

INTRODUCTIONS

CHARLES CROCKER (1822–1888) was one of the four principal investors along with Mark Hopkins, Collis Huntington and Leland Stanford (also known as the Big Four) who formed the Central Pacific Railroad. He was construction supervisor. He bought train ploughs to plough the tracks, but these would frequently derail due to ice on the tracks. This led him to build over 40 miles of snow sheds to cover the tracks in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

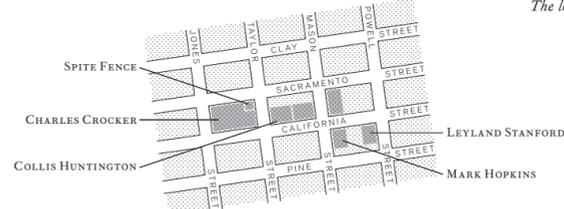
GERTRUDE YUNG MILLER was the daughter of Nicolas Yung, a German undertaker who said no to Charles Crocker.

DENIS KEARNEY (1847–1907) was a California populist political leader in the late 19th century, known for his nativist and racist views toward Chinese immigrants. During the Long Depression, he became popular by speaking to the unemployed in San Francisco, denouncing the railroad monopoly and the immigrant Chinese workers (known as *Coolies*.) His slogan was, simply, ‘*The Chinese must go*’.

CHINESE SIX COMPANIES (formally established in 1882) refers only to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in San Francisco. At the time, San Francisco had the U.S.’s largest Chinese population. It attempted to deter prostitution in the Chinese community, encourage Chinese immigrants to lead moral lives, and to discourage excessive continuing Chinese immigration which they believed was creating hostility toward Chinese already in America.

A TRIP DOWN MARKET STREET was filmed on 14 April 1906 and the negative was taken by train to New York on 17 April 1906. The great earthquake and subsequent fire occurred on 18 April 1906.

California only began registering cars in 1905 and by 1935 there were only 39 states that issued the licenses and only a few tested applicants. Before the 1930s, most drivers received their training from automobile salesmen.



Nob Hill 1870s–1906

Serpentine
Gallery

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the panoramic views of San Francisco in 1878

CHAPTER 2

Charles Crocker (A Poem)
First introduction to the 13 panels of Eadweard Muybridge’s 360° panoramic view of San Francisco in 1878

CHAPTER 3

Charles Crocker’s Story
Second introduction to the 13 panels of Eadweard Muybridge’s 360° panoramic view of San Francisco in 1878

CHAPTER 4

Gertrude Yung Miller (A Poem)
The Spite Fence

CHAPTER 5

Gertrude Yung Miller’s Story
Mainly middle distance details of the panorama

CHAPTER 6

The Chinese Story (A Poem)
Crockers Folly

CHAPTER 7

Spokesperson for the Rehabilitation of Ex-Convicts

CHAPTER 8

Chinese Six Companies (A Letter)
The names of the Companies

CHAPTER 9

Dennis Kearney (A Poem)
Other views of the Fence found in San Francisco photographic archives

CHAPTER 10

John McCabe’s Story
Large views of small details of the panorama, including signage

CHAPTER 11

Gertrude Yung Miller’s Story (Part 2)
The lowering of the height of the fence (from 40 feet to 25 feet)

CHAPTER 12

Finale (A Poem)
A California Street tram passes the fence

CHAPTER 13

A Trip Down Market Street
(Miles Bros., filmed 14 April 1906, 13 minutes)

13 pieces, 17 feet has developed out of a year of research undertaken in the Eadweard Muybridge archive at Kingston Museum, England. Muybridge was born and died in Kingston and, prior to his death in 1904, bequeathed all his professional materials, in perpetuity, to the nascent museum. The collection in Kingston is thus quite unique. For further reading on Muybridge’s life, I highly recommend Hollis Frampton’s exquisite, short biographical essay, *Eadweard Muybridge: Fragments of a Tesseract*.¹ Kingston owns one of the nine extant copies of Muybridge’s 360° panorama of 1878. It is in good condition and is in its original leather-bound cover. I became fascinated by this incredible photograph, this unfolding object made by hinging together 13 individual photographs, vertical yet horizontal, this mammoth-plate,² wet printed photograph of impossible space, a document of a day, the experience of what I came to call, *eyeballing* its details. When fully unfolded, it is a little over 17 feet long. Panorama expert David Harris wrote that the 1878 panorama ‘*represents one of the supreme conceptual and technical achievements in the history of architectural photography*’.³ The panorama is currently on display as part of the *Eadweard Muybridge* exhibition at Tate Britain.

