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Turn Up the Base

A revitalized Fort Mason amps up Bay Area arts and culture.

By Gregory Hurcomb



Janet Cardiff's installation, *The Forty Part Motet* on view at Gallery 308 in the renovated Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture.

JKA Photography

One voice out of forty emerged from the speaker installed in the recently renovated Gallery 308 at Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture as part of Janet Cardiff's *The Forty Part Motet* now installed as the last project of the SFMOMA On the Go exhibition series. The ethereal voice sung *Spem in Alium*, Latin for "In No Other Is My Hope," by 14th-century British composer Thomas Tallis.

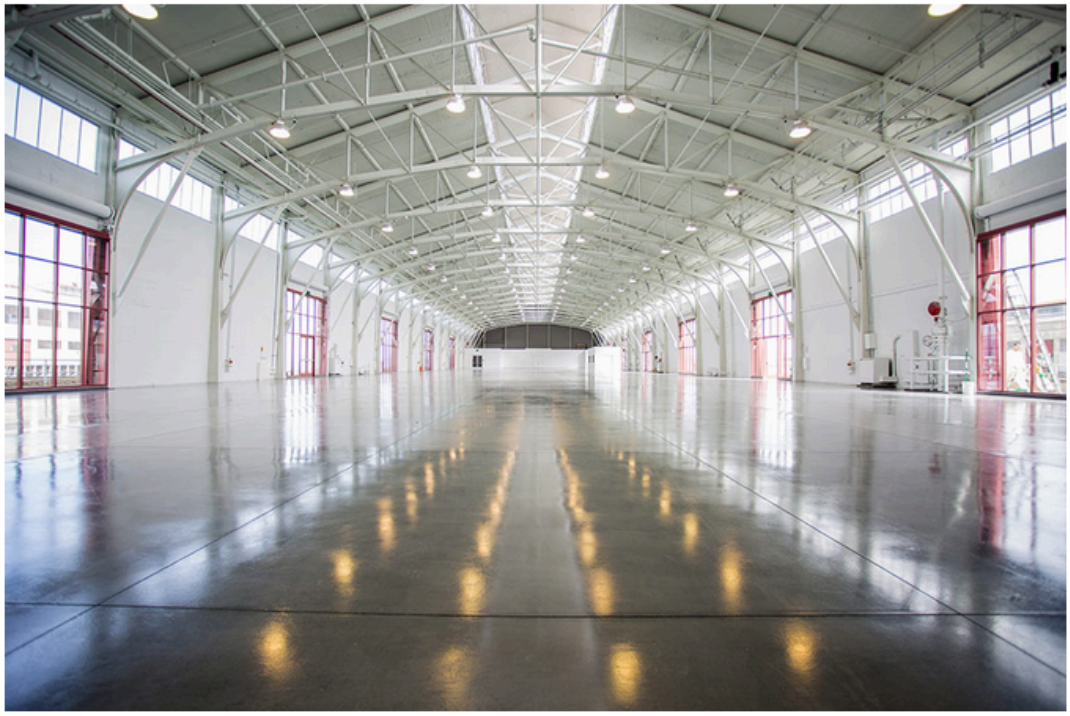
The immersive sound sculpture is transfixing and it is complemented by the recently updated space, which was specifically renovated for this contemporary sound masterwork. Jensen Architects transformed the old army base building into a light-filled, airy gallery.

Jensen principal Steven Huegli explained that the project was instigated by Cardiff after her visit to the proposed space. “She had found it overly beige, with lots of carpets, partitions, and to be an overall suffocating environment,” recalled Huegli. With a light and deft hand Jensen Architects returned the space to one large volume. “[We] removed more materials than added,” he continued, explaining that the firm went to lengths to expose the gossamer steel trusses and the existing structure.



Located on San Francisco’s northern waterfront, Gallery 308 is the latest piece of the multi-year, multi-million dollar rehabilitation and renovation of the Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture, a complex which began life as a U.S. Army base in 1910 but ceased being an active base in the 1960s. Ownership was transferred to the National Park Service in 1972 and the Fort Mason Center was established in 1977. Currently, it operates as a nonprofit cultural center within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and hosts over 1.2 million visitors a year who attend a mix of arts, educational, and cultural programming. Additionally, the Center is permanent home to nearly two dozen nonprofit art and cultural organizations.

“The project preserves an important part of our city’s historic waterfront, and allows Fort Mason Center to continue to serve as a unique cultural hub in San Francisco,” said Rich Hillis, the Center’s executive director.



Jensen's new gallery adds to a major adaptive reuse project finished in 2014—a renovation of Pier 2 undertaken by the National Park Service and designed by San Francisco-based firm Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects.

The earlier renovation focused on the rehabilitation of the pier's substructure and shed, seismic repair, and added an energy efficiency upgrade. "The renovations incorporated a variety of sustainability strategies, including installation of a 255-kilowatt photovoltaic solar panel array that meets up to 85 percent of the building's electricity needs, an economical heating/cooling system that incorporates cool bay air, radiant-floor heating, enhanced insulation, and high efficiency-lighting," said architect Marsha Maytum, principal of LMS Architects. Her firm has been involved with Fort Mason since spearheading a campus assessment in 1999 and their dedication to rehabilitating the structures while maintaining their historic character has been widely recognized: Pier 2 was awarded a Design Award by the California Preservation Foundation in 2015 and most recently the Center received the Trustees' Emeritus Award for Excellence in the Stewardship of Historic Sites by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Pier 2 awaits the imminent arrival of the San Francisco Art Institute's graduate campus, slated to open in June 2016. It adds to academic sites already in situ, including San Francisco City College's Fort Mason Art Campus. Supporting the art-making and exhibition spaces is a 5,000-square-foot Flax art supply store, which needed to move from its location at Valencia and Market streets to make room for luxury housing.

A defunct military port transformed into a hub of artistic creation, the Fort Mason campus is bursting with cultural energy and enthusiasm that impacts SF's whole north waterfront area.