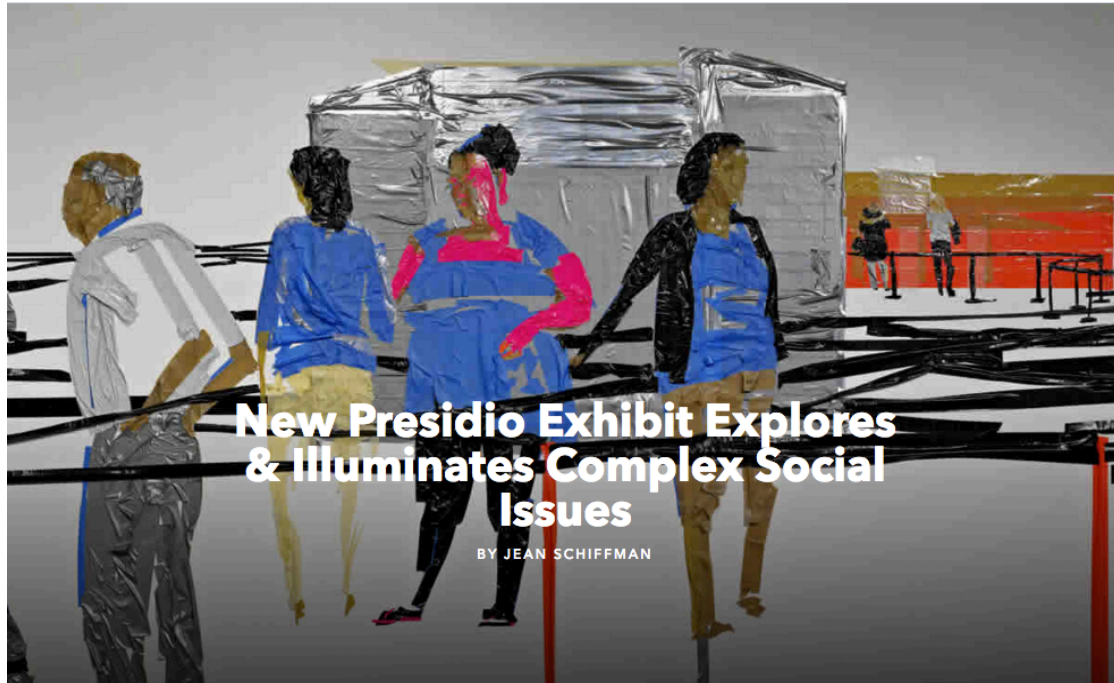


## LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

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### New Presidio Exhibit Explores & Illuminates Complex Social Issues

BY JEAN SCHIFFMAN

**The former home of the Nike Missile Program is the location of an exhibition of works exploring the meaning of national security.**

After long-time San Francisco gallery owner Cheryl Haines curated "@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz"-the ambitious 2014-2015 exhibition housed on the island-she knew that from then on she would produce work that examines our most important social issues. Thinking about the immigration crisis, she wondered, "What is home and safety? What constitutes security? What are the barriers we create between ourselves and other people, and between nations?"

Those questions were the genesis for the new exhibition "Home Land Security," which opens at the Nike Administration Building in Fort Winfield Scott in the Presidio, the one-time U.S. Army defense post that is now a 1,500-acre national park.

The free exhibit occupies four venues: the ramshackle building, a wood-frame chapel and three gun batteries. Visitors follow a marked path from site

to site to see paintings, murals, video, installation, sculpture and more-from 18 artists worldwide-that explore concepts of home, safety and security in a world of war and displacement.

A project of the FOR-SITE Foundation, the exhibit is curated by founder/executive director Haines and produced in partnership with the National Park Service (now celebrating its 100th anniversary), the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy and the Presidio Trust

The Nike Building, former headquarters for the now-obsolete Nike Missile Program, features 11 of the show's artworks in its various rooms. Among them are a wall mural commissioned from New York-based Israeli artist Tirtzah Bassel; her "Concourse," composed entirely of colorful packing tape, depicts travelers in an airport security line. Nearby, Bay Area artist Michele Pred's "Encirclement" is a wreath-like sculpture, a collection of seemingly ordinary objects (scissors, penknives) confiscated by the TSA at SFO. Down the hall is a small room where the duo Díaz Lewis continue their ongoing project, "34,000 Pillows": making pillows from old clothes, often donated by detainees, which will eventually be sold, the funds given to human rights organizations. And down another hall is video artist Bill Viola's "Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire, Water)," comprising four hi-def videos, each showing a figure in agony, each a witness to "the human capacity to bear pain and death."

