. Other recent casualties include the Michael Rosenthal and Encantada Gallery on Valencia, and Triple Base on 24th Street.

Individual artists have also faced the new rent realities. Mission artist Rene Yañez, who founded the Mission Cultural Center and the Galería de la Raza, is currently facing eviction from his San Jose Avenue home under the Ellis Act.

Allyson Seal, who has a studio at Art Explosion, said that despite the greater presence of the tech crowd at Art Explosion’s annual open studios last month, Seal didn’t sell anything.

“Art Explosion is always full, but this year it was a very different crowd – palpably younger. There was more of the Google, Apple, Facebook crowd. There was a different feel to it.”

Seal sees artists adapting by redefining what constitutes a gallery – primarily by setting up hybrid art spaces that double as retail stores. She says that selling more commercial items such as greeting cards provides owners of these spaces with a steady stream of revenue to support a small gallery space. The art also tends to be more affordable than traditional gallery spaces.

“It’s not that the shops are trying to fill the gallery void, but their style is not high-end, it’s more affordable. This is what is sticking around.”

Fewer galleries here, however, has not meant an end to new gallery space. Downtown galleries such as Catharine Clark and Hosfelt are finding their way to Potrero Hill and some are calling Utah Street a new arts district. For those more traditional galleries where paintings by Chris Doyle and Kara Maria can sell for much more than the price of a greeting card, the rents in the neighborhood are a bargain.