

# SF WEEKLY

## Off Shore: Finding City Waterways in Unexpected Places

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May 30, 2014



Earlier this week we introduced you to the Southern Exposure summer series *Off Shore*, an exhibit where various artists would use San Francisco waterways and bays as an artistic medium. Now here's our next installment of this ongoing project:

Local artist Chris Sollars has been investigating the outdoors for years. In 1997 he started taking his work out of the studio and putting in into the streets in an effort to have art within a real space. He's worked in sculpture, performance, video, and, unexpectedly, water. He even says that he's swam across San Francisco, from the bay to the ocean, through a

network of pools and fountains. Not entirely sure how that works, but intrigued? So was Southern Exposure, the gallery who invited Sollars to be a part of their summer series, *Off Shore*.

In Sollars' pieces entitled *Water Shed*, he and his crew (made up of Haegen Anthony-Crosby, Courtney Costello, Rod Hartzog, Nolan Jankowski, Tim Kopra, and Matt Shapiro) take participants on walks along San Francisco's forgotten streamlets. On the first walk, this Sunday, those who join will be carrying a city-block-length of rope for 5 miles along Islais Creek, a watercourse that has been reshaped to fit in present-day SF. It's part urban underground culverts, and part exposed city oasis.

The walk will bring the group to Sollars' *Water Shed*, a literal shed sitting on the bay made from rubber, tarps, and metal, along with recycled water barrels and doors. The shed -- accessed in small groups by a small, human-powered boat, serves as a platform for the group to examine their relationship to San Francisco and it's waterways.

Chris Sollars answered a few questions to give us insight into his upcoming project.

**Southern Exposure describes *Off Shore* as the bringing of, "historical waterways to light, [and to] celebrate a space for outsider communities and imagine the possibilities of water as an expanded territory." In your case, you explore hidden pathways in the city. How did you discover these pathways?:**

## SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Well, Alison Pebworth worked on a map years ago, that's also part of a Rebecca Solnit book, which has Mission Creek, Islais Creek, and Yosemite Creek on [it]. I used her map as a reference, as a starting point. And then what I ended up doing is -- there's a creek map of the waterways, from the Oakland Museum, with the public water and utilities, and there's a Creek and Waters Map of San Francisco which has the original flows of the water within the city and a few of the remaining ones. So, for example, Islais Creek is buried at the edge of Glen Canyon and it's buried all the way -- in an underground culvert -- all the way to the bay. It connects to the sewer system basically.

### **So what exactly will you be doing?:**

I had this idea of carrying a mile of rope through the city. [Laughs] I decided that was a little long, so I decided to use a city block measurement as a way to represent the flow of the creek. I did a bunch of bike rides using the map, because, you know, the creek doesn't conform to the city street per se; it would have gone through the middle of certain blocks. So I sort of had to retrace or redraw my own map as per the city grid as a way to walk it all the way, or ride it all the way to the bay.

I did it on my bike initially just to document it - just so that I'd have the route. Then me and my Water Shed crew walked Islais Creek, so we walk each creek ahead of time as a performance, but also just to understand ourselves where it goes.

### **And what sort of meaning do they hold for you? In other words, what's the premise of the walks?:**

I'm just trying to physically represent water in this place that doesn't seem like it has any.

### **What can we expect when participating in these walk?:**

My crew and I, we wear life jackets because we're heading to water, and also because they're visible. We basically coordinate the group that joins the rope. Whoever grabs onto it will help carry it from the spring source to the bay. We're going to be walking the original path of the creeks.

### **And at the end of the walk?:**

The food and drink is all sourced for each walk so the food that is along Islais Creek is [from] Alemany Farm. I'm gathering things for the meal at the end of the walk from the walk itself. So, we eat and drink from along that path. The beer from that walk is Speakeasy beer from the brewery on the original baymouth of Islais Creek.

Once we walk to water it's important for me to have people *on* the water, so we'll have a boat that ferries people on and off the *Water Shed* that I built. [The *Water Shed* itself is] portable and can fit in the back of a truck and it will be at the creek by the time that we get there.