Alexander and Bonin

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Robert Kinmont: Trying To Return Home Educated
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Robert Kinmont has been called "a forgotten legend of West Coast art." Given the course of his life and career, "forgotten" is almost an essential, quasideliberate part of his artistic status.

Born (in 1937) in Los Angeles and raised in the rural Northern California town of Bishop, Mr. Kinmont was known early on for "8 Natural Handstands," a group of photographs showing the artist doing handstands in precarious wilderness places. (They're not in this show, but a hilarious 1973 pendant piece, "Plumb Bob," with the artist hanging upside down off a cliff, is.)

He originally gave up making art around 1975 to raise his children and allow his wife to finish writing a cookbook. Working as a carpenter and studying Buddhism occupied him outside art for three decades, although—as with many legends of reclusion—it's not quite that simple: Mr. Kinmont did a lot of teaching at various art schools as well as the University of California, Berkeley.

In 2005, he began making art again, using beige-to-cinnamon-brown materials that indicate the natural landscape that is—forgive the pun—the ground of his work. "Five Dirt Roads" (2014) consists of shallow copper trays filled with soil from the artist's favorite nonpaved roads.

"Wait" (2013) is a long, long box—again, made from copper—housing 28 willow branches that can be seen through a small square opening.

"Listen" (2013) is a big plywood display-wall-cum-shelf on which are posted and placed a plethora of photographs, drawings and notes constituting Mr. Kinmont's recent artistic stream-of-consciousness.

Thereby hangs the crucial question concerning Mr. Kinmont's exhibition—and indeed, about the 1970s Northern California sensibility as a whole: If the artist has felt it, is it there in the work?

The conceptual joke in "Five Dirt Roads" (you can't put a road in a box) militates against the possibility, but the unpretentious self-exposure in "Listen" argues in favor. Though not entirely certain, I'd say it is.