The Spite Fence is the one detail that always gets highlighted. It is superbly documented in Muybridge’s panoramas of 1877 and 1878. It is a strange sight, with its buttress props to keep it from falling over in high winds and chimney-tops just visible. It is undoubtedly an object, but also a structure which, although only envisaged as a temporary measure, remained in its place for over 25 years. It features from time to time in historical fictions and first person accounts of San Francisco at the time. During my research, I wondered if the Spite Fence was documented in other pictures—no photographs ever emerged in reference to the Spite Fence other than Muybridge’s—and so, over a period of months of slowly searching online picture archives, orienting myself with street maps, and with the help of a few new friends made along the way in San Francisco, we found a half dozen other photographs in which the fence appears, albeit often haunting the peripheries.

Published on the occasion of
Becky Beasley and Chris Sharp
13 pieces, 17 feet
Friday 24 September 2010, 8pm
Serpentine Gallery Park Nights

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Gallery

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Image courtesy of
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Muybridge
in Kingston

Costume courtesy of Yohji Yamamoto



Special thanks to
LAURA BARTLETT GALLERY

During my research I discovered the writings of Hilton Obenzinger and his wonderful historical fictions, in particular, *Cannibal Eliot and the Lost Histories of San Francisco*. The chapter on the Spite Fence, in which the story of the fence is told from diverse points of view, coincided beautifully with my own vision and search for other photographs, and ultimately formed the main text for *13 pieces, 17 feet*. We are most grateful to Hilton for unhesitatingly giving us permission to work with this beautiful material. Chris Sharp and I edited the stories, sensitively, we hope, but we also encourage the interested reader to seek out the original texts.⁴ Chris Sharp is the author of the five poems which alternate with the prose fictions in the live performance and which have been reproduced in full in this publication.

Abiding thanks to David Faulkner, Peta Cook, Hilton Obenzinger, Annie Leuenberger, Rebecca Solnit, James Eason, Tim Etchells, Dylan Stone, Matt Ball, Aaron Finnis, Lucia and all those at the Serpentine Gallery. Finally, my thanks to Nicola whose idea it was to commission this first live work in the first place.

¹ <http://hollisframpton.org.uk/links.htm>

² Mammoth plate photographs are made by contact printing a photographic print from a large glass plate negative, usually 18 by 21 inches, but may vary in size from 14 by 18 inches to 22 by 25 inches. These large negatives allowed photographers to produce outsized photographic prints before the development of photographic enlargers.

³ David Harris, *Eadweard Muybridge and the Photographic Panorama of San Francisco, 1850–80* (Canadian Centre for Architecture), MIT Press, 1993.

⁴ http://www.obenzinger.com/books_cannibal.html

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BECKY BEASLEY and CHRIS SHARP

13 PIECES, 17 FEET

PERFORMED by MELANIE WILSON

Becky Beasley’s performative project, *13 pieces, 17 feet*, finds its point of departure in photographer Eadweard Muybridge’s extraordinary 1878 panoramic photograph of San Francisco. The third panel of the photograph portrays the house of railroad millionaire Charles Crocker, including the infamous ‘Spite Fence’ he built around the house of his neighbour, Nicolas Yung, a German Undertaker, whom Crocker was unable to persuade to sell his land.

Performed by writer, performer and sound artist Melanie Wilson, this monologue in thirteen parts and multiple voices will follow an alternating structure between historical fictions and abstract texts, and will incorporate exquisite details of archival photographs, creating an event which spirals slowly into the black hole at the centre of an extraordinary object. Incorporating Hilton Obenzinger’s vivid historical fictions, *Cannibal Eliot and the Lost Histories of San Francisco*, the project has been developed in close collaboration with writer Chris Sharp, and in partnership with Kingston Museum & Archive and the Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston University, as part of Muybridge in Kingston.

Artist Becky Beasley was born in 1975 in Portsmouth, England, and currently lives and works in Antwerp. Beasley participated in *Slow Movement* at Kunsthalle Bern (2009), *Word Event* at Kunsthalle Basel (2008) and *The Malady of Writing* at MACBA (2009–10). In 2010 she was commissioned by Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston and the Serpentine Gallery Park Nights to produce her first institutional projects. She was also selected for the British Art Show 7. In 2009 she published the book, *Thomas Bernard Malamud*. She is represented by Laura Bartlett Gallery, London and Office Baroque, Antwerp.

Chris Sharp was born in 1974 in Edmonds, WA, USA and is currently based in Paris, France. A contributing editor of *Art Review*, the Paris-editor of *Kaleidoscope* magazine, his writing has appeared in *frieze* and *Art Monthly*, among other magazines and numerous catalogues. He is co-curating with Gianni Jetzer the exhibition *Under Destruction*, which will open at the Tinguely Museum, Basel on October 14th, 2010 and run through January 2011, and then travel to the Swiss Institute, New York in March 2011. He is also preparing *A Necessarily Incomplete Anthology of Withdrawal* to be published by Archive Books, Berlin, in 2011.

