

Fat Chance

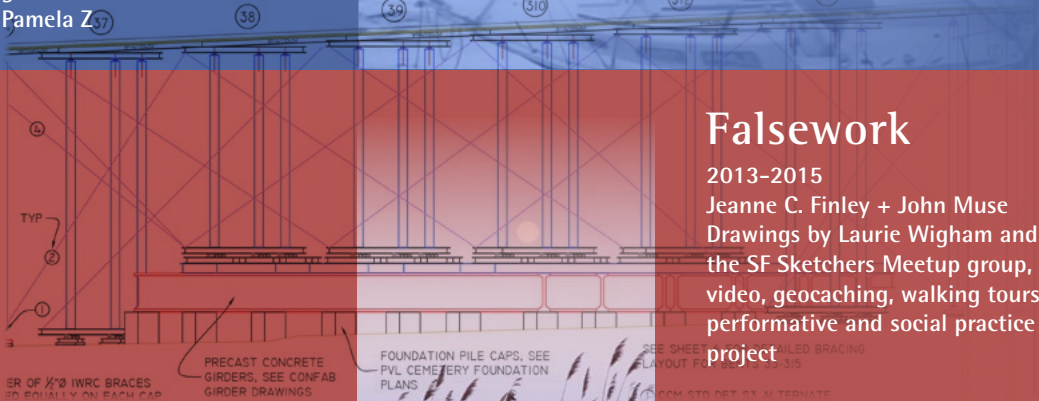
2013

Shot, written, directed and
edited by Jeanne C. Finley

12:15 minute film

In collaboration with Mel Day

Original score and narration
by Pamela Z



Falsework

2013-2015

Jeanne C. Finley + John Muse
Drawings by Laurie Wigham and
the SF Sketchers Meetup group,
video, geocaching, walking tours,
performative and social practice
project

Imperfect City/ Imperfect State

2013

Jeanne C. Finley + John Muse
Delaware Center for the
Contemporary Arts
Media installation and web-based
social practice project



Temporary Structure

Jeanne C. Finley + John Muse at Patricia Sweetow Gallery June 28 – August 16, 2014

Temporary Structure

by Maiza Hixson

*Falsework consists of temporary structures used in construction to support, protect, provide scaffolding for, or shore up other architectural components of the construction zone.*¹

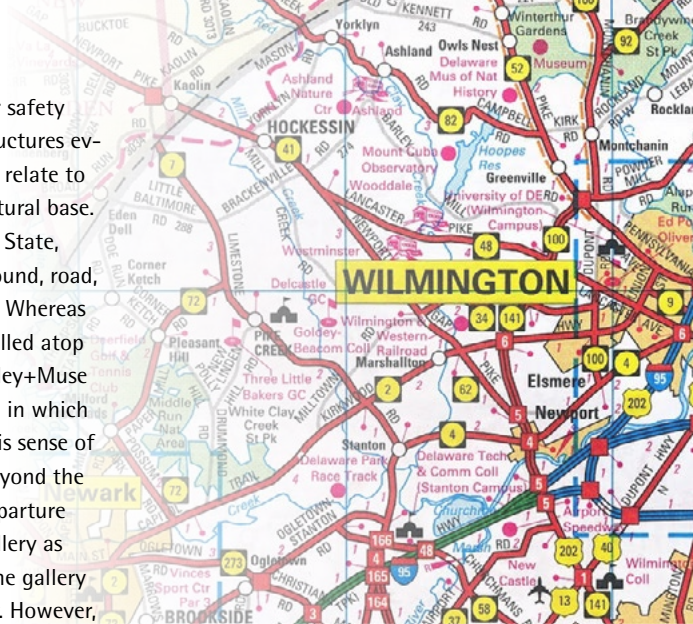
In a series of recent works, artist-collaborators Jeanne C. Finley and John Muse have constructed and archived memorials, monuments, and the landscapes that hold them. *Falsework* 2014, *Imperfect City/Imperfect State* 2013, and *Fat Chance* 2013, gathered here under the title *Temporary Structure*, employ socially engaged forms and digital technology in and around practices of mourning, both to document these practices and directly engage with them. For example, *Falsework*, a work about a massive construction project built solely to protect a fragile pet cemetery in the San Francisco Presidio, includes geocache “travel bugs” that invite participants to find and unite photographic talismans of pets with those of their owners. Visitors to *Imperfect City/Imperfect State* were prompted to locate and visit roadside memorials throughout the state of Delaware. Photographs of these memorials taken by Finley+Muse and participants have been uploaded and geotagged and can now be discovered via Panoramio and Google maps. In *Fat Chance*, Finley narrates a small but consequential maritime disaster, connecting her own memories of the sea to one survivor’s tale. Whether located by a beached sailboat, under a massive construction project, or on the side of the road, Finley+Muse link empathy and memory to the built environment while furthering their ongoing interest in storytelling as a social media. While many critics see the digital age as one of increased emotional and physical isolation, Finley+Muse expand our digital access to memories and visual cultures that are otherwise forgotten or avoided.

