

HEARNE PARDEE

Garden Grid, 2016

Acrylic and collage on paper, 50 x 38 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

KATHLEEN DE AZEVEDO

Bad and Beautiful

The transformation of John McClaren Park in San Francisco

On my daily run through John McLaren Park, I pass the sign that reads: *No Dumping, Punishable by \$1,000 Fine*. One day, I continue uphill past a broken easy chair, the next day, it's a microwave and a purple toy helicopter, then it's a couple of empty boxes of Thug Life firecrackers and a plaster statue of three cherubs, one missing a head. I climb to the top of the hill, where coyotes poised on the road give me their bitch face before ducking into the trees.

Finally I arrive at an overgrown section with knee-high wild oats, rattlesnake grass, and wild mustard—the neglected part of the park. I take the trail that runs down, down, past a man pushing an old bicycle through the tall grass, through a dark tunnel of cedars, and along a backyard fence belonging to several houses. A yellow-and-orange mural with black letters painted along the fence reads: *Art comes from ur soul but most importantly ur heart. Art gave me birth. I am a cultural activist, who Is here to explain and help. Because 2 make a change I can't do it myself. George Hurtado, RIP. Class of 2007. JJSE.*

I don't know when the mural was painted, but eighteen-year-old Mr. Hurtado was killed just before his second semester at college, a targeted assassination by a gang member. JJSE, or June Jordan School for Equity, is a nearby alternative high school. Hurtado was a poet. His artist friends, the ones who knew he spoke out against the gang lifestyle, brought some paint and brushes to pay homage. Perhaps some of the artists worked for Precita Eyes, a program getting otherwise graffiti-prone kids to fill dim city walls with colorful murals telling their stories. An artist first created a grid and sketched the design on paper then transferred the design to the fence. Hurtado's friends may have asked permission of the property owners or not. If the owners had lived here for ages and saw the artists painting away, they probably thought: "What a great idea! Anything to brighten up the area." If the residents worked long hours, they may have not been aware of the youthful chatter on the other side of their property. Yet Hurtado's friends had worked reverently, even though this mural would not be seen by many people because it is hidden within the park. McLaren Park, a sprawling 312 acres of hilly open space, lies in southernmost San Francisco, among working-class and immigrant neighborhoods. Until a few years ago, city maps of San Francisco