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‘A vision of the world that can be’: 10 Bay Area artists on the presidential changeover from Trump to Biden

Artists from dance, theater, music and more agree: Inauguration is a spur to keep working.

By [Lily Janiak](#)

Many **Bay Area artists** are relieved that Joe Biden succeeds Donald Trump as U.S. president this week. But they also say the change is hardly a revolution. Wounds are fresh. History weighs too much.

But the artists The Chronicle interviewed about the transfer of executive power all agree on one thing: Inauguration is a spur to keep working.

Here are excerpts of our conversations.



Gold lamé costumes make a splash in “Boys in Trouble” by S.F.’s Sean Dorsey Dance.
Photo: Kegan Marling

Sean Dorsey

Location: San Francisco

Profession: Choreographer and dancer; founder of **Sean Dorsey Dance**

Current projects: “The Lost Art of Dreaming,” including “The Dictionary of Joy and Pleasure” (micro-commissions to 10 artists seeking a source of pleasure for every letter of the alphabet); “Video Postcard” series

“Our most recent project, ‘Boys in Trouble,’ did sharpen focus and shift direction upon the election of the last administration. The emboldening of white supremacy and specifically proudly anti-trans, transphobic values and strategic planning by the administration meant that I really wanted our project to stand up and speak back to that.

“(‘The Lost Art of Dreaming’) also is informed by living through this last administration. We had very little time to dream or imagine or feel joy or pleasure. It felt really important and radical to begin the project during that administration — to of course continue organizing, educating and fighting back but also to claim the importance of joy and pleasure and dreaming in our lives.”



Keiko Shimosato Carreiro performs during the San Francisco Mime Troupe’s annual outdoor show in Dolores Park in San Francisco in 2018. Photo: Gabrielle Lurie, The Chronicle 2018

Keiko Shimosato Carreiro

Location: San Francisco

Profession: Theater actor, designer, writer and director

Current projects: Recording radio plays with the San Francisco Mime Troupe; writing the one-woman show “From Baby Girl Yellow to Now” (working title); co-founding **Kunoichi**

Productions

“There is a woman of color in the future picture of our administration. That gives me hope.

“With whatever administration it is, one of the biggest things I feel like I need to deal with as an artist is the role of women in our society and equity for genders. I’m hopeful that our voices will be able to be heard more and our issues will be more in the forefront.

“Whether through the Mime Troupe or any other theater project that I’ve been working on, I’ve had no choice but to focus on race and then economic equity because it’s just been oppressive — a really, really difficult four years for people of color. I’m hopeful that we can focus on other issues, like women’s rights and educational equality for all people, instead of just trying to survive.”



Mildred Howard has been selected to provide a sculpture in connection with the Southeast Community Center in the Bayview. Photo: Yalonda M. James, The Chronicle

Mildred Howard

Location: Oakland

Profession: Visual artist

Current projects: “Curiosity” sculpture at the San Leandro Main Library; poetry, sculpture and horticulture streetscape at Third and Stevenson streets; untitled triptych of enlarged West African currency at the Southeast Community Center in San Francisco’s Bayview neighborhood

“Artists are going to make art regardless, some kind of way. Artists are different in that they have this creativity that they have to articulate, of the medium in which they work, but we’re citizens of this country. I’m Black in America. That’s always going to be an issue when we live in a systemically racist society. Right now it’s sexy to have ‘BLM’ in your window, but when that leaves, what happens? Will it go back to the same?”



Jewelle Gomez, author of “The Gilda Stories,” doesn’t want to make her character “a big downer.” Photo: Leah Millis, The Chronicle 2016

Jewelle Gomez

Location: Oakland

Profession: Playwright, poet, author and activist

Current projects: “Unpacking in Ptown” with New Conservatory Theatre Center; ongoing “Gilda — The Alternate Decades” (working title); subject of the documentary “Jewelle: Art, Activism & Vampire Futures!” by Madeleine Lim

“I’m still writing Gilda stories for the next novel, and I find that for the character Gilda, who was this idealistic and idealized character in the first novel, there’s much more psychological trauma that she’s dealing with. She’s much more cynical. She’s still a believer in justice and a believer in equity, but she’s finding herself being disappointed much more. I know that’s because I’m feeling that. I don’t want to make her a big downer, because that’s not what made her popular, but the people she encounters are creating much more havoc as she tries to make life good for the people she cares about and for the world.”



Enrique Chagoya completed “Bathroom Painting,” a work in acrylic and water-based oil on canvas, in 2018. Photo: Anglim/Trimble

Enrique Chagoya

Location: San Francisco

Profession: Visual artist

Current projects: “Double Trouble” exhibition with Kara Maria at Sonoma Valley Museum of Art; “The Seven Deadly Sins and Utopías Coloniale” exhibition with Anglim/Trimble, which features some graphic takes on President Trump

“I was reluctant even from the beginning to do any representation of (Trump). He’s his own cartoon — pathetic, an almost Shakespearean comical king. In ‘Seven Deadly Sins,’ I have done one or two pictures of him, but then I got sick of it. I replaced his face with avatars; instead of Donald Trump, I did Donald Duck.

“I like doing this kind of imagery, like editorial cartooning. It’s like a lowbrow art. I’m not interested in making high art. It’s my satisfaction to get rid of all these inside things I have. It’s my way of putting it out, even though it might not sell. I’m pretty lucky to get away with putting it in an exhibition. In the best-case scenario the work creates some kind of dialogue and hopefully some humor, where people still might be able to laugh and think about how we could change for better. Art doesn’t change the world, but if you start with thought-provoking imagery, hopefully people think that we need to move away from this.”



