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THE DO LIST

Artists Foretell the End of Everything in Cliff House Show, ‘Lands End’

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Installation view of Ana Teresa Fernández, ‘On the Horizon,’ 2021; acrylic resin cylinders, seawater. Part of the exhibition ‘Lands End,’ organized by FOR-SITE. (Courtesy of FOR-SITE; Photo by Robert Divers Herrick)

At the bottom of the Cliff House basement, Jana Winderen’s sound sculpture *Energy Field* emits the howl of someone, or something, in pain. Ravens air their grievances. Ice floes shriek and break apart as they melt into the ocean. Trees moan and buckle against merciless weather.

Winderen's collection of voices (or vocalizations) from nature encapsulates the larger theme of FOR-SITE's exhibit *Lands End*. The concept of "Weltschmerz," loosely translated as the "world pain," is featured in nearly every reclaimed room.

When the Cliff House closed at the end of 2020, it seemed unlikely that, within a year, the building would be repurposed as a temporary museum. But FOR-SITE announces its singular approach to curation in its tagline: "art about place." The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy agreed to host the foundation's exhibit through the end of March 2022. High atop a cliff on the city's shoreline, the Cliff House offers views of the ocean from every vantage point.



Installation view of Carsten Höller, 'Octopus,' 2014 in 'Lands End,' organized by FOR-SITE. (Courtesy of FOR-SITE; Photo by Robert Divers Herrick)

Lands End capitalizes on both its setting above the Pacific and the decaying building itself. Days before the exhibit opened, the first rainstorm of the season caused some damage; when I visited, several ceiling panels were water-stained or in the process of being replaced. While one of the curators worried another storm was due to arrive, I found the rusting doors and smell of dampness worked in concert with the show. Together, site and artwork communicate an ongoing tragedy—the suffering of Planet Earth at the hands of mankind.

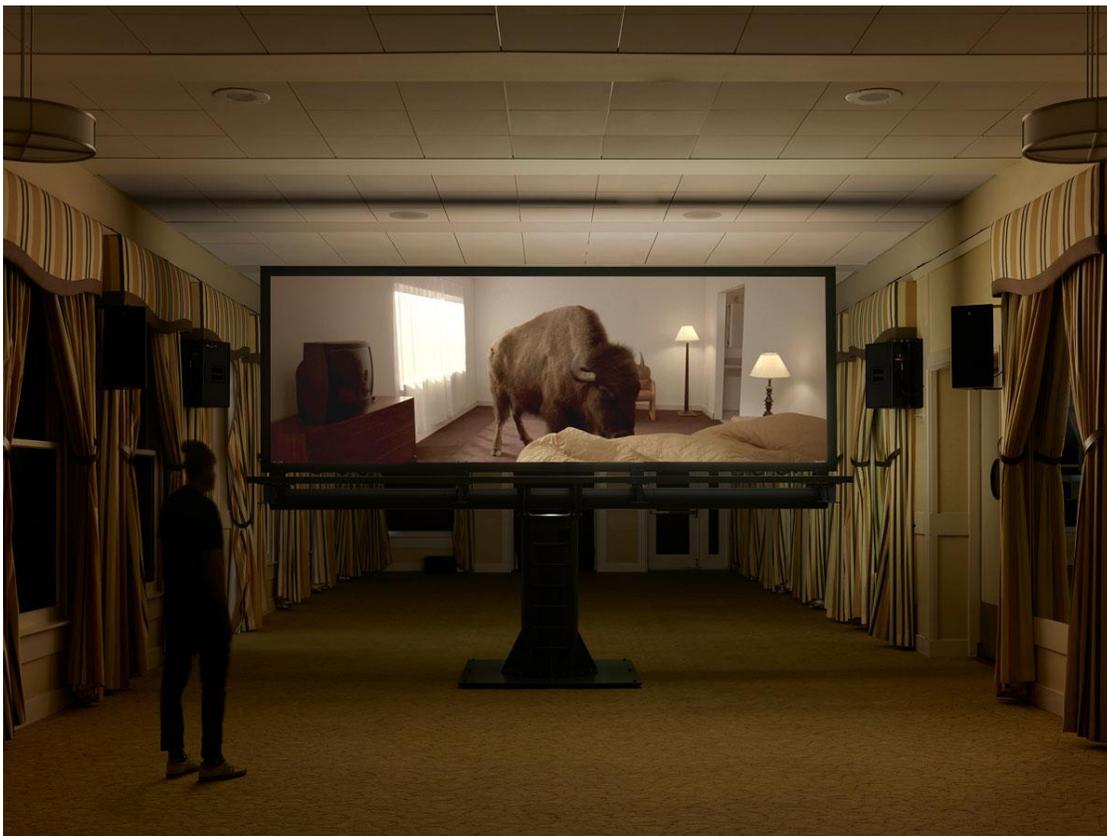
While there are whimsical and nautical subjects competing for attention, the dark basement steps leading down to Winderen’s discord and fury alter the reception the sunnier displays. I fell in love with Carsten Höller’s purple-colored polyurethane *Octopus*, sprawled out on a platform like a cuddly, domestic, animal pal, only to recall that humans are destroying its natural ocean habitat (can an octopus howl?).



