



# 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*.

Becky Beasley (b. 1975) is an artist who lives and works in St Leonards on Sea, UK. Exhibitions include: (solo) *The Outside*, Tate Britain Art Now (2012); Spike Island, Bristol (2013); *13 pieces, 17 feet*, Serpentine Gallery Pavilion (2010); (group) *British Art Show 7: In The Days of the Comet* (touring 2010–11); *Structure and Material*, Arts Council Collection (touring 2010–11); *La Carte D'Après Nature*, curated by Thomas Demand, NMNM, Monaco (2010) which toured to Matthew Marks Gallery, New York (2011). She is represented by Laura Bartlett Gallery, London and Francesca Minini, Milan.

Chris Sharp (b. 1974) is a writer and independent curator currently based in Paris, France. A contributing editor of *Art Review*, he is editor-at-large of *Kaleidoscope* magazine, where his writing often appears. He recently co-curated with Simone Menegoi *Bouvard and Pécuchet's Compendious Quest for Beauty* at the David Roberts Art Foundation, London, and is currently preparing *Smeared with the Gold of the Opulent Sun* for the Nomas Foundation, Rome, which will open in May.

Melanie Wilson is a London-based performer, writer and sound artist. Her most recent performance *Autobiographer* toured nationally in 2011 and was presented in London at Toynbee Hall in April 2012. Melanie's other work includes *Iris Brunette*, which toured nationally and internationally in 2009–11, receiving Best Production award at Dublin Fringe 2009; *every minute, always* (Edinburgh Fringe 2010); *The View From Here* (One on One Festival 2010) and *Simple Girl* (UK and international tour, Edinburgh Festival, Dublin Fringe). Melanie has worked with Chris Goode, Rotozaza, Clod Ensemble, Shunt, Coney and Subject to\_change. melaniewilson.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

## HENRY MOORE INSTITUTE WEDNESDAY 6 JUNE 2012, 6pm

### 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.

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Becky Beasley and Chris Sharp  
*13 pieces, 17 feet*  
Wednesday 6 June 2012, 6pm  
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Designed by Arnoud Verhaeghe

#### 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)

*Crocker's 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* was 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 Tesseraet*.<sup>1</sup> Kingston owns one of the nine extant copies of Muybridge's 360° panorama of 1878. I became fascinated by this incredible photograph, this unfolding object made by hinging together 13 individual photographs, vertical yet horizontal, this mammoth-plate,<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup>

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.

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.<sup>4</sup> 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 Falkner, Peta Cook, Hilton Obenzinger, Annie Leuenberger, Rebecca Solnit, James Eason, Tim Etchells, and Dylan Stone. Thanks to Michael for the invitation and to all at the Henry Moore Institute, in particular to Kirstie for all the details.

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 15 by 18 inches to 22 by 25 inches. These large negatives allowed photographers to produce oversized 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](http://www.obenzinger.com/books_cannibal.html)

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[www.muybridgekingston.com](http://www.muybridgekingston.com)

**Muybridge**  
in Kingston

Costume courtesy of Yohji Yamamoto

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