

A New Nonprofit, Ars Citizen, Serves Up Conceptual Art in San Francisco

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29/06/2017

Immersive Art Comes to the Bay

Art | Jun 2017 | BY Carol Kino



Ars Citizen founder Evelyne Jouanno. Portrait by Manfredi Gioachini.

Recently the eyes of the international art world have turned toward San Francisco, with its expanding collection of museums, galleries, art fairs and other less classifiable ventures like the David Ireland House and [Leo Villareal's](#) Bay Lights. Now comes [Ars Citizen](#), a nonprofit dedicated to producing major art and cultural projects in the San Francisco Bay area. Its first, "Sophie Calle MISSING," runs June 29 through August 20 at Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture. Offering five major artworks by France's most celebrated conceptual artist, it will take visitors to four different spaces, from the Firehouse near Aquatic Park to the former U.S. Army chapel, making for the center's largest exhibition and Calle's most extensive United States survey to date. It will also be accompanied by a two-week long program of screenings, talks and book signings.

"It has become 'Occupy Fort Mason with Sophie Calle,'" says Evelyne Jouanno, Ars Citizen's founder and the show's curator. "It will be an immersive journey through her work and also through her recurring concepts and themes."

Calle is known for projects involving photography, writing, video and performance in which the artist, 63, plays detective, seductress, voyeur and confessor—a combination that gives viewers a frisson of complicity when

encountering the work. *Rachel, Monique*, the 2007–2014 installation to be shown in the chapel, is shaped around a video featuring the artist's mother's death. And *Take Care of Yourself* (2004–2007), in Gallery 308, is a grand project based on a break-up email Calle once received from an ex: she had it analyzed and decoded by 107 women—experts in many fields, from actresses to a forensic psychiatrist—and displayed their assessments at the French Pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale. It has since toured museums and biennials in Denmark, Norway, Mexico, the Netherlands and Argentina, as well as Paris's Bibliothèque Nationale de France—a great demonstration of the maxim that if you don't want your thoughts publicized, don't put them in an email. Jouanno feels Calle's work is a perfect fit for the Bay Area, which played such an important role in the development of photography and film, and now leads the way in eroding boundaries between public and private with social media. Calle, Jouanno says, was doing that even earlier. "Before blogging and social networks, Sophie was responding to the world in a very intimate way," she explains. "Her work proposes another approach."



Sophie Calle's "MAdRE".

Jouanno began dreaming of Ars Citizen in 2006, when she moved from Paris to San Francisco with her husband, the curator Hou Hanru, when he became director of Exhibitions and Public Programs at the San Francisco Art Institute. (The couple now lives in Rome part-time, where he's artistic director of the MAXXI Museum.) A curator herself, Jouanno had a strong interest in social engagement. Her best-known project was the Emergency Biennale, begun in 2005, for which she asked artists to create two works, one to be transported to Chechnya by suitcase and

shown there, and the other to be exhibited in a touring exhibition around the world, beginning at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris.

When Jouanno arrived in San Francisco, she was struck by its power. "It is like an epicenter of the contemporary," she says. "There's a huge gap between poor and rich, and an accelerated gentrification. And Europeans simply don't realize how influential Bay Area industry is for the outside world. I wanted to develop a cultural project at the same level." The result is Ars Citizen, whose ultimate goal is to mount long-term public projects. Calle, a longtime visitor to the Bay Area, was a natural choice for its debut.

As the story goes, Calle decided to become an artist in the fiercely independent Marin County hamlet of Bolinas, which she discovered the late 1970s after traveling the world for eight years. While housesitting for a photographer, Calle visited its graveyard and made her first serious photographs of two headstones engraved "MOTHER" and "FATHER." After returning to Paris, where she grew up and lives now, Calle invited strangers to occupy her bed for eight days; the resulting documentation became *The Sleepers* (1979). Then came *Suite Vénitienne* (1980), for which she trailed strangers on the street, eventually following one to Venice.

Over the years, Calle has returned to Bolinas for extended visits. "I go there, because of friendships and memories," she says. On one such trip, plans came together for the show.



Sophie Calle's Room 20. Photo by Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Calle says that big shows are not a rarity for her. “And all these works have been presented elsewhere,” she adds, “in classic places and more exotic ones,” including a baroque church in an isolated mountaintop village. Yet “more and more,” she adds, “I try to find spaces which are not white cubes. This is a pleasure I have, otherwise I would be bored.” The thought of dispersing her work throughout Fort Mason appealed.

“True Stories,” shown in the General’s Residence, will present objects, like a taxidermied cat, normally on view in Calle’s home, accompanied by ambiguous anecdotes. “It will be like a scene of the crime, you will see numbers, clues and descriptions,” she says. (A similarly themed work, in the project space of her San Francisco gallery, Fraenkel, will present photo-based work focusing on the deaths of her mother, father and cat.)

In the Firehouse she’ll show two works: *The Last Image* (2010), photo and text pieces that reconstruct the last vision of people who’ve gone blind, and *Voir la Mer* (2011), videos of people who’ve just seen the ocean for the first time—which will be installed near windows overlooking the Bay.

“Maybe *Voir la Mer*, is the one that will be most special,” Calle says, “because it’s the first time it’s presented so close to the sea. With this one I would say maybe it’s found its strange spot.”