

FOR-SITE Foundation Celebrates the Golden Gate with International Orange

By Christian L. Frock

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A number of cultural events celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge this month. Among them, International Orange features site-specific contemporary art installations at Fort Point, a civil-war era structure built in 1861 to protect San Francisco from potential Confederate war ships. None came, but the building found other uses and later served as temporary housing for soldiers during World War II. It was deemed a National Historic Site in 1970 and is now part of the National Park Service. Tucked away beneath the southern base of the Golden Gate Bridge, which was built over it by design, Fort Point offers an immersive sense of history and incomparable views. The artists featured in International Orange delve into these extraordinary circumstances to reveal anew our sense of the world's most iconic bridge.

Allison Smith, *Fort Point Bunting*, 2012; Photo: Jan Stürmann.

The exhibition features fifteen projects commissioned by FOR-SITE Foundation and includes work by artists Doug Hall, Cornelia Parker, Bill Fontana, Allison Smith, and Pae White, among several others. The works are integrated into various spaces within the antiquated fort, including former soldier's quarters, and are often juxtaposed with exhibits of historical objects. In some cases, such as with Pae White's *muhf-uhl* (2012), the juxtaposition of art and artifact is stunning. Continuing her recent explorations into digitally-woven tapestry, White worked with Belgian loom experts to embody the ethereal fog that wafts in off the Pacific and engulfs the bridge almost daily; the result is an enormous wall hanging whose colors seem to vaporize, ranging from the colorless silver of fog to the signature brick-red-orange of the bridge. Its placement, off to the side in a series of rooms behind a decaying archway, affords the viewer a rare breath-taking jolt of pleasure at first sight.



Doug Hall, *Chrysopylae*, 2012; Photo: Jan Stürmann.



Pae White, *muhf-uhl*, 2012; Photo: Jan Stürmann.

Some works strive to create new vantage points from which to consider our sense of the familiar. Sound artist Bill Fontana, whose work often draws on ambient noise, began by looking for unfamiliar vistas in the bridge's architecture -- a challenge for a structure that has been presented in myriad images from every conceivable angle. His installation, *Acoustical Visions of the Golden Gate Bridge* (2012), employs live audio and video footage in a cavernous space set away from the Fort's sun-lit courtyard. Video is captured from cameras installed in the seismic expansion joints

beneath the bridge. Shadows and a familiar *clank-clank* indicate the passage of cars overhead, while a foghorn bellows in real time and the sea thrashes below, each amplified by microphones. Through the process of listening and looking, other senses are engaged and even the sea air is somehow intensified. Fontana's work creates a fleeting, concentrated sense of place that lingers between the past and present tense in memory, just as the mere recollection of salty air tingles the tongue.

In her work *The International Orange Commemorative Store (A Proposition)* (2012), Stephanie Syjuco addresses the tourist's impulse to encapsulate an experience through souvenirs with an astonishing installation of mass-produced and artisan-made objects, all in the Golden Gate's signature color "international orange" and all unavailable for sale. It is an amusing skewer of gift-shop culture where pretty much anything can be packaged and sold. Amidst the display of jewelry, toys, and other *tchotchkes*, there are also air fresheners, cork circles and actual rocks. It is also a little heart-rending: the unavailability of the gorgeous custom Heath ceramics is sure to generate angst among some. Syjuco, whose work consistently exposes the fraught relationship between art and commerce, allows visitors one concession in the form of free postcards, printed with a rectilinear block of international orange. There is nothing to buy -- this experience can't truly be captured -- but you may take a postcard to bridge this place in time with what you remember later. For those who call the Bay Area home, the occasional sight of the Golden Gate Bridge in the distance will do the same.



Stephanie Syjuco, *The International Orange Commemorative Store (A Proposition)*, 2012; Photo: Jan Stürmann.