For Finley+Muse the phrase “temporary structure” relates to makeshift sites that hold, if only for a moment, cultural meanings, ones worth preserving. Such structures connote an impermanent disposition of objects, values, and a sense of transience and fleeting forms—from people and nature to infrastructure and technologies. In contrast to the white cube gallery space, which constitutes fine art as timeless and priceless—at a price, of course—the natural and human made world around the cube continues to make



¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falsework>

demands, simultaneously threatening our safety and inducing amnesia. The temporary structures evidenced in the work of Finley+Muse then relate to the world itself as an impermanent sculptural base. In *Fat Chance*, *Imperfect City / Imperfect State*, and *Falsework*, the importance of the ground, road, and water should not be underestimated. Whereas in the modernist canon, sculpture is installed atop pedestals or within exhibition spaces, Finley+Muse adopt a nomadic approach to installation in which bases proliferate or disappear entirely. This sense of moving beyond the sculptural base, or beyond the pictorial frame, signifies an important departure from the traditional artist's use of the gallery as display case. Connoting transcendence, the gallery symbolically anoints art with immortality. However, through their interactive, ritualistic engagements with memorials, often requiring us to go within and outside of gallery spaces, Finley+Muse probe the paradox of human finitude within and beyond the white cube's sacred yet secular architecture. In the fine art context, they elevate the bleak subject of mortality by making it the urgent topic of personal reflection and in the public sphere, an aesthetic form of public participation. Making visible the invisible threats that have been built into the environment, Finley+Muse use the frame of the gallery to create awareness of the larger frame of the city and landscape.



The conspicuous presence of death in these works paradoxically makes life present too. Participants stand in for the figures whose absence is the basis of both the memorial and the subsequent artwork: those who have died and the families and friends who



built and maintained the memorials and other temporary structures. Thus we become aware of how we move through the disappearance of others, as if death were scarcely more than a skipped beat in our own daily rhythm. For example, considering *Imperfect City/Imperfect State*, it would seem that fatal traffic accidents are another necessary sacrifice on the altar of mass production and consumption; and what politician would protest the manufacturing of cars? Through simple gestures and invitations, Finley+Muse awaken us to the potential for deeper consideration of the larger structures that institutionalize indifference to roadside fatality, and with this awareness, certain larger questions of modern life emerge. What will our industries leave behind? The fruits of global dominance, conspicuous consumption, and total amusement; these are a frenzied grind. We are rarely encouraged to slow down and actively reflect on what is worth preserving and tending—even if only for a limited time—before it is shred-

ded, deleted, or recycled. In projects such as *Imperfect City/Imperfect State*, *Fat Chance*, and *Falsework*, Finley+Muse treat the practices of remembrance and preservation as both topics and mediums. Finley+Muse are not only making art that speaks to existential, cultural, and environmental instability, they also invite us to join them in a collective yet abstracted process of grieving for what is, was, or could be lost. Losses—lost lives, artifacts, and places—guide their ethnographic, research-based artistic process. Naming these people, places, and things, they offer them up for meditation and in turn pose their loss as the object of even closer scrutiny.

At the core of *Falsework* and *Imperfect City/Imperfect State* are fragile, idiomatic cultural expressions such as folk or vernacular art in the form of graves marking both human and animal life. In the case of *Fat Chance*, a sailboat remains on the shore after an accident, which is then to be preserved in cinematic form. Finley+Muse invite their audiences to metaphorically “follow” them—parallel to and beyond social media’s many “follow”s and “like”s—to places and spaces they may have never known existed and then do more than simply follow.

