



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Pier 24's 'Looking Forward' is a Delayed Anniversary Show Worth the Wait

By [Sarah Hotchkiss](#)  Aug 10

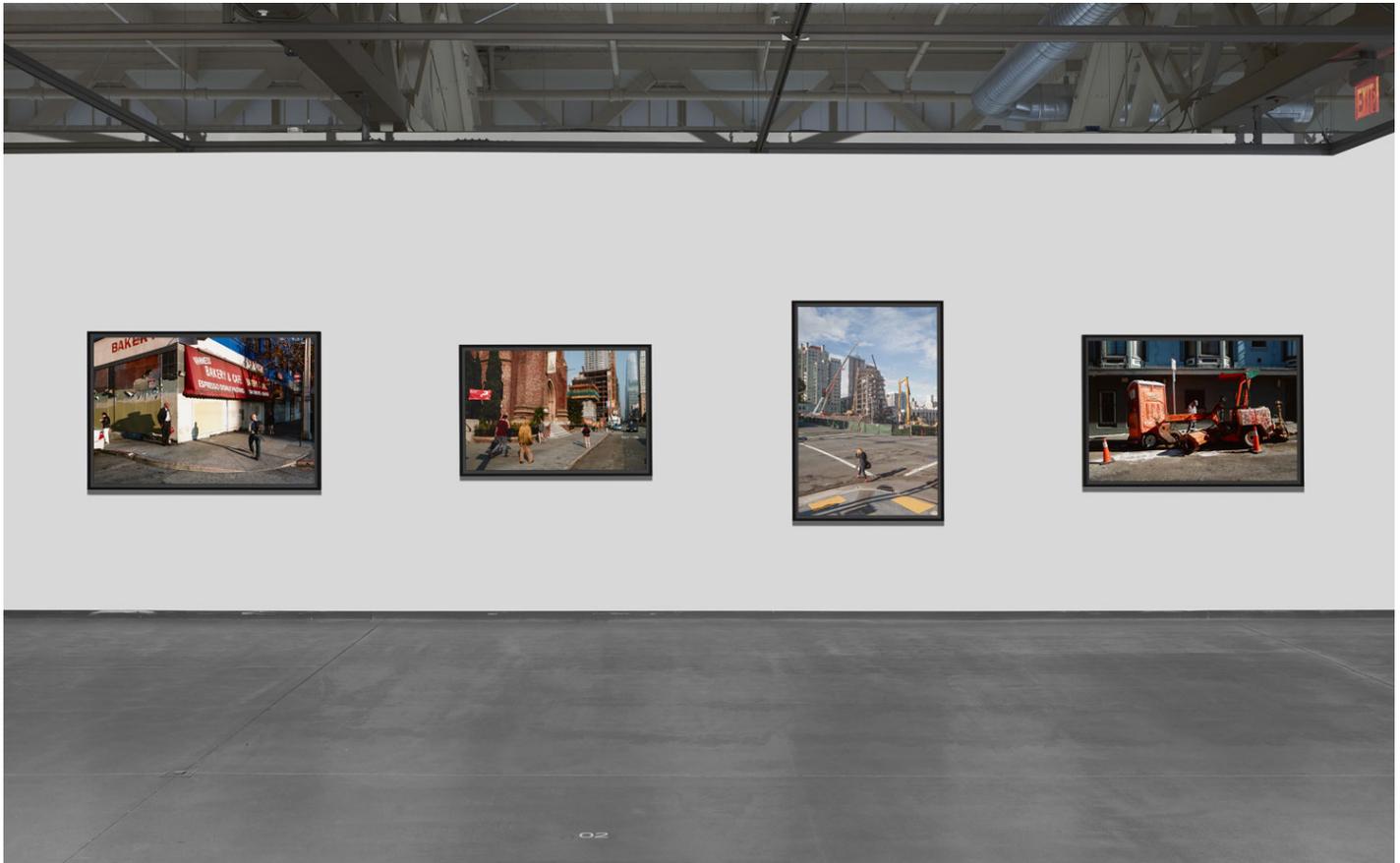
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Chanell Stone, 'In search of a certain Eden,' 2019. (© Chanell Stone, courtesy the artist)

It felt like years since I'd visited Pier 24 when I arrived on a recent weekday morning to view *Looking Forward: Ten Years of Pier 24 Photography*. Wait, it *had* been years. Like many, many things, Pier 24's generally unhurried schedule (their exhibitions can stay up for close to a full year) was further delayed by the pandemic. So while they launched the first half of their 10th anniversary celebration in 2019, this second installment, which opened Aug. 8, has turned into a 12th anniversary celebration. I'm happy to report it was worth the wait.

