

# BayWrap



MIKE KEPKA

## FaceTime

### John Law

High in the garret of the Oakland Tribune building, up two flights of rickety stairs, behind a door marked "Central Services," in a deep purple office no bigger than a closet, John Law runs his businesses.

"I'm in sign services," he explains cryptically over the whirring and clicking of the elevator, and then goes on to mention his Web hosting business, known for its underground-art events listings ([laughingsquid.com](http://laughingsquid.com)), his work installing art shows and a pressing book project.

The book, which he is co-authoring with local writer and Dashiell Hammett tour guide, Don Heron, chronicles the adventures of a group active locally from 1977–82, "The Suicide Club." Law and his cohorts undertook such feats as climbing the city's bridges (he's been on the Golden Gate more than a hundred times), rappelling off and inside empty buildings, and even taking a cable car ride in the buff. They also infiltrated so-called cults, including the Moonies and a group of neo-Nazis. He calls this "urban adventuring."

But all this action aside, Law hit our radar because he's the proud owner of not one, not two, but three Doggie Diner heads, which he keeps in Emeryville. On more than a dozen occasions during the year, he "rolls out the heads," parading the triplet of grinning dachshunds in snappy bow ties and chef's hats to various Bay Area events on a flatbed trailer.

**On why one would own three of the 12 remaining 350-pound, 10-foot-high Doggie Diner fiberglass heads.**

It's a public service. When the dogs go out, everybody loves it. The appeal of the heads crosses lines of race and class. Cops, gangbangers, even Lexus drivers smile when they pass us. Despite the fact that they are made from fiberglass and metal, I have a huge affection for them. Plus, things happen around the dogs, they have a kind of spiritual energy.

### On the "Suicide Club."

The group took its name from a Robert Louis Stevenson story written in the 1890s, which was about living every day as if it were your last. We weren't frivolous; we were serious about what we did. However, our group was fairly secret. Our philosophy was based on facing our fears. We had real respect for the environment and people. When the old City of Paris building was about to be pulled down, we went in the middle of the night and hung a banner on the replica of the Eiffel Tower. "Save the City," it read, along with then-Mayor Dianne Feinstein's home phone number. Because of the public outcry, the developers were forced to save the building's rotunda, which was then incorporated into the new structure.

### On his own fear.

Riding a cable car naked was by far the scariest for me. I was raised middle-class and so I am horrified to be embarrassed. Afterward, I was not as self-conscious.

### On what it all means.

People come by the house all the time in Emeryville to get their picture taken with the dog heads. They're drawn to them. For people who grew up in the city, the dog heads are a link to their past. They went to the Doggie Diner after the ballgame, or on the way home from the zoo and just seeing them brings up memories. For everyone else, they're just cool.

### On their names.

Manny, Mo and Jack. I wanted to give them names that reflect a kind of recycled commercialism.

### On collecting.

You never know what's going to be historically valid in 30 years, what's going to be traded in the future on some unseen version of EBay. People are now actually collecting those '70s molded plastic chairs! Absolutely anything can be collectible. When Harold Bachman designed these in the late '50s, he had no idea he was making something that would get so much attention. He was simply a commercial artist doing a job.

— Louise Rafkin