Finley+Muse combed the roadways of northern and central Delaware for *Imperfect City/Imperfect State*, identifying, documenting, and archiving over 80 vernacular roadside memorials. Roadside memorials, temporary structures serving as makeshift graves on the side of roads and highway, are illegal in the state of Delaware, as they are considered traffic hazards and eyesores. In search of quotidian expressions of grief, Finley+Muse go beyond naming lost lives to actively preserving the memorials in digital form on both Google Maps and Panoramio. Further, they designed elegant invitations for gallery visitors of *Imperfect City/Imperfect State* to visit the actual roadside memorial. When the visitor saw the displayed invitations, it was up to her to select one, read it, and accept the task of driving many miles to view a marker—before it too dies by order of the State². If the visitor accepts the artists' invitation, she must drive not only far but to a decidedly unglamorous destination, often in the middle of a proverbial and provincial nowhere, non-sites more than sites: median strips, roadsides, places with neither address nor vistas. Invitees, on completing, their journey, often wrote to the artists:

Hello Jeanne Et John,

Yesterday I had the opportunity to visit the roadside memorial at 2277 Delaware 72 (Purgatory Swamp Rd). The anonymous memorial has been maintained with new flowers on the sign. I took a picture with my cell phone and posted it on the ImPerfect City Facebook page.

Thanks!

Carol





None of these landmarks are made for famous or historic figures, but all matter to someone and are addressed to all, even in their reticence. Focus on marginality in relation to lost lives is central to the work in *Temporary Structure*. When we devote our time to speed and consumption, how do we find time for the random, lyrical excursion devoted to memory and loss, whether our own or those of others?

As does *Falsework, Imperfect City/Imperfect State* expands the walls of the gallery to include the streets and ordinary life as a social and sculptural form. Finley+Muse created *Imperfect City/Imperfect State* in response to a curatorial invitation to contribute to a utopian city called Imperfect City, which was built and inhabited within the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts. They proposed a work on death and mourning: even an ideal society—whether terrestrial or heavenly—cannot ignore death. The artists installed a video slideshow of individual Delaware roadside memorials and paired the slides with ambient sound recorded at each site. Finley+Muse brought the outside in as a memorial to death in the context of a dedicated utopian space. In this sense, the artists fittingly introduced a measure of gravitas into a convivial, socially engaged exhibition platform.

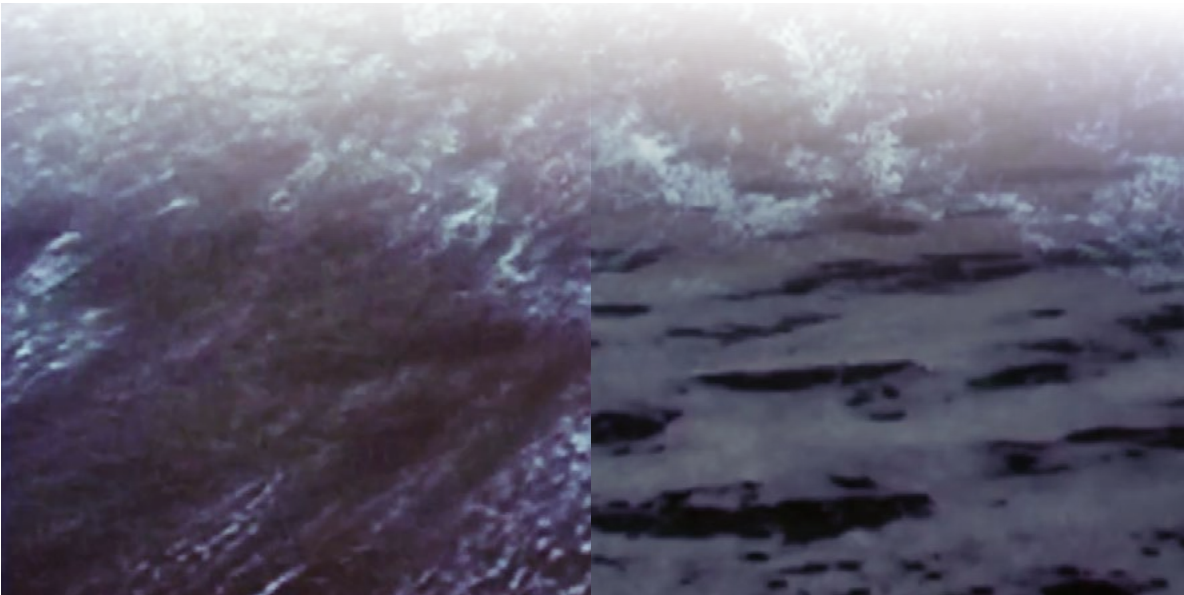
In an installation otherwise designed to steer visitors outside the museum, the slide-show projection of street memorials further complicated the notion of the gallery space as one of transcendence. A bench seat installed in front of the projection encouraged people to sit and view images of the roadside markers made by