Pier 24 houses the Pilara Foundation's photography collection, an impressively ever-growing thing, and does a rare thing with its group shows. While there are 16 artists in *Looking Forward*, each is displayed in their own roomy gallery. And in those galleries, we're usually seeing a single body of work, a privileged view that keeps the threads of an artist's approach intact. It's a style of presentation that is as much like a studio visit as it is a museum show.



Daniel Postauer, installation view of 'Boomtown' in the exhibition 'Looking Forward: Ten Years of Pier 24 Photography.' (Photograph by Josef Jacques, courtesy Pier 24 Photography)

The theme of “work collected in the past 10 years” is a pretty loose one, but certain themes and gestures run through the galleries: city life; obscured views; highly staged compositions; fortuitous light. The show opens with images of the Bay Bridge (one wall a grid of found postcards, many depicting the pre-2013 double-decker eastern span), Pier 24's most prominent visual neighbor, and follows photographers [Daniel Postauer](#), [Awoiska van der Molen](#) and [Austin Leong](#) through familiar San Francisco streets.

Postaer's images, from a series called *Boomtown*, feature buildings going up and coming down and the intermingling of office workers and unhoused people on brightly lit, colorful corners. Shadows are crisp and dramatic. Meanwhile, van der Molen's city is moody, photographed in black and white, and empty of people. And Leong's is somewhere between the two: intimate, small-scale images full of odd encounters between technology and city residents. All three depictions of San Francisco are immediately recognizable and true.



Ray K. Metzker, 'Philadelphia (81 DA-2),' from the series 'City Whispers,' 1981. (© Estate of Ray K. Metzker, courtesy Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York)

The exhibition bookends these local views with Ray K. Metzker's high-contrast black-and-white images, mostly from the 1950s and 60s in Philadelphia and Chicago. He captures people lit by the slimmest shafts of sunlight sneaking between tall buildings. "We pluck a few threads from reality and weave them into another reality," Metzker is quoted in the exhibition guide. In Metzker's hands, that "other reality" dwarfs people, casts us as tiny, round figures against a backdrop of urban design that is all hard edges and disorienting reflected light. While Postaer, van der Molen and Leong's work flows out of this 20th century street photography, the distance between their approaches is vast. In their focus on more human-scaled spaces, it's possible to see a contemporary understanding of how the structures of finance and capital have damaged our very fragile lives.

*Looking Forward* is not all cityscapes. Some familiar bodies of work that have made local appearances in recent years feature prominently: **Erica Deeman**'s *The Brown Series*, Daniel Gordon's trompe l'oeil *Table Arrangements*, and Tabitha Soren's *Surface Tension* (recently at the **Mills College Art Museum**). But in the realm of portraiture, it was new-to-me work that was most exciting to see in the context of this collection and exhibition.



Tania Franco Klein, 'Car, Window (Self-portrait),' 2018. (© Tania Franco Klein, courtesy the artist and ROSEGALLERY, Santa Monica)

**Tania Franco Klein**'s *Long Story Short*, which combines framed photographs with prints applied directly to the walls, is reminiscent of Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, hinting at an enigmatic narrative. In cinematic self-portraits, we see a woman on the move across an unpeopled landscape, the artist's face obscured, distorted or too small to decipher. The images

are both poetic and playful. She can't be pinned down: In *Pool, Wig (Self-portrait)*, a blonde wig lies discarded by the water as legs push off the side of the pool.

In the next gallery, one of *Looking Forward's* most impressive displays comes from Oakland photographer **Chanell Stone's** *Natura Negra*. Inserting herself into backyard gardens and sidewalk plantings, Stone makes everyday greenery appear lush and otherworldly. *In search of a certain Eden* shows Stone surrounded from the knee down by giant leaves, creating a kind of magical hoop skirt. Even when trees are not fully visible—seen only as shadows against buildings or through blinds—her subtle black-and-white images hint at movement and rustling leaves.



Chanell Stone, installation view of 'Natura Negra' in the exhibition 'Looking Forward: Ten Years of Pier 24 Photography.' (Photograph by Josef Jacques, courtesy Pier 24 Photography)

It's a far gentler and less alienating view of the built environment than Metzker's precise slivers of light. And it was Stone's vision of city life I most hoped to carry with me as I emerged from Pier 24's cavernous warehouse onto the Embarcadero. But everything I saw in *Looking Forward* was also present in the outside world, whether that was a new appreciation of Treasure Island courtesy of **John Chiara**, or an undamaged car zooming by in stark contrast to Richard Learoyd's burned-out and crumpled vehicles in *Catastrophes*.

Ultimately, this is one of the great outcomes of art viewing, and one that Pier 24 handily achieves with *Looking Forward*: carrying new views into old places.



*'Looking Forward: Ten Years of Pier 24 Photography'* is on view at San Francisco's Pier 24 through May 31, 2023. [Details here.](#)