

Two East Bay entrepreneurs are giving new meaning these days to the phrase "artistic enterprise." One of them, photographer **Paul Schiek**, is a man with a passion for mail-order goods. As a teen in small-town Wisconsin without access to a car or a good record store, Schiek lived for the music cassette that arrived each month in the mail from the Sub Pop Singles Club.

Inspired by this memory, in 2006

Schiek created **These Birds Walk** ([www.tbwbooks.com](http://www.tbwbooks.com)), a photo-book subscription club based in Oakland. Like his creative counterparts at **The Present Group**, also in Oakland, Schiek has discovered that subscriptions are a low-cost, suspense-driven way to get artwork out into the world.

For an annual fee of \$100, These Birds Walk members receive a limited-edition volume every three months. Schiek has lined up an impressive roster of nationally exhibited, award-winning image makers: Todd Hido, Marianne Mueller, Abner Nolan, and Alec Soth.

Schiek figured a subscription model would be an affordable way to showcase up-and-coming photographers from the California College of the Arts scene and pay homage to some of his mentors—like Magnum member, Jim Goldberg, and indie documentarian, Ari Marcopoulos. And he loved the retro idea of his books showing up unexpectedly on doorsteps like a delivery from the milkman.

Favoring the personal, local, and handmade, Schiek designs the layout, chooses paper stock, and uses Oakland-based 1984 Printing. He adds a handwritten note to each order, then drops it off at the local post office. Each issue is limited to 700 copies.

Meanwhile, over at The Present Group ([www.thepresentgroup.com](http://www.thepresentgroup.com)), founded in 2007, husband-and-wife artists **Oliver Wise** and **Eleanor Hanson Wise** compare themselves to a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) service, where city dwellers pay for periodic produce deliveries from local farms. For \$150 a year, subscribers receive a limited edition artwork every three months.

The Wises collaborate with each of their artists, helping create a work that will be reproduced in an edition of 50 to 100 copies. Recent works include a photo piece by David Horvitz that came packaged as a View-Master slideshow, and Joseph Del Pesco's rainbow-hued letterpress posters describing the political hopes and dreams of local artists. Each issue is accompanied by an interview with the creator, critical essays, and care instructions.

Tempted by the simple pleasure of presents arriving at the door, many of us already subscribe to mail-order clubs offering Fruit or Book of the Month. Now we can sign up for pears, bestsellers, and art.

—Jeanne Storck

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*Doorstep delivery.*

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