² To discourage loved ones from building roadside memorials, the state has created an official memorial garden at a rest stop in Smyrna, Delaware.

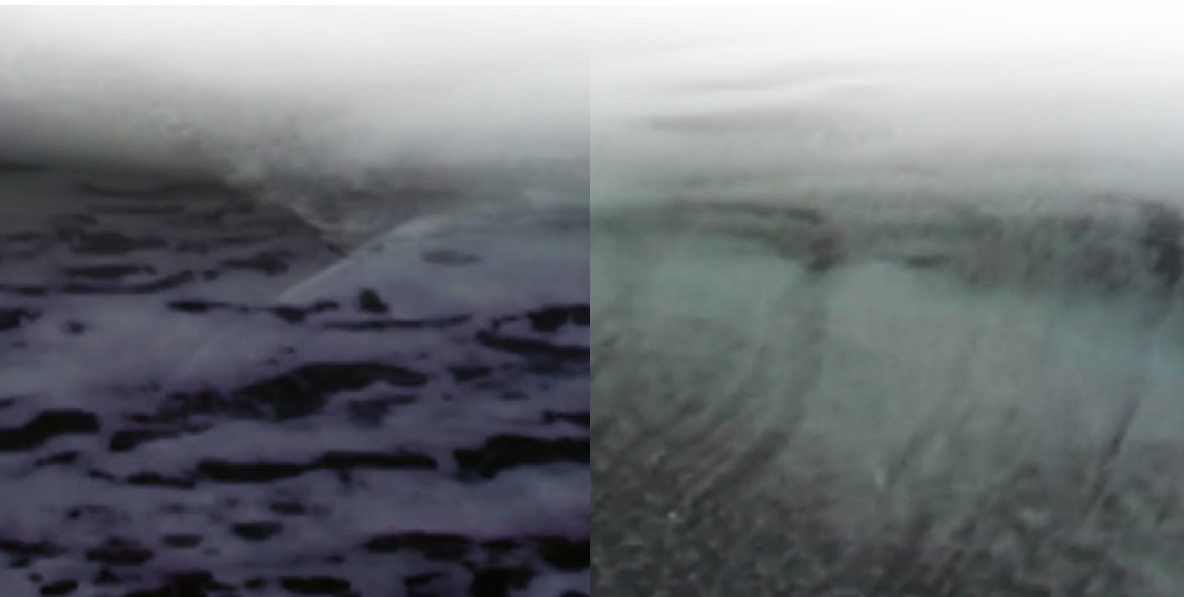
friends and family of the deceased victims. Featuring white crosses, teddy bears, flowers, and other memorabilia, the video became a haunting site-specific monument to the survivors of the deceased. The work also canonized the vernacular memorial as an under-recognized, yet compelling aesthetic object on view in a conventional gallery setting.

While *Falsework* and *Imperfect City/Imperfect State* preserve vernacular memorial expressions, they also employ temporary structures as tropes and critical staging devices. Extending the metaphor, Finley+Muse construct falseworks of their own through activities and programming designed to support their work. These falseworks can include intimate personal engagements through improvisatory, public programming as opposed to bureaucratized, city-sponsored tours. Testing the myth of public space where people are seemingly free to engage with one another on their own terms, Finley+Muse look beyond convivial gawking and gathering around public art to a sober, discursive practice of public programming and walking tours of primary grave markers. In order to fully apprehend the total experience of their work, we must step outside of the gallery system into the physically and digitally expanded field.



Fat Chance documents the disastrous journey of a sailboat called Fat Chance. Two fathers and three boys were celebrating high school graduation by sailing home from San Francisco to Portland. Thirty-five miles off the coast of Point Reyes, they were hit by a rogue wave. Two members of the crew washed overboard and one of the boys was killed. The remaining crew sailed without power for eleven hours back to the Bay Area and grounded *Fat Chance* on Rodeo Beach.

