

Art Review

A Newly Enchanted Forest

By Kelly Wilkinson | May 25, 2009



For anyone who has been living under a rock (which I would imagine the artist would approve of), artist Andy Goldsworthy creates elaborate installations out of natural materials he finds on the spot: leaves, rocks, twigs, even ice. Sometimes the work lasts only moments or hours. But here in San Francisco, we're fortunate enough to have two more or less permanent pieces.

Goldsworthy's **Faultline** is the cracked rock exhibit at the de Young -- a fissure that meanders through boulders and pavers, leading visitors to the museum while referencing our shared seismic history.

His second installation is in the city's other major park: the Presidio. In **Spire**, Goldsworthy brings the same lightness of concept and execution to another heavy medium. In this case, dozens of 15,000 pound cypress trees that the Presidio is systematically felling and replanting to create a more sustainable, staggered-growth forest.

I witnessed **Spire** in various stages of its construction as I visited the Presidio. At first I found it somewhat unremarkable -- a plain bundle of logs that reached skyward out of a newly-barren landscape. But after visiting **Goldsworthy at the Presidio**, I realized that the effort required to achieve that plainness made it remarkable.

Sketches, video and photographs document Goldsworthy's discipline in creating the **Spire**, which soars 90 feet into the sky, but is rooted in extensive excavation, concrete and rebar. The crane and chainsaw work alone is artistry. As is Goldsworthy's insistence to bundle the trees so deftly and tightly that almost no light can pass through.

Another highlight of the exhibit is a rubbing of the "king tree" or central tree. Compared to the heaviness of the trees and Goldsworthy's sketches, the rubbing is a ghostly and light counterpoint.

The exhibit states that the **Spire** tells the story of the forest, while welcoming the next generation of trees. "It is a poetic reference to the forest's past; as new young trees grow up to meet the sculpture, it will eventually disappear into the forest."

A simple idea, but complicated to portray so simply. The **Spire** projects monumental yet quiet power. And the Presidio exhibit reveals the mastery of that accomplishment.

Goldsworthy at the Presidio is at Building 49 next to the Presidio Officers' Club on the Main Post of the Presidio through July 19, 2009 For more information visit www.presidio.gov.