Mina Morita, director (left), and Lloyd Suh, author, speak to the actors in Lloyd Suh’s “The Chinese Lady,” produced by Magic Theatre. Photo: Jana Asenbrennerova, Special to The Chronicle 2019

Mina Morita

Location: Oakland

Profession: Theater director; artistic director of Crowded Fire Theater

Current projects: “Making Good Trouble: Anti-Racist Trainers” with Crowded Fire, Magic Theatre and Playwrights Foundation; Accountability Workgroup of Bay Area theater leaders; Bay Area Artists for Racial Justice

“My main focus is going to be about Black folks’ and Black artists’ vision for the future: Making sure that every resource we can start to gather is delivered into their hands to shape where we’re headed.”



Carlos Aguirre appears in “Tell Tale Hearts” at Aurora Theatre Company. Photo: Scot Goodman, Aurora Theatre Company

Carlos Aguirre, a.k.a. Emcee Infinite

Location: Daly City

Profession: Actor, musician, vocal percussionist, educator

Current projects: Debut album “Critical Minded” (released Feb. 22); Thursday performances with Bay Area Theatre Cypher at www.twitch.tv/bayareatheatre/cypher; hip-hop theater piece “Tell Tale Hearts”; “Infinite Fridays” beatboxing at www.instagram.com/emceeinfinite; “Citizen” audio drama with Word for Word; “Delano,” part of TheatreFirst’s serial season; teaching Acting for Critical Thought at Downtown High School via American Conservatory Theater

“My direction is: I want to have fun. I’ve watched other artists hurt themselves being too serious for too long. I can’t not be sociopolitical and serious, but I want to find balance.

“Recently Gwen Loeb from Arts for Oakland Kids sent me a video of a 14-year-old rapper. It’s called ‘Armageddon’; it blew me away. Gwen asked, ‘Can you redo this but make it yours?’ I just finished it. He’s amazing; I just complex-ised it to the 10th degree. If I can push my skill set, and

it's helping a student, and it's bringing people joy, and it's serving an underserved community? That is where I want to be.”



Filmmaker H.P. Mendoza says “Whatever young-adult media I make right now could display a vision of the world that can be.” Photo: Lea Suzuki, The Chronicle 2018

H.P. Mendoza

Location: San Francisco

Profession: Filmmaker, visual artist, musician

Current projects: “Folx,” new music album and companion untitled art piece as part of the Svane Family Foundation’s Ark Commissions

“In 2018 I made my film ‘Bitter Melon,’ which was very much a call to action, very much a plea for empathy. A lot of artists have told me, ‘You released this at the wrong time. This country isn’t ready for a story about empathy right now.’ The theme of the movie is, ‘When people ask for apologies, they don’t want apologies; they want blood.’ The movie’s about a really bad brother in the family, a black sheep who’s caused a lot of heartache. A lot of people saw that character as Trump. But the story’s about me and my family.

“I am realizing that I do want to get the future voters. Whatever young-adult media I make right now could display a vision of the world that can be. We’re not quite there right now, but how cool would it be to show them a world that can be, so when they’re finally old enough to vote, they’ve had all these uncles and aunts who’ve spoken to them through their media and built this potential world that they can realize themselves?”



David Harrington (right) and Alonzo King watch rehearsal for Alonzo King Lines Ballet’s celebration of its 35th season, which included a performance in collaboration with the Kronos Quartet. Photo: Scott Strazzante, The Chronicle 2018

David Harrington

Location: San Francisco

Profession: Violinist, founder of Kronos Quartet

Current projects: Living Jazz Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (online event 4 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 17); soundtrack contributions to the film “Users” (screenings Jan. 31-Feb. 2 via the Sundance Film Festival)

“Earlier, during the pandemic, there was all this spin about how you can’t believe the scientists. Somehow I ended up hearing about these scientists from the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History; they had formed a club of bird callers. I thought, ‘This is so beautiful; I love it.’

“I was able to be in touch with one of the scientists. We got involved in making a piece, ‘Music of the Birds,’ with not only the bird-calling scientists — and the range of scientists began to include those from all over the world — but then the San Francisco Girls Chorus became involved and Sahba Aminikia, one of my close friends. It’s so beautiful to hear young people sounding like birds, to hear older people sounding like birds. For me that is kind of a response, and it works no matter who’s president.”



Fantastic Negrito says we can learn a lot from plants. Photo: Yalonda M. James, The Chronicle

Fantastic Negrito

Location: Oakland

Profession: Musician

Current projects: Grammy-nominated album “Have You Lost Your Mind Yet?”; live-streamed concert 6:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 23 (ftpresents.com/event/fantastic-negrigo); launching the record label Storefront Records; creating Revolution Plantation, a skills-building organization based in Oakland

“I live on a farm. It’s less than a quarter of an acre, but that’s big in Oakland. I’ve been farming 15 years. I raise chickens. Right now I’m growing garlic, onions, everything leafy. I haven’t had to buy any leafy greens in years. It’s the idea that if we take care of that soil, it can take care of us. Plants are like people. ... Listen, it costs a lot of money for this setup, but if I give that plant, just like that person, the love, the light, the nutrients, the space to grow, the intention — that plant, that person, provides for me. That’s the greatest lesson we can learn from plants.

“With this new administration, maybe they’re open to funneling money to help organizations like mine and like countless others. If you pay attention to these plants, these people, they’re going to provide for us.”