

San Francisco

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'Artists-in-place': Bernal Heights neighbors transform homes into outdoor gallery walk



Kate and Marco Razo, in front of their studio on Bennington Street. | Photos: Nikki Collister/Hoodline



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As museums and art galleries across San Francisco remain closed, local artists have found several new ways to share their talents, from [virtual exhibitions](#) to [outdoor art installations](#).

This weekend, a group of artists in Bernal Heights offered their own take on the phenomenon — transforming their garages, driveways, and windows into makeshift galleries that neighbors could view at a safe distance.

Dubbed "[Artists in Place](#)," the pop-up outdoor art gallery was intended to be "a fun way for neighbors to meet each other," said Laurie Wigham, who organized the event.

Wigham, a longtime Bernal Heights resident, said the idea was inspired by an [art drive-by](#) that took place last month in Long Island.

"A drive-by wouldn't really work here," she said. "But the neighborhood is perfect for a 'walk-by:'"





Artist [Laurie Wigham](#) in front of her house in Bernal Heights.



Wigham's pandemic project: watercolor paintings of the wildflowers she discovered on Bernal Hill.

Wigham reached out to nearby neighbors to gauge interest, and word quickly spread among the hillside neighborhood. A grassroots committee of about 10 neighbors was formed, its members meeting over Zoom to pick a date and organize the event.

News of the event spread by word of mouth over the past five weeks, said Rachel Leibman, who was in charge of the sign-up form and an [interactive map](#) of participating households. By her last count, 120 individuals had signed up to display their artwork, with some registering the night before the event.



Juan Vargas and Edie Williams on their front steps. Vargas's paintings and collages draw inspiration from San Francisco scenery.

A wide variety of art was on display during Saturday's event, including paintings, collages, photography, ceramics, and sculptures.

Leibman's homemade exhibit included a series of vintage watch pieces embroidered onto hand-dyed

SIUK. MOST OF THE WORK ON DISPLAY WAS MADE SINCE THE START OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC, SHE SAID.

"I stopped for a while," she said, citing the initial anxiety of the pandemic. But soon, the urge to create settled back in. "It was a way to return to some sense of normalcy."



Artist [Rachel Leibman](#) turned her front gate into a miniature gallery, showcasing work she created during lockdown.

Some artists were even inspired by the current crisis. [Dianne Platner](#)'s interactive art piece invited neighbors to write the names of Black and minority Americans who had been killed by police, with drawings of some of the victims, like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.



Dianne Platner's portraits of Black people killed by police.

From the start, the organizers had safety in mind. News of the event was intentionally kept local, to avoid too many people crowding the streets. "We wanted to be responsible and safe with social distancing," Wigham said.

In addition to affixing their artwork to garage doors and fences, artists also posted signs asking visitors keep six feet apart and wear masks.





Robert Geshlider and Todd Hanson took face masks to a new level with their performance piece, "Ozymandias."



Ilana Gauss's homemade ceramics included candle holders, bowls, and plates.

The result was an afternoon of art and conversation, with some neighbors catching up and others meeting for the first time.

While many participating households were centered around the south side of Bernal Hill and Cortland Avenue, the outdoor art gallery spanned the entire neighborhood — from Cesar Chavez to Crescent, between Mission Street and the 101 freeway.

Many of the artists told Hoodline they were grateful for an outlet to share their work, especially given the cancellation of art shows and events. Others found inspiration by witnessing the creative output of their neighbors.

"It's wonderful to be able to see what's going on behind all these walls," artist Jill Judd said, gesturing to the houses on her block.





Artwork by Jill Judd.



Jill Judd offers free art kits, containing materials like beads and colored paper, to neighbors of all ages.

Wigham isn't sure if the event will be repeated, but she's happy that Saturday's displays went off without a hitch.

"Our hope is that other neighborhoods might be inspired to do the same," she said.

Neighborhoods
[Bernal Heights](#)

Location
 Cortland Avenue and Andover Street, San Francisco, California 94110, United States, San Francisco, California, 94110, United States, San Francisco, CA

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