

playa jewelry. Pendants and badges tend to dominate the Burning Man output. As the popularity of the event has grown (roughly 70,000 people attended in 2016), many artists have turned to mass production, particularly in cast metals such as aluminum, silver, bronze, and pewter.

Boston-based Oasis 47, a "theme camp" organized by Christians, has run jewelrymaking workshops at Burning Man for more than a decade. Since 2007, Dr. Sumner Silverman has carved wax pendants based on each year's announced theme. They are cast in bronze, with one embellished side and negative cells on the reverse to receive colored resins. For three hours each day, "burners," as participants call themselves, can embellish and personalize a casting with resins for a cloisonné-like effect. Pieces over the years have included a horseshoe crab and a pomegranate.

Artist Thomas Mann attended his first Burning

Man gathering in 2014. The Fuller exhibition includes several of his stamped or die-cut pieces, as well as a more complex hand-fabricated pendant. In the foreword to the book, Mann writes of the freedom he felt creating work to gift rather than sell. By not having to attach a price to a piece, it became pure self-expression to bestow on another burner.

The Fuller exhibition runs the risk of resembling an anthropological display of tribal art. As beautiful or witty as many of the pieces are, the artifacts lack cultural context on their own. But George Post's photographs of Burning Man festivals over the decades provide precisely that surround and sense of purpose to the jewelry. They are documentary in the best sense of the word, capturing the spirit and ethos of a transient yet recurring event.

*Critics Patricia Harris and David Lyon live in Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

## Suzanne Pugh: Post Pastoralia

City College Art Gallery, San Francisco  
1.17.17 – 2.8.17

Velvet da Vinci Gallery, San Francisco  
2.24.17 – 3.12.17

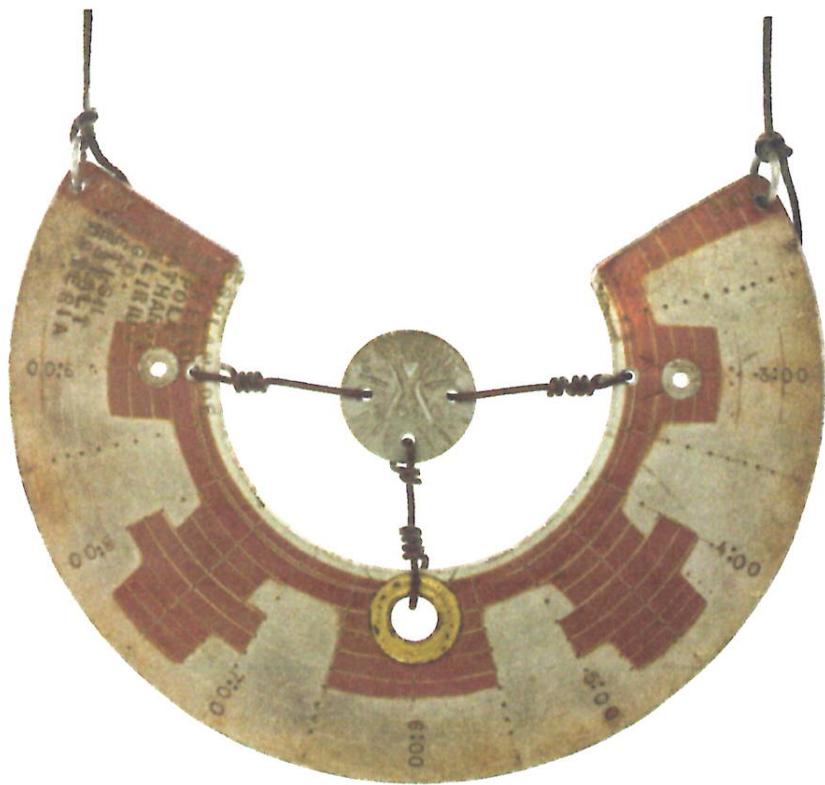
by Carolyn Tillie

"What do we lose when we lose language?" With this opening question, Suzanne Pugh's two-venue exhibit, "Post Pastoralia," challenges the viewer by means of more than two dozen forged, cast, and fabricated sculptural pieces in copper, bronze, and steel—all elegantly clothed in a supple

black patina. By exhibiting identical collections of pieces, grouped slightly differently in two contrasting spaces, two startlingly different experiences emerge. The first venue, San Francisco City College's Art Gallery (where Pugh has taught for more than ten years), is spacious and luminous, with open white walls and a structured grid floor; while the second installation—the narrow and industrial adjacent garage at Velvet da Vinci Gallery—gives the work an enigmatic sense of implied purpose.

With her compelling introductory question, Pugh responds to and reflects on loss and the societal process of preserving, discarding, and ultimately changing. Challenging the viewer to see "the lateral relationship between language and skill, the parallel consequences of losing language and losing skill," Pugh's *It's Too Far to Tell* places 12 hollow tube forms upon a makeshift pale table in the City College Gallery. These sigil-like shapes, created with austere and fluid lines, beckon to be touched. These glyphs transform into an alphabet and summon within the viewer a mental re-ordering into phrases and sentences of their own.

