

# Coastal art installations

by Sura Wood

The idea of site-specific installations in unconventional spaces is often more exciting in theory than in practice. That context can shape perception of artwork in unexpected ways, and that artwork, in turn, can alter one's view of the place where it's exhibited, are thrilling concepts but devilishly difficult to pull off. *Home Land Security*, the latest project from the FOR-SITE Foundation, a collaborative venture between curator Cheryl Haines, owner of Haines Gallery; the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy; National Park Service; and the Presidio Trust, exemplifies what happens when all the elements align. This is the same team, with the exception of Presidio Trust, behind last year's *Ai Weiwei at Alcatraz*, which was long on ambition but failed to fully ignite, in part because the ghosts of tortured souls and the decrepit prison's cinematic mystique and atmosphere hung so heavy they competed with the work.

Special in its own right, *Home Land* hits its marks, and out of the park, so to speak. Recent and newly commissioned paintings, sculptures and videos are by a slate of 18 international artists and collectives, who, like latter-day archaeologists, unearth hidden histories and inhabit five historic structures, including old gun batteries and a deserted chapel at Ft. Winfield Scott, a deactivated coastal defense complex at the Presidio. Though the ruggedly beautiful area, which overlooks the Golden Gate Bridge and the Pacific Ocean, is spectacular, the site reinforces rather



Robert Divers Herrick

"Weapon" (2003-7) by Yin Xiuzhen (view from outside Battery Boutelle): used clothes and materials from everyday life, courtesy the artist and Beijing Commune.

than overwhelms the exhibition's primary themes of coastal defense, displaced and voiceless persons, fear of the "other," and war: its weapons and the damage done.

The Nike Administration building, the first stop on the tour, most closely approximates a standard gallery experience with a series of white

brick rooms off a narrow hallway, but that doesn't mean the work isn't first-rate. Israeli, New-York-based artist Tirtzah Bassel does wonders with duct tape in "Concourse," using it to draw scenes on the walls, of airport travelers dragging suitcases, hanging on security rope lines, and being subjected to TSA pat-downs.

One figure with his hands up blocks a barred window. New media video artist Bill Viola's hypnotic *Martyr* series features solitary figures dressed in white, in works projected on four screens mounted in a darkened room. In "Fire Martyr," an African-American man dozes in a chair as flames rain down on him from above,

while "Earth" starts with a man buried under a pile of rubble that defies gravity, the dirt rising slowly toward the sky as he unfurls into an upright position, unbowed and clean as a whistle. In "Air," a woman twists in the wind, suspended by knotted rope, her ankles tied.

Displacement and loss course through this exhibition, and Alexia Webster, who runs a mobile portrait studio that travels to refugee camps around the globe, supplies transmissions from limbo. Equipped with a portable printer, she offered to photograph people in the Bulengo IDP camp in the Congo. Having lost everything, some stood on line for hours and borrowed clothes so they could pose for the precious family photos seen here. Trevor Paglen's "Code Names of the Surveillance State" consists of a list of names scrolling on a rectangular screen. Dressy Shoes, Dumb Waiter and my favorite, Evil Hamster, are among the 4,000 snappy appellations used by the NSA for security purposes.

Battery Godfrey, just down the hill, is where installations complemented a low-ceilinged space as if they were made for each other. Here the AK-47, the cheap weapon of choice for Soviets and guerilla insurgents, and the M-16, the precision American firearm, literally collide in "AK-47 vs. M16," a brilliant, arresting piece from the Propeller Group, a collective established in Vietnam a decade ago, now based in Ho Chi Minh City and L.A. The work calls up both the Cold War

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# Waste not, want not

by Erin Blackwell

We are indeed fortunate to live in the enlightened city of San Francisco, where recycling is a way of life. Some of us are more into it than others, assiduously parsing each individual tea bag towards the compost and moaning inwardly when we see that a plastic bag has insinuated itself into an otherwise pristine recycling tub. Others are downright degenerate, bundling their cardboard toilet rolls along with shiny energy-bar wrappers and flinging them all into the black bin destined for landfill. Far from being a matter of individual weakness, a failure to recycle is a blot on civic pride, as is made clear in a thrilling new documentary called *Racing to Zero*, opening Friday at the Roxie.

