



Rex Ray (1956–2015), *Placidium*, c. 2003, collage with mixed media over canvas, 54 x 54 in. Courtesy of Gallery 16.

Monterey Museum of Art Presents the First-Ever Rex Ray Museum Retrospective:
WE ARE ALL MADE OF LIGHT

We Are All Made of Light is the first-ever museum retrospective of the prolific, contemporary Bay Area artist, Rex Ray (1956–2015) whose bold work brings beauty, excitement, and delight to Monterey Museum of Art.

MONTEREY, CA (June 16, 2026)—Monterey Museum of Art (MMA) presents *Rex Ray: We Are All Made of Light*—a retrospective of critically acclaimed Bay Area artist, Rex Ray (1956–2015), guest curated by Cydney Payton. Ray is renowned for his prolific and multi-faceted creative approach to mixed media paintings. Using cutouts, printing techniques, and collage, his unique paintings enliven the senses and invite viewers to participate in his vision of beauty and delight. Ray's work defies an easy definition, as he was also known for being a leading graphic designer for book covers, CD cases, and famously for his event posters and album covers—that feature notables such as: Machine Head, The Pixies, Joe Satriani, Beck, The Cure, R.E.M., Audioslave, Jane's Addiction, Rolling Stones, and perhaps most celebrated, David Bowie.

Rex Ray's work blends familiar artistic influences—including Mid-Century Modern design, Dada, and Pop Art—with a distinctive vision that feels both timeless and futuristic. Organic botanical forms and flowing curves



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interact with bold geometric shapes, while vibrant colors and meticulous craftsmanship come together to create images that are playful, imaginative, and sophisticated.

Ray's art bridges fine art and craft, balancing beauty with boldness, and optimism with defiance. His commitment to creating outside conventional boundaries invites viewers to experience joy, wonder, and possibility through each carefully composed piece. Together, the works in this exhibition create an immersive world filled with color, whimsy, and inspiration. Audiences are invited to step into Ray's luminous imagination and reflect on the light within themselves and others.

Rex Ray attended the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), where he studied with Sam Tchakalian, Kathy Acker, and Angela Davis, and received his BFA in 1989. His work has been featured in exhibitions at the Akron Art Museum; Berkeley Art Museum; Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento; MCA DENVER; McNay Art Museum, San Antonio; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; San Jose Museum of Art; and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco.

"This fall, MMA is thrilled to present *Rex Ray: We Are All Made of Light*, featuring the visionary art of Rex Ray. His art embodies hope, creativity, and liberation, and inspires us to seek out joy and light even in times of darkness." —Corey Madden, MMA Executive Director

Across three galleries, the exhibition features Ray's vibrant mixed media paintings, posters, album covers, works on paper, and other ephemera. This first-ever museum retrospective of Ray's work is not to be missed.

Rex Ray: We Are All Made of Light

Guest Curated by Cydney Payton

August 27, 2026 – January 17, 2027

Public Opening is Saturday, September 12, 2026.

Guest curator Cydney Payton explains, "*We Are All Made of Light* features multimedia American artist Rex Ray (1956–2015), best known for his innovative and subversive pop aesthetic. This is the first museum exhibition to present a retrospective of Ray's fine art alongside works on paper, rock and roll graphics, book designs, and ephemera, often created as agitpop. Throughout his career, Ray was a major force in the Bay Area's art, literary, and activist communities....He favored beauty and adornment in an era when such concerns were not popular...." —Cydney Payton

MMA will host a curator talk with Cydney Payton and present educational activities as opportunities to engage more deeply with the exhibition.

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The Museum gift shop will offer a variety of Rex Ray merchandise, including a limited reprint of the catalogue *We Are All Made of Light*, by Griff Williams, Kevin Killan, and René Paul Barilleaux; with a poem by Norma Cole, (Gallery 16, 2017).

Highlights/Angles:

- Rex Ray was a legendary, creative, innovative artist known for his unique and beloved, creative expression. He was a Bay Area star in the arts and graphic design worlds. See this first-ever expansive museum retrospective at MMA.
- *Rex Ray: We Are All Made of Light* offers a sense of delight and hope when divisive media and discord are commonplace.
- Connecting communities: artists and art lovers, graphic designers, activists.
- Historical significance: arts, Bay Area art scene, graphic design, pop culture, LGBTQ activism, AIDS activism, Mail Art.
- Educational value: Art theory and practice mixed with graphic design and innovation.
- A creative person, who traveled the world but felt out of place, became a powerhouse of influence as he found community with his love of music, design, art, and activism. Moving from Colorado Springs, Colorado to San Francisco, California in the early eighties, Rex Ray's journey inspired a life of creative expression.

About the Curator

Cydney Payton is an independent curator and writer, and former CEO and Chief Curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver and the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art. At MCA Denver she led the architectural process and campaign to build the first Gold LEED-certified museum in the US. Her leadership in the arts has been acknowledged by *The New York Times*, *The Denver Post*, *Artforum*, and *Art in America*. She has served as a nominator for the MacArthur Fellowship and as a juror for the Taishin Art Awards Taiwan and Creative Capital. As a co-juror with Spike Lee, she selected Shepherd Fairey's HOPE to represent the 2008 Obama Campaign. Since the late 1980s, Payton has curated groundbreaking exhibitions by such artists as David Altmejd, Morley Baer, Lynda Benglis, Yu-Chen Chou, Brad Kahlhamer, Susanne Kühn, Roberto Behar, Rosario Marquardt, Wangechi Mutu, Arlene Shechet, Collier Schorr, and Fischli & Weiss, to name a few. Payton holds an MA in Curatorial Practice from California College of the Arts, with an emphasis on Architectural History and Theory.

Special thanks to the sponsors who helped to make this exhibition possible: Sandra Dewey, Jacqueline June Horton, and Louise O'Connor.

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Rex Ray Studio Shots. ©Henrik Kam 2015

Land and People Acknowledgement

Monterey Museum of Art (MMA) extends its respect to the Esselen and Rumsen/Rumsien Ohlone Tribes, on whose ancestral homeland the Museum stands. MMA also recognizes the Chalon, Mutsun, and Salinan Tribes, whose unceded lands encompass much of what is now Monterey County. In alignment with our mission to celebrate the diversity of California art—past, present, and future, MMA acknowledges and honors these communities, who have cared for and cultivated the Monterey Peninsula for millennia.

The Museum recognizes that our collection and exhibitions are inherently tied to the Indigenous land on which they were created, as California's landscape has long served as inspiration for generations of artists and creatives. MMA honors the Chalon, Esselen, Mutsun, Rumsen/Rumsien Ohlone, and Salinan Tribes—alongside all California tribes, past, present, and future—for their enduring connection and lasting impact on our shared lands and waters.

To learn more about the Indigenous lands we inhabit, visit <https://native-land.ca/>.

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About the Monterey Museum of Art

Monterey Museum of Art (MMA) inspires creativity, connects communities, and celebrates the stories of California art.

MMA is grounded in the art of place—the dynamic relationship between creative vision and the landscapes, communities, and ideals that shape it. From our extraordinary vantage point on the Monterey Peninsula, we present California art that inspires our community and attracts visitors from around the world. As the only



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museum devoted to collecting the art of our region, we steward iconic works that reflect and shape California's evolving cultural identity. Beyond our region, we champion artists across the state, situating Monterey County within the broader story of California art—past, present, and future.

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Monterey Museum of Art

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Open Thursday – Sunday 11:00 am – 5:00 pm

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