Simultaneously, within the Velvet da Vinci garage, a cold concrete slab and brown pressboard walls produce their own atmosphere, akin to a working barn or industrial farm. Here, the same alphabetic shapes are hung horizontally down the stretch of the cavernous space upon cylindrical wooden posts that Pugh created, both supporting the work and becoming an integral aspect of the design. In this setting, the lush brown walls become cowhide and the symbols perhaps unintentionally invoke cattle brands. On the opposite wall of this grouping is *That's Just an Estimate*, shanks of raw rope,

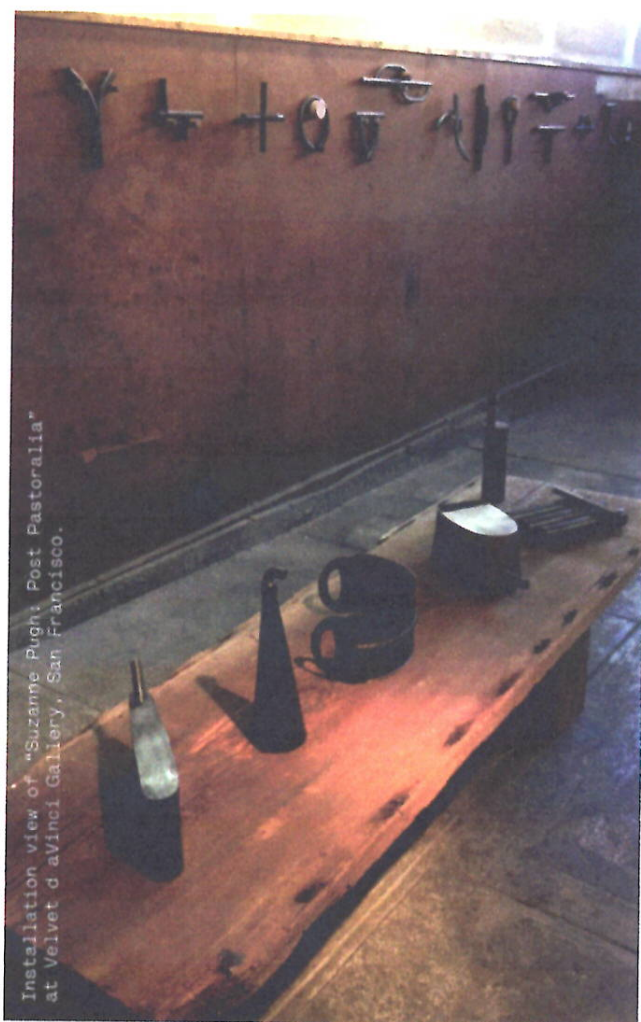


Steve Curl, *BRC Map Breastplate*, 2005, aluminum, hard-drive-disk, 8 1/2 x 6", Photo: George Post





Installation view of "Suzanne Pugh: Post Pastoralia"  
at City College Art Gallery, San Francisco



Installation view of "Suzanne Pugh: Post Pastoralia"  
at Velvet d'Avinci Gallery, San Francisco.

capped in metal and draped in body-length oblong ovals, furthering the cowboy motif.

The stark whiteness of City College Gallery evokes blank pages of paper upon which Pugh writes her dialogue, anecdotes, and questions with her artwork; stimulating the viewer to create their own internal conversation from a language seemingly ancient, yet discernable. This sense of impenetrable mystery transfers to the Velvet da Vinci space, where the long rectangle of a rough-hewn, low wooden bench slices down the center of the room, showcasing a set of larger hollow copper forms entitled *Deadly Forearms*. Distinct from the sigil-like pieces, these six objects suggest artifacts of reverie, conjuring fragments of some vague yet oddly familiar post-apocalyptic machine. The primacy of form pervades these shapes as they complement one another in their boldness, expressing assured strength and intent of purpose, even if that purpose is obscure. At City College, the viewer's mind struggles to define not only the identities

but also the relationships between these engaging objects, as they are deliberately separated and arranged into two groupings that upon spare white stands, very near the floor, force one to peer down from above.

The constructivism that pervades Pugh's work is most evident in her two larger pieces, the pendulum form *Bounty*, and the stirrup-like implements of *A Fire in Advance*, both hanging from substantial loops of draped rope. Hung on blank walls in the City College Gallery, with the same wooden cylinders and without explanatory tags, the viewer must rely on raw perception without falling into the trap of supposing the artist's intent. But in the Velvet da Vinci space, these same objects are purposefully suspended and paired with a third collection, *Bushel*; heavy, brooding, forged steel implements thoughtfully laid out upon a well-used, hefty, square work table. These mysterious utilitarian devices are compellingly nestled within a service elevator, effectively framing the collection. Perhaps harkening to a medieval torture chamber, perhaps agricultural remnants of a futuristic catastrophe, there is no doubt that Pugh is creating a mythology in this work: elusive mysteries that we viewers desire to be privy to and feel oddly comfortable with. There is nothing passive about viewing Suzanne Pugh's art. Her forms are stark and strong, dark and weighty with an existential affirmation to the union of aesthetics. She deftly and subtly creates her own metaphoric language, inviting the viewer to experience and join in a vision that is as elusive as it is compelling.

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