*Zero* in the title stands for zero waste, zero landfill, nothing going into the black bins. The self-imposed deadline for the city of San Francisco, to which Mayor Lee has given his imprimatur, is the year 2020. That deadline has been on the minds of the people whose minds work that way since the early 70s. We are currently generating irredeemable trash at the

rate of 400,000 tons a year, or half of what we were generating 15 years ago, but equal to what we generated in the early 70s. The fact is, we have to work a lot harder today than we did then to combat lifestyles based on accelerating addictions to disposability.

*Racing to Zero*, produced by Diana Fuller and directed by Christopher Beaver, wastes zero of its purposeful 57 minutes in lecturing us on our predilection for products wrapped in trashy plastic and recyclable cardboard that we sometimes fail to conscientiously separate out in the blue-for-recycling and black-for-landfill bins so conveniently provided by the city. The film wisely steers clear of imposing any guilt trips, focusing rather on a concept somewhat ineptly described by James Kao, of Green Citizen, as "cradle to cradle." We're not talking human babies here, but items produced to serve a human need, which wear out, or get boring, and need to leave our sight, but can and must be repurposed for some other human.

"Out of sight, out of mind" doesn't work for Robert Haley, the curly-haired gentle giant who is Zero Waste Manager for the city's Department of the Environment. The concept



Courtesy the filmmaker

Recology artist-in-residence Terry Berlier in director Christopher Beaver's *Racing to Zero*.

of "throwing something away," as though objects could be made to magically disappear, seriously needs to be composted. *Zero* conveys, with a subtle, lyrical simplicity, not unlike Soviet cinema of the 1920s, how all our yucky urban garbage can be spun into gold-like threads of useful hand-me-downs to Goodwill, raw materials to eclectic artists, electronics to Green Citizen, concrete to Ferma Corporation, stubborn

plastic to MBA Polymers, glass to bottle-makers, paper to China, and most sublimely, food scraps to heroic earthworms called Red Wrigglers, who shit them out as life-giving mulch for farmland a wee bit north.

Like Soviet cinema, this vision is utopic, but it is not unachievable, and as the film gently reminds us, the goal of zero waste will only be achieved by communal effort. "There are financial incentives," says

Haley, and there are laws. And there is a third way. "This is the culture of San Francisco. In San Francisco, this is what people do. And then, people will naturally tend to follow that social bar. This is all part of the educational process." Otherwise known as peer pressure, or wanting to be cool, or fashion. There's an idea: overly art-directed shots of models tossing carrot tops, to-go cups, and slightly nibbled burritos into green bins.

Unlike Soviet cinema, *Zero* is devoid of ideology. There's no reference to our proud hippie heritage, which includes the San Francisco tradition of the free table: any designated area in a building where people discard still-useful items. The simplest and most antithetical to a market economy, this repurposing method is said to have originated with the Diggers, or perhaps they brought it back. The Diggers were a group of hippies who performed in the parks, provided free food, medical care and housing, and generally offset the pernicious grasp of private property any way they could. Their spirit did not die with the 60s. It's alive and well to the extent that we practice commonsense, life-enhancing civic virtues. ▼

# Indies at the box office

by David Lamble

Ever find yourself loving a new indie drama only to discover it has already left town? No matter how good that LGBTQ movie is, it still has to compete for screen space and consumer dollars with an ever-increasing tide of similar fare. While 2016 has been an above-average year artistically, how did indie films survive the rigors of reviews, fickle taste and hundreds of competing entertainment options? Our source is the theatre-tracking service Box Office Mojo. Scanning their Top

100 grossing films of the summer, it's dispiriting to note that Sundance films are way down the list. Here are the raw numbers for the summer's smartest offerings.