Also in the Nike Building is Bay Area artist Shiva Ahmadi's 2013 animation "Lotus," a video in the detailed style of Persian and Indian miniature paintings, created from a series of watercolors. In it, a Buddha-like figure sits benignly on a throne as happy monkeys juggle champagne-like bubbles-until the scene morphs, and bubbles become bombs. Ahmadi grew up during the Iran-Iraq war and immigrated to the United States two years before 9/11. She uses traditional art forms to talk about contemporary issues that are very personal for her. "All my work is beautiful and decorative, but when you get closer, you see the harsh message underneath," she says-a message about power and corruption. She adds, "My life is very much affected by this anxiety as an Iranian in the United States and a Muslim."

In another room is Syrian artist Tammam Azzam's triptych, from his "Storeys" series: large-scale paintings of bombed-out cities-"hauntingly beautiful," comments Haines. And yet another large-scale work, Liza Lou's "Barricade," a curtain-like structure of 24-carat golden beads on aluminum, amazes Haines:

"This beautiful resplendence... to use that materiality for something we associate with aggression and harsh and cold!" At the same time, its delicacy suggests merely the illusion of security.

Across the wind-swept grounds is Battery Godfrey, a reinforced-concrete bunker, partly underground, with a medieval-style curved wooden door. Near the entrance are Revelation 1 and Mosque III, a scale-model church and a mosque, respectively, set in side-by-side alcoves, by Marin County social commentary artist Al Farrow. The first is a representation of a neo-gothic style clapboard American church with steeple and bell tower; the second is a copy of the National Mosque of Nigeria. Both are fashioned from spent ammunition and weapons parts; the mosque's four minarets are shaped like missiles, its walls composed of bullet shells. They're part of Farrow's 20-year project: crafting architectural models that "reflect the hypocrisies of religion," he explains. He buys materials at gun shows and online: bullets, spent shells, gun parts ("but nothing explosive!") and researches houses of worship from books and online, creating his designs according to whatever objects he has on hand in his studio. For Haines, the models reference the role religious extremism plays in instigating violence.

Elsewhere in Battery Godfrey is an oblong plexiglass box housing a block of ballistics gel that holds a "sculptural freeze-frame of colliding bullets," created by the Propeller Group out of Ho Chi Minh City. And Korean artist Do Ho Suh's "Some/One" is a seven-foot-high suit of armor made of 1,000 military dog tags.

At nearby Battery Boutelle visitors don't enter but view three works from outside, including "Exodus," a single-channel video by Iranian-born Swedish artist Mandana Moghaddam, of immigrants' battered suitcases floating in the sea, then slowly washing ashore. (The artist fled Iran at age 21, after her father was executed in the revolution.) At Battery Marcus Miller, Mexican-born visual and sound artist Luz Maria Sanchez presents "2487," in which a voice recites 2,486 names: people who have died crossing the U.S./Mexico border at the time she created the work. And inside the chapel, Iranian artist Shahpour Pouyan's "Projectiles" hang from the armature: metal sculptures that merge missile- and drone-like objects with antique Iranian helmets and chain mail. This is the final stop on the exhibition trail, an exhibition whose installation process, says Haines, involves such challenges as negotiating to ship artwork



from Tehran, handling delicate pieces arriving from Seoul and maintaining the ballistic gel exhibit in a constant climate.

Haines and assistant curator Jackie von Treskow have written eloquently about how the exhibit's military setting "turns a spotlight on the often sacrificial role of soldiers [and] on the thin line between defense and attack" and the way in which the ocean directly below evokes images of "diaspora and displacement... lives adrift..."

"If one person comes through this project and looks at the work of these artists from all these countries around the world," muses Haines, "and is inspired to further consider what's going on-the cultural misunderstanding, the forced migration, war and poverty and tragedy-it will be a successful project."

"Home Land Security"

Sept. 10 → Dec. 18

Fort Winfield Scott, the Presidio

[www.for-site.org](http://www.for-site.org)