Installation view of *One Beach Plastic*, 'for here or to go,' 2021 in 'Lands End,' organized by FOR-SITE. (Courtesy of FOR-SITE; Photo by Robert Divers Herrick)

That point is underlined in *for here or to go*, Richard Lang and Judith Selby's remarkable set piece. Housed in the Cliff House's defunct kitchen, the artists, a husband and wife team who call themselves One Beach Plastic, have been collecting detritus for decades along the Point Reyes' shoreline at Kehoe Beach. For a few seconds, I stood outside the kitchen looking at a variety of objects that seemed out of place. I could see that the staging areas were covered in plates and bowls and jars, all of them overflowing—it looked like a kitchen prepped for a lunch rush.

When I stepped inside for a closer look, I saw pile after pile of misshapen mounds of plastic in a hundred different shades of white. Instead of salads and soups, grilled cheese sandwiches and tuna melts, I found cutlery, rope, concrete, metal, vials, wheels, caps and containers. All of it washed ashore, discarded by human hands. Knowing this waste showed up on a single shoreline only amplified the idea that a real-life octopus was more likely to be choking on trash than swimming in an ocean free of plastic debris.



Installation view of Doug Aitken, 'migration (empire),' 2008 in 'Lands End,' organized by FOR-SITE. (Courtesy of FOR-SITE; Photo by Robert Divers Herrick)

More soothing, and hopeful, is Doug Aitken's film *migration (empire)*. Throughout most of *Lands End*, sea birds, surfers and crashing waves are visible from every window. But in the screening room for *migration (empire)* (which must have been a formal parlor or ballroom), the windows are blacked out. Aitken films a series of animals in roadside motels. Among the many creatures he's chosen are a baffled owl and a pair of albino peacocks. He captures their fanned feathers as they ruffle themselves out across two twin beds. And, improbably, a horse watches television.

The obvious message we're witnessing is the collision between man and nature. What makes the film allusive and hypnotic is its slower frame rate and moody lighting. Aitken's camera is in no hurry to leave, and although logic and instinct indicate otherwise, neither are the animals. They look like curious actors improvising in their novel, artificial environments. Or, at least, investigating the human standing in front of them with his wide-open lens.



Installation view of Andy Goldsworthy, 'Geophagia,' 2021 in 'Lands End,' organized by FOR-SITE. (Courtesy of FOR-SITE; Photo by Robert Divers Herrick)

It takes a similar amount of attention to avoid missing Andy Goldsworthy's colorless installation *Geophagia*. The title means, approximately, a devouring of the earth. In a nod to the apocalyptic end days, Goldsworthy has covered all of the restaurant's tables with thick slabs of cracked white clay. Thirty years ago you could sit at those tables and order a meal. Now, after a century of diners have long since come and gone, *Geophagia* seals a memory of them, above ground, in a makeshift cemetery.

Geophagia's enduring effect, like the *Lands End* exhibit itself, also suggests that the tables are just the beginning. It's simply a matter of time before the rising tides and recurring mudslides cover entire restaurants, highways and houses. As we invade the octopus's environment, the environment itself, vis-à-vis climate change, is invading ours. A terrible reciprocity has occurred.



'Lands End' is on view at the Cliff House (1090 Point Lobos Ave., San Francisco) through March 27, 2022. [Details here.](#)