**Florence Foster Jenkins** This critically praised comedy-drama about the 30s heiress whose lifelong ambition to sing opera was thwarted until the end of her life by a complete lack of talent has become an Oscar-buzz vehicle for Meryl Streep. Produced on what seems like a shoestring budget of \$19 million, the film has grossed just south of \$20 million and can be seen on

a robust lineup of 1,324 screens nationwide. Since the film-biz rule of thumb is two-and-a-half times the negative cost, *FFJ* will not break even until the first batch of critics' Top 10 lists are announced.

**Viva Héctor Medina** makes his feature debut as Jesus, a skinny teen who dreams of becoming a larger-than-life drag diva. By night Jesus appears in Old Havana's cross-dressing clubs, while by day he's doing hair and wigs for his hood's grand dames. Jesus' cross to bear is his sponging, homophobic macho dad. A hit on the queer

festival circuit, *Viva* did modest but steady business in the early summer, with a two-month US run netting \$177,062. Given the practices of the import film business, it's doubtful that its producers will see much or any of its Stateside income.

**Spa Night** Korean American filmmaker Andrew Ahn plants his good-little-boy protagonist David (Joe Seo, Sundance Special Grand Jury Award) in his family's run-down LA bathhouse. David quickly discovers that this old-fashioned business has become a *de facto* late-night same-sex make-out club.

One-week run on American screens made a total of \$20,224.

**Little Men** Gay writer-director Ira Sachs explores gentrification through the lens of a double coming-of-age tale, 12-year-old best friends in breakout performances from Theo Taplitz and scene-stealing natural-born actor Michael Barbieri. *Little Men* did modest business for the month it was in theatres, with an American domestic gross of \$282,968.

**Front Cover** Ryan discovers that his emotionally volatile editor has reneged on a long-promised cover See page 19 »



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If that's in no particular order, it's because the centerpiece of the opening, the concert itself, couldn't seem to come up with any clear priorities either.

MTT has attempted and achieved a mostly persuasive formula over the years. As the elegant opening-night host, his results usually satisfy just about everyone. There are typically big-name guest stars on hand too, as further insurance of glamor. The beginning of 2016-17 felt much the same as always, but the show was surprisingly shorter and slighter than what we learned to expect. A "Give em what they want" programming attitude didn't appear too heavy or overly cliché, but there was more sense of grab-bag than potpourri about the bill.

The opening Overture from *William Tell* by Rossini was strong enough to engage younger listeners, but I suspect it was the older crowd that smiled most when the *Lone Ranger* theme appeared. Not exactly pandering, but I wondered why the overcooked *amuse-bouche* was served in the first place.

Time to send in the superstars. Mezzo-soprano Susan Graham made a fine entrance, looking marvelous in emerald green, to sing a measured and tonally lustrous aria from Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*. Gal pal and colleague (both

chums of MTT as well) soprano Renée Fleming arrived to sing two arias because La Graham's first song was "longer than hers." A lovely gem from Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur* and the familiar, beloved "O mio babbino caro" from Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* highlighted the concert with Fleming's trademark limpid sound. "Like buttah," as they say, and the first half ended with the pair singing a bright duet from Mozart's *Così fan tutte*.

After a literally sparkling intermission (nothing like the bubbly to fuel the fun), the second half opened with *Three Movements*, which was to be played again later in the week and on the following Sunday in the concert celebrating Steve Reich's birthday. It was a fine rendition, easily the most impressive music on the bill, and happily, the composer was there, wearing his trademark ball cap, to accept the ovation. Granted, the piece stuck out a little, like the only guest who didn't get the dress code, but it was enough to satisfy listeners hankering for more substantial fare.

The ab fab ladies returned to sing some Gershwin and then paired amusingly for a jokingly confrontational and cleverly modified Irving Berlin "Anything You Can Do."

If the program seemed slighter than most in recent memory, it was still fun and fast enough, and the *soigné* after-party could easily be called gala. Bigger bites of the orchestral repertoire will be following soon. ▼

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and the hotter one waged in Southeast Asia in a freeze-frame of bullets shot simultaneously from each weapon into ballistic gel that solidified. The result: tensile silver fragments, frayed, jagged and stretched, encased in a vitrine lit from within. The victimless "shoot-out" sits on a stand like a specimen in a mad scientific experiment. Across the way is a slow-motion video of the dueling metal projectiles at the moment they were shot into the gel, a substance designed to mimic human flesh for weapons-testing purposes.