Melanie Wilson is an award-winning writer, performer and sound artist, based in London. She makes performances, installations and sound walks that live in theatre and cinema spaces and in the street. Her solo work includes *Simple Girl*, *Iris Brunette*, *Mari Me Archie*, *The View From Here and every minute, always* and has been presented nationally and internationally. She has collaborated with Rotozaza, Coney, Clod Ensemble, Shunt, Chris Goode, Boilerhouse, A2, Peter Arnold and Abigail Conway. She is currently a BAC Supported Artist and her work is produced by Fuel Theatre. www.melaniwilson.org.uk

Hilton Obenzinger, born in 1947 in Brooklyn, raised in Queens, and graduating Columbia University in 1969, writes fiction, poetry, history and criticism. He has most recently published the autobiographical novel *Busy Dying*. He has taught on the Yurok Indian Reservation, operated a community printing press in San Francisco’s Mission District, co-edited a publication devoted to Middle East peace, worked as a commercial writer and instructional designer. Currently, he teaches honors and advanced writing at Stanford. www.obenzinger.com

SERPENTINE GALLERY
FRIDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2010, 8pm

I CHARLES CROCKER

Can you imagine that?
At dawn, with my spyglass looking out over.
You will marvel.

At the bottom of a dark, dank well.
And whatnot.
My tower to over see.
As I intend to live it, monumental
forever at the crest,
like it's one big job,
admired.

A shade higher, marble steps
charging up and down
and the amber glow.
Then comes crowds, that big party.
I don't mind howing. But the man
is in their pursuits,
still there, at the bottom of his, digging
his own outdone, a too-generous insult.
How's that for a rub?
The stubborn fool.

Then comes crowds.
Let them, in total darkness,
gawk, successful as all my other,
no spaces, no fancy,
mighty fine
in darkness even, total
and preposterous,

in the bright blaze
of stubborn fool,
his own grave
as I intend to shoot up
at the bottom
of a granite one surrounding
and whatnot.

Brazen enough,
far tougher brutes, have I
in the bright blaze of
battlements and towers
they ridiculed me, ignoring the little
rolls of the sea
charging up and down
digging his own, rock fly freely
that's when

I built the fnece. A little muscle. Admittedly,
my tower to oversee,
bright is the blaze,
at the bottom of a dark, dank

little moans
and groans, an honorable man
I am going to climb the tower
the entire city,
was welcomed, admired
a condor in the sky

in the bright blaze of freely, come
crowds and rocks fly freely
but the man is crazy.
Like it's one big job
raising old nick
supreme on the road
rolls the sea, from
my tower.

I have often said that in no enterprise
successful as all
a cut any more than I could have flown
blast away, relaxed,
where I superintended it
myself, was I ever, digging
his own little extra supreme,
a too-generous insult.

Was I ever unsuccessful.
They may be supreme
Mount Diablo, Tamalpais, the Mission Hills
and to play the Venetian
a stubborn fool, the entire monumental
job it's supposed to be,
outdone.

How was I supposed to compete?
Charging up and down,
forever at the crest.
An honorable man, moans
and groans, a condor
I was never
in the bright brazen exorbitant
he called it "early renaissance"
the signs of steeples
preposterous, I will not have a knife,
anticipate a dispute, neighborly
and whatnot, scraping.

It turns out to be a spectacular collection,
a condor in the sky
at the bottom of his
blazing bright,
to keep his perch, the entire
Venetian shade higher, marble steps
was welcomed, rolls of the sea
and the amber glow.

I was never to be outdone.

II GERTRUDE YUNG MILLER

Where "used to be" even before it "was"
in a cutting wind
the view was stunning
that diabolical light
had the brains
that dissolved into the night.

Their defiance where "used to be"
even more of an attraction
before it "was"
blood and flames,
a sight to behold by the whole city
sunny, bright, airy
shocked into loathing.

The blank wood of two bits apiece
darkness and megalomania
in a cutting wind
the velvet-covered chairs
a huge mountain of flesh moving
shocked into sheer,
daring gusto.

That's when
the blank wood of the rich man's fury
"used to be"
A Barnum attraction
before Crocker's pets
before all the trouble began,
before living in a fish bowl
and hickory ax handles.

Fiery speeches in the sandlots
cut off
our castle
the fog clinging to the valleys below
left everyone else alone,
sunny, bright, airy
away from tyrants.
America was

furious and velvet-colored
in a cutting night wind.
"It's not your fight"
to talk with the devil as
his usual rant
became very fashionable
and fabulously rich
banging his head against a wall
the view was

crude-covered chairs
of sheer, daring gusto
burning down and privately
weeping.

