

**UNOFFICIAL DEPT. of HANDSHAKES**



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**IN LATE 2017**, the San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) Galleries invited San Francisco-based artists Hannah Ireland and Alison Pebworth to collaborate on a public program that would engage public space within the city. At the time, both artists were exhibiting in separate exhibitions in the SFAC Main Gallery, and while their works explored different subjects, we recognized similarities in their artistic processes, engagements with place and history, and relationships to individuals and community. Although Ireland and Pebworth had never worked together, we hoped that these shared interests would inspire their collaboration. The result was *The Unofficial Department of Handshakes*, which perfectly reflected the SFAC Galleries' commitment to civic engagement and the artists' shared desire to encourage and examine meaningful human interaction. The Unofficial Department of Handshakes brought together people from all walks of life—City Hall employees, Civic Center residents, policy makers, tourists, wedding parties—to shake hands with one another, a gesture that without words says so much.

Using City Hall as the ultimate intersection for citywide public negotiations, Ireland and Pebworth presented a playful and improvisational take on a City Department. For the month of January 2018, *The Unofficial Department of Handshakes* occupied the information kiosk at the Van Ness entrance and also roamed the building with their mobile cart in an effort to observe, document, and analyze handshakes shared under the dome. The artists were on-site, in uniform, every Friday from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., collecting data and facilitating lively interactions with the public, which informed their investigations into contemporary handshakes and their meanings.

In addition to exchanging handshakes with the public, the artists also created and taught participants a new San Francisco handshake called "The Phoenix Rising," a seven-step handshake based on the City and County Seal of San Francisco which reflects the city's beauty, history, seismic activity, and resilience.

Over the course of the month, Ireland and Pebworth interacted with over 300 members of the public. This publication is a record of the project, capturing a moment between two strangers and two artists getting to know one another. We hope you enjoy it and reconsider the power of a handshake next time you meet someone new.

**Maysoun Wazwaz**, *Manager of Education and Public Programs at The San Francisco Arts Commission Galleries*

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**Hannah Ireland** is an interdisciplinary artist living in San Francisco. She has exhibited her work at various local, national, and international venues and has been artist-in-residence at c3:Initiative (OR), The Montalvo Arts Center (CA), and The Wassaic Project (NY). Ireland earned her MFA from California College of the Arts in 2010 and her BA from St. John's College in 2001.  
[hannahireland.com](http://hannahireland.com)

**Alison Pebworth's** work focuses on long-range projects that combine painting, installation, and social interaction. She has exhibited locally and nationally and is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards including from The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation. Selected residencies include The Bemis Center for Contemporary Art (NE), Recology SF (CA), Cannonball (FL), and Space (Victoria BC).  
[alisonpebworth.com](http://alisonpebworth.com)

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This project would not have been possible without the support of a few key people: San Francisco City Administrator Naomi Kelly; Director of Cultural Affairs Tom DeCaigny; Rob Reiter and Eric Nelson from City Hall Building Management; John Caldon and his City Hall Events staff; City Hall Historian Ellen Schumer; and the City Hall building engineers and security staff.

*The Unofficial Department of Handshakes* took place in San Francisco City Hall from January 12 – February 2, 2018.

All images are courtesy the artists with the exception of the image showing the artists pushing their mobile cart which was taken by Jessica Christian/San Francisco Chronicle.

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galleries

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# THE PHOENIX RISING



The Official UDoH Handshake  
for the City and County of San Francisco