Nearby, in what feels like the dimly lit recesses of a castle dungeon, Do Ho Suh's "Some/One," a six-foot-tall, stainless steel robe, awaits a Samurai warrior, albeit one of gargantuan proportions, or a knight errant. (Resembling armor, it's actually comprised of dog tags, shipped in sections and assembled on-site.) Reflective on the inside, and sweeping around the floor in a three-quarter circle, it holds court in a pool of light like a grand artifact

displayed at a history museum.

Merging the conflicting forces of culture and militarism, Shahpour Pouyan's "Projectiles," a quartet of totemic, missile-inspired works, hang above the floor of the vacant Ft. Scott Chapel. There's a hint of Moorish influence in the Iranian artist's wing-like steel sculptures. Sharply pointed at top and bottom like arrows, and etched by hand, they have long mesh cylinders, modeled after Persian chain mail, lodged in the center. A fifth piece looms over an absent altar.

Walking back to the car, I was haunted by the words of Tammam Azzam, whose large-scale black & white paintings, based on news photographs of devastated Syrian cities, capture the maze of bombed-out streets in his homeland. Although he wants to believe the creative impulse can rebuild the future, he says, "Bullets are more powerful than art now." Let's hope for the sake of humanity he's wrong about the latter.

Author's note: Be prepared for cold, wind, flocks of pelicans and heart-stopping scenery. Don't miss it. ▼

Through Dec. 18. Info: for-site.org.

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story and has instead assigned him to create a campaign around an ego-inflated Chinese fashion model just in from the mainland. Director Ray Yeung's film was one of the weakest-performing of this summer's LG-BTQ dramas, taking in \$6,907 in a single week's run on two screens.

**Where to Invade Next** Michael Moore travels to thriving democracies from Norway to Latin America, quizzing the locals about how the US should get its act together and provide for Americans the sort of domestic socialism, state-sponsored health care, that other societies take for granted. It's performed modestly well for a political doc, with a domestic box office take of \$3,820,195.

**The Last Man on the Moon** Only after a second viewing of British doc-maker Mark Craig's gorgeously filmed memory piece did it strike me just how sad it is for 21st-century Americans to be casting a nostalgic eye back on the salad days of the US space program. Took in \$30,880 in its single week on American screens.

**The Lobster** A bleak love story unfolding at a rural hotel where



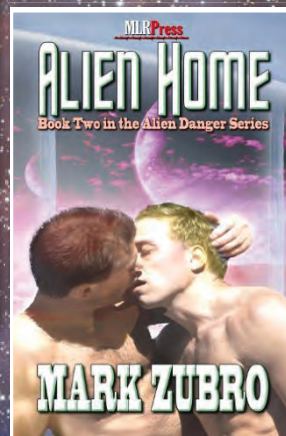
Meryl Streep and Hugh Grant in *Florence Foster Jenkins*: yet to break even.

single people are tracked down and forced to pair up. The penalty for not going along with the plan is being turned into an animal and hunted down for sport. Ran for four months in the US, reaching domestic ticket sales of \$8,685,182.

**The Hollars** This screwball family comedy finds character actor Margo Martindale finally finding her perfect showcase as a family matriarch dying of cancer forced to ride herd over an extended clan with few truly grown-ups. Took in \$38,800 its opening weekend, and is still in release.

