

Ana-Teresa Fernández

VOGUE

Set Against the Crashing Waves of the Pacific, a New Art Exhibition Takes On the Climate Crisis

By: Marley Marius

Published on: November 5th, 2021



San Francisco's Cliff House, the dramatic setting for "Lands End." Photo: Shutterstock

Since 2003, the San Francisco-based FOR-SITE Foundation has centered “art about place,” mounting affecting exhibitions at Fort Mason Chapel (2017’s “Sanctuary,” examining “the basic human need for refuge, protection, and sacred ground” through a series of contemporary handmade rugs), Fort Winfield Scott (2016’s “Home Land Security,” which activated former military structures in the Presidio), Alcatraz Island (2014’s “@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz”), and other sites. With its latest, “Lands End,” opening to the public on Sunday, the setting is San Francisco’s historic Cliff House, a former restaurant and ballroom built in the mid-19th century. There, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, 26 artists from 14 different countries are using painting, photography, sculpture, sound, and other media to respond to the climate crisis.

“It was an appropriate venue from a number of perspectives,” says curator Cheryl Haines, the founding executive director of FOR-SITE and principal of Haines Gallery. “From inside the building, you feel you’re cantilevered out over the edge of the ocean. It’s a very energized space, and it makes you acutely aware of how important the sea is to our existence here; how fragile and changeable it is.” All of that “opens your mind to greater issues, and the fact of a global connectivity,” she adds.



THE "CLIFF HOUSE."

An 1872 illustration of the Cliff House. Photo: Getty Images

Indeed, foregrounded in “Lands End” is the value of collective action in the face of a truly international issue. “By bringing together a group of artists from around the world, the exhibition strives to remind viewers of our interconnectedness via global currents of water and air,” Haines’s curatorial statement reads, “and to encourage them to partake in all the fresh ideas and perspectives that emerge from the rising tides as we head deeper into this tumultuous century.”

The creatives that she assembled include Brian Jungen, whose sculpture *Tombstone* (2019) considers the effects of colonialism on Native lands; Doug Aitken, whose video installation *migration (empire)* (2008) highlights “conflicts between human and animal territories”; and Andy Goldsworthy, who points to California’s ongoing drought

with *Geophagia* (2021), a set of salvaged restaurant tables covered in cracking white clay from the Central Valley. Elsewhere in the space, Iris van Herpen exhibits a dress made from upcycled sea debris; Mark Dion and Dana Sherwood riff on memento mori with their colorful and grim *Confectionery Marvels and Curious Collections* (2021); and Pae White evokes rainfall in a suite of commissioned tapestries.



Andy Goldsworthy, *Geophagia*, 2021. Lone kaolin clay and wooden tables. Courtesy of the artist. Photos: Robert Divers Herrick



Brian Jungen, *Tombstone*, 2019. Rubbermaid step stools and filing cabinets. 69 x 107 x 86 in. Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver, B.C.

The setting proved especially resonant for Ana Teresa Fernández, the artist behind *On the Horizon* (2021), an installation of six-foot-tall acrylic pillars filled with sea water. (In a worst-case-scenario, sea levels could rise by that much over the next 80 years.) “You have all this epic landscape occurring, and you have these waves that are, like, 15 feet and crashing into these three large boulders that are just in front of the building,” she says. The precariousness of the site—its proximity to a ruinous force—feels germane to the issue at hand in “Lands End.” “There’s nothing ‘pacific’ about it,” Fernández says of the site. “It’s quite literally the wild west.”

So too was she inspired by the variety of approaches and concerns represented in the show. “I’ve known their work for quite some time,” Fernández says of the other artists “Lands End,” “so it’s interesting when we intersect. For example, Andy Goldsworthy’s piece and mine are at opposite extremes, right? Mine is about an abundance of water and his is about scarcity and dryness. But this is very much what the conversation around climate change is—extremes, and all the complexities in between.”



Ana Teresa Fernández, *On the Horizon*, 2021. Acrylic resin cylinders filled with seawater. 72 in. high each. Courtesy of the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco. Photo: Courtesy of Ana Teresa Fernández

To engage those ideas without getting preachy or teachy was a priority for virtually every person in the show, Sherwood included. “I don’t really believe in didacticism in art—I think that’s horrible,” she says. What she seeks out

instead are ways to intrigue and provoke, which in her case often begin with imagery related to food. Take the jewel-like, cast-resin desserts in *Confectionery Marvels and Curious Collections*, for instance: “They are kind of hypnotic—I made these porcelain and gold leaf cake stands for each one,” she says. Get in close enough, though, and you’ll see the signs of rot: Each goodie is covered in dead butterflies, moths, bees, and wasps. Nature isn’t healing so much as eagerly, messily reclaiming what once belonged to it. “One of the strongest properties of art is that you can create an immediate physical reaction and connection,” Sherwood continues.



Mark Dion and Dana Sherwood, *Confectionery Marvels and Curious Collections* (detail), 2021. Resin, insects, porcelain, plaster, glass, and various dry and wet specimens. Courtesy of the artists. Photo: Robert Divers Herrick

That sentiment is shared by White, whose tapestries, depicting drifting clouds and silvery rainfall, indulge a bit of wishful, magical thinking amid California's endless cycle of devastating wildfires. "I asked myself this question: There is a critique here, but it happens to be really beautiful. What does that mean?" she says of her work. "I think it comes down to believing that humanity can receive these ideas, and that through them maybe there will be some desire for change."

For her part, Haines has already started to formulate what a "sequel" to "Lands End" might look like. "I'm thinking about what I would do next around these topics—global warming, sea health, ocean stewardship—because it's incredibly rich, and artists have always been on the vanguard of social change," she says. "A lot of the works in this exhibition ask questions. It's up to the viewer to complete the equation."

"Lands End" is on from November 7 to March 27, 2022, at 1090 Point Lobos Ave, San Francisco. Entry is timed and free.

<https://www.vogue.com/article/lands-end-climate-crisis-exhibition>