

San Francisco Chronicle

'International Orange' Opens at Fort Point

By Sam Whiting

May 20, 2012



Allison Smith wanted to create art that bridges a gap between civilians and service members. "There are female veterans all around us, but we often don't know how to interact with them," said Smith. "I hope that the art acts as a connector."

One Monday this month brought the greatest concentration of artistic talent to Fort Point since Alfred Hitchcock arrived at the seawall with Jimmy Stewart and Kim Novak.

It was move-in day for "International Orange," the site-specific installation that will transform the old brick Army post into a warren of gallery showrooms. The exhibition, a year in the making, with a budget of \$1 million, is sponsored by the For-Site Foundation: Art About Place.

The art For-Site has placed in the Presidio of San Francisco includes the permanent sculptures "Spire" and "Wood Line" by Andy Goldsworthy, and "Presidio Habitats," a yearlong display that drew 60,000 to 70,000 viewers to Fort Scott.

"International Orange" is its largest project yet, with 15 artists of local, national and international renown invited to respond to the 75th anniversary of the big orange bridge overhead.

Nothing like "International Orange" has ever been done inside the Fort Point National Historic Site, and, from the courtyard, the only visible hint is the bunting that hangs from the railing on three tiers. The 75 swags, in four shades of orange, were designed by textile artist Allison Smith of Oakland. It took four people four months to do all the painting, pleating and sewing.



Artist Anandamayi Arnold models one of the seven crepe paper dresses for the "International Orange" show saluting the Golden Gate Bridge's 75th anniversary



"I call the project Fiesta Queens" shares artist Anandamayi Arnold as she shows her Notebook with pictures, sketch and history of the counties she represents with her design dresses. She makes 7 crepe paper dresses inspired by the original Fiesta Queens from the Golden Gate bridge opening 75 years ago.

Bunting instantly creates anticipation and excitement, as if there is a World Series game about to get under way. This game is free. Following are three stories of what you'll find by climbing the stairs.

7 crepe paper Fiesta Queens to salute bridge

The six counties that chipped in to fund construction of the Golden Gate Bridge, in 1937, never get enough credit, so Anandamayi Arnold, age 37, has done something about it.

Using crepe paper as her fabric, Arnold has designed, sewn and glued an honorary gown for each, in a county-specific color with a county-specific pattern on the front. When "International Orange" opens Saturday these six gowns, plus one dedicated to the bridge itself, will be modeled by vintage mannequins in a piece called "Fiesta Queens," in a second-floor showroom at Fort Point.

Deserving of glory

The counties deserving of the glory are San Francisco, Marin, Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino and, most heroic of all, the tiny county of Del Norte, which paid its share while the nearer counties of Humboldt, Lake and Trinity declined. Upon learning that, Arnold got in her car and drove 355 miles to Crescent City just so she could understand Del Norte enough to do it justice in a dress.

"People basically voted for a bond that was backed by their homes because they were counting on the bridge to bring more revenue to their county," Arnold says. "So really the citizens of these counties invested in the bridge."

Arnold builds her paper sculptures in the home she grew up in, across from the Berkeley High School football field. The house is pre-quake and everything on display inside is pre-tech, including the people. Her mom, Tara Arnold, is a custom dressmaker and her dad, Arjuna, is a Sanskrit scholar.

There is a record player with opera. The finished dresses hang in the parlor, and if you peer through the front window, you won't know what century you are in. Ask Arnold for a business card and she tears off a strip of paper and writes

down her name and number.

Grandma's sewing machine

She works at her grandmother's black Singer sewing machine, which sits in a stuffed studio room at the top of a narrow staircase.

All of the dress silhouettes are the same, patterned after the uniforms worn by the Fiesta Queens, who paraded around the bridge-opening festivities in ruffly floor-length dresses.

Arnold describes the style as " '30s retro Spanish." The different county designs are collages similar to the patterns on the state quarters, if not as busy and promotional. The symbols are cut and glued.

"If you try and get everything about the county into the design, it just looks like one of those 1950s dish towels," she says. "So I get an impression and then respond to it."

Each dress took 10 days to construct, and her days can run to 12 hours hunched over the Singer or the glue pot. Arnold lives in Kensington, and if she arrives to work at noon she might not leave until midnight. The hours are flexible when you are working in your own childhood bedroom.



Artist Anandamayi Arnold works on 7 crepe paper dresses as one of 17 artists in "International Orange" in honor of the 75th anniversary of Golden Gate Bridge in May.

Wearing her art

These dresses aren't just for show. To prove it, Arnold will be wearing one of them at the "International Orange" premiere party on Thursday night. She hasn't decided which one, but she will be hard to miss, 5 feet, 10 inches in a gown of crepe paper over a hoop skirt, standing there shivering in the cold brick fort beneath the bridge.



You'd be forgiven for mistaking Stephanie Syjuco's art installation, "The International Orange Commemorative Store (a Proposition)," for a souvenir shop. In fact, it celebrates Golden Gate Bridge's color.

'International Orange Commemorative Store' as art

Like every major museum exhibition, "International Orange" comes with a gift shop. But the items don't bear the name of the show or the dates or the location. There are no logos or lettering of any kind, including price tags, because nothing is for sale. It is not that kind of store.

"It is an installation that looks like a souvenir shop," explains Stephanie Syjuco, the artist who has spent the last four months designing and making a catalog-worth of

mementos for "the International Orange Commemorative Store (a Proposition)."

"Imagine it as a large-scale proposal for a fictional store that would never exist," she says. "If you think about the way marketing happens for commemorative events there is such a big hubbub about logos and celebratory language. I was more interested in what would happen if the color itself was the thing that was celebrated."

A sculptor and installation artist, Syjuco has to laugh at how far her celebration of color has taken her. Instead of just one prototype of an international orange lapel pin, she has a bowl full of them, each hand-painted. Want an international orange postcard? She has a rack full of them, 50,000 in stock.

"I think I kind of outdid it, didn't I?" she says. "But you have to convince the public that there is this mass production going on."

Just before shipping it all over to Fort Point, her studio at Yosemite Place, a re-purposed mattress factory in the Bayview, looks like a distribution hub.

There are tissue holders, pencil cases, calling card cases, coffee bags, bottled water labels, potholders, back scrubbers, key chains, neck pillows, aprons, tote bags, T-shirts, pencils, rulers, flags, pennants, candles, coasters, puzzles, clocks, piggy banks, birdhouses and birds, necklaces and earrings, stationery and notebooks, orange wine in a bottle with an orange label, and a line of clothing.



20 minutes of orange

There is an international orange DVD and if you slip it into a DVD player you will get nothing but international orange on your screen for 20 minutes.

What Syjuco didn't fabricate or sew or assemble herself, she jobbed out to local artisans and manufacturers. Heath Ceramics of Sausalito contributed a set of 1940s dishware, glazed in orange. The orange Eames chair is a knockoff.

"There are some classy things. I didn't want it to look super-tacky," says Syjuco, whose 38th birthday is May 27, the day the bridge opened to foot traffic, 75 years ago.

Commercial success

Last year she installed "Shadowshop," a vendor for artists' wares on the fifth floor at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Intended as "a playful critique on a museum store," it was also a commercial success. In six months she sold \$105,000 in items, distributing the proceeds to 200 Bay Area artists.

A subversion of that theme, "The International Orange Commemorative Store (a Proposition)" will be on the third floor of the brick fort. Postcards will be given away, but people are going to want to buy the other stuff, which explains the "Proposition" in the title.

"Ironic, isn't it," she says.