**Miles Ahead** Don Cheadle dishes up a warts-and-all portrait of jazz genius Miles Davis. Domestic sales of \$2,609,971. ▼

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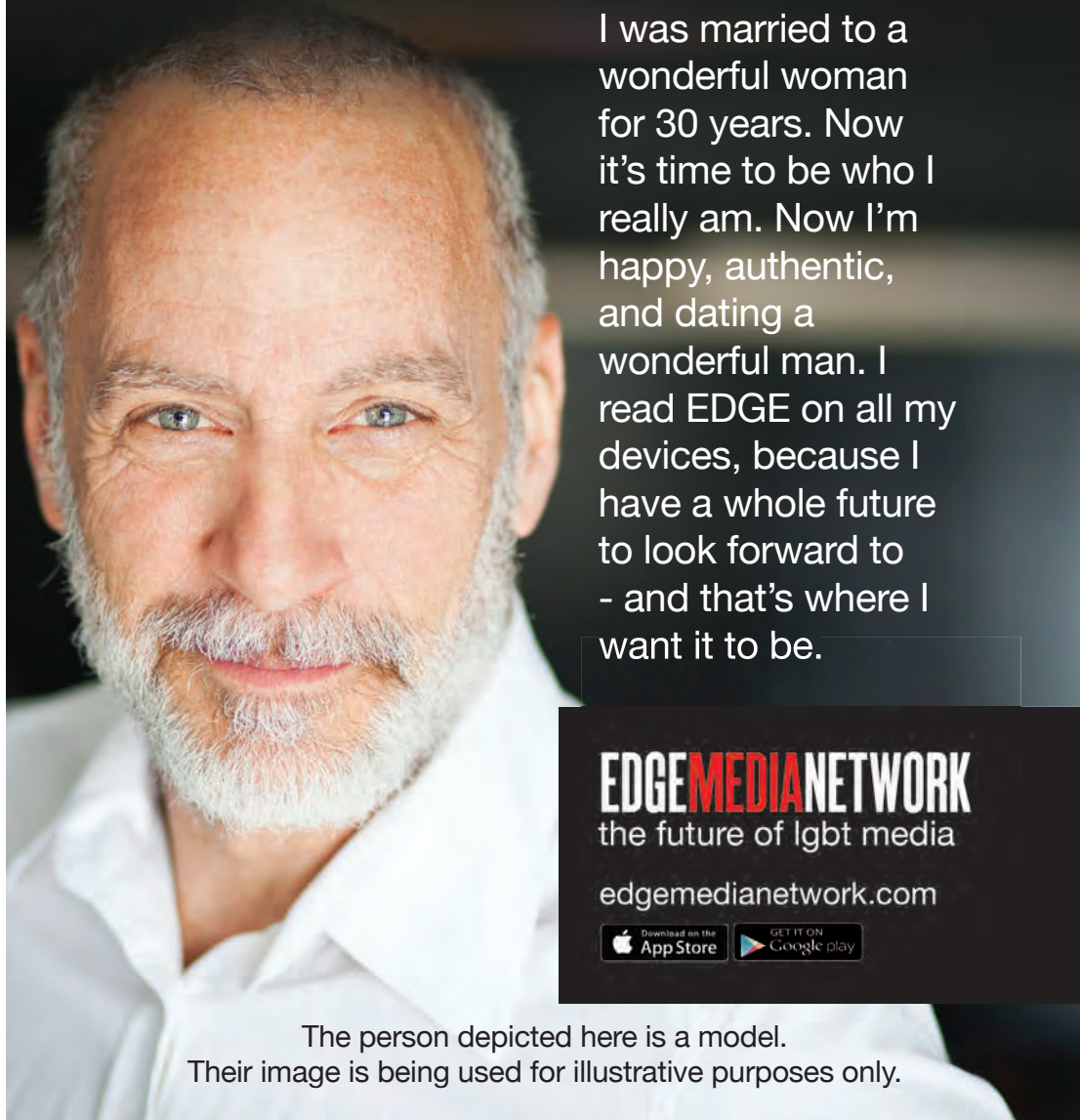


If you're looking for something incredibly well-written, a Sci-Fi romance epic that delivers on every front; action, love, perfect villains, and triumph, this is the series you need to read. Even if your're not a Sci-Fi fan (and I'm not), you will likely fall in love with 'Alien Dangers'. I did.

-Allen @ Sinfully Gay Romance Reviews

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