

# BLACK ROCK ARTS FOUNDATION

INSPIRING ART, COMMUNITY & CIVIC PARTICIPATION

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## **Black Rock Arts Foundation Directors Awards: Mike Farrah and REBAR Honored for their Work in Building Community through Art**

The Black Rock Arts Foundation is pleased to honor Mike Farrah, Director of the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services, and the artist's collective REBAR with its first annual Directors' Awards at *Flip Your Lid!*, the grass roots organization's annual benefit on Thursday, April 17<sup>th</sup>. Both honorees have made compelling contributions to community-generated public art and have brought creative leadership to programs that inspire civic participation. We are pleased to tip our hats to Mike Farrah and REBAR starting at 6:30pm at *supperclub, san francisco*, 657 Harrison Street.

Mike Farrah is a fifth-generation native San Franciscan who has worked in city government for nearly 20 years, during which time he has supported, encouraged and rolled up his sleeves to help an impressive number of community arts organizations. He founded the Juri Commoners park group to engage neighbors with their historic public park, backed a number of (sometimes controversial) community art projects proposed by the Black Rock Arts Foundation and aided community arts groups including the San Francisco Black Film Festival, Youth Speaks, Dance Mission Theater, REBAR and the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre. "Mike Farrah is terrific," said Quentin Easter Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre. "His work on our behalf made all the difference. His leadership helped galvanize the community and our government leaders and I'm happy to now report that our theater will remain a vital cultural resource in downtown San Francisco."

In 2004, Farrah traveled to the Black Rock Desert and experienced the Burning Man event for the first time. The immersion in community and the arts altered his life in ways that he never imagined possible; it fundamentally changed the way that he viewed government and its responsibility to the arts and changed his perceptions about how community could be built. Farrah has spent the last four years as Gavin Newsom's Senior Advisor and is currently the Director of the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services. He is married to Maya Draisin and lives in Bernal Heights with their son Finnegan Abraham Draisin Farrah.

REBAR is an interdisciplinary collaborative of creators, designers and activists based in San Francisco. REBAR's work often engages regulatory systems and social frameworks as artistic media, particularly as these systems relate to the organization and use of land. The group is the creator of

PARK(ng) Day, a very successful and socially collaborative project that received a 2007 grant from the Black Rock Arts Foundation. For this a one-day global event, artists, activists, and citizens are invited to collaborate to temporarily transform metered parking spaces into tiny public parks. Rosi Bustamante of CC Puede talked of their community BBQ and health clinic temporarily housed in a Mission neighborhood parking space, "The impact of PARK(ing) Day is amazing! It's an opportunity to show people what we can do with square footage that's dedicated to cars -- isn't it better to show how it can be dedicated to people?"

REBAR has also completed a number of other large-scale collaborative projects, including: *The Cabinet National Library* -- a functioning library constructed out of a file cabinet in the middle of the New Mexico desert, and *COMMONspace* – a year-long series of collaborative performances and interventions that explored the political and social contours of San Francisco's so-called "Privately Owned Public Open Spaces." According to Matthew Shaffer with The Trust for Public Land, "It takes many forces to make our cities better places to live. REBAR is to be admired for their engaging art installations that promote an improved public realm, where ultimately we can know our neighbor better and gain a positive, shared experience of the places we call home."

REBAR is directed by three principal artists. Matthew Passmore, a native San Franciscan, has been a professional musician with the Los Angeles-based experimental industrial band Chalk Circle, an attorney, and the Cabinet National Librarian. John Bela, a producer of creative ideas and a maker of things, studied drawing, performance and sculpture at the Art Institute of Chicago; Biochemistry at University of Massachusetts; and holds a Masters Degree in Landscape Architecture from U.C. Berkeley. Blaine Merker began remixing urban spaces one summer in Portland, Oregon with a legally questionable street closure, commandeered barricades and a borrowed video projector. Since then, Merker has pursued a fascination with re-arranging the fabric of the everyday. Merker also earned a Masters Degree in Landscape Architecture from U.C. Berkeley.

Tickets for the Black Rock Arts Foundation's *Flip Your Lid!* event (\$125 and \$250) are available via [www.donatetoblackrockarts.org](http://www.donatetoblackrockarts.org).

The Foundation's mission is to inspire art, community and civic participation. Melissa Alexander, the Foundation's executive director remarked, "We recognize that these values are shared by many. It's important to recognize individuals working to improve civic life through art and community beyond those efforts directly generated by our programs. In this way we help to inspire others."

The Black Rock Arts Foundation, a San Francisco-based 501c3 nonprofit organization, emerged in 2001 with ambitious goals in order to enrich civic life through art. Its growth since then reflects a spreading awareness of the benefits community-based art projects can bring to broader society. Art can thrive outside the walls of museums and galleries, in public places that encourage direct involvement with people who encounter it. The Black Rock Arts Foundation consistently seeks to include an expanding universe of people to participate in the creation, presentation, and experience of art.

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