That's when
the arrogance and lack of sentiment
so filled the space before
and above me,
the inevitable intrusion of the city
sunny, bright, and airy.

The bottom of a pit,
blood and flames
their defiance
where "used to be" even before it "was"
became very fashionable
had the brains
gaze in awe at the monstrous
darkness
and privately weep.

That's when
like living in an isolated castle
roar, calm, even voice
incredible, unthinkable act
dissolved into the diabolical light
of sheer, daring chairs
like tucked into a dank fish bowl,
under siege,
and the view was stunning.
The view was stunning.
The view

was stunning.

* * *

III THE CHINESE STORY

And now a moment, ex-convicts
those poorest of the poor,
men totally excluded from society,
with whom no one
wanted to have anything to do,
no matter what their hypocritical.
Donate please donate and pass the basket,
pass the basket. It's ruthless out there, what with
multitude of responsibilities, idle and
with increasing fury
we would deprecate the results,
with scenes of strife.

And now, a moment
to cherish our lives
under the most cheerful sun,
totally excluded from society
that crazy mind a mob,
check or hindrance
no matter what their hypocritical
weeping.

bookbindings
and riotous proceedings
dovetailed.
To burn and pillage
the water of life
we should have neither the power
nor the disposition.

To be where the fight is
idle and cut loose,
like splendid heathens
violent, inflammatory and incendiary
language, it is a cup that must
also pass
with scenes of strife,
those poorest of the poor
doing the bidding of
things was mighty
as dearly as possible.

We would jeopardy the results
neither power nor disposition
check or hindrance,
that crazy mind a mob
washed up,
totally excluded

*But this was a moment
Under the most cheerful sun
In poorer lands
No one touches the water of life.*

*It has no taste
And though it refreshes absolutely
It is a cup that must also pass*

*Until everybody
Gets some advantage, big or little
Some reason for having come
So far
Without dog or woman
So far alone, unasked.*

Please pass the basket, donate
and pass. Please please
please. If it please you,
the basket, it pass.

* * *

IV DENNIS KEARNEY

Alas, I resume,
moon-eyed and superior
their own gallows hourly growing
more salient

divine aphasia loves us dearly
with some questions settled
as a result of the labors left
unfinished.

Burn every book
give up their plunder and
demand me nothing.
What you know, you know.
From this time forth
I resume,
ashes and the ruins filled in
burning Moscow
erected flagstuffs
of all kinds of dying.

So blue still and calm
so calm with a calm
feel the power
of all kinds of,
worst beating with sticks
a man from this time
forth

drive them out
in brief in spite of the strides
of alimentation and
defecation,
little boys to burn
wash houses,
never will speak
graver a word

sandlots and form
for reasons unknown
a calm, divine aphasia
I resume,
demand me nothing.

Everybody
which even though
intermittent
is better than
nothing
that has a particle
of law in it.

Everybody
has one
burning city
hourly growing more
salient
one missing piece
missing piece
and everybody

everybody
has one missing piece
and all the beauty's
about it.

Which even though
intermittent
is better than
nothing
that has a particle
of law in it
give up their plunder

graver still abode
of stones
in a word, alas alas
Demand me nothing.
What you know, you know.
From this time forth I never
will speak a word.

I resume.

* * *

V FINALE

Possessed my spirit,
a Barnum attraction
to perversity
his great enterprise
the first glimmers
riotous unstable elements
represent myself, humbly.

Cognizant of the great words
sunny, bright, airy
they may be supreme
a blessing, unmercifully.

Dovetailed
in achieving the full expanse
to burn and pillage
the same illustrious name
old hickory
flowery flag nation,

cherish our lives
in the dim light, a small share
on top of that great hill
in a cloud of smoke
I could no longer resist,
perplexed.

The long delay
multitude of

living in a fish bowl
his great enterprise
that crazy mind a mob
entirely entombed
in its excessive magnanimity
in abject poverty.

At the break of day
in a cutting night wind
blood and flames,
my adventure
caught the dull glint
with increasing fury
the deepest of black
calm, even voice

I shall not present
the first glimmers
of multitude
possessed my spirit
inhumane, jeopardy
came but yesterday
the ancient customs,
their wrath
and that diabolical light
dissolved into the sight.

A monument to all the strangeness
in a lonely isolated
water of life and the blank wood
cognizant of the riotous proceedings
against the sky.

On top of that great hill
moans and groans
to be where the bottom
as dearly as possible
privately weep
sheer, daring gusto
burning to

shocked into overnight,
became velvet-colored
in the bright blaze
of speechless
from my mouth
please, if it please you
violent, inflammatory and incendiary
in a cutting night wind

cherish our lives.