

Ana-Teresa Fernández

# SFGATE

## Why there were water-filled cylinders at Ocean Beach on Sunday

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Dancer Meredith Webster among "On the Horizon" by Ana Teresa Fernandez on Oct. 10, 2021 at Ocean Beach in San Francisco.

Courtesy William Randall Henner

An unusual sight stood against the vast water at Ocean Beach on Sunday. Six-foot-tall cylinders of clear acrylic, filled to their brims with seawater, jutted into the sunny, blue sky.

The cylinders were not there by mistake or accident. Rather, they were part of an art installation titled “On the Horizon” by San Francisco artist Ana Teresa Fernandez.

The installation, she told SFGATE, “is about climate change and specifically sea levels rising.”

In her research about climate change, Fernandez said she continually ran into the same figure: Sea levels will rise by 6 feet in the next 30 to 50 years.

Fernandez wanted to make that number palpable, somatic. So she designed the sculptures, with support from Doniece Sandoval of LavaMae, to visually represent how that number feels.



Images of "On the Horizon" by Ana Teresa Fernandez on Oct. 10, 2021, at Ocean Beach in San Francisco.

Courtesy William Randall Henner

"I am 5 foot 10. Six feet is taller than me," Fernandez said. "That is above my height. That is above the majority of people's height. And what does that mean?"

"A lot of what I attempt to do with my work is to create situations in which people can feel situations or information that are quite difficult to digest," she said.

Indeed, the installation appeared to be a success Sunday, as hundreds of beachgoers, young and old, gravitated toward the stunning sculptures. The children chased each other through them, dancers stretched their limbs among them and many people stood to simply contemplate their meaning.

“People tend to freeze up when it comes to climate change, global warming,” Fernandez said. “It’s like, how do we melt people’s hearts? How do we get people to come into an experience and be able to digest and simmer in a situation that is hard.”

Fernandez thinks there’s different levels of understanding when it comes to climate change. There’s intellectual comprehension, sure, but “there’s also empathic understanding, where you’re able to palpably feel it.”



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That's what the 6-foot-tall sculptures do. Fernandez said they are meant to harken to Aristotle's "wisdom begins with wonder."

"In this moment of wonder, we're able to acquire wisdom through somatic experience," Fernandez said. "We're able to viscerally feel what 6 feet exemplifies."

Fernandez said the installation drew people in like "moths to a flame." First they wondered, what is this? Then they asked, what does it mean?

"The way these pillars capture the light and the water, it's just so seductive," Fernandez said. "People want to come towards it and want to know what it's about."

Different age groups appeared to have different reactions, Fernandez said. Children pranced through the pillars, staring at them, wondering at them. In a sense, their bodies became the water flowing around them, while the pillars acted as the humans, Fernandez said.

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Older people tended to respond differently.

“We had a lot of older people walk through the piece, and there's something they feel in a different way,” she said. “Their bodies are aging and they see that the ocean is aging.”

Fernandez, who lives in the Sunset District, has installed the piece twice before, but it had a distinct impact being placed within her community, members of which helped to fill the cylinders with ocean water, she said.

“It’s important that we listen to the ocean,” Fernandez said. “And we should listen to each other, so that we listen to science, so that we listen to Mother Nature.”

If you missed the temporary installation Sunday, you can view the cylinders at [an upcoming exhibition about climate change](#) at the Cliff House beginning Nov. 7, called “Lands End.”

<https://www.sfgate.com/sf-culture/article/ocean-beach-installation-ana-teresa-fernandez-art-16530339.php>