Finley filmed the boat while a salvage crew unexpectedly appeared and towed the boat back out to sea. But it wasn't until five years later that she conducted an interview with the father of one of the surviving boys, and documented his experience of seeing the footage of the boat so long after the accident. In the film, the essay form is broken then newly supported by the inclusion of these reflections. He comments movingly on the film footage we're watching, which ceases to be either illustrative or documentary; he describes the footage as a memorial that alleviates the guilt he's lived with for so many years:



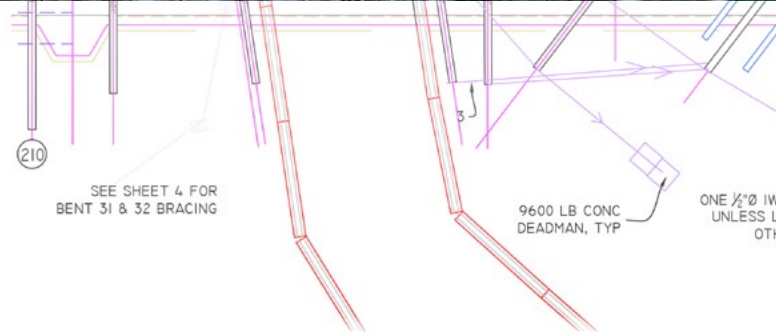


I think what it [the film] did was it helped to externalize it [the accident]. I mean, obviously I have run the tape in my head a million times, but somehow I managed to externalize it... There is one little bit of that film which I found very very powerful. And that is when the boat begins to move and the rudder inscribes a little squiggle in the sand. And it's, somehow, the boat coming to life again.

That squiggle will be lost to a wave, the boat will disappear around a bluff, the film will end; the boat is a temporary structure, memorialized.

Working with Sense of Place LAB in the San Francisco Presidio, Finley+Muse created *Falsework*, an interactive, socially engaged project surrounding the memorialization of a pet cemetery built on the site of a former military base. The title refers to temporary components that support a construction project. Here the falsework covers and protects the cemetery and its cultural historical significance while shoring up the roadway construction above it.

The launch of the *Falsework* project began with a walking tour of the massive falsework. Seven 100' steel-reinforced, prestressed concrete beams, each weighing approximately 160,000 pounds, are separated by crossed wooden beams and tied together with heavy cables. Columns support the concrete beams and extend down to bedrock, 60' below the surface. While the falsework is a 21st century engi



neering marvel, the graves it's designed to protect are small, handmade, wooden markers. This contrast was the focus of the walking tour, which was led by the Threshold Choir, an all-womens acapella choir whose mission is to sing at bedside for hospice and palliative care. The choir sang for this site which is at the threshold of change and in honor of the pets and the owners who created the memorials. The tour concluded with a demonstration of geocaching, a GPS-driven, online treasure hunt. Finley+Muse placed a cache at an overlook a bove the pet cemetery.

In 2015 Doyle Drive will be complete, the falsework will be gone, and the Pet Cemetery will be formally reopened; the *Falsework* cache will remain, linking the site to its recent history.



WRC TYP. LABELLED OTHERWISE

CCM STD DET SI STROUD PLATE CONN. TYP @ INT POINTS. PLACE C-CLAMP TO PREVENT SLIDING WHERE CABLE IS AT AN ANGLE < 90° TO BEAM

PLAN

FORM	REV	DATE	BY	CHKD	APP'D	DESCRIPTION
1	1	04/27/05	CCM	CCM		ISSUED FOR PERMIT
2	2	04/25/05	CCM	CCM		REVISED PER COMMENTS
3	3	04/25/05	CCM	CCM		REVISED PER COMMENTS

<p>CC MYERS INC.</p>  <p>3286 Fitzgerald Road, Rancho Cordova, CA 95742 P.O. Box 2948, Rancho Cordova, CA 95741 916.635.9370 Fax 916.635.1527</p>

BRACING
PRESIDIO VIADUCT
 PROJECT: DOYLE
 CCM PARTIAL CCM 0204

SHEET NUMBER:

6

FILE: Presidio_PV_tower.dwg



Finley+Muse offer means by which we may co-exist collectively in works that involve both a digital search and analog walk. They employ programs such as the geolocation-oriented photo-sharing website Panoramio to expose us to an archive of idiomatic cultural expression related to the built environment. In this capacity, they co-opt public digital spaces to visualize a vernacular archive that the city may not want us to see or that it fails to document as a result of benign neglect. Because it connects us to independent, non-traditional sites in order to view non-institutional art, this highly inclusive, decentralized, and interdisciplinary aesthetic practice does not neatly dovetail with the art market. While the projects rely on two-dimensional maps, digital image archives, video documents, and invitational and didactic texts, these "objects" are in the service of engaging the

viewer in a ritual around art rather than seeing the art itself. The experience Finley+Muse design connects art, public space, and everyday life with an integrated but open system involving the digital, natural, and built environments.

What does it mean for Finley+Muse to make visible this country's under-appreciated yet ubiquitous grief culture, which was made particularly manifest after 9/11? In a larger sense, their work functions as an urgent re-cataloging of dozens of seemingly nameless, faceless victims who presumably already have sanctioned graves. Never artists to exploit individual grief by creating overly sentimental works, Finley+Muse employ the modern tools at their disposal to illuminate the phenomenon of vernacular grief culture while preserving a subjective record of the fleeting life and culture erupting underneath, above, and beyond our monolithic structures and built environment. In all of the Temporary Structure projects, Finley+Muse treat commemoration as a non-linear path that leads inexorably to the thresholds of the vital present. Through the artists' research into the visual culture of grief, we are invited to take the time to locate ourselves in relation to such disparate sites of mourning, despite the long drives and inexact locations. What is left is a moving artistic practice and an archive of subjectivities that acknowledges the material objects and weight of human suffering and loss. ■

3:30 Meet up under this sculpture to spread out our sketches and chat (with coffee).

Falsework covering the cemetery

1:00 Parking lot at McDowell and Cowell Streets



Presidio Pet Cemetery





Collaborators

Jeanne C. Finley and John Muse have worked collaboratively on numerous films and installations. In 2001 they received a Rockefeller Media Arts Fellowship. Additional awards include a Creative Capital Foundation Grant and an Artists Residency at the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center. In 2009 they were featured artists at the Flaherty Seminar. Finley, a Guggenheim Fellow and Alpert/Cal Arts Award winner, is a Professor of Film and Graduate Fine Arts at the California College of Arts. Muse is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Independent College Programs at Haverford College. www.finleymuse.com

Maiza Hixson is the Gretchen Hupfel Curator of Contemporary Art at the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts. She is also founder of the SHAFI Space with Lauren Ruth. Hixson has extensive museum and curatorial experience, having worked for the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia as well as serving as associate curator of the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati and curatorial fellow in the Contemporary Art Department at the J.B. Speed Art Museum in Louisville, KY. Hixson's 2013-2014 exhibition program, *Radical Participation: A Series of Four Interactive Exhibitions* was recently funded by the Warhol Foundation and implemented at the DCCA.

Laurie Wigham is a graphic designer and painter in San Francisco. She founded the SF Sketchers meetup group in 2012 as part of an ongoing mission to engage the world directly with hands and eyes, unmediated by electronic devices. She used a computer to design this catalog, but otherwise is trying to work without an undo button and get inkstains on her fingers. www.lauriewigham.com

Francesca Enzler is pursuing an undergraduate degree in film studies at USC and is Jeanne Finley's studio assistant.

Events & Exhibits

Temporary Structure

Falsework, Imperfect City/Imperfect State, Fat Chance

Jeanne C. Finley & John Muse

Patricia Sweetow Gallery, June 28 – August 16, 2014

77 Geary Street, San Francisco

Opening Event, Saturday June 28

2:00 pm Sketching with the SF Sketchers

4:00 pm SF Threshold Choir sings in honor of the Fat Chance crew

4:15 pm reception

Imperfect City/Imperfect State 2013

Finley+Muse

Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts

Media installation and web-based social practice project

www.panoramio.com/group/delawareroadsidememorials

Fat Chance 2013

Shot, written, directed and edited by Jeanne C. Finley

12:15 minute film

In collaboration with Mel Day. Original score and narration by Pamela Z.



Falsework

2013-2015

Finley+Muse

Drawings by Laurie Wigham and the SF Sketchers Meetup Group, video, geocaching, walking tours, performative and social practice project

November 17, 2013, 1pm

A walking tour of the falsework construction, led in song by the SF Threshold Choir, included a geocaching demonstration and remarks by Damien Raffa, Presidio Trust Education Program Manager.

