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3.17 / A Living Thing That Changes

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International Orange

Group Show, May 25 - Oct 28

Fort Point National Historic Site

By John Zarobell



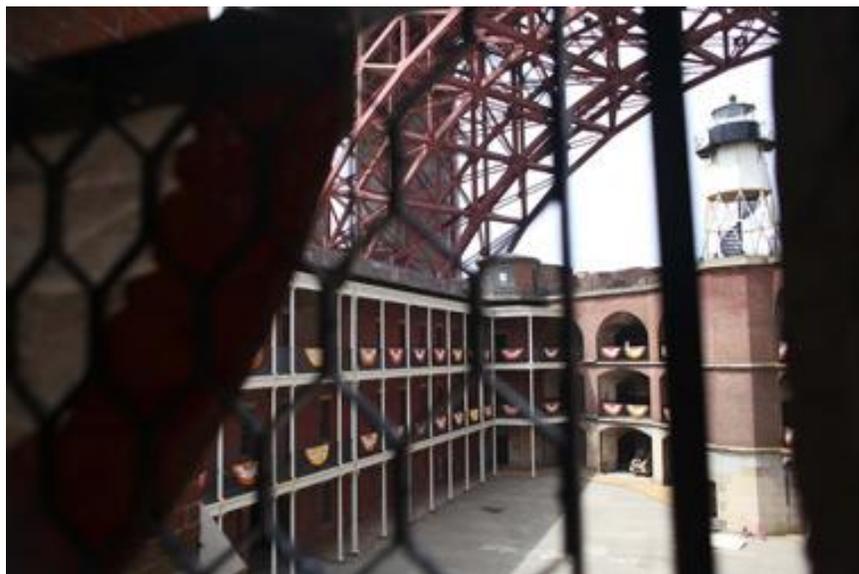
Abelardo Morell. *Vertigo*, 2012; site-specific double camera obscura using Fort Point windows to reflect an inverted image of the Golden Gate Bridge into the interior space of the East Bastion of the Fort. Courtesy of the Artist and the FOR-SITE Foundation. Photo: Jan Stürmann.

Celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge, *International Orange* is a public art exhibition like no other. Orchestrated by Cheryl Haines, the executive director of the FOR-SITE Foundation, this project is a product of a partnership between the FOR-SITE Foundation, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, and the National Park Service. The realization of this project is an achievement in itself, and it salutes the Golden Gate Bridge resoundingly. But as an exhibition, *International Orange* also opens up new domains for the realm of public art.

Like the broader sphere of contemporary art, public art has diversified, incorporating strategies of social practice, performance, and video. Yet I have never before seen such a range of time-based public works assembled together as what is incorporated here. Though lacking performance-based works, *International Orange* hosts an array of approaches to public art that create dynamic and compelling dialogue around the theme of the Golden Gate Bridge. The profusion of video works above all, in the breezy exposed spaces of Fort Point, is something of a revelation. By tucking screens into the darkest corners of the buildings, such as with Abelardo Morell's projections, new perspectives are created. In *Vertigo* (2012), Morell breaks down the wall between interior and exterior spaces by using the age-old optical technology of the camera obscura. Small apertures allow light into a dark room to create a pair of live-action cameras, reflecting the outside world upside-down on adjacent white screens. The incredible beauty of the exterior environment beams into the chilly darkness of the room, and the sounds of seagulls, tides, and traffic complete the work.

Sound works, another form of time-based art, are also presented in abundance. Bill Fontana siphons the sounds and rhythms of the bridge in real time, accompanied by live footage taken from just beneath the traffic deck, in *Acoustical Visions of the Golden Gate Bridge* (2012). In *Sea Vision T.V.* (2012), Courtney Lain presents historic film footage of the bridge on an archaic television in tandem with her musical interpretation of the structure. Jeannene Przyblyski's *K-BRIDGE* (2012) is a radio program that plays historic stories and contemporary interviews about the bridge, complemented by sounds and music written for the project. This program is played daily in a former officer's quarters. Visitors can access the broadcast on their cell phones via a wifi network installed at the Fort, and specially produced portable radios are available to hearing impaired visitors. Przyblyski's recording nods to history not only in its gallery presentation but also in the old-timey style of the program.

While these works are all time-based, the last two pieces constitute forms of engagement with the past. Time-based works rarely compose the foundation of



Allison Smith. *Fort Point Bunting*, 2012; seventy-five swags of painted linen bunting with unique photographs and quotes from female United States Military veterans. Courtesy of the Artist and the FOR-SITE Foundation. Photo: Jan Stürmann.

a public art project—permanently installed sculptural works are the norm—but it is more fascinating that the medium intersects with the themes of the works here. The effect is remarkable because history cannot be grasped in a glance. To direct the attention of a casual observer towards history requires both commemoration and encouragement. It is one thing to come to Fort Point, learn about its former function as a military sentry, and appreciate the scenic beauty and monumental grandeur of the Golden Gate Bridge; it is quite another for visitors to reflect upon their relationships to history. The selection of artists commissioned to produce works, and the forms of their responses, demonstrates a collective effort to reconfigure the nature of public art and its relationship to history. Time is the method used by many of these artists to draw out the complexities involved in looking backwards and determining what this past might mean to us.

Other artists in the show use space to engage viewers with place. The installations of Allison Smith and Stephanie Syjuco direct our attention to the fort as a historic site and tourist destination. Smith has festooned the balconies of the fort's interior courtyard with orange-and-white striped bunting in *Fort Point Bunting* (2012). The various shades of orange—the color of the bridge—correspond with codes for safety and security, such as the Homeland Security color-coded alert system. The swags are backed by photos and quotes from women who have served in the United States military. Smith's work addresses national service while also upsetting stereotypes of the military, linking that world to craft in unexpected ways. The quotes are often pithy, such as this one by Liz Colunga: “The Military allowed me to find my true self and pursue a higher education after the brain-washing.”

Stephanie Syjuco's *The International Orange Commemorative Store (A Proposition)* (2012) invites visitors to reflect on their expectations of exhibition experiences. Building on her prior project at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, *Shadowshop*, Syjuco has generated a retail environment to capture the memory of this commemorative exhibition, and, like one might expect, a series of different products with spiffily designed international-orange swatches can be found. But the artist plays a trick on viewers, challenging their consumerist desires and forcing them to acknowledge that, as Syjuco's project description informs, “there are many experiences that money can't buy.” The contents of Syjuco's store are not for sale, the suggestion being that one cannot pack memories into an object of desire that is retired to a knickknack shelf.

Both these works challenge viewers to find history in our midst and acknowledge the ways in which time shapes our world. In this sense, the multiscreen video work by Camille Utterback, *Span* (2012), functions as a linchpin for the entire show. In a series of video projections on screens arranged in the geological form of the Golden Gate, the artist layers footage to demonstrate the landscape's evolution over time. The impact of the natural world and the growth of civilization on the land are made visible through the overlaying of live images on maps. The experience of viewing *International Orange* is another layer of transformation that aligns our presence with the past and reminds us how small our individual footprints really are.

International Orange is on view at the [Fort Point National Historic Site](#), in San Francisco, through October 28, 2012.