



san francisco

by jan butterfield

everything you always wanted to know about rainbows

It's happening in San Francisco — the definitive Rainbow show. Coinciding with the Vernal Equinox, the city's Fine Arts Museums, (the Legion of Honor and the de Young,) under the combined guidance and inspiration of the guest curator, "Sunshine," and the museum's Chief Curator Lanier Graham, have organized a monumental "Rainbow Show," scheduled to run in its entirety for some three months duration, through June 22.

A multi-media phenomenon executed with 60s nostalgia, the Rainbow Show includes activities of every conceivable type of definition, including exhibitions of paintings, sculpture, holography, light shows, color demonstrations, theatrical presentations, mime troupe activities, lectures on Kirlian Photography, productions of the Eukaryoptic Family Magic Circus and Self-Healing Energy Show and religious participations — all

a part of the "Bay Area wide celebration of color and light."

"Throughout the world, the rainbow has traditionally been the symbol of a bridge — a stairway to heaven," Sunshine states. "It is the luminous path of harmony that beckons us from the world of man to the abode of the Gods, from the mundane to the magnificent, from ignorance to enlightenment." Gathering together the combined forces of the city's gypsies, mimes, actors, poets, artists, musicians, dancers, curators, scientists, magicians and mystics, the Rainbow Show has unleashed an enormous amount of energy.

The core portion of the exhibition will take place at the de Young Museum. It will include such diverse elements as: A world-wide survey of historical art which uses a rainbow for its theme; an audio-visual experience by artists Inocencio and Kanyon,

depicting rainbows in nature, and their use in art; a *Spectral Passage*, designed by Aleksandra Kasuba, which will allow the visitor to walk up the spectrum through a series of seven nylon color chambers, each saturated with one hue of the rainbow; and a *Primordial Swamp*, hung, somewhat inexplicably, with air-brushed, patchworked, woven, dyed and appliqued fabrics, like a Raggedy Ann Sci-Fi set, over which will soar a 48-foot holographic rainbow. Exiting from the swamp, viewers will have the opportunity to see a collection of *Auras in Art from the East and West*.

The comprehensive catalogue for the exhibition will be printed in red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet. The museum describes it as "A veritable encyclopedia of rainbow lore; the art of the rainbow, including man, myth, magic, paintings, prints

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and poems; the physics of the spectrum — light, color and the stars, and the 'Music of the Spheres;' the metaphysics of color, exploring the colors of consciousness and auras . . . as well as poems by Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Blake, Keats, Wordsworth, paintings by Giotto, Bosch, Van der Weyden, Durer, Rubens, Blake, Turner, Constable and Church, as well as the sacred art of Tibet."

The idea for the exhibition began with the acquisition of a major painting by Frederick Church, entitled *Rainy Season in the Tropics*, 1866. Intrigued by its double rainbow theme, Curator Lanier Graham began to formulate an exhibition which would take place around it — an exhibition which has now expanded to include such diverse phenomena

as holography, auras, and the "Music of the Spheres."

In addition to the activities scheduled for the Fine Arts Museums, some forty institutions, individuals and publications will participate in some way in the show. Virtually everyone into rainbows in any way has gotten into the act. The Oakland Museum of Art will present an exhibition of works of rainbows or of spectral significance, including the work of contemporary sculptors who work in plastic. The Legion of Honor will present an exhibition of contemporary California artists who use the spectrum as a focal point. At the San Francisco Museum of Art, a major exhibition of the works of Swiss artist Max Bill will present abstract works which utilize color, space, light and movement to "define the ex-

pression of the human spirit. "Commercial galleries will also participate: William Sawyer Gallery will present an exhibition of gallery artists who use the rainbow as theme and Thackery and Robertson will exhibit rainbow posters.

A staggering array of supplementary events and activities has been scheduled to take place around the exhibition: The de Young Museum will present lectures entitled "Holography as an Art Medium," and "Psychology and the Human Rainbow — a demonstration of Kirlian Photography. At the de Young museum as well, the "Trip Out Truck," which is a part of their education outreach program, will feature rainbow-related activities. During the show, the California Academy of Sciences will feature "Laserium," a cosmic laser beam concert, and the zoo and aquarium will plan special events.

Coordinated by a group which calls itself "Omniversal Family Presents," a variety of theatrical activities will take place, ranging from productions presented by the Haight Ashbury Arts Workshop and the Tempo Living Theater. Even Churches will participate. Old St. Mary's Church made plans for a Folk Mass Easter Sunday, using the rainbow as theme, to be accompanied by a color and light display.

As Tom Wolfe would say "The mind boggles." One can only pray for rain so that the ultimate activity — a real rainbow might take place — but perhaps that too has been prearranged by cloud-seeding.

The amount of energy and enthusiasm generated by the Rainbow Show is remarkable — proving that there is indeed a need for activities of this sort, but it is well within the purview of art criticism to ask if it should take place within the confines or under the aegis of a museum. It does seem that the primary purpose of a museum — the collection, preservation and exhibition of works of art — gets somewhat lost if not altogether drowned out by the multitude of activities in such a three-ring circus. If the Rainbow Show helps to build return attendance, and real enthusiasm for art, then it will have been well worthwhile. If it succeeds only in luring those who wish to participate in a spring carnival, then it will have failed. It is too early yet to tell, but perhaps it may just be time to put away the tattered banner of radical chic and get down to the real business of art.



Above: Frederic E. Church, *Rainy Season in the Tropics*, oil, 1866. Mildred Anna Williams Coll., Palace of the Legion of Honor. Below: Textile designers, Janet Lipkin and Marika Contompasis, discussing their *Primordial Swamp* at the de Young. Previous page: *Spectral Passage*, designed by Aleksandra Kasuba, also at the de Young Museum.

