

Chris Doyle



A Day in Dogpatch, Potrero Hill, and Environs – November 2017

By Brett Yates
November 2017

SF

248 Utah Street
SF, CA 94103
+ 415 399 1439

NY

313 W 14th Street 2F
New York, NY
By appointment only

WEB

www.cclarkgallery.com

In October, my day in and around Dogpatch included an afternoon walk along Mission Creek, guided by informational placards known as the Mission Creek Signs, which were made by schoolchildren to increase awareness of local wildlife. This month, I took a closer look at this aquatic habitat, thanks to the Campus Life Services' Outdoor Programs at the University of California, San Francisco, which, in addition to hiking excursions, camping trips, and standup paddle boarding, offers group kayaking adventures from the UCSF Mission Creek Boathouse at 400 Berry Street.

UCSF's programming is open to the public for a fee, campusliveservices.ucsf.edu. My wife's affiliation with the hospital got us into a two-person kayak for free on a foggy morning that gradually cleared up once we got out on the water. I can hardly think of a nicer way to start one's day in San Francisco. The trip was loosely guided by a group of students from UCSF's physical therapy school, who gave instructions and occasionally checked in with us along the route. Mostly, we were free to paddle around and admire the birds, boats and light on the water. Alongside 20 or so other kayakers, we looped up and down Mission Creek, ventured past McCovey Cove and out onto the Bay for a view of the Downtown skyline, and then circled back through South Beach Harbor, next to the ballpark. Not a particularly arduous journey; just enough exercise to put us in the mood for lunch.

Lately, I've been getting burritos from the Buena Fe Taqueria truck, at 16th and Mississippi streets. I'm not sure when, exactly, this truck materialized in our neighborhood – sometime earlier this year – but it's typically parked at Potrero Hill's northeastern corner from about 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., serving traditional taco truck fare. Their burritos are robust constructions. Although the meats are all tasty, I most often order the camaron (shrimp).

Next, some culture. On the opposite end of the Hill's northern border is the Catharine Clark Gallery, at 248 Utah Street, which until November 11 is running *Hollow and Swell*, by New York artist Chris Doyle. It's free to see, and I'm glad I went. The well-known gallery was, by its own account, "the first commercial gallery in the area with a dedicated media room," which it puts to use for *Hollow and Swell*, whose centerpiece is a ten-minute animation based on *The Course of Empire*, the 19th-century series of paintings by Thomas Cole of the Hudson River School.

Cole charted civilization's progression from agrarian to urban life, and then imagined its collapse. The artist's fatalistic depiction of human ambition begins amid unspoiled natural beauty. By the end, nature has reclaimed the fallen shards of an overpopulated and chaotic city. Doyle's work — a fantastical depiction of today's built environment — complicates Cole's neat narrative. It's no longer so easy to tell where we're headed, or to distinguish progress from self-ruination. The metropolis of Doyle's imagination has a bright Candyland quality that exerts an immediate visual appeal, but it's a troubling place, in which the line between reality and digital imagery has started to blur. An electronic billboard may display a fully lifelike picture of a forest, but the physical materials of the construction industry have become unreal, Tetris-like, blocks that turn traditional townscapes into video game worlds.

At one point, a hamlet of cozy single-family homes is suddenly uprooted and carried away, one by one, on the backs of shadowy workers. In Doyle's video, faceless laborers are always toiling at the fringes of landscapes where they don't seem to belong. Their work often has no clear aim. They may hammer continuously at an object to no effect. Eventually, they themselves may metamorphose into objects or — mirroring the transition back to nature in Cole's series — into plants. Significantly, Doyle's metropolis is surrounded and nearly engulfed by water. It's everywhere, barely contained by a tortuous network of tubes and canals.

Rounding out the exhibition are a pair of watercolor paintings showing the pristine classical grandeur of artifacts within Russia's Hermitage Museum; an additional triptych animation on a smaller screen; and a set of sculptures that embed digital tablets with animated displays within natural materials like branches and stones, seemingly less to emphasize contrast than to suggest compatibility. Right now, we're in the midst of what Cole referred to as "The Consummation of Empire," which he represented as a decadent celebration of mankind's glory, yet perhaps none of us is actually comfortable within this stage. Doyle avoids any obvious optimism or pessimism about where we go from here.

If looking at contemporary art lends you a feeling of personal sophistication, you may, then, be inclined to have a glass of wine before dinner. Coincidentally, I recently visited Dogpatch WineWorks, 2455 Third Street, for the first time. Local oenophiles may know about it, but this urban winery strikes me as something of an undiscovered gem in the neighborhood, despite occupying a huge space in the center of Dogpatch. Principally it functions as a production facility and event space, but once a week — Sunday, from noon till six — it opens its tasting room to the public. For \$22 you get a flight of six wines fermented right here in our backyard; grapes sourced from Napa and Sonoma. The reds and whites made by Dogpatch WineWorks are served only on premises; you can buy a bottle, but not in a liquor store.

Because Dogpatch WineWorks doesn't distribute or, between Monday and Saturday, operate as a wine bar, its business model is a little complicated. Its own wines are made in quantities sufficient to accommodate the weddings that make use of its chic, barrel-lined space, and curious drop-in visitors like me. Otherwise, its equipment and grape-procurement services are hired to boutique commercial labels and for personal winemaking. On the day I checked the place out, party planners were setting up tables and decorations for an ambitious-looking baby shower, but the bartender was still kind enough to let me and my friends in for a tasting.

I've been wine-tasting only once or twice, but Dogpatch WineWorks replicates the wine-country experience quite well, from what I recall of it. Here, as in Napa, there's a knowledgeable and passionate wine industry professional who pours beverages; describes them in casually informative terms; pleasantly seeks to ease your obvious insecurities regarding your lack of wine expertise and undiscerning palate; and tells you interesting facts about wine and winemaking, some of which you'll remember. You'll taste the wine; the wine will taste good. Why drive two hours north?

Lastly, my somewhat scattered itinerary this month takes us back to the opposite side of Potrero Hill for dinner at La Paz, an excellent, friendly, Salvadoran restaurant at 1028 Potrero Avenue. Located directly across the street from Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital, La Paz sits a little distant from the Mission's Latin American culinary corridors, and makes for a wonderful spot for a quiet, modestly priced, meal. The elegant pupusas avoid the blob-like qualities of lesser iterations of the dish; the fried plantains are sweet, lightly crystalline, on the outside, soft on the inside. La Paz is open pretty much all the time, serving continuously, seven days a week, typically from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., with only slightly reduced hours on Sundays.