March 8, 2014, 1pm

The SF Sketchers Meetup Group, organized by Laurie Wigham, sketched in the Pet Cemetery, the falsework structure above the cemetery and environs. Many sketchers used the engineering plans as a base for their drawings. At the end everyone gathered in Crissy Field to lay out the sketches and talk about the experience. These sketches are part of the *Temporary Structure* exhibition at the Patricia Sweetow gallery.

www.meetup.com/SF-Sketchers

www.patriciasweetowgallery.com

Falsework Sketchers

Lauren Abrams

Amaya Bader-Rios

Prabin Badhia

Karen Bash

Alison Brincat-Walker

Alan Codd

Daniele Erville

Diane Hall

Cheryl Harawitz

Mehizan Ghaffari

Catherine Mackey

Seth Moorman

Sean Murphy

John Muse

Eli Noyes

Robert Ofsevit

Diane Olivier

Erica Rios

Liz Scotta

Sharon Steuer

Shelia Schoeder

Yian Shang

Sharon Skolnick-Bagnoli

Meagan Smith

Alice Stribling

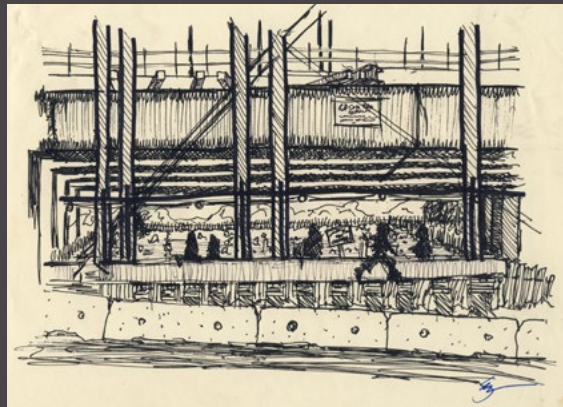
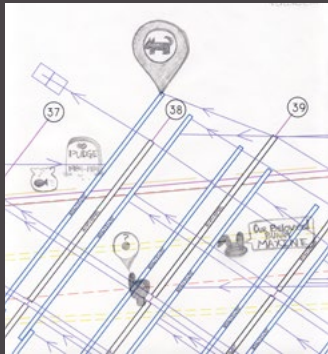
Lorna Strutt

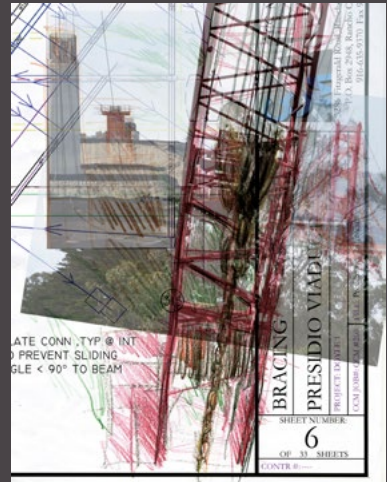
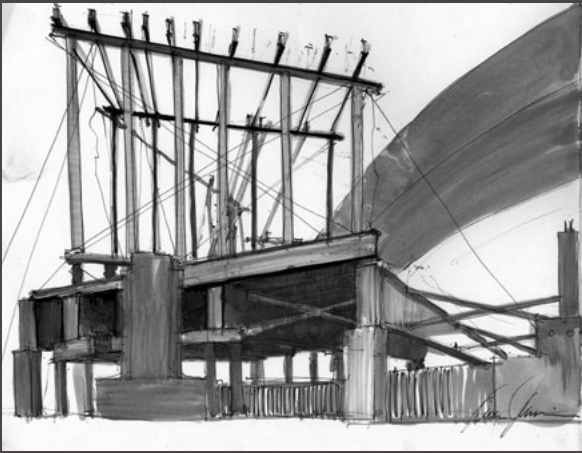
Panos Theofilas

Dennis Tocol

Laurie Wigham

Kristine Wong





Falsework sketch artists, clockwise from top right: Danielle Erville, Sharon Skolnick-Bagnoli, Laurie Wigham, Seth Moorman, Erica Rios, Panos Theofilas, John Muse, Catherine Mackey, Diane Olivier