

NorthBeachInsideOut

BY ANTHONY F. GANTNER/SPECIAL GUEST COLUMNIST



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Artist Renders a World Ravaged by Nature

S.F. man draws on flood experiences in England, Italy

Before the California Gold Rush of 1849, the San Francisco shoreline was very different from its present configuration.

Then, our northern waterfront ran along the base of Russian Hill and Telegraph Hill, edging inward at what is now Broadway and Battery Street to the heart of the Financial District, water lapping at Montgomery and Jackson streets, then curving around to Folsom Street and out to Rincon Point.

With the discovery of gold, San Francisco became a budding metropolis.

And to help control the city's fast-growing waterfront, a State Lands Commission was established in 1863. Its first task was to supervise the construction of a seawall to maintain the edge of the bay shore from China Basin to the foot of Taylor Street, transforming the northern waterfront from a series of coves, inlets and shallow lagoons into the curving shoreline with which we are presently familiar.

Is our shoreline starting its return to pre-Gold Rush days?

The question is presented by **Anthony Holdsworth**, a visionary painter who has a show, "Cities on the Water," that will

open at the Newmark Gallery next Wednesday.

After slamming a double espresso Wednesday at Caffe Trieste, I walked down Broadway to the Embarcadero and over to Harrison Street to meet with the plein air artist, who was working at the edge of the bay on a large canvas of the waterfront.

Holdsworth was born in Bournemouth, England and moved as a child to Toronto to a house overlooking the Humber River.

When he was 11, he witnessed a catastrophic flood that washed away an entire suburban community in the plain below his house.

A decade later, Holdsworth began painting in Florence, Italy, right after the flood of 1966 — a flood so powerful it ripped the Gates of Paradise, **Lorenzo Ghiberti's** gilded bronze panels of magically atmospheric Old Testament scenes, from the 17-foot high doors of the Florentine Baptistery.

Like thousands of other young people who rushed to Florence's aid, Holdsworth became a "mud angel" and was soon given a job as head of outdoor restoration for the Palace of the Uffizi. His proudest accomplishment was participating in the Green Cloister restoration in the Church of Santa Maria Novella, which ironically was famous for **Paolo Uccello's** representation of the biblical flood.



COURTESY PHOTO

"Across a Hundred Years," oil on canvas, by Anthony Holdsworth.

Holdsworth's flood experiences have surfaced in his newest exhibition, which includes an apocalyptic vision of San Francisco inundated by rising sea levels triggered by global warming. In his "Global Warming Triptych," the first of the three paintings is a wide-angle view of New Montgomery and Market streets, including the McKesson Building and the Hobart Building as they appear today. The second image repeats the same composition, except a massive sea surge is pouring into the intersection. The third

painting depicts the area after it has been abandoned for a century.

There is a "terrible beauty to a disaster," said Holdsworth, quoting poet **William Butler Yeats**. "We are in a real state of denial. San Francisco is a city on the water; we need to visualize the consequences of global warming, then act to prevent it. It's no longer an academic issue. Cities are our greatest cultural achievement, they are dynamic, they change over time, often radically."

I imagined San Francisco's northeastern shoreline before the Gold Rush, then considered Holdsworth's global warming vision for the San Francisco waterfront — a mere two centuries to come full circle.

Here's the Scoop

WHAT: "Cities on the Water," paintings by Anthony Holdsworth
WHEN: 12:30-5:30 p.m. Wednesdays to Saturdays from March 26 to April 19; Reception 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. April 3
WHERE: Newmark Gallery, 251 Post St., suite 412
INFO: 392-3692

Throughout history, the artist and poet, the prophet and the seer have warned society of the dire consequences of selfish human behavior. Holdsworth's disturbing vision urges us to think differently and act now — before the flood.

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